James Herod
A Great Plains Association for Anarchy?
A Proposal, with Discussion
November 2002; revised March 2007

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Contents

to handle. I don't know. But if they could be managed, I think they would be valuable.

7. Maintain a Web Site

This could at the minimum serve as a bulletin board to announce coming events. It could also serve as a substitute for a printed newsletter. Hopefully, however, the site could eventually be built up into a rich resource, with lots of links, archived essays, discussion boards, and the like.

chists offer plenty of suggestions about building militant working class movements.

4. Operate a Bookmobile

This project would require a large van or small truck, money to acquire the original stock of books, and several people to drive it around to various events and meetings. Bookmobiles are great. In a way they are better than bookstores, in that they can be used to take the literature to where the action is. The bookmobile could be a walk-in, as well as having the equipment to do book tables. As far as I know, our region doesn't have a large, well-established radical bookstore, although a couple of initiatives are under way. Bookstores take a lot of time and effort, and are expensive, and hard to keep alive. A Bookmobile might be a more manageable project for us.

5. Sponsor Public Debates

Given the very diverse tendencies existing in the contemporary anarchist movement, broadly defined, not to mention in the larger progressive and radical movement as a whole, it would be useful I think to sponsor formal debates between articulate representatives of the various tendencies. These debates could be recorded and transcribed and made available in streaming audio and in printed form on the internet. This would be a valuable service to the movement I believe. Maybe two or three or four debates a year, scattered around the area.

6. Organize Annual Gatherings

The anarchist gathering last June in Lawrence was impressive. Of course that was a national event. I know it must have taken a lot of work to put together. Perhaps annual gatherings, on a smaller scale, just for our region, would still be too much

(Prepared for the Kansas Anarchist Caucus, November 9, 2002, Lawrence, Kansas.)

Discussion

Association not Federation

I have used the term Association instead of the usual term Federation because federation, in its current usage, implies hierarchy. It is based on the election of 'recallable, mandated delegates'. Even though the people setting up these recent federations (Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists, Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives–Great Lakes Region, Northwest Anarchist-Communist Federation, and now the Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy) constantly claim to be committed to direct democracy, they immediately give it up by instituting, not direct democracy, but a representative democracy, based on the election of delegates. They delude themselves that they have solved the problem of how to achieve direct democracy in social units larger than a small peer circle by saying that their elected delegates are recallable and mandated.

Both these ideas are mirages. Even representatives in Congress are recallable, every four years. The only change the federationists have made is to say that the delegates can be recalled at any time. But in order to do this we would have to have functioning deliberative bodies to decide whether or not a delegate had deviated far enough from established policy (and we would have to have established policy) to warrant recall. And if we have such functioning deliberative bodies, why have delegates at all? Why not just decide the issues in our deliberative assemblies? As for the idea that a delegate can be 'mandated', I argue that this is an illusion, and that it is impossible to mandate a delegate, because once a discussion starts on a particular issue, everything is open. It is impossible for

the decision maker (delegate) not to exercise personal judgement on the issues as the debate proceeds. What is urgently needed is a thoroughgoing theoretical critique of representation per se, and a solid theoretical defense of direct democracy as preferable to representation.

There is a way to keep direct democracy and use it to form associations to cover larger social units and territories. How? Through the negotiation of treaties (agreements, pacts). Groups which want to affiliate together to accomplish a goal which cannot be successfully pursued by each group acting separately, could negotiate a pact or agreement to cover the details of their affiliation. This way the decision making power remains in the small face-to-face deliberative groups, and is not given up to representatives or delegates. The draft agreement may go back and forth for some time amongst the groups involved, until an agreement is hammered out. This assumes of course that the groups involved actually vote, and have established procedures for making decisions, and are willing to honor the decisions thus fashioned. So-called affinity groups which reject voting and meetings altogether obviously have no way to participate in such a process. Nor do extreme individualists who will not honor any collective decision, unless they just happen to want to.

Actually, there is another way to apply direct democracy to large units. If a proposal could be worked out, then it could be voted on directly, by everyone, each in their separate group. The proposal would be discussed and debated locally, but the votes would be tallied across all groups, no matter how geographically disbursed they were. The catch here of course, is getting the concrete proposals to vote on. And this would involve us in a negotiating process quite like the one discussed above, for negotiating treaties or pacts. So perhaps this is just saying the same thing in a different way.

