Critical Notes on Developments in the Anarchist Movement

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olutionary' pretensions. However, it also means that we must organise, make decisions, and act in ways which both reflect the ideal we are working to establish and directly alter the balance of class forces, without deference to institutions or leaders of any kind. Our organisations must be freely constructed from the rank-and-file upward and our strategic orientation must be toward direct action against the bosses and government.

As a final comment, it is worth noting that this institutional analysis of the State extends to the local or municipal level, and that anarchism can't be reconciled with such experiments in 'direct' or 'town hall democracy'. Murray Bookchin's eventual break with anarchism in the late 1990s seems to have been forgotten by 'anarchists' who now seek inspiration from his theory of municipalism.[20] His followers mistakenly echo the municipalist belief that the structural imperatives of the capitalist state disappear the closer a governing body is to the population. Unfortunately for the municipalists, the organisational forms of parliamentary politics, the ways in which they alter us as people, and their function within capitalist society, all remain the same at the level of a city council. A localist state-socialism is still state-socialism.

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[20] For a good critique of Bookchin's break with anarchism, see Iain McKay's review of *The Next Revolution* (2015): robertgraham.wordpress.com.

archists maintain that reform and revolution are the result of the *same kind of activity*. They cannot be separated, as though one were the natural domain of parliamentary politics, and the other self-organised direct action.

Strikes, sabotage, blockades, civil (and uncivil) disobedience, riots, insurrection: these are not only the tools of revolution, but the sole weapons available to us to change things within capitalism itself. They are also a bridge between the two objectives, reform and revolution, as it is in building our capacity to pressure the bosses and governments that we also develop our forces, our ideas, and our confidence to do away with all forms of oppression and exploitation, which we intend to replace with a free, socialist society.

Electoral campaigns, the day-to-day work of parliamentary bureaucracy, and the exercise of state power are all specific forms of activity which, due to their very nature, distract and pacify workers, diverting us from self-organisation and class struggle. They enmesh us in authoritarian models of organisation and task those who do manage to reach government with maintaining the interests of an exploitative property-owning class, whose interests (given their control over the economic life of society) the State must inevitably serve, and which any government (if it is to continue existing as a government, with the power to govern society as a privileged elite) must always reproduce.

Anarchists believe these tactics necessarily alter the behaviour of those who take part in them, whatever their personal beliefs or intentions. This is not a question of corruption, or betrayal, but rather systemic imperatives and institutional logics which can not be overcome by even the most radical of politicians.

Which brings us back to that principle at the very heart of anarchism: *the necessary unity between means and ends*. As I have said, this requires that we refuse participation in electoral politics, or the formation of any 'new' State, whatever its 'rev-

Anarchists and Dual Power: Situation or Strategy?

A strange development has occurred which has led to anarchist theory being increasingly associated with a tactic referred to as 'building Dual Power'. The advocates of this tactic believe that anarchists – being opposed to bosses and governments – should, as our primary strategy, create parallel, self-managed institutions, such as worker co-operatives, community assemblies, mutual aid groups, and so on. The argument goes that as such organisations proliferate, they will constitute a form of a popular power which not only provides an attractive vision of another world, but leaves the capitalists without workers and the State irrelevant.

Though using the term 'Dual Power' to refer to such tactics appears sporadically in the 1990s (in the material of the group Love and Rage, for example), it's unclear how exactly the association became so widely popularised over the last few years. What is clear is that this conception of Dual Power has nothing in common with the original usage, coined by Lenin, as a means of describing *a condition of revolutionary potential*.

Dual power was not a strategy to achieve such circumstances (let alone socialism). It described a *really existing situation* wherein organs of workers' power (soviets, factory committees, militias), formed through class struggle, could marshall resources and popular legitimacy capable of rivaling, and conceivably surpassing, that of the State. Such conditions placed workers in a position to expropriate the capitalist class and overthrow the State. Later, in the Spanish Revolution, similar committees and collectives, with the same revolutionary potential, emerged amidst the anti-fascist insurrection, and then sat uneasily alongside a gradually reconstituted Republican government. In both cases two rival claims to power co-existed: one bourgeois, one proletarian. In neither

case does dual power refer to the employment of a *strategy*; certainly not one based on starting cooperative workplaces, community gardens, or 'mutual aid' groups like Food Not Bombs – whatever the merits of those respective projects.

Real dual power is inherently unstable, given it represents an active threat to the power of governments and capitalists. In both the Russian and Spanish cases, the circumstances of dual power were ended by *inevitable* confrontations. In Russia the Provisional Government was overthrown in favour of an increasingly authoritarian Bolshevik government (initially legitimised under the banner of 'all power to the soviets'). In Spain the revolutionary committees, having failed to smash the State beyond repair, or fully socialise production, were subsumed by the Popular Front, and eventually crushed by a liberal-Stalinist coalition within the Republican government they had helped revive.

