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The reality is that many actions claimed by insurrectionalists are not above critique — and if workers are not allowed to critique such actions are they not simply reduced to passive spectators in a struggle between the state and the revolutionary minority? If, as Bonnano seems to imply, you can't even critique the most insane of actions then you can have no real discussion of tactics at all.

Towards an anarchist communist theory

Anarchist communists have adopted a different test to that of sanity when it comes to the question of militant action. That is if you are claiming to act on behalf of a particular group, then you first need to have demonstrated that the group agrees with the sort of tactics you propose to use. This question is far more important to anarchist practise than the question of what some group of anarchists might decide is an appropriate tactic.

As we have seen, anarchist communists have no principled objection to insurrections, our movement has been built out of the tradition of insurrections within anarchism and we draw inspiration from many of those involved in such insurrections. In the present, we continue to defy the limitations the state seeks to put on protest where ever doing so carries the struggle forward. Again that is not just a judgement for us to make — in cases where we claim to be acting in solidarity with a group (eg of striking workers) then it must be that group that dictates the limits of the tactics that can be used in their struggle.

Insurrectionalism offers a useful critique of much that is standard left practise. But it falsely tries to extend that critique to all forms of anarchist organisation. And in some cases the solutions it advocates to overcome real problems of organisation are worse than the problems it set out to address. Anarchist communists can certainly learn from insurrectionalist writings but solutions to the problems of revolutionary organisation will not be found there.

for say a rent reduction or an increase in wages, such a banner is an insult to the needs of those in the struggle.

Short of the revolution, the issue should not be whether or not to negotiate but rather who negotiates, on what mandate and subject to what procedures before an agreement can be made. The reality is that if these questions are avoided, then that vacuum will be filled by authoritarians happy to negotiate on their terms in a way that minimises their accountability.

Repression and debate

Without going into the specifics of each controversy, a major problem in countries where insurrectionalists put their words into deeds is that this often means attacks that achieve little except on the one hand providing an excuse for state repression and on the other isolating all anarchists, not just those involved, from the broader social movement.

Insurrectionalists claim to be willing to debate tactics but the reality of state repression means that in practise any critique of such actions is presented as taking the side of the state. Nearly 30 years ago Bonanno attempted to define all those who thought such actions premature or counter productive as taking the side of the state when he wrote in 'Armed Joy' that

> *"When we say the time is not ripe for an armed attack on the State we are pushing open the doors of the mental asylum for the comrades who are carrying out such attacks; when we say it is not the time for revolution we are tightening the cords of the straight jacket; when we say these actions are objectively a provocation we don the white coats of the torturers."*[23]

[23] Alfredo Bonanno , Armed Joy, Translated by Jean Weir, Original title ,La gioia armata, 1977 Edizioni Anarchismo, Catania, 1998 Elephant Editions, London online at www.geocities.com

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This asks more questions then is answers — how can you plan without pre-determining something? If a group of people *"think strategically about the future"* is that group not a *"committee or meeting"* even if it chooses not to use that name. And who argues for plans that are not *"adaptable to events as they unfold"*?

From an anarchist communist perspective, the point of thinking strategically about the future is to use that thinking to plan for the future. Plans involve making decisions in advance — predetermining them to at least an extent. And plans should be made and agreed formally, that certainly involves meetings and may well involve the meeting of a committee. Why deny any of this?

Negotiation

Like the more ideological anarcho-syndicalists, insurrectionalists take an ideological position against negotiations. *"Compromise only makes the state and capital stronger"* we are told. But this is a slogan that only works if you are a small group that has no influence on a struggle. Short of the revolution, it will be unusual to win a struggle outright so if our ideas are listened to we will again and again be faced with either a limited and therefore negotiated victory or snatching defeat from the jaws of victory because we advise fighting for more than we know can be won. Surely our aim should be to win everything that is possible, not to go down to glorious defeat?