Also, if such a vote were taken, with the votes having been tallied across all associated units, it would mean, obviously,

might be thought of as the founding of an anarchist intentional community, hopefully in an urban setting. We could then starting learning from this experience, and use it as an example for other similar initiatives. I'm not talking about houses that are used as crash pads for students, or winter quarters for traveler kids, but permanent residences, for people who are rooted in their communities.

2. One Neighborhood Assembly

There must be at least one neighborhood, in this huge region, where the people who are living there would be interested in setting up neighborhood assembly, to try to start taking control over their lives. Our task would be to find it, and to help bring the assembly into being. Alternatively, if enough anarchists happen to be living in the same neighborhood, or if enough anarchists could move into the same neighborhood, they could initiate an assembly themselves. The point is just to get the first one established, and then to start learning from the experience, and to start promoting this social alternative.

3. Networking with Worker-Owned Workplaces

This will only be a start, toward devising a program to struggle for worker managed workplaces across the board. Of course, only a few of these will ever come into being legally. The rest will come as the result of takeovers, at some point. But for now, we could try to identify the existing worker-owned outfits in our region, establish contact with them, see what we can learn from them, and how we can help them. We might also try to identify any other enterprises in the region that might be ripe for legal transfer to worker ownership. The *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter* follows all these matters closely, and of course, the numerous publications of the class war anar-

particular project, and feel they have time and resources to devote to it, will volunteer. All these volunteers will then meet together to hammer out an agreement about how to do the project. Who will do what? Where will the resources come from? How exactly is the project defined? And so forth. The list is obviously suggestive, not definitive. The Caucus may want to add or subtract from it. Obviously, a project can go forward only if there are enough people who want to work on it. But these are conceivably projects that we are capable of accomplishing at this time. This process of affiliating around particular projects will not demand from us endless hours of work setting up and running an organization, which, given our sparse numbers and resources, we could hardly sustain anyway. We will not have a regional organization for which we will have to keep membership rolls, collect dues, publish a newsletter, or keep accounts. Instead, we can strike directly for some of the things we want. These are projects that might require some cooperation across groups. I do not list specific direct actions, not because I don't believe in them, but because I figure they will be carried out by those interested in doing them. I don't list demonstrations and rallies, because I think they absorb far too much of our energy as it is. (Demonstrations against the coming war in Iraq represent a reasonable exception though, as a way to try to stop this particular ruling class atrocity, given our otherwise overall powerlessness.)

1. An Expanded Household

Surely the means exist to establish at least one expanded household in the region, based on cooperative living, mutual aid, direct democracy, and so forth. I'm thinking of about twenty-five to fifty people, living in several adjacent houses, or else in a larger building, with residential facilities for individuals, couples, and families, with shared incomes, some communal cooking, a common room, a workshop, and the like. This

that a prior decision would have to have been made about voting procedures, and a commitment made to abide by decisions taken following that procedure. The most pressing decision would be whether to select simple majority rule, or to have, say, a two-thirds majority rule. In the first procedure described above, for negotiating treaties amongst autonomous groups, the so-called consensus decision making procedure could be used in the individual groups. This would not be possible if individual votes were tallied across all groups.

Consensus decision making, by the way, is actually not a procedure based on unanimity, as the name implies, but just a way of rejecting simple majority rule and working for the largest majority possible on a particular issue (and hence its claim to have rejected and overcome majority rule is false, since even a vote of 99 to 1 is majority rule). It is also a procedure, it should be noted, that breaks down in the face of severe disagreements (as does any previously agreed to decision making procedure).

I am unaware that there has ever been an association covering a larger territory (municipality, region, nation) that has been based on direct democracy, rather than delegates or representatives. But there very well could be. It's not impossible, although it would take a lot of hard work and creativity to make this breakthrough.

It seems obvious to me that if there are a dozen or so groups in the Great Plains Region who want to affiliate to form an association to accomplish certain things they could not accomplish alone, then the way to proceed is to negotiate a treaty, one that each group can agree to and abide by. But what will the agreement consist of? What are the details? What things do we want to accomplish through such an association? But first, before trying to answer these questions, a few asides.

Possible Purposes of Such an Association

Perhaps as good a way as any to get into this, is simply to list the objectives set forth by the recently established Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy. It seems to be a fairly comprehensive list.