Far from representing the politics of classical mass-anarchism (sometimes referred to as 'class struggle' anarchism), the new advocates of Dual Power *as a strategy* are, in reality, reviving the old 'utopian' tradition of non-confrontational, non-revolutionary socialism. It is, at best, the proto-anarchist politics of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, rather than the anarchism of Errico Malatesta, Mikhail Bakunin, or the revolutionary anarchist workers' organisations which developed out of the Federalist wing of the International Workingmen's Association.

Like Proudhon, and contrary to the revolutionary anarchist view, the proponents of Dual Power argue that we can improve our position under capitalism, and ultimately achieve anarchy, by cobbling together whatever resources we can muster and managing them in an autonomous, cooperative manner. In practice, this would mean the better off among us providing goods and services to those of us who are worse off (a form of service provision often confused with the concept of 'mutual

sion of communism, though he advocated electoral politics and some form of 'transitional revolutionary state' as the means for doing so. It is important to reiterate, therefore, that what really distinguishes anarchism is not simply the goal, but rather our insistence on a *necessary unity between means and ends*; of the need to act *outside of* and *against* the State, rather than through it.

Equally mistaken is the idea that such a view is only relevant when revolution seems imminent, and that, in the meantime, we should directly involve ourselves in the politics of electoral campaigns, parliaments, and legislation, as these are "the only way to achieve reforms".

Anarchists reject this understanding of how social change – even reformist social change – occurs. Changes in governments and their policies are driven by the shifting needs of the State and capital, *within parameters established by the existing balance of class forces*. Reforms are not the product of good or bad ideas, politicians, or legislation, but are, instead, the result of the State serving the best interests of capitalism *as a system*. Where there is sustained pressure from below, directed against bosses and governments, the ruling class must adjust to the threat posed to profitability and stability. Where naked force is not enough to eliminate the danger of organised working class activity, the threat is pacified through concessions and recuperation.

Electoral and parliamentary victories (including referendums and constituent assemblies) are often touted as flawed, but necessary, culminations of social movement energy into 'real power'. They should instead be understood as efforts to channel extra-parliamentary activity – the only real power we have – into manageable, legal, and, ultimately, non-threatening forms.

Anyone who seriously examines the historical record will find that it has always been direct struggle, and never legal politics, which has allowed us to achieve reform. As such, an-

ognize where our power is within capitalist society, and use that power.

Let's build the organisational capacity to struggle within our respective industries. In the process of that struggle, we can likewise build the capacity to (forgive the dusty old phrase) *seize control of the means of production.* This requires that we do all that we can to encourage the renewal of a militant workers movement, with rank-and-file control over the struggle, coordination across the economy, and links with radical social movements beyond the workplace.

For those interested in anarchy and communism, this remains the central task.

Anarchists and Parliamentarianism: Elections and Social Change

There are some who now consider themselves anarchists who tell us, '*Yes, anarchy is our goal, but we are nowhere near achieving it and have to think about winning desperately needed reforms. That means campaigning for politicians, even running for office ourselves, so that laws can be passed in the interest of the working class.*'

There are several problems with this. First, it is important to clarify that anarchism not only entails a *belief* in the *ideal* of anarchy – of a society without domination, the State, capitalism, etc. – but a *method* and *theory of social change,* based on a specific analysis of existing social relations, processes, and institutions.

Any communist, even the most enthusiastic champion of state power (held in the hands of 'communists', of course), can claim the abolition of capitalism and the State as their 'ultimate goal'. They may even truly believe that their authoritarian tactics are the only ones capable of achieving it. Marx himself conceded that the ideal of anarchy was consistent with his vi-

aid')[1] and cooperative businesses competing with traditional firms on the market.

Historically, this strategy has been a loser, for reasons that were well articulated by anarchists and Marxists alike. As workers, we have barely anything to share amongst ourselves. Meanwhile, the capitalists have everything. They will always be able to out-compete the cooperative sector. The logic of the market will always pressure the worker-owners of those co-ops – that is, of cooperatively managed private property in the form of firms – to worsen their own conditions, lower their own wages, reduce the quality of their products, and raise prices for consumers in order to survive.

Survival, while maintaining the spirit of the cooperative project, is itself a struggle. Driving traditional capitalist firms out of business, appropriating their resources, placing this property under broader social control, and having the State vanish in the process, is a fantasy.

The advocates of Dual Power avoid the whole question of what victory looks like. Even if the Dual Power strategy could achieve a situation of real dual power (as articulated by Lenin), our goal as anarchists is to *eliminate* capital and the State, not to exist 'outside of' or 'parallel to' them as a 'second power'. Clearly, at some point, we would need to expropriate capital, and this would naturally invoke the response of the State, which both depends on and reproduces class society.

