An Anarchist FAQ

Section J - What do anarchists do?

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This section discusses what anarchists get up to. There is little point thinking about the world unless you also want to change it for the better. And by trying to change it, you change yourself and others, making radical change more of a possibility. Therefore anarchists give their whole-hearted support to attempts by ordinary people to improve their lives by their own actions. We urge *"**emancipation through practical action**"* recognising that the *"collective experience"* gained in *"the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses"* will transform how they see the world and the world itself. [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 103] Ultimately, *"[t]he true man does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real, in the present."* [Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 327]

Anarchism is more than just a critique of statism and capitalism or a vision of a freer, better way of life. It is first and foremost a movement, the movement of working class people attempting to change the world. Therefore the kind of activity we discuss in this section of the FAQ forms the bridge between capitalism and anarchy. By self-activity and direct action, people can change both themselves and their surroundings. They develop within themselves the mental, ethical and spiritual qualities which can make an anarchist society a viable option. As Noam Chomsky argues:

> *"Only through their own struggle for liberation will ordinary people come to comprehend their true nature, suppressed and distorted within institutional structures designed to assure obedience and subordination. Only in this way will people develop more humane ethical standards, 'a new sense of right', 'the consciousness of their strength and their importance as a social factor in the life of their time' and their capacity to realise the strivings of their 'inmost nature.' Such direct engagement in the work of social reconstruction is a prerequisite for coming to perceive this 'inmost nature' and is the indispensable foundations upon which it can flourish"* [*"preface"*, Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. iii]

In other words, anarchism is not primarily a vision of a better future, but the actual social movement which is fighting within the current unjust and unfree society for that better future and to improve things in the here and now. Without standing up for yourself and what you believe is right, nothing will change. Thus anarchy can be found *"wherever free thought breaks loose from the chains of dogma; wherever the spirit of inquiry rejects the old formulas, wherver the human will asserts itself through independent actions; wherever honest people, rebelling against all enforced discipline, join freely together in order to educate themselves, and to reclaim, without any master, their share of life, and the complete satisfaction of their needs."* [ElisÃ©e Reclus, quoted by John P. Clark and Camille Martin (ed.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 62]

For anarchists, the future is **already appearing in the present** and is expressed by the creativity of working class self-activity. Anarchy is not some-day-to-be-achieved utopia, it is a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed from constraint. As such anarchist activity is about discovering and aiding emerging trends of mutual aid which work against capitalist domination, so the Anarchist *"studies society and tries to discover its **tendencies**, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his [or her] ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 47]

Indeed, as we discussed in section I.2.3, the future structures of a free society are created in the struggles against oppression today.

The kinds of activity outlined in this section are a general overview of anarchist work. It is by no means exclusive -- we are sure to have left something out. However, the key aspect of **real** anarchist activity is ***direct action*** - self-activity, self-help, self-liberation and solidarity (*"We wish,"* as French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier wrote, *"that the emancipation of the people might be the work of the people themselves."* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 18]). Such activity may be done by individuals (for example, propaganda work), but usually anarchists emphasise collective activity. This is because most of our problems are of a social nature, meaning that their solutions can only be worked on collectively. Individual solutions to social problems are doomed to failure, at best slowing down what they are opposed to (most obviously, ethical consumerism as discussed in section E.5). In addition, collective action gets us used to working together, promoting the experience of self-management and building organisations that will allow us to actively manage our own affairs. Also, and we would like to emphasise this, it can be **fun** to get together with other people and work with them, it can be fulfilling and empowering.

Anarchists do not ask those in power to give up that power. No, we promote forms of activity and organisation by which all the oppressed can liberate themselves by their own hands. In other words, we do not think that those in power will altruistically renounce that power or their privileges. Instead, the oppressed must take the power **back** into their own hands by their own actions. We must free ourselves, no one else can do it for use.

Here we will discuss anarchist ideas on struggle, what anarchists actually (and, almost as importantly, do not) do in the here and now and the sort of alternatives anarchists try to build within statism and capitalism in order to destroy them. As well as a struggle against oppression, anarchist activity is also struggle for freedom. As well as fighting against material poverty, anarchists combat spiritual poverty. By resisting hierarchy we emphasis the importance of **living** and of **life as art.** By proclaiming ***"Neither Master nor Slave"*** we urge an ethical transformation, a transformation that will help create the possibility of a truly free society. This point was stressed by Emma Goldman after she saw the defeat of the Russian Revolution by a combination of Leninist politics and capitalist armed intervention:

> *"revolution is in vain unless inspired by its ultimate ideal. Revolutionary methods must be in tune with revolutionary aims . . . In short, the ethical values which the revolution is to establish must be initiated with the revolutionary activities . . . The latter can only serve as a real and dependable bridge to the better life if built of the same material as the life to be achieved."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 404]

In other words, anarchist activity is more than creating libertarian alternatives and resisting hierarchy, it is about building the new world in the shell of the old not only with regards to organisations and self-activity, but also within the individual. It is about transforming yourself while transforming the world (both processes obviously interacting and supporting each other) for while *"we associate ourselves with others in working for . . . social revolution, which for us means the destruction of all monopoly and all government, and the direct seizure by the workers of the means of production"* we do not forget that *"the first aim of Anarchism is to assert and make good the dignity of the individual human being."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 43 and p. 51]

By direct action, self-management and self-activity we can make the words first heard in Paris, 1968 a living reality: ***"All power to the imagination!"*** Words, we are sure, previous generations of anarchists would have whole-heartedly agreed with. There is a power in humans, a creative power, a power to alter *what is* into *what should be*. Anarchists try to create alternatives that will allow that power to be expressed, the power of imagination.

Such a social movement will change how we act as individuals, with anarchists seeking to apply our principles in our daily lives as much as our daily struggles. This means that libertarians must change how we relate to our comrades and fellow workers by applying our egalitarian ideals everywhere. Part of the task of anarchists is to challenge social hierarchies everywhere, including in the home. As Durruti put it:

> *"When will you stop thinking like the bourgeoisie, that women are men's servants? It's enough that society is divided into classes. We're not going to make even more classes by creating differences between men and women in our own homes!"* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 341]

So we have a interactive process of struggle and transformation of both society and the individuals within it. In the sections that follow we will discuss the forms of self-activity and self-organisation which anarchists think will stimulate and develop the imagination of those oppressed by hierarchy, build anarchy in action and help create a free society.

J.1 Are anarchists involved in social struggles?

Yes. Anarchism, above all else, is a movement which aims to not only analyse the world but also to change it. Therefore anarchists aim to participate in and encourage social struggle. Social struggle includes strikes, marches, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, occupations and so on. Such activities show that the ***"spirit of revolt"*** is alive and well, that people are thinking and acting for themselves and against what authorities want them to do. This, in the eyes of anarchists, plays a key role in helping create the seeds of anarchy within capitalism.

Anarchists consider socialistic tendencies to develop within society as people see the benefits of co-operation and particularly when mutual aid develops within the struggle against authority, oppression and exploitation. Anarchism, as Kropotkin argued, *"originated in everyday struggles."* [**Environment and Revolution**, p.58] Therefore, anarchists do not place anarchy abstractly against capitalism but see it as a tendency within and against the system -- a tendency created by struggle and which can be developed to such a degree that it can **replace** the dominant structures and social relationships with new, more liberatory and humane ones. This perspective indicates why anarchists are involved in social struggles -- they are an expression of these tendencies within but against capitalism which can ultimately replace it.

However, there is another reason why anarchists are involved in social struggle -- namely the fact that we are part of the oppressed and, like other oppressed people, fight for our freedom and to make our life better in the here and now. It is not in some distant tomorrow that we want to see the end of oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. It is today, in our own life, that the anarchist wants to win our freedom, or at the very least, to improve our situation, reduce

oppression, domination and exploitation as well as increasing individual liberty for *"every blow given to the institutions of private property and to the government, every exaltation of the conscience of man, disruption of the present conditions, every lie unmasked, every part of human activity taken away from the control of the authorities, every augmentation of the spirit of solidarity and initiative is a step towards Anarchism."* [Errico Malatesta, **Towards Anarchism**, p. 75] We are aware that we often fail to do so, but the very process of struggle can help create a more libertarian aspect to society:

> *"Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers [and other oppressed sections of society] learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on the things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the reasons of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activity and they will in the end understand that to make victory secure and definite, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of moral elevation and emancipation of the workers [and other oppressed sections of society] must benefit by the fact that workers [and other oppressed people] unite and struggle for their interests."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Therefore, *"we as anarchists and workers, must incite and encourage"* workers and other oppressed people *"to struggle, and join them in their struggle."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 190] This is for three reasons. Firstly, struggle helps generate libertarian ideas and movements which could help make existing society more anarchistic and less oppressive. Secondly, struggle creates people, movements and organisations which are libertarian in nature and which, potentially, can replace capitalism with a more humane society. Thirdly, because anarchists are part of the oppressed and so have an interest in taking part in and showing solidarity with struggles and movements that can improve our life in the here and now (*"an injury to one is an injury to all"*).

As we will see in section J.2 anarchists encourage direct action within social struggles as well as arguing for anarchist ideas and theories. However, what is important to note here is that social struggle is a sign that people are thinking and acting for themselves and working together to change things. Howard Zinn is completely correct:

> *"civil disobedience . . . is **not** our problem. Our problem is civil **obedience.** Our problem is that numbers of people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience . . . Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running the country. That's our problem."* [**Failure to Quit**, p. 45]

Therefore, social struggle is an important thing for anarchists and we take part in it as much as we can. Moreover, anarchists do more than just take part. We are fighting to get rid of the

system that causes the problems which people fight against. We explain anarchism to those who are involved in struggle with us and seek to show the relevance of anarchism to people's everyday lives through such struggles and the popular organisations which they create. By so doing we try to popularise the ideas and methods of anarchism, namely solidarity, self-management and direct action.

Anarchists do not engage in abstract propaganda (become an anarchist, wait for the revolution -- if we did that, in Malatesta's words, *"that day would never come."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195]). We know that our ideas will only win a hearing and respect when we can show both their relevance to people's lives in the here and now and show that an anarchist world is both possible and desirable. In other words, social struggle is the "school" of anarchism, the means by which people become anarchists and anarchist ideas are applied in action. Hence the importance of social struggle and anarchist participation within it.

Before discussing issues related to social struggle, it is important to point out here that anarchists are interested in struggles against all forms of oppression and do not limit ourselves to purely economic issues. The hierarchical and exploitative nature of the capitalist economy is only part of the story -- other forms of oppression are needed in order to keep it going (not to mention those associated with the state) and have resulted from its workings (in addition to those inherited from previous hierarchical and class systems). Domination, exploitation, hierarchy and oppression do not remain in the workplace. They infest our homes, our friendships and our communities. They need to be fought everywhere, not just in work.

