

Foundational Concepts of the Specific Anarchist Organisation

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Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	4
What is the Specific Anarchist-Communist Organisation?	5
Key Ideas	6
Anarchism	6
Communism	7
Class Struggle	7
Class Consciousness	8
Freedom	9
Democracy	9
Means and Ends	10
Historical Materialism	10
Dialectics	11
Theory and Ideology	12
The State	12
Oppressive Social Relations	13
Colonisation	14
Federalism (Conceptual)	14
Social Force	15
Direct Action	15
Praxis	16
Self Management	17
Possibilism (Reform)	18
Dual Power	19
Workers Power	19
Revolution	19
Internationalism	20
The Transition Period and Anarchist Gradualism	21
Organisational Concepts and Modes	22
Social Vector	22
Social Insertion	23
Social and Political Level	23
Popular (or Mass) Organisation	23
Theoretical Unity	24
Strategic Unity	25
Collective Responsibility	26
Federalism (Organisational)	26
Concentric Circles	27

Education	28
The Revolutionary Programme	29
Key Strategies	30
The United Front and the Grouping of Tendency	31
Parliamentary Abstensionism	32
Mass Insurrection	32
Syndicates, Soviets, or something else?	33
Conclusion	34
References	34

Abstract

Foundational Concepts of the Specific Anarchist Organisation is a new pamphlet by Tommy Lawson. In this pamphlet Lawson introduces the basic theoretical concepts that inform Anarchist-Communists and their organisational practices. From a set of theoretical concepts forms of organisation and strategies shared in common across the history of the anarchist tendency emerge.

Foundations traces the influences on anarchism from theorists like Marx and Malatesta to the practices of modern Anarchist-Communist organisations.

It is by centering a material analysis of society and class struggle Anarchist-Communists seek to contribute to the struggle for a better world. At once free and equal, or in other words, Libertarian Communism.

This pamphlet was written on the lands of the Wathaurung peoples of the Kulin Nation. Sovereignty was never ceded.

For Nicolas Lazarevitch; a construction worker and translator, who fought in the Russian Civil War, occupied the factories of northern Italy during the Biennio Rosso, fought Italian fascists on the streets and organised strikes in Belgium in support of the Spanish Revolution. He continued to work exposing the crimes of the USSR throughout his life and participated in the occupations of May '68 in France. Lazarevitch also co-authored the Organisational Platform of the General Union of Libertarian Communists. May we all lead such revolutionary lives.

Introduction

The intention of this pamphlet is to introduce the foundational concepts that inform the organisational models, strategies and tactics of Anarchist-Communists. Though this work attempts to lay these concepts out in a manner that is easy to understand, it is not intended to be introductory to anarchist or socialist theory in general. It attempts to reflect the general practices of Anarchist-Communist organisations throughout the history of the Anarchist-Communist political tendencies existence. There are of course, however, some differences in theory and practice between both historic and contemporary organisations that must be acknowledged. But overall, a coherent set of theories and practices form the general outline of the specific anarchist organisation. Hopefully the reader will be inspired towards further research regarding the details as related to the context and practice of different organisations.

Topics and concepts included in the pamphlet reflect an attempt to cover a broad base of relevant concepts, and also to a degree reflect my personal biases and experiences in the anarchist movement. This work can only be taken as my own explanation of foundational concepts, in the sense that I should be held to account for mistakes rather than Anarchist-Communist organisations in general. This work no doubt also reflects to some degree the mood and preferences of the Australian movement. For example, contemporary Australian Anarchist-Communists have had a critical engagement with the specific anarchist organisational theory of *Especifismo* (Murphy, 2020). As such some concepts and topics may be as notable for their exclusion as much as those that are included.¹

¹ For example, the concept of Mutual Aid has been deliberately left out. See “*Socialism is not charity; why we are against Mutual Aid*” by Black Flag Sydney; <https://blackflagsydney.com/article/21>

In an attempt to demonstrate the breadth and consistency of Anarchist-Communist theory I have made deliberate references to particular texts rather than compiling a recommended reading list. Referencing therefore is generous but not excessive. For the sake of accessibility, references are so far as possible, made to the Anarchist Library, Libcom, and Marxists online archives. Where books are referenced, it is usually for a preference for translation or that they are not yet online.

Occasionally, a footnote will elaborate or give more detail. Footnotes will also sometimes indicate various connections between concepts that connect between sections. Certain concepts have been expanded upon further than others. This is either because the idea requires further explanation as to its particular import for Anarchist-Communists, to add historical context or to give practical examples. Others are shorter as they are more reflective of revolutionary socialist theory in general. Overall, the hope is that this work will contribute to the cohering and further development of the Anarchist-Communist tendency in Australia, and may also be of practical use to international comrades.

What is the Specific Anarchist-Communist Organisation?

The ideas that inform the modern concept of the specific anarchist organisation can be traced back to the Alliance for Social Democracy in the International Working Mens Association (IWMA). Also known as the First International, the great body that was the IWMA reflected the coming together of the early socialist movement across borders as nascent socialist ideas contended the meaning of working class emancipation. Inside the First International James Guillaume, Mikhail Bakunin and other ‘federalist’ revolutionaries advocated the need to form a specific, revolutionary socialist organisation to agitate for revolutionary goals (Graham, 2015). Since the Alliance’s rudimentary structures were drawn up by these comrades a red (and black) thread can be traced through history connecting the practice of unitary revolutionary organisation by anarchists. Specific anarchist organisations have consistently functioned as a space for militants to coordinate their activity, develop theory, practice and skills and collectively propagate anarchist ideas (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 1985).

While anarchism is considered by scholars and intellectuals to be a fairly broad philosophy, its theoretical roots and the practice of the vast majority of its historical adherents have been definitively based in the organisational, class struggle socialist movement. Anarchist-Communists have overwhelmingly been advocates of both specific revolutionary political organisations and mass proletarian organisations, while other currents, such as insurrectionists and syndicalists have at times rejected them (Corrêa, 2021).

The most contemporary manifestation of Anarchist-Communist organisational theory, which today’s reader may be familiar with, is known as ‘especificismo.’ Especificismo was coined by the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay (FAU) in the 1960s to refer to the particular conclusions they came to around the need for programmatic anarchist organisation. After the FAU played a significant role in Uruguayan workers revolts and the subsequent resistance to military dictatorship, the model of ‘especificismo’ spread to Argentina and Brazil, and then across the Americas (Lawson, 2022).

There are many similarities in the ideas of the Especificists and those of the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists* written by Peter Arshinov, Ida Mett, Nestor Makhno and

others following the Russian Revolution.² Surprisingly, the Uruguayan anarchists had no access to the historical document of the Platform when they developed their own ideas. However they were at least influenced by and aware of the history of members of the Bulgarian Anarchist-Communist Federation (FAKB), who had adopted the Platform as a model in the mid 1920's.³ Both the most influential members of the Anarchist-Communist movement and the majority of its adherents have consistently advocated a similar strategy, even if there have been slight disagreements over form (Corrêa & da Silva, 2022).

Today, the terms Platformism, Dual-Organisationalism and Especificismo are relatively interchangeable.⁴ There are small differences given the historical context of when and where they evolved. However this pamphlet uses the term “Anarchist-Communist” to indicate the continuity of historic practice and suggest a return to the orthodoxy of the term. Hopefully the pamphlet also reflects a modern articulation of Anarchist-Communist ideas, which have by no means remained stagnant over the last century.

“Anarchy, in common with socialism, has as its basis, its point of departure, its essential environment, equality of conditions; its beacon is solidarity and freedom is its method. It is not perfection, it is not the absolute ideal which like the horizon recedes as fast as we approach it; but it is the way open to all progress and all improvements for the benefit of everybody.”

Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy*, 1891.

Key Ideas

The first section of this pamphlet provides introductory explanations on fundamental concepts for Anarchist-Communists. These form the theoretical basis from which the organisational concepts and models, strategies and tactics of the specific Anarchist organisation emerge. The list provided here is not exhaustive in terms of general anarchist theory. Some concepts raised are included explicitly to draw a line between the way Anarchist-Communists and other anarchists understand them.

Anarchism

Anarchism itself can be understood as a set of ideological principles, core strategies and a vision of a free society.⁵ Furthermore anarchism is a revolutionary, class struggle tendency of

² All of these anarchists had played important roles in the anarchist movement during the Russian Revolution. Nestor Makhno would become the most famous, due to his role as a commander in the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine. Arshinov was an advisor to Makhno and chronicled the actions of the RIAU. Ida Mett published an important pamphlet with many first hand sources on the Kronstadt rebellion.

³ This information is based on an interview I conducted with the FAU in 2021.

⁴ The term Dual-Organisationalist is favoured in Italy, where it is associated with the strategies of past Anarchist-Communist organisations including the Revolutionary Anarchist-Socialist Party, founded by Malatesta in 1891 and the Italian Anarchist Union, founded in 1919.

⁵ Throughout this document the word “Libertarian” is used as a synonym for anarchist. In the USA and Australia the word has become associated with right-wing pro-capitalist forces, however it was originally coined by the Anarchist-Communist Joseph Déjacque in 1857. In the non-english-speaking world the word generally retains its original, anti-capitalist meaning.

the socialist movement. Its principles are anti-capitalism, federalism, and the attempt to find the most harmonious between means and ends possible. These principles result in a set of strategies based on class struggle, self-management, direct action and parliamentary abstention. The goal is a society run directly by workers free from all forms of exploitation and coercion (Workers Solidarity Federation, 2018). Anarchism is, ultimately, a methodology (Malatesta, 1891). The purpose of the anarchist method, composed of its principles and strategies, is for advancing towards the goal, communism, which to anarchist-communists is synonymous with anarchy itself (Cafiero, 1880).

Communism

The essence of communism is captured in the famous dictum “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs” (Marx, 1875). It is the abolition of all capitalist social relations: waged labour, commodification and exchange value.⁶

Communism is the construction of a new society described by a variety of revolutionaries as the “free association of producers” and a set of collective methods and principles that in turn guarantee the fullest realisation of the individual (Puente, 1932; Group of International Communists, 1930). In a communist society everyone will be granted access to all the necessities to live, the greatest degree of democratic participation in all aspects of life and all possible opportunities to flourish as individuals. Furthermore, communism, by abolishing exploitative relationships, will be the elimination of class distinctions.

