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Seeing the Inadequacies of the Strategy Proposals of the Anarchist Communist Federation (UK)

James Herod

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original essay, in that brief sketch on anarchist strategy, as well as in my little book, *Getting Free*.) I had intended to discuss the implications of the events in Argentina for anarchist strategy and as a refutation of the strategy you are advancing; the neighborhood assemblies there did not come into being because of the intervention of 'the revolutionary organization', and if such an organization had tried to intervene it would probably have been booted out, and rightly so. I was going to point out that what we need most are regional associations, formed through negotiated treaties not federations based on delegates, of actually existing anarchist neighborhood assemblies, workers councils, and housing co-ops, not federations of free-floating anarchists.

But I'm going to break this off instead. Much of the pamphlet I agree with, but there is just so much language, and so many concepts, that I find offensive, that it's pointless to go on with this.

Yours in Struggle,
James Herod

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How on earth is the working class going to do this? It is not organized, is not a single body, doesn't have a central committee, or an administrative head. It is mostly an aggregate of atomized individuals, except perhaps for a few unions. So who is going to invite 'the revolutionary organisation' over, to be used by them. This is in fact a pretty nonsensical statement. You know, I just can't shake the feeling that you all are vanguardists at heart, but struggle mightily not to seem so. Otherwise, why would you write such a sentence? You are trying to build a revolutionary party to make the revolution. You don't think a revolution can be made without such an organization/party. You have jettisoned the goal of seizing state power, and you have added a demand for internal democracy. But otherwise, everything is just the same as in the leninist vanguard party, all the same attitudes, concepts, and polemics.

And you know what else, I've suddenly lost interest in going on with this commentary. I'm a little disgusted with myself for having spent all this time and effort commenting, *yet again*, on this pamphlet of yours (and I'm only halfway through it), especially since no one will read these remarks except possibly a few people in your organization (if I'm lucky), and the likelihood of them influencing you in any serious way is pretty remote. There were other things that I wanted to comment on. I was dismayed that you seem to have picked up using the term 'left' in a derogatory way, like the so-called post-left anarchists in the US, thus excluding anarchism from the left. I was puzzled by your quasi-attack on the concept of direct action. I did appreciate a lot your critique of individualism, which is a virtual scourge in the anarchist movement here. I am totally against your plans to combat your authoritarian opponents in the movement "on a physical level". I had planned to indicate how I think anarchy will come about, how we can achieve it, but I'll do that in some other context. (Actually I already did that in my

work in” or to ”work inside” other organizations? For example, let’s say that in a small town in England you have a chapter of Anarchist Federation with twenty members. Is each member going to be assigned another organization to join, to try to influence it from within?

Now, if this were done secretly, it would obviously be very bad, very manipulative. But you have insisted that all this is in the open, and that it not your intention to infiltrate other groups with the aim of promoting your own program, clandestinely. But if members are not assigned other groups to join, it must mean that some members might just happen to have dual memberships. Many people after all are members of several organizations. But in this case, anarchists would have joined these other groups because they wanted to help that organization achieve its purposes. While they are there, doing that, they might also try to promote anarchist ideas. This would be perfectly natural, and unobjectionable. But this is not quite ”actively working in”, or ”working inside” these organizations, in order to ’radicalise them” in the sense that you have indicated.

Quite frankly, I believe that this line of reasoning, that appears repeatedly in the pamphlet, is a hangover from vanguard politics. You can’t slough off all the baggage of the vanguard party simply by changing the name from party to organization. There are many ways one organization can attempt to influence another one. It happens all the time. You can give them your literature, organize debates with them, organize protests against them, join with them in coalitions. This is all standard practice. But it is not ”actively working in” a group in order to radicalize it. This definitely has a sinister ring to it in my view.

In the fourth paragraph, you write: ”working class communities must be united in both thought and action.” I commented on your insistent call for ’unity’ in section four of my original essay.

In the sixth paragraph of this section you write: ”The revolutionary organisation ... is a weapon to be used by the working class...”

With additions on January 2001 and June 2003

Despite its claims and intentions, this short statement on anarchist strategy is still very much a leninist document, and remains trapped within most of the major concepts of that tradition. I would like to point out some of the inadequacies of the statement and show why it does not suit as a strategy for achieving a free society.

1. Everyone in one organization. On page seven of the pamphlet version the authors state that all anti-capitalist forces ”will be united inside the organization.” What geographical unit are we talking about here? A neighborhood, small town, city, state, region, nation, continent, the world? The absurdity of the statement is obvious if you take the world as the unit. All anti-capitalists in the world united within one organization? Please! But it is also a faulty notion even if we take a small unit, the neighborhood. There is no need, and it’s unlikely to happen anyway, and also undesirable, for all activists to be in one organization. Better to have dozens of organizations, if we even have organizations of activists at all.

2. ”A libertarian organization is necessary.” Are organizations of activists even needed? I think not, or at least that they are not the primary need. These strategists do not want just a propaganda group, but ”an assembly of activists.” Why? Why assemble as activists when we could be assembling as workers, neighbors, or housemates? Revolutionaries should not be wasting time building organizations of revolutionaries, which can never defeat the ruling class anyway, but fighting directly to establish associations of self-government in their neighborhoods and communities – worker owned and democratically managed workplaces, neighborhood assemblies based on direct democracy, and expanded and cooperative households. With assemblies like these we could overpower our rulers. But no, we continue to postpone striking directly for what we want, and instead pour our lives into secondary, peripheral activities. This is one reason we continue to flounder.

3. ”Coordination of all anti-capitalist struggles”. (page 2) Once again, in what unit? The world? The neighborhood? World-wide

coordination of all anti-capitalist struggles? Is this what we want, one coordinated world? You can bet your life that if the struggle is coordinated, then the victory, and life after the victory, will be coordinated too, and more so. I prefer a world in turmoil, splitting apart at the seams with differences, a world of contrasts, variety, disagreements, and novelties. Even on the neighborhood level coordination is a misguided notion. We do not need one coordinated struggle. We need a war on many fronts, a decentralized, diverse, chaotic (from the enemy's point of view) struggle. A single, coordinated struggle is easier for them to defeat. All they have to do is destroy the coordinators, or if by some miracle the coordination has been achieved through decentralized networking, they can destroy the means of networking, or disrupt the coordination in some other way. But how do they defeat an uncoordinated fight, a fight going on everywhere, in unexpected places, at unexpected times, in unexpected ways, by unexpected people? Real democracy is noisy, chaotic, unpredictable, and so must be the struggle to achieve it. The idea that we need "an organization that fights for the co-ordination of all anti-capitalist struggles" is ridiculous. It is an idea left over from the vanguard tradition of Lenin.