Therefore, anarchists are convinced that human life and the struggle against oppression cannot be reduced to mere money and, indeed, the *"proclivity for economic reductionism is now actually obscurantist. It not only shares in the bourgeois tendency to render material egotism and class interest the centrepieces of history it also denigrates all attempts to transcend this image of humanity as a mere economic being . . . by depicting them as mere 'marginalia' at best, as 'well-intentioned middle-class ideology' at worse, or sneeringly, as 'diversionary,' 'utopian,' and 'unrealistic' . . . Capitalism, to be sure, did not create the 'economy' or 'class interest,' but it subverted all human traits -- be they speculative thought, love, community, friendship, art, or self-governance -- with the authority of economic calculation and the rule of quantity. Its 'bottom line' is the balance sheet's sum and its basic vocabulary consists of simple numbers."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Modern Crisis**, pp. 125-126]

In other words, issues such as freedom, justice, individual dignity, quality of life and so on cannot be reduced to the categories of capitalist economics. Anarchists think that any radical movement which does so fails to understand the nature of the system it is fighting against (indeed, economic reductionism plays into the hands of capitalist ideology). So, when anarchists take part in and encourage social struggle they do not aim to restrict or reduce them to economic issues (however important these are). The anarchist knows that the individual has more interests than just material ones and we consider it essential to take into account the needs of the emotions, mind and spirit just as much as those of the belly:

> *"The class struggle does not centre around material exploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation. In addition, entirely new issues emerge: coercive attitudes, the quality of work, ecology (or stated in more general terms, psychological and environmental oppression) . . . Terms like 'classes' and 'class struggle,' conceived*

> *of almost entirely as economic categories and relations, are too one-sided to express the **universalisation** of the struggle. Use these limited expressions if you like (the target is still a ruling class and a class society), but this terminology, with its traditional connotations, does not reflect the sweep and the multi-dimensional nature of the struggle . . . [and] fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 151-2]

For anarchists, exploitation and class rule are just part of a wider system of domination and hierarchy. Material gains, therefore, can never completely make-up for oppressive social relationships. As the anarchist character created by anarchist science-fiction writer Ursula Le Guin put it, capitalists *"think if people have enough things they will be content to live in prison."* [**The Dispossessed**, p. 120] Anarchists disagree -- and the experience of social revolt in the "affluent" 1960s proves their case.

This is unsurprising for, ultimately, the *"antagonism [between classes] is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers. . . because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want any more."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

J.1.1 Why are social struggles important?

Social struggle is an expression of the class struggle, namely the struggle of working class people **against** their exploitation, oppression and alienation and **for** their liberty from capitalist and state. It is what happens when one group of people have hierarchical power over another: where there is oppression, there is resistance and where there is resistance to authority you will see anarchy in action. For this reason anarchists are in favour of, and are involved within, social struggles. Ultimately they are a sign of individuals asserting their autonomy and disgust at an unfair system. As Howard Zinn stresses:

> *"Both the source and the solution of our civil liberties problems are in the situations of every day: where we live, where we work, where we go to school, where we spend most of our hours. Our actual freedom is not determined by the Constitution or by [the Supreme] Court, but by the power the policeman has over us in the street or that of the local judge behind him; by the authority of our employers [if we are working]; by the power of teachers, principals, university president, and boards of trustees if we are students; by the welfare bureaucracy if we are poor [or unemployed]; by prison guards if we are in jail; by landlords if we are tenants; by the medical profession or hospital administration if we are physically or mentally ill.*
>
> *"Freedom and justice are local things, at hand, immediate. They are determined by power and money, whose authority over our daily lives is much less ambiguous than decisions of the Supreme Court. Whatever claim we . . . can make to liberty on the national level . . . on the local level we live at different times in different feudal fiefdoms where our subordination is clear."* [**Failure to Quit**, pp. 53-4]

These realities of wealth and power will remain unshaken unless counter-forces appear on the very ground our liberty is restricted -- on the street, in workplaces, at home, at school, in

hospitals and so on. For the *"only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which people show themselves capable of opposing it."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 196]

Social struggles for improvements are also important indications of the spirit of revolt and of people supporting each other in the continual assertion of their (and our) freedom. They show people standing up for what they consider right and just, building alternative organisations, creating their own solutions to their problems - and are a slap in the face of all the paternal authorities which dare govern us. Hence their importance to anarchists and all people interested in extending freedom.

In addition, social struggle helps break people from their hierarchical conditioning. Anarchists view people not as fixed objects to be classified and labelled, but as human beings engaged in making their own lives. We live, love, think, feel, hope, dream, and can change ourselves, our environment and social relationships. Social struggle is the way this is done collectively. Such struggle promotes attributes within people which are crushed by hierarchy (attributes such as imagination, organisational skills, self-assertion, self-management, critical thought, self-confidence and so on) as people come up against practical problems in their struggles and have to solve them themselves. This builds self-confidence and an awareness of individual and collective power. By seeing that their boss, the state and so on are against them they begin to realise that they live in a class ridden, hierarchical society that depends upon their submission to work. As such, social struggle is a politicising experience.

Struggle allows those involved to develop their abilities for self-rule through practice and so begins the process by which individuals assert their ability to control their own lives and to participate in social life directly. These are all key elements of anarchism and are required for an anarchist society to work (*"Self-management of the struggle comes first, then comes self-management of work and society"* [Alfredo Bonnano, *"Self-Management"*, pp. 35-37, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 48, p. 35]). So self-activity is a key factor in self-liberation, self-education and the creating of anarchists. In a nutshell, people learn in struggle:

> *"In our opinion all action which is directed toward the destruction of economic and political oppression, which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people; which gives them an awareness of their individual rights and their power, and persuades them themselves to act on their own behalf . . . brings us closer to our ends and is therefore a good thing. On the other hand all activity which tends to preserve the present state of affairs, that tends to sacrifice man against his will for the triumph of a principle, is bad because it is a denial of our ends.* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

A confident working class is an essential factor in making successful and libertarian improvements within the current system and, ultimately, in making a revolution. Without that self-confidence people tend to just follow "leaders" and we end up changing rulers rather than changing society. So part of our job as anarchists is to encourage people to fight for whatever small reforms are possible at present, to improve our/their conditions, to give people confidence in their ability to start taking control of their lives, and to point out that there is a limit to whatever (sometimes temporary) gains capitalism will or can concede. Hence the need for a revolutionary change.

Only this can ensure that anarchist ideas are the most popular ones for if we think a movement is, all things considered, a positive or progressive one then we should not abstain

but should seek to popularise anarchist ideas and strategies within it. In this way we create ***"schools of anarchy"*** within the current system and lay the foundations of something better. Revolutionary tendencies and movements, in other words, must create the organisations that contain, in embryo, the society of the future (see section H.1.6). These organisations, in turn, further the progress of radical change by providing social spaces for the transformation of individuals (via the use of direct action, practising self-management and solidarity, and so on). Therefore, social struggle aids the creation of a free society by accustoming people to govern themselves within self-managed organisations and empowering the (officially) disempowered via the use of direct action and mutual aid.

Hence the importance of social (or class) struggle for anarchists (which, we may add, goes on all the time and is a two-sided affair). Social struggle is the means of breaking the normality of capitalist and statist life, a means of developing the awareness for social change and the means of making life better under the current system. The moment that people refuse to bow to authority, its days are numbered. Social struggle indicates that some of the oppressed see that by using their power of disobedience they can challenge, perhaps eventually end, hierarchical power.

Ultimately, anarchy is not just something you believe in, it is not a cool label you affix to yourself, it is something you do. You participate. If you stop doing it, anarchy crumbles. Social struggle is the means by which we ensure that anarchy becomes stronger and grows.

J.1.2 Are anarchists against reforms?

No, we are not. While most anarchists are against reformism (namely the notion that we can somehow reform capitalism and the state away) we are most definitely in favour of reforms (i.e. improvements in the here and now). Anarchists are radicals; as such, we seek the root causes of societal problems. Reformists seek to ameliorate the symptoms of societal problems, while anarchists focus on the causes.

This does not mean, however, that we ignore struggles for reforms in the here and now. The claim that anarchists are against such improvements are often put forth by opponents of anarchism in an effort to paint us as irrelevant extremists with no practical outlet for our ideas beyond abstract calls for revolution. This is not true. Libertarians are well aware that we can act to make our lives better while, at the same time, seeking to remove the root causes of the problems we face. (see, for example, Emma Goldman's account of her recognition of how false it was deny the need for short-term reforms in favour of revolution. [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 52]). In the words of the revolutionary syndicalist Emile Pouget:

> *"Trade union endeavour has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.*
>
> *"At present, trade union action is designed to win partial and gradual improvements which, far from constituting a goal, can only be considered as a means of stepping up demands and wresting further improvements from capitalism . . .*

"This question of partial improvements served as the pretext for attempts to sow discord in the trades associations. Politicians . . . have tried to . . . stir up ill-feeling and to split the unions into two camps, by categorising workers as reformists and as revolutionaries. The better to discredit the latter, they have dubbed them 'the advocates of all or nothing' and they have falsely represented them as supposed adversaries of improvements achievable right now.

"The most that can be said about this nonsense is that it is witless. There is not a worker . . . who, on grounds of principle or for reasons of tactics, would insist upon working ten hours for an employer instead of eight hours, while earning six francs instead of seven . . .

"What appears to afford some credence to such chicanery is the fact that the unions, cured by the cruel lessons of experience from all hope in government intervention, are justifiably mistrustful of it. They know that the State, whose function is to act as capital's gendarme, is, by its very nature, inclined to tip the scales in favour of the employer side. So, whenever a reform is brought about by legal avenues, they do not fall upon it with the relish of a frog devouring the red rag that conceals the hook, they greet it with all due caution, especially as this reform is made effective only if the workers are organised to insist forcefully upon its implementation.

"The trade unions are even more wary of gifts from the government because they have often found these to be poison gifts . . . Wanting real improvements . . . instead of waiting until the government is generous enough to bestow them, they wrest them in open battle, through direct action.

"If, as sometimes is the case, the improvement they seek is subject to the law, the trade unions strive to obtain it through outside pressure brought to bear upon the authorities and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament, a puerile pursuit that might drag on for centuries before there was a majority in favour of the yearned-for reform.

"When the desired improvement is to be wrestled directly from the capitalist, the trades associations resort to vigorous pressure to convey their wishes. Their methods may well vary, although the direct action principle underlies them all . . .

"But, whatever the improvement won, it must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation. So . . . the fine distinction between 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' evaporates and one is led to the conclusion that the only really reformist workers are the revolutionary syndicalists." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 71-3]

Pouget was referring to revolutionary unions but his argument can be generalised to all social movements.

By seeking improvements from below by direct action, solidarity and the organisation of those who directly suffer the injustice, anarchists can make reforms more substantial, effective and long lasting than "reforms" made from above by reformists. By recognising that the effectiveness of a reform is dependent on the power of the oppressed to resist those who

would dominate them, anarchists seek change from the bottom-up and so make reforms real rather than just words gathering dust in the law books.

For example, a reformist sees poverty and looks at ways to lessen the destructive and debilitating effects of it: this produced things like the minimum wage, affirmative action, the projects in the USA and similar reforms in other countries. An anarchist looks at poverty and says, "what causes this?" and attacks that source of poverty, rather than the symptoms. While reformists may succeed in the short run with their institutional panaceas, the festering problems remain untreated, dooming reform to eventual costly, inevitable failure -- measured in human lives, no less. Like a quack that treats the symptoms of a disease without getting rid of what causes it, all the reformist can promise is short-term improvements for a condition that never goes away and may ultimately kill the sufferer. The anarchist, like a real doctor, investigates the causes of the illness and treats them while fighting the symptoms.