Class Struggle

Capitalist society is ultimately divided into two fundamental classes. The capitalist class, also known as the bourgeoisie, who owns the “means of production.”^{7,8,9}

Because capitalists must seek to maximise the profits they make from industry, they need to find ways to keep costs low. Usually, rather than sell products for a higher price, which might make their business uncompetitive on the market, capitalists find other solutions. They will invest in automated machines rather than employing workers, use cheaper materials, or drive down wages.

Workers, who do not own the “means of production” are forced to sell the only thing they have to survive. That is, their ability to work.¹⁰ In return for time and labour, workers are paid

⁶ Commodification is the process whereby something that simply exists is given an “exchange value” and sold on the market. For example, water has always existed but only under capitalism has it been bottled and sold by private business.

Exchange value is the value a commodity has when traded on the market. Marx states that objects or commodities also have “use value.” That is, the usefulness of an object is not always defined by its exchange value. Communism is the overcoming of exchange value so that objects are only related to on the basis of their use value.

For more on Marxist economics, which is outside the framework of this pamphlet see Karl Marx *Wages Price and Profit* and *Wage Labour and Capital* or Wayne Price *The Value of Radical Theory*

⁷ see footnote 9

⁸ see footnote 9

⁹ Means of production are everything from factories and farms to cafes.⁷ In opposition to the capitalists are the working class, or proletariat, who work to make profits for the capitalists (Marx, 1847).⁸ The working class are also known as “proletarians.” The working class can also broadly include all those excluded from, or falling in and out of waged labour for various reasons.

¹⁰ Marx calls this their “labour power.”

wages. Out of their wages workers have to buy food and clothes, pay rent, pay bills, pay for transport to work, and all the things that mean they can reproduce and enjoy their own lives. Clearly, the better the workers wages, the more opportunities they have for a fulfilling life. This places workers on a direct collision course with capitalists.

But it goes further than just the immediate interests. The logic of capitalism means that all of society is subjected to the need for making profit. Capitalist interests dominate government (think of the inaction on climate change, because it would cost too much for capitalists in many industries to deal with), local planning, the content we see on television, and even shape the structure of the family. Everything that is produced is produced for profit, rather than the greater needs of society. Given that workers make up the vast majority of society, this means that the entire structure of society is subjected to the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

For all revolutionary socialists, be they anarchist-communists or Marxists, the only way these contradictions can be overcome is by the abolition of capitalism.

It would be negligent to not mention that there are what can be described as ‘intermediate classes’, such as the peasantry, the self-employed, and the permanently unemployed. These other classes may or may not be incorporated into the struggle against the capitalists, depending on the historical moment. But the fact remains that the fundamental conflict of society revolves around capitalist production, and subsequently between workers and capitalists.

What makes the working class key to social transformation is not just the way the nature of their material needs clashes with those of capitalists, it is also because during a revolutionary transformation society will still need to produce in order to survive. Workers thus become the most important class in revolutionary transformation, because they have the skills and knowledge to both run and restructure production to meet the needs of all.

Class Consciousness

Class consciousness refers to the awareness that workers have of their position in capitalist society. That is, their understanding of how capitalism shapes their social world, how they are exploited, and the ways in which they might overthrow the system and construct another one. Karl Marx put this neatly when he said that the working class exists as a class ‘in itself’ but through struggle comes to realise its place, and as it actively fights for a new society becomes a class ‘for itself’ (Marx, 1847). While such a statement is an abstraction that contains no great psychological insights as to the actual processes of shifting ideas amongst individuals, it is broadly applicable as a way of comprehending the prevailing mood and politics amongst workers at a given time. Anarchist-Communists understand that the greatest realisation of class consciousness occurs when the individual is aware of their position in society, and their own capacity to act, both individually and as part of the collective to change it (Bookchin, 1975).

Anarchist-Communists see the process of developing class consciousness as an organic result of conflict of material needs and the heightening of the contention between the needs of the proletariat and the capitalist class. While Anarchist-Communists and their specific organisations, like any other political organisation of the working class, reflect developments in the conflict between the bourgeois and the proletariat, they see themselves as a part of that process, not the very end result of revolutionary consciousness. They are instead simply an attempt by workers with a political vision and ideology to articulate and contribute their own insights to the mass struggle (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 2003).

Freedom

The ideal of freedom is central to anarchist ideas. However this term can appear quite abstract. To anarchist-communists, freedom contains two sides. There is negative freedom, or ‘freedom from’, and positive freedom, ‘freedom to.’

Negative freedom can be seen as the freedom from oppressive social relations. Capitalism, the state, poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia and all forms of interpersonal discrimination. Without negative freedom, there can be no positive freedom.

Positive freedom rests on the ability to achieve things, to reach the full potential of an individual human being. This requires access to resources, education, and a healthy, egalitarian society. To anarchist-communists then, society is the guarantor of freedom as it can not be achieved upon an individualist basis. Mikhail Bakunin noted that ‘Society is the basis and natural starting point of man’s human existence, and it follows that he only realises his individual liberty or personality by integration with all the individuals around him and by virtue of the collective power of society. According to the materialist theory . . . instead of diminishing or constricting the freedom of the individual, society creates it. Society is the root and branch, liberty the fruit (Bakunin 1895/1973, p. 145).’

Democracy

Often discussions of democracy amongst radicals, anarchists included can be hampered by semantics around definitions (Baker, 2022). The concept of democracy often suffers from this problem, so it is necessary to expand upon it slightly. If we consider ‘democracy’ to be the system of bourgeois administration of capitalist states where the mass of people get to vote for a party or politician every few years, then anarchists are against such a democracy (Price, 2018). Bourgeois democracy is hypocritical, and essentially a cover for the dictatorship of bourgeois, capitalist interests, although it is also obviously preferable to a literal dictatorship.

When it comes to radical, working class democracy the term itself does not suffice to cover what is meant. Would socialist democracy mean electing workers candidates to a workers parliament every few years to make decisions about how the economy is run? If that is the case, Anarchist-Communists are also against such a workers’ democracy, although it would be preferable to bourgeois democracy.

Democracy also comes with the baggage of utilitarian philosophy. That is, what’s best for the majority is the best for everyone. Hence in standard practice a vote is won if it is carried by fifty percent plus one vote. Majority vote has always been the predominant practice of Anarchist-Communists, but it does not tell the whole story. This is why the ‘libertarian’ aspect of Anarchist-Communism has always been emphasised.

Majorities should not always have the right to dictate to minorities, as majorities are not always correct. But neither should, indeed it would be worse if, minorities dictated to majorities (Malatesta, 1926). Anarchist-Communists believe people should be free from coercion to do whatever they wish provided it does not infringe on the freedom of others.

Following the logic of the points above, democracy, if it is to be given a positive definition by Anarchist-Communists means it’s most radical realisation. Everyone should have a say in decisions in the workplace and in the community. Majorities are respected, but not when they impinge the rights of the minority. The application of such a concept is entirely practical and at

times the majority must nonetheless be respected (Price, 2000). The development of a train line through a certain suburb for example would practically require majority support. In contrast, say a majority wanted to impose a restrictive dress code at a social club, that would be ridiculous.

Whenever organisations are required to make decisions that most people cannot participate in, anarchists advocate a particular practice of delegation. The topics to be decided on are previously discussed prior by local groups and their decisions and views are taken and given to the delegate. The delegate is expected to argue and vote according to the views they are to represent, though with a degree of autonomy for discussing unforeseen developments. Following every delegated meeting, delegates can be recalled and replaced if they have not done their job. In this sense, democracy for Anarchist-Communists is unique and reflects the realisation of popular participation in social life that does not unnecessarily limit or bind minorities or individuals.

Means and Ends

What seems at a relatively simple concept, the connection between means and ends, lies at the heart of anarchism. Anarchist-Communists have a vision of a free society as their end goal, and they believe the means used to reach such a society should be adequate to achieve such an end. As means employed in struggle affect the ends that are sought, they should also be judged not only according to intentions but according to the real results they produce (Malatesta, 1920).

As with all philosophical considerations, it is important to maintain the right level of abstraction when considering the concept of means and ends. For example, some might take the logic of consistent ends and means to insist on pacifism if we seek a world without war. However, despite wanting a world free of war, this is not the anarchist position. To Anarchist-Communists it is justifiable for the oppressed to commit violent acts against their oppressors, as it contributes to the liberation of humanity. However anarchist-communists also suggest that a society built on militarism would not produce an egalitarian, libertarian society. Thus the practices regarding the armed struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors, so far as they are informed by anarchism, must have a degree of consistency.

Because of the link between means and ends, anarchist-communists insist that means considered must contribute to the self-management and organisation of the working class in struggle (Price, 2020). From this basic position flows the logic of federalism and direct action. There are thus a set of practices somewhat inherent in anarchism, such as every member of an organisation having a say, the appointment of mandated delegates and the restriction power granted to people in positions of leadership, the insistence upon independent struggle by the working class.¹¹ As the nature of socialist values and vision for a future society is abstract and contested by various tendencies, the forms of struggle advocated by anarchists help to guarantee the working class has the ability to shape the revolutionary means and ends themselves (Kinna, 2016).

Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is a philosophical concept that is shared alike by Anarchist-Communists and Marxists. The theory was first articulated in the works of Marx and Engels, then incorporated into early anarchist theory by Mikhail Bakunin (Morris, 1993, #78). It is a

¹¹ See the 'Organisational Concepts and Models' and 'Key Strategies' sections to see how and why these practices are argued to be consistent with anarchist means and ends.

tool for thinking that is not entirely empirical or complete, rather it is useful for thinking about concrete conditions (Organização Socialista Libertária, 2007). Historical materialism argues that the *ideas* that exist at any stage in society are not just abstract, independent things floating around like ghosts waiting for people to notice them. They are instead the direct result of the practical, *material* interactions of humans with their environment at a particular stage in history (Engels, 1880).

According to historical materialism, each (roughly defined) ‘stage’ of human history is defined by a *mode of production*, that is, the way humans interact with their environment to produce, consume and reproduce their own lives, constructing and shaping their environment and ultimately reproducing the human species. Each of these stages contains various class relations and thus, various contradictions, driving social change through conflict (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 2003).

