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Constructing the Revolution

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But if we ever hope to do this, all of us together must take back the autonomy and the dignity they have stolen; strike down the exploiters, confound the slave catchers and destroy their implements, overthrow the tyrants and bury their shattered thrones. In the great void that is the unknown future, there is a liberatory world that lies yet unfulfilled. Let us struggle together to destroy the great chimera of hierarchy. We have nothing to lose but our chains.

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nested within the citizen power structures. And with them, we have laid out our four pillars.

Confederation

Now, with all of these pieces in place, we can imagine a process in which local councils, cooperatives, militias, and intelligence pods, join together into larger bodies at the city, state, region, nation, or global level. After all, the enemy is not the bourgeois of one country or region, the enemy is a planetary system. The arbitrary, opportunistic propaganda of the powerful is only meant to separate us and pit us against one another, to placate us, to encourage us to give in to nihilism and defeat.

For this reason, our praxis must be unification upon an anti-hierarchical program. Our praxis must be to build a new human social ecology that does not view itself as separate from its environment, that opposes patriarchy, white supremacy, paternalism, and all other forms of justification for hierarchies of power and privilege. In these new communities we must recover the revolutionary spirit and dismantle the mentality of the oppressor. Their borders are not our borders, their constructs of race and gender, of who is indebted, of who is enslaved, of who is deserving and who is undeserving, must all be demolished. Structures of supremacy and exploitation are not fit for a communal future; that future can only be built through the mass action of a common people in struggle against tyranny.

It is then global solidarity that will lead humanity to a new stage of development, contrary to the needs of the oppressors and the bigots and the self-interested capitalists. Let us build a revolutionary ecosystem that will heal the planet and dismantle the justifications of the overlords. The powerful have not yet won this fight. The planet is not yet doomed. We can become the stewards of the land once again.

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Because handlers, analysts, and assets are all given extremely high access to secretive information, there must also be a process in place to hold them accountable to the councils, just like the militias and economic bodies. This process is called auditing. If the council body requests, they can elect an auditor who is given a mandate to inspect the functions and information within the work of analysts, handlers, and assets. Nothing is off limits to this auditor and they will create a report to bring back to the council so that the council can make decisions about revoking the positions of analysts and handlers if necessary, as well as possible restructuring of these pods.

As with previous sections, there is not nearly enough room to discuss the tactics of these pods, however the Makhnovists in Ukraine used an intelligence structure that had some key similarities to this. There is a very good book written on this topic called *Kontrrazvedka: The Story of the Makhnovist Intelligence Service* by V. Azarov¹¹. Examples of decentralized intelligence pods in the modern era have also now evolved to include digital spaces, where we can see the utility of hacking groups such as Anonymous and anonymized information publishers like Wikileaks, although they are much less structured and accountable compared to what we lay out here. Lastly, if one wishes to become good at intelligence work, it is advisable to study the tactics of the enemy; for this purpose, it is recommended that one refer to the US Army's *Counterinsurgency Manual*¹².

These anarchist intelligence pods are the eyes and ears of the confederation of councils and economic bodies, a clandestine, dispersed network of individual entities; interwoven and

¹¹ V. Azarov, "Kontrrazvedka: The Story of the Makhnovist Intelligence Service"

¹² United States Army, "Counterinsurgency Manual"

also mimicking crucial features of how intelligence agencies must function to be successful.

The first organizational principle is that the intelligence bodies will be split into clandestine pods, just as militias are split into localities. These intelligence pods have three primary positions: handler, analyst, and asset.

The job of the handler is to read reports given to them by intelligence analysts and assets and then to create a course of action for assets. This position is elected by the council body and should be chosen with trust as the highest priority. The handler does not do work on the ground, they are the intermediary between the analysts, the councils, and the assets. They only have access to information given to them by analysts and assets.

The job of the analyst is to compile information and report-backs from a larger body of assets and handlers into reports to help handlers manage their assets and for councils to make decisions. This position is also elected by the council body and should also be chosen with trust as the highest priority. The analyst is tasked with storing information gathered by assets in the field into information databases, but, similarly to the handler, they do not do work in the field. They sort information as to its importance to the council, the handler, or the asset and those three bodies must merely make requests to the analyst in order to get information that is needed.