Therefore, anarchists are of the opinion that *"[w]hile preaching against every kind of government, and demanding complete freedom, we must support all struggles for partial freedom, because we are convinced that one learns through struggle, and that once one begins to enjoy a little freedom one ends by wanting it all. We must always be with the people . . . [and] get them to understand . . . [what] they may demand should be obtained by their own efforts and that they should despise and detest whoever is part of, or aspires to, government."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas** p. 195]

So, anarchists are not opposed to struggles for reforms and improvements in the here and now. Indeed, few anarchists think that an anarchist society will occur without a long period of anarchist activity encouraging and working within social struggle against injustice. Thus Malatesta's words:

> *"the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchism today, tomorrow or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards Anarchism today, tomorrow and always."* [**Towards Anarchism**, p. 75]

So, when fighting for improvements anarchists do so in an anarchist way, one that encourages self-management, direct action and the creation of libertarian solutions and alternatives to both capitalism and the state.

J.1.3 Why are anarchists against reformism?

Firstly, it must be pointed out that the struggle for reforms within capitalism is **not** the same as reformism. Reformism is the idea that reforms within capitalism are enough in themselves and attempts to change the system are impossible (and not desirable). As such all anarchists are against this form of reformism -- we think that the system can be (and should be) changed and until that happens any reforms, no matter how essential, will not get to the root of social problems.

In addition, particularly in the old social democratic labour movement, reformism also meant the belief that social reforms could be used to **transform** capitalism into socialism. In this sense, only Individualist anarchists and Mutualists can be considered reformist as they think their system of mutual banking can reform capitalism into a free system. However, in contrast to Social Democracy, such anarchists think that such reforms cannot come about via

government action, but only by people creating their own alternatives and solutions by their own actions:

> *"But experience testifies and philosophy demonstrates, contrary to that prejudice, that any revolution, to be effective, must be spontaneous and emanate, not from the heads of the authorities but from the bowels of the people: that government is reactionary rather than revolutionary: that it could not have any expertise in revolutions, given that society, to which that secret is alone revealed, does not show itself through legislative decree but rather through the spontaneity of its manifestations: that, ultimately, the only connection between government and labour is that labour, in organising itself, has the abrogation of government as its mission."* [Proudhon, **No Gods, No Master**, vol. 1, p. 52]

So, anarchists oppose reformism because it takes the steam out of revolutionary movements by providing easy, decidedly short-term "solutions" to deep social problems. In this way, reformists can present the public with they've done and say "look, all is better now. The system worked." Trouble is that over time, the problems will only continue to grow because the reforms did not tackle them in the first place. To use Alexander Berkman's excellent analogy:

> *"If you should carry out [the reformers'] ideas in your personal life, you would not have a rotten tooth that aches pulled out all at once. You would have it pulled out a little to-day, some more next week, for several months or years, and by then you would be ready to pull it out altogether, so it should not hurt so much. That is the logic of the reformer. Don't be 'too hasty,' don't pull a bad tooth out all at once."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 64]

Rather than seek to change the root cause of the problems (namely in a hierarchical, oppressive and exploitative system), reformists try to make the symptoms better. In the words of Berkman again:

> *"Suppose a pipe burst in your house. You can put a bucket under the break to catch the escaping water. You can keep on putting buckets there, but as long as you do not mend the broken pipe, the leakage will continue, no matter how much you may swear about it . . . until you repair the broken social pipe."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 67-8]

What reformism fails to do is fix the underlying root causes of the real problems society faces. Therefore, reformists try to pass laws which reduce the level of pollution rather than work to end a system in which it makes economic sense to pollute. Or they pass laws to improve working conditions and safety while failing to get rid of the wage slavery which creates the bosses whose interests are served by them ignoring those laws and regulations. The list is endless. Ultimately, reformism fails because reformists *"believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the cause of, as well as the prop that supports these evils."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 82]

Revolutionaries, in contrast to reformists, fight both symptoms **and** the root causes. They recognise that as long as the cause of the evil remains, any attempts to fight the symptoms, however necessary, will never get to the root of the problem. There is no doubt that we have to fight the symptoms, however revolutionaries recognise that this struggle is not an end in

itself and should be considered purely as a means of increasing working class strength and social power within society until such time as capitalism and the state (i.e. the root causes of most problems) can be abolished.

Reformists also tend to objectify the people whom they are "helping": they envision them as helpless, formless masses who need the wisdom and guidance of the "best and the brightest" to lead them to the Promised Land. Reformists mean well, but this is altruism borne of ignorance, which is destructive over the long run. Freedom cannot be given and so any attempt to impose reforms from above cannot help but ensure that people are treated as children, incapable of making their own decisions and, ultimately, dependent on bureaucrats to govern them. This can be seen from public housing. As Colin Ward argues, the *"whole tragedy of publicly provided non-profit housing for rent and the evolution of this form of tenure in Britain is that the local authorities have simply taken over, though less flexibly, the role of the landlord, together with all the dependency and resentment that it engenders."* [**Housing: An Anarchist Approach**, p. 184] This feature of reformism was skilfully used by the right-wing to undermine publicly supported housing and other aspects of the welfare state. The reformist social-democrats reaped what they had sown.

Reformism often amounts to little more than an altruistic contempt for the masses, who are considered as little more than victims who need to be provided for by state. The idea that we may have our own visions of what we want is ignored and replaced by the vision of the reformists who enact legislation **for** us and make "reforms" from the top-down. Little wonder such reforms can be counter-productive -- they cannot grasp the complexity of life and the needs of those subject to them. Reformists effectively say, *"don't do anything, we'll do it for you."* You can see why anarchists would loathe this sentiment; anarchists are the consummate do-it-yourselfers, and there's nothing reformists hate more than people who can take care of themselves, who will not let them "help" them.

Reformists may mean well, but they do not grasp the larger picture -- by focusing exclusively on narrow aspects of a problem, they choose to believe that is the whole problem. In this wilfully narrow examination of pressing social ills, reformists are, more often than not, counter-productive. The disaster of the urban rebuilding projects in the United States (and similar projects in Britain which moved inter-city working class communities into edge of town developments during the 1950s and 1960s) are an example of reformism at work: upset at the growing slums, reformists supported projects that destroyed the ghettos and built brand-new housing for working class people to live in. They looked nice (initially), but they did nothing to address the problem of poverty and indeed created more problems by breaking up communities and neighbourhoods.

Logically, it makes no sense. Why dance around a problem when you can attack it directly? Reformists dilute social movements, softening and weakening them over time. The AFL-CIO labour unions in the USA, like the ones in Western Europe, killed the labour movement by narrowing and channelling labour activity and taking power from the workers themselves, where it belongs, and placing it the hands of a bureaucracy. The British Labour Party, after over 100 years of reformist practice, has done little more than manage capitalism, seen most of its reforms undermined by right-wing governments (and by the following Labour governments!) and the creation of a leadership of the party (in the shape of New Labour) which was in most ways as right-wing as the Conservative Party (if not more so, as shown once they were in power). Bakunin would not have been surprised.

Also, it is funny to hear left-wing "revolutionaries" and "radicals" put forward the reformist line that the capitalist state can help working people (indeed be used to abolish itself!). Despite the fact that leftists blame the state and capitalism for most of the problems we face, they usually turn to the **capitalist** state to remedy the situation, not by leaving people alone, but by becoming more involved in people's lives. They support government housing, government jobs, welfare, government-funded and regulated child care, government-funded drug "treatment," and other government-centred programmes and activities. If a capitalist (and racist/sexist/authoritarian) government is the problem, how can it be depended upon to change things to the benefit of working class people or other oppressed sections of the population? Surely any reforms passed by the state will not solve the problem? As Malatesta suggested:

> *"Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self-preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 81]

Therefore, reforms gained by direct action are of a different quality and nature than those passed by reformist politicians -- these latter will only serve the interests of the ruling class as they do not threaten their privileges while the former have the potential for real change.

This is not to say that Anarchists oppose **all** state-based reforms nor that we join with the right in seeking to destroy them (or, for that matter, with "left" politicians in seeking to "reform" them, i.e., reduce them). Without a popular social movement creating alternatives to state welfare, so-called "reform" by the state almost always means attacks on the most vulnerable elements in society in the interests of capital. As anarchists are against both state and capitalism, we can oppose such reforms without contradiction while, at the same time, arguing that welfare for the rich should be abolished long before welfare for the many is even thought about. See section J.5.15 for more discussion on the welfare state and anarchist perspectives on it.

Instead of encouraging working class people to organise themselves and create their own alternatives and solutions to their problem (which can supplement, and ultimately replace, whatever welfare state activity which is actually useful), reformists and other radicals urge people to get the state to act for them. However, the state is not the community and so whatever the state does for people you can be sure it will be in **its** interests, not theirs. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"We maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges . . . the economic and political liberation of man will have to create new forms for its expression in life, instead of those established by the State.*
>
> *"Consequently, the chief aim of Anarchism is to awaken those constructive powers of the labouring masses of the people which at all great moments of history came forward to accomplish the necessary changes . . .*

> *"This is also why the Anarchists refuse to accept the functions of legislators or servants of the State. We know that the social revolution will not be accomplished by means of **laws.** Laws only **follow** the accomplished facts . . . a law remains a dead letter so long as there are not on the spot the living forces required for making of the **tendencies** expressed in the law an accomplished **fact**.*
>
> *"On the other hand . . . the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, -- the State.*
>
> *"Such a struggle . . . better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work [and life in general], while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his [or her] thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Environment and Evolution**, pp. 82-3]

Therefore, while seeking reforms, anarchists are against reformism and reformists. Reforms are not seen as an end in themselves but rather a means of changing society from the bottom-up and a step in that direction:

> *"Each step towards economic freedom, each victory won over Capitalism will be at the same time a step towards political liberty -- towards liberation from the yoke of the State . . . And each step towards taking from the State any one of its powers and attributes will be helping the masses to win a victory over Capitalism."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 95]

However, no matter what, anarchists *"will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to keep advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government."* Therefore, it is *"not true to say"* that anarchists *"are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from government and employers, who only give in through fear, and because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81 and p. 83]

Only working class people, by our own actions and organisations, getting the state and capital out of the way can produce an improvement in our lives, indeed it is the only thing that will lead to **real** changes for the better. Encouraging people to rely on themselves instead of the state or capital can lead to self-sufficient, independent, and, hopefully, more rebellious people. Working class people, despite having fewer options in a number of areas in our lives, due both to hierarchy and restrictive laws, still are capable of making choices about our actions, organising our own lives and are responsible for the consequences of our decisions. We are also more than able to determine what is and is not a good reform to existing institutions and do not need politicians informing us what is in our best interests (particularly when it is the right seeking to abolish those parts of the state not geared purely to defending property). To think otherwise is to infantilise us, to consider us less fully human than other people and reproduce the classic capitalist vision of working class people as means of production, to be used, abused, and discarded as required. Such thinking lays the basis for

paternalistic interventions in our lives by the state, ensuring our continued dependence and inequality -- and the continued existence of capitalism and the state. Ultimately, there are two options:

> *"The oppressed either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than good by helping to slow down, or divert . . . the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81]

Reformism encourages the first attitude within people and so ensures the impoverishment of the human spirit. Anarchism encourages the second attitude and so ensures the enrichment of humanity and the possibility of meaningful change. Why think that ordinary people cannot arrange their lives for themselves as well as Government people can arrange it not for themselves but for others?

J.1.4 What attitude do anarchists take to "single-issue" campaigns?

Firstly, we must note that anarchists do take part in "single-issue" campaigns, but do not nourish false hopes in them. This section explains what anarchists think of such campaigns.

