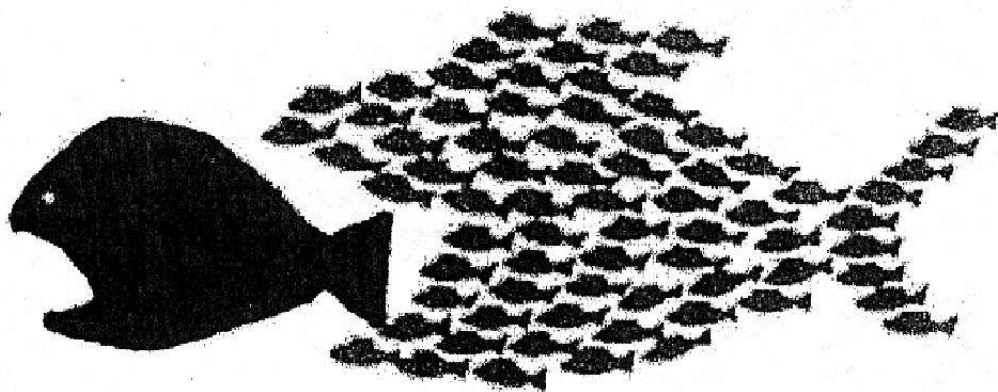
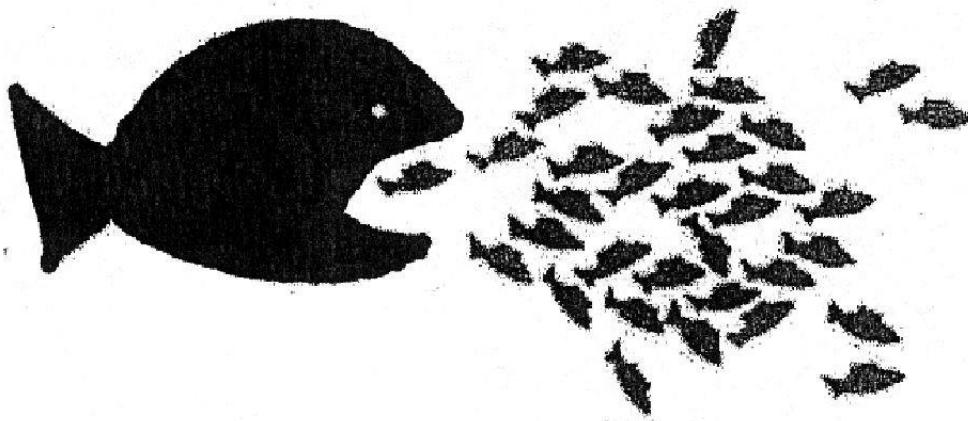


Anarchist Political School

Anarchism and Organisation



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Modules in this series:

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The Anarchist Political School is a project of the Anarchist Communist Federation. For more information, check out our website ancomfed.org



Organisation

Anarchist? Organisation? Surely that's a contradiction! This is still one of the most common objections that anarchists encounter.

In reality, human society is synonymous with organisation. Everything we require to live, from food to housing to education, is the product of co-operation and interaction with multitudes of other human beings. In order to live, humans have to associate for various purposes and adopt the forms and means required to achieve those purposes. Which is to say, in order to live, humans build organisation.

The ruling class tells us that organisation cannot exist without **authority**—the idea that some are in command, and others must obey. To maintain this authority, all manner of violent coercion is required. The notion that there is no organisation without authority is a self-serving lie concocted by rulers of all kinds trying to defend their parasitic existence.

At the heart of anarchism is the idea that humans can organise, live and produce everything we need without masters, without a ruling class, and without any special group in command that everyone else must obey. Authority is not a prerequisite to social organisation, but a hindrance upon it. The ruling class gives us wars, poverty,

and environmental destruction, whilst siphoning off the wealth produced by the working class.

Discuss

What are some ways in which we organise without authority today?

Specific Anarchist Organisations (SAOs)

Specific anarchist organisations share a similar understanding of the situation that confronts them, and the struggle that is required to face it. Members of this organisation have a shared understanding of anarchist communist theory, sufficient to enable the group to agree on its practical activities. Collectively, they are able to develop a clear, well-defined, and concrete strategy based on a shared set of politics.

Specific anarchist organisations are not separate from the working class. Anarchist ideas are 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. The role of the specific organisation is to win the most widespread understanding and influence of anarchist ideas and methods among the working class.

