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Some thoughts on Dual Power

Beyond Resistance

February 12, 2010

Beyond Resistance talk a bit about the idea of Dual Power in our strategy paper, but there are various understandings of the term. From our strategy:

“Dual power is the idea that the embryo of the new world must be created while fighting the current one; ‘building the new in the shell of the old’. It means encouraging working class organs of self-management, where we can exercise our autonomy and restrict the power of boss and government until such time as we can confront and abolish both. A dual power strategy is one that directly challenges institutions of power and at the same time, in some way, pre-figures the new institutions we envision. Therefore, it not only opposes the state, it also prepares for the difficult confrontations and questions that will arise in a revolutionary situation.”

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Retrieved on 14th October 2021 from
beyondresistance.wordpress.com

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At the recent anarchist bookfair in Los Angeles, Tom Wetzel of the Workers Solidarity Alliance went on to debunk some of

the myths surrounding anarchist positions on power, and sums up nicely how we define Dual Power:

“One of the weaknesses of anarchism historically was there was a lot of confusion about power. People say we’re against power, but actually, the mass of people, the working class people, can’t liberate itself without actually creating new structures of power to run things. To run the society, that’s power. And I think the idea of popular power, power that’s based on ‘we’re all equals,’ self-managed kind of power, I mean, that’s how I think of the replacement for the state and the corporations, and so on. But in terms of developing power now, it might be useful to distinguish between social power that people build through movements that are engaged in confrontations, like shutting down workplaces. That means ordinary people are actually exercising power, some power. But it’s power that comes about through struggle, through confrontation with the people that have power in this system. But if you’re just running a collective, like of food distribution, that’s not really power, that’s collectively managing a resource. But I think that’s different from social power. And the point you said about transition to the new society, we have to have things there that can make that transition, historically, that was part of the whole reason for syndicalism—you develop a working-class movement where we have in all the various workplaces, we have workers organized in revolutionary, self-managed workplace organizations or unions, so that in a transitional situation, they can take over the running of those workplaces and guarantee that we still have food and transportation and public utilities and so on.”