A "single-issue" campaign are usually run by a pressure group which concentrates on tackling issues one at a time. For example, C.N.D. (The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) is a classic example of "single-issue" campaigning with the aim of getting rid of nuclear weapons as the be-all and end-all of its activity. For anarchists, however, single-issue campaigning can be seen as a source of false hopes. The possibilities of changing one aspect of a totally inter-related system and the belief that pressure groups can compete fairly with transnational corporations, the military and so forth, in their influence over decision making bodies can both be seen to be optimistic at best.

In addition, many "single-issue" campaigns desire to be "apolitical", concentrating purely on the one issue which unites the campaign and so refuse to analyse or discuss wider issues and the root causes of the issue in question (almost always, the system we live under). This means that they end up accepting the system which causes the problems they are fighting against. At best, any changes achieved by the campaign must be acceptable to the establishment or be so watered down in content that no practical long-term good is done. This can be seen from the green movement, where groups like **Greenpeace** and **Friends of the Earth** accept the status quo as a given and limit themselves to working within it. This often leads to them tailoring their "solutions" to be "practical" within a fundamentally anti-ecological political and economic system, so slowing down (at best) ecological disruption.

For anarchists these problems all stem from the fact that social problems cannot be solved as single issues. As Larry Law argued:

> *"single issue politics . . . deals with the issue or problem in isolation. When one problem is separated from all other problems, a solution really is impossible. The*

> *more campaigning on an issue there is, the narrower its perspectives become . . . As the perspective of each issue narrows, the contradictions turn into absurdities . . . What single issue politics does is attend to 'symptoms' but does not attack the 'disease' itself. It presents such issues as nuclear war, racial and sexual discrimination, poverty, starvation, pornography, etc., as if they were aberrations or faults in the system. In reality such problems are the inevitable consequence of a social order based on exploitation and hierarchical power . . . single issue campaigns lay their appeal for relief at the feet of the very system which oppresses them. By petitioning they acknowledge the right of those in power to exercise that power as they choose."* [**Bigger Cages, Longer Chains**, pp. 17-20].

Single issue politics often prolong the struggle for a free society by fostering illusions that it is just parts of the capitalist system which are wrong, not the whole of it, and that those at the top of the system can, and will, act in our interests. While such campaigns can do some good, practical, work and increase knowledge and education about social problems, they are limited by their very nature and can not lead to extensive improvements in the here and now, never mind a free society.

Therefore, anarchists often support and work within single-issue campaigns, trying to get them to use effective methods of activity (such as direct action), work in an anarchistic manner (i.e. from the bottom up) and to try to "politicise" them into questioning the whole of the system. However, anarchists do not let themselves be limited to such activity as a social revolution or movement is not a group of single-issue campaigns but a mass movement which understands the inter-related nature of social problems and so the need to change every aspect of life.

J.1.5 Why do anarchists try to generalise social struggles?

Basically, we do it in order to encourage and promote solidarity. This is **the** key to winning struggles in the here and now as well as creating the class consciousness necessary to create an anarchist society. At its most simple, generalising different struggles means increasing the chances of winning them. Take, for example, when one trade or one workplace goes on strike while the others continue to work:

> *"Consider yourself how foolish and inefficient is the present form of labour organisation in which one trade or craft may be on strike while the other branches of the same industry continue to work. Is it not ridiculous that when the street car workers of New York, for instance, quit work, the employees of the subway, the cab and omnibus drivers remain on the job? . . . It is clear, then, that you compel compliance [from your bosses] only when you are determined, when your union is strong, when you are well organised, when you are united in such a manner that the boss cannot run his factory against your will. But the employer is usually some big . . . company that has mills or mines in various places. . . If it cannot operate . . . in Pennsylvania because of a strike, it will try to make good its losses by continuing . . . and increasing production [elsewhere] . . . In that way the company . . . breaks the strike."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, pp. 199-200]

By organising all workers in one union (after all they all have the same boss) it increases the power of each trade considerably. It may be easy for a boss to replace a few workers, but a

whole workforce would be far more difficult. By organising all workers in the same industry, the power of each workplace is correspondingly increased. Extending this example to outside the workplace, its clear that by mutual support between different groups increases the chances of each group winning its fight. As the I.W.W. put it: ***"An injury to one is an injury to all."*** By generalising struggles, by practising mutual aid we can ensure that when we are fighting for our rights and against injustice we will not be isolated and alone. If we don't support each other, groups will be picked off one by one. and if we go into struggle, there will be no one there to support us and we are more likely to be defeated.

Therefore, from an anarchist point of view, the best thing about generalising struggles is that as well as increasing the likilihood of success (*"Solidarity is Strength"*) it leads to an increased spirit of solidarity, responsibility and class consciousness. This is because by working together and showing solidarity those involved get to understand their common interests and that the struggle is not against **this** injustice or **that** boss but against **all** injustice and **all** bosses.

This sense of increased social awareness and solidarity can be seen from the experience of the C.N.T in Spain during the 1930s. The C.N.T. organised all workers in a given area into one big union. Each workplace was a union branch and were joined together in a local area confederation. The result was that the territorial basis of the unions brought all the workers from one area together and fomented **class** solidarity over and before industry-loyalties and interests. This can also be seen from the experiences of the syndicalist unions in Italy and France as well. The structure of such local federations also situates the workplace in the community where it really belongs.

Also, by uniting struggles together, we can see that there are really no "single issues" -- that all various different problems are inter-linked. For example, ecological problems are not just that, but have a political and economic basis and that economic and social domination and exploitation spills into the environment. Inter-linking struggles means that they can be seen to be related to other struggles against capitalist exploitation and oppression and so encourage solidarity and mutual aid. What goes on in the environment, for instance, is directly related to questions of domination and inequality within human society, that pollution is often directly related to companies cutting corners to survive in the market or increase profits. Similarly, struggles against sexism or racism can be seen as part of a wider struggle against hierarchy, exploitation and oppression in all their forms. As such, uniting struggles has an important educational effect above and beyond the benefits in terms of winning struggles.

Murray Bookchin presents a concrete example of this process of linking issues and widening the struggle:

> *"Assume there is a struggle by welfare mothers to increase their allotments . . . Without losing sight of the concrete issues that initially motivated the struggle, revolutionaries would try to catalyse an order of relationships between the mothers entirely different from [existing ones] . . . They would try to foster a deep sense of community, a rounded human relationship that would transform the very subjectivity of the people involved . . . Personal relationships would be intimate, not merely issue-orientated. People would get to **know** each other, to **confront** each other; they would **explore** each other with a view of achieving the most complete, unalienated relationships. Women would discuss sexism, as well as their welfare allotments, child-*

rearing as well as harassment by landlords, their dreams and hopes as human beings as well as the cost of living.

"From this intimacy there would grow, hopefully, a supportive system of kinship, mutual aid, sympathy and solidarity in daily life. The women might collaborate to establish a rotating system of baby sitters and child-care attendants, the co-operative buying of good food at greatly reduced prices, the common cooking and partaking of meals, the mutual learning of survival skills and the new social ideas, the fostering of creative talents, and many other shared experiences. Every aspect of life that could be explored and changed would be one part of the kind of relationships . . .

"The struggle for increased allotments would expand beyond the welfare system to the schools, the hospitals, the police, the physical, cultural, aesthetic and recreational resources of the neighbourhood, the stores, the houses, the doctors and lawyers in the area, and so on -- into the very ecology of the district.

"What I have said on this issue could be applied to every issue -- unemployment, bad housing, racism, work conditions -- in which an insidious assimilation of bourgeois modes of functioning is masked as 'realism' and 'actuality.' The new order of relationships that could be developed from a welfare struggle . . . [can ensure that the] future penetrates the present; it recasts the way people 'organise' and the goals for which they strive." [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 153-4]

As the anarchist slogan puts it: ***"Resistance is Fertile."*** Planting the seed of autonomy, direct action and self-liberation can result, potentially, in the blossoming of free individuals due to the nature of struggle itself (see section A.2.7) Therefore, the generalisation of social struggle is not only a key way of winning a specific fight, it can (and should) also spread into different aspects of life and society and play a key part in developing free individuals who reject hierarchy in all aspects of their life.

Social problems are not isolated from each other and so struggles against them cannot be. The nature of struggle is such that once people start questioning one aspect of society, the questioning of the rest soon follows. So, anarchists seek to generalise struggles for these three reasons -- firstly, to ensure the solidarity required to win; secondly, to combat the many social problems we face as **people** and to show how they are inter-related; and, thirdly, to encourage the transformation of those involved into unique individuals in touch with their humanity, a humanity eroded by hierarchical society and domination.

J.2 What is direct action?

Direct action, to use Rudolf Rocker's words, is *"every method of immediate warfare by the workers [or other sections of society] against their economic and political oppressors. Among these the outstanding are: the strike, in all its graduations from the simple wage struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in all its countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda, and in particularly critical cases . . . armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 78]

Not that anarchists think that direct action is only applicable within the workplace. Far from it. Direct action must occur everywhere! So, in non-workplace situations, direct action

includes rent strikes, consumer boycotts, occupations (which, of course, can include sit-down strikes by workers), eco-tage, individual and collective non-payment of taxes, blocking roads and holding up construction work of an anti-social nature and so forth. Also direct action, in a workplace setting, includes strikes and protests on social issues, not directly related to working conditions and pay. Such activity aims to ensure the *"protection of the community against the most pernicious outgrowths of the present system. The social strike seeks to force upon the employers a responsibility to the public. Primarily it has in view the protection of the customers, of whom the workers themselves [and their families] constitute the great majority"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86]

Basically, direct action means that instead of getting someone else to act for you (e.g. a politician), you act for yourself. Its essential feature is an organised protest by ordinary people to make a change by their own efforts. Thus Voltairine De Cleyre's excellent statement on this topic:

> *"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practicing direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers [of the World] are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.*
>
> *"Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.*
>
> *"Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.*
>
> *"These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practisers of it."* [**The Voltairine De Cleyre Reader**, pp. 47-8]

So direct action means acting for yourself against injustice and oppression. It can, sometimes, involve putting pressure on politicians or companies, for example, to ensure a change in an oppressive law or destructive practices. However, such appeals are direct action simply because they do not assume that the parties in question we will act for us -- indeed the assumption is that change only occurs when we act to create it. Regardless of what it is, *"if such actions are to have the desired empowerment effect, they must be largely self-generated, rather than being devised and directed from above"* and be *"ways in which people could take*

control of their lives" so that it *"empowered those who participated in it."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 55]

So, in a nutshell, direct action is any form of activity which people themselves decide upon and organise themselves which is based on their own collective strength and does not involve getting intermediates to act for them. As such direct action is a natural expression of liberty, of self-government, for direct action *"against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 76-7] It is clear that by acting for yourself you are expressing the ability to govern yourself. Thus it is a means by which people can take control of their own lives. It is a means of self-empowerment and self-liberation.

Anarchists reject the view that society is static and that people's consciousness, values, ideas and ideals cannot be changed. Far from it and anarchists support direct action **because** it actively encourages the transformation of those who use it. Direct action is the means of creating a new consciousness, a means of self-liberation from the chains placed around our minds, emotions and spirits by hierarchy and oppression.

As direct action is the expression of liberty, the powers that be are vitally concerned only when the oppressed use direct action to win its demands, for it is a method which is not easy or cheap to combat. Any hierarchical system is placed into danger when those at the bottom start to act for themselves and, historically, people have invariably gained more by acting directly than could have been won by playing ring around the rosy with indirect means. Direct action tore the chains of open slavery from humanity. Over the centuries it has established individual rights and modified the life and death power of the master class. Direct action won political liberties such as the vote and free speech. Used fully, used wisely and well, direct action can forever end injustice and the mastery of humans by other humans.

