

Towards the Creation of an Anarchist Movement: From Reactive Politics to Proactive Struggle

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In opposition to the current trend of offering only negative ideological developments in the movement, such as “giving up activism,” which offer us needed self-criticism but no real path forward other than vague cries reminiscent of “go to the people,” or engaging in purely semantic debates over the prioritization of ‘activism’ versus ‘organizing,’ it seems clear that a coherent and practical plan of action is necessary. If we are ever to succeed in our goal of creating an anarchist-communist society, we need to be asking ourselves first and foremost: how do we get there? Of course, praxis determines practice, and so theoretical development is necessary. However, we can develop the perfect theory and analysis of capitalism, and yet all will be for naught unless we have a tactical program to take us forward.

This is an attempt to provide such a program, or rather, a basic framework to give guidance to our activities. It is hoped that this will spark debate amongst revolutionary anarchists with a focus on the practical, and tactical, rather than the ideological or semantic.

Goals

It should be clear, as we are revolutionary anarchists, that our ultimate aim is for a revolution against the State and capitalism, and all forms of oppression, seeking to replace them with a world based on self-management, free association, federalism, communism, and freedom. We believe further, that this revolution can only take place through the emergence and development of a mass revolutionary anarchist movement.

Therefore, the intent of this article is to propose concrete means by which we will be able to achieve these goals. We do not believe that the anarchist revolution is an impossibility, nor do we conceptualize the class struggle as a vague abstracted notion which does not affect our lives; quite the opposite, we recognize that we are in the midst of a pervasive social war, and we intend to win. As such, we feel it is necessary to develop a long term strategy, and to place all our actions in the framework of that strategy: such is the intent of this document.

Ideological Points

As stated above, praxis determines practice, and therefore it seems only appropriate to declare the ideological assumptions from which this program draws. First, and probably most contentious, this framework draws most heavily from the platformist tradition within anarchism. This is not to say that one must, or even should, agree with the specifics of the original Organization Platform of the Libertarian Communists, but is rather a recognition of the importance of collective responsibility, discipline, and tactical unity which the platformist tradition puts forward. Clearly then, the framework laid out in this document recognizes that many of those who today identify as “anarchists” will strongly disagree with this most basic assumption, and therefore will find the entire framework less than satisfactory. However, our priority, as stated above, is the creation of a mass anarchist movement, and where we feel that building such a movement means alienating others who identify as anarchists, we should have no problem in doing so.

Further, this framework assumes that it is through the creation of dual power and a culture of resistance that a truly mass, working-class based, anarchist revolutionary movement will be born. Rather than rely on overused rhetoric, and to be especially clear, the existence of dual power implies a social condition where the community has managed to take over the functions

normally relegated to the State and Capital; when people begin to run basic services and provide for necessities in the interest of all, rather than to create profit. For us as anarchists, this condition must also be complemented with a culture of resistance that instills a natural aversion in the community as a collective whole to the forces of the State and Capital. Only in this manner will the foundations of an anarchist revolution be laid. Finally, part of this framework requires the development of a strong and organized internal structure in the explicitly anarchist community. Beyond informal networks, we should strive to be able to make concrete decisions as a community so that we can coordinate all our individual activity. Ultimately, we need a strong explicitly anarchist infrastructure in order to be able to contribute to and intervene effectively in the overall class struggle.

Prioritizing Struggles

Continuing to think tactically, it seems clear that the current modus operandi in anarchist circles is not going to bring about a revolution anytime soon. Speaking from experience, we all too often get caught up in minute details and end up wasting all our energy perpetuating the current anarchist scene, the stale and isolated creature that it is. In order to achieve our goals as anarchists, we need to begin examining how we can escalate, and eventually win, the class struggle. This means we need to look at how we can build a popular anarchist movement based in our neighborhoods and workplaces.

From experience, history, and common sense, the answer to these questions is abundantly clear: we, as anarchists, must work around issues which directly affect working class people. It is only by proving to non-politicized working class people that anarchists are capable of markedly improving their lives that our ideas will gain legitimacy outside of a narrow, white-dominated subculture.

However, we must still have an overall strategy to the issues which we choose to focus our energy around if we hope to move from resistance to revolution. There is no one particular aspect of the class struggle that all anarchists can or should involve themselves in with such a strategy, as different issues have different priorities in our respective locations and social situations. What we should be able to develop is a reasoned understanding of what qualifications to look at a variety of struggles with, in order to make a clear choice as to where we want to spend our energies. Such a set of qualifications should include all of the following:

(1) The struggle directly connects to the everyday lives of working class people: As stated above, the fact that anarchism will only become a mass movement when it connects with people's needs and lives is manifest throughout history. Therefore, it is vitally important that the struggles we involve ourselves in are capable of connecting to people in this way. Primarily, this will be in relation to people's economic well-being, but it is imperative to also look at the political and social realities of people's lives.