"(1) Popularizing a call for non-hierarchy, confederated direct democracies, communal economics, social freedom, and an ecological sensibility; (2) Helping to build revolutionary movements aimed at fundamental social transformation; (3) Confronting hierarchical institutions, including but not limited to capitalism and the state; (4) Challenging all systems of oppression – including but not limited to racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism – within society as well as our own movements; (5) Demonstrating active solidarity with movements of oppressed peoples as well as other anti-authoritarians throughout the world via collaborative campaigns of mutual interest; (6) Further developing our own analyses and ability to think critically, as well as our reconstructive vision and strategies, and advancing them within social movements; and (7) Creating a dual power of strong resistance movements and liberatory counter institutions that inspire and empower people to take directly democratic control over the decisions that affect their lives."

Well, here is a list of possible objectives. Is this what we want? Please note that except for their call for creating "liberatory counter institutions", which is tucked away in the last item (does this reflect the priority they give it?), none of their objectives is directly concerned with actually establishing a new social order. Please note also that work is not even mentioned, unless it is implied in the term communal economics. Nor is wage-slavery even included in their list of oppressions (they mean something else by classism).

cept and what to reject. Unrelenting examination of everything. This is the way to go.

In light of all of the above, and given that anarchists in the Great Plains region number in the dozens, not in the hundreds or thousands, I guess I'll back off from even calling for a formal Association at this time, based on a negotiated general treaty or pact, and will instead settle for a loose affiliation. I guess it's pretty clear that I don't recommend a membership federation with a complicated internal structure, not for us anyway, at this time, and perhaps not for anyone ever, although I do of course value the work that the Federations are doing. Naturally, anarchists are free to construct formally organized Federations if they want to and feel that they are valuable. Nevertheless, I recommend instead, for the time being, a loose affiliation around specific projects. The first three projects listed below are inspired of course by the revolutionary anarchist strategy I outlined in *Getting Free.*

P.S.

I have explored in greater detail the implications of an anarchist strategy based on establishing neighborhood, workplace, and household assemblies in my small book, *Getting Free: A Sketch of an Association of Democratic, Autonomous Neighborhoods and How to Create It.* This work is available on the net at http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_george/Strategy/GettingFree .

A Proposal

This is a proposal for a loose affiliation of individuals and groups in the Midwest Great Plains Region around specific projects. Individuals and groups who want to participate in a

They pay lip service to it, just about the way syndicalists pay lip service to community.

This whole split in the anarchist movement has simply got to be overcome. These are not mutually exclusive strategies. It should be obvious that we have to get control of all aspects of our lives. Do we want an anarchist society organized around the 'world of work' we have inherited from capitalists? Certainly not. Do we want our decision-making structures for self-governing our activities to be based on this inherited division of labor? Certainly not. We do want self-managed projects (production, research, education, culture), but we also want self-governed neighborhoods. Obviously, at least to me, the community as a whole, and its self-government, through directly democratic assemblies, will have to have authority over any particular project in it. But if municipalists cannot recognize that we have to fight for workers control of workplaces, in the here and now, and if syndicalists cannot recognize that, under anarchy, the whole community, through the decisions it takes in its deliberative assemblies, takes priority over any given workplace, then I guess the split will continue.

Critical Thinking, not Liberal Pluralism

Rather frequently these days, in the ongoing disputes about primitivism versus syndicalism versus libertarian municipalism versus crimethinc, someone will bemoan the argument by saying that they we should let it be. They are all okay. Stop arguing. Just accept everyone. This is an expression of the sentiments of liberal pluralism. It is a call for the suspension of critical judgement. It's the "I'm okay, you're okay" philosophy. You do your thing and I'll do mine. Sorry. Not for me. I don't think we should ever suspend critical judgement of anything, or anyone, or any belief. Everything is not okay. Some things, people, and ideas must be opposed, and it is only by exercising our capacity to think and judge that we can sort out what to ac-

Time Spent Organizing Ourselves (as Anarchists) is Time Not Spent Reconstituting Society

The most obvious objection to putting time, energy, and resources into organizing ourselves, as anarchists, is that we are thereby operating one step removed from actually making a revolution. In order to actually make a revolution, defeat capitalism, and establish anarchy, we would have to take decision making away from the ruling class and start governing our own lives. This can only be done by getting control of all aspects of our lives, but especially by self-managing our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our residences. Thus, if we were attempting to establish neighborhood assemblies, workplace assemblies, and household assemblies, we would be directly attacking and undermining capitalism while simultaneously building anarchy. Anything else, while possibly being useful (things like propaganda, or agitation against particular ruling class offenses) falls short of our ultimate goal.