The job of the asset is to gather information in the field, either as a technician or as a spy. The asset is not elected by the council bodies, they are chosen by the handler. This is to avoid putting assets in danger, as delegation would expose their identity to the public and thus ruin their ability to embed successfully and put them at risk of discovery. Examples of roles that assets might take are: spies, hackers, surveillance teams, and social engineers. All of these positions are bound to breach into illegal actions and that is why they must be kept completely safe and their actions clandestine.

Introduction

The following is the script of the video I published on my channel Anark. If you would like to watch that video, it is here: <https://youtu.be/W9K6ISx8QEQ>

Minor edits have been made to the script to instead refer to itself as an essay instead of a video. Other than this, the content has remained the same and may be seen as a copy of the video, in text form, that can be distributed wholly in place of the video. I hope that this work provides a strategic overview of the project of prefiguration and revolt.

Solidarity forever.

Preface

One of the main goals of the essays I have written has been to lay out the bigger picture of how anarchists and libertarian socialists view the world and explain the theoretical and historical justifications for this view point. However, after I completed *The State is Counter-Revolutionary* (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anark-the-state-is-counter-revolutionary>), many people were still left wondering: if not vanguardism and the state, then what? This is an entirely reasonable question to ask. As I have said before, my goal on this channel is not just to offer you abstractions, critiques, and deconstructions, I want to lay out a concrete and actionable understanding of the world.

In this way, this essay can almost be seen as a direct follow up to *The State is Counter-Revolutionary*, not because it dwells on the same issues, but instead because it seeks to lay out an alternative which was absent there. It can also be seen as a strategic bridge from the theoretical inspection of *Change and Revolution* (<https://youtu.be/bSgdqczhrOk>) to the structural discussion of *After the Revolution* (<https://youtu.be/sMoTWFZjoYA>).

Together, these can be seen as a more comprehensive overview of the revolutionary project at hand, of its pitfalls and triumphs, of possibilities for future action and an understanding of the guiding tendencies of progress and revolt.

What I will describe here is a sort of synthesis of many other anarchists and libertarian socialists: contemporary Black anarchists, historical anarchist militaries, communalists and democratic confederalists, the Neo-Zapatista movement, anarcho-syndicalists, and many other peoples who have struggled for autonomy and dignity throughout the world. And while these diverse traditions differ significantly, they overlap in one very important concept: prefiguration.

Prefiguration is the praxis which desires to “build the new in the shell of the old.” It is a process of revolutionary action in which the structures we create here and now, are attempts to mirror the institutions of the future world to the greatest extent possible. And I say “to the greatest extent,” because it is quite possible we will be unable, in many circumstances, to build those post-revolutionary institutions in their fullest sense within the boundaries of capitalism. After all, capitalism will place many constraints on what we can create within its sphere of dominance. But this concept of prefiguration, in its desire to reach for the highest achievement of future goals within the current moment, is a direct response to the failures of previous revolutionary junctures. It is an embodiment of the anarchist conception that the means are fundamentally intertwined with the ends.

Prefiguration is a sort of revolutionary school, in which the masses are taught how to manage themselves through action, how to struggle themselves, not to be commanded, but to emancipate humanity as a unified mass. This essay seeks to lay out a plan of how we will go about constructing the revolution

fact, United States Army has one in particular which may be of interest in anarchist militia training called the Unconventional Warfare Manual¹⁰.

But there is one last subject we must cover if we are going to have a fully functioning revolutionary confederation. How do we deal with the fact that our enemies will be constantly attempting to surveil and undermine our projects? How do we gather intelligence and create actionable information to make decisions? It is a question that has received very little attention in anarchist literature, so let us explore a possible answer.

Intelligence

In this last section of the essay, I will proceed to lay out what I am calling ‘anarchist intelligence.’ And this function is an important one. The information gathered by this intelligence apparatus will not only be needed by the militias, it will also be needed by the civil council bodies so that they can make fully informed decisions about their society. If the council is to be a tool for self-governance, it must be informed about the actions of its enemies. If the militia is to act in situations of life or death, it must know the lay of the land. Even economic bodies may benefit from the knowledge that can be gained by a trained and effective intelligence agency.