Out of each of these contradictions, new forms of production eventually emerge. Great clashes between classes mark the history of humanity. Think of the slave revolts in Ancient Rome, the Peasant Rebellions of the Middle Ages, and since the birth of capitalism, workers revolts like the Russian and Spanish Revolutions.

This of course, does not mean that history follows a pre-ordained path or that there are not “random events” that shape history. Nor that human action cannot change the course of destiny. But as a broad rule class struggles, just like development of techniques of production and scientific innovation mark the shaping and direction of human history.

There have been certain “Marxists” who have interpreted the insights of Marx and Engels as prescriptive rules of development, suggesting every society *must* pass through a series of stages before communism can be achieved. Such reductive interpretations strip historical materialism of its revolutionary content. In reaction, some anarchists have rejected Marx and Engels theories, which is also a great mistake. As Daniel Guérin noted “historical materialism should not be reduced to a simple determinism; the door must stay wide open to individual freewill and the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses (Guérin, 1981).’

Anarchism is not bound by a strict adherence to Marx’s ideas, but rather seeks to employ all correct scientific and philosophical understandings towards its ideological ends.

“The causes of injustice, in the socio-economic sense, do not reside so much in human conscience as in the inhuman essence of societies of conflicting classes and in the State which perpetuates them throughout history”

(Guillén, 1993)

Dialectics

Dialectics is a philosophical concept with long historical roots. Its relationship to anarchism can be traced back to the development of certain tendencies of socialist philosophy during their break with the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel. Marx, Engels, Bakunin and an entire group of young radicals were educated by Hegel who posited the idea of dialectics as ‘thesis, antithesis and synthesis.’

Any attempt to put dialectics as an abstract concept in simple terms will undoubtedly have its shortcomings, but it is worth attempting a basic explanation, as the concept appears consistently in radical literature. Essentially, *thesis* is something that already is, *anti-thesis* is its ‘negation’

or its opposite. The two come into conflict, destroying or absorbing elements of the other and producing *synthesis*. Hegel applied these concepts to abstractions like the spirit, Marx to social classes in society. If the bourgeois exist as the defining class of capitalist social relations, the proletariat exists as its opposite. They come into conflict, resolved by the abolition of both in the synthesis of communism.

This abstract way of thinking can be useful, but it is merely a tool. Following Marx, Friedrich Engels attempted to apply dialectics to other fields than philosophy and social science in a number of ways that are quite dubious.¹²

However the strength of dialectics as a theoretical tool is its application to materialist philosophy in explaining that things are not static. They are constantly shifting according to the balance of multiple forces in contestation. It is in this manner that anarchist-communists will sometimes use the term dialectics in theory, but it does not occupy a central place to all anarchists. While some classic authors like Mikhail Bakunin and Elisée Reclus may be argued to have their own conception of dialectics, others like Peter Kropotkin rejected the concept as it can be interpreted to reflect incorrect the laws of nature and reality incorrectly (McLaughlin, 2002; Clark, 1997; Kropotkin, 1913; Organização Socialista Libertária, 2007).

Theory and Ideology

To Anarchist-Communists there is a clear distinction between what constitutes theory, and what is ideology. Rather than trying to resolve the ‘problem’ of ideology, anarchist-communists recognise that it has its own place alongside the production of theory.

Theory is the product of intellectual tools and concepts that allow us to know and understand reality. It attempts, so far as possible, to be objective and is based on logic, the collection of facts and data, and testable hypotheses. Ideology on the other hand is a set of abstract principles that motivate people to action. Ideology to anarchists is essentially a ‘motor’ for political action (Mechoso & Corrêa, 2009).

As anarchists do not believe socialism is inevitable, the conscious desire for a new way of life has to be developed amongst the working class, full of insights that spring from the class struggle itself. Action as revolutionaries can only ever be based on the limited scientific knowledge that we have at a given stage in history, but that does not stop us from trying to achieve our goals. Furthermore, the development of theory is given impetus by ideological values (Organização Socialista Libertária, 2007).

The State

To Anarchist-Communists the state is a coercive, centralised institution that is the manifestation of class relations in society. Mikhail Bakunin said ‘the State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class or other; a priestly class, and aristocratic class, a bourgeois class’ (Bakunin, 1950). To Peter Kropotkin ‘Capital and the State are two parallel growths which never could have existed without each other’ (Kropotkin, 2014, #498). To Errico Malatesta, a society where ‘the mass of people’ are ‘exploited and oppressed by a small possessing class’ there ‘arises a special class (government) which... exists to legalise and protect the owning class’ (Malatesta, 1920).

¹² See Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Duhring*; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/>

As Wayne Price notes ‘of the theories which place the state within the context of the capitalist economy... anarchism and Marxism stand out’ (Price, 2018).

While the state in both anarchism and marxism represents a manifestation of class struggle, elements of the bourgeois state were considered more historically progressive by Marx and Engels than by anarchists (van der Walt & Schmidt, 2009, p. 96). Going further than Marxism, anarchists also suggest that the state is a hierarchical and centralised institution that uses coercive methods in defense of inequalities (Baker, 2019).

The state has a number of institutions that enforce its rule through coercion; the police, the military, the legal system and judiciary, prisons and a bureaucracy that presides over all of these repressive functions. While the state also organises services like healthcare, public transport and infrastructure it must be kept in mind these are necessarily required for capitalist society to function efficiently, and a number of the ‘positive’ aspects of services provided by the state have been won as concessions through struggle by the working class. The final purpose of the state is the reproduction of capitalist society.

Anarchists argue that nuance should be shown when analysing the state. Though the state ultimately exists to perpetuate capitalist rule, it also generates a degree of interests separate to that of the disparate capitalists in any given society. Therefore it is wrong to purely reduce the activity of the state at all times to the interests of capitalists. The interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole are sometimes in conflict. This can be between individual capitalists, international business, and the political class of any given society.

Either way however, the state as an apparatus and form of social rule must be destroyed. The manner in which society is centralised under an executive minority with coercive powers reproduces inequality. Even if it is possible to overturn capitalist society while maintaining any form of state, anarchists do not seek a militarised socialist society that reproduces any forms of inequality. Instead, Anarchist-Communists seek the abolition of the legal, military and administrative institutions which regulate class society. They will be replaced by federated and self-managed proletarian structures based upon communist methods of production (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 2008).

Anarchist-Communists believe that capitalism cannot be abolished while ignoring the role of the state, but neither does smashing the state guarantee the end of capitalism.

Oppressive Social Relations

Anarchist-Communists are not only opposed to capitalism and the state, but all forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia etc. A consistent historical materialist analysis suggests that the concrete forms that these oppressions take in any given society are informed by the historical and productive relations of said society. For example, the cultivation of racial divisions between black and white workers in the USA (Rashid, 2021). While class structures are fundamental to the form non-class oppressions take, oppression cannot be reduced purely to the functions of capitalism. Each form of oppression must be analysed in its concrete nature (Price, 2007). However the notion that class, race and gender are similar ‘overlapping’ oppressions as suggested by liberal conceptions of intersectionality do not provide an accurate picture nor provide a useful way forward (Volcano & Rouge, 2013).

It is the relationship of class as the binding form of exploitation that unites all workers and offers the possibility of solidarity in resistance, but only if oppressive relations are challenged

individually and collectively in the process. Furthermore the development of theories of identity and oppression such as gender must be incorporated into a class struggle framework if analysis and practice are to remain meaningful (Akemi & Busk, 2016).

Colonisation

Any broad discussion of revolutionary political theory written in Australia must necessarily address the question of colonisation. To Anarchist-Communists colonisation is a process whereby the indigenous people of a land are dispossessed. While colonial processes began before capitalist social relations had spread across the globe, colonial projects were nonetheless shaped and given further impetus by the interests of early capital. Colonisation is simultaneously its own process and one intimately linked to imperialism. The political interests of capital in its processes of accumulation require centralisation and tolerate no social system outside of capitalism and the bourgeois state. Thus the material process of colonisation does not end even under a liberal capitalist regime (Bonanno et al., 2019).

Today capitalism continues to dispossess and destroy indigenous communities in the pursuit of resource extraction, profit, and the bourgeois project of nation building. Continued colonial projects are also based on processes of coercive assimilation, denying indigenous autonomy and identity that exists outside the project of the bourgeois nation (Melbourne Anarchist-Communist Group, 2008). Anarchist-Communists argue there can be no meaningful autonomy of indigenous communities nor decolonisation in any sense under the capitalist system. Only the real abolition of the state and capital can end colonisation.

Federalism (Conceptual)

Federalism is one of the most distinguishing features of anarchist politics. It is at the same time a theory of how anarchist organisations ought to be structured, and a model for revolutionary social organisation.

Federalism holds that organisation should always be freely agreed upon and constituted from the 'bottom up, periphery-to-center', with 'higher' bodies mandated to fulfil tasks decided upon by the lower, grassroots bodies. The groups that form a federation are self-governing, voluntarily forming higher co-ordinating bodies. The higher levels have no executive power over the lower levels. However this does not mean that organisations are not accountable to each other. (Rashid, 2020) Individuals and branches that enter into a federation on a particular basis, be this social or political, are held to account for their action regarding the agreed principles of the federation. Accountability to each other and the community is the direct opposite of capitalist society, where workers are only accountable to their boss (not each other), small businesses to the state (not their workers), and the state to powerful business interests. While there are of course capitalist states organised upon a 'federalist' basis however only socialism can give federalism real revolutionary content (Guérin, 1970). That is, proletarian federalism is completely unlike bourgeois federalism.

Federalism means workers directly control their own affairs, establishing socialism on a genuine basis of workers control, and allowing the space for transformative practices. Thus, federalism really is 'socialism from below.' As a historical example, many large trade union bodies have been formed on federalist practices. At its peak the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers Association (IWA), had millions of members, all whilst operating in a federalist manner.

Federalism is usually considered in opposition to ‘centralism.’ This does not mean that there is no central space for coordinated activity nor decision making, rather that the central body of any social organisation should not establish a minority with executive power over its parts. The establishment of such ‘centralism’, usually in the name of efficiency, has a tendency to stifle initiative and freedom. It can often exaggerate inequalities in an organisation by granting privileges to small minorities.

