Anarchist Revolutionary Strategy

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Contents

European Historical Antecedents . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 5
US Antecedents in the 18th, 19th, & 20th Centuries . . . . . 5
Preliminaries – Mainstream Political Currents in the US . . 6
  Conservatism . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 6
  Liberalism . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 7
  Leninism . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 8
  Social Democracy . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 9
Contemporary Anarchist (and related) Currents (and pub-
  lications) in the United States . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 10
  Anarcho-Syndicalism, Anarcho-Communism, and
    Cousins . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 10
20. A Proposed Strategy

James Herod, Getting Free: Creating an Association of Democratic, Autonomous Neighborhoods

Table of Contents:
Introduction
An Awareness of How We Do Not Want to Live
A Notion of How We Might Want to Live
Basic Agreements of the Association
Obstacles
Strategies That Have Failed
The Strategy Described Abstractly
Ways to Begin Gutting Capitalism
General Comments on the Strategy
Ways to Finish Gutting Capitalism
Further Discussion
Some Comments on the Literature
Appendix: Draft General Agreement

A printed edition will be available in the summer of 2006. It will be distributed by AK Press.

A 2004 edition is available on the web at:
http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strate/GetFre/index.htm

The 2006 printed edition has been expanded a bit and copyedited and so is much improved over this last 2004 internet version. You might want to wait for the printed book if you are thinking of reading it.


European Historical Antecedents

Radicals of the German Peasant Revolts of 1525
Radicals of the English Revolution of 1640
Sans-Culottes in the French Revolution of 1793-94
Utopian Socialists
Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarcho-Communism
The Cooperative Movement
The Paris Commune
Communist goal of a society without states, classes, markets, wages, or money

Experiences with Workers Councils – Russia, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland
Spanish Revolution
Nineteenth & Twentieth Century European radical social philosophy in general

US Antecedents in the 18th, 19th, & 20th Centuries

Radical Currents in the American Revolution of 1776
The Anti-Federalists
US Communal Experiments
The Anarchist Movement, 1880-1920
The Industrial Workers of the World
Anti-authoritarianism and participatory democracy of the New Left in the 1960s
The US’s rich tradition of emancipatory social thought

Preliminaries – Mainstream Political Currents in the US

Conservatism
The dust had hardly settled on the revolts of the sixties before the counter-revolution began, a class war to ensure that in the future capitalists would control absolutely everything. This counter-revolution brought with it a new right wing ideology, to replace the traditional conservatism, an ideology that came to be known worldwide as neoliberalism, which was capitalism without the veneer, a brutal, zero tolerance capitalism. This initiative called for the privatization of everything, that is, ownership by capitalists and corporations. Every last thing on earth was to be turned into a commodity and source of profit – water, hospitals, schools, social services, parks, libraries, science, mass media, even war, and the government itself. Nothing public was to be left standing. Everything was to be sold off, and turned over to profit-taking corporations, usually at bargain basement prices. These policies were imposed relentlessly and successfully all over the world, resulting in a fabulous enrichment of the ruling class. They were also implemented domestically in the United States. So this is the face of modern conservatism. There remains of course a tiny assortment of right wing libertarians, who believe in small government, the Bill of Rights, and rugged individualism, but these people have no power, even though this philosophy probably expresses majoritarian sentiment in the US. As of 2006, capitalist domination of American society (the USA, that is) could hardly be more complete.

Critiques:

Forum, as of 2006, may already have been NGOed (or so claims Arundhati Roy).

Resources:
Notes from Nowhere, editors, We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism (Verso, 2003)
William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, editors, Another World Is Possible: Popular Alternatives
Kevin Danaher, and Roger Burbach, editors, Globalize This! The Battle Against the World Trade Organization and Corporate Rule (Common Courage Press, 2000)
Trent Schroyer, editor, A World That Works: Building Blocks for a Just and Sustainable Society (Bootstrap Press, 1997)
Naomi Klein, Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate (Knopf, 2002)
Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, editors, The Case Against the Global Economy and For A Turn Toward the Local (Sierra Club Books, 1996, 549 pages)
David Solnit, editor, Globalize Liberation; How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World. (City Lights Books, 2004, 497 pages.)