4. **The call for unity and solidarity.** The authors bemoan "the fragmentation of working class solidarity" by the ruling class. What they want is "a solid and united class, conscious of itself and its power." This call for 'solidarity' is an integral part of the vanguard tradition. What they ignore is the innateness of disagreement, among humans. Or to the extent that they recognize disagreement, they think that it is bad, rather than wonderful (being the very essence of freedom). They seek to remove disagreement, rather than embrace it. Rather than building a world which recognizes the inevitableness of disagreement, and therefore the necessity of creating directly democratic decision making arrangements, they want a world based on agreement and solidarity. This is altogether the wrong focus.

persons could join and devote themselves to the goal of making a revolution, or even a traitor or two from the ruling class. Of course, you wouldn't find yourself in this conceptual muddle if you were fighting for your own liberation, especially in workplace, neighborhood, and household assemblies, which you had created, instead of trying to get others to do so. This whole bad polemic of 'false consciousness', and all the agonizing about being within the working class, stems in fact from taking a stance outside the revolution, as mere advocates, rather than inside, as participants. You are protagonists of the proletariat, not proletarians in revolt. Being a protagonist is a good thing of course, as not everyone everywhere can always be in revolt. But it's important to keep our heads straight about what role we are playing, and not get all puffed up about being *the* revolutionary organization, about embodying the *leading ideas* of the revolution, about *uniting* the working class, or about *coordinating* all anti-capitalist struggles.

Tasks of the Organisation

In the first paragraph of this section you list what seem to me as some very worthy objectives for the organization, namely to be a propaganda grouping, to give examples of self-activity, to search out the history of past struggles, and to spread the news. I would think that this is what a voluntary, membership organization of anarchists would do. But you are not content with this. You write: "But the organisation is not just a propaganda group: above all it must actively work in all grassroots organisations of the working class such as rank and file groups, tenants associations, squatters, and unemployed groups as well as women's, black, and gay groups." Later on in this same section you say that: "The organisation seeks to work inside single-issue groups to help radicalise them and to argue for a break with reformism and authoritarian revolutionaries." I want to discuss this. What does it mean, concretely, to "actively

to and join the program we ourselves are fighting for. I discussed these issues in section fifteen in the postscript to my earlier essay.

In paragraph two you write: "The anarchist organisation must always be part of the working class." And elsewhere you often insist that 'the revolutionary organization' is 'working within the working class.' I would like to discuss this. I believe this is a mirage, or sleight of hand, which enables you to think of yourselves as not being elitist, and as more than just a propaganda organization. But what could it possibly mean to be working 'within the working class'? The working class is not organized, except partially in unions (which in the United States is down to 8% of non-governmental workers, 13% including governmental workers). But you don't mean by this that you will be working within unions. Saying that you are 'within the working class' can only be an abstract, conceptual thing. In your theoretical analysis of society you have a category, that of worker, and consider yourself to be in that category (or if not, to at least identify with it). People you consider to be workers however may not so consider themselves as such, or to have any identity as workers at all. This does not put them outside the category of worker, in your opinion, but only indicates that they have a false consciousness, and have not developed a working class consciousness, which you take it upon yourself to help them get.

In such a situation it is pretty absurd to speak of being 'within the working class'. What are you inside of, a conceptual category? This makes no more sense than to say that a local chess club or band, whose members are all 'working class' (by your definition; they possibly might simply see themselves as citizens) is 'within the working class'. In reality, what you have, in 'the revolutionary organization', is a special purpose, voluntary, membership organization, like any one of hundreds of voluntary organizations that people have created for various purposes. Your program, the goals of your organization, is to make a revolution. Moreover, not everyone in your organization need even be a worker; petty bourgeois

5. The infiltration of other organizations. "The organization seeks to work inside the women's groups and sexual politics groups to help radicalize them ..."; "...it must actively work in all the grass roots organizations..."; "The revolutionary organization will fight in the newly created workplace and neighbourhood structures on an ideological level against authoritarian groups." This is a really horrible, arrogant, elitist plan. I have been in radical organizations which were infiltrated by members of other groups, with the intent to "radicalize" us, and it is not a pleasant experience. They are not there to share and help accomplish the goals of the group they have joined, as equal participants, but as outsiders, with goals of their own, with ulterior motives. They are often deceitful about all this. Any group with an ounce of sense will expel such people promptly once their identities and intentions are discovered. This is vanguardism, pure and simple. Vanguardists always seek to use, manipulate, recruit, convert, and otherwise abuse other radicals.

6. Revolutionaries as the organizers, welders, coordinators, assistants. "Revolutionary anarchist militants seek a regroupment..."; "... a 'libertarian front' of all these movements and groups..." must be built; "To assist in the building of such a mass movement, ..." Nowhere in this short document is there even a hint that revolutionaries are persons who are fighting to overcome their own oppression. No, according to these authors, the role of revolutionaries is to help others achieve liberation, especially the working class, but also women, blacks, gays, unemployed, squatters, tenants. The stance of these authors is outside the movement for liberation, as directors, guiders, influencers, molders, not inside the movement, as equal participants. They are vanguardists, whether they believe it or not. If they were busy fighting to overcome their own oppression, they would be looking for allies, arguing about strategy, countering their opponents, and so forth. They would not be trying to 'radicalize' anyone.

This outside stance they take is the root of the problem. They are radicals who want to destroy capitalism, make a revolution, and

build a new society. But they are a tiny minority. Most workers don't want to do this, not to mention small shopkeepers. But the militants have misconceived their problem, which accounts for all their agonizing about their relationship to the working class. They don't have to "radicalize" the working class, let alone establish a world-wide coordination of all anti-capitalist struggles. How could we ever get anywhere if this were a prerequisite for revolutionary work? It only takes one person to call a meeting at a workplace, in a neighborhood, or in a household. It only takes two people to have a meeting. It's because most radicals continue to think that they have to do something to workers to get them to make a revolution that they (the militants) are paralyzed and reduced to propaganda work. What activists have to do is start fights with their bosses, especially at their places of work, but also with the authorities who control neighborhoods and households. They will gain a few allies and many opponents, but at least the war is under way, the battle has been joined. This puts them inside the revolution, as participants, actively making history and building a new world. They abandon their fruitless and frustrating role as mere proselytizers of revolution, as mere protagonists of the proletariat, and instead become direct threats to the ruling class, by directly trying to wrest power away from it in those social contexts where it really counts. They will try to link up with other militants engaged in similar fights and to publicize their struggles, but this is completely different from trying to proselytize or radicalize the working class.

7. Trapped within the 'mass-elite' framework. The authors use the term 'mass' again and again in this short statement: mass action, mass movement, revolutionary masses, mass organizations, and even mass decision making (what ever can that mean?). The companion concept of course is 'elite'. Elite-mass go together; they cannot be separated. The concepts in fact describe the structure of the world as created by the bourgeoisie – a ruling class on the one hand and a mass of isolated, atomized, individuals on the other. The whole point of the revolution is to overcome the condition of

only, it might refer to the internal structure of the organization. As regards the first, as I just indicated, all sorts of tendencies refer to themselves as revolutionary. You and I probably pretty much agree on what we think a 'revolutionary' program is. But all we can do is put forward this program, explain why it is best, agitate for it, and try to win adherents. How else could it be? Nothing much is gained by calling it revolutionary.

As regards the second, an organization's internal structure, we also probably agree that a revolutionary structure is one that is based on direct participatory democracy. The first paragraph in this section talks about this in broad general terms as applying to practically everything. And it does. It is not just the 'revolutionary organization' that needs an internal structure based on direct democracy, but every other organization or association in society, all the volunteer and non-governmental organizations, and eventually the workplace itself. We could begin now by trying to make sure that any organizations that we ourselves create are so structured. We could also agitate to bring direct democracy to any other organizations in which we happen to be participating. So the issue of 'revolutionary structure' is not peculiar to an Anarchist Federation. (I'm not implying that you said it was, but just pointing this out).