(2) The struggle logically undermines the legitimacy of the state and capitalism: the struggles we prioritize and involve ourselves in must therefore be founded in a contradiction within capitalism. This qualification forces us to involve ourselves in struggles with real potential to go beyond resistance to insurrection and ultimately revolution. To elucidate on this point, one example of this would be involving ourselves in housing struggles; not because it is necessarily the easiest struggle to rhetorically connect to capitalism, but because the logical conclusion to

solving a housing problem is community control over land and buildings which fundamentally contradicts the very basis of the state and capitalism. There are certainly ways of approaching most struggles which will lead to an undermining of the status-quo, though some are certainly easier than others. What we must avoid is asking the powers that be to improve our lot for us, but actively make the necessary changes in our lives without seeking permission from the state or legal system.

(3) The struggle is based on our own interests as working class people: The struggles we involve ourselves in must also have a direct impact on our own daily lives if we are to be reasonably capable of interacting with others who are affected by the same issue in a principled and non-paternalistic manner.

(4) The struggle involves as diverse a population, in terms of race, gender, and sexuality, as possible: In order to combat racism, sexism, and heterosexism, we should seek to build egalitarian and non-hierarchical organizations across all identity lines. Of course, we must be conscious of doing so in a highly principled manner, and should seek to empower those who have suffered from exclusion, oppression, and discrimination because of their identity. Ultimately, however, unless we are able to come together in struggle and learn from one another, we will not be capable of overcoming institutional forms of racism and sexism.

(5) Potential for militancy and direct action: Probably our greatest strength as anarchists is our willingness to ignore legality and engage in militant direct actions. It is via these means that we will be able to prove ourselves effective in winning ground in the class struggle. Unfortunately, there seems to be a general misunderstanding of the term “direct action,” and what the difference between symbolic and direct actions is. To be absolutely clear, a direct action must directly accomplish our goals, thus defending working class people from evictions by blocking the police from getting into their residence is a direct action, whereas breaking the windows of Gap or Nike is generally purely symbolic.

Method of Intervention

(1) Formation of an anarchist issue-oriented organization: One of the most common problems encountered by anarchists who attempt to involve themselves in issue-oriented organizing is that they are quickly subsumed into the fold of reformist and hierarchical organizations, and become their grunt workers. Even those of us who are fortunate enough to find relatively radical, grassroots organizations to work within, we are almost always constrained by concerns of legality and public relations, and still find ourselves working towards reformist goals with reformist tactics.

Because of this, if we are to effectively intervene in specific instances of class struggle we need to form our own radical mass organizations. While it is probably not advantageous to use the term “anarchist” to publicly describe these organizations, as there is a lot of baggage associated with that term, the organizations should be run along anarchist principles (non-hierarchical, consensual democracy, federalism) and should have stated goals which are in line with revolutionary anarchism (self-management, community control of social wealth.) Ideally, non-politicized working class people will come to know about and have interest in our organizations because we are effective in real struggles. In this way the organizations we create should strive to supercede the original anarchist membership and become truly mass organizations.

(2) Direct Action: As alluded to above, it is our reliance on direct action that places us as anarchists in the unique position of being capable of making real and significant changes in our lives and the lives of all working class people. Thus, direct action must be an understood staple of the mass organizations we initiate.

(3) Secondary Coalitions: Far from thinking that we can, or should, win significant victories in isolation from the existing reformist or progressive organizations working on similar issues, it is imperative that secondary coalitions be formed with these groups. It is important to ensure that these groups know that we have the same general goals as they do (betterment of peoples' lives), and that we are not interested in competing for membership with them, but that we have our own approach we want to try.

When at all possible we should strive to coordinate our efforts with these groups, as they often appreciate the presence of a more radical tactical force willing to take risks that they cannot.

(4) Large demonstrations: Rather than abandon the experience many of us have gathered over the past several years of large mass mobilizations, we should harness this tactic to fit our prioritization of local struggles. Furthermore, we should use these large demonstrations as an opportunity to engage in truly direct actions around the issues we are struggling around. While there is much to criticize in the anti-globalization "movement," it is undeniably remarkable that we are capable of mobilizing hundreds, if not thousands, of radical militants to travel across huge distances to participate in these demonstrations. Rather than view this purely as the negative "summit-hopping," we should also see in this great opportunity for inter-regional mutual aid. As we shift the focus of mass mobilizations from knee-jerk reactions brought on by the actions of the rich, to a calculated attack on the state and capital via our involvement in real struggles, we will end the validity of the criticism currently levied against mass mobilizations that they contradict local organizing. While radicals will still be traveling across great distances to participate in militant actions, they will no longer be removed from the community they are taking place in, and are therefore simply expressions of solidarity and mutual aid with revolutionaries in that city. This is still a necessary component of the overall struggle, as we currently lack the numbers required to engage in successful militant direct actions that will have lasting effects without converging from great distances onto one location.

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