Postscript


Keith Melville, *Communes in the Counter Culture* [of the ‘60s]: *Origins, Theories, Styles of Life.* (1972)

A few years ago there was an attempt to establish an Anarchist Communitarian Network, but I believe all the chapters are now defunct, although the New Jersey Collective still has a web site up at: http://www.geocities.com/acn_njc/collective.html

See also the web site for Intentional Communities at: http://www.ic.org/

19. Global Justice Movement

There are pronounced anarchist tendencies in the Global Justice Movement, including a commitment to direct democracy on the local level in many cases, a serious disillusionment with national representative government, extensive horizontal networking among various groups and projects, a refusal to set up a hierarchical, bureaucratic governing structure for the overall movement, a discrediting and rejection of the old Leninist strategy of capturing state power, many attempts to link the global movement to local struggles, and many innovative experiments toward sustainable self-sufficiency on the community level. Regrettably, there are also strong reformist elements in the movement. The World Social

David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* (Oxford, 2005, 247 pages.)


For left wing research on the right see the work of Political Research Associates, at their web site, The Public Eye, at: http://www.publiceye.org/index.html

Liberalism

After the New Left’s attempt (by its liberal wing) to break into national electoral politics was smashingly defeated in the 1972 McGovern campaign, what emerged out the fiasco is what came to be known as ‘progressive populism.’ Traditional liberalism, along with traditional conservatism, died (or were killed off) during the sixties. Progressive populism is the face of contemporary liberalism in the United States. It is represented by figures like Ralph Nader, Molly Ivins, Jim Hightower, and Medea Benjamin. Most of the widely recognized faces in the independent media on the so-called left (but not the left as defined by neocons) are progressive populists, or greens. They are liberal because they are not anti-capitalist. They may rant and rail against giant corporations, but they sing the praises of small town businesses. They believe in the US constitution. They believe that the United States used to have a democracy and they want to get back to it by building a grassroots citizens movement. They think that we can go back to the welfare state,
and reestablish it. They are firmly committed to representative government, with its elections, and its Congress. The tendency is represented by a weekly newspaper out of Iowa, the *Progressive Populist*, among other publications. Progressive populists may number a million or two, as evidenced for example by the Nader vote, but they are far from being a mass movement.

*Resources:
Ralph Nader, *The Ralph Nader Reader*. (Seven Stories Press, 2000, 640 pages.)

Preliminaries — The Two Failed Two-Stage (statist) Strategies of the Left

Leninism

Leninism, the strategy of capturing the state apparatus through armed struggle and revolution, has been one of the two-stage strategies for overthrowing capitalism – first capture the state, and then move to build a free society (variously called communism, socialism, anarchism). The strategy was applied not only in Russia but throughout the colonial world in national liberation struggles. Even though numerous revolutionary parties came to power, nowhere was capitalism overcome. Thus the strategy now stands as a proven failure, through more than a century of trials. Even hard-core Marxists are abandoning the goal of seizing the state. Unfortunately, there are still moribund, remnant leninist groups active in the United States, all of which are striving to build a vanguard party to seize state power. Two of the most prominent are: International Socialist Organization, which publishes the weekly paper *Socialist Worker*, and the bi-monthly magazine, *International

17. Cooperative Housing Movement

[There are hundreds of housing co-ops. My research into this topic, however, is not far enough along to know whether there is any potential here for anarchist initiatives. The existing co-ops seem entirely mainstream, but I’ve only started looking.]

*Resources:
National Association of Housing Cooperatives, online at: http://www.coophousing.org
Cooperative Housing Coalition, online at: http://www.chc.coop
Cooperative Housing, online at: http://www.housingforall.org/index_co-ops.htm

18. Intentional Communities

There is a rich tradition in the United States of communal experiments. The nineteenth century was littered with them, representing a wide variety of philosophies and structures. The New Left of the sixties gave birth to a whole new generation of “communes”, both urban and rural, many of which embodied anarchist principles. Today, the country is covered with dozens of “intentional communities.” Most of them are ‘new age,’ and are based on religion. But there are some which are more secular. Some are democratic, and to the extent that this democracy is direct, these communities therefore represent an actually existing bit of (partial) anarchy (not many are anti-capitalist) scattered across the landscape of America. There should at least be a campaign by anarchists to try to win these communities over to full anarchy.

*Resources:
There is not much in this body of literature in the way of concrete strategy proposals or concrete sketches of social forms, but there is a lot of useful theoretical clarification about the meaning of real democracy.

Sources:
Christian Bay, *Strategies of Political Emancipation* (Notre Dame UP, 1981), especially Ch. 6, “Toward a World of Natural Communities”

*Bringing Democracy Home*, a pamphlet from the Institute for Social Ecology, by Cindy Milstein,
Chaia Heller, Peter Staudenmaier, Jay Driskell, Arthur Foelsche, Amoshaun Toft, and Andrea Del Moral

Social Democracy

Social Democracy, primarily in Europe, was the strategy of capturing the state apparatus through elections. This two-stage strategy can also now be seen as a massive failure, since even though socialist parties have been in power in many European countries, sometimes for decades, capitalism has gone rolling on. What has thus been established is that we can’t get to a free society (anarchy/communism, that is a society without a state or capitalism) by getting control of the state apparatus. This is why the anarchist strategy, of bypassing the state altogether, is once again back on the front lines of the class war.

