

Nationwide Organization of Revolutionary Anarchists in the United States?

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Over 150 years of the anarchist theoretical and organizing tradition have passed, yet anarchist influence in the United States is practically non-existent. In some local contexts, we do see occasional anarchist influence, but in a nationwide context anarchists are practically irrelevant.

There has been a conversation brewing for a few years among some anarchists. This conversation has moved forward specifically in a grouping of organizations that have come together in recent years around the Class Struggle Anarchist Conferences. Since the first Class Struggle Anarchist Conference in New York City in 2008, it's been increasingly clear that these different organizations have a great deal of agreement and could be strengthened by unification into a nationwide anarchist organization.

In anticipation for an upcoming conference of these organizations that intends to found this single, nationwide organization, this article is an effort to bring together the many arguments for why such an organization is desirable. More than that, I hope to show the inspirational possibilities of such an organization in the broader anarchist movement, so that this organization can take off after its founding.

Why Anarchist Organization in the First Place?

A great deal of literature already exists on the question of anarchist specific organizations and the role of such a revolutionary organization. For those who aren't familiar with these traditions, many of the organizations already involved in this process are explicitly informed by dual-organizationalist, especifista, platformist, and syndicalist traditions. These traditions raise the importance of anarchists organizing specifically as anarchists to spread and further develop the influence and understanding of our revolutionary ideas alongside more broad-based social movements.

Given that many anarchists in the United States are increasingly informed by these traditions, I'd like to focus on the value specifically of a unified and nationwide revolutionary anarchist organization.

Mass Propaganda

An organization with hundreds of members throughout the country is capable of spreading anarchist ideas at a larger scale than we've seen from the anarchist movement in decades. We could manage and sustain national or regional agitational papers like Freedom/Libertad and Four Star Digest, as well as the more intensive theoretical literature of Ideas & Action and the Northeastern Anarchist. More importantly, with the skills of anarchist media workers around the country, we could surely move into creating high quality audio and video addressing the wide array of radical organizing already happening.

Beyond simply producing media at larger scale and more energy intensive media, we can also create the spaces for debate on ideas, tactics, and strategies within the anarchist movement that help us to unify and coordinate our efforts.

Solidarity at Scale

When anarchist organizers around the country face repression by the state or bosses, or are engaged in particularly difficult or important campaigns, the ability to coordinate national solidarity in a unified way can be instrumental. Bail or legal funds can be immediately paid off from the treasury of a nationwide organization with hundreds of regular dues-paying members. When a fight of national or international significance is happening, members could coordinate solidarity efforts around the country. When hot-spots of struggle pop up, anarchist organizers from around the country could be sent to participate in the on-the-ground organizing.

Build Local Chapters

The hardest organizing one can do is the real task of creating an organization from the ground up, developing the skills of members, finding effective work that the group can do and succeed at, and work to make all of that effort sustainable enough that it doesn't fall apart in just a few years. Many of the anarchist organizations around the country right now are started by members of other organizations that have moved to a new city and work to start groups like their previous group.

Why not work to develop an ability to help people start local chapters, train some of them in basic organizing skills, give them agitational literature to use in their town, and support them through the challenges that they will inevitably face? Why not strategically consider where we would like to devote resources and energy to creating local chapters, rather than have the anarchist movement grow more or less by accident?

Many current anarchist organizers have also written books or developed inspirational presentations and gone on speaking tours. Let's maximize the potential of these tours by giving those touring the tools to recruit people that agree into forming locals after the speaker leaves. At the very least, why not have national tools that help us to keep in touch with sympathetic people in cities where we may not be able to build locals, but might have that ability in a couple of years?

Open to Various Levels of Participation

Part of what keeps so much of the anarchist movement small and fairly homogenous is that in effect we require all participants to immediately become high-level thinkers and organizers. For most people, particularly those most affected by the disastrous consequences of the state and capitalism, constant organizing simply isn't possible. An effective organization is capable of accommodating various levels of involvement, and making it easy for members to move fluidly through those levels of involvement. A unitary nationwide organization would allow members to join without requiring that they become such effective and committed organizers as to have to build chapters immediately, but could help to ensure that whatever level of commitment they can agree to can have a positive impact. This is particularly important to anarchists that may not be surrounded by other revolutionaries in small cities, rural areas, or more than 50 miles from the Bay Area.

Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide

Can a serious revolution happen with organization only in the cities? Can the anarchist movement really have an impact on rural issues when we're incapable of supporting more isolated rural anarchists? When we talk of organizing the unorganized and building militant worker movements how do our movements continue to miss the various opportunities to work within and find the militants already organizing in immigrant and farm-worker communities?

When there is an option for isolated individual anarchists in rural communities to join up with a nationwide organization, not only can they connect with anarchist organizers in cities nearby, but with other anarchists working in rural communities throughout the entire country.

Impact Politics and Organization on a National Scale

So many of the issues that we work on are national questions. While we aren't nationalists, we do live in a political reality where many policies are decided on a national level. Opposition to US invasions for instance require nationwide opposition and organization. When those broad-based anti-war organizations are working at a national level, for anarchists to have an impact on their strategies and tactics, we need to coordinate at a national level as well. Rather than have this happen accidentally through networks of friends, why not do this purposefully on an ideological and strategic basis?

The same can be said about most major unions. We often complain the activities of workers within the major unions throughout the country don't match our political or strategic orientation. Well, why would they? We have zero capacity to coordinate the activities of revolutionaries in the rank and file of these organizations. We can't strategically choose to orient our efforts at any union larger than the IWW, and even there revolutionary anarchists often can't assert any coordinated influence. To believe that we will have any real impact on the direction of the labor movement without a nationwide organization of anarchists is to fantasize about the possibility rather than organize towards it.

Ability to Mass-Mobilize Effectively

In the case where anarchists throughout the country are trying to instigate a fight rather than influence the direction of a larger organization, we could actually decide on strategies and tactics together and mass-mobilize on a regional or national scale. Being able to turn out hundreds or even thousands without having to rely on liberal and progressive organizations could allow anarchists to influence the political and economic narrative in a purposeful and strategic way. To have the capacity to push issues forward as anarchists, we wouldn't have to continue trying to put a radical spin to an otherwise liberal effort.

Honestly, in many ways our ability to mass mobilize without the funding and support of big, liberal non-profits is the key to legitimizing our perspectives and tactics throughout social justice struggles. We can strategically decide on ways to move direct action forward as a key method of social struggle locally, regionally, and nationally.

Internationalism not Nationalism

We don't believe in nations, so why nationwide organization and not continental? The immediate response is that we do live in a political reality of nations. The politics, economics, and foreign policy largely emanate from a national level. Acknowledging this and organizing on that basis doesn't mean that we are nationalists, it means that we are organizing based in a shared reality. The Federation of Anarchists-Communists of Argentina, the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay and the anarchist Worker Solidarity Movement of Ireland are not nationalist organizations.

We should be building towards an internationally coordinated anarchist movement. Part of what anarchists in the United States can do is build a strong US organization that can confederate with allied organizations throughout the world.

Our Moment is Now!

The economic context of the United States is drastically changing and this is having an impact politically. We need to take advantage of this moment, because these moments don't come frequently. To miss this moment may mean setting the anarchist movement in the US back decades. As the nation's economy slowly implodes, wealth concentration becomes increasingly obvious to millions of people, and the social safety net gets destroyed it becomes clear to millions that the status quo can't maintain itself and that drastic change is necessary. We are foolish if we think that capitalists, fascists, authoritarian communists, and others won't be organizing in massive and coordinated ways to take advantage of the moment and manipulate millions of people to fight against their own interests. If we don't make building anarchist organization on a nationwide scale a priority, than we should understand that we are effectively surrendering the moment to other forces.

Instead let's take the challenges being thrown at us as an opportunity to build and legitimize to millions our visions of a revolutionary anarchist society. In the coming months, I hope that we will be announcing the creation of a nationwide US-based revolutionary anarchist organization. Let's get behind this effort quickly and powerfully to show that our ideas are more than just ideas, but an inspired road-map of mass struggle to a genuinely free and equal world.

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