Questions of Consciousness

When you use a phrase like "different degrees of consciousness" (first paragraph), you are assuming that radical consciousness is a fixed, given, thing, that one can know, and that people acquire this knowledge by degrees, with some being more radical than others. Actually, there is no such thing as an objective definition of radical. We can only judge other people as more or less radical in reference to our own beliefs. It is not a question of 'bringing people along' to some preconceived dogma, but merely of persuading them to agree

authoritarian tendencies, to unify it. You constantly agonize over the relationship of 'the revolutionary organization' to the working class. If 'the revolutionary organization' were not in reality separate from the working class, such agonizing would not even arise or be necessary.

And so you describe, in the last paragraph in this section, all the things that 'the revolutionary organization' has to do to carry out its tasks, things like remaining flexible, resisting attack, minimizing damage, changing as need be, perpetuating itself, and so forth. You could have been writing about all the things that councils, assemblies, and co-ops would have to do in order to survive and succeed, but you weren't.

Creating a Revolutionary Structure

It seems to me pretty meaningless these days to try to distinguish one's organization by describing it as revolutionary. Marxist-Leninist Parties think they are revolutionary, as do Trotskyists. The newly formed Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy in the United States calls itself a revolutionary organization. More distressingly, the neocon hawks, the hardright extremists who have captured control of the US Government, call themselves revolutionaries. We would call them reactionaries, but in their own eyes they are revolutionaries. And in a certain sense they are; they are completely transforming the system, taking it back to the days of unfettered capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century before radical social movements had imposed some constraints on capital. So the word in itself is pretty meaningless. What counts is one's program. And this had better be described in concrete terms if it is to have any value.

What might the term revolutionary organization refer to, in the abstract? Well, as I said, it might first of all refer to ideology, the program or set of beliefs that the organization is agitating for. Sec-

being a mass, and to reestablish 'community', to reestablish a rich texture of egalitarian social ties among ourselves, and destroy the hierarchical ties that bind us to our rulers. The authors don't seem to perceive this. They spurn the idea of an elite, of course, but it is present nevertheless throughout their statement, in the way they see revolutionaries acting, as the "driving force", in the "leadership of ideas", "to defend the advanced ideas of the working class", "...to ensure that these structures function with the full participation of all...", and so forth. Revolutionaries are seen as the defenders and protectors of the working class, not as workers themselves who are fighting to end their exploitation.

The idea of 'masses' and the idea of 'solidarity' are closely related. The image is one of millions of people welded together by common beliefs. It is a religious idea, based on the idea of a body of given truths. This is how the 'leadership of ideas' fits in. The 'revolutionaries' know what these truths are. Thus they are essentially priests, tending their flocks, trying to keep them from straying from the correct path. This is Lenin all over again, who was not an advanced thinker on the cutting edge of liberatory ideas in Europe at the turn of the last century, but basically a religious thinker from a backward country on the periphery of capitalism. The authors state that "...different sections of the working class reach different degrees of consciousness." See the idea of 'given truths' again? In their minds, there is this preconceived definition of 'radical consciousness'; the activists have it, workers (or most workers) don't. The task of radicals, in this view, is to bring workers along, to raise their consciousnesses. Excuse me! I left the priesthood once; I have no intention of joining it again as a Leninist. Yet this is what these strategists are asking me to do. (And how is this different, really, from Lenin's claim that workers can't reach a revolutionary consciousness by themselves without outside intervention?)

8. Romanticizing the working class. In light of all these Leninist ideas which they are regurgitating the authors are obviously uneasy, and struggle gallantly to qualify, hem and haw, back away

from, and otherwise indicate that they don't mean this like it sounds. One way they do this is actually old hat – they romanticize the working class. Revolutionaries, they say, are really only the depositories of advances made previously by the working class itself, through 'mass spontaneity'. They are saving these advances, preserving them until the working class becomes revolutionary again, at which time they can be fed back to workers, since workers themselves have no memory and have lost awareness of what they did earlier. But as soon as the working class, through 'mass spontaneity', does something new, revolutionaries have to update their theories. It's very much a "from the people, to the people" idea (a la Mao, who even wrote an essay or two about this). Once again we see the mass-elite framework; once again a thoroughly vanguardist idea.

By using a concept like "mass spontaneity" the authors show that they have not yet broken out of the dualism – voluntarism vs. determinism – so characteristic of bourgeois thought (and of Lenin too, which shows that he was a bourgeois thinker at heart). They have not yet arrived at a dialectical understanding of humans. Ideas like 'spontaneous' and 'determined' simply do not apply to humans. All humans make their own histories, but not under conditions of their own choosing. All humans are creative, but not in a vacuum, but within a given cultural context. Humans are both spontaneous and determined, simultaneously; that is, they are neither spontaneous nor determined – the concepts are inappropriate, and do not apply. A strategy which is based on false concepts like this is not going to get us anywhere.

9. Combatting leninists "on a physical level." (page 7) That is, armed struggle against leninists if they "try to use force to destroy the gains of the working class...". Well of course, in a real democracy, direct democracy, that is, in communism, the community would defend its democratic procedures and social arrangements from anyone attempting to destroy them in order to reestablish tyranny by one or a few, and it would defend these institutions

you are not talking about these assemblies, councils, and co-ops, but about 'the' revolutionary organization, this membership organization made up of anarchist revolutionaries, who are to "help the revolutionary process" by struggling "to clarify and co-ordinate struggles in the working class."

Well, of course, the pamphlet is about 'the role of the revolutionary organization', isn't it. But this is the trouble. Your strategic thinking is not about actually organizing anarchy, but about organizing a 'revolutionary' group of anarchists who will then try to get the working class to organize anarchy. You maintain throughout this pamphlet that: "Working class spontaneity is the ability of that class to take direct action on its own behalf and to develop new forms of struggle and organization" (as you wrote in the previous section), without the services of, and sometimes in opposition to, so-called revolutionary organizations (whether you call them parties or organizations or vanguards is irrelevant). If this is really true, why then does the working class need a 'revolutionary organization'? But of course, you don't really, or only partially, believe this, because you also say (in the section on Questions of Consciousness) that "its [the revolutionary organization's] consciousness is more developed ("in advance")" of the consciousness of the working class. You can't have it both ways. But you try to. You don't want to be thought of as a vanguard, so you insist that it is the working class itself that comes up with new theories and strategies. You say, "We must always be ready to learn from the class...". On the other hand, "different sections of the working class may reach different degrees of consciousness", so you see yourselves as intervening to bring them along.

This is why I believe that the Anarchist Federation is still partially enmeshed in the Leninist mode of strategic thinking. Your 'revolutionary organization' is always spoken of as being *outside* the working class, in spite of all your claims that it is working inside (more on this in a minute). Its purpose is to intervene in the working class, to radicalize it, to coordinate it, to protect it from

them to be so. I criticized this idea in my original critique, in section three.

Class Spontaneity

There is improvement here over previous versions. At least you are talking now about class spontaneity rather than mass spontaneity, and about "previous agitation by revolutionary minorities" rather than about an organization which preserves the lessons of previous struggles to feed back to the working class the next time it revolts. Even so, I believe the thinking of the 'autonomous marxist' camp is far superior to the concept of spontaneity, as a way of characterizing working class resistance. Autonomists believe that the working class is permanently in opposition, by its very existence, to capital, and this opposition manifests itself in multiple ways. It is not a question of periodic 'spontaneous' revolts interspersed with periods of passivity and non-opposition. A good overview of this body of radical thought can be found in the extensive, annotated syllabus written by Harvey Cleaver, which is available on his website.