But anarchist organisations don't aim to 'lead' struggles in the sense of taking them over or giving orders from above. Communism cannot be declared by decree. The workers and oppressed must make the revolution by and for themselves.

Instead, we fight for the leadership of our ideas and methods amongst the working class. To do this, we must be able to explain and clarify what is happening in capitalist society and to provide answers for the pressing questions facing our class.

Specific anarchist organisations are a place for revolutionaries to reflect on the struggle and to strategise and coordinate with each other on how it can be taken further.

To us, it only makes sense that we should unite with others who share our politics, reach agreement on strategy, share resources, and co-operate to advance our politics.

Discuss

Would a specific anarchist organisation that admits anyone who self-identifies as an 'anarchist' be effective?

The Structure of Specific Anarchist Organisations

Specific anarchist organisations are structured from the bottom up. By this, we mean that higher-order committees and councils have no power to direct the whole organisation. Instead, they simply act as coordinating bodies and follow the instructions given to them by lower-level units of the organisation.

We call these instructions **mandates**, and we call the people that sit on the committees and councils **delegates**. Delegates are appointed from below and can be recalled at any time if they operate outside of their mandate. In this way, higher-order committees and councils are prevented from establishing executive power over the rest of the organisation.

A set of independent specific anarchist organisations may choose to come together to form a **federation**, by agreeing to a shared set of politics, aims and principles. Within a federation, the constituent groups maintain complete autonomy over their own affairs within the bounds of the aims and principles which were agreed to upon federating. Constituent groups are also free to disassociate from the federation at any time.

We call these ways of structuring an organisation **federalism**. Considered as a whole, federalist structures allow for workers to directly control their own affairs, rather than being compelled to act in a particular way

from above. They are also the model we envision for organisational structures within a revolutionary society.

Discuss

How does federalism differ from other ways of structuring organisations?

Mass Organisations

It is not enough to only build anarchist organisations; the minority of workers who are convinced of anarchism are not enough to make a revolution. We should not make convincing everyone of every aspect of our ideas a prerequisite for revolutionary struggle. To convince people of our ideas, we need to struggle alongside them. This means that beyond the specific anarchist organisation, anarchists must enter and build wider organisations of class struggle.

We call the wider organisations of class struggle **mass organisations**. These are not just large associations of workers engaging as activists, but organisations oriented towards building working class power.

Mass organisations emerge from, and are concerned with, the immediate struggles of the working class, and oppressed groups *within* the class. These can include fights to improve wages and conditions at work, struggles

against oppressions of gender or sexuality, struggles for housing, struggles against environmental destruction, struggles against racism, and so on.

Mass organisations do not require a complete vision of the broader class struggle, only a practical capacity and a desire to fight for the interests of the class.

The mass organisation is both a collective fighting organisation of the working class, and a school that builds working class consciousness and politics. It is through collective struggle that workers in mass movements have the opportunity to learn revolutionary principles: no pandering to the bosses, no reliance on elections or politicians, or other saviours from above.

It is through struggle that workers can develop the shared understanding of solidarity necessary to overcome division and fight all structures of oppression.

Fragmentation of workers by race, gender, nationality, or any other category would only weaken the unity and power of the mass organisation and therefore of the class. It is through mass struggle that workers learn about their collective capacities, the interests they have in common, and the enemies they share.

Discuss

What elements of mass working class organisation exist in Australia today?

The Task for Anarchists in Mass Organisations

Specific anarchist organisations work inside mass organisations of the working class.

Within the mass organisations, we argue for anarchist principles and methods of struggle. We advocate for ever greater and wider solidarity between struggles. We show that our own struggles and other struggles are linked, that we face common enemies, and that the issues we face have systematic causes rooted in capitalism.

We want to make anarchism the leading idea within these struggles, but we never want to make the mass organisations officially 'anarchist'. To be effective, mass organisations of class struggle must draw in all workers prepared to struggle, and not just those we can convince of anarchism.

Within organisations of class struggle, we argue for direct action. We argue that working class organisations should act of their own initiative, rather than waiting for permission from politicians, courts, tribunals, or other representatives. We recognise that our power lies in our workplaces and in the streets. We aim to disrupt the interests of bosses and governments by striking, occupying, demonstrating, and so on. The working class is strongest when it uses its own collective force in ways that have a material impact on the ruling class.

We seek to defend mass movements of the working class from opportunists, reformism, and authoritarianism. We seek to block the tendency of political parties to substitute themselves for the power of the working class.

