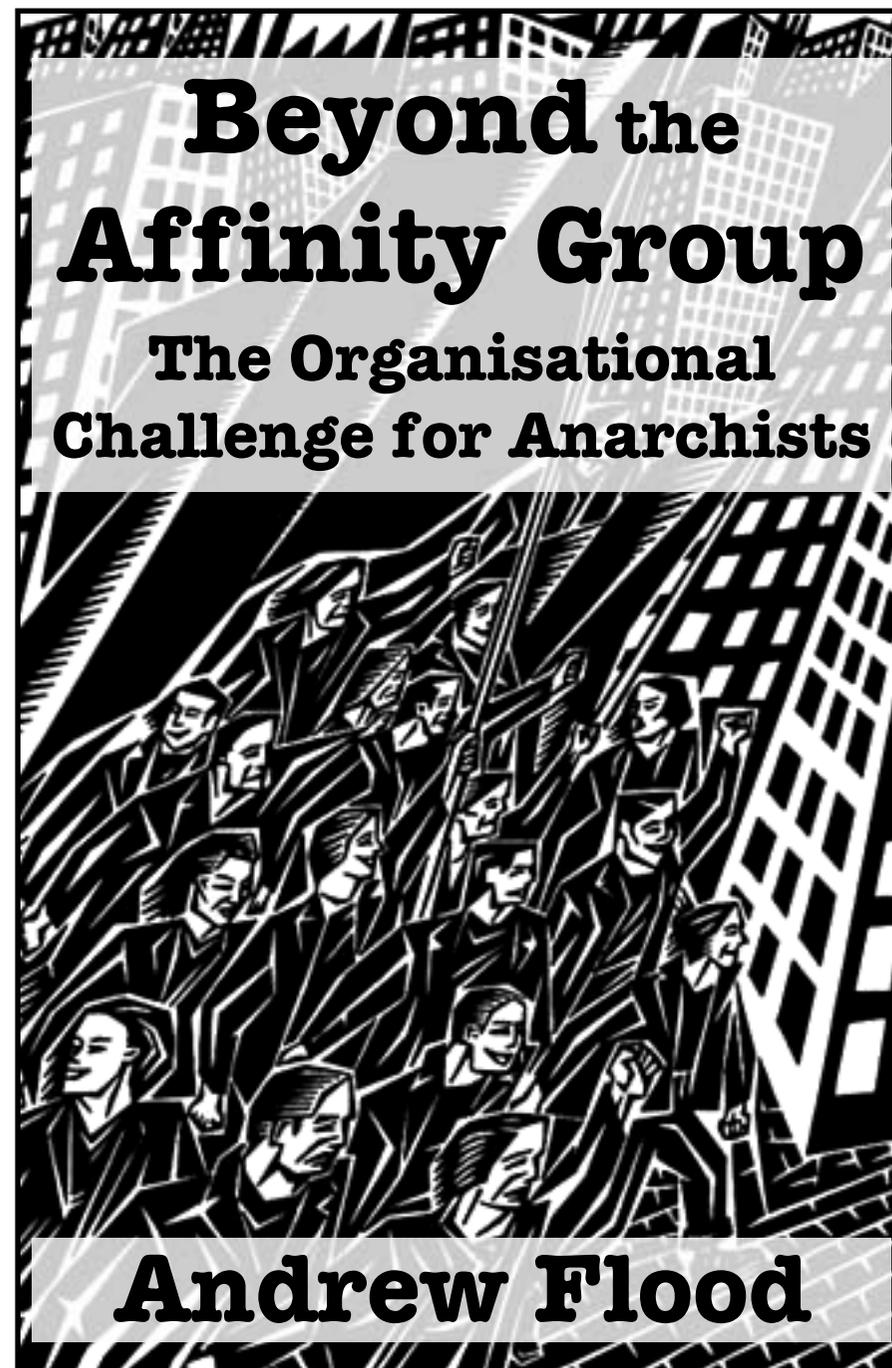This collection of three articles examines the how and why of anarchist organisation. The first is a look at the success of the network form of organisation and why it came to the fore in the current period. It then looks at the limitations of that form or organisation. The second article looks at the organisational practise of the first anarchists and in particular Michael Bakunin and re-examines the different levels of organisation he advocated in the light of the needs of anarchists today. The final article asks why anarchist organisations mostly failed to grow following the collapse of the left and identifies why large-scale anarchist organisations are essential if we are to ever overthrow capitalism.

ZABALAZA BOOKS

★ ★

"Knowledge is the Key to be Free!"

Beyond the Affinity Group
The Organisational Challenge for Anarchists

Andrew Flood

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Contents:

16. The CNT had about one million members at the start of the revolution, this may have risen as high as two million by 1937.

17. CNT textile worker Andreu Capdevila, quoted in 'Blood of Spain' p. 72

18. See the article Syndicalism: Its strengths and weaknesses in *Red & Black Revolution* No. 1

19. Which is why we must be careful not to imagine that the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, which means no more than democratically selecting who gets to decide party policy, has anything in common with the anarchist concept of theoretical and tactical unity.
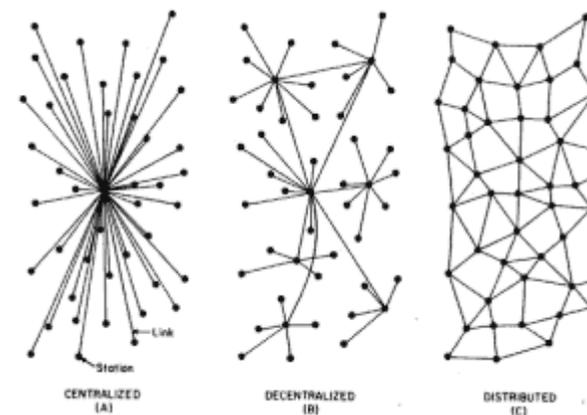
20. Bakunin discussed the difference in the two forms as being two different forms of meaning of the word authority; i.e. to be an authority on something as opposed to being in authority over something.

21. In practice, though, this selection is fixed through mechanisms like the use of slates. Leninist groups are infamous for having the same leader 'elected' again and again until he dies and the organisation then splits!

22. In fact, as usual, we can observe that the Leninists have adopted the methods of capitalist organisation on this issue, with a division between those who make decisions and those who carry them out whereas collective responsibility models the future anarchist society, where those making the decisions will be all of those effected by those decisions (workers' self-management in the economic context).

Footnotes to *Building the Anti-Capitalist Movement - Organisational Choices for Anarchists and the Left*

1. This casualty figure is the maximum estimate for actual war deaths I have seen. It is a sign of the continued acceptance of the rationale behind the war in the West that no-one actually seems to either know or care how many died on the Iraqi side, or that perhaps 500,000 Iraqi children have died since the end of the war due to the combined effects of destruction at the time of the war and sanctions since.

2. The EZLN rising of 1 Jan. 1994 in Chiapas; see *Red & Black Revolution* No. 1 for an analysis of the Zapatistas.

3. Quoted in 'The SWP and the Crisis of British Capitalism', 1992

4. A faction within the Bolshevik party that was based on the unions and demanded a return to some workplace democracy. The main result was that factions were then banned in the Party!

5. R.V. Daniels 'The Conscience of the Revolution', pp. 145-6

6. This is split into two sections, the section with its HQ in Paris was expelled from the IWA-AIT at its December 1996 Congress.

7. This article is referring to the anarchist movement in Britain and Ireland except where I state otherwise. This is the area where I am very familiar with the internal life of organised anarchism but from what I am told similar problems apply in the U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand. These countries all share a common tradition of union and political organising, dominated by struggles for the leadership of the movement and where self-organisation of struggle has seldom progressed beyond a slogan.

8. Workers Solidarity Movement (publishers of *Red & Black Revolution*)

9. Anarchist Communist Federation

10. British section of the IWA, now called Solidarity Federation, formerly the Direct Action Movement

11. Although including Class War in a listing of national anarchist organisations is problematical as they keep changing their minds about whether they are or are not anarchists.

12. Scottish Federation of Anarchists

13. The Anarchist Workers Group which self-destructed in 1992 when it abandoned anarchism, changed its name to Socialism from Below and then vanished.

14. There has been an increase in interest in anarchism as a set of ideas but in English language countries this has not translated into a significant growth in organisation.

15. Not unreasonable in the context of syndicalism where either the union is capable of taking over the economy on its own or it is not. In terms of non-syndicalist anarchist politics, however, the idea of completing the revolution on a non-syndicalist basis through the creation of other organs of workers' self-management was open. By 1937 a sizeable minority of the CNT were willing to explore this possibility in the form of a revolutionary junta elected (and recallable) by the CNT and CGT workers.