Why Should We Be Organized?

In answering this question, you talk only about 'the revolutionary organization'. In paragraph two, you do say that organization "is necessary both in and in achieving a libertarian society. What is important is to make organisations that reflect the ideas of anarchist communism in their own practice." Well, this could include assemblies and councils, but you don't mention that. I take it that organization "in" a libertarian society would mean at least self-managed workplaces, neighborhood assemblies, and housing co-ops. But you talk only of '*the* revolutionary organization.' When you ask: "What then is the purpose of 'revolutionary organisation?'"

by force if need be, although this would probably not be necessary in most cases. But our anarchist strategists are preparing "to combat them [leninists] on a physical level" during the revolutionary struggle. That is, they are going to fight other radicals. Where is this going to take place? In meetings? Outside bookstores? At lectures, demonstrations, rallies, parties? In offices? Who decides who is a leninist and who is not? Are leninists going to be wearing labels, tattooed by the finger of God, so that there is no mistaking a leninist from an anarchist?

It seems that these anarchist strategists have merely turned the tables on Lenin. Lenin defined anarchists, social democrats, and in fact everyone except Bolsheviks, as counter-revolutionaries, and combatted them physically, sometimes with a bullet to the head. Is this what we're going to do again? And why stop at leninists? Why not include also liberals (especially these), mainstream feminists, right-wing gays, corporate-oriented environmentalists, fanatic individualists (who are probably the single greatest threat to revolution in the rich core countries and far more dangerous and disruptive than leninists), black nationalists, social democrats, trees-before-people earth firsters, new age spiritualists, and goddess worshippers? What about god-fearing, country-loving, gay-bashing, president-adoring workers? Are we going to combat them on the physical level? If not, why not?

If we are ever going to establish direct democracy and communities based on peace, cooperation, and deliberative self-government, we have to get out of the mind-set that the way to resolve disagreements is to physically eliminate (murder, assassinate, liquidate, exterminate, imprison, transport) our opponents. This is what the ruling class does to us. We should not imitate them. There may of course be exceptions to this general guideline, and naturally it's not always wise to try to co-exist in the same organization with our opponents, but workplaces, neighborhoods, and households are not 'organizations'. Is the tactic of expelling opponents from these so-

cial forms even conceivable? Ostracism is probably the worst that could be done.

10. Workers militias under the control of the mass organisations. This is a weird notion. I always thought militias should be under the control of the people making them up, or of the communities from which they come. And why only workers? What about homemakers, the unemployed, or students? They're not going to help defend their anarchy? And what is this "mass organization" that controls these militias? Is it the "assembly of activists"? Is it some other command structure activists have set up? Is it an organization workers have created, like a party or union? This way of talking gets us absolutely nowhere.

11. All the usual abstractions. This essay is replete with all the usual abstractions, about which the authors presume universal agreement. They write as if we all agree about who is in the working class, what communism is, what federalism is, what libertarianism means, and so forth. Whereas in fact there are intense debates about all these things, and they offer no advice about how to resolve these debates. They believe there are such people as 'intellectuals', and they agonize about the role of such people in the revolution and their relationship to the working class (an historical obsession among leftists). They fall back on the chimera of 'mandated delegates' as their only clue about working democratically in large territories. And so forth and so on.

An Anarchist Revolutionary Strategy Sketched Briefly

Here is a sketch of a proposed revolutionary anarchist strategy, in story form.

Some persons become convinced that they are oppressed. They study and ponder the situation to discover the sources of that oppression; who is doing it and how they are doing it. They also imag-

true for the core capitalist countries, where practically everyone works.

In the section on Tasks of the Organisation, you write: "The revolution may be led by an awakened proletariat breaking out of the prison of the workplace but is just as likely to begin with a radicalised *populace* calling the workers out to join them." If we are thinking in class terms, I would think that we would recognize that most of the people in this so-called *populace* are actually members of the working class themselves – like the unemployed, housewives, elderly and retired persons, prisoners, adolescents and students, welfare-dependents, hobos and bums, and so forth. It could also perhaps include significant numbers from the petty bourgeois, like small business families, small farmers, or self-employed professionals. It might even include a traitor or two from the ruling class. But this 'populace' revolt would still be, if seen properly in class terms, overwhelmingly working class. So I don't think it is too useful to make this distinction between the proletariat and the marginalized.

This same slant appears in the next paragraph too, where you have the phrase "the middle class's fear of the impoverished sections of the working class". Have you fallen into mainstream sociological cant here, in thinking that class is defined by level of income, rather than relationship to the means of production? Just because some workers have jobs, with good wages and benefits, does not mean that they are 'middle class'. They are still working class. What you say is true of course, that better off workers do have a fear of their worse off neighbors. But I think it is confusing and incorrect (i.e., liberal rather than radical theorizing) to use the term 'middle class' in reference to this.

In the next to last sentence in this section you write: "...an organization that fights for the co-ordination of all anti-capitalist struggles." This is a preposterous notion. There is no way on earth for all anti-capitalist struggles to be coordinated, nor is it desirable for

So, unless capitalism is stopped, there will be another world war to decide which bloc will prevail and dominate. The argument for the continuing necessity of nation-states for capitalism has been nicely stated in Ellen Meiksins Wood's recent book, *The Empire of Capital*.

In the last sentence of this section you write: "Forced to work, forced to consume, we are trapped in a system in which inequality and social division persist because the hierarchy of labour creates a socially-destructive hierarchy." I don't get the meaning of this sentence, because I don't understand what you mean by 'the hierarchy of labour'. Is this a phrase meant to refer to the division of capital and labour, or to the 'aristocracy of labour', or perhaps something else? To my mind, inequality and social division persist because of capitalism, period.

From Workplace to Revolution

I don't quite like your contrast, in this section, between 'industrial workers' and 'the marginalized'. It's true that you do include these marginalized and excluded people as part of the working class, and it's also true that a great deal of mileage can be gained by focusing on these most oppressed of peoples. They are the ones who are most often and most seriously in revolt. Nevertheless, this dichotomy sort of inadvertently excludes most working people in the world. Only a tiny minority of wage-slaves now are 'industrial workers', but other workers are wage-slaves all the same – all the millions in the tertiary and service sections, in agriculture, and in government employment, and all the multitude of jobs that are not industrial. It's true of course, in much of the world, that those members of the working class who actually have jobs are sort of becoming a privileged sector. Nevertheless, it seems to me that a strategy that ignores these millions of workers, and relies primarily on the marginalized and excluded, is seriously flawed. This is especially

ine a situation in which they would not be oppressed; what it would be like, and how it would differ from the way things are now.

Let's assume that they decide that the key thing, the essential factor, in their oppression is that they are not free and that they have no control over their lives or communities. That is, they realize that they are slaves, wage-slaves, being controlled and exploited for the profit of someone else, and therefore that it is very far from a democratic society they are living in. They decide that they would prefer having some control over their own lives and communities, and prefer not to slave away for someone else's benefit, or have some government somewhere making all the rules. They would prefer to get together with their neighbors to decide things in common, and similarly at home and at work, they would prefer to assemble together with their work mates and household mates to decide how to do things, what to do with the things they make, how to divide up the work, and so forth.