Apparently not. One insurrectionalist favourably describes how *"The workers who, during a wildcat strike, carried a banner saying, 'We are not asking for anything' understood that the defeat is in the claim itself"*[22] This obviously can only make sense when the workers concerned are already revolutionaries. If this is a social struggle

[22] Anon., At Daggers Drawn with the Existent, its Defenders and its False Critics, Elephant Editions Online at www.geocities.com

ological recuperation by power or against repression pure and simple."[21]

If anything this is worse — the specific anarchist structures are given the role of making pretty much every significant decision for the league. This makes a nonsense of any claim to self-management and would turn such a league into a creature to be manipulated by a self-selected cadre of true revolutionaries supposedly capable of grappling with the issues that its other members cannot. This seems to fly so much in the face of what insurrectionalists say elsewhere that we should stop and pause to wonder why do they end up with such a position.

The question of agreement

The reason lies in the fact that common action obviously requires a certain level of common agreement. The insurrectionalist approach to this is quite hard to get a grasp of and is the reason why such odd contradictions open up in the self-managed leagues they advocate. The problem is that reaching agreement requires decision making and in the making of decisions you open the possibility of a decision being made by the majority that the informal cadre think is a mistake,

The Do or Die article tries to define this obvious problem away as follows *"Autonomy allows decisions to be made when they are necessary, instead of being pre-determined or delayed by the decision of a committee or meeting. This does not mean to say however that we shouldn't think strategically about the future and make agreements or plans. On the contrary, plans and agreements are useful and important. What is emphasised is a flexibility that allows people to discard plans when they become useless. Plans should be adaptable to events as they unfold."*

[21] O.V.,Insurrection, online at www.geocities.com

Anarchist communists have no principled objection to insurrections, our movement has been built out of the tradition of insurrections within anarchism and we draw inspiration from many of those involved in such insurrections. In the present, we continue to defy the limitations the state seeks to put on protest where ever doing so carries the struggle forward. Again that is not just a judgement for us to make — in cases where we claim to be acting in solidarity with a group (eg of striking workers) then it must be that group that dictates the limits of the tactics that can be used in their struggle.

Insurrectionalism offers a useful critique of much that is standard left practise. But it falsely tries to extend that critique to all forms of anarchist organisation. And in some cases the solutions it advocates to overcome real problems of organisation are worse than the problems it set out to address. Anarchist communists can certainly learn from insurrectionalist writings but solutions to the problems of revolutionary organisation will not be found there.

Insurrections — the armed rising of the people — has always been close to the heart of anarchism. The first programmatic documents of the anarchist movement were created by Bakunin and a group of European left-republican insurrectionists as they made the transition to anarchism in Italy in the 1860's. This was not a break with insurrectionism but with left-republicanism, shortly afterwards Bakunin was to take part in an insurrection in Lyon in 1870.

European radical politics of the previous hundred years had been dominated by insurrections ever since the successful insurrection in France of 1789 had sparked off the process leading to the overthrow of the feudal order across the globe. The storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 showed the power of the people in arms, this insurrectionary moment which changed the history of Europe probably involved only around one thousand people.

Insurrection and class politics

1789 also set a pattern where although the working people made up the mass of the insurrectionists it was the bourgeoisie who reaped the rewards — and suppressed the masses in the process of introducing their class rule. This lesson was not lost on those who saw freedom as something that had to involve the economic and social liberation of everyone, not the right of a new class to carry on 'democratic' exploitation of the masses.

In the republican insurrections that broke out in Europe in the century that followed, and in particular in 1848, the conflict between the republican capitalist and small capitalist classes and the republican masses became more and more pronounced. By the 1860's this conflict had led to the emergence of a specifically socialist movement that increasingly saw freedom for all as something that the republican bourgeoisie would fight against not for — alongside the old order if necessary. For Bakunin, it was the experience of the 1863 Polish insurrection where it became clear that the bourgeois republicans feared a peasant insurrection more than the Czar that conclusively proved this point. So now the fight for freedom would need to take place under a new flag — one that sought to organise the working masses in their interests alone.

