

The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation in the Class Struggle

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“The revolutionary collectivists [i.e. Anarchists] try to diffuse science and knowledge among the people, so that the various groups of human society, when convinced by propaganda, may organise and spontaneously combine into federations, in accordance with their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan traced in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by a few ‘superior’ minds.”
Mikhail Bakunin

Introduction

This pamphlet broadly outlines our view of the role of the revolutionary organisation.¹

Class Struggle and Revolution

Anarchists believe that it is important to build a mass Anarchist organisation amongst the workers and poor (the Working Class). The role of this organisation is to popularise and fight for the creation of a society based on the principles of Anarchism: that is, a society based on a federation of worker and community councils, production for use and distribution according to need. This society can be described as Stateless Socialism or Libertarian Communism. The Bikisha Media Collective, Zabalaza Books and Anarchist Union network aims to build such an Anarchist organisation.

Such a society can only be built by a conscious movement of the Working Class, using our industrial power.

In order for this to take place our class must have two things:

First, a revolutionary consciousness. This includes: a rejection of the State, capitalism and all forms of oppression; the desire to reorganise society in a new and better way in the interest of the workers and the poor; the recognition of the fact that only the workers and the poor can make and secure the revolutionary transformation, and following from this, the belief that only the mass organisations of the working class – in the workplace and in the community – are to make decisions in society. The State will not be allowed in any form.

Secondly, industrial organisation. The workers must have enough organisation and solidarity to be able to physically take over the means of production and distribution and destroy all remnants of the state. In concrete terms this means that the workers must be organised into revolutionary unions in the mines, factories and farms (Anarcho-Syndicalism). It also means that the workers and the poor must be able to defend their revolutionary conquest by means of a democratic workers militia under the control of the mass organisations of our class.

¹ Our position on the role and structure of the Anarchist organisation is based directly on Makhno, Arshinov et al, [1926], *The Organisational Platform for a General Union of Anarchists (Draft)* (published by Zabalaza Books). As such, we stand within the “Platformist” tradition of Anarchism, but we do not think that this is incompatible with the tactic of promoting revolutionary unionism. We agree with the Platform that the Anarchist organisation must be based on ideological and tactical unity, collective responsibility and federal organisation. We agree that it is necessary to build a large and democratic Anarchist organisation that can ensure that Anarchism becomes the “leading concept” of the exploited masses. The idea that Anarchists must not “lead” the masses into revolution, but prepare the masses to make the revolution for themselves is, of course, a basic principle of Anarchism.

The Role of the Anarchist Organisation

The role of the Anarchist organisation is to win the most widespread understanding and influence of Anarchist ideas and methods amongst the workers and poor. Anarchism must become the “theoretical driving force” or “leading idea” of the working class.

We believe only these ideas can make possible a successful revolutionary transformation of society. Only these ideas can both destroy capitalism, the State and all forms of oppression AND prevent the emergence of a new form of oppressive elite.

Anarchist ideas link a criticism of capitalist/State society with a vision of a new way of organising human society. This link involves practical understanding of the means necessary and acceptable to achieve results, and which can also help build the confidence of the class in its own abilities and decision-making power.

The Anarchist organisation does not aim to “lead” the workers and poor into socialism, or to decree socialism from above. The workers and poor must make the revolution by and for themselves. The role of the Anarchist organisation is to educate and organise the masses to take power in their own name.

In concrete terms this means we need to build a mass international Anarchist organisation.

This aims to link a criticism of the modern State/Capitalist society with a vision of a new way of organising human society. It will produce propaganda and help to build the confidence and ability of the workers and the poor to fight for themselves and make their own decisions.

It will work inside the unions and other class organisations for the leadership of the Anarchist idea. It will fight for the reconstruction of the union movement on the basis of Anarchist ideas (Anarcho-Syndicalism). The unions must become the battering ram that can destroy capitalism.

The Anarchist organisation must be big enough and effective enough to block the tendency of political parties to substitute themselves for the masses.

The Anarchist organisation, and its sister organisations internationally, aim at building such an international Anarchist organisation.

The Anarchist Organisation and its Relationship to the Working Class

The Anarchist organisation sees itself as part of the working class, its Anarchist ideas a historical development of the experiences of workers, who as an exploited class seek to create a new world free of tyranny and exploitation in any form.