Centralism in economic matters is also no silver bullet. Certain industries may be better served by establishing giant workshops and factories, others may require localised production. Federalism allows such flexibility and is not hampered by a priori notions around centralisation or decentralisation. Dogmatism around either is usually inferred from existing capitalist social practices.

Social Force

The term *social force* is a term found in anarchist literature used in an interchangeable manner with *collective force*. Effectively, it simply means the collective capacity to act. It is the rather common sense proposition that by combining their efforts, human beings can achieve far more than they could as individuals. On an ideological level, this is a departure from liberalism. Think of how capitalists claim that ‘they’ as an individual ‘built’ or are responsible for the achievements of their business. To anarchists however, all labour, all production, is a collective effort. Even when an individual labours, they draw on the labour of people in the past who developed technologies, made scientific discoveries, and established the basis for the reproduction of social life etc. (Rashid, 2020)

Expanding upon social force as the collective capacity to act, it became a key concept amongst anarchists in articulating the need for oppressed social groups to join together to fight. Bakunin took this concept and expanded it to the tactical needs of organisation:

“It is true that there is in the people a great elementary force, a force beyond that of the government and that of the ruling classes as a whole, but without organisation the elementary force is not a real force. It is this undeniable advantage of organised force over the elemental force of the people that the force of the state is based. Therefore the problem is not so much to know if the people can revolt, but to see that they are capable of building such organisation that gives them the means to reach a successful end.”

Mikhail Bakunin (Corrêa, 2009)

So then the task of anarchists is to encourage workers and the oppressed to harness their social force, to amplify it by organisation and to wield it against the state and the capitalist class.

Direct Action

One way in which social force can be harnessed and encouraged is by the means of direct action. A well known phrase used by anarchists, it is at its core both strategic and tactical. It attempts to link the means and ends of struggle to a society where workers self govern without capitalism or the state. What direct action means is working class people taking action to achieve

a particular goal by themselves, bypassing bourgeois representational and legal means. (Sparrow, 1997) It is the collective acting out of social force.

The term direct action was coined by French anarcho-syndicalist Emile Pouget.¹³ To Pouget the concept was born of class conflict, where the workers created their own means of struggle. Instead of understanding themselves as citizens of the liberal state, workers who undertake direct action come to understand themselves and their power as the producers of society. Direct action, collectively undertaken by workers, is a direct attack on the capitalist system. (Pouget, 1910)

Anarchist-Communists seek to avoid the fetishisation of small scale and individual actions as 'direct action.' This is not to say that we do not support individuals fighting against oppressive circumstances, but that direct action should be understood in its original sense. That is, as a transformative practice of mass, collective and class based action.

Praxis

Fundamental to anarchist politics is the concepts of praxis, or, the embodiment of theory in action. Praxis is a philosophical concept that is key not only to anarchists, but all socialist doctrines. In essence, it means 'process' and is concerned with the creation of knowledge and how it is turned into action.

To Anarchist-Communists in particular praxis means that an individual or collective establishes a reflective relationship between action and theory, placing a particular emphasis on the action that must be undertaken to change the world (Miami Autonomy and Solidarity, 2010). This was also a particular concern for Marx in his philosophical analysis. To Marx, contradiction in theory can only be resolved in action, and this is what separates revolutionary political theory from bourgeois philosophy. Bakunin had similar reflections, believing that if socialism was left to scientists and intellectuals rather than created by the conscious activity of the masses it would merely become another tyranny (Bakunin, 1871).

In revolutionary theory, the starting point must be a materialist analysis of society, with an eye towards resolving its contradictions by action (Marx, 1845). Based on such a principle for analysis, individuals and collectives decide upon actions they may choose to undertake in order to alter the world. The action they decide to undertake is then analysed according to not only its intentions, but its actual results, thus informing future action. This basic concept underlies the entirety of anarchist politics, as blind action is useless much as theory without practice is useless (Federación Anarquista Uruguay, 1972).

The undertaking of praxis not only changes the world around us by conscious and active intervention into society, but it also transforms those who undertake it. This is why, in contrast to individualist schools of anarchism, or authoritarian, vanguardist schools of Marxism, Anarchist-Communists seek to consistently mobilise the mass of workers. Praxis after all is not limited to revolutionaries.

Anarchist-Communists thus seek to encourage workers to undertake self-directed activity. Through mass action, the consciousness of individuals is transformed, as people realise they have the capacity to change the world, reshaping it towards their collective desires.

¹³ Pouget was a long time anarchist and pioneering revolutionary syndicalist, who was at one point the vice-secretary of the CGT. The CGT today remains the largest federation of Trade Unions in France, although its politics have long since ceased to be revolutionary.

“*Meaningful action*, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. *Sterile and harmful action* is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others – even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.”

– Maurice Brinton (Brinton, 1967)

Self Management

Drawing from and expanding upon social force, direct action and praxis, it makes sense to explain *self-management*, a concept applicable to both economics and the organisation of anti-capitalist struggle. Self-management means that at every level, people have direct democratic control over their lives, their community and their workplaces. The term itself gained popularity to contrast the concept of socialism-from-below, or anarchism, to other models of revolutionary socialism that justified forms of top down organisation (Keefer, 2018).¹⁴ Through self-managed movements, the content of class-struggle is linked with democratic forms such as mandated delegates and popular assemblies.

There is sometimes a misconception that anarchists fetishise the forms of struggle over the content.¹⁵ This is incorrect. Anarchists believe there is a dialectical relationship whereby form and content are mutually reinforcing. For example, imagine a popular movement that elects a directing committee of working class origins. This does not guarantee the class basis of the demands the movement puts forward. A small relatively unaccountable clique could produce its own interests, make decisions around alliances with other class forces etc. Rather, democratic forms ensure that the popular mass of a movement, that is, workers, are able to put forward proletarian demands, which at least ensures the class has democratic control over the content of struggle.

In terms of economics, self-management means that workers have direct control over their own labour and the very firm they work in (Pannekoek, 1947). By these means, workers can overcome alienation, avoiding the development of a technical-bureaucratic class of managers. From each democratically controlled workplace, delegates are sent to congresses and bodies that combine industries and community representatives. This allows for the working out of bottom-up plans for production and consumption. The self-managed system avoids the problems of the traditional Leninist model where a small clique is elected to plan the economy and dictate down to the producers. Contrary to such models, anarchists believe there is no iron law that dictates centralisation is always the best model of production (Fabbri, 1922). The problem is a balancing of centralisation, in the sense of coordination, with autonomy (Price, 2014).¹⁶

¹⁴ In particular, the term was coined to oppose pre-dominant forms of Marxism-Leninism, including Orthodox Trotskyism.

¹⁵ The forms of content are how organisations function, such as mass assemblies, protests, riots etc. The content is the social basis of a struggle and its demands. An example of the prioritisation of form over content would be Murray Bookchin’s so-called *Libertarian Municipalism*, which departed from anarchism when he advocated mass assembly democracy, regardless of the classes participating.

¹⁶ The concept of centralisation is of constant conflict between anarchists and marxists. If marxists mean a central body or congress of delegates organised from the bottom up to make plans, then anarchists have no opposition. In

There are critiques that self-management does not guarantee socialist content. Of course, this is true. Anarchists make this exact critique. Co-operatives for example function as capitalist enterprises without bosses. They may fulfil certain social needs at a given time, but they are not core to anarchist strategy, which seeks a revolutionary rupture with capitalism. After a revolution, when the means of production have been seized by workers the problem changes. So called ‘factory socialism’¹⁷ can become a very real problem.

During the Spanish Revolution for example, many factories functioned as entirely separate enterprises, interested primarily in the interests of their workers rather than workers in general. This in turn reproduced inequality amongst the class (Hill, 2020). On the other hand, some syndicates completely socialised production, moving rapidly towards communist structures (Guilamón, 2020). For Anarchist-Communists then, during the revolutionary transition the goal is to encourage workers’ economic organisations to freely move towards increasingly socialised models of economic production.¹⁸

Possibilism (Reform)

Possibilism refers to an attitude towards social reforms and their potential. While *impossibilists*¹⁹ believe that any reform under capitalism is tangential, meaningless or not worth fighting for, as it puts off the day of revolution, anarchist-communists take a more nuanced view. There is simply no good argument that workers and the oppressed should not fight to make their lives under capitalism more bearable. The question for anarchists who take the *possibilist* view is how reforms are achieved.

What separates revolutionaries seeking reform from actual reformists like social democrats is not the struggle for reforms themselves, but the strategies and goals undertaken to achieve them. Anarchist-Communists do not seek reform through electoral candidates, lobbying or any such manner. For a start, these methods are actually much less effective. (Malatesta, n.d.) The strategies Anarchist-Communists employ in the struggle for reform seeks to build workers power by relying upon direct action. This empowers workers and the oppressed, teaching them that they can achieve improvements in their lives by the social force of their own collective action. The intervention of anarchists in this process is to help keep the forms of struggle as directly democratic and unmediated as possible, and to agitate for socialism and the idea of revolution within any movement for reform. As movements become more powerful and the class becomes more conscious of the nature and limits of its conflict with capitalists and the state, the potential for a revolutionary moment increases.

fact anarchists have always advocated for the exact same! The problem is centralisation to the marxist usually means the handing over of powers to a smaller elected body over which the mass of people have no direct control.

¹⁷ Where workers have seized their workplaces, but continue to produce for a market, placing the needs of their factory/workplace over that of society.

¹⁸ For further reading on potential practical models, see Gaston Leval, *Libertarian Socialism, a Practical Outline* or the Group of International Communists, *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*. For a good introduction to the intersections of anarchist thought with Marxist political economy see Wayne Price, *The Value of Radical Theory: An Anarchist Introduction to Marx’s Critique of Political Economy*.

¹⁹ Usually anarchists are associated with Insurrectionism and subsequently so-called ‘propaganda-of-the-deed.’

Dual Power

Dual power refers to a *situation*, a moment in time, where the organised power of the workers and oppressed social groups rivals that of the bourgeoisie (Lenin, 1917). The term Dual Power was coined by the Bolshevik leader Lenin when the power of the Soviets in Russia existed side by side with that of the Constituent Assembly (the Russian parliament). This was not a situation that could last. Nor should it. In the end, an anarchist, Anatoli Zhelezniakov, ordered the dissolution of the bourgeois Constituent Assembly (Heath, 2005). Thus, the organised power of the workers was expressed, if only temporarily, through the Soviets, opening the door to the potential for socialist transition.