Yet *counter-power* – power within traditional capitalist firms, against the bosses and the government, capable of seizing control over the economic life of society, putting it in service of human need, and forcefully defending this

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[1] For a critique of what is often mistaken for 'mutual aid', see the article 'Socialism is not charity: why we're against "mutual aid"' published by the collective Black Flag Sydney in their magazine *Mutiny* (available at: blackflagsydney.com). For another examination of how mutual aid relates to Kropotkin's revolutionary anarchism, see: Gus Breslauer's 'Mutual Aid: A Factor of Liberalism' in *Regeneration* regenerationmag.org

transformation of social relations – is rarely addressed by the champions of Dual Power. Here there is also a fundamental weakness in the Dual Power vision of reform, as it is our structural position within capitalist firms (which require our labour) that allows us to exert leverage over the bosses and the governments which serve them.

Anarchists should keep in mind Peter Kropotkin's words on this subject, and his warning to workers who refuse to abandon such tactics for revolutionary struggle:

> Work for us, poor creature who thinks you can improve your lot by co-operatives without daring to touch at the same time, property, taxation, and the State! – Keep them up and remain their slave!
>
> Kropotkin, P. 1914. Modern Science and Anarchy.[2]

Anarchists and Neo-anarchists: Horizontalism and Autonomous Spaces

It is not uncommon, particularly in North America, to see anarchism defined as an ideology rooted in 'direct democracy', consensus decision making, and the maintenance of 'horizontal' (i.e., 'non-hierarchical') social relations, particularly in autonomous zones or public spaces.

This idea of anarchism is unusual in that it places at the centre of its definition an adherence to very specific forms of procedure and interpersonal behaviour while downplaying the political ends a 'horizontal' movement should be trying to establish. From this perspective, reclaiming public space as an

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[2] This quote contains additions made to the 1913 original in a 1914 edition published by Freedom. I am quoting from the definitive 2018 edition edited by Iain McKay, and published by AK Press, but have used the extended text (included by McKay in a footnote) to reflect the longer 1914 version. Available here: usa.anarchistlibraries.net

But Bonanno bolsters this argument with citations of… Malatesta! who argued that the anarchist union was either limited to anarchists, and therefore "weak and impotent, a mere propaganda group", or built on a class basis, rendering "the initial program […] nothing but an empty formula."[18]

This is Bonanno once again echoing dual organisationalism.[19] The rest of his argument amounts to the mere insistence that anarchist organisations cannot help but become a bureaucratizing, counter-revolutionary force if they adopt a continuity of membership and an anarchist programme. He also makes the unsubstantiated claim that it is the form of 'production nuclei' which is uniquely immune to the tendencies inherent to unions; whether they are reformist, revolutionary syndicalist, or anarchist.

As unconvincing as this is, it is worth noting how far we are from 'smoking weed, having sex, killing cops' – or the slogans favoured by Bonanno's contemporary admirers, calling for the 'destruction of the economy', 'of production', and the abandonment of old dreams, such as 'revolutionary self-management'.

If insurrectionary anarchists – tired of endless riots, and disoriented by the return of organising on the shop floor – can bring themselves as far as Bonanno's best work, perhaps they can also allow themselves to concede that the mass-anarchist tradition is something worth reviving.

Let the affinity group stick around; think together about the world and how to change it; write down your ideas and share them with comrades; talk with your co-workers about how to act against the boss; spread news of struggle everywhere; rec-

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[18] All quotes from Bonanno A. M. 1975. 'A Critique of Syndicalist Methods'. *Anarchismo*. Available at: archive.elephanteditions.net.

[19] Or 'synthesis organisation' as Bonanno confusingly calls it. Typically, synthesis organisation refers to an approach in which anarchists of all types work together, without a specific shared analysis, programme, or strategic approach.

comes one of potentially sacrificing the struggle in favour of self-preservation.

But this is not a unique insight of insurrectionary anarchism! And Bonanno knows this. Indeed, he approvingly quotes these words of the Dutch anarchist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis:

> I am an anarchist before anything else, then a syndicalist, but I think that many are syndicalists first, then anarchists. There is a great difference... The cult of syndicalism is as harmful as that of the State...

As anarchist proponents of dual organisationalism have long argued, what is needed is the ongoing capacity for anarchists to maintain a consistent libertarian position; to be able to act independently of any mass-organisation, while still maintaining opportunities to intervene in the struggles of our fellow workers.

Bonanno cites the experience of the CNT in the Spanish Revolution as demonstrating the institutional and psychological danger posed by *merging the specifically-anarchist movement with non-specific mass-organisations of direct struggle.*[17] The deference shown by so many workers to the collaborationist policies of the CNT, including permitting leading anarcho-syndicalists to take positions in government, is indicative of the need for the organisational independence of anarchists. This strategic approach best prepares us for circumstances in which we must break with the wavering positions of mass-organisations, both mentally and practically, and allows us to encourage a clear, revolutionary course within the movement; redirecting our energies wherever the self-organisation of the struggle takes us.