So this is what they start doing. They start assembling together to try to govern their own lives, at work, in their households, and in their neighborhoods. It turns out that the ruling class is not too happy about their meetings, and in fact gets very angry that they are meeting like this. So the ruling class tries to bust them up. Naturally, these persons take steps to defend themselves and to get the ruling class off their backs. They learn how to defend the social arrangements they have created. They invent social weapons to neutralize the military might of their oppressors.

They are also aware of course that friends and neighbors of theirs don't all agree that they are oppressed, or that they are slaves, or that the society is not democratic. So they argue with these friends and neighbors, trying to convince them of the validity of their perception of the situation.

In the meantime they go on trying to establish these new decision-making arrangements they have dreamed up. But disagreements emerge about how to proceed. Some have been frightened and intimidated by the attacks of the rulers. They want to back

off a bit, and to settle for what they think is realistic, for what they think they can get. So they start pushing for this, and laying out their arguments. But the arguments don't fly too well. Everyone has been through this so many times before. They have watched as the world has slowly disintegrated, as the social situation has degenerated toward collapse, with the environment spinning toward irreversible life-threatening decay. They have seen again and again that compromises gain nothing, except defeat. And time is short. So for once the faint-hearted lose out. Those who want to settle for less are out politicked by those who want it all.

They are aware however that they have to rally wider support, outside the neighborhood, in order to win. So they publicize what they have been doing. They try to inform as many people as possible about their struggles, dreams, defenses. They especially shout to the far ends of the earth all the details about every attack the ruling class makes against them. They take their case to the court of world public opinion, trying to gain the upper hand morally, in the hearts and minds of people everywhere.

They also begin to withdraw from and to stop participating in (as this becomes possible) all the hierarchical, ruling class institutions that they now see as onerous. They especially try hard to stop being wage-slaves and to embed themselves instead in cooperative communal labor. More and more workplaces become cooperatively owned and operated. Fewer and fewer of the necessities of life are being produced by wage-slaves.

They also increase their efforts to persuade more people locally that the course they have chosen is the road to freedom and greater happiness and well-being. They establish contacts with other neighborhoods and try to work out agreements with them regarding common interests and problems. They work out trade agreements.

Slowly, more and more people begin to perceive the situation in a new light, by seeing the examples before them and the direct action that others are taking to gain control over their communities

pamphlet. You do not even call for the formation of councils in the section on 'In the Workplace'. The closest you come is a brief description of 'workplace resistance groups'. In another phrase, in the section on 'Creating a Revolutionary Structure' you do list some specific social forms: "free associations, collectives, federations, communes or 'families'". Elsewhere you also mention "local social and mutual aid centres".

But other than these few instances, you leave the matter of the social forms of anarchy on a very abstract level. You talk about a "free self-organised society", "self-activity", "self-organization", "a free and equal society," "self-ordering", or say that "society will be self-regulating". Don't you think though that an image of the social forms that anarchy will take has a bearing on devising a strategy for achieving those forms? By leaving the goal so vague, you can perhaps more easily, without having to face uncomfortable questions, focus on the role of the revolutionary organization, which of course is the purpose of the pamphlet.

You write (also in this introductory section): "Traditionally capitalism was governed by the iron laws of supply and demand." This is not true. Capitalism has never been based on a perfect, free market. From the very beginning, the greatest profits have always been taken by those who have managed, usually with the help of the state, to secure a temporary monopoly. This dynamic is succinctly described in Immanuel Wallerstein's little book, *Historical Capitalism*, chapter two, "The Politics of Accumulation: Struggle for Benefits".

In this same paragraph you also write: "With the end of the age of antagonistic nation states and blocs that existed between from 1875 to 1995..." This is not true either. Nation-states have not gone away, nor have their antagonistic relations, nor are they about to, because they are integral to the capitalist system as a whole. Capitalism couldn't exist without nation-states. What you will be seeing in coming decades is the rise of two new blocs to challenge the hegemony of the United States, namely, Europe and Northeast Asia.

proved, from my perspective, from the 1991 version that I analyzed, and also from the version in *Beyond Resistance*. At least this is my first impression. Of course, though, several of the themes I criticized in my earlier essay are still present in this document, in more subdued form, so we'll have to see. At bottom, I suspect that our beliefs about how anarchy can come about are simply at serious odds. I think what I'll do is go through the pamphlet section by section, commenting on things that jar me; this, rather than trying to write a more formal critique in essay form. The results of this procedure might also prove easier for you to use, if you are so inclined.

Introductory Paragraphs

In the first two sentences you write: "Anarchist Communists have a vision of a revolutionary organisation very different from State-oriented parties and groups. But there is also something wrong with the idea of informal groupings as advocated by some Anarchists." Well, right off the bat, you have already gone wrong. You are advocating your version of a 'revolutionary organization' in opposition to both the leninist party and informal groupings. So you have overlooked another option, the *main* organizational forms relevant to anarchy and anarchists, namely workplace councils, neighborhood assemblies, and housing co-ops. We do not have to choose between informal groupings like affinity groups, or formal membership organizations in the form of either the leninist vanguard party or the anarchist federation's 'revolutionary organization'. Anarchists could choose to organize themselves into assemblies, at work, in the neighborhood, and in their households.

Yet this option is not highlighted or promoted in your pamphlet. It is hardly mentioned. You do report, in the section on 'Class Spontaneity', that "... in every great revolutionary upsurge ... working people have formed committees and councils independent of 'vanguards'". This is your only mention of 'councils' in the whole pam-

and to set up new social arrangements. More and more wealth and power begins to be taken away from the ruling class and returned to the communities from which it had been stolen. The attacks of the ruling class become more intense and frantic, and this of course has the effect of clarifying the situation even more, although at a terrible price.

As more wealth and power become available, these neighborhoods, now rapidly becoming autonomous, cooperative, and democratic, can publicize their experiences even more, and begin to make a dent in the cultural hegemony so long held by the masters, and can promote more intensely the democratic, autonomous, self-governing, decentralized, communal (that is, anarchist) way of life. This way of life becomes a concrete reality in more and more neighborhoods, and then in millions and millions of neighborhoods, villages, and small towns throughout the world.

At long last, the institutions of the ruling class, all those weapons of oppression, all those corporations, governments, schools, churches, cinemas, newspapers, armies, hospitals, museums, universities, courts, malls, police stations, television networks, and law firms, are nothing but empty shells, with no power to hurt anyone. They are relegated to the dustbins of history, buried and forgotten, by the wondrous new world full of free communal peoples. New statues are erected to honor the martyrs. New holidays are chosen to celebrate the victories, commemorate key battles of the war, and highlight the achievements and dreams of free communities. People dance and sing and play and love. Ten hundred thousand traditions bloom. And a Jubilee begins, which lasts until the end of time.