The early anarchists embraced the new forms of workers' organisation that were emerging, and in particular the International Workers Association or First International. But although they saw the power of the working class organised in unions, unlike the majority of the marxists they did not see this as meaning that capitalism could be reformed away. The anarchists insisted that insurrections would still be needed to bring down the old ruling class.

all "permanent conflict" that is groups with the characteristic of attacking the reality in which they find themselves without waiting for orders from anywhere else. Then the characteristic of being "autonomous", that is of not depending on or having any relations at all with political parties or trade union organisations. Finally, the characteristic of facing problems one by one and not proposing platforms of generic claims that would inevitably transform themselves into administration along the lines of a mini-party or a small alternative trades union."[20]

For all that they have 'self-managed' in their title these leagues in fact look pretty much like the front organizations used for linking into and controlling social struggles by many Leninist organizations. Why so? Well the above definition is one of an organisation that while seeking to organise the masses does so along lines defined by the informal groups of anarchists. If it was truly self-managed, surely the League itself would define its method of operation and what issues it might like to struggle around? And from the start the leagues exclude not only all other competing organisations but even relations with political parties or trade union organisations. Again, any real self-managed struggle would make the decision of who to have relations with for itself and not simply follow the dictat of an organised ideological minority.

Another insurrectionalist, O.V., defined the leagues as *"the element linking the specific informal anarchist organisation to social struggles"* and said of them

"These attacks are organised by the nucleii in collaboration with specific anarchist structures which provide practical and theoretical support, developing the search for the means required for the action pointing out the structures and individuals responsible for repression, and offering a minimum of defence against attempts at political or ide-

[20] Alfredo Bonanno, The Anarchist Tension, Original Title,La Tensione anarchica

Translated by Jean Weir, 1996, online at www.geocities.com

There have even been attempts to extend this to the international level.

"The Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionalist International is aimed at being an informal organisation... [It]is therefore based on a progressive deepening of reciprocal knowledge among all its adherents... To this end all those who adhere to it should send the documentation that they consider necessary to make their activity known... to the promoting group."[18]

Autonomous Base Nucleus

It is obvious that a successful libertarian revolution requires the mass of the people to be organised. Insurrectionalists recognise this and have attempted to construct models of mass organisation that fit within their ideological principles. Autonomous Base Nucleus, as they are called, were originally based on the Autonomous Movement of the Turin Railway Workers and the Self-managed leagues against the cruise missile base in Comiso.

Alfredo Bonanno in The Anarchist Tension described the Comiso experience

"A theoretical model of this kind was used in an attempt to prevent the construction of the American missile base in Comiso in the early '80s. The anarchists who intervened for two years built "self-managed leagues".[19]

He summarized them as follow *"These groups should not be composed of anarchists alone, Anyone who intends to struggle to reach given objectives, even circumscribed ones, could participate so long as they take a number of essential conditions into account. First of*

[18] For An Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionalist International, Elephant Editions 1993 online at www.geocities.com

[19] Alfredo Bonanno, The Anarchist Tension, Original Title,La Tensione anarchica

Translated by Jean Weir, 1996, online at www.geocities.com

Early anarchist insurrections

Anarchist attempts at insurrection spread with the growing movement. In fact, even before the Lyon attempt the anarchist Chávez López was involved in an indigenous insurrectionary movement in Mexico which in April 1869 issued a manifesto calling for *"the revered principle of autonomous village governments to replace the sovereignty of a national government viewed to be the corrupt collaborator of the hacendados".*[1] In Spain in the 1870's, where workers' attempts to form unions were met with repression, the anarchists were involved in many insurrections, and in the case of some small industrial towns were locally successful during the 1873 uprisings. In Alcoy for instance after paper workers who had struck for an eight-hour day were repressed *"The workers seized and burned the factories, killed the mayor and marched down the street with the heads of the policemen whom they had put to death."*[2] Spain was to see many, many anarchist led insurrections before the most successful — that which greeted and almost defeated the fascist coup of July 1936.