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[17] This is true whether we are concerned with unions or (Bonanno cannot avoid this!) *'federations of production nuclei'.*

opportunity to hold non-hierarchical public assemblies, where we can hammer out decisions by consensus, is, in itself, 'anarchist' – whatever the result of such processes.

This has little to do with the classical, mass-anarchist tradition and its politics of revolutionary socialism. It is, instead, an approach which is better described as falling under the banner of 'neo-anarchism' (or 'small-a anarchism'). Neo-anarchism is a modern conception of anarchism largely informed by the feminist and peace movements of the 70s, the environmental movement of the 80s, the alter-globalisation movement of the 90s, and the Argentinian uprising of 2001; which coined the term *horizontalidad* ('horizontalism') to describe the movement's rejection of representative democracy, the use of general assemblies to coordinate activity, and converting abandoned or bankrupt factories into cooperative businesses.

Take, for instance, the insistence by neo-anarchists on the use of consensus decision making. Though consensus (or 'unanimity', as it was typically called) was sometimes a feature of anarchist political organisations, and often seen as an *ideal* to work towards through comradely discussion, it was never a fundamental component of the anarchist movement. Anarchists have generally agreed that the appropriate form of decision making depends on the circumstances concerned, and frequently endorsed variations of majoritarian voting; particularly in mass organisations based on commonalities other than close-ideological affinity, such as unions. The focus for anarchists has generally not been the form of decision-making, but instead the principles of *free association* and *solidarity.* Furthermore, though anarchists have always stressed *the right of the minority to be free of the majority's coercion*, it is even more important that *the great majority be free of minoritarian rule or sabotage.* As Malatesta wrote in his pamphlet *Between Peasants: A Dialogue on Anarchy*:

everything is done to reach unanimity, and when this is impossible, one would vote and do what the majority wanted, or else put the decision in the hands of a third party who would act as arbitrator, respecting the inviolability of the principles of equality and justice which the society is based on.

In response to the concern over minoritarian sabotage, he continues by asserting that such a situation would

> [make it] necessary to take forcible action, because if it is unjust that the majority oppress the minority, it's no more just that the contrary should happen. And just as the minority have the right of insurrection, so do the majority have the right of defense, or if the word doesn't offend you, repression.[3]

As for 'autonomous zones' and the tactic of reclaiming public spaces (as seen in the Occupy movement) – here we have no connection to anarchism as a revolutionary tradition, and an example of a tactic which has repeatedly shown its inability to extract significant reforms, let alone revolutionise production and destroy the State.

The fundamental limitations of the 'public occupation' or 'autonomous zone', and the defeats which have followed from these limitations, have led some former advocates of the strategy to make a notable transition from neo-anarchism to parliamentary politics. Though inexplicable to some outside observers, the change is easily understood when we consider neo-

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[3] Malatesta, E. 1884. *Between Peasants: A Dialogue on Anarchy*. Available at: theanarchistlibrary.org. Malatesta puts forward the same position in his series of dialogues titled *At the Cafe* (1922). In 'Dialogue 8' he writes the following exchange: "**AMBROGIO**: And if the others [the minority] want to make trouble? **GIORGIO**: Then… we will defend ourselves." See: theanarchistlibrary.org.

perfectly well that the collapse of this obstacle would mean the transformation of relationships both inside and outside the factory, the school, the land, and the whole of society. For the worker the concept of proletarian management is above all that of the management of production […] It is therefore control over the product which is lacking in this perspective, and with it decisions on lines of production, choices to be made, etc. […] What is required is to explain to him the way this mechanism could be brought about in a communist economy, how he can come into possession of as many products as are his "real" needs and how he can participate in "useful" production according to his own potential.

Who does Bonanno think should "explain" this? Not 'privileged delegates' or 'salaried bureaucrats', but rather "political animators": "activist[s] [who] must work in the direction of the workers' needs. "In other words, the militant minority of anarchists should encourage the development and activity of "[economic] federations of base organisations", in accordance with the principles agreeable to us, in pursuit of both improvements (at work and outside of it) as well as social revolution.

Where exactly does Bonanno's opposition to formal anarchist organisations figure into such a proposal? Does our role as "political animators", or "activists", become inevitably bureaucratizing if our organisations are committed to more than just singular, immediate tasks, and are guided by revolutionary programmes available for all to read?

Bonanno notes the risk of organisations prioritising their own reproduction *as organisations* over their supposed *function*. For mass-organisations, such as federations of workers associations, located at the point of struggle, the problem be-

it would be possible to stop producing at any moment, when there is enough.[16]

The most contrarian of insurrectionists can pretend otherwise, but if Bonanno's words are to have any coherence at all, this amounts to 'a frontal attack on capitalist forces', 'taking over the means of production', and communist 'self-management' – as articulated by the classical mass-anarchist movement.