We wish to win the most widespread understanding and influence for our Anarchist ideas and methods in the class and in society, primarily because we believe that these alone will expedite a successful revolutionary transformation of society. In this sense we recognise our role within the class being a “leadership of ideas”.

We seek influence for our ideas in all working class organisations. In real terms that means that we will go forward for all positions in the unions and other bodies where there is the possibility of mandating and recall. We will never accept any position that is not under the control of the members of that body. Such positions are not ends in themselves. The struggle to win them must be bound up with a fight for more democracy, more mandating, more grassroots control. We are striving for the self-activity of the many.

We have to be able to explain and clarify what is happening in society. We have to be capable of combating false ideas such as Marxism and nationalism. We aim to be a “collective memory” for the class – in terms of combating false ideas, and in terms of keeping alive and developing the traditions of the working class movements and Anarchism. This includes analysing the lessons of past community and workplace struggles.

History teaches us that organisations like ours can experience a rapid growth in membership and support for its ideas during a revolutionary situation... but also that a certain size is necessary for this to happen. So it is important that we win more people to the organisation but this will be worthless unless we ensure that people are joining us because they understand and agree with Anarchism and share our libertarian values. It is not enough to build a small organisation with many sympathisers. Where there is no clear line between members and supporters a massive central apparatus is needed to hold together a mass of half-politicised people in a series of political activities. Political discussion gets toned down, a lack of seriousness creeps in. This in turn reduces the capacity of members to make independent political evaluations and provides the basis for a dependence on a central bureaucracy. This would be in absolute contradiction to our Anarchist values.

“Only the truth is revolutionary”. Whoever first said this was correct. We do not raise as immediate demands those that are impossible at the time because of the balance of forces. We do not play at politics. We do not fool, intimidate or manipulate people from our class towards Anarchism. We aim to win the arguments for change and Anarchism. It is not part of our program to try to take power “in the name of the workers”. Anarchism will either be the creation of a free and politically aware working class... or it will not be Anarchism.

Anarchism and Everyday Struggles

We understand the centrality of struggle and organisation in the workplace because that is where we have real power.

But this does not mean that we neglect or ignore the struggles that take place in other areas of life. We don't. We support all struggles that can improve the conditions we live under: in schools, the communities etc. Nor do we think the class struggle is just about wages, etc. It is also a struggle against racism and all forms of oppression, and to unite the working class in a progressive struggle for freedom.

At every opportunity we seek to bring these struggles into the union and workplaces, we try to bring the potential strength of organised workers to bear in their favour... to link up the different struggles into an understanding of their common roots in Capitalism and the State, and to establish the legitimacy of political issues being taken up on the shopfloor.

We support all progressive struggles both for their own aims and for the increased confidence that campaigning can give people. Secondly, we support them because we recognise that it is in struggle that people are most readily won to the revolutionary ideas of Anarchism. Third, we support them because it is in struggle that people can potentially create organisations of self-management that develop their skills and that may possibly help in the revolutionary transformation of society.

We argue in campaigns strongly against reliance on politicians, the courts, arbitration etc. It is through mass struggle that the greatest potential lies.

We defend other progressive organisations that are involved in struggles, from repression. Where necessary, we will engage in United Front action alongside them. However, whilst we defend these groups unconditionally, we do not do so uncritically – we maintain our independence and argue for our ideas.

In addition, we see involvement in campaigns as a central part of the work of the Anarchist organisation because it forces us to test our ideas against existing reality and because it provides a forum in which new members learn the skills needed to be active in struggle. Finally, most campaigns are an education in themselves as activists acquire first hand experience of the reformists, leftists, the law etc.

Building Tomorrow Today

It is important that we Anarchists have a clear idea of the type of society that we aim to establish².

The two fundamental structures of the Anarchist society will be the syndicate (democratic workplace association) and the Free City-commune (the self-managed city or village, made up of syndicates and community committees in a given area).

Communes will be federated into regions and inter-regionally; they will also be linked by federations of syndicates that provide services impossible to organise purely at the level of the individual commune (e.g. transcontinental railways, post, etc.).

Each commune must be located in a particular ecological region (bio-region) and must learn to preserve, enhance and integrate itself into that region's natural dynamics.

There will also be a workers militia to defend the free society.³ This militia will be internally democratic, and accountable to, and bound by, the decisions made at congresses of the mass organisations of the revolutionary working class.

These structures may also be referred to as “worker and community councils (or committees)”

We believe that the trade unions and community organisations of today (e.g. civic associations) can provide the nucleus of the future syndicates and communes, as well as the vehicles of revolutionary transformation.

