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An Anarchist Strategy Discussion

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ing of alternatives should be encouraged, however such activities should be incorporated within the larger (populist) struggle to reduce illegitimate authority. If we can convince significant sections of the left-liberals to take their chatter about diversity seriously, libertarian municipalism, free counties and Permanent Autonomous Zones become possible.

no more interested in cutting back on the State then their leftist pseudo-opposition. The best way to do this would be to propose client-owned and run mutual aid systems for social services like public education, health care and unemployment insurance, with subsidies for those people too poor to afford the fees. This would show up the neo-cons as phonies and back the left into a corner from which it could not escape.

A third point is that while the leadership of the left are liars and hypocrites, the membership is not necessarily so. Many of these people are sincere and support the Greens, the NDP, Labour Party or Democrats or whatever out of what they see as a lack of alternatives. As well as finding the liberatory and social among the common people (who are not ideological) we must find some common ground with the rank and file left. This would mean appealing to their notions of the social and of diversity and pluralism. This also means confronting them with the totalitarian nature of corporate liberalism. This would mean showing them how we can better achieve their goal of equality through non-statist means. This would mean getting them to understand that democracy, community and civil society are not catch phrases. This would mean educating them what the old-time left was about and that the labor movement once practiced social solidarity. Ultimately, we need to maintain a dialogue and build bridges with both the libertarian "right" and rank and file left-liberals in an attempt to build a social consensus favorable to our goals.

The fourth point consists of all that can be gained from what I have earlier suggested as partial solutions to the problems of governmental authority and corporate capitalism.

We should adopt much of the panarchist perspective. Many people simply fear freedom and will fight it to the bitter end. Rather than promoting the ideal of freedom for all, we should promote the ideal of freedom for those who want it Rather than pushing universal freedom, suggest universal pluralism through sociological governments (and non-governments) Opting out and the build-

PART ONE

I tried unsuccessfully to get this discussion going in the A-Act anarchist discussion group. Unfortunately, no one seemed interested. My conclusion is that many anarchists — simply have no idea what they are doing or even want to know.

Past Strategies.

Strategic thinking involves a search for what Marxists have called the "subject of history" ie the group that is seen as the agent of change. Once the agent is identified, the means by which this agent makes change is discussed. Anarchists as varied in viewpoint as Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy and Landauer all favored a populist approach, one that identified the agent as the common people — made up of farmers, artisans, peasants, industrial workers and small traders. Anarcho-syndicalists such as the Spanish CNT favored a populist approach as well, favoring a union of peasant and worker. Syndicalism that was more marxist in orientation, tended to adopt the view that the proletariat alone was the agent.

While social individualists like Proudhon, the younger Tucker and Jo Labadie were populists, the more hard-core individualists influenced by Max Stirner (like Emile Armand) rejected any collective notion of an agent. While the working population (in the broad sense as above) might be more open to anarchism than the elite, conscious individuals through their actions made change. Another group of anarchists — comprising social individualists and anarcho-communists — favored the building of intentional communities.

The means varied as well. After the death of Proudhon most anarchists favored revolution, at first through insurrection and later the notion of the general strike. Social individualists favored the creation of mutual aid societies, support for decentralism and education. Stirnerists favored education and the individual action.

Contemporary Strategies.

"Marxist" syndicalism. Chomskyism. Permanent Protest. Opting Out. Intentional Communities. Gulching. TAZ. County Takeover. Panarchy. Green Anarchism, Social Ecology, Libertarian Municipalism.

The first two have little to offer us as strategic thinking.

Syndicalism.

Most contemporary syndicalism adopted the marxist class viewpoint. As such there is little understanding of the population which does not fit within that rubric, nor any explanation of how the tiny syndicalist groups are going to expand to influence the working population in a revolutionary direction. Often ends up tailing bureaucratic unions, with little understanding of how they are some of the most centralizing, conservative and authoritarian groups in society.

Chomskyism.