However, intelligence agencies represent one of the most dire threats for power accumulation. Where there is secrecy, there must be trust, but in order for there to be trust, there must be transparency. Thus there has to be a clever middle ground. In this section we will attempt to find that middle ground. It is very likely that there will be flaws in this model, but it is one which I have crafted with the utmost attention toward maintaining a balance of power in the hands of the councils, while

¹⁰ United States Army, “Unconventional Warfare Manual”

as they would in a workplace or a community council. This control by the mass of militia members does not mean that discipline is still not paramount, but is instead a statement that punitive justice does not work in military command any more than in civil society. Instead, unwillingness to follow commands should be judged on a case by case basis. If the insubordination of a soldier saved the lives of fellow militia members, avoided committing a war crime, or served the end of protecting the autonomous body, for example, they should be pardoned and kept in their position, maybe even rewarded. If, however, their choice to disobey command put other peoples' lives at risk, whether fellow militia members or the autonomous body, they may be sanctioned through removal from the position they were in, reassignment, further training, or dismissal from the militia structure back into citizen life.

It should also be said, much of what is specified here about the militias will probably also need to be true of the other defensive bodies that we have laid out. They should be accountable to their communities, their code of conduct decided jointly with the councils, and so on. However, we have focused on the militias, because their effective formation is most integral to the long term revolutionary success of the project.

As with the practice of building community councils and solidarity economies, we do not have time to get into specific militia tactics or the many organizational precepts which will lead to effective defense organizations. The topic could not possibly be summarized in the course of a single essay. However, it is recommended that people who are interested in this aspect read Kuwasi Balagoon's *A Soldier's Story*⁸ and, once again, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance* by Kali Akuno⁹. Also, we are fortunate that our enemies publish their field manuals openly. In

⁸ Kuwasi Balagoon, "A Soldier's Story"

⁹ Kali Akuno, "Let Your Motto Be Resistance"

Build What?

If we are to demand prefiguration as our revolutionary vehicle, if we are to say that we must "build the new in the shell of the old," then the burden is on us to describe what institutions we think will meet that task. Many anarchists shirk this burden, thinking that prescribing the revolutionary struggle too closely is to work against the fundamentally experimental nature of revolt. And it's true, if we create a program which is too rigid, we risk being too inflexible to survive the harshness of reality. But, as Malatesta said¹:

"When a collective has needs and its members fail to organize themselves spontaneously, by themselves, in order to get by, someone, some authority figure pops up to cater for that need by deploying everyone's resources and directing them according to his whim."

Indeed, this is exactly what Nestor Makhno diagnosed as the primary failure of the Russian anarchists after seeing what took place in the Bolshevik Counter-Revolution and it was the reason he wrote *On Revolutionary Unity*²; to help establish a platform so that anarchist and libertarian communist movements could avoid vanguard co-option and aimlessness. Knowing these mistakes, we cannot harbor disorganization and we cannot reject concrete programs because it is within a disorganized, aimless people that the cancer of hierarchy is first allowed to metastasize. In that spirit, I contend that there are four key components that must be sufficiently developed if we hope to weather the revolutionary process and actually enact a liberatory future. They are:

1. Councils
2. Economics

¹ Errico Malatesta, "Organization"

² Nestor Makhno, "On Revolutionary Unity"

3. Defense

4. Intelligence

This list is not exhaustive, nor are each of these mutually exclusive. That is to say, each cannot just be built in and of themselves with the belief that they will successfully prefigure a future society. They are also not all equal in their weight. In fact, the first component on this list, council bodies, precedes all others in its importance, because if there is no aspect of community control, whatever is created in the other categories is going to be neutralized or destroyed. The council is the body by which Economics, Defense, and Intelligence are made into projects of revolutionary activity. The councils solidify the revolutionary thrust of this four part program by creating a vehicle for expansion and resolution. And, because the councils represent the needs of the people, they are the civil bodies by which further transformation can take place as successes and failures present themselves.

It is no coincidence then that this is precisely where we shall begin.