You might argue, and many have, that the time is not right for setting up neighborhood or workplace assemblies or seizing our residences, and that therefore the best we can do now is to organize ourselves together, as anarchists, in order to more effectively agitate for anarchy. But is this really true? Is it really true that all we can do right now is agitate for anarchy, and not actually take concrete steps to establish it? Already in the United States there are about 1500 worker-owned businesses. Perhaps some of those are located in the Great Plains. We could be working with them, helping them to network, and encouraging the spread of this form. Some of us could surely be taking steps in this direction in our own workplaces. Similarly, there must be at least a few neighborhoods, in this huge region, that are ripe for the establishment of neighborhood assemblies. And as for establishing cooperative, expanded, directly democratic households, I know there are many opportunities already at hand for doing this. An Organization of Anarchists could at

least agitate for these goals, if it only would. As far as I'm aware though, the goals of the existing Federations are much vaguer.

It's true of course that not many people believe in or even know about anarchy. But is propaganda the best way to spread knowledge of this social alternative? Wouldn't the actual establishment of some examples in real life, and then the advertisement of these examples, be a better way to proceed than just propagandizing abstract theoretical principles?

If the main purpose of forming an organization of anarchists is only to propagandize for anarchy, then we at least have to take note of the fact that such propaganda can be done, and is being done, by all sorts of people – film makers, publishers, journalists, novelists, webmasters, and so forth. You don't need a regional organization of anarchists to agitate for anarchism. All of us, no matter what our station in life, can do this. Of course, so can a regional association. It might even get good at it. And this would be useful. But is propaganda really the best that we can do at this point? Aren't we in fact capable of taking more concrete steps, right now, to establish anarchy? This is what we have to decide. Will the establishment of a regional association of anarchists advance or postpone the actual setting up of anarchy?

On Counter-Institutions

Having lived through and participated in a whole historical movement which established hundreds of "counter-institutions", I think I can be excused for being rather skeptical about their usefulness, at least of the kinds that we established. Food co-ops, day care centers, and bike shops are basically service initiatives, designed to meet some human need. They are not inherently revolutionary, in that they don't seriously challenge the existing system. Of course they can be run democratically, and they can provide superior service and products, but that's about as far as they can go. Educational experiments, like

mass working class movement. And if such a movement does emerge, they hope to radicalize it, and push it in a revolutionary direction. What direction is that? Well, toward the seizure of the means of production, that is, to a massive takeover by workers of their workplaces (factories, offices, stores), wherein workers will manage these workplaces themselves, through councils, without bosses. What happens next? How will the society as a whole be organized? This is where the plan breaks down, to my mind. They want these workplace councils to be federated, using delegates, by industry and section, into municipal, regional, and national councils, with one supreme national council of councils at the top. Such a plan was outlined by Sylvia Pankhurst in 1920 in her *Constitution for British Soviets* (although Pankhurst did add, uniquely, a provision for household soviets). Basically the same scheme appears in numerous anarcho-syndicalist documents. So all this militancy of class war anarchists (and scorn for those who aren't, I might add) is devoted to bringing into being an undesirable social structure, one that is based on hierarchy, and one that could never work.

On the other hand, I find it hard to understand how libertarian municipalists can downplay the world of work the way they do. The Alliance statement mentions the workplace only as one among many entities ("schools, workplaces, social movements") in the "social sphere" (which they distinguish from the "political sphere" – another false set of categories). Well, surely, workplaces are of a very different order and magnitude than schools, or social movements, or anything else (churches, clubs, families, or what have you). Work (wage-slavery) is an overwhelming force in our lives. Most adults spend most of their lives at work, or in supportive housework, or in looking for work, or in recovering from work. The idea that we can defeat capitalism without getting control of workplaces is ludicrous. Yet, for libertarian municipalists, organizing at the workplace is not a prominent part of their strategy, if it is there at all.

