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Hakim Bey

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Hakim Bey, the Association for Ontological Anarchy

People who think that they know our politics, who know that we are individualists (or even worse, "neo-individualists"), will no doubt be shocked to discover us taking an interest in the IWW. They'll be even more flabbergasted to hear that Mark Sullivan & I joined the NY Artists & Writers Job Branch of the IWW this January at the urging of Mel Most (who subsequently went & died on us!). Actually, we're a bit shocked ourselves. "Never complain, never explain" .....; but perhaps this time we'll relax the rule a bit — hence the apologia.

The Mackay Society, of which Mark & I are active members, is devoted to the anarchism of Max Stirner, Benjamin Tucker & John Henry Mackay. Moreover, I've associated myself with various currents of post-situationism, "zero work", neo-dada, autonomia & "type 3" anarchy, all of which are supposed to be anathema to the IWW & syndicalism in general. Other members of the NY Artists Branch are also individualists or pacifist-anarchists (in the

Julian Beck line of transmission); some unease has already been expressed during meetings about the Preamble & other IWW texts….; so, aside from making a sentimental gesture in honor of Mel's memory…. why are we collaborating with the IWW?

First: what's wrong with a little sentiment? When I first discovered anarchism at about 12 or 13 I wanted to be a hobo (more practical ambition than piracy, I figured), & the Wobbly organizers appeared to me as authentic American heroes. I still think so.

Second: we type-3's like to show our contempt for ideology — even our own brand of *anti*-ideology. Class-warfare may not suffice for us as an explanation of all reality, but obviously it is real — we know where our sympathies lie. We oppose the idea of the social construct "Work" — but we are far from opposing "the workers". The alienation of labor, we feel, cannot be explained entirely by wage-system economics; it also has a *psychological* origin. This double critique throws the very concept & deep structure of "industrial work" into the crucible of radical deconstruction. Meanwhile however industrial work is *real*, & workers' control must be considered a fully valid tactic toward realizing both the economic & the psychological aspects of any hypothetical "new society within the shell of the old."

A "individualists" moreover we have good reason to appreciate the IWW concept of the union. Stirner — contrary to the belief of those who have not actually read his book — spoke approvingly of a "Union of Unique Ones" (we prefer this translation to "Union of Egoists"), in which all members would reach for individual goals through common interests. He suggested that the workers had the most to gain by embracing this notion, & that if the productive class were to organize on such a basis it would prove irresistible. (The prejudice against Stirner, by the way, can be traced to Marx & Engels, who considered him potentially even more dangerous than Bakunin, & wrote their biggest book to destroy his influence.)

The Mackay Society, incidentally, represents a little-known current of individualist thought which never cut its ties with revo-

lutionary labor. Dyer Lum, Ezra & Angela Haywood represent this school of thought; Jo Labadie, who wrote for Tucker's ***Liberty***, made himself a link between the american "plumb-line" anarchists, the "philosophical" individualists, & the syndicalist or communist branch of the movement; his influence reached the Mackay Society through his son, Laurance. Like the Italian Stirnerites (who influenced us through our late friend E. Arrigoni) we support all anti-authoritarian currents, despite their apparent contradictions. Why? Because we feel that some realization of personal liberty is possible even in the very act of struggling for it. From our point of view, radical organizing (up to the point of insurrection) is not a sacrifice one makes to the future; it is rather a mode of self-liberation with its own immediate reward — even if that reward consists only of fragments & moments of realization. Wobblies, with their contempt for "pie in the sky someday" (or as Lewis Carroll put it, "Jam tomorrow or jam yesterday, but never jam today"), must feel the same distrust of any leftist utopianism which demands our martyrdom on behalf of a materialist "someday" which we ourselves will not live to see.

In a recent issue of ***Factsheet Five***, M. Gunderloy (another notorious neo-individualist) salutes the "winds of change…. blowing through the One Big Union" as exemplified by an "intriguing article on 'The Greening of the IWW'" in ***The Industrial Worker***. If the IWW is compatible with Earth First!, it must surely be able to accept pacifists & individualists. In the Jan. issue of the ***IW*** a San Francisco delegate describes the 1989 Without Borders Conference as a "festival of anti-work counterculturalism" — but admits that the local Branch benefited greatly from the gathering. The SF delegate would perhaps be surprised to hear that we "neo-individualists" also felt underrepresented at the conference. The point is that the *anarchist movement* is growing & that all varieties & currents of anarchism will thrive, cross-pollinate, & bloom. No anti-authoritarian tendency should be excluded — or exclude itself — from this ferment. Ideology is dying — Communism today,

maybe Capitalism tomorrow — & anarchism is the only modern political movement left with any chance of being taken seriously. We challenge the IWW to broaden its horizons beyond class consciousness, just as we challenge the punks (or the environmentalists) to become *more* aware of class, of labor, & of anarchist history. We're all in this together, & it's time to start treating one another in a comradely fashion.

The IWW Preamble is almost a sort of "sacred" text — a Scripture. No believer likes to meddle with scripture — & we're just superstitious enough not to want to disturb the ghosts of those old hobos we venerate. But times change, & Scriptures need to be reinterpreted. Thus, with a smile, this suggestion for an "esoteric" reading of the text.

From the viewpoint of the alert exegetist, there are some wonderfully vague & elastic key-terms to be found in the Preamble. The definition of "working class" could be extended to include all those who suffer from the alienation of labor, both economic & psychological. "The employing class" would then consist of all forces opposing both economic & psychological freedom. "The good things of life" are clearly not to be understood only as material goods, but also as the arts of life, actions, creations, inspirations, modes of freedom, ways of living.

"An injury to one is an injury to all" not because "we" are parts of some mystical body or church under some categorical imperative or moral code or Holy Spook, but because each of us aspires to "good things" which circulate freely only among free spirits, individuals acting in "union" for certain values — values which begin to emerge in the very act of declaring them, & declaring one's willingness to struggle with them.

Why after all are we against "hunger & want"? Because we're bleeding-heart pious do-gooders? Or because hunger & want (both economic & psychological) prevent the full realization of a society in which good things circulate freely, & therefore diminish the power of each individual to obtain those things?

As artists & writers we appreciate the image of the banner inscribed with the revolutionary watchword — our own "work" is precisely the creation of such banners, such symbols. We do not create icons to be worshipped or slogans to be carved in eternal stone — no, we make *tools for realization.* Our Job Branch "produces" the potential for free consciousness by working toward the abolition of consensus perception, both self-repression & the oppression of authority. The wages of alienation is the death of the human spirit; the revolutionary watchword is "possession of the earth" — which includes possession of the self, of the imagination, the body, the creative power — all these, too, are "the machinery of production."

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Notes: Mel Most was an IWW organizer who died last year. Mark Sullivan is the founder of a branch of the John Henry MacKay Society. "Type 3" anarchy is a term coined by Bob Black to mean an amalgamation of individualist and communist anarchy. "Autonomia" is an anti-authoritarian movement which began in Italy and Germany in the 1970s. Julian Beck founded, with Judith Malina, the Living Theatre. (— *Eds.*)