Anarchist-Communists do not aim for a situation of dual power, they seek to establish workers' power. Lenin's definition was correct, and the waters should not be muddied by employing the term Dual Power to refer to anything else. The building of Workers (or Counter, or Popular) Power, that is the capacity of the workers and oppressed to impose their own demands upon the bourgeois and the state is a strategy, not a situation (Crossin, 2022).

Workers Power

Workers Power (sometimes Popular Power or Counter-Power in literature) ties into the definitions of class struggle, direct action and self-management explained above. It is essentially a term for the capacity of workers and oppressed groups to take action and enforce their demands independently of the state. (Corrêa, 2009) It is the *accumulation of social force* or *autonomous power of the proletariat* in movements, trade unions and revolutionary political organisations. Workers Power is created, not taken. The culmination of Workers Power is when these forces are organised and overthrow capitalist production and the state, establishing socialism based on self-management.

Workers Power also demands a degree of autonomy for groups and individuals as actors within the class. Power is essentially the capacity to act and to transform things. If workers not only as a class, but as individuals and as sectors of the broad working class lack the ability to act and change the society they exist within, then the term of Workers Power only applies in the abstract.

Revolution

It should go without saying that Anarchist-Communists are for revolution. The question is then what does this actually mean?

A revolution is an insurrectionary moment where the power of a ruling class is smashed and overturned by the mass of people. In popular culture the overturning of a dictatorship and its replacement by a bourgeois democracy can be conceived of as a revolution.²⁰ But to anarchists this is a *political* revolution. One set of masters is replaced by another and the system of production and the state remain. Anarchist-Communists seek a *social* revolution.

That is the thoroughgoing transformation of society from one based on exploitation, in other words capitalism, into one of self-managed socialism. The anarchist revolution seeks the abolition

²⁰ One of the most contemporary examples is the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. The military dictatorship was overturned and replaced with a government of the Muslim Brotherhood. The fundamental features of the state and economy remained, and within a few years the military took control again.

of private property in the means of production²¹ and the abolition of government. This includes the military, parliament, the police and the judiciary (Malatesta 1920).

The social revolution will not be a national affair. Anarchists will seek to encourage workers to expand the revolution across all borders, reconstituting the world into a new international federation of self-managed communities and communist production organised from the bottom up. Along the way all forms of domination will be challenged and overthrown as social life is reconstructed anew. The revolution begins not only with workers taking over the means of production, but with the smashing of the state. Revolution is the mobilisation of the masses, the exercise of freedom, unconstrained by laws and governments (Fabbri, 1921).

Internationalism

Internationalism is basic to anarchism not just as an ethical value, but a vital concept in terms of struggle. As capitalism is an international system, the struggle against capitalism can also only be international. The division of workers across national boundaries ultimately undermines liberation. Benefits that workers of a particular imperialist nation state may receive often come at the cost of workers in other countries. The further the division between nations grows, the more divided the labour movement becomes, and the weaker even the workers of the imperialist nations become in imposing their own strength upon the capitalist system (Rocker, 1938). Hence, it is vital that anarchists aim to clarify the importance of internationalism in labour struggles.

Furthermore, nationalism sacrifices workers to the war efforts of competing capitalists. Out of opposition to the sacrifice of workers for the sake of profits, anarchist anti-militarism becomes an important point of agitation. This is not to renounce violent practice when it works towards our own ends, but rather to stand in opposition to the military of national states and their capitalist classes (Tiggjan, 2022). For workers in imperialist countries this value means *revolutionary defeatism*. Revolutionary defeatism means that during the struggle of an imperialist bourgeoisie the workers of that country will fight to see their own nation fail at its imperialist conquests. They agitate against the sacrifice of workers' lives to oppress and occupy another nation and aim to turn imperialist war into class war (Nilsen, 2022).

When it comes to questions of anti-imperialism, Anarchist-Communists try to avoid the ultra-leftist errors of other anarchist schools. There is a trap where some anarchists and revolutionary socialists equate all *national liberation struggles* with *bourgeois nationalism*. On the one hand, national liberation struggles inevitably involve bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements; the concrete struggle necessarily mobilises all classes. But it would be criminal for anarchists to suggest that workers in a concretely oppressed nation refrain from a national liberation struggle on the basis that they are falling into the trap of 'nationalism' (Bonanno et al., 2019).

The real question is one of strategic involvement. Anarchist-Communists argue that workers make up the vast majority of people in any oppressed nation. These groups can take up the struggle on an independent basis. It does not necessitate falling into the project of bourgeois nation building, nor oppose the potential of making alliances with revolutionary defeatist workers in the imperialist countries. Certainly anarchist and revolutionary socialists abstaining from national liberation movements only makes the bourgeois content of such struggle more inevitable.

²¹ Both industrial and agricultural.

Anarchists must participate, winning people to their program and pushing national liberation even further, towards an internationalist, socialist revolution.²² (Price, 2017)

Finally, the importance of internationalism is vital in the revolutionary period. When any territory begins to go through a revolutionary process it will be inevitably isolated and attacked by bourgeois forces. No matter the pure ideals of revolutionaries, material conditions will dictate what is achievable. Prolonged isolation makes degeneration inevitable. The strength of the international revolutionary movement will be fundamental in protecting, defending and expanding any potential revolutionary situation. The more internationalist organisation is prior to the revolutionary rupture, the more likely the revolution will be internationalist in content.

The Transition Period and Anarchist Gradualism

To expand upon the concept of international revolution, we must necessarily deal with anarchist understandings of the so-called 'transition period' between capitalism and socialism. There is another common myth that anarchists believe in a semi-magical revolutionary transformation, from one day to the next, between capitalist social relations and communism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The transition period from capitalism to socialism rests upon two fundamental factors. The defeat and suppression of the bourgeoisie and their state, and the reconstruction of a socialist society. (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 1985) Neither of these are simple, and will take many years to accomplish.

The standing bourgeois army must be conquered and eliminated. Different nations will face different tasks in confronting the reactionary threat of the military. Some nations still have large militaries made of conscripts with close ties to the mass of the population. Relations between the workers and the rank and file of the military may offer opportunities for liaison and rebellion that do not exist in countries with smaller, highly trained and specialised militaries. In such countries the *extremely rapid* economic isolation and crippling of the military will be key, given that usually the population is rarely armed or trained in combat.

The new popular forms of social organisation will have to organise militias, established with similar protocols to economics organisations. Democratic structures, mandated roles, no distinction between officers and soldiers, accountability to civilian bodies, and as little as possible permanence of institutions as the situation permits. A fundamental factor in the military defeat of the bourgeoisie is not necessarily terrain nor even arms, but the positive will of the people (Guillén, 1969/1973, p. 242). Furthermore, international bodies will have to be formed linking the struggle between forces in the revolutionary territory and those fighting for revolution elsewhere.

In terms of economic reconstruction, workers will immediately have to restart production. No revolution was ever won by starving people. Representatives of productive industries will have to link together in regional, national and international federations, finding the most immediate and practical solutions to economic matters whilst under the direction of workers. Deals will have to be made between industrial and agricultural sectors, ensuring the appropriate supply works both ways. Everything from towns to cities to schools and train lines can be restructured.

²² There has been a significant anarchist-communist presence in national liberation movements in the past. The most obvious example is the role of anarchists in the Ukraine from 1917-21. The French *Federation Communiste Liberatoire* played a significant revolutionary defeatist role in the struggle for Algerian Independence. For a broader history of anarchist anti-imperialism see Lucien Van Der Walt, *Towards A History of Anarchist Anti-Imperialism*.

The revolution will unleash the creative capacity of the workers from the restrictions of capital. Solutions will be found that are both local and decentralised, to economically federated and international.

Exactly what these intermediate economic forms take we cannot specify. They will have to be the subject of the free creation of workers to make their own ends meet. This is what is meant by anarchist gradualism (Malatesta, 1925). We do not expect a communist society overnight, but an experimentation with alternatives to capitalist production that anarchists will encourage social reorganisation towards completely communist practices (Kropotkin, 2015, p. 29-39).

This commitment to free association and bottom up construction is a distinguishing feature of anarchism. Anarchist-Communists do not believe that libertarian ends can be achieved by authoritarian means.²³ Anarchism seeks, as much as possible, to find a gradual solution that neither invites unnecessary conflict between the non-exploiting classes nor passes authority to a small clique charged with planning the lives of millions of people.²⁴ Practical solutions should be found that are not only economically viable, but produce the most socially equitable, just and free forms. (Malatesta 1925)

“We trust more in agreement than in imposition, in knowledge than coercion, in freedom than in authority. That is why we are libertarians.”

Gerardo Gatti

Organisational Concepts and Modes

The following section on Organisational Concepts attempts to illustrate the concrete forms and practices of the Specific Anarchist-Communist Organisation. Certain concepts included in this part of the pamphlet rather than the Key Ideas section inform particular practices and models of organisations. In turn, understanding the theoretical basis of Organisational Concepts will help illustrate why particular strategies are employed, vis a vis the final section.

Social Vector

The social vector conceptualises the relationship of anarchism to the popular movements in which anarchism has or seeks to have an influence (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro, 2008). The relationship is dialectical. As anarchism influences the mass of people, it in turn is further articulated and developed in relation with mass struggles. Historically, the key social vector of anarchism was the labour movement, endowing the anarchist ideology itself with certain characteristics.²⁵ Following the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War and the struggle against

²³ There is often the accusation from Marxists that the abolition of the state and the power of capitalists is authoritarian. This is a childish play on words, anarchists have never denied that they will violently strip the power of the state and capitalists away and impose the power of the working and oppressed classes. To anarchists this equalisation is the destruction of authority, not the enactment of it.

²⁴ For example, during the Spanish Revolution rural collectives allowed single peasants to keep their own tract of land provided they did not employ the labour of anyone else. This avoided unnecessary conflict and almost every time, the individualist peasants ended up joining the greater collective. The reason? Collective economics is much more efficient.

²⁵ Ie, a certain over-obsession with waged workers to the detriment of other oppressed social layers, and organisational forms like syndicalism.

fascism, it can be said anarchism broadly lost its once significant social vector. The struggle to recover anarchism's social vector informs core elements of Anarchist-Communist organisational practice and analysis.