In Italy in 1877 Malatesta, Costa and Cafiero led an armed band into two villages in Campania. There they burned the tax registers and declared an end to Victor Emmanuel's reign — however their hope of sparking an insurrection failed and troops soon arrived. Bakunin had already been involved in an attempt to spark an insurrection in Bologna in 1874.

The limits of insurrections

Many of these early attempts at insurrection led to severe state repression. In Spain the movement was forced underground by the mid 1870's. This led into the 'Propaganda by Deed' period

[1] John M Hart's "Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class"

[2] James Joll, The Anarchists, 229

when some anarchists reacted to this repression by assassinating members of the ruling class, including a number of kings and presidents. The state in turn escalated the repression, after a bombing in Barcelona in 1892 some 400 people were taken to the dungeon at Montjuich where they were tortured. Fingernails were ripped out, men were hung from ceilings and had their genitals twisted and burned. Several died from torture before they were even brought to trial and five were later executed.

Arguably the fatal theoretical flaw of this period was the belief that the working people were everywhere willing to rise and that all the anarchist group had to do was light the touchpaper with an insurrection. This weakness was not limited to anarchism — as we have seen it was also the approach of radical republicanism, which meant sometimes, as in Spain or Cuba the anarchists and the republicans found themselves fighting together against state forces. Elsewhere the left sometimes slotted into this role — the Easter Rebellion of 1916 in Ireland saw a military alliance between revolutionary syndicalists and nationalists.

However the original organisational approach of the anarchists around Bakunin was not limited to making attempts at insurrection, but also included the involvement of anarchists in the mass struggles of the working people. While some anarchists responded to circumstances by constructing an ideology of 'illegalism' the majority started to turn to these mass struggles and, in particular, entering or constructing mass unions on a revolutionary syndicalist base. In the opening years of the 20th century anarchists were involved in or simply built most of the revolutionary syndicalist unions that were to dominate radical politics up to the Russian revolution. Very often these unions were themselves then involved in insurrections, as in 1919 in both Argentina and Chile which included in Chile workers who *"took possession of the Patagonian town of Puerto Natales, under the red flag and anarcho-syndicalist*

across struggles. Although even here the distinction is clouded because insurrectionalists also see that sometimes informal organisation may be involved in more than one struggle or may move from one struggle to another.

From an anarchist communist perspective, the major point of an organisation is to help create communication, common purpose and unity across and between struggles. Not in the formal sense of all struggles being forced into the one program and under the one set of leaders. But in the informal sense of the anarchist communist organisation acting as one channel of communication, movement and debate between the struggles that allows for greater communication and increases the chance of victory.

The insurrectionalist alternative — Informal organisation

The method of organisation favoured by insurrectionists is guided by the principle that *"The smallest amount of organisation necessary to achieve one's aims is always the best to maximize our efforts."* What this means is small groups of comrades who know each other well and have a lot of time to spend with each other discussing out issues and taking action — affinity groups.

We are told *"to have an affinity with a comrade means to know them, to have deepened one's knowledge of them. As that knowledge grows, the affinity can increase to the point of making an action together possible.."*[17]

Of course insurrectionalists know that small groups are often too small to achieve an objective on their own so in that case they say that groups can federate together on a temporary basis for that specific goal.

[17] O.V.,Insurrection, online at www.geocities.com

While this is quite a good critique of Leninism or Social Democratic forms of organisation, it doesn't really describe ongoing forms of anarchist organisation — in particular anarchist communism organisation. Anarchist communists don't, for instance, seek to *"synthesise all struggle within a single organisation"*. Rather we think the specific anarchist organisation should involve itself in the struggles of the working class, and that these struggle should be self-managed by the class — not run by any organisation, anarchist or otherwise.

Solutions to the problems of organisation

Far from developing hierarchy, our constitutions not only forbid formal hierarchy but contain provisions designed to prevent the development of informal hierarchy as well. For instance considerable informal power can fall to someone who is the only one who can do a particular task and who manages to hold onto this role for many years. So the WSM constitution says no member can hold any particular position for more than three years. After that time they have to step down.