Councils

So what is a council? When I use the word council I am referring to a horizontal, freely associated, directly-democratic body, which is composed of the people from some particular region, interest, identity, or profession. In these councils, all proposals are created and brought to a vote by the members, not some narrow leadership, and if the council needs to delegate someone to carry out a task, that delegation is temporary and able to be revoked by a simple majority vote at any time. If you would like to get a more in-depth explanation of what I mean by this, I recommend reading the essay *After the Revolu-*

But it's not inevitable that this will take place. It is, instead, the outcome of too much centralization and not enough integration of militias into their communities. A militia should not be viewed as the revolution itself, it should be seen as the enacted wrath of the people, the conscious self-defense of the collective, and therefore a mere instrument to carry out the overthrow of the tyrants when the time comes that they think they will crush us through force.

In order for the militias to carry out these necessary tasks, however, they must be able to model a structure of discipline while simultaneously avoiding the hierarchies of coercion and rejecting the cult-like brainwashing seen in standing armies. If these hierarchies of power are allowed to exist, the heads of the militias will become failure points in the system, a new place for the cancer of centralization to metastasize. So let us try and find a balance.

In all militias, in order for a person to become a member, they must opt-in to a code of conduct both in the militia and in the confederation of militias. Because the militias have only been given the right to train and enact organized violence by the collective, that code of conduct should also be decided by the collective. For this reason, there is no separate process of militia grievance. Militias are fully integrated parts of a revolutionary community and therefore they are held to the standards that the community has set. The councils will almost certainly choose to delegate some significant number of these militia tasks to experts within the confederation, of course, but crucially, the power to revoke those decisions and to recall those people chosen as delegates must be held in the hands of the council bodies.

In this structure, militia members and community members vote together to determine the chain of command. Unlike a standing army, militia members are a fully constituted part of the total military body and thus they have the same rights to vote on the placement of themselves and fellow soldiers

capital, they are also a means to keep our communities safe in the meantime.

Some examples of defense organizations which might be formed are: cop watch, community defense, direct action security, and militias. Each of these, built for a different purpose, will also be structured in a slightly different way. For example, community defense and cop watch groups may not even be armed by default, but encouraged to arm themselves in the occasion that violence is being carried out in the area. Direct action security may often be armed in order to protect protesters from interference as well as uniquely trained for protest safety tactics, however there are examples of direct action security, such as the Bike Brigade, which are both effective and unarmed. By contrast, militias, as revolutionary bodies in waiting, will need to be armed and educated on the principles of military conflict, and should therefore read about military tactics and strategy, drill small unit tactics, and educate the community on its place in the larger revolutionary schema. What each defensive body holds in common, however, is that they should each be formed first at the level of the locality and should be based primarily on the needs of that locality.

There are real pitfalls that must be avoided, however, in forming militias. Because a militia is a trained group of citizen soldiers, it is also, inherently, a group trained to do violence. Even more, it will often be necessary, especially as enemies attempt to suppress our projects, that a truly effective revolutionary militia becomes clandestine, largely hidden away from the view of the public and planning actions of a seditious nature. And if such a group does not view itself as accountable to and consisting of the community it is embedded in, it will often have a tendency to become a sort of violent vanguard party, conscripting the masses into an insurrection under their hierarchical control.

tion. There I lay out how a mass scale weak-consensus voting system of nested council structures might work.

However, I would offer two points about how this process of council building should differ from the one I laid out in that essay: first, when sizes permit, consensus voting should be used instead. That is to say: decisions should only pass in these councils with unanimous approval. Consensus is almost always superior, so long as it can be used, because it guarantees that no one's needs are ignored and promotes strong agreement upon a plan of action. The second comment is simply to say that this vision of council structures is much more flexible than the system laid out in *After the Revolution*, involving a much larger variety of groups for which councils could be built to facilitate their needs.

With such a wide open field, it is probably difficult to decide where to even begin. But I advise that you begin with yourselves. That is to say; the group of people that seek to organize councils in different communities, should be the first to model the method. After all, if you're going to bring the idea of democratic management to strangers, you should already have proof that it at least works in managing your group first. This sort of organizing council, composed of ideological anarchists and libertarian socialists that has the goal of spurring on further radicalization and prefiguration, is called a catalyst group. It stands in contrast to the vanguard model of the authoritarians. In this catalyst group, power is never centralized in the hands of a narrow group of leaders, at any stage. Instead, control is held equally among all members of the group. The catalyst is meant to integrate itself into and learn from the communities it interacts with, to listen to their struggles and meet their needs, not paternalistically dictate to them the conditions for assistance. The catalyst group is not a superior, dictating from outside of the masses, but a cooperator and a confidant to those who are oppressed.