Social Insertion

Social insertion then is the struggle to recover the social vector of anarchism. Essentially, anarchists must be involved in the daily fights of the oppressed and working class. This does not mean involvement in political parties, or advocacy and lobbying organisations. Instead anarchists focus on the fighting movements based in oppressed social layers (Weaver, 2007).

The task of the specific anarchist organisation is to analyse various forces at work at society, calculating the appropriate spaces in which to intervene. The task in these movements is simultaneously to promote anarchist ideas, but more importantly to fight for the popular set of principles and methods associated with anarchism and working class liberation. These are anti-capitalism, direct action, mass democratic procedures, self-organisation, and political independence.

Anarchist-Communists believe it is through the mass organisations born of class struggle that workers will exercise their power. While it is vital the specific anarchist organisation has clarity and direction in its program, the task of implementing and constructing socialism will be the work of mass organisations of the working class. The specific anarchist organisation, through the influence of its ideas, attempts to guide the mass forward by linking and encouraging struggles, but it does not dictate the specific line or programme.

Social and Political Level

The concept of the 'social' and 'political levels' aims at clarifying confusion and mistakes in previous anarchist theory. The conflation of the two has led to not only theoretical, but organisational errors amongst other currents of anarchism, in particular anarcho-syndicalism.

The social level is where basic class struggle occurs. Struggles at this level are popular, wide ranging and mobilise significant numbers of not only the working class, but periphery and intermediate classes around immediate demands.²⁶ They are heavily shaped by the predominant ideologies of society, i.e. liberal demands limited to the capitalist framework. Struggles at this level rise and fall, motivated by material events and structures. For example, financial crisis, war, climatic events. (Collective Action, n.d.)

In contrast the political level is where individuals, organisations and parties operate with particular frameworks and ideologies, aiming to achieve particular goals. The political level can be conservative, social democratic, liberal or socialist. For the specific anarchist organisation, the political level indicates the work its militants undertake to specifically promote and achieve their ideological goal; libertarian communism or, anarchy.

Popular (or Mass) Organisation

Mass organisations are organisations of the class, not specific political organisations. They are based on the satisfaction and achievement of immediate and objective material needs. Their

²⁶ I.e. progressive factions of the self employed, students, the unemployed, small farmers.

program however may in time approach that of the specific organisation.²⁷ Efforts must be made not to confuse the program of the mass organisation, which is developed as a whole by the oppressed groups articulating their own struggle, with the specific revolutionary program of political organisations. Such is sometimes the difference between Anarchist-Communist and Leninist conceptions of mass work (Gutiérrez, 2021).

The specific anarchist organisation works to clarify political ideas amongst the mass organisation without dominating or dictating the line of march. That is, Anarchist-Communists do not place themselves in positions of executive power over class organisations, rather they take up positions only when specifically mandated and delegated by a democratic process.

This does not suggest that anarchists cannot provide leadership. Anarchist-Communists work to encourage workers to draw revolutionary conclusions through both illustrating the contradictions within capitalism and through the practice of direct action in class struggle. As revolutionary situations develop, the mass organisation must be prepared for the establishment of self-management and socialist economy. In the right situation, through the mass organisation, workers unleash revolutionary transformation (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, 1985).

Today's Anarchist-Communists do not delude themselves with the historical errors of many Marxists or anarchists alike. We do not assume that revolutionary spontaneity will be enough to bring about revolution.²⁸ Nor that certain forms guarantee revolutionary content; syndicalist unions, factory committees, soviets²⁹. All these forms of workers organisation still exist within a broader context that can shape them as revolutionary or collaborationist. Finally, the fundamental error of making a principle out of 'red unionism.' That is, establishing separate *revolutionary* unions as a principle.³⁰ These organisations often split class forces and abandon intervention amongst workers who do not join the new unions, hence leadership in the mass unions automatically falls to less revolutionary or even reactionary forces.

Theoretical Unity

The absolute basis of any coherent political organisation is theoretical unity. By theoretical unity we mean a shared framework for interpreting the world and in turn acting upon it. A specifically political organisation without theoretical unity is as useful as a racehorse whose legs are independent and run in different directions the moment the gates open. In other words, not effective at all. This is important to understand for two reasons.

²⁷ For example the CNT's libertarian communism or the Turin Factory Councils communist programme during the Biennio Rosso.

²⁸ Though the day of the Spanish Revolution may have been spontaneously triggered by the Fascist coup, decades of practical and organisation preparation made the revolution possible. The struggles of the CNT defence committees for example were nothing if not the opposite of spontaneous organisations.

²⁹ During the Biennio Rosso for example, some Italian Marxists had an idealist conception of the factory councils, assuming that by their very nature they were revolutionary. As the Italian Anarchist Union pointed out, their radical nature was contingent on the forward march of working class struggle.

³⁰ Or other organisations. For example, during the German revolution the Communist Party(s) abandoned the trade unions and established the AAUD, a union of so-called revolutionary 'factory committees.' This is not to say at all times and places splits within the labour movement are unnecessary. The Italian Syndicalist Union for example was expelled from the main labour body during the First World War. These comrades had no option but to organise themselves separately. The Anarchist Federation of Uruguay was instrumental in creating a new national union body, splitting from and dissolving the established unions based on political tendencies.

In the first and most obvious instance this is because the revolutionary political organisation operates at a different level to social struggle organisations, such as trade unions. Unions for example are united by common interests but can functionally retain people who adhere to different philosophies. The revolutionary organisation however works to argue for and achieve specific goals across multiple fields of social struggle; in the workplace, the neighbourhood, the unions and in social movements.

The second reason is because of the need for shared analysis; a lack of broad concrete and conceptual theory means that militants and organisations would have to over-examine, study and debate every single issue that arises they wish to act upon and may find they have completely different ways of understanding a problem. Starting from a solid basis of theoretical unity avoids this over complication or reactions based on spontaneity and subjectivity (Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, 1972).

Through the course of their development Anarchist-Communist organisations develop shared positions on particular issues. The development of theory and practice go hand in hand. It is not vital that every single issue is theorised and decided upon before people begin to act. However it is vital that as work arises the organisation reflects upon its activity and forms a solid theoretical basis. Such theoretical reflection can take shape via journal articles, propaganda, and position statements.

Overall, the specific anarchist organisation requires a high level of theoretical unity given the tasks it sets itself. In the past many looser anarchist organisations have attempted to function with low levels of theoretical unity; all have failed or proven largely ineffective.

Strategic Unity

Given that Anarchist-Communists argue for high levels of theoretical unity, the need for unity in strategy and tactics should also be apparent. By basing analysis of an economy, a political situation, a struggle or a social movement on a firm theoretical ground the specific organisation should be capable of developing a clear collective response.

Tactical unity amplifies the social force of the anarchist organisation. It helps cohere and direct the broader social layers around it towards libertarian socialist goals and it rids the broader movement of the confusion of antagonistic tactics and actions (Dielo Truda (Workers Cause), 1926).

A specific anarchist organisation should aim for the highest level of voluntary tactical unity, while remaining flexible enough to respond appropriately to immediate local needs. Anarchist-Communist organisations employ a number of frameworks to decide upon the scope of a particular strategy. Such as a conjunctural analysis of a social situation, the general or overall political and organisational strategy, short term strategies and in the most immediate and flexible level, general tactics (Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira, 2017).

Often, Anarchist-Communist organisations usually break down their social work into internal 'fronts.' These sections generally relate to movements in the context the revolutionary organisation operates within. For example, all Anarchist-Communist organisations will have a 'union' front, where activists work, reflect, theorise and struggle in their workplaces. There might also be fronts, or sections, for environmental struggles, housing, student, queer rights, indigenous rights, anti-fascism etc. It depends on the context. Given that militants only have so much time, beyond

their general responsibilities to the organisation they may be expected to select and contribute to a particular front over others.

Ultimately, the correct application of theoretical and tactical unity should result in not only reflective and collective struggle, but the creation of the revolutionary programme; the backbone of any serious political organisation.

Collective Responsibility

Furthering the basic concepts of the revolutionary organisation itself, one that further ensures the integrity of the organisation is the concept of collective responsibility.

Anarchist-Communist organisations reject the liberal conception of *individual* responsibility. This does not mean that an individual cannot be held to account; quite the contrary. It means that the individual *is* held to account to the collective, mutually reinforced by all the individuals holding each other and the entire organisation to account. As it is laid out in the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists; ‘the [organisation] as a whole is answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of each member of the union, likewise, each of its members is answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of the [organisation] as a whole (Dieło Truda (Workers Cause), 1926).

In practice, this means that individuals and branches are accountable to the entirety of the organisation. People and sections can be disciplined and expelled for inappropriate behaviour, or for undertaking actions that undermine the broadly defined and collectively agreed course of action. It also means that an organisation has the duty to provide and assist the development of each individual within the organisation; providing education, access to resources, moral and material support, efforts to make it easier for parents or people with disabilities to contribute to the struggle etc. After all, to anarchists freedom is collectively established and developed, it is not simply defined by a lack of rules or restraint on the individual. Libertarian organisation rests upon the principle of fraternal discipline (Makhno, 1996, #68).

Overall, the anarchist organisation is not a political free-for-all but a tightly knit, mutually supportive and collective organisation.

Federalism (Organisational)

Federalism in the anarchist organisation attempts to safeguard against the growth of domination in social relations and the creation of a leadership clique separate from the mass of members.

Anarchist-Communists recognise that although the dangers of the creation of a permanent class of managers are somewhat inherent in organisation, formal structures and accountability actually do more to prevent degeneration than to create it. Organisation after all, is both socially and politically necessary for revolutionary action and for the building of a communist society.

Therefore there are certain federalist organisational principles that anarchists follow, most of which are touched upon in the conceptual section on Federalism.

These include *free agreement*: Members consent to the ideas and practice of the organisation, and are not dominated or coerced to join or to remain as members. This does not mean that individuals are not accountable to each other, nor that the organisation is not accountable to anyone. Individuals and branches that enter into a federation on a particular basis, be this social or political, and are held to account for their action regarding the agreed principles of the federation.

This is distinct from capitalism, which compels individuals to participate in the labour market with the discipline of the wage, and where individuals are held to the account of the boss.