Postscript (January, 2001)

The above criticisms of the Anarchist Communist Federation in Britain were based on the short pamphlet, "The Role of Revo-

lutionary Organization,” cited below. I regret now that the overall tone of the piece is so harsh. I have recently had a chance to read most of the documents(a) posted on their web site (which I didn't know about when I wrote the above critique), and it turns out that I am in broad agreement with their anarchist politics. I think that we are basically in the same camp, and are more political comrades than political opponents. There are many things that I like about the views they expressed in these documents. It's encouraging to see a group actually writing about strategy, which is a strangely and badly neglected topic among radicals. I'm glad they are strongly anti-capitalist. I like their uncompromising opposition to reformism. I am in basic agreement with their critique of anarcho-syndicalism. I like the structure of their pamphlet *Beyond Resistance*. They start out with a critique of capitalism, and then outline an alternative to it, and then discuss how to defeat the first and build the second. This is basically what I did in my pamphlet *Getting Free*. I began with what I didn't like about the present order, and then outlined a social arrangement that I would like, and then described a strategy for gutting the first and bring into being the second. I don't have much trouble with the first and second parts of their program, their critique of capitalism and their vision of the future. It is the strategy part that I have trouble with. I'm still convinced, even though they explicitly reject the goal of seizing state power and repeatedly stress that the working class has to liberate itself (and that no Party can do this for it), that, overall, their discussion of strategy is still leninist, or at least has strong leninist overtones. This is unsettling, dismaying, and unfortunate, coming as it does from anarchists, which is why I have devoted time to criticizing their position. In this Postscript, therefore, I will continue the discussion, clearing up some misunderstandings, making some corrections, and adding some further points.

A friend of mine, who had met a couple of the members of this group in England, forwarded my essay to Mike, at ACF, and got a short response, as follows:

really needed to coordinate all this? Wouldn't this be a step backwards? I think so.

Notes

(a). (1) ACF–The First Ten Years; (2) As We See It; (3) Text of a talk, by Mike of ACF Nottingham, given at an open meeting at the Anarchist Bookfair, 18th October 1997, at Conway Hall, London, England; (4) *The Union Makes us Strong? Syndicalism: A Critical Analysis*; (5) *Anarchist Communism in Britain*; (6) *Beyond Resistance: A Revolutionary Manifesto for the Millennium* (Third Edition, Spring 2000); (7) *The Future Society* (a talk presented by Claire and Mike of ACF, Nottingham, at the Sheffield Red and Black Centre on July 6, 1997).

(b). I have discussed the issues of radicalization and reform versus revolution at greater length in my essay on 'The Weakness of a Politics of Protest'.

James Herod, June 2003

Further Comments on *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation* (2003 version), by the Anarchist Federation, England

Dear Odessa Steps,

I'm happy at long last to send you my further comments on the Anarchist Federation's strategy proposals. My apologies once again for the long delay in getting back to you. (I'll be using 'you' here to mean not only you personally, but also the Anarchist Federation, and the authors of the pamphlet.)

This new edition of the Anarchist Federation's pamphlet, *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation*, seems considerably im-

we have to try to actually establish anarchist social relations and defend them. We need to be better organized among ourselves in order to more effectively agitate for what we believe to be a revolutionary program. But organizing among ourselves is still one step removed from actually participating directly in revolution. If this is all we ever do, the revolutionary movement will continue to be sluggish. Wouldn't it be better to actually be trying to set up neighborhood assemblies, household assemblies, and workplace assemblies, and thus start taking the first steps toward gutting capitalism and establishing a free society, than to be spending the bulk of our time maintaining what is essentially only a propaganda organization.

Propaganda work is better than nothing of course. Many people are not really in a position to directly take on ruling class power at home, at work, in the neighborhood, or anywhere else (although it's hard to believe that most people couldn't find some way to confront our rulers). So proselytizing for revolution is a useful thing. But that can be done in many ways, by writers, publishers, film makers, musicians, journalists, booksellers, broadcasters, and so forth. Is a 'revolutionary organization', with a 'unified theory and practice', actually even the best way to agitate for anarchism? In just a little over a year, Indymedia has become a fantastic propaganda force for democracy and revolution, and it is not a 'revolutionary organization' (as pictured by the acf).

Since the Zapatistas have burst on the world scene, we have an historical event which we could usefully study for clues about how to proceed, strategically. Several small communities of people in Chiapas actually attacked their rulers. They then succeeded in getting their messages out, rallied international support, formed alliances with other progressive forces in Mexico, established networks of communication, and so forth. Perhaps the same pattern could be followed elsewhere, in factories, farms, or neighborhoods, wherever revolts are taking place. Is a 'revolutionary organization'

"Okay, I do think James' response to "The Role of Revolutionary Organisation" misjudges our approach to other organisations. In fact we do not think it is necessary to have one big revolutionary organisation, though if there's not one big one, they'd better be enough smaller ones that can agree on a basic level! Maybe a confederation. I think the pamphlet is clear on this earlier but in the last section maybe we should have used 'organisations' rather than 'the organisation'. If we are unclear, that could be our problem and I'll put it to the ACF. Leninists believe it is the 'duty' of the party to take over the whole of the economy and state apparatus to prevent counter revolution. This is very different.

I think our newer pamphlet, *Beyond Resistance*, is much clearer ... We are fully into an idea of communities and workplaces forming a culture of resistance by building antagonistic grouping in those areas. However we do not agree with the idea of forming a dual economic power against the system. Personally I cannot see this essentially mutualist strategy progressing much without being subsumed into the existing capitalism, or if it is seen as a threat, being attacked either militarily or 'legally' by state or capitalist legislation (as happened in Chile at the turn of the century). Even now, with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, it is even getting difficult for even nation states to oppose multinationals, e.g. India and GM crops. However, this is still an important question, because leninists always criticise anarchists for not having the will to take over the entire economy in 30s Spain, and for allowing inequalities in pay between collectives and between men and women in the collectives. Of course we in the ACF would argue that it was a problem of syndicalism that they did not have the theoretical strength to abolish money and the state at the crucial time. On the accusation of entryism, again, maybe [the pamphlet] is not clear enough. We are in fact much more council communist than the pamphlet might appear. My understanding of the leadership of ideas is about influencing what sort of workers councils will arise in a revolution-

ary situation. We must make sure our politics are seen as the right ones, so they really are revolutionary anarchist councils.”

My friend also wrote to me that it had not been his impression that ACF promoted infiltration. Another friend of mine also took issue with the essay, especially with point five (on infiltration). He wrote:

”I’m glad you plan to rework your critique somewhat, as you indicated in the handwritten note accompanying the text. My sense is that Derek is probably right in how he sizes up the people in the ACF that he met when he was in England ... You do in fact come down very heavily, and it could make some people defensive. For example, the line between trying to raise the consciousness of people in a group that you join and trying to infiltrate the group is pretty clear. It’s a matter of whether you act up-front or covertly. Each of us has his own ideas of what ought to be done – i.e., our private agenda, and we would like our activities to be in groups that share our ideas. To me it’s quite legitimate to try to influence the other members, but not to be manipulative. Even though the ACF statement is pretty faulty (I think they’re not careful enough in thinking about the language they use), clearly any group that puts out a public statement about working in ”women’s groups ... etc.” can’t be thinking about infiltrating such groups. So it seems to me your point five, undeservedly puts their head on the anvil. It’s not that they’re conniving, obviously. You got carried away with the infiltration theme and gave them the business more than was called for.”