CENTRALIZED (A) DECENTRALIZED (B) DISTRIBUTED (C)

The Origins and Limitations of the Network Form of Organisation for Anarchists

With the emergence of the summit protest movement into the public eye after J18 and Seattle, anarchism gained an influence way beyond what the numbers of anarchists and the level of anarchist organisation might have led you to predict. Quite quickly in the English-speaking world, anarchism emerged from being a fairly obscure and historical critique of the left to become one of the main poles in the globalisation movement.

It was not the long-existing anarchist organisations that achieved this. For the most part it was a new generation of activists using much more informal methods of organisation and communication. Rather than seeking to build one powerful and united organisation, they built thousands of small, informal and often quite short-lived ones. In fact 'built' is probably too strong a word for a process that in many cases consisted of a few friends coming together to travel to a protest and act together during it.

★ The Internet and Why this Form of Organisation Came to the Fore

Revolutionary politics has always been strongly influenced by new technology. The emergence of the mass democratic rebellions in France, American and Ireland in the closing decades of the 18th century were linked to the advent of widespread literacy and access to printing. This allowed the rapid spread of quite complex republican ideas around the world. At the start of the new millennium it was the Internet that allowed for a model of organisation of highly decentralised networks.

Previously both international communication and one-to-many communication needed significant resources and so required mass organisation and a centralisation of resources. The web and email meant that for first time huge numbers of people could directly communicate internationally on a day-to-day basis.

This allowed the coming into being of very large and informal networks. In terms of debate and organisation these could be no more formal than an email list. A single mail sent to one list could be picked up and forwarded to many others so the ideas of one individual or small collective could spread rapidly to large numbers of people whom they had never met. This tended to bypass existing organisations many of whom tended to see the internet as a threat rather than an opportunity. For a time it also threw the various state spying and police forces into disarray as they were used to a model where infiltration of one or a small number of centralised organisations could give them a very accurate picture of how many would attend something and what they were likely to do.

Simply put these new methods initially allowed activists to seemingly appear from nowhere and either shut down summits as in Seattle and Prague or, as in Quebec, force the state to imprison itself behind high walls and fences. It was suddenly possible for a small and poorly resourced group to communicate with and seek aid from people all over their continent. It was possible for those thinking of travelling to a protest to get quite detailed local information in advance through web sites and email lists. After a decade where the only thing of significance happening on the left was the Zapatistas, the initial success of the summit protests seemed to represent an enormous leap forward.

★ The Advantages of this Form of Organisation

The major advantage of this form of organisation is that it allowed the rapid development and growth of a movement of tens of thousands from a tiny base without significant resources. Almost without exception groups formed spontaneously, copying what they perceived as the success of what others were doing elsewhere. Their knowledge of the process was obtained not from individual contact or even books but from what people were writing on a multitude of web sites and email lists.

In the first years it was also possible for network organised summit protests to have a real impact on the various global capitalist summits. The business of both the 1999 World Trade Organisation (WTO) summit in Seattle and the 2000 World Bank summit in Prague was disrupted, in the case of Prague leading to the abandoning of the entire event as delegates fled the city. This was possible because initially the various state security forces who are used to dealing with top down, centralized organisations didn't know who to watch and what to take seriously. On a more local level the initial Reclaim the Streets events that were held in many cities around the globe also caused confusion amongst police forces unused to such organising methods.

Of course the state has enormous resources at its disposal and after some pretty

anarchism/bakunin/bakunin3.html
24. Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 155
25. Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 155
26. Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 156

Footnotes to *Michael Bakunin - Biography and Contribution to Models of Anarchist Organisation*

Most of the texts here with a URL can also be accessed via the Bakunin web page at http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin.html

1. Quoted in *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson, Fontana 1960, p. 271

2. Bakunin in *Who am I*, p. 126, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, taken from *La Commune de Paris et la notion de l'Etat 1870*, Oeuvres IV, p. 249ff

3. Quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p. 14

4. *Appeal to the Slavs* (1848), in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, Sam Dolgoff, Black Rose Books, 1972, pp. 63-68

5. Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p. 26

6. Sam Dolgoff, ed, *Bakunin on Anarchy*, New York, 1973, p. 388

7. Quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p. 29

8. Daniel Guerin in *No Gods No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 132

9. Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p. 30

10. Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 138

11. *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 132

12. Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 142

13. Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, pp. 133 - 137

14. Report from a Russian positivist quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p. 34

15. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism*, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 212

16. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism*, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 215

17. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism* (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 6

18. *The Capitalist System*, available for download from the ZB site or to read at http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin/writings/capitalist_system.html

19. Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 156

20. Bakunin to Nechayev on the role of secret revolutionary societies, June 2, 1870, http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin/writings/nechayev_secret_disagree...

21. *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* (1871), http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/bakunin/paris.html

22. Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters*, Vol 1, p. 139

23. *Founding of the Workers International*, http://flag.blackened.net/daver/

disastrous experimentation - the Quebec NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) summit, also in 2000 - it adjusted to these new forms of organisation and developed new policing methods to deal with them. These new policing methods included an intense level of repression which saw the shooting of protesters at the Gothenburg and Genoa summits. Many of the Summits were also moved out of the big cities, where protesters could easily gather, to isolated locations and in the case of the World Bank to Qatar, a dictatorship!

In particular, after the September 11th terrorist attacks, when security became a very plausible excuse in the mind of the general public, the effectiveness of attempts to actually shut down or disrupt the summits of global capitalism plummeted. Protests and confrontations still occur at many summits but the summit delegates now see these on Sky News rather then right outside the buildings in which they meet. As such, the protests have become purely symbolic even if there are often frequent scuffles with whatever police force has drawn the short straw of protecting the world's elite that month.

The network form of organisation is effective but also rather ruthless when it comes to experimentation with new methods and tactics. Each local group is free to go out and try out new ideas without consulting with anyone else first. If something obviously works then it is reported on and can be rapidly replicated elsewhere. The ruthless element is that this freedom to experiment without consultation also means that obvious failures that would have been spotted at the discussion phase in a more formal organisation slip through and people have to learn the hard way all too frequently. And the hard way can mean jailings or losing all local support for an action that was never going to make any difference anyway. In contrast a formal organisation would first need a formal geographically widespread debate over strategy and tactics before they could be implemented. While this may eliminate repeating the mistakes of the past it may also result in missed opportunities and certainly limits the number of new strategies that can be tried at any one time.

In the 1990's, with the bankruptcy of the old authoritarian left, it was precisely this space for experimentation and replication that allowed the rapid appearance of a new movement with new tactics and a new strategy created through 'walking the road' rather than studying the books.

★ What are the Limitations it Faces?

The state may be slow to respond but it is a massive structure of power with billions of dollars of resources and hundreds of thousands of dedicated personnel. So no single form of organisation, unless it is one that involves the majority of workers, will ever be able to take it on in a straight fight. This includes not only formal organisations but also informal decentralised methods of organisation.

Many of the things that make network forms of organisation useful are also disadvantages in other respects. Their informality means that 'members' have a relatively weak commitment to them so for finance and resources they are often dependant

on donations and loans from more formal organisations. The ease of getting involved (perhaps no more then signing up to an email list) also means they are easy for police, journalists and fascists to infiltrate and, if they are smart about it, to disrupt by carrying out provocations in the name of the network or issuing statements from what claims to be a node of a network designed simply to discredit the network as a whole. In the recent past we have an example in this in the letter bombing campaign carried out by an Italian group that nobody had ever heard of but which used the same initials as the largest Italian anarchist network, the FAI. In a network that has no formal structure it can be very hard to even issue a statement pointing out that such actions are not part of the network.

★ Beyond Networks and Protests

Network methods of organisation have proved to be very effective at organising one-off summit protests. They have also played a vital role in building international solidarity, in particular with the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas in the mid-1990's. But the experience of those organising the summit protests suggests that in the aftermath the networks proved fragile and were unable to sustain a local impact.

In Argentina, network forms of organisation proved capable of getting several presidents out of power and were able to help organise the occupations of dozens of factories but appear not to have made much progress towards overthrowing capitalism. The slogan was 'they all must go' but the reality was that there was always another candidate in the wings to fill the president's chair when it became vacant.

This does not prove that the network form or organisation is useless, nor that there is an alternative form of organisation that is better in all circumstances. But it does suggest a need to look at models of organisation beyond networks. Or rather at models intended to complement the network form of organisation and address those areas where it is weak.