In order for this to take place, such structures must be restructured on anti-bureaucratic and grassroots democratic lines, and won to the ideas of Anarchism and class struggle.

Within them, revolutionaries have to fight the ideas of authoritarian tendencies and continually argue that, in a revolutionary situation, the new workers' democracy must not delegate away its power to any elite, or allow any minority to seize that power. Within them members of the Anarchist organisations must be the “driving force”. This means winning the battle of ideas. It does NOT mean capturing the leading positions, vesting them with undue authority and then dishonestly interpreting this as a mandate for giving orders.

² On the theory of the syndicates, communes and regions as developed by classical Anarchism, see Guerin, Daniel, (1970), *Anarchism: From Theory To Practice*. Monthly Review Press. New York and London. Chapter 2, esp. pp. 56–60. See also G.P. Maximoff, (1985), *The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Monty Miller Press. Australia. pp. 42–8. The addition of the bio-regional dimension is found in Purchase, Graham, (1991) *Anarchist Organisation: Suggestions and Possibilities*. Black Rose. and Purchase, Graham, (1990), *Anarchist Society and its Practical Realisation*. San Francisco. See Sharp Press. (all available from Zabalaza Books)

³ On the defence of the revolution, see Makhno et al, [1927], pp. 29–31; Berkman, (1964), *ABC of Anarchism*. Freedom Press. London. chapter 14; G.P. Maximoff, (1985), *The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Monty Miller Press. Australia. pp. 49–55. (available from Zabalaza Books)

After the initial stage of the revolution when the ruling class are dispossessed of their wealth and power, the Anarchist organisation will continue to grow. There will be a massive surge of working class poor people into its ranks because its ideas will seem all the more concrete and realistic.

In the transitional period (that time before the overthrow of the old order and consolidation of the new), the main task will be to further Anarchist ideas and values, and fighting for all power to be taken by the mass organisations of the working class.

As the revolution consolidates its gains and begins the reconstruction of society the task is to help the class towards the Anarchist ideal. As this ideal becomes more and more established and the obstacles to its achievement fade away, the revolutionary Anarchist organisation becomes less necessary and eventually vanishes completely.

Are Anarchists a “Revolutionary Leadership”?

Our role is that of educators and instigators. In so far as we are leaders it is because we are a “leadership” of ideas.

We have no time for the leadership of personalities or that of a higher committee of a party. We have no wish to be what the Marxists (Leninists, Trotskyists) call “The Revolutionary Leadership” (or “vanguard”), which implies their Party has reached a stage where it has the “right” to take decisions for the class (whether we like it or not). We reject this sort of leadership as authoritarian and destructive of workers’ democracy. We reject the notion that the revolutionary organisation has the right to “lead” or rule our class because of its “leadership of ideas”. We are totally opposed to the idea that power must be controlled by the “vanguard party” during and after the revolution.

While we do recognise that there is an uneven level of class consciousness amongst the class, and that only a few are presently won to a revolutionary position. Our aim as an organisation is always to minimise such unevenness without compromising our content. We recognise and will always fight against that influence in our class that seeks to promote the need for a permanent, unelected leadership no matter what context, explanation or excuse is used.

We reject the idea that the State can be used to create Socialism. The State is a hierarchical, centralised, top-down structure built in order to allow the exploiting minority to rule over the poor and working majority. No State can ever create a free society for the masses.

The division between leaders and led, between those who rule and those who are ruled has lasted far too long. The revolution must be made by and for the working class. These masses must rise up in our own name. The State must be destroyed: any attempt to control it “for the workers” can only lead to the creation of a new ruling elite. Socialism cannot be brought into being from above by the decrees of a “vanguard party”. These are the lessons of the Russian Revolution. All power must lie in the democratic mass organisations of the Working Class. Such power shall be compatible with the Anarchist slogan that individual freedom will know no limit except that it does not take away the freedom of others.

It is on this issue that our fundamental difference with Leninism is made clear. We agree with Lenin that authority can only be defeated by authority, that the authority of the bosses will be destroyed by the authority of the workers. We agree on the need for a lead to be given within the class, but while our leadership is one of persuasion and education, the Leninist party goes way beyond this and tries to grab power through control of the state. It seeks to exercise the

authority of the party over the workers. In doing this it prepares the way for the growth of a new oppressive ruling class.

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