I think Mike and my friends were right about this, as regards point five, about infiltration, although I do think that the language used in the pamphlet warranted, at least partially, my interpretation. But I’m persuaded that I was off the mark in reality. This language has been pretty much eliminated from the third edition of their expanded pamphlet *Beyond Resistance: A Revolutionary Manifesto for the New Millennium* (spring, 2000).

ingly anti-capitalist stand, glad that they oppose electoral politics and business unions, and glad that they are agitating for anarchism. What I object to is the still basically Leninism framework within which they are doing this. A nice little critique of Lenin was published by Ron Taber in 1988 called simply *A Look at Leninism*. Chapters five and six of this short work are devoted to ”Lenin’s Theory of Knowledge”. It is rare in radical writings for this kind of connection to have been made, between epistemology and vanguard politics, although it has been done before (see for example Anton Pannekoek’s 1937 work, *Lenin as Philosopher*, and more generally, hegelian marxism). I myself spelled out this connection in a 1974 pamphlet entitled *Four Way Criticism: A Critique of the Notion of ‘Criticism/Self-Criticism’*. It is worthwhile to study these texts, and radical theories of knowledge in general; otherwise we will get bogged down again in that old mechanical marxist quagmire of the ’false consciousness of the working class.’

16. The Role of the Revolutionary Organization: A strong theme in the polemics of these papers focuses on the need for a revolutionary organization. They complain, in ”ACF – The First Ten Years” that: ”Many libertarian revolutionaries are as yet unconvinced of the need to create a specific libertarian communist organisation. They remain tied to the ideas of local groups, or at best regional federations loosely linked, being adequate for the very difficult tasks of introducing libertarian revolutionary ideas and practices to the mass of the population.” Apparently, this has been a contentious issue (whether or not to build a ’revolutionary organization’), and has re-emerged periodically in England and elsewhere in the anarchist movement (according to their brief history of ”Anarchist Communism in Britain”).

I encountered this debate myself recently at a small gathering of twenty-five anarchists in Chicago who had met to discuss the desirability and feasibility of establishing a Midwest Anarchist Federation. The dilemma, I think, when it comes to organizing among ourselves, is that the more time we spend doing this the less time

emerge, and the 'revolutionary' position with regard to them will have to be thrashed out all over again. Similarly, even if we had anarchy, and direct democracy, the correct course on any given dispute would have to be debated and worked out in our assemblies, on a case by case basis.

I myself have a fairly well defined set of beliefs which I believe are revolutionary (which have nevertheless changed over the years), and I have at various times belonged to groups which were agitating for those beliefs, but we didn't see ourselves as a 'revolutionary organization', loaded down with a ton of leninist baggage, like the ACF does. We were just a small group of people agitating for the kind of world we wanted. I would be a lot more comfortable with the ACF if they would just drop all the stuff about being a repository for the past revolutionary achievements of the working class, about assisting the working class to establish worldwide unity, about making sure that reformist tendencies in the working class are defeated, about advising the working class on establishing militias with which to win the class war.

Couldn't they simply admit that they are just a tiny group of people in England who are agitating for anarchism, and that they are not even involved themselves directly in attacking ruling class power, for the most part, but are, as it were, content to play the role of protagonists of the proletariat? Wouldn't this be a happier stance? Propaganda after all is important. Sometimes it is about all that we can do. We should not lose sight though of the truth that it is always better to be actually revolting rather than only advocating revolt. I have read the founding documents of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists in the United States. I believe they have a clearer, more realistic, and less leninist self-conception, as being primarily that of a propaganda and agitational organization.

Lest I be misunderstood, I want to stress that I think it is important for people to define what they think is revolutionary and to fight for it. I'm glad that the ACF has taken an uncompromis-

There was also some confusion, some thought, in my essay, about "spontaneity". I had not intended to leave the impression that I believe in a "spontaneous" revolution. In fact my position is just the opposite. I believe that a spontaneous revolution can never succeed. Only if the new social arrangements of anarchism are already largely in place, and only if people have already created the capacity to live without capitalism and are using it to meet most of their needs, could there be any hope of gutting and dismantling that system. I was mostly arguing for a change in sites for struggle, and for concentrating on starting fights on those sites, rather than putting energy into building a "revolutionary organization" of anarchists. In section eight of the above critique, I explicitly criticized the idea of "mass spontaneity". The reader may want to reread that paragraph.

Other than these few qualifications, I think that my criticisms of ACF's strategy are pretty much on the mark, and I'll stick to them. Throughout these papers they call for 'unity and solidarity' so my point four above is confirmed. They very definitely take a stance 'outside the working class' even though they may be members of the working class themselves. So my points six, seven, and eight are confirmed. As for point nine, it holds too. They say in *Beyond Resistance*: "The working class must be prepared from the outset to use force against counter-revolutionary groupings, when they attempt to hijack the revolution and attack libertarians, as readily as we would against capital or the state." They have qualified their belief that we should all be in one organization (point one above), but they still insist on "a united and global revolutionary movement."

But having read the rest of their papers there are several additional points I'd like to discuss: (1) the concept of 'working class' (mentioned only in passing in paragraph eleven above); (2) the time span of 'the revolution'; (3) armed struggle; and (4) the notion of the 'leadership of ideas'. Then I'll return to further comments on 'the role of the revolutionary organization' (discussed also in point

two above), a topic which seems to best capture our differing approaches to destroying capitalism and building anarchism.

12. The Concept of the Working Class: Throughout these papers the concept of 'working class' is used in a wooden, mechanical way. The authors never define it. For them it is a monolithic category, a given. They seem unaware of the great divisions within the working class, along many lines – education, income, lifestyle, gender, race, ethnicity, sex, nationality. They never talk about that other, neglected, class (the petty bourgeoisie, or small businesses), which is of course rapidly disappearing (but is still a powerful player), and the role that this class might or might not play in 'the revolution'. They do not discuss large categories of persons whose class status is ambiguous, for example, highly paid middle level managers, cops, professors, professionals (who are salaried, not self-employed), or semi-proletarianized peasants who have one leg in wage-slavery and the other still in the cooperative village and household economy. Nor do they explore complicating factors such as, for example, stock ownership by an increasing number of workers (but still a tiny percentage), or that many working class families have managed to acquire a second house, which they rent out, thus becoming petty rentiers, which income supplements their wages. The militants at ACF consistently use a simple two class analysis – workers versus capitalists – which is basically true of course. But their usage is not nuanced, and therefore sounds rigid, sectarian, doctrinaire. And it leads to strategy mistakes, for example, to the tendency to think that the working class is homogeneous, and can therefore be 'unified' (a constantly reiterated goal of acf radicals). They often talk as if 'the working class' were a single subject, and capable of acting as such (and on a world scale!). I believe that this wooden, mechanical, abstract image of 'the working class' plays into their ideas about the role of 'radicals' and 'the revolutionary organization'. Rather than seeing a complex, highly diverse class struggling to liberate itself, they see a monolithic block of workers which must be 'radicalized' by revolutionaries. They tend to think of radicalism

In this statement we see several of the problems already discussed above: (1) use of the concept of 'masses' and 'mass movements'. (2) An image of the revolution as happening suddenly, thus creating a separation between revolutionary and non-revolutionary periods; there is no notion here of protracted struggle, or any sense that the revolution might be already under way, might be going on now. (3) Why is it only the working class that needs to be won over? What about the petty bourgeoisie? Wouldn't it help tremendously if a lot of small business families could be persuaded to convert to cooperatively owned workplaces?

There is another belief however that undergirds the notion of 'the leadership of ideas', namely that the distinction between conservative and revolutionary ideas is unambiguous, fixed, given, perhaps even objective; that is, revolutionary ideas are something that one can know, for sure. For acf militants, 'revolutionary' is defined as uncompromisingly anti-capitalist, anti-elections, anti-unions (with qualifications), anarchist, and so forth. This sounds straightforward enough, but whenever we have to examine concrete cases, things get a little murkier. Is the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas revolutionary or reformist? Were the massive demonstrations in Belgrade in the fall of 1999, which brought on the resignation of Milosevic, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary? Were the workplace seizures that took place in Yugoslavia shortly thereafter a step toward workers control or did they usher in neoliberalism?