The parallels with mass-anarchist thought (particularly of the dual organisationalist, or 'platformist' kind) are even clearer in other works by Bonanno, such as those which outline a strategy based on 'production nuclei'. For example, In the pamphlet *A Critique of Syndicalist Methods* he argues in favour of:

> direct struggle organised by the base; small groups of workers who attack the centres of production. This would be an exercise in cohesion for further developments in the struggle which could come about following the obtaining of increasingly detailed information and the decision to pass to the final expropriation of capital, i.e. to the revolution.

He proceeds to assert that:

> The economic situation could be organised without any oppressive structure controlling or directing it or deciding on the aims to be attained. This the worker understands very well. He knows exactly how the factory is structured and that, this barrier overcome, he would be able to work the economy in his own interest. He knows

[16] All quotes from Bonanno, A. M. 1977. *Armed Joy*. Available here: theanarchistlibrary.org.

anarchism's peculiar view of 'direct democracy', or 'horizontally organised spaces', as the defining characteristic of anarchism, and not a theory of libertarian revolution against the State and capital.

If we accept the idea of anarchism as proposed by the neo-anarchists, there is no fundamental contradiction between anarchism and involvement in parliamentary politics. If the political party is a directly democratic one, composed of social movements, and committed to horizontal interpersonal relations, what difference does it make if the decision made (ideally by consensus) is to campaign for political candidates, or even administer the State?

We have seen this with the so-called 'Movements of the Squares' in Europe. Activists who took part in the 15M (or 'Indignados') movement in Spain abandoned their dismissal of all politicians (*"¡Que no nos representan!"* – "They don't represent us!") with the formation of Podemos and various other 'municipalist' parties.[4]

A similar trajectory was followed by the anthropologist David Graeber towards the end of his life. Graeber – a figurehead of Occupy Wall Street and, prior to that, a participant in the alter-globalisation movement – apparently saw no contradiction between his professed (neo-)anarchism and his efforts to join the British Labour Party in support of Jeremy Corbyn. In particular, Graeber was enthusiastic about the Labour-affiliated organisation Momentum; an outgrowth of the Corbyn leadership campaign, which he argued constituted a unique attempt to fuse a radical social movement with a traditional parliamentary party.[5]

[4] See Mark Bray's 'Horizontalism: Anarchism, Power and the State', published as a chapter in the 2018 collection *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*. Bray's chapter is available at: blackrosefed.org.

[5] Graeber was also one of the most prominent advocates of the Rojava Revolution, the specifics of which are too complex to examine in detail here. It must be said, however, that his uncritical lauding of a revolution which

More recently we have witnessed the absurdity of a self-proclaimed 'libertarian socialist', Gabriel Boric (who touts his association with Chile's radical student movement), ascending to the presidency in the aftermath of a militant popular uprising.

The damage caused by these supposedly 'unique' attempts to translate the 'horizontalism' of neo-anarchism into the party-form – which, in reality, hardly differs from the historic approach offered by Marxists as an alternative to anarchism – has been outlined well elsewhere, and there is no need to go over the details here.[6] It suffices to say that in each case there was bureaucratisation, accomodation with the necessities of administering the capitalist state (or even just campaigning to administer it), and zero empowerment of workers against the bosses.

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(all the available evidence indicates) has formed a state, and purposefully maintained class divisions, indicates the same kind of drift in his political thinking. This drift appears to be rooted in a framework which sees a libertarian legitimacy in all outcomes which can (at least plausibly) be said to have been born out of 'direct' or 'assembly-based' democracy. For a valuable resource on the Rojava Revolution, which describes the movement's opposition to expropriation and gradual transfer of power from a rudimentary council system (the 'People's Council of West Kurdistan', or MGRK) to a parliamentary one (the 'Democratic Autonomous Administrations', or DAAs), see the 2016 book *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan.* Available at: theanarchistlibrary.org. This is an important book given it is the most positive account of the revolution in print (the picture painted should be taken with a grain of salt), features an introduction from Graber himself, and yet concedes these crucial points regarding Rojava's parliamentary system and the leaderships opposition to the socialisation of property.

[6] For an analysis of Spain, see 'What went wrong for the municipalists in Spain?' by Peter Gelderloos in *Roar* magazine: roarmag.org. For a critique of the Corbyn project, including Momentum, see 'Labour defeat – Thoughts on democratic socialism' by the Angry Workers of the World collective, based on a chapter from their excellent book *Class Power on Zero Hours* (2020): www.angryworkers.org.

Short of revolution, such a development would have terrified the ruling classes far more than all the burning cop cars put together.

Accepting that this is the case, insurrectionary anarchists would benefit from revisiting some of the thoughts expressed by one of their more serious thinkers: the Italian revolutionary Alfredo M. Bonanno.

Bonanno's most famous work, *Armed Joy* (1977), is in many ways representative of insurrectionary anarchist writings. Certainly, it reflects all of the shortcomings that entails, the most blatant of which is the tendency to write in an overwrought and pretentious style. The pamphlet is notable, however, in that – when not simply reducing our class struggle politics to either a strawman of conservative syndicalism, or an opportunistic tailing of social movements – it concedes so much to the mass-anarchist analysis.