These sorts of formal mechanisms to prevent the development of informal hierarchy are common in anarchist communist organizations. In fact, it is an example of where formal organisation is a greater protection against hierarchy, our formal method of organisation also allows us to agree rules to prevent informal hierarchy developing. Insurrectionalism lacks any serious critique of informal hierarchy but, as anyone active in the anarchist movement in the anglo world knows, the lack of sizeable formal organisation means that problems of hierarchy within the movement are most often problems of informal hierarchy.

If you strip out the things that can go wrong with an organisation, then the insurrectionalist concept of 'formal' organisation boils down to an organisation that continues to exist between and

principles."[3] Earlier, in 1911, the Mexican anarchists of the PLM, with the help of many IWW members from the USA, *"organised battalions ...in Baja California and took over the town of Mexicali and the surrounding areas"*.

Insurrections and anarchist communists

The anarchist communist organisational tradition within anarchism can be traced back to Bakunin and the first programmatic documents produced by the emerging anarchist movement in the 1860's. But these organisational ideas were not developed in any collective way again until the 1920's. Still there were individuals and groups that advocated the key features of organised anarchist communism; involvement in the mass struggle of the working people and the need for specific anarchist organisation and propaganda.

Anarchist communism was clarified in 1926 by a group of revolutionary exiles analysing why their efforts to date had failed. This resulted in the publication of the document known in English as the 'Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists' which we have analysed at length elsewhere.

Here the relevance is to note that, like their predecessors of the 1860's, this grouping of anarchist communists were trying to learn from the anarchist involvement in insurrections and revolution of the 1917–21 period. They include Nestor Makhno who had been the key figure of a massive anarchist led insurrection in the Western Ukraine. The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine fought the Austro Hungarians, anti-semitic pogromists, various white armies and the Bolshevik controlled Red army over those years.

These platformists as they have come to be known wrote "*The principle of enslavement and exploitation of the masses by violence*

[3] Thanks to Pepe for information on these events in Argentina and Chile.

constitutes the basis of modern society. All the manifestations of its existence: the economy, politics, social relations, rest on class violence, of which the servicing organs are: authority, the police, the army, the judiciary... The progress of modern society: the technical evolution of capital and the perfection of its political system, fortifies the power of the ruling classes, and makes the struggle against them more difficult... Analysis of modern society leads us to the conclusion that the only way to transform capitalist society into a society of free workers is the way of violent social revolution."[4]

The Spanish experience

The next development of anarchist communism once more involved those at the centre of an insurrection — this time the Friends of Durruti group who were active during the Barcelona insurrection of May 1937. The FoD *"members and supporters were prominent comrades from the Gelsa battle-front"*[5]

The FoD was composed of members of the CNT but was highly critical of the role the CNT had played in 1936 *"The CNT did not know how to live up to its role. It did not want to push ahead with the revolution with all its consequences. They were frightened by the foreign fleets... Has any revolution ever been made without having to overcome countless difficulties? Is there any revolution in the world, of the advanced type, that has been able to avert foreign intervention? ... Using fear as a springboard and letting oneself be swayed by timidity, one never succeeds. Only the bold, the resolute, men of courage may attain great victories. The timid have no right to lead the masses...The CNT ought to have leapt into the driver's seat in the country, delivering a severe coup de grace to all that is outmoded and*

[4] Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, Dielo Trouda (Workers' Cause), 1926 online at struggle.ws

[5] Jaime Balius (secretary of the Friend of Durruti), Towards a Fresh Revolution, online at struggle.ws

Here we see the chief weakness of insurrectionalism — its lack of serious discussion of other anarchist tendencies. We are led to believe that other revolutionaries, including all other anarchists, favour waiting around and preaching about the evils of capitalism rather than also taking action. There are some very few groups for whom this is true, but the reality is that even amongst the non-anarchist revolutionary movement most organisations also engage in forms of direct action where they think this makes tactical sense. In reality this is also the judgement that insurrectionalists make — like everyone else they recognise the need to wait until they think the time is right. They recognise that tomorrow is not the day to storm the White House.