The old left often took the attitude that there was one ideal form of organisation that could be scaled down to fill all needs and all circumstances. For the Leninists that was often democratic centralism, the idea that putting a smart leadership in charge was the way forward. For some anarcho-syndicalists it was syndicalism but most anarchists have always favoured a plurality of organisational forms.

From the late 19th century, anarchists have advocated a number of forms of organisation. Sometimes given the nature of the debate these were put forward as polarised alternatives to each other. But some, like Bakunin, argued that all these forms of organisation should exist side by side and that anarchists should be involved in all of them.

What is needed is that committed anarchists also organise in anarchist political organisations that seek to provide the continuity, theoretical depth and tactical unity that networks, because of their advantages, lack. The main goal of networks is to organise lots and lots of people around a limited project (e.g. a single day's protest). Trying to develop any agreed theoretical depth in such a project would just limit the number of people who can be involved.

"class traitors" (readers will be aware of how Leninist groups relate to each other).[22] A third difference is that members would be free to carry on whatever activity they were interested in providing it did not contradict the agreed policy of their organisation, rather than having their political activity monopolised by the party leadership.

Many of the readers of this article may find themselves agreeing with the sort of organisational structure and principles it outlines. But this is not written merely as a set of ideas to be thought about and then laid aside. If you agree with the core ideas presented here then you have a responsibility to start to put these into action by searching out others who also agree and taking the first steps in building such organisation(s). It is my experience that many of the anarchists I have met are completely selfless when it comes to putting themselves in exposed physical positions in the struggles of our class, it is time to put the same sort of energy into building anarchist organisations that can re-define the traditions of working class struggle and prepare for a successful revolution.

ed people and in the end tends to result in a small organisation that consists of a circle of friends (and feuding partners). The second is because you believe that the organisation is trying to achieve what you are trying to achieve, that the parts of it you can't see (because of geographical separation or just complexity) will act in a similar way to how you will act, that in the event of a crisis you will then be part of a large number of people acting in a common way on the basis of prior agreement. All these require tactical and theoretical unity.

The main misunderstanding which arises from discussion of the need for theoretical and tactical unity is that an organisation which has such agreement will consider itself to hold the 'true' ideas of anarchism and all others as heretics. It's not hard to see where this idea emerges from, again from the culture of the left and the 57 feuding brands of Leninism. But for anarchists such an attitude has to be impermissible. It is also obviously incompatible with the role of the organisation I argued for earlier - that of being a nucleus of ideas and activists within the struggles of the working class rather than something which seeks to become the formal leadership of the class.

A final area of controversy around this idea is the surrender of individual sovereignty it entails. The original 'Platformists' talked about this as a "Collective responsibility" the organisation shared for the action of its activists. Alongside this is the responsibility of activists to implement the decisions of the organisation even where they clashed with their own views on this matter. Some anarchists see this as being akin to the organisational discipline required by many Leninists where party members are required to give the party a "monopoly of their political activity" and follow "democratic centralism".

Of course there are similarities but there are also similarities with respecting a picket line even if you voted against the strike. In fact every day in our lives we voluntarily adhere to a "collective responsibility", when we share cooking or holiday arrangements with others, or even settle on going to a pub we are not all that keen on because that's where our friends want to drink! Doing things that are not your first preference are pretty much part of all social interactions, the only way to avoid this in any society would be to live the life of a hermit.

★ Follow the Party?

What makes these decisions different and acceptable to us is in fact what separates "collective responsibility" from "party discipline". The first and most important of these is that we have an equal say in how these decisions are reached. In the anarchist organisation all have an equal say and vote in defining the organisation's position through conference discussions or mandated delegates. In the Leninist organisation the closest you get to this is getting some sort of vote on which party leader tells you what to do.[21] Secondly, in the anarchist organisation the nature of this discipline is voluntary in the sense that members should be free to leave organisations they disagree with and join ones they agree with without being regarded as

★ The Role of Anarchist Organisations

Anarchist organisations have the resources to develop theoretical depth out of their experience across a range of networks and then take these ideas into individual networks and argue for them. Anarchist organisations also have the time to enter into the sort of historical and theoretical discussion that are not possible in a broad meeting that seeks to sort out the concrete organisational details of a specific event.

This sort of analysis is needed if we are to move from confronting the worst aspects of capitalism as they arise to building an alternative to capitalism. The creation of an alternative is a long term project that needs to be able to deal with capitalism in all its different phases from social democratic to neo-liberal to fascist. In the past capitalism has been able to disband or suppress protest movements by simply shifting phase and either giving an apparent, if limited, victory (with a new social democratic government) or imposing repression that people are not prepared for (with fascism).

When it comes to doing work in trade unions or in communities where we can expect that many of those we are addressing and seeking to involve will be around for many years there is a real advantage in having a stable formal organisation. This can build up credibility and trust amongst those it wants to work with in a way that an informal network that comes and goes simply cannot sustain in the long term.

There is something of a false debate facing the anti-capitalist movement. At one pole some put forward tight organisation. The Leninists of course want tightly centralized parties but even some libertarians see the answer to increasingly effective policing of protest in a turn towards more disciplined and perhaps semi-clandestine organisation. At the other pole most activists continue to put forward loose organisations as a solution in themselves, with some 'post-leftists' even arguing against any form of more co-ordinated organisation.

Both see the two organisational methods as in competition with each other. This need not be so, in fact for anarchists both forms should be complementary as the strengths of one are the weaknesses of the other and vice versa. The rapid growth of the movement has strongly favoured the network form, it's now time to look at also building its more coherent partner. That is to build specific anarchist organisations that will work in and with the networks as they emerge.

Michael Bakunin - Biography and Contribution to Models of Anarchist Organisation

★ Bakunin's Idea of Revolution & Revolutionary Organisation

The Russian revolutionary liberal Alexander Herzen, who was a close friend of Michael Bakunin, told a story of how when Bakunin was travelling from Paris to Prague he came across a revolt of German peasants *"making an uproar around the castle, not knowing what to do. Bakunin got out of his conveyance, and, without wasting any time to find out what the dispute was about, formed the peasants into ranks and instructed them so skilfully that by the time he resumed his seat to continue his journey, the castle was burning on all four sides"*.[1]

Bakunin was the giant of the revolutionary movement in Europe from 1848 to his death in 1876. At 6' 4" and 240 lbs he was a literal giant as well as the demon that stalked the bourgeois imagination. Yet although he is often cited as the father of the anarchist movement, today his ideas of revolutionary organisation are poorly understood by anarchists and Marxists. Instead he is most remembered for his role in countering the authoritarian aspects of Marxism in the 1st International.

There are several good reasons why Bakunin is not remembered for his positive ideas. The years Marx spent in the British Library perfecting *Das Kapital* were spent by Bakunin in a series of prisons, chained to walls, and losing his teeth through scurvy. Not the best environment for research or writing! And in any case as he admitted in 1870 *"I am neither a scientist, nor a philosopher nor even a profession-*

Platform of the Libertarian Communists * as the need for "Tactical and Theoretical Unity".

Because it is difficult to talk of a leadership of ideas because of the negative connection most anarchists draw between the word leadership and authoritarian politics, I want to explain the term and then move onto discussing a practical example of what this means in practice.

Bourgeois politics is based around the concept of the 'leadership of position'. This means that you get to a particular position and, because you are in this position, you then get to implement your ideas. The position may be that of a politician or a union bureaucrat but the basic idea remains the same, the position gives you power over people. In fact, once in power you don't even have to pay any attention to those you claim to represent. It is not unusual for this sort of leader to claim some sort of special understanding which the people he represents lack because they lack the time or information to form this judgement. Obviously anarchists completely reject this form of leadership.

However Leninists deliberately confuse this form of leadership with a second form, that of the 'leadership of ideas', into the general term 'leadership'.[19] Many anarchists make the mistake of accepting this deliberate confusion and so end up rejecting or feeling uncomfortable with the idea of becoming a 'leadership of ideas'.[20] This is the source of confusion, not just in politics, but also on more general questions like that of the role of specialists in the workplace (e.g. surgeons, architects etc.).

What the leadership of ideas means is not that the organisation holds any special position but rather that it has built up a record of being 'right' or 'sensible' so people are inclined to take its advice seriously and act on it. Its power lies solely in its ability to convince people. But obviously to develop such a reputation, it must be able to speak with a common voice in its publications and at strategy meetings. Otherwise, although individuals may develop this reputation the organisation cannot!

★ Follow the Leader?

So why do we need to develop organisations that are seen as a 'leadership of ideas'? There are two answers to this. The first is that it is a bad thing for this development to take place at the individual level as it tends to lead to informal cults of the individual.