We combat ideas like nationalism, racism, and sexism that divide workers from each other. Wider working class unity is impossible when poisonous and oppressive ideologies are allowed to fester within our ranks.

We fight against hierarchical control and for movement democracy. We argue for these principles and methods both because we believe they are the best for winning the immediate demands of movements today, and because we believe they equip movements to fight and defeat greater enemies tomorrow.

By participating and fighting for our ideas within the mass organisations of struggle that exist and emerge presently, we hope to support the development of the mass organisation of the working class that can make and win the social revolution against capitalism.

Anarchists use our roles in both specific and mass organisations to enrich and strengthen both. Building specific anarchist organisations allows us to better coordinate our work inside mass organisations, and working inside mass organisations allows us to implement and constantly refine the ideas of our specific anarchist organisations.

Without specific anarchist organisations, we leave coordinated political interventions to our better organised opponents. Without involvement in mass organisations of class struggle, we condemn ourselves to the sidelines and neglect the most powerful force necessary to change the world.

Discuss

Anarchists will often take (unpaid) leadership positions in our trade unions such as delegate positions or formal branch council/committee roles. Is this contradictory to our politics? Why/why not?

Insurrectionary Anarchism

The framework we have outlined above of organising ourselves at two levels—the ‘specific’ level and the ‘mass’ level—follows the approach known as **organisational dualism**. This is a strategy which dates back to the beginning of the anarchist movement.

There is, however, a minority current within anarchism that is opposed to formal organisation. This tendency is known as **insurrectionary anarchism**.

Insurrectionary anarchists argue that formal organisations restrict the autonomy of individuals and their ability to act

and take initiative. Thus, they argue, formal organisations make their members unfree.

As anarchists, they believe (as do we) that the means you use determine the ends you reach. Their conclusion is that formal organisations are incompatible with pursuing social revolution, since they will not produce the self-determining individuals needed to enact such a revolution.

Insurrectionary anarchists support a revolution to abolish capitalism and the state, but envisage it as basically a riot on a massive scale. Historically, they have favoured tactics like bombings and assassinations of politicians and bosses. Today, they favour tactics like riots (often as black blocs), lighting fires, looting shops, and fighting street brawls with the cops.

Many insurrectionary anarchists see the struggle for reforms within mass organisations as pointless. They argue that reforms, such as higher wages, still rest upon the existence of capitalism. As such, they believe that movements to win reforms will end up reproducing class society, rather than overthrowing it.

Insurrectionists tend to be hostile to building solid organisations, arguing that specific projects require nothing more than informal 'affinity groups': close comrades working together to achieve concrete goals, without any ongoing structure or political programme.

The strategy of insurrectionary anarchism has been proven time and time again to be ineffective. This is ultimately because the social relations which reproduce capitalism cannot be smashed or blown up in the streets.

Discuss

*Some anarchists argue for a 'diversity of tactics' when it comes to pursuing a revolution. For example, they might advocate for **both** building the trade unions and initiating punch-ons with the cops. What do you think of this?*

Why Anarchists Must Be Organised

Because their strategies are futile, many insurrectionists become politically inactive after a few years or flip over to reformism. In Europe and the United States, though not yet in Australia, some insurrectionists have followed their ideas to their logical conclusion and turned to guerrilla warfare. Examples include Italian insurrectionist groups in the 1970s and the self-appointed armed guards that emerged in the George Floyd uprising. In every case, this has ended in disaster.

Though they rarely realise this, insurrectionary anarchists substitute the militancy of a small minority for the economic power of the working class. Instead, we believe that the power of a united working class, which opposes the oppression of all groups within it, is the *only* force

strong enough to overthrow capitalism. This is why we build and defend mass organisations.

We also have to take seriously what it means to be a committed revolutionary. We want to accomplish something which has not yet been accomplished in human history. Our politics require a forceful transformation of virtually all social relationships in our society, across the entire world. To achieve this will require a high degree of organisation and coordination between all workers.

Comrades who refuse to organise squander their time and energy on ineffective and isolated action, before falling into inactivity, and leaving the next generation of anarchists the task of once again rebuilding our politics. Specific anarchist organisations allow us to learn from the history of workers' struggle and to pass this knowledge onto our fellow workers. We have a job to do. So, as the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta often said: **To work, comrades!**

Discuss

Anarchists often disagree on theory and tactics and form different political organisations accordingly. Should organisations like these ever attempt to synthesise their politics and form a single shared organisation?