You see, there is no 'objective', fixed definition of what 'radical' is. It has to be worked out anew as events happen. This is why it's pretty ridiculous to think that there can be a 'revolutionary organisation' that preserves, defends, and propagates such radical ideas, because the meaning of radical is constantly changing, constantly being reforged. In the same way, we cannot protect ourselves against splits in our organizations by making sure that incoming members agree to a set of 'revolutionary' beliefs before they are allowed to join, because new situations are going to

ernment, like happened in Eastern Europe a decade ago. If armed struggle is needed, they haven't shown how it is possible or how it could win. Nor have they considered the possibility that capitalism might be defeated without armed struggle. In fact, this just might be the only way that it can be defeated, given the near impossibility, I would say, of revolutionary forces ever matching the arsenal of the ruling class. But they haven't examined this. Yet, isn't this one of the most agonizing questions facing anarchists today – how do we defeat the stupendous military might of the world's capitalist ruling classes? It will obviously take more than a few scattered passages of cliches to come to terms with this issue.

15. The Notion of the 'Leadership of Ideas': Now we come to the heart of the matter. But first a brief comment on the phrase itself, and the two words in it. Leadership. Aren't anarchists against leadership? Doesn't leadership imply followership? Don't anarchists believe in direct democracy, self-government, and cooperative projects? So why are we talking about 'leadership'? Ideas. Can ideas be separated from practice? Have our authors fallen here into the notorious separation of ideas and action so characteristic of vulgar marxism and the dominant bourgeois culture in general? Can you have a correct (read: revolutionary) body of ideas abstracted from any concrete practice? Our militants at the acf seem to think so. Here is a quote from point seven in their list on the role of the revolutionary organization. "Defending the independence and self-organisation of mass movements does not mean that the revolutionary organisation does not seek to spread its ideas in these movements. In this sense we recognise and fight for 'the leadership of ideas' within the working class through example and suggestion. In a non-revolutionary period the potentially revolutionary masses by and large hold conservative ideas and values. In this period there needs to be an organization that holds on to revolutionary ideas. This leadership of ideas means a clearer understanding of hierarchical society, the concept of self-organised society, and of the problem of Leninism."

and revolution as a matter of consciousness, rather than as a matter of concrete social arrangements for decision making, at work, at home, and in the neighborhood, just as they tend to see the fight between reformists and revolutionaries as a struggle over a correct set of ideas, rather than as a struggle for social autonomy.(b)

13. The Time Span of "The Revolution": The ACF anarchists believe that "the revolution must be global and virtually simultaneous". Throughout these papers they talk like this, like 'the revolution' will be sudden, happen all at once, and be worldwide. Of course there will be a pre-revolutionary build up, but these are struggles "before the revolution". The revolution is seen as a distinct event, as something separate from the pre-revolutionary preparations. They say things like: "We cannot say when or where the revolutionary outburst of class anger will first appear..." or "The culmination of all the hopes and fears expressed in this manifesto will come when our class directly challenges the bosses and states for control of our world – the Revolution itself." and "Many different types of workers' councils, communes, community networks, affinity and other groupings may emerge spontaneously in the first days of the revolution, ..." I believe that this is a false picture. Isn't working class anger already being expressed right now, daily, on a thousand fronts. Aren't we already challenging bosses and states in numerous ways? Could we ever hope to prevail if we have to rely on councils which "emerge spontaneously in the first days of the revolution"? Wouldn't our assemblies need to have been in existence for some time, and wouldn't we need to have acquired experience in working with and through them? I believe that this picture of a sudden revolution is a carry over from all the elitist, Jacobin, Blanquist, Leninist images of revolution, that is, from the idea of capturing the state, and of replacing one government with another. This can be sudden, and can happen overnight, as it often has. But gutting capitalism, as a world social order, could not happen like that. Gutting capitalism can only happen through a protracted struggle, covering decades, wherein capitalist institutions

are drained of power, wealth, and meaning, and replaced with anarchist arrangements. This protracted struggle is in fact going on right now, in numerous places.

It's true that capitalism can only be destroyed on a world scale, because it is a world system, but this does not mean that it will be replaced by a world government or be done in by a "unified global revolution". It can only be done in by hundreds of millions of autonomous communities who have rearranged their social relations along cooperative lines, gotten out of the labor market and out of the commodity market in general, and who have learned to form municipal and regional associations. This will happen sooner in some places and later in others. It will be an uneven development. It will be a process of gutting and weakening capitalist institutions until they are no longer able to repress the emergence of self-governing communities anywhere. To recover self-sufficiency is the key thing, that is, the ability to survive outside of the capitalist market. This can only be done on the local level, which local levels could then be coalesced into associations covering larger territories. But the acf papers disparage "localism" and advocate instead organization on the national and then the global levels.

To picture how capitalism, a global system, can be destroyed and replaced by anarchism, we need to begin with a picture of how an anarchistically organized world would function on the global level. It would do so through negotiated treaties among millions of autonomous communities or neighborhoods, just as now nation-states negotiate numerous treaties about global warming, ozone depletion, the oceans, the antarctic, whales, fishing. There is no global world government regulating any of these things. Nor is there a world authority operating the world postal system. Yet anyone in the world can mail a letter to anywhere else in the world and it will get there, because of treaties that have been negotiated by numerous governments. So to destroy capitalism we have to start building up, first the autonomous communities, and second the negotiated social arrangements, based on free association, among communi-

ties. This is obviously not something that can happen suddenly, all over the world, all at once.

14. Armed Struggle: This is one of the weakest, least developed, arguments in these papers. They believe in armed struggle. They put this forward as a principle. They believe that the capitalist ruling class can only be defeated through armed struggle. They are clear that the ruling class will use its military might to try to crush 'the revolution'. But they believe that this war is winnable, through 'workers militias'. The revolutionary organization will help with this. They write: "A strong anarchist communist organisation can help facilitate the working class itself producing coordinated armed self-defence forces, to counter the police and armies of states world-wide." They don't get into the details however. How are these militias going to organize themselves, especially on a global level, which the authors seem to think will be needed? More crucially, where are the militias going to get weapons, weapons that will counter tanks, helicopters, riot gear, pepper spray, automatic rifles, stun guns, rubber bullets, gas? There is no discussion of how this will be done or whether or not it is even possible. I believe they haven't really faced up yet to the obstacle to revolution that the overwhelming firepower that today's governments have amassed represents. Instead, they rely (in one of their other two or three passages on armed struggle) on that old standby, rebellion within the state's military forces. They write: "The majority of military personnel are working class and, however indoctrinated they are, we doubt that they will be prepared, on the whole, to shoot down their friends, neighbors and relatives." They believe that: "...the army will desert the state when it becomes clear that the people will no longer tolerate their government and are prepared to take to the streets to prove it." This is a completely unrealistic view. The shock troops of the ruling class are utterly dependable. Desertion is a very feeble hope to build a revolution on. "Taking to the streets" is not a strategy; it is a bad habit. And even where successful, it cannot result in anarchism, but only in a change of gov-