The second though is more profound. The world is a big place, if we ever hope to see an anarchist revolution we will require to be able to address the majority of the population with libertarian ideas. It's unlikely the capitalist media will ever allow any individual the sort of media access this would require (and, even if they did, this - for the reasons outlined above - would not be a good thing). So this is going to have to be achieved on an organisational basis.

There are two reasons for joining an organisation. The first is to meet like-mind-

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* Also known as the "Organisation Platform for a General Union of Anarchists (Draft)".

spective of vanguard organisations it is a central part of their politics to see similar organisations as the biggest problem because they are 'false prophets'. Anarchists have been influenced by this practise too but it is entirely non-sensical for us. Where we disagree we are competing on the terrain of ideas alone, we are not competing for leadership positions in working class organisations. So adopting the sectarianism of the vanguardists towards each other is suicidal and has to be overcome. As long as anarchist groups are on the fringes of society this sort of behaviour is likely to continue. It's both a product of and a cause of being on the fringe. But revolutionary change requires that we move into the centre of society.

The anarchist organisation(s) has to become a centre for struggle in today's society. In this way, although it may not be possible to win a majority of workers, it should be the case that a very large minority have either worked alongside or in anarchist organisations and so a large minority have experience of libertarian practice and know it can work. The organisation needs to not just preach the need for social revolution but organise the fight against the day to day grind of capitalism now.

This implies an organisation quite different from any that currently exist. The advantage of the syndicalist method is that, where it can be applied, it results in an organisation that is based very much on day to day struggles in the workplace or, at a more advanced stage, in the community. If the limitations [18] of anarcho-syndicalism have caused us to reject it as an adequate organisational tool, this should not prevent us from recognising its strength in creating genuine, mass, grassroots organisations.

★ Stop and Think

Let us stop for a moment and consider what level of organisation we're talking of. We mean not only activists on every street and in every workplace but social centres in every neighbourhood, weekly or even daily papers with circulations in the tens or hundreds of thousands, radio stations... and all this of sufficient strength to resist the state oppression that will come before the revolution. It must have activists who are known and trusted in all the struggles occurring throughout the class.

What is the role of our organisations instead of being social clubs or talking shops? That role must be to become a 'leadership of ideas' within the struggles and organisation of the working class. That is for the organisation to gain the credibility and acceptance, so that when it speaks people listen and seriously consider what it has to say. At the moment, particular individuals within a group often succeed in doing this on an individual level by becoming known as a 'good head', with whom it is worth talking to about a new situation in a struggle. This may give a certain local influence to that individual, but it does not give a wider influence to the organisation, or lead people to realise that it is anarchism as a set of ideas that is worth looking at as the motivation of this 'good head'.

If the organisation hopes to influence the struggles and ideas in the class, it must speak with an agreed voice. This idea was put forward in the Organisational

al writer. I have written very little in my life time, and have only ever done so in self-defence". [2] In fact he wrote thousands of letters but relatively few articles or pamphlets. Many of those available today are drafts of unpublished works.

Also he never claimed any consistency to his life's writings or activity. Even in 1871, when he and Marx were fighting over the future of the First International, he could write *"As far as learning was concerned, Marx was* [in 1844]*, and still is, incomparably more advanced than I. I knew nothing at that time of political economy; I had not yet rid myself of my metaphysical observations... He called me a sentimental idealist and he was right;...".* [3]

Many Marxists came to see Marx as a sort of prophet whose writings comprise a perfect materialist 'revelation' that can be used to answer all of today's questions. This may be a foolish approach but it's true to say that Marx's life's writings are more consistent than Bakunin's are. The writings of the young Bakunin have quite different politics to his writings at the end of his life.

★ Bakunin's Early Life

Bakunin followed a similar path of development to many of the other revolutionaries from a bourgeois background of that generation. Like Marx and Engels this included involvement with the left Hegalians. In 1844 he was a member of Marx's Democratic Federation in Paris where he also met and was influenced by Proudhon. When the 1848 revolutions (which centred on the demand for bourgeois parliaments and home rule) erupted, he served in the Workers' National Guard in Paris. When that rising was defeated he headed to Germany in March as the revolutions there started, hoping to encourage a Polish revolt.

Bakunin's political ideology at the time was fairly unformed but is usually described as 'Pan-Slavist'. Many commentators since have had problems putting this in any sensible context. Anarchists have tended to see it as irrelevant, while Marxists have generally concentrated on attacking Bakunin for the anti-German (Prussian) aspect to it.

His writings and activity in this period bear more than a passing resemblance to what has been called left republicanism in Ireland. The idea that the 'national struggle' can be an impetus towards the abolition of class rule even as it achieves national independence is also found in many Marxist writings, including those of Connolly and Trotsky. His anti-German rants are echoed much later in the anti-US diatribes of Marxist South American revolutionaries who sometimes identified the enemy as the 'blue eyed blondes of the north'.

1848 also saw Bakunin participate in the Slav congress in Prague and publish 'An appeal to the Slavs'. This appeal had many things in common with later left republican statements, for instance the call for revolutionary Slavic unity against the German, Turkish and Magyars occupations *"while we stretched our fraternal hands out to the German people, to democratic Germany"*. He sought to make socialism an inevitable part of the national liberation struggle writing; *"Everybody has come to*

the realisation that liberty was merely a lie where the great majority of the population is reduced to a miserable existence, where, deprived of education, of liberty and of bread, it is fated to serve as an underprop for the powerful and the rich." The appeal ends with *"The social question thus appears to be first and foremost the question of the complete overturn of society."* [4]

★ Years in Jail

Bakunin moved to Dresden where he met and befriended the composer Richard Wagner. There, in May 1849, a constitutional crisis led to another rising. With Wagner he joined the insurrection and became a revolutionary officer. Marx gives a summary of events in a letter to the *New York Daily Tribune* (October 2, 1852) on 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany' *"In Dresden, the battle in the streets went on for four days. The shopkeepers of Dresden, organised into 'community guards' not only refused to fight, but many of them supported the troops against the insurrectionists. Almost all of the rebels were workers from the surrounding factories. In the Russian refugee Michael Bakunin they found a capable and cool headed leader".*

Bakunin was arrested after the rebellion was put down. His luck had run out. He was already wanted by the Russians, the Czar having confiscated all his property and removed all his rights in 1844. He spent 13 months in jail in Dresden under sentence of death. One night he was led out, he presumed to be executed, but instead he was handed over to the Austrians. They jailed him in Prague for nine months before moving him to the Olmutz fortress where he was chained to the wall for two months. They condemned him to hang for high treason. Instead he was handed to the Russians where he was jailed in the Peter-Paul Fortress. Here he lost his teeth from scurvy and came close to losing his mind.

He spent nearly ten years in the various prisons until he was exiled to Siberia in 1857. There, once he had recovered his health, he fled via Japan to the US and then to London at the end of 1861. His incredible escape from Siberia (Japan had only just opened up to the west in 1853) only added to the mystification that surrounded Bakunin.

In prison he had remained a pan-Slavist and was clearly not yet an anarchist. The Czar, like later generations of Russian rulers, had a fondness for extracting confessions from his victims. Bakunin used his as a chance to outline his program which included the idea that what Russia needed was *"a strong dictatorial power"* to raise the standard of living and education. While some have correctly pointed out that what is said in such a confession should be taken with a pinch of salt, even as late as 1862 Bakunin *"thought the Tsar was capable of really working with the people, and the people capable of imposing its will on the Tsar through a National Assembly"*.[5]

However alongside and contrary to this he was clearly developing his thoughts in a libertarian direction. In 1862 Herzan's journal 'The Bell' published his open letter

dices and traditions developed in the long years under Leninism and initiate a positive, outgoing, organising and growing movement to take its place. We can no longer be satisfied with being a 'pure' opposition, we must begin to move into a position where anarchist ideas lead struggles rather than simply explaining why they are failing or will in the future be sold out.

In Britain it may be said that 'sure the national organisations have not grown but locally there are far more anarchists around and involved in stuff'. This might be true but while these groups may be useful in aiding struggles they are very limited in building a wider anti-capitalist movement. Where this is discussed local groups tend to repeat on a local scale the problems of 'national' organisations (discussed below). This does however raise a second question, why do so many otherwise active anarchists reject not only the existing national organisations, but it would appear organisation at the national level altogether?