Bottom-up, periphery-to-center: The ultimate decision making body of an organisation is a democratic assembly of all its eligible members, which has real power to compel, create and destroy committees to serve its goals.

Officials: For tasks that require permanent roles for the organisation, members are elected to a fixed mandate, are required to report back on their activities to the entire organisation, are regularly rotated, and are recallable at any time. This includes members of higher co-ordinating bodies, which do not have executive power over the 'lower' levels.

Anarchist-Communist organisations tend to use one of two practical forms of federalism. In the first model, a set of independent anarchist communist groups form a federation on the basis of shared theoretical, strategic and tactical agreement. Each group retains its independence in the forms of internal practices, constitutions, and fields of activity, but creates a common set of shared practices and political analysis that allow for unified action and collective accountability and growth. Groups like the 1919-1920 Italian Anarchist Union or today's Anarchist Coordination of Brazil share this model.

Alternatively, a federation may be formed by a set of constituent groups who then dissolve their independent organisations into the federation whilst retaining functional independence as branches, or a singular group may expand into various regions and workplaces. Organisations such as the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay, Libertarian Communist Union (France), Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation (USA) are all examples of more unitary federations.

In both situations, power resides with the branches and grassroots bodies. They maintain complete autonomy within the bounds of the agreed political line. Administrative bodies oversee the work of militants and branches, however no executive power is granted to an elected minority. Political decisions are made at congresses, not by minority committees.

Concentric Circles

Concentric Circles is an organisational model employed by some, but not all, Anarchist-Communist organisations. It aims to resolve questions around the level of integration and responsibilities of militants. An organisation based on concentric circles has a series of "layers" that relate to the specific duties of the militant (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro, 2010).

The core, or central layer is that of a specific organisation itself. It is made up of fully committed militants. These militants decide the theoretical and strategic line of the organisation. They are also responsible for the main activities of the organisation such as publishing the journal, integration of new militants, education, and political work in the various fronts.

In the secondary level, often referred to as 'supporting members', there may be activists who identify with or support the organisation but are unable or unwilling to dedicate the time or energy required to fulfil the functions required of a full member. Activists in the secondary level would not be granted the same decision making power as those of the core militants. They might not sit on the editorial collective of the organisation's journal, or may not have full voting privileges at a Congress. But perhaps they still have voting rights in their local branch. Supporting members would still contribute to the journal or to everyday work whenever possible. The anarchist-communist organisation attempts to find ways to allow anyone who wants to contribute the ability to do so.

The overall differences in the concentric circle model are worked out by each organisation according to what functions best for them. Organisations may of course have even more levels, or establish a secondary organisation, such as a school, to educate and train new activists.

While a layered model might seem hierarchical, there is a simple and logical reason for this division between layers in the organisation. Decisions should not be made by those who do not bear the responsibility for following through with action. Such an imbalance of power to those who bear no responsibility for revolutionary activism would actually be the less democratic option. After all, to anarchists, rights are balanced by duties.

Movement between the layers is entirely voluntary. If we imagine an organisation with two layers, core and supporting, membership of both may require the same level of integration. Usually integration requires a process of several months studying an educational curricular and working with established militants in a particular front.

Once a prospective member thoroughly understands the concepts of the organisation and proves their commitment they are considered full members.

Of course, any organisation will have external supporters. To the revolutionary anarchist organisation these are the same as any other political organisation. Militants relate to them through the mass organisations.

As we have noted, there is a level of division in the organisation that ensures coherency and effectiveness. However, as touched upon in the section on Federalism, the revolutionary organisation practices horizontal forms of organisation as far as possible. All official roles, such as secretary, education officer (or committee), international liaison etc are rotated as often as effectively possible. This is a standard practice of anarchist organisation. The logic is that everyone should be as trained and capable of running the organisation as possible. This helps prevent unnecessary internal hierarchies and divisions from developing, increases the skills of militants, and ensures that should the organisation lose members it can continue to function.

Sometimes it is argued that mandated rotation of roles will remove people who are effective at a particular job leaving the organisation weakened by not employing their skills. However a revolutionary organisation is only as strong as its weakest member. Unlike Leninist organisations a militant in an official position (ie secretary) is delegated and mandated as far as possible, and not immediately granted executive decision making powers over the mass of the membership. While the formality of the positions ensures a militant is held to account, the relative lack of hierarchy in the organisation also helps prevent the formal accumulation of power or over reliance on a particular personality. The development of political leadership is collectively exercised, not individually concentrated.

All this being said, some Anarchist-Communist organisations do not employ the concentric circle model. Militants are either members or they are not. Either way, most organisations still employ the same general principles of internal organisation. These being rights and responsibilities, educational integration, formal accountability and the rotation of roles.

Education

It probably goes without saying, but education is an integral part of Anarchist-Communist organisations. The development not only of individuals but of the organisation as a whole depends on the integration of educational practices. Militants are offered the opportunity to share and to develop their own knowledge of politics, history, philosophy and even science in the pursuit

of clarity and development. The process of education in the specific anarchist organisation is a collective project which contributes to the solidarity and theoretical development of the entire organisation (Stroud, 2022).

Most organisations integrate educational practices into everyday branch activity. For example, a set topic may be discussed at each branch meeting. An individual or group of comrades may be tasked with choosing readings, presenting and hosting the discussion. This helps keep education as a consistent practice and can help a group of comrades stay on topic of current political developments.

Furthermore an organisation may run both internal and external reading groups on books or on various topics. This can help produce the theoretical line in regards to a position statement or the development of a strategy. A theoretical journal, a paper, a podcast or a YouTube channel can all further contribute to both internal and external educational practices.

Historically anarchists have placed great value in educational practices. So called *ateneos*, or *bourse travails*, were schools established by anarchists encouraging education for workers free from control by the bourgeoisie. Given the emphasis on praxis and self development, anarchists are strong supporters of self-educational practices (autodidacticism). Anarchist organisations with sufficient resources still dedicate significant resources towards maintaining radical public education.

The Revolutionary Programme

The sum of a political organisation, its philosophy, its history and its practices are summarised in the revolutionary programme. The programme is simultaneously a reflection of the insights, principles and goals of the organisation. A programme helps steer an organisation towards its ultimate goal, so its militants do not get lost during the ebbs and flows of class struggle whilst building a link between the struggle for reforms and the end goal (Price, 2009). It forms the basis for developing strategy rather than a reliance upon ‘prefiguration’, and formalises adherence to a chosen strategy in a given time and place (Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira, 2017).³¹

Therefore programmes are not unchangeable, but are reflected upon and adapted towards as time goes on, integrating new insights, experiences and visions of the future society. The programme is tested by the experience of class struggle itself, and reflects the historical experience of workers as revolutionaries (Federation Communiste Libertaire, 1953). The Anarchist-Communist programme directs the organisation and its militants towards the goal, communism, following its methodology, anarchism.

“Revolutions without theory fail to make progress. We of the “Friends of Durruti” have outlined our thinking, which may be amended as appropriate in great social upheavals but hinges upon two essential points which cannot be avoided. A program, and rifles.”

The Friends of Durruti in *El Amigo del Pueblo*, no. 5, July 20, 1937

³¹ Prefiguration is another contested term in socialist theory. Though often associated with anarchism it has also been deliberately left out of this pamphlet as Australian Anarchist-Communists place no great emphasis on the concept. It is impossible to ‘pre-figure’ our way to revolution by individualistic, isolated acts, however the ways we materially organise and relate to each other do matter. In the same way that socialist parties may have anti-discrimination policies, formal ways of voting and doing politics that reflect their values as anti-capitalists, so too do anarchist-communists. This is an appropriate way to conceive of prefiguration in revolutionary organisations.

Key Strategies

The following section is shorter than the previous, as hopefully the concepts and organisational practices of the Anarchist-Communist organisation have become clear. Strategies of course are never eternal nor appropriate to every time and place. However those outlined in this section may be reasonably accepted as fundamental to Anarchist-Communist practice in general.

Inside the Trade Unions, Against the Bureaucracy

Amongst the broader tendencies of anarchists, there are a number of approaches to the trade unions. Like anarcho-syndicalists, anarchist-communists see the labour movement and class struggle as fundamental to revolutionary strategy. However Anarchist-Communists have their own clear understanding of unions and strategies for relating to them.

Unions are bodies of workers that combine to defend their economic interests against employers. Anarchist recognise that unions exist both as bodies of workers and as bureaucratic legal structures (Eko, 2019). In either form, unions aim to win concrete, day to day improvements. For example increased wages, the 8 hour day, weekends, public holidays, overtime rates, sick leave etc are all examples of things unions have won and continue to struggle for.

Unions as official institutions have an elected leadership whose job it is to negotiate between labour and capital. Though leadership will endorse strikes and workers activity, they often have an interest in perpetuating their own positions. In Australia, they often co-manage superannuation firms, tying union interests to the success of capitalist enterprises. In honouring the contracts that unions make with capitalists, there is a pressure to ensure industrial peace (Walmsley, 2020). At times, all these factors come into conflict with the demands of workers, especially at times of advancing class consciousness and struggle.

In response to this contradiction, anarchists have developed a number of responses. Usually, insurrectionist anarchists avoid working in unions. They focus on the negative side, believing that unions are unreformable, anti-revolutionary bodies. This position is virtually useless. By avoiding engaging with the mass of organised workers the insurrectionists isolate themselves and win no one to their ideas. They are thus absent from the most critical of places during a revolutionary process, the point of production.

Other anarchists, known as anarcho-syndicalists advocate forming “anarchist” or “revolutionary” unions. However, even radical unions face the problem of their concrete purpose in capitalism. That is, negotiating between capital and labour. Not even the most revolutionary of unions can keep up industrial struggle at all times. They also suffer the problem that by defining themselves as purely ‘anarchist’ or ‘revolutionary’ they exclude the mass of workers, who identify with neither. The revolutionary union thus becomes either a confused body of revolutionary workers, which lacks the clarity of a political organisation, or becomes a traditional union and loses its revolutionary impetus.

The third option however is the one advocated by anarchist-communists. This is to be active, rank and file, militant members of the trade unions. By agitating amongst the mass of workers, we can win them over to anarchist ideas. Anarchists can also struggle against the reformist instincts of the bureaucracy. To abstain from this would be to surrender the space where the mass of workers are organised to the politics of social democrats, or worse. By activity inside the unions, anarchist-communists believe that as class struggle intensifies, more and more workers can be won to radical positions.

