

Anarcho-Communist Organization & the Needs of the Present

Chilean anarchists on the movement they need

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These days, we find ourselves in an extremely propitious moment, not only because of the development of libertarian practices, born from the fire of the various social struggles, but also because of having to raise seriously the question of anarcho-communist organization. For a couple of years now, discussion on forms of organization and on the need for anarchists to organize, has not just been a series of philosophical speculations but rather a succession of equally valid political possibilities. Since 1999, however, we have seen an increase, unexpected for many, in the anarchist presence in a certain number of social struggles and organizations. There have been solid examples of libertarian organization in various towns throughout Chile (Santiago, Concepción, Chillán, Temuco, Valparaíso, etc.) as a result of the increased participation in social struggles. Since then, discussion on anarchist organization has left the realms of Olympus, and is based firmly in reality. Now, discussion is not on the basis of abstract elaborations, but has, by necessity, some practical substance, based on the needs of our real situation.

As a movement, are we up to the task that we have before us? Will we be able to take advantage of this favorable context without repeating the errors of the past and take the opportunity to outline a serious, revolutionary and libertarian way out of the capitalist system?

Certainly, the movement has matured rapidly, in the light of practical experiences. But much still has to be done within the movement. It is our task to encourage a “theoretical-practical revolution” within anarchism, which will give the movement some dynamism, get rid of dogmatism, and take advantage of the lessons we have learnt and our experiences over the last decade, to give a final kickstart to a movement that has reached the “age of majority”. Only then will we be able to advance and to strengthen our influence among the people.

THE ERRORS OF YESTERDAY THAT STILL AFFLICT US

We must be able to face our history critically — the best teacher anarchists have is history. From it we must learn our strengths and work on them. But above all, we must learn from our errors and overcome them, so as not to trip over the same stone twice. We must be more self-critical still of the recent history of our movement, of the last ten years, because it is here that we can see most of the limitations that have so far prevented us from advancing and growing faster. We must transform self-criticism into a faithful companion, who helps us to correct ourselves before each error and to understand that self-criticism is never a bad thing, that it can always help us to grow and to mature.

The development of the anarchist movement during the ‘90s, reflected the low period in the popular movement and the fragmentation of the left, which tended, obviously, to set the standard in many of the things that characterized us up to today.

The low tide of the popular movement to a great extent caused the fights that were previously directed towards the regime turned into internal conflicts between fractions and groups, that badly affected the whole left, but were felt most strongly by the revolutionary currents. This resulted in a strong attitude of mistrust and sectarianism, which is a great obstacle to revolutionary unity.

Similarly, the fragmentation of the left was seen in the appearance of an endless number of groups in the middle of the last decade. It was not understood by certain comrades that this growing number of groups was not a phenomenon which reflected the revitalization of the left, but was in fact symptomatic of a state of greater fragmentation and weakness. Of course the

collectives, as a phenomenon, reflected many positive aspects, like the rejection of traditional politics, the bourgeois patrimony and/or authoritarian parties, or the search for new forms of organization. But these positive aspects have frequently been blown out of proportion, leaving to one side a critical analysis which would try to understand the necessity today to go further on the level of organization.

Although they marked a necessary moment in the development of the movement, the collectives only reinforced the mistrust and a certain hostility towards organization (basically, the more we spoke about anarchism being organization, the less there was of it). They developed in us little bad habits like “assemblyism”, instead of a more correct federal principle. This translated into a situation where the limits, in numerical terms, of the organization, were thought about in terms of how many people were able to meet and to reach agreement in a room, instead of articulating different federative nuclei. They were responsible for us remaining on the level of “domestic” politics, propaganda, activism, and small struggles, and also for allowing us to lose sight of the direction of the struggle in the long term, and on a larger scale. Today, it is essential that we move towards organizations on a greater level, not only as far as numbers are concerned, but also as regards the method of organization itself. And for this to happen, for this to lead to greater levels of organization, it is necessary to leave behind us that mistrust which originated in the policy of the “little group of friends”. We have to stop thinking in small terms and start thinking about preparing an explosion of anarchism as a mass phenomenon, through strong, solid organizations. We must leave aside our prejudices on organization, which means abandoning the idea of it as a purely idealistic phenomenon, to have sufficient maturity and will to forge it in real terms, and to facilitate the unity of libertarians on real and firm bases.

UNITY: FROM BELOW AND IN ACTION

Many comrades, impatient because things do not always go as fast as we would like them to, want there to be unity simply in order to tot up numbers of organizations, groups, collectives, individuals, etc. We believe that the experience of previous years teaches us very well, that such a premise can slow things down, before speeding them up.

Unity never comes about “just because”, because we shared the same flag. “Slogan unity” is always a weak unity, easily broken before its first encounter with reality, ending up in disputes and quarrels on all sides. True unity must come about from below, and through action. That is to say, our aim should be, instead, for unity and convergence of the different anarchist sectors to come about as a result of our respective work in the public arena. Only by uniting as a result of practice in our various struggles (be they student, social or union), will we see that our unity is necessary and productive.