A large part of this must be the experience of national organisations, which in most cases has been negative. There is a sharp tendency in many countries for national organisations to become little more than propaganda groups which criticise but are seldom seen as doing anything, while local groups become the centre for activity but seldom manage to develop strategies for promoting anarchism. So while national organisations are associated with sectarian feuding, at least local organisations are seen as doing something, even if that 'something' isn't particularly coherent. This division is disastrous as it separates theory and action into two separate spheres and commonly two separate and mutually suspicious sets of people. It is impossible to build a movement on this basis and until organisations arise that are capable of bringing together theory and action such groups that exist will be condemned to continuing irrelevance.

★ Make Love not War

This conflict is also avoidable. While there is a clear and pressing need for coherent national (and international) organisations, this in no way precludes anarchists coming together on a geographical basis to work on common projects. In fact local co-operation between organisations with political differences would seem to be essential in preventing or overcoming sectarianism. There are many projects that need considerable resources but don't require more then a minimum of political agreement, for instance the opening and running of centres and bookshops, that will obviously benefit from such co-operation and indeed, in areas where anarchism is weak, cannot take place without it. Likewise joint activity around campaigns will commonly be possible and make the anarchist input very much stronger. The holding of regional gatherings of anarchists can only help the flow of information.

Almost everyone's experience of first encountering the left is to find the divisions and rows that go on frustrating and puzzling. 'Why can't everyone just come together and be more effective?' is a common plea of newcomers. With time you understand that many of the differences are actually important, and indeed from the per-

activists criticising from outside. Instead it will be eroded over time if anarchists enter struggles and argue for different methods of organisation as the opportunities arise.

It is useful to consider why it seems necessary to make these arguments, ones that should be self-evident. To start answering this question it is useful to examine the forces that created the anarchist movement in the English speaking world.

Anarchism re-emerged in the English speaking countries in the post-WWII period in two forms, one was a kind of liberal radical democracy that paid lip service to the historical movement and the movement elsewhere but never really had all that much to do with anarchism. Essentially it combined a utopian wish for a nicer world with a rejection of any and all of the methods needed to achieve such a world. It comprised a minority of those who called themselves anarchists but received the bulk of the attention of the media because it included a number of prominent intellectuals.

Secondly there were groups formed by activists who were inspired by anarchism as a fighting ideology that seemed to avoid the pitfalls of Leninism. The label 'class struggle anarchist' is sometimes used to distinguish this second set from the liberals above. But because these groups were a tiny minority in a much larger social democratic or Leninist left they came to adapt themselves almost completely around the issues and practices of that left. They tended to define themselves not in a positive fashion but in a negative one, against some aspect of the existing left, so they would

1. seek to build 'real revolutionary unions' rather than social democratic ones
2. write a funny and aggressive paper rather than a boring and complaining one
3. expose the authoritarian practices of the left
4. not bore people with talking about politics but 'do stuff' instead.

★ Cold War Culture

This is part of the cultural legacy of the Cold War for anarchists, an attitude where the idea of mass national and international organisations may get lip service but very little energy or enthusiasm goes into constructing them. Another legacy is that many anarchists have come through the destructive mill of Leninist politics and are nervous about seriously addressing organisational issues in case this is seen as 'latent' Leninism.

This culture also arose in part as a reaction, often by ex-members, to the manipulative practices and authoritarian internal organisation of the left in general. This also resulted in a tendency to shy away from anything too closely connected with recruitment, spreading ideas (paper sales/public meetings) or trying to advocate a strategy for a particular struggle (as opposed to criticising someone else's).

This culture was never useful but it is entirely useless for anarchists today in a situation where there are a vanishingly small number of authoritarian left outfits to expose or be mistaken for. There is a very serious need to junk a lot of the preju-

with the title "To my Russian, Polish and other Slav friends". The section addressed to university students reads *"Go to the people. This is your field, your life, your science. Learn from the people how best to serve their cause! Remember, friends, that educated youth must be neither the teacher, the paternalistic benefactor, nor the dictatorial leader of the people, but only the midwife for the self-liberation, inspiring them to increase their power by acting together and co-ordinating their efforts".*[6] In that period the denial of education to the working class in most countries made it inevitable that the vast bulk of revolutionary writers would come from the bourgeois. Leaving that aside, Bakunin suggests a relationship between the 'revolutionary intellectual' and the people that anarchists would still hold with today.

He finally came to reject pan-Slavism after the 1863 Polish insurrection when he saw that the Polish nationalists were more interested in Ukrainian land than the support of the Ukrainian Slavs and that they were more afraid of peasant insurrection than the Czar. He visited Marx in London on his return. Marx invited him to join the 1st International and wrote to Engels (Nov. 4, 1864) saying *"On the whole he is one of the few people whom I find not to have retrogressed after 16 years, but to have developed further".*[7]

Bakunin had not yet seen the value of the 1st International (which was then in an embryonic form as a combination of British trade unions and French followers of Proudhon or Blanqui). He went to Italy where he worked on an international project of revolutionary organisation. According to Daniel Guerin *"The few members of the brotherhood were ... former disciples of the republican Giuseppe Mazzini, from whom they acquired their taste for and familiarity with secret societies".*[8] Brian Morris includes Polish and Russian exiles in this list.[9]

Bakunin comes in for a lot of criticism from modern day revolutionaries over his advocacy of secret societies in this period. Such criticisms though are looking back from the comparative safety of 20th century western Europe or the US where mass unions are a fact and revolutionaries are comparatively free to hold meetings and publish papers. In Bakunin's time such activity was almost always illegal and liable to get the author sentenced to years in prison, if not death. Marx and Engels had published the 'Communist Manifesto' from one such secret society, the League of the Just, and had continued in another up to the founding of the International despite the fact they were in the relative safety of liberal England.

The group around Bakunin had worked in similar secret societies for years, there were no legal revolutionary organisations in Poland or Russia in this period. In Italy and France these societies, often based on the Freemasons, were also the norm. It is thus hardly surprising that they concluded that "*an association with a revolutionary purpose must necessarily take the form of a secret society".*[10]

They drew up sets of rules for such groupings, the first under the title Revolutionary Society/Brotherhood in 1865. Arthur Lehning, editor of the Archives Bakunin points out that such programs and statutes mirror Bakunin's evolving thoughts, rather than *"the operation of an organisation".*[11] They were intended to be a blueprint of an 'ideal' organisation rather than a description of an already fully formed one.

The first of these documents, while clearly on the path to libertarian organisation, is firmly rooted in Bakunin's pre-anarchist phase. It combines ideas of libertarian organisation with the contradictory aim of setting up a parliament; *"For the governance of common affairs, a government and provincial assembly or parliament will of necessity be formed"*.[12]

It also reduces the question of revolution to an organisational one. The assumption is that everywhere the people are ready to rise and that all that is needed is for a relatively small number of revolutionaries to co-ordinate this rising. This is an idea also common in 20th century Marxism, either in the Trotskyist idea of the 'crisis of leadership' or the Gueverist revolutionary foci.

If this program cannot be considered any sort of final blueprint this does not mean that it is irrelevant. The kind of new society they advocated was a radical advance in the Europe of the 1860's and remains surprisingly relevant. The selection in the box gives the flavour of how they saw post-revolutionary society.

The Program of the Brotherhood (1865)

"the advent of liberty is incompatible with the existence of States.

...

...the free human society may arise at last, no longer organised ... from the top down ... but rather starting from the free individual and the free association and autonomous commune, from the bottom up

...

... women, different from man but not inferior to him, intelligent, hardworking and free as he is, should be declared his equal in all political and social rights ... religious and civil marriage should be replaced by free marriage, and that the upkeep, education and training of all children should be a matter for everyone, a charge upon society ... children belonging neither to society nor to their parents but rather to their future liberty

...

the revolution ... can ... be effected only by the people

...

the revolution ... cannot succeed unless, sweeping, like a worldwide conflagration ... it encompasses the whole of Europe for a start and then the world

...

the social revolution ... will not ... put up its sword before it has destroyed every state ... across the whole civilised world" [13]

"There was total disorder. We formed a commission and thereafter all arms were handed only to revolutionary organisations ... 10,000 rifles, I calculate as well as some machine guns, were taken. That was the moment when the people of Barcelona were armed; that was the moment, in consequence, when power fell into the masses' hands. We of the CNT hadn't set out to make the revolution but to defend ourselves, to defend the working class. To make the social revolution, which needed to have the whole of the Spanish proletariat behind it, would take another ten years... but it wasn't we who chose the moment; it was forced on us by the military who were making the revolution, who wanted to finish off the CNT once and for all." [17]

This is one of the key questions anarchist have to tackle in the aftermath of the Spanish revolution, for it should be clear that far from being a combination of exceptional circumstances the environment in which the revolution took place is typical of the environment all revolutions have taken place in. Unlike the Leninists we cannot advance a strategy where a small minority of activists, prepared with the right ideas before a revolutionary upsurge, can then manoeuvre themselves into the leadership of such an upsurge. A successful anarchist revolution requires not only huge numbers of conscious anarchists but also a massive confidence throughout the working class in its ability to immediately move to take over the running of the workplaces from the local to the global level. Such a confidence can only come from experience of self-managing struggle in the years before the revolution. Here and now anarchists cannot be content to exist in isolated propaganda or activist groups but must seek out ways to draw in wider and wider layers of society.