In the sections that follow, we will indicate why anarchists are in favour of direct action and why they are against electioneering as a means of change.

J.2.1 Why do anarchists favour using direct action to change things?

Simply because it is effective and it has a radicalising impact on those who practice it. As it is based on people acting for themselves, it shatters the dependency and marginalisation created by hierarchy. This is key:

"What is even more important about direct action is that it forms a decisive step toward recovering the personal power over social life that the centralised, over-bearing bureaucracies have usurped from the people . . . we not only gain a sense that we can control the course of social events again; we recover a new sense of selfhood and personality without which a truly free society, based in self-activity and self-management, is utterly impossible." [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

By acting for themselves, people gain a sense of their own power and abilities. This is essential if people are to run their own lives. As such, direct action is **the** means by which individuals empower themselves, to assert their individuality, to make themselves count as

individuals by organising and acting collectively. It is the opposite of hierarchy, within which individuals are told again and again that they are nothing, are insignificant and must dissolve themselves into a higher power (the state, the company, the party, the people, etc.) and feel proud in participating in the strength and glory of this higher power. Direct action, in contrast, is the means of asserting your individual opinion, interests and happiness, of fighting against self-negation:

> *"man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free independent spirits, for men who are men, and who have a bone in their back which you cannot pass your hand through."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 75-6]

In addition, because direct action is based around individuals solving their own problems, by their own action, it awakens those aspects of individuals crushed by hierarchy and oppression -- such as initiative, solidarity, imagination, self-confidence and a sense of individual and collective power, that what you do matters and that you with others like you **can** change the world. Direct action is the means by which people can liberate themselves and educate themselves in the ways of and skills required for self-management and liberty:

> *"Direct action meant that the goal of . . . these activities was to provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities, to take back the power of naming themselves and their lives . . . we learn to think and act for ourselves by joining together in organisations in which our experience, our perception, and our activity can guide and make the change. Knowledge does not precede experience, it flows from it . . . People learn to be free only by exercising freedom. [As one Spanish Anarchist put it] 'We are not going to find ourselves . . . with people ready-made for the future . . . Without continued exercise of their faculties, there will be no free people . . . The external revolution and the internal revolution presuppose one another, and they must be simultaneous in order to be successful.'"* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 54-5]

So direct action, to use Bookchin's words, is *"the means whereby each individual awakens to the hidden powers within herself and himself, to a new sense of self-confidence and self-competence; it is the means whereby individuals take control of society directly."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

In addition, direct action creates the need for new forms of social organisation. These new forms of organisation will be informed and shaped by the process of self-liberation, so be more anarchistic and based upon self-management. Direct action, as well as liberating individuals, can also create the free, self-managed organisations which can replace the current hierarchical ones (see section I.2.3). For example, for Kropotkin, unions were *"natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future order."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 81] In other words, direct action helps create the new world in the shell of the old:

> *"direct action not only empowered those who participated in it, it also had effects on others . . . [it includes] exemplary action that attracted adherents by the power of the*

> *positive example it set. Contemporary examples . . . include food or day-care co-ops, collectively run businesses, sweat equity housing programmes, women's self-help health collectives, urban squats or women's peace camps [as well as traditional examples as industrial unions, social centres, etc.]. While such activities empower those who engage in them, they also demonstrate to others that non-hierarchical forms of organisation can and do exist -- and that they can function effectively."* [Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

Also, direct action such as strikes encourage and promote class consciousness and class solidarity. According to Kropotkin, *"the strike develops the sentiment of solidarity"* while, for Bakunin, it *"is the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie . . . Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they electrify the masses, invigorate their moral energy and awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie . . . secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886**, p. 256 and pp. 216-217]

Direct action, therefore, helps to create anarchists and anarchist alternatives within capitalism and statism. As such, it plays an essential role in anarchist theory and activity. For anarchists, direct action *"is not a 'tactic' . . . it is a moral principle, an ideal, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

J.2.2 Why do anarchists reject voting as a means for change?

Simply because electioneering does not work. History is littered with examples of radicals being voted into office only to become as, or even more, conservative than the politicians they replaced.

As we have discussed previously (see section B.2) any government is under pressure from two sources of power, the state bureaucracy and big business. This ensures that any attempts at social change would be undermined and made hollow by vested interests, assuming they even reached that level to begin with (the de-radicalising effects of electioneering is discussed in section J.2.6). Here we will highlight the power of vested interests within democratic government.

For anarchists, the general nature of the state and its role within society is to ensure *"the preservation of the economic 'status quo,' the protection of the economic privileges of the ruling class, whose agent and **gendarme** it is"*. [Luigi Galleani, **The End of Anarchism?**, p. 28] As such, the state and capital restricts and controls the outcome of political action of the so-called sovereign people as expressed by voting.

Taking capital to begin with, if we assume that a relatively reformist government were elected it would soon find itself facing various economic pressures. Either capital would disinvest, so forcing the government to back down in the face of economic collapse, or the government in question would control capital leaving the country and so would soon be

isolated from new investment and its currency would become worthless. Either is an effective weapon to control democratically elected governments as before ensure that the economy would be severely damaged and the promised "reforms" would be dead letters. Far fetched? No, not really. As discussed in section D.2.1 such pressures were inflicted on the 1974 Labour Government in Britain and we see the threat reported everyday when the media reports on what *"the markets"* think of government policies or when loans are given only guarantee that the country is structurally adjusted in-line with corporate interests and bourgeous economic dogma.

As far as political pressures go, we must remember that there is a difference between the state and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The government is made up of various politicians. It is the institutions that have power in the state due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. In other words, the state bureaucracy has vested interests and elected politicians cannot effectively control them:

> *"Such a bureaucracy consists of armed forces, police forces, and a civil service. These are largely autonomous bodies. Theoretically they are subordinate to a democratically elected Parliament, but the Army, Navy, and Air Forces are controlled by specially trained officers who from their schooldays onwards are brought up in a narrow caste tradition, and who always, in dealing with Parliament, can dominate that body by their superior technical knowledge, professional secrecy, and strategic bluff. As for the bureaucracy proper, the Civil Service, anyone who has had any experience of its inner workings knows the extent to which it controls the Cabinet, and through the Cabinet, Parliament itself. We are really ruled by a secret shadow cabinet . . . All these worthy servants of the State are completely out of touch with the normal life of the nation."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, p. 100]

As an aside, it should be noted that while *"in a society of rich and poor nothing is more necessary"* than a bureaucracy as it is *"necessary to protect an unfair distribution of property"* it would be wrong to think that it does not have its own class interests: *"Even if you abolish all other classes and distinctions and retain a bureaucracy you are still far from the classless society, for the bureaucracy is itself the nucleus of a class whose interests are totally opposed to the people it supposedly serves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99 and p. 100]

In addition to the official bureaucracies and their power, there is also the network of behind the scenes agencies which are its arm. This can be termed *"the permanent government"* and *"the secret state"*, respectively. The latter, in Britain, is *"the security services, MI5, Special Branch and the secret intelligence service, MI6."* Other states have their equivalents (the FBI, CIA, and so on in the USA). By the former, it is meant *"the secret state plus the Cabinet Office and upper echelons of Home and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence . . . and the so-called 'Permanent Secretaries Club,' the network of very senior civil servants -- the 'Mandarins.'"* In short, the upper-echelons of the bureaucracy and state apparatus. Add to this *"its satellites"*, including M.P.s (particularly right-wing ones), *"agents of influence"* in the media, former security services personnel, think tanks and opinion forming bodies, front companies of the security services, and so on. [Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay, **Smear! Wilson and the Secret State**, pp. X-XI]

These bodies, while theoretically under the control of the elected government, can effectively (via disinformation, black operations, bureaucratic slowdowns, media attacks, etc.) ensure

that any government trying to introduce policies which the powers that be disagree with will be stopped. In other words the state is **not** a neutral body, somehow rising above vested interests and politics. It is, and always will be, a institution which aims to protect specific sections of society as well as its own.

An example of this "secret state" at work can be seen in the campaign against Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister of Britain in the 1970s, which resulted in his resignation (as documented by Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay). Left-wing Labour M.P. Tony Benn was subjected to intense pressure by "his" Whitehall advisers during the same period:

> *"In early 1975, the campaign against Benn by the media was joined by the secret state. The timing is interesting. In January, his Permanent Secretary had 'declared war' and the following month began the most extraordinary campaign of harassment any major British politician has experienced. While this is not provable by any means, it does look as though there is a clear causal connection between withdrawal of Prime Ministerial support, the open hostility from the Whitehall mandarins and the onset of covert operations."* [Dorril and Ramsay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 279]

This is not to forget the role of the secret state in undermining reformist and radical organisations and movements. This involvement goes from pure information gathering on "subversives", to disruption and repression. Taking the example of the US secret state, Howard Zinn notes that in 1975:

> *"congressional committees . . . began investigations of the FBI and CIA.*
>
> *"The CIA inquiry disclosed that the CIA had gone beyond its original mission of gathering intelligence and was conducting secret operations of all kinds . . . [for example] the CIA - with the collusion of a secret Committee of Forty headed by Henry Kissinger - had worked to 'destabilize' the [democratically elected, left-wing] Chilean government . . .*
>
> *"The investigation of the FBI disclosed many years of illegal actions to disrupt and destroy radical groups and left-wing groups of all kinds. The FBI had sent forged letters, engaged in burglaries . . . opened mail illegally, and in the case of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, seems to have conspired in murder . . .*
>
> *"The investigations themselves revealed the limits of government willingness to probe into such activities . . . [and they] submitted its findings on the CIA to the CIA to see if there was material the Agency wanted omitted."* [**A People's History of the United States**, pp. 542-3]

Also, the CIA secretly employs several hundred American academics to write books and other materials to be used for propaganda purposes, an important weapon in the battle for hearts and minds. In other words, the CIA, FBI (and their equivalents in other countries) and other state bodies can hardly be considered neutral bodies, who just follow orders. They are a network of vested interests, with specific ideological viewpoints and aims which usually place the wishes of the voting population below maintaining the state-capital power structure in place.

Therefore we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react in different ways to the same economic and institutional influences and interests. Its no coincidence that left-wing, reformist parties have introduced right-wing, pro-capitalist ("Thatcherite/Reaganite") policies similiar to those right-wing, explicitly pro-capitalist parties have. This is to be expected as the basic function of any political system is to manage the existing state and economic structures and a society's power relationships. It is **not** to alter them radically, The great illusion of politics is the notion that politicians have the power to make whatever changes they like. Looking at the international picture, the question obviously arises as to what real control do the politicians have over the international economy and its institutions or the pattern of world trade and investment. These institutions have great power and, moreover, have a driving force (the profit motive) which is essentially out of control (as can be seen by the regular financial crises during the neo-liberal era).

This can be seen most dramatically in the military coup in Chile against the democratically re-elected (left-wing) Allende government by the military, aided by the CIA, US based corporations and the US government to make it harder for the Allende regime. The coup resulted in thousands murdered and years of terror and dictatorship, but the danger of a pro-labour government was ended and the business environment was made healthy for profits (see section C.11). An extreme example, we know, but an important one for any believer in freedom or the idea that the state machine is somehow neutral and can be captured and used by left-wing parties -- particularly as the fate of Chile has been suffered by many other reformist governments across the world.