Neighborhood versus Workplace Organizing: A False Choice

I find it hard to understand how syndicalists can continue to believe that only people who have jobs can make a revolution, that the workplace is the most important arena overshadowing all others, and that seizure of the means of production is the only revolutionary path. This means that they have failed to grasp the significance of the 'Wages for Housework' campaign that women launched in Italy in the 70s, which demonstrated conclusively that housework is an essential component of wage-slavery. The wage-earner depends on the backup at home. It means also that they have missed the concept, coming also from Italy during the same period, from the 'autonomen' movement, of the 'social factory', which claims that the entire society, under late capitalism, has been incorporated into the production process. It means they have missed the significance of the organization of the unemployed in contemporary Argentina. And missed the strong critiques of unions per se that have been emerging for some time. And missed the critique of 'work' itself, as being a capitalist category which should not be used as our prime organizing principle. It also means that they are still tied to an image of an anarchist society as being composed of federated structures of workers councils, with 'community' taking a back seat, or thrown in, as an afterthought. And since these federated structures, by industry, are precisely that, federated, using delegates, it means that syndicalists have not embraced the idea of direct democracy. This is a model for anarchy put forward a century ago by the anarcho-syndicalists of that period. I once asked a wobbly, sort of off-handedly, how he thought anarchy would eventually be organized. He replied that it would be based on the IWW Constitution. Can you imagine!

The general goal of class war anarchists is well known. They hope to encourage (stimulate, facilitate) the emergence of a

free schools, go somewhat further, in that they can at least try to educate children about anarchy, or at least about radical social philosophy, and can be based on a freer, superior philosophy of child rearing and education. But we can't destroy capitalism and establish anarchy just through education, especially schools. If fact, in many cases we would be better off to simply abandon schools. Bookstores fall into a somewhat different category though, as they can be good weapons in the fight against bourgeois cultural hegemony, as can radical newspapers, magazines, and journals. The independent media (radio, television, and internet broadcasting and publishing) are also quite powerful tools for challenging capitalism, and are sometimes used for that purpose. They are also used of course by left liberals, social democrats, and progressive populists to agitate for their agendas, which for the most part do not include the destruction of capitalism.

If food co-ops, day care centers, and such were part of a campaign by a distinct neighborhood to achieve self-government and autonomy, escape the labor market (and wage-slavery) by switching to cooperative labor, and to reduce reliance on the capitalist market, then they would be revolutionary. But the existing so-called counter-institutions are not part of such neighborhood initiatives. They are projects run by radicals living all over town. The project itself can be located anywhere in town. Virtually all the existing food co-ops, day care centers, bike shops, bookstores, clinics, radical research projects, independent newspapers and magazines, pirate radios, community gardens, and food kitchens, are run like this. Their organizers are residentially dispersed, living individually, in couples, or in small groups, and come together for the express purpose of working on a given project.

Food Not Bombs, to take but one example, although partially run and founded by anarchists, is not a revolutionary program. For anarchists to be using their time, energy, and resources to feed the hungry is no more revolutionary than for christian

churches to do so, or the Salvation Army, or the government itself. Anarchists can be revolutionary only by attacking and destroying the system that generates hungry people, not by trying to feed those hungry people, although of course it is a nice humanitarian gesture. There is a church in my town which runs a free lunch program for the homeless and hungry every day, a regular cafeteria actually, with good hot food.

The Salvation Army runs a similar program, with two meals a day plus an overnight shelter. These are praiseworthy projects, but they are not revolutionary.

Strange to say, neighborhood assemblies, workplace assemblies, or household assemblies are almost never included in the list of so-called counter-institutions. They are certainly so, although I would rather not use the term institution for free social forms. If our focus were on establishing such assemblies, the issue of "counter-institutions" would be a different matter entirely.

Should We Negotiate a Statement of Political Beliefs?

Well, with primitivists, crimethincers, extreme individualists, syndicalists, municipal libertarians, affinity groupers, class war militants, street activists, and god knows what, all claiming to be anarchists, what could such a statement possibly express. For all these tendencies to be included in one coherent, unified, statement of belief, the statement would have to be so vague as to be meaningless.

Usually, an organization is established to achieve an expressly stated purpose. But if the organization is primarily for propaganda purposes, then obviously there needs to be a statement of the beliefs that are being promulgated. Clearly, primitivists and syndicalists cannot join together in one organization to agitate for anarchy, because their versions of anarchy are so at odds. Therefore, what obviously happens is that they

establish anarchy. They are both one step removed from actually making a revolution. The best they can do is agitate for revolution, not actually do it.