Armed Joy dismisses "meetings", the "rigid model of the frontal attack on capitalist forces", and efforts to "take over the means of production" through a system of "self-management". Bonanno makes clear that he is much more impressed by those who simply, "make love, smoke, listen to music, go for walks, sleep, laugh, play, kill policemen, lame journalists, kill judges, blow up barracks" etc. And yet, Bonanno does recognize the need for *"the self-organisation of producers at the workplace"*, so as to realize *communism*: "The affirmation that man can reproduce and objectify himself in non-work through the various solicitations that this stimulates in him". For Bonanno, communism is a mode of production in which:

> production would no longer be the dimension
> in which man determines himself, as that would
> come about in the sphere of play and joy...

sphere of circulation is not central, it is upstream and downstream of production [...] In May 68, when 10 million workers were on strike, there was no more flow to block! Therefore, to make revolution, blocking or stopping production is not enough [...] it is necessary to change production from top to bottom (and therefore most likely to do away with a lot of it), as well as changing the social relationships that come with it. This is rather difficult if you only rebel in your spare time.[15]

With the rise in strike activity across the world – inside of the unions, outside of them, and even against the wishes of union bureaucrats – it is interesting to note that the insurrectionists have gotten rather quiet about the 'irrelevance' of class-based organisation. We are even hearing less about the supposed sufficiency of affinity groups!

Who could possibly argue now that the George Flloyd Rebellion would have been 'bureaucratized' by the participation of anarchists, belonging to anarchist organisations, encouraging activity in accordance with a shared anarchist analysis and programme? Who would object to the movement having shifted from street battles over 'autonomous' roads and parks, to the occupation and repurposing of essential supply chains under workers' control? Can it really be doubted that organised workers, federated in solidarity, and capable of wielding their shared technical knowledge of their respective industries against capitalist production itself, would be better prepared for such an uprising?

The reality is that there is no way to fully 'prefigure' anarchy and communism through 'directly democratic' spaces of 'autonomy'. Anarchism requires a specific anarchist movement and anarchist practice. Though we must certainly organise ourselves from the bottom up, with a consistent federalist structure, we can not simply bring about our ideal by 'living anarchisticly' or relating to one another as 'horizontally' as possible. Similarly, the content of anarchism can not be limited to the structure of our movement – its *content* of revolutionary class struggle must be maintained. To quote Luigi Fabbri:

> If anarchism were simply an individual ethic, to be cultivated within oneself, and at the same time adapted in material life to acts and movements in contradiction with it, we could call ourselves anarchists and belong to the most diverse parties; and so many could be called anarchists who, although they are spiritually and intellectually emancipated, are and remain, on practical grounds, our enemies.But anarchism is something else... proletarian and revolutionary, an active participation in the movement for human emancipation, with principles and goals that are egalitarian and libertarian at the same time. The most important part of its program does not consist solely in the dream, which we want to come true, of a society without bosses and without governments, but above all in the libertarian conception of revolution, of revolution against the state and not through the state...[7]

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[15] Leoni, T. 2019. *Sur les Gilets Jaunes*. Translation is from Gilles Dauvé's equally important piece for *troploin*, 'Yellow, Red, Tricolour, or: Class & People'. For Dauvé's essay see: www.troploin.fr. Leoni's work is available in French here: ddt21.noblogs.org

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[7] Fabbri, L. 1921. *Dittatura e Rivoluzione*. Fabbri's book has yet to be published in English. The chapter referenced here ('The Anarchist Concept of the Revolution') has, however, been translated by João Black, with assistance from myself. It can be read here: theanarchistlibrary.org.

Anarchists and Insurrection: Organisation, Class Struggle, and Riots

The 'classical' period of anarchism, which can be defined as lasting from the foundation of the St. Imier 'anarchist' International in 1872 to the end of the Second World War in 1945, had two significant currents. 'Mass' or 'Social' anarchism, represented by anarcho-syndicalism (the formation of anarchist union federations) and dual organisationalism (the formation of specific anarchist organisations intervening in mass struggles), was overwhelmingly dominant, and traces its lineage through the St. Imier Congress, to the libertarian wing of the First International, and other federalist precursors within the workers' movement.[8] Opposed to this was the minority current of 'insurrectionary' anarchism, which saw the developing workers' movement as reformist (and reforms themselves of dubious worth), opposed formal organisations as inconsistent with anarchism, and limited itself to tactics intended to provoke widespread insurrection: armed attacks against the State and property, assassination of politicans and bosses, etc.