★ Playing a Waiting Game

We could hope for revolutionary periods that last decades but historically such periods are far shorter and revolutions begin when the revolutionaries are in a small minority. It seems more sensible to lose our complacency about being small 'guardians of the faith' now, while awaiting mass upsurge, and look for ways to win over at least a sizeable and militant minority in the period before the next revolutionary upsurge. For when it comes we need to have the numbers and confidence to make sure it does not stop short of overthrowing capitalism but also goes on to defeat the authoritarian left that will argue for a new state.

This means organising alongside our class in the here and now, despite whatever differences we may have with the way unions or community campaigns are structured. Our role in the unions or community organisations must be to bring anarchist ideas into them and gain an audience for these ideas by being the best activists. Anarchist methods have to be shown to work in people's day to day lives. We cannot gain this audience by carping from the outside about flaws in their structure and refusing to involve ourselves until these flaws are spontaneously rectified. The authoritarian tradition of organisation will not be changed by small numbers of

Ireland (WSM [8], Organise!, ACF [9], Sol-Fed/DAM [10], Class War [11]) none have grown significantly although we can note the addition of the SFA [12] and the self-destruction of the AWG [13]. Excuses of course can be provided, some good, some indifferent but in an overall sense the complete failure of any of these organisations to win a significant number of new people to anarchism, despite both the potential in terms of struggle and the redundancy of the alternatives has to say something. The fact that the same experience has been reflected in the USA, Australia and New Zealand underlines that something, somewhere is badly wrong. The question is what?

★ Where are we Going?

This failure in a period which saw anarchism proved 'right' in many respects should cause anarchists to pause and think. Does it reflect a fundamental failure in Anarchism, perhaps an inability to deal with the conditions of the modern world? Or is it something to do with the way we have been organising over the last few years? If we are serious about revolutionary change and do not want to be just a permanent protest movement, we need to confront this question head on. The easy answer of course is to blame it all on the international circumstances we find ourselves in, the general swing to the right found throughout society.

According to this perspective the failure of the organised anarchist movement to grow [14] in the post-Cold War period is due to the lack of opportunity. Circumstances, which include the collapse of Soviet style 'socialism' and the boost this gave to capitalism, mean that very few people believe there can be an alternative to capitalism. From this point of view there is little anarchists can do except wait for workers to enter into mass struggle and re-discover the need for an alternative to capitalism.

Yet in terms of anarchism a strategy of waiting for 'the workers' to enter into prolonged periods of struggle before expecting large numbers to become anarchists is deeply flawed. The level of struggle itself brings things to a head long before this process can be completed as capitalism, rather than waiting for the revolutionary movement to gather its strength, will precipitate the revolution by attacking first. This was what happened in 1936 in Spain when the majority of the capitalists opted for backing a military coup rather than allowing the anarchists to continue to gain in numbers and influence. During the Spanish revolution many anarchists laid their failure to complete the revolution on the not unreasonable [15] grounds that the anarchists, being a minority [16], could not make the revolution for fear of creating an 'anarchist' dictatorship. If the majority of an organisation of anarcho-syndicalists with over one million members could feel this unprepared after a couple of decades in existence as a mass organisation, the suggestion that we can afford to wait for the next revolutionary wave before growing is perhaps not the wisest of strategies.

Many of those at the forefront of the struggle in Spain were aware of this problem, even in the anarchist stronghold of Barcelona on the outbreak of the revolution. They were aware of how the moment of revolution is always forced prematurely on revolutionaries rather than being something they can hold back until the time is ripe

Bakunin next attempted to introduce a revolutionary socialist program into the League of Peace and Freedom. This was founded at a conference in Geneva in August of 1867 attended by 6,000 people, *"all friends of free democracy"* . Bakunin is described rising to speak at the conference; *"the cry passed from mouth to mouth: 'Bakunin!' Garibaldi, who was in the chair, stood up, advanced a few steps and embraced him. This solemn meeting of two old and tried warriors of the revolution produced an astonishing impression ... Everyone rose and there was a prolonged and enthusiastic clapping of hands"*.[14]

Some people date Bakunin's advocacy of anarchism from this point, not least because as part of his speech he denounced nationalism - a break with his previous pan-Slavism. Others date it from the following congress of Berne in 1868. In any case it is from this period onward that Bakunin becomes centrally involved in the building of mass revolutionary organisations, including that of the 1st International.

It is from this point that he starts to advocate methods of organisation consistent with anarchism. His last major work, written in 1873, outlines the following program for the revolutionary youth in Russia.

> *"...they must go the people, because today - and this is true everywhere, but especially in Russia - outside of the people, outside of the multi-million-strong labouring masses, there is neither life, nor cause, nor future".*[15]
>
> *"The chief defect which to this day paralyses and makes impossible a universal popular insurrection in Russia is the self-containment of the communes, the isolation and separateness of the local peasant worlds. At all costs we must shatter that isolation and introduce the vital current of revolutionary thought, will, and deed to those separate worlds. We must link together the best peasants of all the villages, districts, and, if possible, regions, the progressive individuals, the natural revolutionaries of the Russian peasant world, and, where possible, creating the same vital link between the factory worker and the peasantry.*
>
> *...We must convince these progressive individuals - and through them, if not all the people then at least a sizeable segment of them, the most energetic segment - that the people as a whole ... share one common misfortune and therefore one common cause. We must convince them that an invincible force lives in the people, which nothing, and no one can withstand, and that if it has not yet liberated the people it is because it is powerful only when it is concentrated and acts simultaneously, everywhere, jointly in concert, and until now it has not done so. In order to concentrate that force, the villages, districts and regions must be linked and organised according to a common plan and with the single objective of universal liberation of the people. To create in our people a feeling and consciousness of real unity, some sort of popular newpaper must be established ... which would immediately spread information to every corner of Russia, to every region, district and village, about any peasant or factory uprising that breaks out in one locality or another, and also about the significant revolutionary movements produced by the prole-*

tariat of western Europe.

.. the Russian people will acknowledge our educated youth as their own only when they encounter them in their own lives, in their own misfortunes, in their own cause, in their own desperate rebellion. The youth must be present from now on not as witnesses but as active participants, in the forefront of all popular disturbances and uprisings, great and small ... Acting in accordance with a rigorously conceived and fixed plan, and subjecting all their activity to the strictest discipline in order to create that unanimity without which there can be no victory." [16]

This one quotation refutes the most common misrepresentations of Bakunin's model of organisation. It does confirm one common criticism of Bakunin, that he did not confine his revolutionary subject to the industrial working class, but looked as much, if not more so, to the artisans and the peasants. However while this criticism might make some sense in modern Europe or North America today, in the 1870's any revolution which only mobilised the urban workers would have been doomed to defeat. At that time urban workers were a tiny minority of society.

For instance, in advocating a similar strategy for revolutionaries in Italy, Bakunin estimates that *"...Italy has a huge proletariat... It consists of two or three million urban factory workers and small artisans, and some 20 million landless peasants."* [17] Bakunin, unlike Marx, saw that the peasants could be actively won over to the side of the revolution, and, because of the numbers involved there could be no libertarian revolution in that period without the peasants.

But Bakunin did not, as is often claimed, dismiss the industrial workers. In fact, in advance of Marx and in anticipation of the factory committee movement of the Russian revolution, he insisted that *"The co-operative associations already have proven that workers are quite capable of administering industrial enterprises, that it can be done by workers elected from their midst and who receive the same wage."* [18] He was however critical of a certain layer of the British, German and Swiss working class who he believed had become a labour aristocracy that could be hostile to the interests of the proletariat as a whole.

Bakunin's view of how revolutionaries should organise is often criticised for appearing to advocate a secret dictatorship over the people. The documents on revolutionary organisation he produced in 1867 (above) and in 1868 do indeed contain an odd contradiction, captured by the quotation below.