Of course there have been examples of quite extensive reforms which did benefit working class people in major countries. The New Deal in the USA and the 1945-51 Labour Governments spring to mind. Surely these indicate that our claims are false? Simply put, no, they do not. Reforms can be won from the state when the dangers of not giving in outweigh any weakening of ruling class power implied in the reforms. In the face of economic crisis and working class protest, the ruling elite often tolerates changes it would otherwise fight tooth-and-nail in other circumstances. Reforms will be allowed if they can be used to save the capitalist system and the state from its own excesses and even improve their operation or if not bending will mean being broke in the storm of social protest. After all, the possibility of getting rid of the reforms when they are no longer required will always exist as long as class society remains.

This can be seen from the reformist governments of 1930s USA and 1940s UK. Both faced substantial economic problems and both were under pressure from below, by waves of militant working class struggle which could have developed beyond mere reformism. The waves of sit-down strikes in the 1930s ensured the passing of pro-union laws which allowed workers to organise without fear of being fired. This measure also partly integrated the unions into the capitalist-state machine by making them responsible for controlling "unofficial" workplace action (and so ensuring profits). The nationalisation of roughly 20% of the UK economy during the Labour administration of 1945 (the most unprofitable sections of it as well) was also the direct result of ruling class fear. As Conservative M.P. Quintin Hogg acknowledged in the House of Commons on the 17th February 1943: *"If you do not give the people reform they are going to give you revolution"*. Memories of the near revolutions across Europe after the First World War were obviously in many minds, on both sides. Not that nationalisation was particularly feared as "socialism." Indeed it was argued that it was the best means of improving the performance of the British economy. As anarchists at the time noted *"the real opinions of capitalists can be seen from Stock Exchange*

conditions and statements of industrialists than the Tory Front bench" and from these it be seen *"that the owning class is not at all displeased with the record and tendency of the Labour Party."* [**Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 9]

History confirms Proudhon's argument that the state *"can only turn into something and do the work of the revolution insofar as it will be so invited, provoked or compelled by some power outside of itself that seizes the initiative and sets things rolling,"* namely by *"a body representative of the proletariat be formed in Paris . . . in opposition to the bourgeoisieâ€™s representation."* [**Le ReprÃ©sentant du Peuple**, 5th May 1848] So, if extensive reforms have implemented by the state, just remember what they were in response to militant pressure from below and that we could have got so much more. In general, things have little changed since this anarchist argument against electioneering was put forward in the 1880s:

> *"in the electoral process, the working class will always be cheated and deceived . . . if they did manage to send, one, or ten, or fifty of them[selves to Parliament], they would become spoiled and powerless. Furthermore, even if the majority of Parliament were composed of workers, they could do nothing. Not only is there the senate . . . the chiefs of the armed forces, the heads of the judiciary and of the police, who would be against the parliamentary bills advanced by such a chamber and would refuse to enforce laws favouring the workers (it has happened); but furthermore laws are not miraculous; no law can prevent the capitalists from exploiting the workers; no law can force them to keep their factories open and employ workers at such and such conditions, nor force shopkeepers to sell as a certain price, and so on."* [S. Merlino, quoted by Galleani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 13]

As any worker will tell you, just because there are laws on such things as health and safety, union organising, working hours or whatever, it does not mean that bosses will pay any attention to them. While firing people for joining a union is illegal in America, it does not stop bosses doing so. Similarly, many would be surprised to discover that the 8 hour working day was legally created in many US states by the 1870s but workers had to strike for it in 1886 as it as not enforced. Ultimately, political action is dependent on direct action to be enforced where it counts (in the workplace and streets). And if only direct action can enforce a political decision once it is made, then it can do so beforehand so showing the limitations in waiting for politicians to act.

Anarchists reject voting for other reasons. The fact is that electoral procedures are the opposite of direct action. They are **based** on getting someone else to act on your behalf. Therefore, far from empowering people and giving them a sense of confidence and ability, electioneering **dis**-empowers them by creating a "leader" figure from which changes are expected to flow. As Brian Martin observes:

> *"all the historical evidence suggests that parties are more a drag than an impetus to radical change. One obvious problem is that parties can be voted out. All the policy changes they brought in can simply be reversed later.*
>
> *"More important, though, is the pacifying influence of the radical party itself. On a number of occasions, radical parties have been elected to power as a result of popular upsurges. Time after time, the 'radical' parties have become chains to hold back the process of radical change."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123-36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]

This can easily be seen from the history of various left-wing parties. Labour or socialist parties, elected in periods of social turbulence, have often acted to reassure the ruling elite by dampening popular action that could have threatened capitalist interests. For example, the first action undertaken by the Popular Front elected in France in 1936 was to put an end to strikes and occupations and generally to cool popular militancy, which was the Front's strongest ally in coming to power. The Labour government elected in Britain in 1945 got by with as few reforms as it could, refusing to consider changing basic social structures and simply replaced wage-labour to a boss with wage-labour to the state via nationalisation of certain industries. It did, however, manage to find time within the first days of taking office to send troops in to break a dockers' strike (this was no isolated event: Labour has used troops to break strikes far more often than the Conservatives have).

These points indicate why existing power structures cannot effectively be challenged through elections. For one thing, elected representatives are not **mandated,** which is to say they are not tied in any binding way to particular policies, no matter what promises they have made or what voters may prefer. Around election time, the public's influence on politicians is strongest, but after the election, representatives can do practically whatever they want, because there is no procedure for **instant recall.** In practice it is impossible to recall politicians before the next election, and between elections they are continually exposed to pressure from powerful special-interest groups -- especially business lobbyists, state bureaucracies and political party power brokers.

Under such pressure, the tendency of politicians to break campaign promises has become legendary. Generally, such promise breaking is blamed on bad character, leading to periodic "throw-the-bastards-out" fervour -- after which a new set of representatives is elected, who also mysteriously turn out to be bastards! In reality it is the system itself that produces "bastards," the sell-outs and shady dealing we have come to expect from politicians. In light of modern "democracy", it is amazing that anyone takes the system seriously enough to vote at all. In fact, voter turnout in the US and other nations where "democracy" is practiced in this fashion is typically low. Nevertheless, some voters continue to participate, pinning their hopes on new parties or trying to reform a major party. For anarchists this activity is pointless as it does not get at the root of the problem, it is the system which shapes politicians and parties in its own image and marginalises and alienates people due to its hierarchical and centralised nature. No amount of party politics can change that.

However, we should make it clear that most anarchists recognise there is a difference between voting for a government and voting in a referendum. Here we are discussing the former, electioneering, as a means of social change. Referenda are closer to anarchist ideas of direct democracy and are, while flawed, far better than electing a politician to office once every four years or so. In addition, Anarchists are not necessarily against **all** involvement in electoral politics. Some advocate voting when the possible outcome of an election could be disastrous (for example, if a fascist or quasi-fascist party looks likely to win the election). Some Social Ecologists, following Murray Bookchin's arguments, support actual standing in elections and think anarchists by taking part in local elections can use them to create self-governing community assemblies. However, few anarchists support such means to create community assemblies (see section J.5.14 for a discussion on this).

The problem of elections in a statist system, even on a local scale, means that the vast majority of anarchists reject voting as a means of change. Instead we wholeheartedly support

direct action as the means of getting improvements in the here and now as well as the means of creating an alternative to the current system.

J.2.3 What are the political implications of voting?

At its most basic, voting implies agreement with the status quo. It is worth quoting the Scottish libertarian socialist James Kelman at length on this:

> *"State propaganda insists that the reason why at least 40 percent of the voting public don't vote at all is because they have no feelings one way or the other. They say the same thing in the USA, where some 85 percent of the population are apparently 'apolitical' since they don't bother registering a vote. Rejection of the political system is inadmissible as far as the state is concerned . . . Of course the one thing that does happen when you vote is that someone else has endorsed an unfair political system . . . A vote for any party or any individual is always a vote for the political system. You can interpret your vote in whichever way you like but it remains an endorsement of the apparatus . . . If there was any possibility that the apparatus could effect a change in the system then they would dismantle it immediately. In other words the political system is an integral state institution, designed and refined to perpetuate its own existence. Ruling authority fixes the agenda by which the public are allowed 'to enter the political arena' and that's the fix they've settled on."* [**Some Recent Attacks**, p. 87]

We are taught from an early age that voting in elections is right and a duty. In US schools, for example, children elect class presidents and other officers. Often mini-general elections are held to "educate" children in "democracy." Periodically, election coverage monopolises the media. We are made to feel guilty about shirking our "civic responsibility" if we do not vote. Countries that have no elections, or only rigged elections, are regarded as failures. As a result, elections have become a quasi-religious ritual. Yet, in reality, *"elections in practice have served well to maintain dominant power structures such as private property, the military, male domination, and economic inequality. None of these has been seriously threatened through voting. It is from the point of view of radical critics that elections are most limiting."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123-36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]

Elections serve the interests of state power in other ways. First, voting helps to legitimate government; hence suffrage has often been expanded at times when there was little popular demand for it but when mass support of government was crucial, as during a war or revolution. Second, it comes to be seen as the only legitimate form of political participation, thus making it likely that any revolts by oppressed or marginalised groups will be viewed by the general public as illegitimate. It helps focus attention away from direct action and building new social structures back into institutions which the ruling class can easily control. The general election during the May '68 revolt in France, for example, helped diffuse the revolutionary situation, as did the elections during the Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism in the early 2000s.

So by turning political participation into the "safe" activities of campaigning and voting, elections have reduced the risk of more radical direct action as well as building a false sense of power and sovereignty among the general population. Voting disempowers the grassroots

by diverting energy from grassroots action. After all, the goal of electoral politics is to elect a representative who will act **for** us. Therefore, instead of taking direct action to solve problems ourselves, action becomes indirect, though the government. This is an insidiously easy trap to fall into, as we have been conditioned in hierarchical society from day one into attitudes of passivity and obedience, which gives most of us a deep-seated tendency to leave important matters to the "experts" and "authorities." Kropotkin described well the net effect:

> *"Vote! Greater men that you will tell you the moment when the self-annihilation of capital has been accomplished. They will then expropriate the few usurpers left . . . and you will be freed without having taken any more trouble than that of writing on a bit of paper the name of the man whom the heads of your faction of the party told you to vote for!"* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context"*, pp. 259-283, **International Review of Social History**, No. 40, pp. 265-6]

Anarchists also criticise elections for giving citizens the false impression that the government serves, or can serve, the people. As Martin remains us *"the founding of the modern state a few centuries ago was met with great resistance: people would refuse to pay taxes, to be conscripted or to obey laws passed by national governments. The introduction of voting and the expanded suffrage have greatly aided the expansion of state power. Rather than seeing the system as one of ruler and ruled, people see at least the possibility of using state power to serve themselves. As electoral participation has increased, the degree of resistance to taxation, military service, and the immense variety of laws regulating behaviour, has been greatly attenuated"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126]

Ironically, voting has legitimated the growth of state power to such an extent that the state is now beyond any real popular control by the form of participation that made that growth possible. Nevertheless, the idea that electoral participation means popular control of government is so deeply implanted in people's psyches that even the most overtly sceptical radical often cannot fully free themselves from it.

Therefore, voting has the important political implication of encouraging people to identify with state power and to justify the status quo. In addition, it feeds the illusion that the state is neutral and that electing parties to office means that people have control over their own lives. Moreover, elections have a tendency to make people passive, to look for salvation from above and not from their own self-activity. As such it produces a division between leaders and led, with the voters turned into spectators of activity, not the participants within it.