In Australia, a classic example is the NSW Builders Labourers Federation (BLF). The BLF was once a rather conservative union. After years of patient, careful work at the rank and file level by militants from the old Communist Party, the left-wing factions of the Labor party and independent activists (they termed their strategy the “militant minority”) the base was eventually won to more radical politics. With a stronger political base, more radical activists won roles in the leadership of the union (the important part is that leadership means nothing without a strong base) allowing the BLF to be reconstructed. The union subsequently took on very federalist practices. Positions of leadership were paid the same as workers, and they had limited tenure. Direct action was encouraged at the base, where the job of organisers was to support the action workers were taking themselves, not to dictate their direction. Democratic decisions were made by mass meetings (Rashid, 2021).

Though the NSW BLF was eventually crushed, they were an illustration of the radical potential within unions. Some of the achievements of the BLF, such as the Green Bans, where workers refused to build projects that were harmful to the environment were so radical they have never been achieved elsewhere in the world.

The United Front and the Grouping of Tendency

Revolutions are not made by anarchists alone. Nor is the struggle for social reform a purely anarchist affair. These simple facts mean that Anarchist-Communists must develop theoretical conceptions of how to shape their alliances, and form them on what basis, with other political and social organisations. There are always a number of factors to consider. The space of intervention, the intermediacy of goals, the social and political context all require different frameworks to articulate correct approaches towards political work. In response to various contexts, anarchists of different tendencies have articulated a number of approaches. The Italian Anarchist Unions *United Proletarian Front* and *Singular Revolutionary Front* respectively, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT's *Workers Alliance*, the Anarquista Federación Uruguaya's *Combative Tendency*, and the modern Especifist *Grouping of Tendency* (Lawson, 2021). The two frameworks most commonly employed today are the ‘United Front’ and the ‘Grouping of Tendency.’

United Fronts involve alliances with other working class organisations on the basis of their class composition and them having at the least social democratic politics. It is a defensive strategy that is employed, providing the Anarchist-Communist political organisation is capable of maintaining its political independence in the Front.

The Grouping of Tendency concept can frame intervention into any situation where any coalition of forces is gathered to achieve a particular aim. Unlike the United Front this framework allows for campaign work, which may include progressive bourgeois forces. In the Grouping of Tendency, Anarchist-Communists attempt to establish an intermediate form of organisation based on a set of coherent definitions of practice and ideological affinities between different organisations and political tendencies. For example, Anarchist-Communists may work alongside other anarchists, or Trotskyists who share a similar commitment to working class politics, direct democracy and direct action.

What is important in all these models is that the Anarchist-Communist organisation reflects and strategically decides who, in what context, and why to make alliances. The United Front and the Grouping of Tendency do not apply in all situations, but isolation from broader forces can also render the Anarchist-Communist organisation isolated and useless. It also must be empha-

sised that while political organisation is inevitable and thus there must be theory around how it functions, the primary focus is on rank and file unity of workers as a class regardless of their political affiliation. The United Front or Grouping of Tendency is meaningless if it is a top down process agreed to by political leaders rather than rooted in the practices of the class.

Parliamentary Abstentionism

Anarchist-Communists do not participate in parliamentary elections, nor endorse particular political parties. This is a standard anarchist position. Anarchists do not run for parliament or participate in parliamentary parties for a number of reasons.

Firstly, parliament is disconnected from the everyday struggle of workers and the oppressed for liberation. Social change comes from below, from the direct action and organisation of working and poor people. This is where anarchists should be focused, helping workers achieve their aims through direct action. Direct action, in turn, helps workers realise their strength, that they can achieve things themselves. It demonstrates that change does not come through getting people elected (Lawson, 2022).

When someone enters parliament, even revolutionary socialists, they are subjected to all sorts of conditions that limit their radicalism. These could be legal pressures, or they could be the privileges that come with positions in the state. Revolutionary parties that enter parliament become caught up in a cycle of trying to get elected. Usually this involves watering down their politics to get elected again. Even revolutionary parties who use parliament to denounce capitalism will find themselves split over time, between those members invested in winning seats, and those who still recognise it is only a tactic. Anarchists also abstain from parliamentary participation to retain their revolutionary politics. While the reasons listed are all in the negative, they are less important than the positive aspect of direct action and self organisation. Anarchist-Communists argue that power is built through independent social movements, not through elections (Ascaso et al., 2018).

Anti-parliamentarianism is one of the fundamental practices of anarchism. People who work inside, support, or run for election in parliamentary parties may be revolutionary socialists, but they are not anarchists.

On a final note, Anarchist-Communists today are not so dogmatic as many anarchists who go so far as to say voting is bad. Anti-voting abstention was more relevant to a particular period of capitalist development that has passed. Anti-voting rhetoric is rather useless today (Black Flag Sydney, 2022).

While there are many times when it is preferable to have a left-wing candidate win over a right-wing one. Little reforms can mean big things for some people, and can be vital in avoiding right-wing authoritarianism. However, what matters is that people do not fall for the illusion that salvation comes from above. That being said, Anarchist-Communists do not endorse candidates, they simply recognise that “politics” cannot be avoided.

Mass Insurrection

Anarchist-Communists recognise that capitalism cannot be overthrown without violent confrontation with the state and capitalists. This is not because we want violence, but because the capitalists will never give up their power without a fight.

Before a social revolution there will be a long period where the oppressed classes accumulate social force, transforming themselves through struggle. Workers will learn to act on their own instincts, rather than relying upon legal reforms granted by bourgeois politicians or the directions of revolutionary minorities. Eventually, after long periods of conflict, there will come a moment when a final confrontation between workers and capitalists will take place.

At the moment of revolution, the majority of workers must be involved. Mass organisations lead the charge. The insurrection cannot be the action of a tiny minority, although a smaller, advanced section of the working and poor classes may act as the trigger (Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, 1972). How this will look, and the forms it will take of course depend on the context.

Anarchists have been active in many revolutionary moments. There were anarchist-communists in the Military Revolutionary Soviet during the Russian ‘October Revolution.’ The Anarchist-Communist Federation of Bulgaria acted in coordination with the Bulgarian Communist Party during the 1923 uprising (Maximov, 1948). The anarcho-syndicalist rank and file led the resistance to the fascist coup in Spain on the 19th of July, 1936, resulting instead in social revolution and the greatest historical experiment in workers self-management (Leval, 1975). Whatever the mistakes that occurred afterwards, the potential of the mass of the working class to overthrow the state and capitalism by mass insurrection was proven (Richards, 1953). A significant minority of the anarchist movement attempted to reverse the mistakes in Spain, in particular the Friends of Durruti group whose programme reflected the traditional values and strategies of the anarchist movement (Evans, 2020, #67-100; Guillamòn, 2001).

In the most contemporary example, the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay, through its strategic intervention in the country’s trade union movement, led much of the general strike and factory occupations that fought the military coup in 1974 (Sharkley, 2009; Lawson, 2022).

History teaches us that the overthrow of capitalism must be total, abolishing all institutions that perpetuate exploitation. This involves the violent suppression of parliament, of business, the police and the armed forces. The new workers organisations must, from the bottom up, reconstruct society. Marxists say this is an authoritarian act, but to anarchists this is the very negation of authority, which results in the free association of producers the moment the capitalist class is defeated.

Syndicates, Soviets, or something else?

To Anarchist-Communists, there are no ‘absolute’ or pre-ordained forms that socialist society will take. What is important is that the revolutionary society emerges from the working class in struggle. While we can give hesitant examples of what that society might look like, based on the study of workers’ revolutions in the past, it is impossible to be exact (Mechoso & Corrêa, 2009). Of course, there are many lessons to be drawn from the successes and failures of various factory committees, syndicates and soviets that have appeared at revolutionary moments that point towards preferential models.

The concrete forms of the future socialist revolution will depend on the organic development of the revolution in a given context. This will in turn be shaped by the modes of production, class composition and political traditions in the given territory the revolution begins to unfold.

Undoubtedly, new, proletarian institutions will be mass democratic bodies, attended by delegates of the workers and the poor. These will be based on workplace, industry, locality, striving to represent the interests of everyone except the bourgeoisie and the institutions of the capitalist

state. From the local, immediate level they will federate into regional, national, and eventually international organisations. Production and distribution will be re-organised along egalitarian, internationalist and libertarian principles (Leval, 1959).

The task of anarchists will be to put into practice their principles and theories, encouraging the workers and oppressed to self-manage their struggle and ensure reconstruction moves in a communist direction.

“Workers’ councils” do not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which only requires a subsequent elaboration of the details. It means a principle — the principle of the workers’ self-management of enterprises and of production...the slogan of “workers’ councils,” does not mean assembling fraternally to work in co-operation; it means class struggle — in which fraternity plays its part — it means revolutionary action by the masses against state power.”

– Anton Pannekoek (Pannekoek, 1952)

Conclusion

Through nearly two centuries of experience and struggle various revolutionary working class ideologies have been smashed against a reality they failed to anticipate and comprehend. Anarchist-Communism however has not only survived but has been sharpened through a number of historic experiences. It remains today as a coherent body of theory and strategy with the vision of a truly free society as a beacon. Anarchist-Communism is a political ideology with a history deeply rooted in the struggle of workers for emancipation.

The refinement of the practice of Anarchist-Communists and the specific anarchist organisation through experience has meant learning from the mistakes and successes of our own tendency, while also absorbing lessons from the failures and successes of Marxism and syndicalism. Anarchist-Communist theories of organisation attempt to balance freedom, democracy and collective responsibility in a manner that is flexible, responsive and coherent. With the world facing global challenges in a way it never has before, such as climate change and pandemics, the vision of anarchist-communism and the strategies of the specific anarchist organisation are more relevant than ever.

This pamphlet has attempted to make Anarchist-Communist organisational concepts accessible and clear, in the hope of contributing to the growing relevance of libertarian ideals. The hope is that the reader may be inspired to join anarchist organisations, to start their own, or even that they take away some useful theoretical concepts and reflections in their own journey. The revolution will not be so limited that it will adopt only a single ideal or label. What matters is that the struggle continues and we move forward, as ever, towards freedom.

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