Affinity groups might be useful for certain things, like going to demonstrations, or carrying out certain small scale projects. But what good are they for organizing neighborhood or workplace assemblies? They might spearhead a drive to establish such assemblies, and join the assemblies if they succeed, at which point they would become just members of the assembly, not an affinity group. But of course, affinity groups, as presently operating, are not even interested in such assemblies. Too many institutions, they say. They are interested in an "organic" society. They refuse to even think about social structures beyond the eight to ten member affinity group. I can't imagine how they think we are going to meet even our basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health care, or how we are going to become self-governing, just by having affinity groups. And I don't think they have imagined it either.

Federationists, on the other hand, are busy organizing themselves as anarchists, not as human beings living in anarchy. They want to get rid of capitalism, the state, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, heterosexism, ageism, sectarianism, imperialism, and so forth, and they can describe with considerable philosophical grandeur what they want to replace these with. But when it comes to the actual social forms that are going to embody these grand philosophical principles, it's pretty much a blank slate. Federationists argue endless over strategy to achieve something that they have not yet even concretely conceived. So how can we expect to get anywhere acting like this?

a General Assembly. So why should it be bound by decisions taken there?

I do not believe that such structures are compatible with direct democracy.

[Note: In the original document I had at this point a discussion of Nefac's decision making procedures, which I had taken from their written documents posted on the internet. They promptly informed me (this was back in the fall of 2002) that my description of their practices were wrong, because their practices had changed and evolved, and therefore the posted documents were no longer accurate. I learned that they had invented a novel way to make directly democratic regional decisions for certain kinds of issues in between their annual assemblies. We exchanged several letters about their practice. I have a written description of those procedures, and when I have time to dig it out, I'll rewrite that section and re-insert it into this document, after checking it out for accuracy with Nefac of course. The section immediately preceding was not in the original, but was made up mostly from paragraphs in the old Nefac section. These are in fact the only revisions in the document. Anyway, for now I want to get this up on my website for use in the current discussions about setting up a northeast anarchist network.]

Affinity Group versus Formal Organization: A Debate Wide of the Mark

Both sides in the ongoing contemporary debate about affinity groups versus formal organization are wide of the mark, as far as I'm concerned. Neither form can defeat capitalism and

each have their own newspapers and magazines and organizations to push their own particular agenda. How could it be otherwise?

The Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy, for example, explicitly excludes a whole tendency. They write: "We nevertheless reject eco-philosophies that blame 'technology', 'population', or 'civilization' as the root cause of ecological problems. Such philosophies misdiagnose mere symptoms as the total disease, and can lead to anti-humanist and racist conclusions." I take it that this refers to primitivism.

In the Northeastern Federation's statement of Aims & Principles, they discuss Anarcho-Communism, Capitalism, Class Struggle, the State, Patriarchy, Racism, Queer Liberation, Ecology, Imperialism, National Liberation, Workers Self-Organization, Social Revolution, and Anarchist Organization. These are 'class struggle' anarchists, with a focus on the working class, and a belief that a revolutionary organization is necessary at this point. They write: "We believe that, if only to wage the battle of ideas, anarchist organizations are necessary. … The anarchist organization is neither a party, nor a self-proclaimed vanguard, but an active minority in the working class. It is a rallying point taking part in the theoretical and practical fight against all authoritarian ideology." The Great Lakes Federation, and the West Coast Federation, I take it, are coming out of a similar orientation.

The Manifesto of the Alliance covers much the same ground as the Northeastern Federation's statement, but with slightly different emphases. They discuss Confederations and Direct Democracy, Communal Economics, Social Freedom, White Supremacy and Racism, Patriarchy and Sexism, Classism, Heterosexism and the Gender-Binary System, and Ecological Sensibility. They too believe in the necessity of an organization. "The vehicle that we believe offers us the greatest foundation from which to begin to actualize our vision is our revolutionary organization… It may provide us with a framework to further

develop our ideas, share resources, and unify our action in our struggle for a free society." Although I don't know for sure (that is, I don't know who wrote these documents), I would guess that the Alliance mainly reflects the orientation toward social ecology and libertarian municipalism of those surrounding the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont. Although they mention the workplace of course, and include in their statement a good discussion of capitalism and commodification, their emphasis is more on community and municipalities.