All this does not mean, obviously, that anarchists prefer dictatorship or an "enlightened" monarchy. Far from it, democratising state power can be an important step towards abolishing it. All anarchists agree with Bakunin when he argued that *"the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better that even the most enlightened monarchy."* [quoted by Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 20] It simply means that anarchists refuse to join in with the farce of electioneering, particularly when there are more effective means available for changing things for the better. Anarchists reject the idea that our problems can be solved by the very institutions that cause them in the first place!

J.2.4 Surely voting for radical parties will be effective?

There is no doubt that voting can lead to changes in policies, which can be a good thing as far as it goes. However, such policies are formulated and implemented within the authoritarian framework of the hierarchical capitalist state -- a framework which itself is never open to challenge by voting. On the contrary, voting legitimates the state framework ensuring that social change will be (at best) mild, gradual, and reformist rather than rapid and radical. Indeed, the "democratic" process has resulted in all successful political parties becoming committed to "more of the same" or tinkering with the details at best (which is usually the limits of any policy changes). This seems unlikely to change.

Given the need for radical systemic changes as soon as possible due to the exponentially accelerating crises of modern civilisation, working for gradual reforms within the electoral system must be seen as a potentially deadly tactical error. Electioneering has always been the death of radicalism. Political parties are only radical when they do not stand a chance of election. However, many social activists continue to try to use elections, so participating in the system which disempowers the majority and so helps create the social problems they are protesting against. It should be a widely recognised truism in radical circles that elections empower the politicians and not the voters. Thus elections focus attention to a few leaders, urging them to act **for** rather than acting for ourselves (see section H.1.5). If genuine social change needs mass participation then, by definition, using elections will undermine that. This applies to within the party as well, for working "within the system" disempowers grassroots activists, as can be seen by the Green party in Germany during the early eighties. The coalitions into which the Greens entered with Social Democrats in the German legislature often had the effect of strengthening the status quo by co-opting those whose energies might otherwise have gone into more radical and effective forms of activism. Principles were ignored in favour of having some influence, so producing watered-down legislation which tinkered with the system rather than transforming it.

As discussed in section H.3.9, the state is more complicated than the simple organ of the economically dominant class pictured by Marxists. There are continual struggles both inside and outside the state bureaucracies, struggles that influence policies and empower different groups of people. This can produce clashes with the ruling elite, while the need of the state to defend the system **as a whole** causes conflict with the interests of sections of the capitalist class. Due to this, many radical parties believe that the state is neutral and so it makes sense to work within it -- for example, to obtain labour, consumer, and environmental protection laws. However, this reasoning ignores the fact that the organisational structure of the state is not neutral. To quote Brian Martin:

> *"The basic anarchist insight is that the structure of the state, as a centralised administrative apparatus, is inherently flawed from the point of view of human freedom and equality. Even though the state can be used occasionally for valuable ends, as a means the state is flawed and impossible to reform. The non-reformable aspects of the state include, centrally, its monopoly over 'legitimate' violence and its consequent power to coerce for the purpose of war, internal control, taxation and the protection of property and bureaucratic privilege.*
>
> *"The problem with voting is that the basic premises of the state are never considered open for debate, much less challenge. The state's monopoly over the use of violence for war is never at issue. Neither is the state's use of violence against revolt from within. The state's right to extract economic resources from the population is never questioned. Neither is the state's guarantee of either private property (under*

> *capitalism) or bureaucratic prerogative (under state socialism) -- or both."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123-36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 127]

It may be argued that if a new political group is radical enough it will be able to use state power for good purposes. While we discuss this in more detail in section J.2.6, let us consider a specific case, that of the Greens as many of them believe that the best way to achieve their aims is to work within the current political system.

By pledging to use the electoral system to achieve change, Green parties necessarily commit themselves to formulating their proposals as legislative agendas. But once legislation is passed, the coercive mechanisms of the state will be needed to enforce it. Therefore, Green parties are committed to upholding state power. However, our analysis in section B.2 indicated that the state is a set of hierarchical institutions through which a ruling elite dominates society and individuals. And, as we have seen in section E, ecologists, feminists, and peace activists -- who are key constituencies of the Green movement -- all need to **dismantle** hierarchies and domination in order to achieve their respective aims. Therefore, since the state is not only the largest and most powerful hierarchy but also serves to maintain the hierarchical form of all major institutions in society (since this form is the most suitable for achieving ruling-class interests), the state itself is the main obstacle to the success of key constituencies of the Green movement. Hence it is impossible **in principle** for a parliamentary Green party to achieve the essential objectives of the Green movement. A similar argument would apply to any radical party whose main emphasis was social justice, which like the goals of feminists, radical ecologists, and peace activists, depends on dismantling hierarchies.

As we argued in the previous section, radical parties are under pressure from economic and state bureaucracies that ensure that even a sincere radical party would be powerless to introduce significant reforms. The only real response to the problems of representative democracy is to urge people not to vote. Such anti-election campaigns can be a valuable way of making others aware of the limitations of the current system, which is a necessary condition for their seriously considering the anarchist alternative of using direct action and build alternative social and economic organisations. The implications of abstentionism are discussed in the next section.

J.2.5 Why do anarchists support abstentionism and what are its implications?

At its most basic, anarchists support abstentionism because *"participation in elections means the transfer of one's will and decisions to another, which is contrary to the fundamental principles of anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, p. 89] For, as Proudhon stressed, in a statist democracy, the people *"is limited to choosing, every three or four years, its chiefs and its imposters."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 152]

If you reject hierarchy then participating in a system by which you elect those who will govern you is almost like adding insult to injury! For, as Luigi Galleani pointed out, *"whoever has the political competence to choose his own rulers is, by implication, also competent to do without them."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 37] In other words, because anarchists reject the idea of authority, we reject the idea that picking the authority (be it

bosses or politicians) makes us free. Therefore, anarchists reject governmental elections in the name of self-government and free association. We refuse to vote as voting is endorsing authoritarian social structures. We are (in effect) being asked to make obligations to the state, not our fellow citizens, and so anarchists reject the symbolic process by which our liberty is alienated from us.

Anarchists are aware that elections serve to legitimate government. We have always warned that since the state is an integral part of the system that perpetuates poverty, inequality, racism, imperialism, sexism, environmental destruction, and war, we should not expect to solve any of these problems by changing a few nominal state leaders every four or five years. Therefore anarchists (usually) advocate abstentionism at election time as a means of exposing the farce of "democracy", the disempowering nature of elections and the real role of the state.

For anarchists, then, when you vote, you are choosing between rulers. Instead of urging people to vote we raise the option of choosing to rule yourself, to organise freely with others -- in your workplace, in your community, everywhere -- as equals. The option of something you cannot vote for, a new society. Instead of waiting for others to make some changes for you, anarchists urge that you do it yourself. In this way, you cannot but build an alternative to the state which can reduce its power now and, in the long run, replace it. This is the core of the anarchist support for abstentionism.

In addition, beyond this basic anarchist rejection of elections from an anti-statist position, anarchists also support abstentionism as it allows us to put across our ideas at election time. It is a fact that at such times people are often more interested in politics than usual. So, by arguing for abstentionism we can get our ideas across about the nature of the current system, how elected politicians do not control the state bureaucracy, now the state acts to protect capitalism and so on. In addition, it allows us to present the ideas of direct action and encourage those disillusioned with political parties and the current system to become anarchists by presenting a viable alternative to the farce of politics. For, after all, a sizeable percentage of non-voters and voters are disillusioned with the current set-up. Many who vote do so simply against the other candidate, seeking the least-worse option. Many who do not vote do so for essentially political reasons, such as being fed up with the political system, failing to see any major differences between the parties, or recognition that the candidates were not interested in people like them. These non-voters are often disproportionately left-leaning, compared with those who did vote. So, anarchist abstentionism is a means of turning this negative reaction to an unjust system into positive activity.

So, anarchist opposition to electioneering has deep political implications which Luigi Galleani addressed when he wrote:

> *"The anarchists' electoral abstentionism implies not only a conception that is opposed to the principle of representation (which is totally rejected by anarchism), it implies above all an absolute lack of confidence in the State . . . Furthermore, anarchist abstentionism has consequences which are much less superficial than the inert apathy ascribed to it by the sneering careerists of 'scientific socialism' [i.e. Marxism]. It strips the State of the constitutional fraud with which it presents itself to the gullible as the true representative of the whole nation, and, in so doing, exposes its essential character as representative, procurer and policeman of the ruling classes.*

> *"Distrust of reforms, of public power and of delegated authority, can lead to direct action [in the class struggle] . . . It can determine the revolutionary character of this . . . action; and, accordingly, anarchists regard it as the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests; and, besides, anarchists feel that even now the working people are fully capable of handling their own political and administrative interests."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 13-14]

Therefore abstentionism stresses the importance of self-activity and self-libertarian as well as having an important educational effect in highlighting that the state is not neutral but serves to protect class rule and that meaningful change only comes from below, by direct action. For the dominant ideas within any class society reflect the opinions of the ruling elite of that society and so any campaign at election times which argues for abstentionism and indicates why voting is a farce will obviously challenge them. In other words, abstentionism combined with direct action and the building of libertarian alternatives is a very effective means of changing people's ideas and encouraging a process of self-education and, ultimately, self-liberation.

In summary, anarchists urge abstentionism in order to **encourage** activity, not apathy. Not voting is **not** enough, and anarchists urge people to **organise** and **resist** as well. Abstentionism must be the political counterpart of class struggle, self-activity and self-management in order to be effective -- otherwise it is as pointless as voting is.

J.2.6 What are the effects of radicals using electioneering?

While many radicals would be tempted to agree with our analysis of the limitations of electioneering and voting, few would automatically agree with anarchist abstentionist arguments. Instead, they argue that we should combine direct action with electioneering. In that way (it is argued) we can overcome the limitations of electioneering by invigorating it with self-activity. In addition, they suggest, the state is too powerful to leave in the hands of the enemies of the working class. A radical politician will refuse to give the orders to crush social protest that a right-wing, pro-capitalist one would.

While these are important arguments in favour of radicals using elections, they ultimately fail to take into account the nature of the state and the corrupting effect it has on radicals. This reformist idea has met a nasty end. If history is anything to go by, the net effect of radicals using elections is that by the time they are elected to office the radicals will happily do what they claimed the right-wing would have done. In 1899, for example, the Socialist Alexandre Millerand joined the French Government. Nothing changed. During industrial disputes strikers *"appealed to Millerand for help, confident that, with him in the government, the state would be on their side. Much of this confidence was dispelled within a few years. The government did little more for workers than its predecessors had done; soldiers and police were still sent in to repress serious strikes."* [Peter N. Stearns, **Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labour**, p. 16] Aristide Briand, another socialist politician was the Minister of the Interior in 1910 and *"broke a general strike of railwaymen by use of the most draconian methods. Having declared a military emergency he threatened all strikers with court martial."* [Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France** p. 36] These events occurred, it should be noted, during the period when social democratic parties were self-proclaimed revolutionaries and arguing against anarcho-syndicalism by using the argument that working people needed their own representatives in office to stop troops being used against them during strikes!

Looking at the British Labour government of 1945 to 1951 we find the same actions. What is often considered the most left-wing Labour government ever used troops to break strikes in every year it was in office, starting with a dockers' strike days after it became the new government. Again, in the 1970s, Labour used troops to break strikes. Indeed, the Labour Party has used troops to break strikes more often than the Conservative Party.