"That association starts from the basis that revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They are, so to speak, self-made, produced by the logic of things, by the trend of events and actions... All that a well-organised society can do is, first, to play midwife to the revolution by spreading among the masses ideas appropriate to the masses' instincts, and to organise, not the Revolution's army - for the people at all times must be the army - but a sort of revolutionary general staff made up of committed, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all else true friends of the peo-

for control of working class organisations, but rather to seek to undermine the rat race itself by creating an alternative tradition of self-organisation of struggles. Such a tradition cannot be built either through attempting to guide struggles within anarchist organisations (the classic tradition of anarcho-syndicalism) or by withdrawing from broad struggles to create narrow anarchist dominated groups operating on the edges of them. Anarchists must be wherever workers are entering into struggle, attempting to influence the direction and organisational strategy of that struggle towards self-organisation. In practice this means anarchist organisations must encourage their members to join and become active in organisations of working class struggle like Trade Unions and community campaigns despite the fact that we may share nothing in common with the leadership of these organisations.

★ The Struggle Goes On

In recent years a host of grassroots movements have demonstrated not only that the class struggle is very much alive but, on single issues at least, capitalism can be defeated. Even in Ireland the struggle against Water Charges shows the continued power of ordinary people. The December 1995 French strikes against neoliberalism demonstrated the potential for these struggles to begin to develop an alternative vision of society. 1996 saw mass strikes and demonstrations in Canada, Germany, and parts of Australia where demonstrators also stormed the parliament building. If such movements are limited to being protest movements against aspects of capitalism, they also offer a very positive strategy as they were based on direct action that frequently took them outside the narrow confines of protest allowed under capitalism.

Yet it was only France which showed the potential in such struggles for the growth of anarchism. In the aftermath of the December strikes all French anarchist groups reported a marked increase in interest in anarchism and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-F [6] grew from just over 1,000 members to 6,000 by late summer of 1996. France is also where the struggle is moving from a defensive to an offensive one, the lorry drivers' strike which brought the country to a halt in November of 1996 demanded a lowering of the retirement age and working week. Contacts with French anarchists since December 1995 have indicated that a new mood is entering the workers' movement there, large numbers of people are talking about different ways of organising society.

In Britain and Ireland [7] however, while anarchists have continued to play a major role in local struggles throughout the 1990's, they have completely failed to break out of the very small circles of activists they relate to. What is more disturbing in many cases is the lack of interest in or discussion of doing so. Rather than looking for ways of winning numbers of people to anarchism, many groups have become content with providing a service to local struggles on the one hand or on the other providing commentaries for the left in general on how such struggles are (or are not) good, bad or indifferent.

In terms of national organisations, of those that existed in 1990 in Britain and

from the Bolshevik Party in 1921, to be to the forefront of attacking the revolutionaries who had risen in Kronstadt. This despite the fact that these sailors they were massacring had a programme far more in common with their platform than that of Lenin and Trotsky, who directed the massacres!

This is putting the party first, so well described by Trotsky in 1921 when he rounded on the Workers' Opposition declaring

"They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!".[5]

This is the logic behind the decades of sabotage of working class struggles by Leninists, justified by the recruiting of a few extra people into the party. This is also why gaining positions of power is so central to Leninist doctrine, so that through these positions they can control struggles - even if they lose popularity within them.

With the attraction of 'actually existing socialism' or 'degenerated workers' states' consigned to the dustbin of history, many Leninists have reconsidered their position and abandoned Leninism. Indeed it seems just about everywhere discussion groups have formed made up of ex-members of Leninist and Social-democratic organisations trying to sketch out a new left. So far these initiatives have tended to run around in circles or to partially re-invent the wheel. Few appear to have considered anarchism seriously as having already answered, at least in part, many of the 'new' questions they are now puzzling over. Sometimes because they have judged anarchism on the poor state of the local movement, but commonly due to a combination of a fear of breaking with the last idol, Marx, alongside a failure to understand that the organisational purpose of anarchist groups is completely different in aim and content to that with which they are familiar. If you are familiar with an organisational practice that constantly seeks to take things over then the anarchist method of organisation can seem worse than useless.

Anarchist organisations exist not to obtain leading positions in the organisations of the working class, but rather to achieve influence for anarchist ideas. From this point of view there is absolutely no point in loyalty towards an organisation whose ideas you do not agree with. The anarchist organisation should seek neither to absorb the whole class under its leadership nor to simply become the class by recruiting every worker regardless of their understanding of anarchism. Rather our organisation(s) need to be nuclei for anarchist ideas and organisation that will be active in all the struggles of our class and so carry these ideas into and between these struggles. Our aim must not be the creation of one big anarchist organisation through which all the struggles of our class will be conducted, but rather aiding the growth of a tradition of working class organisation that is based on direct democracy and independent of all political organisations.

The role of the anarchist organisation is not to compete in the destructive rat race

ple and not presumptions braggarts, with a capacity for acting as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the people's instinct

The numbers of such individuals, then, need not be huge. A hundred tightly and seriously allied revolutionaries will suffice for the whole of Europe. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will be enough to organise the largest of countries".[19]

This contradiction is emphasised in the last couple of lines where Bakunin seems to be suggesting that, on the one hand, two or three hundred revolutionaries are required in the larger countries but, on the other, only 100 (a smaller figure) are required for Europe (a larger area.).

This 'contradiction' appears again and again in Bakunin's writings, for instance in 1870 he was to write

"Thus the sole aim of a secret society must be, not the creation of an artificial power outside the people, but the rousing, uniting and organising of the spontaneous power of the people; therefore, the only possible, the only real revolutionary army is ... the organisation should only be the staff of this army, an organiser of the people's power, not its own... A revolutionary idea is revolutionary, vital, real and true only because it expresses and only as far as it represents popular instincts which are the result of history. To strive to foist on the people your own thoughts-foreign to its instinct-implies a wish to make it subservient to a new state... The organisation must accept in all sincerity the idea that it is a servant and a helper, but never a commander of the people, never under any pretext its manager, not even under the pretext of the people's welfare.

The organisation is faced with an enormous task: not only to prepare the success of the people's revolution through propaganda and the unification of popular power; not only to destroy totally, by the power of this revolution, the whole existing economic, social and political order; but, in addition ... to make impossible after the popular victory the establishment of any state power over the people - even the most revolutionary, even your power - because any power, whatever it called itself, would inevitably subject the people to old slavery in a new form...

We are bitter foes of all official power, even if it were ultra-revolutionary power. We are enemies of all publicly acknowledged dictatorship; we are social-revolutionary anarchists. But you will ask, if we are anarchists, by what right do we wish to and by what method can we influence the people? Rejecting any power, by what power or rather by what force shall we direct the people's revolution? An invisible force - recognised by no one, imposed by no one - through which the collective dictatorship of our organisation will be all the mightier, the more it remains invisible and unacknowledged, the more it remains without any official legality and significance.

Imagine... a secret organisation which has scattered its members in small

groups over the whole territory of the Empire but is nevertheless firmly unit-ed: inspired by a common ideal... an organisation which acts everywhere according to a common plan. These small groups, unknown by anybody as such, have no officially recognised power but they are strong in their ideal, which expresses the very essence of the people's instincts, desires and demands...

This dictatorship is free from all self-interest, vanity and ambition for it is anonymous, invisible and does not give advantage or honour or official recog-nition of power to a member of the group or to the groups themselves. It does not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official char-acter..." [20]

On the one hand Bakunin recognised that "*The future social organisation should be carried out from the bottom up".*[21] On the other hand the possibility for the cre-ation of this new society would not come about due to a spontaneous revolution but would require an international organisation of revolutionaries which would be *"cen-tralised by the idea and by the sameness of a program".*[22]

As we have seen Bakunin had some considerable experience of insurrection. He was also of course, like Marx, a disciple of Hegel and hence the dialectical method by which two apparently contradictory things would interact to create a new situa-tion/idea that was an advance on both. At this stage in his writing Bakunin was advo-cating a way of overcoming the contradiction between the goal of a libertarian soci-ety and the organisational methods needed to overthrow an authoritarian one. Other and later revolutionaries faced with this contradiction have tended to either argue for a strongly centralised party that would aim for state power or to pretend that serious organisational methods were not necessary. Bakunin was attempting to go beyond these two opposing ideas to find a new solution that satisfied reality.

Bakunin's views on revolutionary organisation can be presented as a sort of wed-ding cake with separate but informally connected tiers of revolutionaries. At the top were the '100', the general staff whose role it would be to establish and maintain the informal links between countries. They would allow some judgement of when the time was ripe for revolutionary insurrection on the one hand and on the other a means of trying to co-ordinate this insurrection. This was to be a secret (because of the danger of arrest) and (after 1868) an informal set of contacts who would attempt to influence the course of events through the power of their ideas.