Critique of organisation

Another place to find fault with the ideology of insurrectionalism is where it comes to the question of organisation. Insurrectionalism declares itself against 'formal organisation' and for 'informal organisation'. Often quite what that means is unclear as 'formal' organization is simply used as a label for all the things that can go wrong with an organisation.

Insurrectionalists attempt to define formal organisation as *"permanent organisations [which] synthesise all struggle within a single organisation, and organisations that mediate struggles with the institutions of domination. Permanent organisations tend to develop into institutions that stand above the struggling multitude. They tend to develop a formal or informal hierarchy and to disempower the multitude ... The hierarchical constitution of power-relations removes decision from the time such a decision is necessary and places it within the organisation ... permanent organisations tend to make decisions based not on the necessity of a specific goal or action, but on the needs of that organisation, especially its preservation. The organisation becomes an end in itself"*

— as we choose our leaders or our burgers — instead of thinking for ourselves."

This all sounds pretty good — and there is considerable truth in it. But this blanket analysis again prevents a discussion about how these problems can be overcome. Until the time we have our own alternative media — and in that case some of the problems above would still apply — we would be crazy not to use those sections of the media through which we might be able to reach the millions of people that lack of resources otherwise cut us off from.

And while the media likes to simplify the story by reducing it to binary choices, this does not mean that everyone who gets information from the media accepts this division. Many if not all people have an understanding that the media is flawed and so tend not to accept its binary divisions.

Waiting for the revolution?

We are told the left in general and the rest of the anarchist movement in particular hold

> *"a critique of separation and representation that justifies waiting and accepts the role of the critic. With the pretext of not separating oneself from the 'social movement', one ends up denouncing any practice of attack as a 'flight forward' or mere 'armed propaganda'. Once again revolutionaries are called to 'unmask' the real conditions of the exploited, this time by their very inaction. No revolt is consequently possible other than in a visible social movement. So anyone who acts must necessarily want to take the place of the proletariat. The only patrimony to defend becomes 'radical critique', 'revolutionary lucidity'. Life is miserable, so one cannot do anything but theorise misery."*[16]

[16] Anon., At Daggers Drawn with the Existent, its Defenders and its False Critics, Elephant Editions Online at www.geocities.com

archaic. In this way we would have won the war and saved the revolution... But it did the opposite... It breathed a lungful of oxygen into an anaemic, terror-stricken bourgeoisie."[6]

Across much of the world anarchism had been crushed in the period up to, during and after World War Two. Anarchists were involved in partisan movements across Europe during the war but in the aftermath were repressed by eastern 'communism' or western 'democracy'. In Uruguay, one of the few places where a sizeable anarchist communist movement survived, the FAU waged an underground armed struggle against the military dictatorship from the 1950's. Cuban anarcho-syndicalists, in particular tobacco workers, played a significant role in the Cuban revolution only to be repressed in its aftermath by the new regime.

The ideology of insurrectionalism

There is a long tradition within anarchism of constructing ideologies out of a tactic. The long and deep involvement of anarchists in insurrections has, not surprisingly, given rise to an anarchist ideology of insurrectionalism.

An early self-definition of insurrectionalism in English is found in this 1993 translation: *"We consider the form of struggle best suited to the present state of class conflict in practically all situations is the insurrectional one, and this is particularly so in the Mediterranean area. By insurrectional practice we mean the revolutionary activity that intends to take the initiative in the struggle and does not limit itself to waiting or to simple defensive responses to attacks by the structures of power. Insurrectionalists do not subscribe to the quantitative practices typical of waiting, for example organisational projects whose first aim is to grow in numbers before intervening in struggles, and who during this waiting period limit themselves to prose-*

[6] Towards a Fresh Revolution

lytism and propaganda, or to the sterile as it is innocuous counter-information"[7]

As an ideology insurrectionalism originates in the peculiar conditions of post war Italy and Greece. Towards the end of World War Two there was a real possibility of revolution in both countries. In many areas the fascists were driven out by left partisans before the allied armies arrived. But because of the Yalta agreement Stalin instructed the official revolutionary left of the Communist Party to hold back the struggle. As a result, Greece was to suffer decades of military dictatorship while in Italy the Communist Party continued to hold back struggles. Insurrectionalism was one of a number of new socialist ideologies which arose to address these particular circumstances. However the development of insurrectionalism in these countries is beyond the scope of this article. Here we want to look at the development of an insurrectionalist ideology in the Anglo world.