Primitivists, crimethincers, individualists, and affinity groupers aren't establishing such federations because they hardly even believe in organization at all, beyond the affinity group that is, but certainly not in regional federations.

Comments on the Founding Documents of the Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy

The most striking thing about these documents (available at www.afadd.org) is that while they devote eighteen pages (one for the Mission statement, eight for the Manifesto, nine for the By-Laws) to describing their program in the abstract, only a few sentences are allocated to describe the actual social forms they would like to create (not counting the 'revolutionary organization', which is outlined in excruciating detail in nine pages). They write: "We work toward the implementation of direct democracy in both the social sphere (schools, workplaces, social movements, etc.) and political sphere (neighborhood assemblies, confederal councils, autonomous municipalities, etc.)." Then they say that "these directly democratic bodies should be based on community charters", but they don't say where the charters are going to come from. They also say that these bodies need to be "confederated across geographical boundaries," but they don't go into detail about how to do this.

I've noticed this before in the writings of social ecologists: they are long on philosophy but short on concrete details. In

its demise. The New American Movement was also similarly organized, I believe. It is a fairly typical structure.

But this structure has severe problems of accountability. The main ones are: (a) holding the local chapters accountable to the decisions taken at the General Assembly, and (b) holding the National Office accountable to the decisions taken at the General Assembly. In the real world, the permanent bodies that administer an organization on a daily basis end up wielding a lot of power and giving a lot of direction to the organization. This is because the difference between administrative decisions and policy is not all that clear. Many decisions have to be taken between General Assemblies, and almost any one of them can have policy implications. So the functioning of the National Office is already suspect, from the point of view of direct democracy, because of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of separating administrative from policy decisions, as well as from the fact that it is made up of elected officers who are making decisions on behalf of the general membership.

There is also simply the question of interpreting the policy directives as applied to day to day practical affairs. Then there is the question of willful bending or ignoring of General Assembly decisions by the administrative bodies, for whatever reason. Then there is the fact that the groups making up the organization tend to have minds of their own. So for them to always shape their activities so that they are in accordance with General Assembly decisions is not always so simple. In practice, Local Chapters always tended toward autonomy, and often explicitly argued that they should be completely autonomous and not restricted by decisions taken either in the National Office or at the General Assembly. This was the New Left, after all, a movement which refurbished and relaunched the idea of participatory democracy.

There was also the question of the quorum needed at the General Assembly in order to set policy for the entire organization. Sometimes entire Local Chapters would be missing from

is the best course to follow, and not blindly following some Manifesto. There is a flaw somewhere in the push for ideological unity, although of course each of us should try to persuade as many people as we can to our side of the argument. But wouldn't we be better off trying to win agreement on a procedure for resolving disagreements, that is on a social order based on deliberative assemblies through which we can air our disputes and decide upon a course of action, instead of striving for ideological agreement around a particular Manifesto?

Of course, disagreement can emerge, and has emerged, about even having such deliberative assemblies. Primitivists, Crimethincers, and Individualists are not interested in them at all. I myself published a brief sketch of what I thought anarchy would look like. Hardly anyone is interested in it. Too rigid they say. Too many institutions. Too claustrophobic. Too rational. Too cold. And so it goes. I guess there is no other way, than for a person or group to put forward a program, and then try to promulgate it and win adherents.

Problems of Accountability in a Typical New Left Organization

I belonged to a New Left organization for about four years, from 1968 to 1972, called the Committee of Returned Volunteers. It was structured as follows: there were numerous Local Chapters, an annual General Assembly which was the final decision-making body of the organization and which set general policy, and a National Office which ran things in between the annual General Assemblies. It was eventually torn asunder by tensions between these three entities. Fortunately, we disbanded, with the wind down of the war and the drastic shrinking of the movement, before we actually imploded.

Although I'm not an expert on the Students for a Democratic Society, it is my impression that it was based on a similar structure, a structure which I believe was partially responsible for

other words, they are busy setting up a complicated 'revolutionary organization' to achieve a new social order ('freedom and direct democracy') when they haven't even figured out what it looks like in concrete detail, or envisioned the actual social forms through which it will be expressed, or how these social forms will function.