Of course, small social democratic parties are still active on the USA scene. The largest is the Democratic Socialists of America.
They organize the annual Socialist Scholars Conference in New York City, publish a magazine, *Left Turn*, and regularly run candidates for public office. A smaller organization is the Socialist Party USA, whose official magazine is *The Socialist*.

**Critiques:**
- Peter Kropotkin, “Representative Government,” Ch. 13, pp. 118-144, in Kropotkin’s *Words of a Rebel* (Black Rose Books, 1992, 229 pages.)
- Iain McKay, *Don’t Vote, Organize!* (pdf pamphlet, Zabalaza Books, at www.zabalaza.net.)
- Wayne Price, “None of the Above: The Anarchist Case Against Electoralism.” Online at: http://nefac.net/node/1209

**Contemporary Anarchist (and related) Currents (and publications) in the United States**

**Anarcho-Syndicalism, Anarcho-Communism, and Cousins**

1. **Workers Solidarity Alliance**

   This tiny group is the closest there is to a pure anarcho-syndicalist organization in the United States. Their strategy focus is on workplace organizing, with an eye to eventually seizing the means of production. For what happens after that, they subscribe...
14. Crimethinc

This is yet another (peculiarly American) highly individualistic political initiative. They hate meetings. Democracy is a dirty word for them. Their attitude toward work is: don’t do it; quit your job. The chapter on “unemployment” in their book of resistance tactics, Recipes for Disaster, is about how to become unemployed, and stay that way. They have a strong belief in the absolute autonomy of the individual. They are intolerant of any social cooperation that goes beyond the affinity group or small collective. The workplace and the neighborhood, as sites for struggle, are completely off their radar screen. They say that “the root of anarchism is the simple impulse to do it yourself.” They believe that since there is no god and no master there is no morality, and you can do whatever you please. They are strongly influenced by primitivism, and constantly rail against civilization. They see the good society as an aggregate of autonomous individuals. It is a philosophy of ‘do your own thing.’ This is the politics of the ‘traveler kids’ who live off theft and out of dumpsters (and the generosity of their friends who haven’t quit their jobs). They exhibit no understanding whatsoever that humans are social creatures, intersubjective beings. Nevertheless, in spite of their horrible politics, I sort of perversely enjoy these writings, expressing as they do such a total, almost poetic, revolt against the existing society.

Sources:
Fighting for Our Lives (pamphlet, by Crimethinc)
Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook, A Movable Feast.
(Crimethinc Workers Collective, 2005, 621 pages.)
Web site: http://crimethinc.com

2. Anarcho-Syndicalist Review

ASR is the main magazine for anarcho-syndicalism in the United States. Its strategy focus is on the ‘revolutionary union’. Revolutionary unions are to be built with the aim of seizing the means
of production, establishing workers councils, which will then be federated into a dual power structure to eventually overthrow capitalism.

Sources:
- ASR magazine, #1-38, 1986-2006 (issues 1-24 as Libertarian Labor Review)
- web site: www.syndicalist.org

3. **Wobblies (The Industrial Workers of the World)**

The IWW strategy is to build ‘one big union’, to defeat capitalism, with a strong emphasis on direct action. There is considerable stress on building a revolutionary working class counterculture. Beyond this though it is probably the syndicalist vision of federated workers councils that provides the backdrop, although wobblies deny that theirs is an anarcho-syndicalist organization.

Sources:
- Industrial Worker (newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World)

4. **Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists**

Their strategy is to build a revolutionary organization to intervene in, and radicalize, working class struggles over work, housing, and community control. They “envision an international confederation of directly democratic, self-managed communities and

Wayne Price, “Class War, Industrial Capitalism, and Civilization.”
Online at: http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=04/11/02/3560638&mode=print

Iain McKay, seven articles at: http://anarchism.ws/writers/anarcho.html#Primitivism

**13. Ontological Anarchism**

Hakim Bey, Temporary Autonomous Zone

“TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it.” This strategy seeks to identify “spaces” (physical, social, cultural, mental) which are not yet completely controlled by the oppressors, and to use them for insurrections, and to live free (for a while). The social form is the band; it is seen as a festival; it practices psychic nomadism. There is a primitivist thread, in that Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson) advocates “the refusal of all mediation”, and other primitivist themes. This is a basically individualistic tendency. Later, Bey extended the strategy to encompass ‘permanent autonomous zones.’ However, these are seen mostly as already existing zones of ongoing duration which the ruling class has somehow overlooked. No strategy actually is ever advanced for defending these zones against attacks by the oppressor, nor is much attention paid to defeating capitalists in general. We certainly must do better than to try to find a few overlooked niches in the Empire where we can breath a little more freely, whether temporarily or permanently. We must get free from capital and empire completely. Nevertheless, there are many insightful suggestions in these writings.