Insurrectionary anarchism found new life with the decline of the international workers' movement in the late 1970s. Radical forms of rank-and-file power were repressed. Unions managed by professionalised bureaucracies, committed to the stability of the capitalist system (including their cushy position

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[8] For an introduction to the ideas of dual organisationalism, platformism, and especifismo, see Tommy Lawson's pamphlet 'Foundational Concepts of the Specific Anarchist Organisation', published by *Red and Black Notes*: www.redblacknotes.com.

    I also highly recommend Felipe Corrêa's essays 'Organizational Issues Within Anarchism' (2010, *Espaço Livre*), available here: theanarchistlibrary.org, and 'Bakunin, Malatesta and the Platform Debate: The question of anarchist political organization' (2015, *Institute for Anarchist Theory and History*), co-written with Rafael Viana da Silva, and available here: theanarchistlibrary.org.

dividuals who rule over us. *They can only be transformed at their root*, within the sphere of production, through the *expropriation of property* and the *forceful destruction of the State.*

The uprising of 2020 no doubt marks a significant moment. The experience transformed the thinking of many who took part, or even witnessed it. The unparalleled expression of solidarity with Palestinains under Israeli assault just a year later was in no small part due to a popular shift in consciousness around racial domination. The militant opposition to the police also deepened their ongoing recruitment crisis. This has intensified the cycle in which the institution nakedly exposes its authoritarian character, as it is disproportionately the most fascistic who continue to be attracted to the profession.

But as the writer Shemon Salam asked in the aftermath of the Rebellion, "In what sense are riots a path towards revolution if they simply cannot generalize to the point of production, unless the latter is no longer needed"? "*Good luck getting food once the grocery store is looted empty.*"[14]

Likewise, Tristan Leoni's insightful analysis of the *Gilet Jaunes* (Yellow Vest) movement in France leads us to the same conclusion:

> [The Yellow Vests] targeted circulation rather than production. Yet blocking means blocking other people's work. It is only because some workers produce goods and others transport them that the blockade has any "impact": in other words, blocking is the result of a minority, because the majority does not go on strike. By definition, the

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[14] Salam, S. Breonna Taylor and the Limits of Riots'. *Spirit of May 28.* Available at: www.sm28.org. Salam's argument recalls similar points made by Malatesta. See, for instance, his articles 'The Products of Soil and Industry: An Anarchist Concern' (*El Productor*, 1891, available at: theanarchistlibrary.org) and 'On 'Anarchist Revisionism'' (*Pensiero e Volontà*, 1924, available at: theanarchistlibrary.org).

armed individuals (having appointed themselves as a 'patrol') fired on and killed a few black teenagers speeding by in their car. Amidst the fog of uncertainty, vague reports spread on social media, exciting those who equate the use of arms with militancy. The killings were initially lauded in some insurrectionist corners of the internet as a successful case of 'revolutionary self-defence' against 'right-wing infiltrators'.[13]

Across the United States insurrection gradually turned to legal, managed protest. The militancy of the initial outburst vanished without having established any organisational forms or strategy suitable for its reproduction, let alone escalation. Minneapolis's Third Precinct was burnt to the ground, windows were smashed, and the goods from looted stores shared amongst grieving communities. But police, prisons, capitalist firms, and commodity production remain. The capitalists continue to be a possessing class in need of the State, and the State – itself the owner of so much of the means of production – continues to require a system of property to reproduce itself and the privileges of political rule.

These social relations can not be smashed or blown up in the streets. They can't be abolished by simply attacking the in-

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comes from the activists themselves. Our worst enemies are always closest to us. You've all been in these marches, these ridiculous marches, where it's, "white people to the front, black people to the center"—this is just another way of reimposing these lines in a more sophisticated way. What we should be aiming for is what we saw in the first days, when these very boundaries began to dissolve."

Robinson's essay can be read here: illwill.com. Another essay by Shemon Salam, 'The Rise of Black Counter-Insurgency' (also published by *Ill Will*) touches on similar issues and is likewise recommended: illwill.com.

[13] One can't help but recall the uncritical enthusiasm demonstrated by many insurrectionary anarchists during the 2014 Euromaidan uprising in Ukraine. Not only was there little interest in the political character of the struggle, but even in the influential presence of far-right elements. People were in the streets, in violent conflict with the brutality of the State... Molotovs were being thrown! '*What else is there to a revolution?'* This is how an 'anarchist' thinks when they are not concerned with class struggle and the need to transform the structures of production and distribution.

within it), and generally subservient to the interests of affiliated political parties, accepted the integration of organised labour within highly regulated, legalistic channels of dispute management, which criminalised effective direct action and restricted workers' control over the struggle.[9]

Rather than recognize the turn from law-defying militancy to legalistic impotence as an outcome requiring a renewed commitment to the long and patient work of workplace agitation, some revolutionaries chose to accept the more convenient narrative that this historic tragedy had been inevitabile. Our position as 'workers' – individuals forged by capitalist development into a class, but capable of becoming a class that acts for itself – was *supposedly* 'no longer relevant' to emancipation.

