

Anarchist Organisation

Thinking about Anarchism

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One of the greatest myths that has been fostered about anarchists is that they are disorganised. Since the anarchist movement first emerged in the International Working Mens' Association in the 1870's it has developed many trends. Each with its own method of organisation.

From the mass unions of the anarcho-syndicalists which today include important unions like the General Workers Confederation (CGT) and the National Confederation of Workers (CNT-AIT) in Spain and the Central Organisation of Swedish Workers (SAC) to the anarcho-communists in tighter, more closely knit organisations.

In Ireland, the Workers Solidarity Movement is an anarcho-communist organisation. The structure our organisation is based on the way we would like to see society structured, and the structure of any organisation reflects the politics that that organisation holds.

Firstly democracy. Any anarchist organisation must be based on the principle of true workers' democracy. The WSM is a platformist organisation.

What is the "Platform"

The Platform or "The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" was written by famous anarchists Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov, Ida Mett and others in 1926, following their experiences in the Russian Revolution.

Despite the fact that there were over 10,000 active anarchists in Russia in 1917, they were quickly wiped out by the Bolshevik Red Terror. As early as April 1918 the anarchist centres in Moscow were attacked. 600 anarchists were arrested and dozens killed.

Not all anarchists were clear about what needed to be done. A few even went to the Bolsheviks but others fought on to defend the gains of the revolution against what they saw was a new developing ruling class. The Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine and the Kronstadt uprising were the last important battles. By 1921 the anti-authoritarian revolution was dead. This defeat has had deep and lasting effects on the international workers' movement.

It was the hope of the authors of the platform that such a disaster would not happen again. The platform looks at the lessons of the Russian anarchist movement, its failure to build up a presence within the working class movement big enough and effective enough to counteract the tendency of the Bolsheviks and other political groups to substitute themselves for the working class.

The Platform states for example that it is ludicrous to have an organisation which contains groups that have mutually antagonistic and contradictory definitions of anarchism. It also says that we need formal agreed structure covering written policies, the role of officers, the need for membership dues and so on; the sort of structures that allow for effective and at the same time large democratic organisation. And it says that we must have fully worked out and agreed policies that we can argue for as an organisation. We need to become a "leadership of ideas".

These views are in contrast to the anarcho-syndicalist view which is that all that is needed is one massive revolutionary union. The problem with this is that people with widely differing views are in the union and so when a crucial decision comes up there will be a split or at least confusion as to what way to go.

The best example of this is the action of the National Confederation of Workers (CNT) in the Spanish revolution who, while supporting the revolution of the working class of Spain had no

plan of what to do. They ended up joining the government instead of smashing the state, and they did not have any worked out policy of how the workers could defend themselves from the backstabbing attacks of the Bolsheviks directed by Stalin.

We call any group that agrees with the basic outlines of the Platform a “Platformist” organisation.

Structure of an “anarchist organisation”

Following the ideas of the platform, we want to build an anarchist organisation. An “anarchist organisation” would be organised on a branch level. There would be a regional committee composed of delegates from the branches and there would be a national committee. The important thing about this structure is that control would come from the bottom up and not from the top down.

To join, an individual or group must agree with the policies and aims of the “organisation” but once inside all members would be encouraged in a free atmosphere to question and develop these policies.

The business of the organisation would be decided at regular conferences of all members. Perspectives on the future, long and short term, further policies and tactics would be decided and all members bound to them. The representatives of regions and national areas would also be elected and mandated to follow the conference decisions.

In an anarchist organisation all representatives would be mandated and recallable. This means that if they start doing their own thing as people in positions of responsibility tend to do, they can be removed from that position. And nobody would be allowed remain in an important position for more than a few years.

For us the position should never become a status symbol or a position reserved for ‘senior’ activists. It should better be seen as a temporary position that everyone could be expected to do at some time.

But the most crucial aspect of an organisation of anarchists is the internal life of the branch. In order for an organisation to be truly democratic, education and development of all members must be encouraged. People must develop the confidence to speak at packed public meetings. The ability to question someone else’s ideas only comes if you know enough about the subject being talked about.

Books must be circulated and read, a library of left wing books used, articles and policies written by all. On the more physical side, all must be willing to do their fair share of the donkey work. Paper selling and poster, leafletting and picketing. The day to day running of the organisation must also be well organised; branch meetings must be attended, membership dues paid, etc.

The best way to avoid an informal elite is to get everyone stuck in and knowing what is going on. The situation where some people do the “intellectual” stuff like writing articles and others do the “manual” stuff like giving out leaflets and yet another section are burnt out and don’t do anything, must never be allowed. If that does happen you can be fairly sure that there is something wrong, politically, with such an organisation.

As anarchists we do not believe that we are the PARTY with the TRUTH. We are quite happy to work with other anarchist groups as long as there is a basic level of agreement. So in the “or-

organisation” of anarchists we expect that there would be many ideas, groups and factions, the only condition necessary would be agreement on the aims and policies of the organisation. Factions would have to support the majority position but would have full access to the internal bulletin and the organisation’s journals to argue their ideas.

The alternatives no.1- parliament

No other political groups organise in this way. Any parliamentary party is run on a hierarchical structure. The higher you are the more control you have. Real decisions are made by the elected TD’s over the heads of the members and the most important decision are made by the leader of the party and a couple of cronies.

Their way of organising reflects their politics of “leave it all to us” They encourage people to allow the bigger decisions that effect their lives to be made by the small elite of the ruling class. We are told to have faith in people who we are told know better than us.

The alternatives no.2 – Lenin

A similar method of organisation is used by Leninist organisations. Based on their failed tactic of “leading” the working class to socialism they develop a ruling elite within their organisations. Leninists do not believe that the working class can develop political ideas. So, instead a Leninist party must provide the leadership and the working class will follow. They see themselves as ‘shepherds leading the sheep’.

Within a Leninist party the future leaders of the working class are bred. Central and Political Committees are elected who are then given the right to make decisions for the whole organisation. The ideas and orders therefore come from the top down.

Central control can go to absurd lengths. One Leninist organisation in Ireland is controlled from the USA. It has to have everything checked and agreed by the central committee across the Atlantic. This includes simple pamphlets which have to be printed in the states and mailed over.

This formal leadership does the “intellectual” side of the business while the majority are left to selling the paper and going to branch meetings for their weekly orders. In these organisations a leader can be a leader for life. Look at Lenin, Stalin or Gerry Healey (English Leninist leader) for example.

As far as education goes, most members are brought up on a diet of their own party literature which limits them to a low level of disinformation about other peoples ideas. Unless you are being trained for leadership there will be very little effort to develop debating or writing skills.

This ties in nicely with their elitist and cynical view of politics. Namely the gaining control of the working class sometime in the future!

Workers’ control

As anarchists we are committed to our democratic ideals. We are members of the WSM because we want to win the battle of ideas and fight for the control and self-management of society by the working class. We are in an organisation because we agree on our politics, have more resources

as an organisation, are better able to put across our views and can combine our forces in the struggle to build an anarchist society.

If you like our ideas we want you to find out more about us, and think seriously about joining us. We encourage everybody to find out more about anarchism, its ideas and its actions.

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