Ultimately, the motivating ethos is that those who are affected by some decision are those who should decide. A council could be created by a neighborhood, so that they could decide together about things which affect them. Or a council could be created on a certain city block, street, area code, city, or any other geographical location. Similarly, councils could be created to represent the needs of particular oppressed identities; Black citizen councils, Indigenous American councils, women's councils, and so on. Councils could be created for families affected by police violence, or elders in an area, or radical youth.

If you want to get an overview of different council bodies that could be created and how to create them, there is a very good coverage in the work *Let Your Motto Be Resistance* by Kali Akuno and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement³. In this work, the atom of council building that they present is called the Block Committee and serves as a very good descriptor of the sort of minimum entity I advocate here. Similarly, among many communalists, there is a conception of what is called a Neighborhood Pod and there is a wonderful video by Neighbor Democracy called *Neighborhood Pods: What They Are And How To Start Them*⁴, which also serves as a tactical companion to this essay.

Regardless of what that minimum entity is called, the thrust remains the same: we must build democratic bodies at the smallest level first, so that the people can control their lives directly. Deciding whether one should focus on neighborhoods, blocks, streets, apartment buildings, or any other span, is a matter which is particular to your conditions! You will have to ask yourself: what size, span, and scope is most reasonable for me to group people together in my area?

³ Kali Akuno, "Let Your Motto Be Resistance"

⁴ Neighbor Democracy, "Neighborhood Pods: What They Are And How To Start Them"

lition of price and currency in favor of human solidaric cooperation.

This summary does not, by any means, exhaust the range of economic bodies that could be created. We have not even delved into land-trusts, alternative currencies, time banks, communes, intentional communities, credit unions, expropriation, or squatting. But each of these may also serve a useful purpose in the project of economic independence. If you wish to find a more extensive history of prefigurative economics, Paul Raekstad (creator of the YouTube channel Red Plateaus) gives a very thorough coverage in his book *Prefigurative Politics*⁷.

But we cannot stop here; economics plus councils is still not enough. Even if we create the entities we have laid out here, insofar as they become a real threat to power structures, they will be actively suppressed. When that time comes, we must be prepared to defend our projects from the tyrants and we cannot simply organize such a resistance in the heat of the moment. To be successful, we will need to have a countervailing force that is trained and ready to defend the collective.

Defense

As we begin this conversation, it may seem a lamentable affair that those of us who only wish to build a more free and dignified world for the masses, must also arm ourselves and prepare for conflict. However, even if we are to imagine we would build and never aggress, we cannot deny the precedents of history. It is an inevitable outcome that power structures will assault our prefiguration violently the more successful it grows and when they do, we must be prepared to defend the seeds of our future society which we have so meticulously planted and tended to fruition. Because, do not think that the purpose of these defense formations is only to countervail the state and

⁷ Paul Raekstad, "Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today"

self-directed enterprises should have the goal of producing the basic necessities which are needed for society to function. Further, these cooperatives should be held accountable to the councils as they operate within the market. In doing this, we create the foundations of a sovereign, self-sustained economy, a way to provide for ourselves and expand as needed, especially in such an occasion that insurrection or sabotage arises.

And there are examples of this praxis being carried out: particularly a group called Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi. This project, heavily involved with ideas of Black anarchism, is very much endeavoring in the direction we have laid out here. While creating cooperatives and establishing community land trusts, they are also making popular assemblies in neighborhoods around them. They have written an excellent book covering this project called Jackson Rising⁶, which I highly recommend.