Sources:
- Hakim Bey, T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism (Autonomedia, 1985)
- Hakim Bey, Immediatism (AK Press, 1994)
- Hakim Bey, Millennium (Autonomedia, 1996)
technology, industry, the domestication of animals, the division of labor, and all symbolic thought. Primitivists seek the destruction of civilization, and do whatever they can to assist in this, although they believe that civilization is going to collapse of its own accord anyway. Their main strategic thinking is about how to survive this collapse, and about how to live as hunters and gatherers after the big die-off (they assume that they will be among the survivors). They don’t actually have a political program and pay scant attention to attempts to change or improve the world because they believe that civilization, all civilization, in its entirety, is destructive and alienating and based on hierarchy and therefore must end. They seek a so-called unmediated existence. They seem blind or unconcerned about the enormous suffering and loss of life that their analysis so calmly contemplates. This current is essentially individualistic. However, many people who now identify as primitivist do not necessarily endorse all the extreme views pushed by Zerzan.

Sources:
John Zerzan, Elements of Refusal (Left Bank, 1988), Future Primitive (Autonomedia, 1994)
Running on Emptiness (Feral House, 2002), Against Civilization (editor) (Feral House, 2005)
Green Anarchy, #1-present
Fifth Estate (until quite recently)
Web site: http://www.primitivism.com
Critiques:
Brian Oliver Sheppard, Anarchism vs Primitivism (a See Sharp Press pamphlet)
Andrew Flood, Civilisation, Primitivism, and Anarchism, available online at: http://struggle.ws/andrew.html
Online at: http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_4_perlman.html

workplaces.” This is a very activist organization. They have participated in numerous labor fights, are regulars on the picket lines, have worked with the unemployed, and are organizing an anarchist workers network. They founded the Boston Angry Tenants Union. And of course they also participate in demonstrations and street protests. Nefac is a member of the International Libertarian Solidarity network. Other federations with much the same purposes and organization as Nefac have been established recently in the Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Midwest, with varying degrees of success.

Sources:
The Northeastern Anarchist, #s 1-10, 2001-2006
The classic statement of anarchist communism is by Peter Kropotkin, The Conquest of Bread, 1913 (many subsequent printings).

5. Situationists

This was a French current, from 1957 to 1972, which helped trigger the revolution of 1968 in France. The Situationist International broke with the old left and orthodox marxism and sought to redefine the radical project across the board. They incorporated the effects of mass media and the culture industry into their analysis of capitalism. Debord, in Society of the Spectacle, restored workers councils to the center of the revolution. But situationists also sought to extend the council system, into “neighborhood, city, regional, and international councils”, that is, to “generalized self-management”. The main proponent of situationism in the US has been Ken Knabb in Berkeley. His essay, “The Joy of Revolution” (1997) is an insightful synthesis of workplace and community emphases, as well as other currents. It is a good exposition of “generalized self-management.”
Grassroots Economic Organizing and the Cooperative Commonwealth

Frank Lindenfeld, Len Krimerman, and the GEO (Grassroots Economic Organizing)

In May 2004 the founding conference was held for the National Federation of Worker Cooperatives and Democratic Workplaces. Len Krimerman, Frank Lindenfeld, and their friends, have been reporting on this movement for the past twenty years. They ferret out actual experiments in workplace democracy all over the world and publicize them in their newsletter. They have published a national directory of such experiments for the United States. Last I heard, there are about 1500 worker-owned businesses in the United States. The GEO collective fosters networks of worker co-ops, organizes conferences, and plugs into the international movement for self-managed workplaces which holds a conference every couple of years or so. They say that “GEO has assisted our movement in becoming conscious of itself.” They believe that the seeds of a cooperative commonwealth are already present in the existing worker and consumer co-ops, community development financial institutions, and barter networks. As these increase in number, and federate, they may reach enough of a critical mass to transform the entire

11. Libertarian Socialism

Libertarian socialism is quite close to the anarchist tradition. It is probably only because anarchism was so thoroughly excluded from the political arena for so long by the hegemonic marxism-leninism that this tendency evolved independently of anarchism. There is much from each tradition that might be useful to the other.