A variant of marxism pretending to be anarchist. Claims to see the working population as the force for change. Supports the centralized state as a means of protecting the alleged gains made by the working class in the 1940s. No explanation as how one achieves statelessness by encouraging the growth of statism.

Permanent Protest.

This concept regards fundamental change, whether revolutionary or reformist, as unlikely. Anarchists consist of small groups or individuals who engage in permanent protest against authoritarianism. The spirit of liberty is thus kept alive, but without a final goal of a libertarian society. This is an understandable direction, given the increasingly totalitarian bent of the contemporary state,

none of the strategies discussed here is perfect, all have their weak points, most all of them have certain strengths.

To begin with, a mass (populist) orientation requires that one search for all the various beliefs and activities that are of a general libertarian and social nature found among ordinary people. These would consist of any form of decentralism, direct democracy, regionalism, opposition to government and regulation, all forms of voluntary association, free exchange and mutual aid. This would imply ditching the left-right dicotomy favored by traditional politics. The real difference is between those who opt for statist, centralist and undemocratic policies — the authoritarians, and those who promote non-statist, decentralist and direct democratic policies, or the libertarians. Of course, there will be a divergence of opinion on many matters such as religion, abortion, economies and so forth, yet these secondary issues should not be allowed to get in the way of the promotion of fundamental changes in the political structure. Once these libertarian aspects are discovered they should be communicated in an attempt to generalize these beliefs and activities among the rest of the population. They also need to be defended from the enemies of freedom, by which I mean the neo-conservatives and the authoritarian left. (The two sides of the debased coin of corporate liberalism) We have seen the vicious slanders with which the corporate liberals attack such groups as tax protesters, home schoolers and gun owners. Hence, anarchists should become directly involved in popular struggles, rather than those that are deemed Politically Correct or Flavor Of The Month. Imagine if only a dozen anarchists had appeared with a readable leaflet and a book table full of decentralist literature during the recent march in Montreal of 75,000 people opposed to municipal amalgamation. An incredible opportunity to make contact with the **real** working population.

A second point would be to turn this anti-government feeling in a positive direction. So far most of this popular expression has only served to give support to the neo-conservatives, who, of course, are

of influence. This is a form of slow evolutionary or gradualist anarchism. (A good example of this has been in the field of education)

If one wishes to remain a social anarchist who wants to move at a pace quicker than Osmotic Gradualism, there is little choice but to see the ordinary working person as the agent of change and to search for whatever libertarian aspects one can find among them. There are simply no alternatives. If one cannot see the average Joe or Jane having some libertarian attitudes, one must forget the idea of quick mass social change and opt for either the Osmotic Strategy or a form of hard core individualism. This is the only way to be consistent. While I am a social individualist who believes radical social change is possible, I respect both positions for their honesty and consistency. They are viable options for those anarchists, who for what ever reason, cannot have faith in the working people.

Nor need there be any conflict between the social individualist who believes in short-term possibilities and the Osmotic Gradualists and hard core individualists. The latter, contrary to the streotype, is not opposed to joining organizations. All three kinds of anarchists can, and do, work together in small organizations or in intentional communities and other alternative structures.

As for the r-r-r-revolutionaries, the folks with the black masks and molotovs, (and especially those who egg them on) please climb down from your cloud. A revolution implies mass involvement. How can you have mass involvement when you alienate those very masses by your words and actions? If you really think yourself so "far ahead" of the working people, youd better dump your revolutionary pretenses and become an Osmotic.

PART THREE

Respectfully leaving aside our Osmotic and hard-core individualist friends, what conclusions might the mass-oriented social individualist come to as a result of the preceding discussion? For certain,

and does provide a viable alternative to the two rejected strategies above. However, the idea that we are unlikely to ever achieve any of our goals is not a particularly great inspiration for action. It also overlooks the fact that an increasing number of people, while not anarchists, have become disenchanted with statism and thus the partial roll-back of authority need not remain forever in the realm of the impossible.