Insurrectionalism in the anglo world

One insurrectionalist has described how the ideas spread from Italy *"Insurrectionary anarchism has been developing in the English language anarchist movement since the 1980s, thanks to translations and writings by Jean Weir in her "Elephant Editions" and her magazine "Insurrection"... In Vancouver, Canada, local comrades involved in the Anarchist Black Cross, the local anarchist social center, and the magazines "No Picnic" and "Endless Struggle" were influenced by Jean's projects, and this carried over into the always developing practice of insurrectionary anarchists in this region today ... The an-*

[7] For an Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionist International-Proposal for a Debate, Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionalist International, (Promoting Group), Elephant Editions 1993 online at www.geocities.com

to help organise a struggle without this happening. A comrade has more time than anyone else so they take on a number of tasks that need to be done — are they not therefore an organiser?

The problem with the apparent blanket ban on 'organisers' is that it prevents analysis of why these problems arise and thus how they can be prevented.

In the case of media work there is no mystery. Anyone doing media work for a controversial struggle will be bombarded with questions about the likelihood of violence — in media terms this is a 'sexy' story. If they are getting this day after day, week after week then they will start to try to shape the struggle to follow this media agenda.

The solution is simple. This problem arises because the left tends to have their 'leader' who is doing the key organising of a protest also as the media contact for that protest. Our experience is that if you divorce the two roles so that the organisers of a specific event are not the people who speak to the media about it then the problem is greatly reduced if not eliminated. The actual organisers are isolated from the media but feed information to whoever is nominated as a media spokesperson. That media spokesperson however has no particular say about the organisation of the protest.

The media and popular opinion

This leads onto the insurrectionalist description of the media. *"An opinion is not something first found among the public in general and then, afterwards, replayed through the media, as a simple reporting of the public opinion. An opinion exists in the media first. Secondly, the media then reproduces the opinion a million times over linking the opinion to a certain type of person (conservatives think x, liberals think y). Public opinion is produced as a series of simple choices or solutions ('I'm for globalization and free trade,' or 'I'm for more national control and protectionism'). We are all supposed to choose*

The idea that such actions need to be taken up across the working class is also seen by insurrectionalists as an important answer to the argument that the state can simply repress small groups. It is pointed out that *"It is materially impossible for the state and capital to police the whole social terrain"*[14].

As might be imagined, individual desires are central to insurrectionalism but not as with the rugged individualism of the 'libertarian right'. Rather *"The desire for individual self-determination and self-realization leads to the necessity of a class analysis and class struggle"*[15].

Much of the insurrectionalist theory we have looked at so far presents no real problems in principle for anarchist communists. On the theoretical level, the problems arise with the organisational ideology that insurrectionists have constructed alongside this. Much of this has been constructed as an ideological critique of the rest of the anarchist movement.

The organiser

The insurrectionist criticism of 'the organiser', while a useful warning of the dangers that come with such a role, has expanded into an ideological position that presents such dangers as inevitable. We are told *"It is the job of the organiser to transform the multitude into a controllable mass and to represent that mass to the media or state institutions"* and *"For the organiser... real action always takes a back seat to the maintenance of the media image"*

Probably most of us are familiar with left campaigns run by a particular party where exactly this has happened. But our experience is that this is not inevitable. It is quite possible for individuals

[14] Do or Die 10 , "Insurrectionary Anarchism and the Organization of Attack".