Beneath this was to be a second, much larger and more open organisation. This was the Alliance and its role was primarily to introduce revolutionary ideas into the mass organisations of the proletariat, in particular through the building of regional sections of the international.

After 1868 he would come to see the base of this 'cake' as the International. The base was to be the creation of organs of working class struggle that would favour direct action and reject political (i.e. electoral) activity. The Alliance would act within the international to push these politics to the fore. This was necessary because, he wrote, the mass of the workers - being illiterate and working long hours just to sur-

ty in economic struggle and the extension of this self-activity to the political arena, have instead sought to tie the unions to the Labour party. This is of course just a reflection of the left's strategy on the economic level which, instead of encouraging workers to take direct control of their struggles, have instead directed the attention of militants towards electing left wing bureaucrats to run the union on 'their' behalf.

This pattern extends outside the workplace as well, in Britain in recent years we have seen an often obscene struggle between different left groups as to who can control working class militancy against fascism and racism. Campaign after cam-paign arises that pretends to be independent but on examination is obviously con-trolled by one organisation alone. Even where joint work occurs, large amounts of energy may be squandered in attempts to control the decision making structures of campaigns. Many activists have become demoralised and then exhausted by these bureaucratic squabbles.

★ The Party and the Class

This pattern of organisation occurred because the key thing for the authoritarian left was the relative strength of their organisation and not the level of self-activity of the class or even the strength of the class. Historical and current defeats of the working class were analysed as being due to the absence of a strong enough van-guard that was equipped with the right slogans, rather than due to a weakness of self-organisation and a reliance on minority leadership by the class. An excellent recent example of this logic was provided by Tony Cliff, the leader of one of the sur-viving Leninist groups, the British Socialist Workers Party. In 1993 mass demon-strations took place all over Britain aimed at preventing the Tories closing the remain-ing coal mines. These demonstrations however remained firmly under the control of union bureaucrats and Labour MPs with workers playing the role of a stage army to be marched up and down hills under their control.

To the SWP though, the weakness of this movement was that they did not have enough members to control it. As its leader, Tony Cliff, said at the time

"If we had 15,000 members in the SWP and 30,000 supporters the 21 October miners' demonstration could have been different. Instead of march-ing round Hyde Park socialists could have taken 40 or 50,000 people to par-liament. If that had happened the Tory MPs wouldn't have dared to vote with Michael Heseltine. The government would have collapsed." [3]

This sort of logic, which can only see the strength of the struggles of the working class in terms of the strength of the party, is precisely the same logic that kept Leninists defending policies they knew to be rubbish year after year. It was what kept Communist Parties all over the world together as the Russian tanks rolled over the working class of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968. To go further back again it was what caused the Workers' Opposition,[4] in the process of being purged

found and tested in the form of the 'western democracies'. Now it was only a question of allowing time for the rest of the world to catch up. The future was rosy since the 'peace dividend' along with the new markets and productive capacity of eastern Europe would usher in a new era of prosperity.

Five years ago the peace dividend collapsed with the 'war' against Iraq. A war that was no more than a high tech light show for western viewers, but which led to the loss of up to 200,000 [1] relatives and friends for those in Iraq. Parallel to this, civil war was brewing in Yugoslavia, and the economies of eastern Europe were collapsing, resulting in widespread poverty, civil war and - particularly for the old - a dramatically reduced life expectancy. The 'New World Order' that was coming into being, we were assured, would indeed introduce global prosperity but first some belt tightening and the removal of 'new Hitlers' was required. This of course required the maintenance of a strong military!

Three years ago this 'New World Order' received its first real resistance when rebellion [2] broke out in one of its show pieces of improvement and modernisation. Mexico was a 'model' of how developing countries which started to move from a state led to a free market economy could also reach the 'end of history' and join the first world. The Zapatista rising blew away this smoke screen to reveal an end of history that excluded most of Mexico's population. The period since has been scattered with examples of capitalism not only failing to provide for people's needs but, more importantly, people recognising this and organising on a mass scale against it. This resistance has spread to the very western countries which were supposed to have moved beyond the need for the population to take to the streets to oppose the state. History, we have learnt, is not over yet.

★ Dead and Buried

State socialism has died as an attractive alternative to anyone, that much is a welcome truth. The need for an alternative to capitalism continues to be strong. Supporters of state socialism have become dwindling cadres of various Leninist groups, 'New' social democrats indistinguishable from conservatives and the occasional dinosaur whose brain has yet to recognise that there is a difference between sloganeering about 'socialism from below' and actually organising in such a manner. The end of these organisations - which mostly served as barriers to workers organising themselves - is welcome, but there is a price to pay. The weakness of libertarian ideas in Britain and Ireland means the possibility of an alternative to capitalism died with these fake 'alternatives' in the minds of many activists. This is not terminal but the message that alternatives to capitalism, other than the state run (non-) alternatives that were on offer, exist will have to be widely spread.

Another legacy of the domination of the authoritarian left is that we are left with a tradition of working class struggle being almost immediately tied to a particular political organisation. Workplace struggles, for instance, take place through the organisational structures of the trade unions but the left, rather than encourage self-activi-

vive - would not be won to socialism through abstract ideas alone. Rather Bakunin wrote

> *"It follows then that in order to touch the heart and gain the confidence, the assent, the adhesion, and the co-operation of the illiterate legions of the proletariat - and the vast majority of proletarians unfortunately still belong in this category - it is necessary to begin to speak to those workers not of the general sufferings of the international proletariat as a whole but of their particular, daily, altogether private misfortunes. It is necessary to speak to them of their own trade and the conditions of their work in the specific locality where they live; of the harsh conditions and long hours of their daily work, of the small pay, the meanness of their employer, the high cost of living, and how impossible it is for them properly to support and bring up a family."* [23]

This was the work that Bakunin came to see as necessary in the preparation of the revolution. But he did not see the higher tiers commanding the lower, quite the opposite he also insisted that *"the peoples' revolution ... will arrange its revolutionary organisation from the bottom up and from the periphery to the centre, in keeping with the principle of liberty".* [24]

> *"As regards organisation of the Commune, there will be a federation of standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade, one per street or per district, these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."* [25]
>
> *An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set by the capital, to reorganise along revolutionary lines for a start and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of these deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces in furtherance of the same principles and to organise a revolutionary force with the capability of defeating the reaction. Not official revolutionary commissars in any sort of sashes, but rather revolutionary propagandists are to be dispatched into all the provinces and communes and particularly among the peasants who cannot be revolutionised by principles, nor by the decrees of any dictatorship, but only by the act of revolution itself, that is to say, by the consequences that will inevitably ensure in every commune from complete cessation of the legal and official existence of the state".* [26]

This is not simply a historical question. It is true that in western countries revolutionaries are in general free to sell papers and hold meetings in a manner they were generally not in Bakunin's time. Yet this liberalism from the state is largely a result of the fact that most revolutionary organisation is not seen as a serious threat.

Where revolutionaries of one form or another have been seen to be a threat, from the Black Panthers, to the Irish civil rights movement, to 1970's Italy, the gloves have come off and the full array of state oppression, including infiltration and provocation have been deployed against them. At the moment the relatively trivial threat of the Black Bloc's on the globalisation demonstrations is seeing an increasing array of state oppression being deployed, including now a fatal shooting. Bakunin's writings provide us with one starting point for looking at the apparent contradiction between wanting to create a libertarian society and needing to overthrow a powerful and authoritarian state to do so.

Building the Anti-Capitalist Movement - Organisational Choices for Anarchists and the Left

This article written in 1997 looked at the choices facing the left and the anarchist movement in terms of building a new anti-capitalist movement. Over ten years later the article retains much of its relevance, I wish it could be otherwise, both in terms of the argument it makes to the left in general and to anarchists in particular.

★ Organising Against Capitalism

Over the last few years I have taken part in many forums which have discussed the collapse of the left, the changes in capitalism and the need for a new opposition. Not all of these have been exclusively anarchist, I attended the 'Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism' organised by the Zapatistas in Chiapas in the summer of 1996 for instance, but most have been held by anarchists in Britain or Ireland. A common feature of these events is a recognition that everything has changed in the last decade, that many of yesterday's answers are discredited today and that there is a need for the construction of a new movement. Such discussions cannot remain on the theoretical level, we must start to put these ideas into practice in building a new anti-capitalist movement.

Seven years ago the Berlin wall came down, bringing to a definitive end the period of history begun by the Russian revolution in 1917. Since the 1950's this was known as the Cold War. To supporters of the Western status quo the end of this period was a signal that history had ended. Not in the sense that nothing interesting would ever happen again but rather that the most perfect model of society had been