Fragmented thoughts on political organization

Juan Conatz

June 15, 2012

Some rough thoughts on political organization, mostly based on my experience with groups in North America and conversations with some current and former members:

1. Contemporary political organization in the United States in large part came out of the post-Seattle 1999 resurgence of anarchism and the subsequent disagreements with primitivists, post-leftists, counter-institution types, and insurrectionaries.

2. So for a long while (and to a certain extent today), the purpose and main appeal if political organization was in part because of defining themselves against other anarchists. This is no longer an acceptable purpose.

3. Political organization has a tendency to take the types of conversations that should be happening in the wider class and instead places them primarily in closed groups between a very small amount of people. This is encouraged by advocating that a strict separation of the political and the economic must be maintained. However, it assumes that existing economic organizations are not already political and it is rarely gives an adequate explanation on how this differs from Lenin's 'trade union consciousness', which anarchists and libertarian communists have always rejected.

4. There has yet to be a serious and comprehensive assessment of the political organization experience since Seattle '99. This includes successes/failures as well as current and now defunct groups.

5. Despite their rejection of building anarchist or radical left mass organizations 'from scratch', the strategy of social insertion (a type of boring-from-within) doesn't seem to take into account the hundreds, if not thousands of leftist groups who have entered mass organizations in order to radicalize them.[1]

---

[1] I consider bringing up the fact that many of them attempted to seize executive positions solely is side-stepping the question, as not all groups did this, nor did they always fail to create a complimentary militant base. Also, none of the political organizations I'm speaking of reject taking formal leadership or staff positions in mass organizations, and some of their members, in fact, do hold such positions.

6. The issue of formal VS informal as some sort of flagship identifier is nearly a false dichotomy, with some political organizations mostly being a listserv you pay dues to be on that occasionally sends out short statements of solidarity. Dwelling on whether something is 'formal' or 'informal' doesn't take into account if the something is worth doing at all.

7. Despite talk of 'theoretical and tactical unity', the actual projects members are involved in as a main activity includes the internal functions of the political organization itself, mainstream unions, the IWW, solidarity networks, Occupy, what amounts to internal reading groups, workers centers, co-operative projects, Food Not Bombs, etc. or…an extremely wide range for a relatively small group of people.

8. Branching off the lack of assessment on the experience of contemporary political organization, there is no formalized resource for passing down skills and knowledge. There are no trainings or documents that help members do the activity the groups say they exist for, nor any effort to make sure members get to trainings or have resources that do exist in other groups.

9. As there is no formalized way to pass down skills and knowledge, there is a huge gulf between older, more established individuals (mostly in major metro areas) and newer, younger and less established people (many in smaller cities, towns and isolated rural areas).

10. Often dominating the dialogue, agenda and concentration of the political organizations are those who speak mainly of theory and 'internal education'. The need for developing organizing skills and experience is secondary. This begs the question of what is a political organization VS what is a reading and discussion group.

Juan Conatz
Fragmented thoughts on political organization
June 15, 2012

usa.anarchistlibraries.net