Insurrectionists claim that the struggle over production ultimately led to bureaucratisation and an accommodation with class society. From their perspective, there is, therefore, no point in attempting to collectively identify as an oppressed class of 'workers', or organise mass organisations of struggle on that basis. Indeed, insurrectionary anarchists oppose all forms of formal organisation and are often sceptical of the idea of 'organisation' itself. They argue that specific projects require nothing more than informal 'affinity groups': close comrades working together to achieve concrete goals, without any ongoing structure or political programme.

But if we are not struggling as an organised class at work, where should such affinity groups be engaged in struggle? In-

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[9] This was often sold by governments and union leaders as a sacrifice necessary to resolve the economic crises of the period. It also supposedly offered the movement "a seat at the table", or a "share in power". In reality, the crisis was one of profitability, which could only end with the crushing of the labour movement, or a social revolution. By sacrificing the ability to take direct action for an illusory idea of power within the State, the labour movement accepted its own disorganisation and a major defeat. For an excellent study of this process as it occurred within Australia, through the form of 'The Accord', see Elizabeth Humphrys' 2018 book *How Labour Built Neoliberalism.*

surrectionists have typically advocated a politics of 'constant attack'. They relish in the images of street fights with police, the lighting of fires, and looting of stores. As with the neo-anarchist politics of Occupy, the point of struggle is generally seen as the street, or the public space, carved out as an experiment in 'autonomy'. But where the neo-anarchist finds freedom in the self-management of a tent-city or community garden, today's insurrectionist seems to find it in the act of rebellion itself; the demonstration of their supposed ungovernability. The insurrectionist and their 'crew' steal a bag of groceries to feed the hungry, and keep the cops at bay when they try to stop them.

It's obviously a good thing to feed someone who is hungry and we have no objections to breaking the law, but this is a strange idea of freedom. It assumes the insurmountable permanence of a society based on the existence of bosses, governments, and commodities. It proposes that we act as if capital and the State can never really be overthrown through a concrete transformation of social relations in production. Things can't be changed, they can only be subverted or defied.

The most far-sighted of insurrectionists view riots, assassination, and property destruction as a sort of propaganda by example, or 'propaganda of the deed'. These are intended as initiating events, sparked by courageous minorities, which they hope may spiral into general insurrections against the government; freeing us from the drudgery of a life spent at work and any risk of a 'return to normality'.[10]

With the George Flloyd Rebellion the politics of insurrectionary anarchism was put to a serious test. The insurrectionists were presented with a nation-wide uprising which broke

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[10] "We have seen that the specific minority must take charge of the initial attack, surprising power and determining a situation of confusion which could put the forces of repression into difficulty and make the exploited masses reflect upon whether to intervene or not." – Bonanno, A. M. 1982. 'Why Insurrection?'. *Insurrection.* Available at: theanarchistlibrary.org

from legality and the control of any organisation. Police stations were attacked and stores looted. A multi-racial coalition of the working class took to the streets, arm in arm, to face down the cops. In the so-called 'Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone' (CHAZ), an entire neighbourhood block was cleared of police, and established as a space for cooperative projects (such as a 'Black and Indigenous only' community garden) as well as an open-mic for ongoing debate.

The 'CHAZ' (which, in reality, was never able to develop beyond a cop-free block-party) quickly stagnated, with no clear aims other than maintaining the occupation. The affinity groups attempted to maintain the rage, but were unable to encourage the rebellion in a revolutionary direction.

Things soon ended in chaos and disaster.[11] All manner of cranks and adventurists were attracted to the project. Liberal notions of 'privilege politics' – a shallow understanding of identity-based domination – were aggressively pushed, undermining the new links of solidarity.[12] Ultimately, a few

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[11] For a comradely critique of the CHAZ (or 'CHOP') project, see the analysis written by Black Rose Anarchist Federation members *Glimmers of Hope, Failures of the Left*: blackrosefed.org. Perhaps even more interesting is the critical account from the CrimethInc collective, *The Cop-Free Zone: Reflections from Experiments in Autonomy around the US*: crimethinc.com.

Indeed, CrimethInc appears to be a collective in a period of transition. Once the favourite of dumpster-divers and purveyors of 'riot porn', they have increasingly become a reasonably reliable source for breaking news of working class uprisings around the world. They have even begun to engage more seriously with classical mass-anarchist history and theory, as in their great 2019 essay *Against the Logic of the Guillotine*: crimethinc.com.

[12] Idris Robinson's essay 'How It Might Should Be Done' (originally a talk; later published by *Ill Will Editions*) is justly scathing on this phenomenon:

There's a lot of talk about how to end racism, especially within corporate and academic circles. We saw how to end racism in the streets the first weeks after George Floyd was murdered.

"It was only after the uprising began to slow down and exhaust itself that the gravediggers and vampires of the revolution began to reinstate racial lines and impose a new order on the uprising. The most subtle version of this