While we are making inroads into worker control within market dynamics, we should also endeavor to create more direct, demonetized distribution networks. Where cooperatives over-produce, they should funnel their products directly into existing mutual aid networks. Even better, they may see fit to put aside some substantial portion of their production, above and beyond sustaining the cooperative, toward these community mutual aid networks. At the same time, establishing community gardens, when carried out with serious intent, can provide greater food security for surrounding areas, especially for those who are in food deserts, where fruits and vegetables may be quite difficult to acquire. Mutual aid is, the more it is expanded, an increasingly real model of communism: distribution based on need and production based on ability, the abo-

⁶ Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, "Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi"

I am sure that many of you, as you are listening, are nervous imagining that you will have to go speak to your neighbors and, worse, have a conversation with them about something so contentious. Yet this is precisely why such a thing must be done. This project is not only revolutionary in the action of creating democratic structures that will oversee our projects, it is revolutionary precisely because it represents a hope in repairing the atomization of capitalism. All hierarchies of power desire to keep us separate, competing, and individualistic, because we are easier to exploit that way. Dismiss the idea that your task is only to build councils of fully like-minded individuals. You have to start from a presumption that those around you are salvageable until the time comes that they confirm to you that they are not. It is by this rebuilding of our shattered communities that we might rediscover solidarity with our fellow humans.

After councils have been constructed, there are many possible goals for them to have. It is generally the case that they should seek out the issues that most affect the individuals within them, then act toward ameliorating those issues. For example: if the council is mostly composed of Black people experiencing police brutality, it is only natural that they should organize community self defense and cop watch groups. If the group is experiencing the poisoning of their soil by some agricultural company, they could organize blockades against that company. If a community is in a food desert, they might start a food sovereignty project. Ultimately, understand that the goal of the council is not the choice of the catalyst group. The catalyst group is not a vanguard. Its job is to provide help and support, ideas and motivation, to those people who wish to achieve autonomy.

And if, after you have assisted some group in constructing a council, they do not organize toward defeating the particular hierarchy you had hoped for, do not spend too much time trying to push them into that end, find the people who are most

motivated to fight and conquer that other hierarchy and organize them as well. This is not a zero sum game. Every hierarchy of power and privilege is a sort of cancer that must be rooted out and destroyed in order to bring mass liberation. We must fight on each front and cooperate together in our shared struggle against hierarchy.

Also, do not think that the catalyst group is the only group fit to become a popular educator. One of the best ways that new councils can remain on a prefigurative trajectory is to become bodies of popular education. The councils should not only try to establish reading groups where they engage with and analyze radical literature, they should also try to host teach-ins that are free to the public, create free libraries, table with radical literature, and generally try to spread radical ideas which are conducive to furthering this project. This is especially important in areas where the constituency is very conservative or generally not amenable to radical ideas. In this way, it may be very necessary to tend the soil for some time before planting seeds.

Another very useful practice for these newer councils is to act as confederators. That is to say, these councils may choose to focus on some particular issue, say food sovereignty, and instead of planting gardens themselves, start by seeing who is already planting community gardens and trying to create a council body that joins all of them together. In doing so, the council who helped carry out the confederation creates an ally and a possible connection for creating mutual aid. All of the groups are strengthened in having access to new resources.

The councils can also function as organizing bodies; planning strikes, raising funds for people in desperate circumstances, using direct action, and so on. As with the practice of creating these councils, it is possible an entire book could

be created laying out the organizing process, so instead I will direct you to the expanded Black Flag Catalyst Protest Guide⁵.

As these councils grow in strength and solidity, they will have the labor needed to spearhead more and more substantive projects. But it is very likely that they will run into issues funding these plans. Such a problem can be especially challenging given the perverse incentives of capitalism. And, while for many historic organizations, the compromise has been some form of membership dues, here I will offer a more holistic approach.

Economics

In having a discussion about economics we are delving into a topic which absolutely dominates the leftist canon. But, despite this extensive range of theoretical work, the bulk of historical leftist movements have relegated themselves to a somewhat narrow prefigurative path, focusing largely on the creation of different kinds of unions; viewing the union as a tool of anti-capitalist warfare. And the union, if established and managed through the same democratic, horizontal principles as we have laid out beforehand, is indeed a body fit to do battle with capitalism. But it is also an entity which only exists as long as capitalism exists; it is a model entirely based on negotiation with capital, not a body configured to give the workers full control. Unions are worthwhile, good even. But the more hierarchical they are, the more likely they will not endure the transition out of capitalism and thus have an institutional tendency to resist that change or function as forms of co-optation in the labor movement.

Our struggle is not just in capitalist workplaces, it is a broader struggle to create our own, cooperative workplaces, operating on our radical ideas. These worker-owned and

⁵ The Black Flag Catalyst Revolt Guide