My first impression upon reading their By-Laws, a detailed, nine-page document, was: "My God, hundreds of radicals could spend their entire lives keeping this thing up and running." And all this effort would be going, not to keeping anarchy itself alive, but to keeping a 'revolutionary organization' alive. I wish they had devoted as much theoretical energy to the problem of how the neighborhood and workplace assemblies are going to work as to how their revolutionary organization is going to work. We shouldn't forget that generations of radicals poured their lives into building unions and parties of various kinds, but to little avail.

We anarchists are being way too timid. We need to be bolder. "The era of representative democracy is coming to an end." (Peter Mandelson via John Pilger). State structures, and unions and national political parties, are losing legitimacy all over the world, sometimes dramatically so, as in Argentina. People everywhere are fed up with being oppressed and hunger for the power to govern their own lives. But instead of trying to envision what a world anarchist society would look like, we spend our time arguing about the internal structures of 'revolutionary organizations,' or whether to even have them. We are missing the boat.

I do admit though, that this is the most detailed attempt I have seen so far to describe how direct democracy might function in larger territorial units. I'm not sure they have succeeded, but they had a good go at it. I've read the document carefully, but I'm confused as to how the Confederation Spokescouncil of the Alliance works, "the primary decision-making mechanism". Perhaps they have a clearer picture of it in their minds than

they managed to get down on paper or that I managed to comprehend. As I understand it, each local picks two spokespeople, who "are expected to spoke for their local during monthly spokescouncil conference calls." Do these spokespeople only report votes already taken in their locals or do they actually make decisions in the name of the locals? These By-laws have some other good features, besides the conference calls. They tally individual votes across locals (I discussed this idea briefly above), that is, they use referenda. They rotate responsibilities. And so forth.

This is a model, if it could be refined, and simplified, and cleansed of the 'delegate' problem, that might work for any voluntary association we might want to establish in any field of interest – a chess society, a scientific project, an association of architects, a regional association of clarinetists. There will be thousands of such associations in a free society, and they will need to operate on the basis of direct democracy, not through representatives. Perhaps this document is a first step in the right direction for achieving this goal, although in its present form it is seriously flawed and way too complex.

I don't think the model will work though for our key decision-making assemblies (neighborhood, workplace, household) in a real-life anarchy. There can be no Coordinating Committee to administer these. There cannot be annual conferences, nor most of the other bodies and procedures described in these By-Laws. Conference calls would not be a good way for neighborhood assemblies to coalesce or associate. Conference calls are not even an option in most regions of the world. Tallies of individual votes across assemblies, however, might be achieved with the appropriate technology, assuming of course a way could be found to formulate propositions to be voted on. I still prefer, though, the process of negotiating treaties as the best way to keep decision-making solidly located in our local assemblies while also giving us a way to coalesce into larger associations for certain purposes. In some cases, if necessary, delegates could be sent to regional treaty negotiating conferences. But the results would have to be taken back for ratification to the local assemblies, and keep on being taken back until every neighborhood assembly agreed to the treaty.

Shouldn't we anarchists, at least those of us who are in a position to do so, be striking directly to create the social forms we need to live autonomously, rather than pouring our energies into setting up and running structurally complicated 'revolutionary organizations'?

Another feature of the Alliance deserves comment. Membership is based on "general agreement with AFADD's by-laws, principles, manifesto and all other core AFADD documents." This is an attempt to achieve ideological unity. So what happened is that a small group of people sat down and wrote up a Manifesto. Now they are attempting to recruit people who agree with their Manifesto into their organization. Membership in the Alliance is pretty tightly controlled. In this way they hope to keep the organization on a certain course, and to prevent it from going off in directions the original founders do not like, like into primitivism or crimethinc. They have a right to do this of course. It happens all the time, and is pretty much inherent to the process of establishing any membership organization.

But if they think they can thus prevent the possibility of a split, they are going to be sadly disillusioned. Serious disagreements can emerge, even among the original drafters of the Manifesto, due to changing circumstances or new historical events. The response of the organization to these new circumstances and events will have to be hammered out. Hence, the inevitability of disagreement, and the possibility even of a split in the organization. The history of parties, of left parties in particular, is replete with such splits.

Splits are not inherently bad. They might even be good. For they show that people are thinking critically, for themselves, and are arguing seriously about their politics and about what