Sources:
Maximilien Rubel, and John Crump, editors, Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth And Twentieth Centuries (St. Martin’s Press, 1987)

12. Primitivists

John Zerzan, Green Anarchy

This current, as articulated by John Zerzan, seeks to overcome alienation (i.e., humans once were one with nature, but are now separated) by abolishing agriculture, language, math, art, culture,
10. **Autonomous Marxism**

This current takes its name from the autonomous movement of Italy’s New Left of the 1970s, and the theoretical output of that movement. Also included are: the Johnson-Forrest Tendency in the US (Raya Dunayevskaya and CLR James), Council Communists, the *Socialism or Barbarism* group in France, and the Midnight Notes collective in Boston. Also usefully and reasonably included, I believe, is western Marxism in general, that is, anti-bolshevik communism, Hegelian Marxism, and the Frankfurt School of critical theory. All this represents an updating and refurbishing of Marxism, without the vanguard and statist strategy. It was a break with both Leninism and the orthodox Marxism of the Second International.

**Sources:**

- Harry Cleaver, *Autonomous Marxism: An Annotated Course Syllabus and Bibliography*
  
  (On the web at: [http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/387Lautonomistmarxism.html](http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/387Lautonomistmarxism.html))


society. A broader anti-capitalist political movement will also be needed though for this to happen. This transformation will not be achieved however by seizing the means of production outright, but through legislation which will enable the construction of a cooperative commonwealth, after the mass movement has gained majorities in Congress through elections. So ultimately, although its focus is on worker-owned workplaces, this tendency is social democratic in nature.

**Sources:**

- Changing Work, #1-10, 1984-1989 (Predecessor to GEO)

- Grassroots Economic Organizing newsletter (GEO), #1-present


- Web site: [www.geo.coop](http://www.geo.coop)

**Libertarian Municipalism**

7. **Libertarian Municipalism**

- Murray Bookchin, Institute for Social Ecology, Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy

  The basic strategy advocated by libertarian municipalists is for anarchists to run for office in municipal governments. Once a majority of anarchists control the local government, they will set about abolishing the electoral system and establishing in its stead community assemblies based on direct democracy. Also, they will somehow institute public (i.e., community) ownership
of ‘the economy’. They don’t explain how they will do this. They reject organizing at the workplace. The community assemblies will be confederated. I don’t think this proposal has ever advanced to the status of being an actual movement or tendency. As far as I know, it has never been tried in practice. The attempt to organize an “Alliance” (the Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy), based more or less on libertarian municipalist principles, was still born.

Sources:
Murray Bookchin, “Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview ,” Green Perspectives, # 24, Oct 91

Critique:
See also the debate provoked by this article, online at: http://www.zmag.org/lmdebate.htm

8. Inclusive Democracy Project

Takis Fotopoulos, and the Democracy and Nature journal (not a US journal)

Takis Fotopoulos’ project for Inclusive Democracy emerged out of Libertarian Municipalism. But Fotopoulos reinstated workplace assemblies and combined them with community assemblies for a more comprehensive view of a self-governing society, based on direct democracy (except these local assemblies will be federated). He nevertheless still advocates trying to capture local governments through elections. He supports all struggles and projects which further inclusive democracy goals, such as local currencies and democratic credit unions. He calls for the formation of a ‘party’ to agitate for these objectives. He also outlines a radical epistemology compatible with direct democracy which avoids the relativism of most post-modernism and the objectivism of orthodox science and mechanical marxism. As far as I’m aware, Fotopoulos’ proposal has found almost no resonance in the anarchist movement in the United States.

Sources:
Takis Fotopoulous, Toward an Inclusive Democracy (Cassell, 1997, 401 pages)
Democracy and Nature (www.democracynaturue.org)

Major Related Currents

9. Surrealism

Chicago Surrealists
Although keenly supportive of workplace and labor struggles, as well as the goal of reestablishing community, these aspects are not explicitly spelled out by Chicago Surrealists in their manifestos. The main items of the surrealist outlook as outlined by Paul Garon and the Rosemonds in 1996 are: revolt and revolution; poetry as praxis; psychoanalysis as a subversive activity; love above all; antimiserabilism; the exaltation of play; free territories of the imagination; the marvelous against religion; abolishing whiteness; undermining patriarchy; black music now and forever; dialectic x dialectic x dialectic; alchemy, by any means necessary; the emancipation of wilderness; humor. Their strategy and practice is to intervene relentlessly in the major struggles, especially cultural ones, and they have done so. They claim a strong affinity with the IWW.

Sources:
Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion, issues # 1-4, 1970-1989
Franklin Rosemont, editor, The Forecast is Hot! Tracts & Other Collective Declarations of the