It is this phenomenon which has begun to appear in recent times and which represents our main strength. It gives an immediate sense to anarchist unity together with a real, solid base. Certainly, this approach, this new perspective has produced friction and has a somewhat vacillating nature, with highs and lows, successes and mistakes — a very logical thing in such a period of definition and transformation. This undeniable fact has discouraged certain comrades and has caused others to keep their distance or to show a certain reticence. But it must be understood that the friction and conflicts that this new perspective has generated are natural, given the characteristics of the political development of our movement, which has passed from a phase

where we were used to functioning as a “tribe”, where we were used to the easy-going life of the collective. Today, our goals are more ambitious and we are looking for our own space, with the aim of forging mass struggles. But just as the rise of friction was natural, it is also natural that it should disappear as positions are gradually clarified, as our real work advances, as unity is actually built from below. It is natural that practical experience itself, struggle itself, helps us to overcome the friction, because what is stronger still is the conviction that we anarchists have, to join together and to build in order to win.

OUR UNITY MUST BE A REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL UNITY

It is not enough, however, for anarchists to be able to engage in a large amount of political and social work all over the territory. It is fundamental that our experiences of struggle and organization, which we develop in the social sphere and which bear the mark of our unity, be seen on a revolutionary political plane. Our frontline work, our practical experiences, give meaning to a much more solid unity, and one of greater influence: unity on the basis of an organization which unifies those different tasks, based on a revolutionary program which is coherent with our Anarcho-Communist principles.

As anarchist militants, it is necessary today to keep this perspective in mind always. However much work we do and real presence we have among different social subjects, our presence, as anarchists, is sterile and impotent if we are not able to forge an “alternative”. This can only be obtained by means of a cross-sectional revolutionary political organization which thrives on all the accumulated and ongoing experience, and which produces a project of even greater reach.

This has been demonstrated by our recent (and past) practice, where many attempts at libertarian construction went adrift through lacking the support which would have driven it on and were taken over by authoritarian sectors, or simply vanished after a short time. This has fully justified the appearance of libertarian organizations who declare themselves to be revolutionary, as a way to overcome these limitations.

It is necessary to stress, once again, that this unity would have no sense if was not based on practical experience, and if it lacked the unity, tactical as well as ideological, to have real substance and not turn out to be a splendid house of cards which collapses at the first breath of wind.

A SINGLE ORGANIZATION, BUT HAVING A FEDERAL CHARACTER

We cannot continue to appear throughout the country as a series of separate organizations without a clearly identifiable face which it is possible to transform into a point of reference for the people. We must overcome the reluctance to unite in greater tasks, and this can only come about through a shared practical trajectory. Furthermore, it is necessary to get rid of this fear of organization, a fear which is rather difficult to understand among libertarians. Many comrades have a phobia about speaking in the name of an organization, and at times seem to have a real complex about it, and so hide behind the generic name of “straightforward anarchists”, and sometimes not even that. We cannot, in all seriousness, continue speaking as “anarchists in general”, given the

heterogeneity of sectors that identify with this epithet (which can be seen in the classic discussions which lead nowhere on who or what is more anarchist). It is necessary that we speak from our organizations, which are clearly identifiable in their relative spaces and with their relative political lines. Only in this way can we represent a real presence.

It is essential that anarchists who share common postulates and practices form a single union, a single organization that can drive ahead, like a big fist, with all the work that today is carried on (with great tenacity) by many comrades spread throughout the territory. This does not deny the right to other groups and other sectors to organize themselves as they seem fit, but we cannot ignore the right of those who think and act similarly to create a single force, simply because of fear of the old politics of the “single party”.

If today we remain locked up in regionalism and are incapable of uniting on a national basis, we will demonstrate to everybody, to the whole political spectrum, that anarchism does not represent a viable alternative for social organization. If we are unable to unite with those we are near in terms of ideas and practices, we (anarchists) will be demonstrating that libertarian principles and action are unable to become the powerful ideas that will unite revolutionaries in the movement towards liberation.

In effect, we need an organization which is established on a basis of common principles and tactics, that it is based on our concrete work with the people (be they students, workers, or whatever...), that is unitary, and on a national basis (only thereafter will we be able to think seriously of an “internationalist” form). But, above all, it is most important, being libertarians, not to forget the fact that the fundamental principle that gives us coherent unity is the federal principle: that is to say, that common policies are not adopted and implemented mechanically and dogmatically over the whole territory, or between all those involved, but that instead we understand the specific peculiarities and conditions of each locality. This does not reduce the force of the programme that the organization has given itself as a result of struggle and the experiences of struggle; this does not reduce the strength of the principles of ideological and tactical unity. Rather it strengthens them by feeding on the different conditions in which the common policies will implement. Let us remember that we intend to act in the real world, and not in some fantasy land of models. It is therefore this federal model which, on the one hand ensures that policies are not dictated from the centre downwards but that they are spread from below towards the centre and, on the other hand, ensures that these are applicable in the particular areas where the anarcho-communist fight is developing.

Today, we must be up to what the circumstances demand of us. When we anarchists begin to organize ourselves from below, we must not lose sight of the aim of political-revolutionary organization, which itself must not lose sight of goal of social transformation, the only factor which can give it meaning. This is necessary in order to avoid being overwhelmed by growth and to avoid feudalist tendencies from becoming mistakenly strengthened in the movement. If instead of strengthening the political-revolutionary organization today we encourage the growth of new collectives, of new fiefdoms, we would regress instead of advancing.

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