Opting Out

The concept here is for people in general to ignore the state, government and corporate capitalism and go their own way creating economic and "political" alternatives. This is one of the most realistic strategies for it is based upon extending existing mutual aid and communitarianism. (Eg barter systems, co-ops, land trusts) Its drawback is the difficulty in ignoring ever increasing regulation and state interference. Some variations on Opting Out include: Intentional Communities, Gulching, TAZ, and County Takeover. Intentional communities can suffer from the attention of government (Remember Waco!) and be hamstrung by regulations and by-laws. The search for cheaper, less-regulated property can lead to difficulties in generating income. Gulching and TAZ[1] overcome many of these problems by hiding from the state and rejecting permanency.

[1] *The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen,* before *the State can crush it. Because the State is concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the TAZ can "occupy" these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace. Perhaps certain small TAZs have lasted whole lifetimes because they went unnoticed, like hillbilly enclaves — because they never intersected with the Spectacle, never appeared outside that real life which is invisible to the agents of Simulation. , but its greatest strength lies in its invisibility — the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it* will *vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else.* Hakim Bey, Temporary Autonomous Zones

While both have much to recommend them, I think the drawbacks here are similar to those of Permanent Protest.

Panarchy.

This concept overcomes one of the major flaws in all forms of social anarchism. This is the fact that many people do not want, and indeed fear, freedom and thus become the staunchest adversaries of libertarianism. The goal is therefore not to destroy all illegitimate authority, but to create a society where those who wish to be free have liberty and those who choose not to be free are dominated by government. Thus, we would have a multitude of freely chosen social arrangements, some authoritarian, some libertarian. Drawbacks: The problem with authoritarians is they are not content with just tormenting each other, but wish to impose themselves upon those who are free. Panarchy envisages social governments, but territoriality is something deeply rooted and cannot be written-off as a kind of superstition.

Green Anarchism, Social Ecology and Libertarian Municipalism

Insights derived from ecology, (or any other science,) are of great value to anarchist thinking. However anarchism cannot be reduced to a branch of ecology. Pinning their hopes on environmentalism has left the Green Anarchists and Social Ecologists hanging out to dry as green concepts have been adopted by authoritarians, corporate capitalists and state socialists. Libertarian municipalism has been valuable in focusing upon the restoration of municipal autonomy and direct democracy. However, it remains a form of anarchist communism and the people most favorable to municipal democracy and autonomy tend to be those who are least supportive of communism.

PART TWO

Most contemporary anarchist strategies have little conception of just who is going to carry out social change. The ordinary "middle class" working person is often treated with contempt by anarchists and one sees continual negative references to "suburbanites", "middle class" etc. But if it is not the ordinary person, who is going to carry out this task? There have been a number of alternatives suggested, none of which are satisfactory.

One alternative is to opt for the lumpen proletariat. The problem here is that this group is only about 5% of the population and is feared and despised by the rest of the people. How can such a group ever give rise to social change? The other problem with the lumpen is they are the most dog-eat-dog "individualists" one could find. And when they do engage in collective action it consists of rioting or gangsterism. The gang, the most authoritarian form of organization possible, is in fact their only natural form of organization. For these reasons, among others, lumpens are not attracted to anarchism, preferring fascism and neo-nazism. There is also an unconscious form of lumpen cultism found among the more violent oriented anarchists. This is to attribute lumpen attitudes to the working class. Thus rioting is considered "proletarian", theft is called "proletarian shopping" etc. These anarchists are simply fooling themselves.

Another alternative is to opt for middle class drop out counter cultures and youth cultures. The problem again is the miniscule number of people involved. Also drop-outs tend to drop back in and become liberals in old age, youth culturists grow up, and youth culture is quickly absorbed by consumerism anyway.

The Osmotic Gradualists. The concept here is that while the mass of the population may not be open to anarchist ideas now, anarchists can introduce their ideas thru education or creating alternative structures. These ideas then gradually perculate down into society. Thus, a few small groups in the end have a great deal