

Insurrectionary anarchy and revolutionary organization

Black Wave Communist Collective

February 21, 2012

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In recent years there have been many debates within the anarchist movement about the insurrectionary method of organizing for revolution.¹ But often these debates do not go into detail regarding the organizational proposals put forth by insurrectionary anarchists. This piece hopes to highlight these organizational methods and serve as an introduction to this project and tendency within revolutionary anarchist thought.

Formal vs Informal Organization?

One of the biggest debates around the insurrectionary method has been that between the need for formal or informal anarchist organization. One does not need to dig far to see that such debates are a false dichotomy. In the Postscript to Issue 2 of the Swedish journal *Dissident* named *Insurrection and Anarchy*, the Batko Group explains “it is important not to trap oneself in the dichotomy between formal and informal organization. The form is always dependent on the capacity of initiative. Formal structures can sometimes be used, as long as the initiative is kept.”²

Even the father of contemporary insurrectionary anarchism Alfredo Maria Bonanno in one of his seminal essays entitled *From Riot to Insurrection* says:

“Certainly, it is still possible to go along the road of the organisation of synthesis, of propaganda, anarchist educationism and debate — as we are doing just now of course — because, as we said, this is a question of a project in tendency, of attempting to understand something about a capitalist project which is in development. But, as anarchist revolutionaries, we are obliged to bear in mind this line of development and to prepare ourselves from this moment on to transform irrational situations of riot into an insurrectional and revolutionary reality.”³

It would be instructive if the current anarchist movement took heed of this above example. The quote above was from a speech given at a formal conference around the journal *Anarchismo* of which Bonanno was the main editor. Informal organization was not meant to be a dogma to be followed at all cost like staunch believers in the party or syndicalist forms of organization, but was a historical tendency that Bonanno was trying to analyze in motion.

In hindsight we can now see, like the Batko Group alluded to, that whether to intervene in the class struggle using formal or informal practices is a matter of choosing the appropriate means to achieve the desired ends.

Self-activity & Self-management

What then are the means by which insurrectionary anarchists propose to organize for revolution? Those familiar to most revolutionary anarchists, self-organization.

Insurrectionary anarchists take very seriously that the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed classes must be a project resulting from their own autonomous self-activity. This applies

¹ Crimethinc’s *Say You Want An Insurrection?*, Peter Gelderloos’ *Insurrection vs. Organization*, and Joe Black’s *Anarchism, insurrections and insurrectionalism*

² *Dissident #2 PostScript*

³ A.M. Bonanno *From Riot to Insurrection*

whether it be individuals, groups of anarchist revolutionaries, or mass bodies of the exploited in struggle for their own autonomy.

The reason this is of importance is because it is a major similarity shared between insurrectionary anarchists and the rest of the revolutionary anarchist movement. It is particularly interesting in the light of it being the same means historically that most anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists have desired, if refocused as we will later see in the discussion of their proposals for mass organizing. Not only is workers' self-activity the preferred method for struggle, but it is the nucleus of the self-organized society anarchists desire to create through social revolution:

“Self-management of the struggle comes first, followed by self-management of work and society...Revolution of work is therefore the self-managed organization of these first elements of the future society, base production nuclei which grow from the autonomy of the struggle.”⁴

Active Minority: Specific Anarchist Organization of Affinity

Contemporary insurrectionary thought arose out of the historical conditions of post-war Italy. In the Italian anarchist movement at that time there was a hot debate between those believing in the validity of the specific anarchist “organization of synthesis” around the Anarchist Federation of Italy (FAI) accused of being “purists” and those defending the model of a specific anarchist “organization of tendency” around the Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action (GAAP). Both groups were organized around a specific anarchist program whether pluralist (FAI) or platformist (GAAP).⁵

It was out of this reality that a third type of specific organization emerged, around local groups based on affinity. Affinity in this scenario did not mean that anarchists should just organize with their friends, or not organize at all like the anti-organizational individualists, but based around clarifying where comrades are at based on political discussion, analysis, and most importantly through experience working with each other in struggle. In short, a focus on building unity with others through praxis. Revolutionary anarchists of all tendencies should consider trying to learn from the best elements of such strategies. Instead of agreeing to political programs (whether minimal, transitional, or maximal) that are set in stone, revolutionary anarchists should strive to continue to have an analysis and organizing practice based and refined through participation in the social struggle:

“The affinity group on the other hand finds it has great potential and is immediately addressed towards action, basing itself not on the quantity of its adherents, but on the qualitative strength of a number of individuals working together in a *projectuality* that they develop together as they go along. From being a *specific structure* of the anarchist movement and the whole arc of activity that this presents — propaganda, direct action, perhaps producing a paper, working within an informal organization — it can also look outwards to forming a *base nucleus* or some other mass structure and thus intervene more effectively in the social clash.”⁶

⁴ A.M. Bonanno *Looking Forward to Self-management*

⁵ Coordinadora Informal Anarquista *Vivir la Anarquía*

⁶ Insurrection #4

Autonomous Base Nuclei: Self-managed Leagues for Workers' Autonomy

As mentioned earlier the self-activity of the exploited and oppressed is incredibly important to insurrectionary anarchists. This reveals itself in the ideal form of mass organizing proposed by insurrectionary anarchists, autonomous base nuclei. "Base" is the Italian word for grassroots. "Nuclei" is another word for "cells." Autonomous base nuclei are essentially self-managed grassroots cells or leagues independent from any political party or syndicalist/union alliances. They are mass organizations based on total workers' autonomy and self-organization.

Insurrectionary anarchists work within community, labor, or other mass struggles with intermediate aims always encouraging workers to organize autonomously if possible. Examples of such organizations from their practice were the self-managed leagues created to fight against the construction of a U.S. missile base in Cosimo, Italy.⁷ The Movimento Autonomo di Base (Autonomous Movement of the Railway Workers) in Turin, Italy is also often cited.

There has often been suspicion that such structures mimic the front organizations created by many Leninist parties, proving that insurrectionary anarchists have a substitutionist and vanguardist practice. On the contrary the call for such self-managed organizations to take on characteristics of direct action (attack), permanent conflictuality (critique of representation) and so on seems to mirror the strategy and tactics espoused by some contemporary revolutionary anarchists who have theorized a practice of "direct unionism."⁸

There has also been a misguided notion that insurrectionary anarchism is a political theory and method that is for the active destruction and attack of the existing Left in the various unions and syndicalist organizations. One may only need to take a look at Bonanno's *Critique of Syndicalist Methods* to see that this is not entirely true:

"A project to disorganize the unions would require a destructive logic...It would be dispersive to put energy (which we do not possess) into such a perspective, and not the right way to look at the problem of worker organization. Quicker and better results would be obtained from making a radical critique of the unions and extending it equally to revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalism."⁹

Insurrectionary anarchists do not argue against working within such structures but for bringing their radical anarchist critique and ideas to these organizations in order to move past the historical passe most such organizations find themselves in. They work towards the building of more class wide structures that are not limited to the workplace or community struggles but where people fight for their own issues and struggles, not just deffensively. A more current example of such organizations can be seen in the "solidarity network" model that has popped up recently where workers fight against their bosses and landlords but have also participated in struggles against the police and sexual perpetrators.¹⁰

⁷ Insurrection #4

⁸ Libcom.org *Direct Unionism*

⁹ A.M. Bonanno *Critique of Syndicalist Methods*

¹⁰ Libcom.org *Solidarity Networks*

Putting the Dead to Rest

In conclusion anarchists should recognize that the perceived differences between insurrectionary and other currents of revolutionary anarchism are not as large a schism as often portrayed in some circles. These divides seem to be derived more from ignorance of the insurrectional project by both proponents and opponents alike or based on historical comparison to perceived similar historical currents. Hopefully this introduction to insurrectionary organizing methods for revolution helps clarify where there is similarity and where there are differences, as well as dispel common myths. Instead of swaying back and forth in the continual debate over organizational form hopefully the anarchist movement as a whole can start focusing further on the (anti-)political goals and visions that revolutionaries of all tendencies are hotly debating today.

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