[15] Do or Die 10 , "Insurrectionary Anarchism and the Organization of Attack".

archist magazine "Demolition Derby" in Montreal also covered some insurrectionary anarchist news back in the day"[8]

That insurrectionalism should emerge as a more distinct trend in English language anarchism at this point in time should be no surprise. The massive boost anarchism received from the summit protest movement was in part due to the high visibility of black bloc style tactics. After the Prague summit protest of 2000, the state learned how to greatly reduce the effectiveness of such tactics. Soon after the disastrous experience of Genoa and a number of controlled blocs in the USA, arguments arose that emphasised greater militancy and more clandestine organisation on the one hand and a move away from the spectacle of summit protesting on the other.

Alongside this, many young people who were entering anarchist politics for the first time often made the incorrect assumption that the militant image that had first attracted their attention on the TV news was a product of insurrectionalism in particular. In fact, most varieties of class struggle anarchists, including anarchist communists and members of the syndicalist unions, had participated in black bloc style protests at the summits. As these all see actual insurrections as playing a significant role in achieving an anarchist society, there should be nothing surprising in them being involved in a little street fighting on the occasions when that tactic appears to make sense. By the time of Genoa, when the state had obviously greatly upped the level of repression it could deploy, anarchist communists were debating whether such tactics had a future in the columns of this magazine and other publications.

[8] Andy posting in respone to an early draft of this article on the anti-politics forum, see www.anti-politics.net

The ideas of insurrectionalism

It is probably useful to dispel a couple of myths about insurrectionalism at the start. Insurrectionalism is not limited to armed struggle, although it might include armed struggle, and most insurrectionalists are quite critical of the elitism of armed struggle vanguards. Nor does it mean continuously trying to start actual insurrections, most insurrectionalists are smart enough to realise that this maximum program is not always possible, even if they are also keen to condemn other anarchists for waiting.

So what is insurrectionalism? Do or Die 10 published a useful[9] introduction with the title "Insurrectionary Anarchy : Organising for Attack!"[10]. I use substantive quotes from this article in the discussion that follows.

The concept of 'attack' is at the heart of the insurrectionist ideology, this was explained as follows

> *"Attack is the refusal of mediation, pacification, sacrifice, accommodation, and compromise in struggle. It is through acting and learning to act, not propaganda, that we will open the path to insurrection, although analysis and discussion have a role in clarifying how to act. Waiting only teaches waiting; in acting one learns to act."*

This essay drew from a number of previously published insurrectionalist works, one of these 'At Daggers Drawn' explained that

> *"The force of an insurrection is social, not military. Generalised rebellion is not measured by the armed clash but by the extent to which the economy is paralysed, the places of production and distribution taken over, the free giving that burns all calculation ... No guerrilla group, no matter how effective, can take the place of this grandiose movement of destruction and transformation."*[11]

The insurrectionalist notion of attack is not one based on a vanguard achieving liberation for the working class. Instead they are clear that *"what the system is afraid of is not these acts of sabotage in themselves, so much as their spreading socially."*[12]. In other words the direct actions of a small group can only be successful if they are taken up across the working class. This is a much more useful way to discuss direct action that the more conventional left debate that polarises extremes of 'Direct Action crews' who see their actions in themselves as achieving the objective versus revolutionary organizations that refuse to move beyond propagandising for mass action — and all too often actually argue against 'elitist' small group actions.

Riots and class struggle

Insurrectionalists often recognize class struggle where the reformist left refuse to, so writing of Britain in the early 1980's Jean Weir observed that *"The struggles taking place in the inner city ghettos are often misunderstood as mindless violence. The young struggling against exclusion and boredom are advanced elements of the class clash. The ghetto walls must be broken down, not enclosed."*[13]

[9] It does however contain at least one basic error, it weirdly describe the synthesist Italian Anarchist Federation as a "platformist organisation" which suggests the authors made little or no attempt to understand what platformism is before moving to reject it.

[10] Do or Die 10, 2003, online at www.eco-action.org

[11] Anon., At Daggers Drawn with the Existent, its Defenders and its False Critics, Elephant Editions Online at www.geocities.com

[12] Do or Die 10 , "Insurrectionary Anarchism and the Organization of Attack".

[13] J.W., Insurrection, online at www.geocities.com