Many blame the individuals elected to office for these betrayals, arguing that we need to elect **better** politicians, select **better** leaders. For anarchists nothing could be more wrong as its the means used, not the individuals involved, which is the problem. Writing of his personal experience as a member of Parliament, Proudhon recounted that *"[a]s soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of the current events . . . One must have lived in that isolator which is called a National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it."* There was *"ignorance of daily facts"* and *"fear of the people"* (*"the sickness of all those who belong to authority"*) for *"the people, for those in power, are the enemy."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 111] Ultimately, as syndicalist Emile Pouget argued, this fate was inevitable as any socialist politician *"could not break the mould; he is only a cog in the machine of oppression and whether he wishes it or not he must, as minister, participate in the job of crushing the proletariat."* [quoted by Jennings, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

These days, few enter Parliament as radicals like Proudhon. The notion of using elections for radical change is rare. Such a development in itself shows the correctness of the anarchist critique of electioneering. At its most basic, electioneering results in the party using it becoming more moderate and reformist -- it becomes the victim of its own success. In order to gain votes, the party must appear "moderate" and "practical" and that means working within the system:

> *"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance . . . Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

This corruption does not happen overnight. Alexander Berkman indicated how it slowly developed:

> *"In former days the Socialists . . . claimed that they meant to use politics only for the purpose of propaganda . . . and took part in elections on order to have an opportunity to advocate Socialism*
>
> *"It may seem a harmless thing but it proved the undoing of Socialism. Because nothing is truer than the means you use to attain your object soon themselves become your object . . . Little by little they changed their attitude. Instead of electioneering being merely an educational method, it gradually became their only method to secure political office, to get elected to legislative bodies and other government positions. The change naturally led the Socialists to tone down their revolutionary ardour; it*

compelled them to soften their criticism of capitalism and government in order to avoid persecution and secure more votes . . . they have ceased to be revolutionists; they have become reformers who want to change things by law . . . And everywhere, without exception, they have followed the same course, everywhere they have forsworn their ideals, have duped the masses . . . There is a deeper reason for this constant and regular betrayal [than individual scoundrels being elected] . . . no man turns scoundrel or traitor overnight.

*"It is **power** which corrupts . . . The filth and contamination of politics everywhere proves that. Moreover, even with the best intentions Socialists in legislative bodies or in governments find themselves entirely powerless to accomplishing anything of a socialistic nature . . . The demoralisation and vitiation take place little by little, so gradually that one hardly notices it himself . . . [The elected Socialist] finds himself in a strange and unfriendly atmosphere . . . and he must participate in the business that is being transacted. Most of that business . . . has no bearing whatever on the things the Socialist believes in, no connection with the interests of the working class voters who elected him . . . when a bill of some bearing upon labour . . . comes up . . . he is ignored or laughed at for his impractical ideas on the matter . . .*

"Our Socialist perceives that he is regarded as a laughing stock [by the other politicians] . . . and finds more and more difficulty in securing the floor. . . he knows that neither by his talk nor by his vote can he influence the proceedings . . . His speeches don't even reach the public . . . He appeals to the voters to elect more comrades. . . Years pass . . . [and a] number . . . are elected. Each of them goes through the same experience . . . [and] quickly come to the conclusion . . . [that they] must show that they are practical men . . . that they are doing something for their constituency . . . In this manner the situation compels them to take a 'practical' part in the proceedings, to 'talk business,' to fall in line with the matters actually dealt with in the legislative body . . . Spending years in that atmosphere, enjoying good jobs and pay, the elected Socialists have themselves become part and parcel of the political machinery . . . With growing success in elections and securing political power they turn more and more conservative and content with existing conditions. Removal from the life and suffering of the working class, living in the atmosphere of the bourgeoisie . . . they have become what they call 'practical' . . . Power and position have gradually stifled their conscience and they have not the strength and honesty to swim against the current . . . They have become the strongest bulwark of capitalism." [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 92-8]

So the *"political power which they had wanted to conquer had gradually conquered their Socialism until there was scarcely anything left of it."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

Not that these arguments are the result of hindsight, we must add. Bakunin was arguing in the early 1870s that the *"inevitable result [of using elections] will be that workers' deputies, transferred to a purely bourgeois environment, and into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois political ideas . . . will become middle class in their outlook, perhaps even more so than the bourgeois themselves."* As long as universal suffrage *"is exercised in a society where the people, the mass of workers, are **economically** dominated by a minority holding exclusive possession the property and capital of the country"* elections *"can only be illusory, anti-democratic in their results."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 216 and p. 213] This meant that *"the election to the German parliament of one or two workers . . . from the Social*

Democratic Party" was *"not dangerous"* and, in fact, was *"highly useful to the German state as a lightning-rod, or a safety-valve."* Unlike the *"political and social theory"* of the anarchists, which *"leads them directly and inexorably to a complete break with all governments and all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no alternative but social revolution,"* Marxism, he argued, *"inexorably enmeshes and entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodation with governments and the various bourgeois political parties - that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction."* [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, p. 193 and pp. 179-80] In the case of the German Social Democrats, this became obvious in 1914, when they supported their state in the First World war, and after 1918, when they crushed the German Revolution.

So history proved Bakunin's prediction correct (as it did with his prediction that Marxism would result in elite rule). Simply put, for anarchists, the net effect of socialists using bourgeois elections would be to put them (and the movements they represent) into the quagmire of bourgeois politics and influences. In other words, the parties involved will be shaped by the environment they are working within and not vice versa.

History is littered with examples of radical parties becoming a part of the system. From Marxian Social Democracy at the turn of the 19th century to the German Green Party in the 1980s, we have seen radical parties, initially proclaiming the need for direct action and extra-parliamentary activity denouncing these activities once in power. From only using parliament as a means of spreading their message, the parties involved end up considering votes as more important than the message. Janet Biehl sums up the effects on the German Green Party of trying to combine radical electioneering with direct action:

> *"the German Greens, once a flagship for the Green movement worldwide, should now be considered stink normal, as their **de facto** boss himself declares. Now a repository of careerists, the Greens stand out only for the rapidity with which the old cadre of careerism, party politics, and business-as-usual once again played itself out in their saga of compromise and betrayal of principle. Under the superficial veil of their old values -- a very thin veil indeed, now -- they can seek positions and make compromises to their heart's content . . . They have become 'practical,' 'realistic' and 'power-orientated.' This former New Left ages badly, not only in Germany but everywhere else. But then, it happened with the S.P.D. [The German Social Democratic Party] in August 1914, then why not with Die Grunen in 1991? So it did."* [*"Party or Movement?"*, **Greenline**, no. 89, p. 14]

This, sadly, is the end result of all such attempts. Ultimately, supporters of using political action can only appeal to the good intentions and character of their candidates. Anarchists, however, present an analysis of state structures and other influences that will determine how the character of the successful candidates will change. In other words, in contrast to Marxists and other radicals, anarchists present a materialist, scientific analysis of the dynamics of electioneering and its effects on radicals. Like most forms of idealism, the arguments of Marxists and other radicals flounder on the rocks of reality.

However, many radicals refuse to learn this lesson of history and keep trying to create a new party which will not repeat the saga of compromise and betrayal which all other radical parties have suffered. And they say that anarchists are utopian! *"You cannot dive into a swamp and remain clean."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] Such is the result of rejecting (or "supplementing" with electioneering) direct action as the means to change things, for any

social movement *"to ever surrender their commitment to direct action for 'working within the system' is to destroy their personality as socially innovative movements. It is to dissolve back into the hopeless morass of 'mass organisations' that seek respectability rather than change."* [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

Moreover, the use of electioneering has a centralising effect on the movements that use it. Political actions become considered as parliamentary activities made **for** the population by their representatives, with the 'rank and file' left with no other role than that of passive support. Only the leaders are actively involved and the main emphasis falls upon them and it soon becomes taken for granted that they should determine policy. Conferences become little more than rallies with politicians freely admitting that they will ignore any conference decisions as and when required. Not to mention the all-too-common sight of politicians turning round and doing the exact opposite of what they promised. In the end, party conferences become simply like parliamentary elections, with party members supporting this leader against another.

Soon the party reflects the division between manual and mental labour so necessary for the capitalist system. Instead of working class self-activity and self-determination, there is a substitution of a non-working class leadership acting **for** people. This replaces self-management in social struggle and within the party itself. Electoralism strengthens the leaders dominance over the party and the party over the people it claims to represent. The real causes and solutions to the problems we face are mystified by the leadership and rarely discussed in order to concentrate on the popular issues that will get them elected. Ultimately, radicals *"instead of weakening the false and enslaving belief in law and government . . . actually work to **strengthen** the people's faith in forcible authority and government."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100] Which has always proved deadly to encouraging a spirit of revolt, self-management and self-help -- the very keys to creating change in a society. Thus this 1870 resolution of the Spanish section of the First International seems to have been proven to be correct:

> *"Any participation of the working class in the middle class political government would merely consolidate the present state of affairs and necessarily paralyse the socialist revolutionary action of the proletariat. The Federation [of unions] is the true representative of labour, and should work outside the political system."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 169]

Instead of trying to gain control of the state, for whatever reasons, anarchists try to promote a culture of resistance within society that makes the state subject to pressure from outside (see section J.2.9). And, we feel, history has proven us right time and time again.

J.2.7 Surely we should vote for reformist parties in order to expose them?

Some Leninist socialists (like the British **Socialist Workers Party** and its offshoots) argue that we should urge people to vote for Labour and other social democratic parties. In this they follow Lenin's 1920 argument against the anti-Parliamentarian left that revolutionaries *"help"* elect such parties as many workers still follow their lead so that they will be *"convinced by their own experience that we are right,"* that such parties *"are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is*

inevitable." If we *"want the **masses** to follow us"*, we need to *"support"* such parties *"in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man."* In this way, by experiencing the reformists in official, *"the majority will soon become disappointed in their leaders and will begin to support communism."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 603, p. 605 and p. 602]

This tactic is suggested for two reasons. The first is that revolutionaries will be able to reach more people by being seen to support popular, trade union based, parties. If they do not, then they are in danger of alienating sizeable sections of the working class by arguing that such parties will be no better than explicitly pro-capitalist ones. The second, and the more important one, is that by electing reformist parties into office the experience of living under such a government will shatter whatever illusions its supporters had in them. The reformist parties will be given the test of experience and when they betray their supporters to protect the status quo it will radicalise those who voted for them, who will then seek out **real** socialist parties (namely the likes of the SWP and ISO).

Libertarians reject these arguments for three reasons.

Firstly, it is deeply dishonest as it hides the true thoughts of those who support the tactic. To tell the truth is a revolutionary act. Radicals should not follow the capitalist media by telling half-truths, distorting the facts, hiding what they believe or supporting a party they are opposed to. If this means being less popular in the short run, then so be it. Attacking nationalism, capitalism, religion, or a host of other things can alienate people but few revolutionaries would be so opportunistic as to hold their tongues on these. In the long run being honest about your ideas is the best way of producing a movement which aims to get rid of a corrupt social system. Starting such a movement with half-truths is doomed to failure.

Secondly, anarchists reject the basis of this argument. The logic underlying it is that by being disillusioned by their reformist leaders and party, voters will look for **new,** "better" leaders and parties. However, this fails to go to the root of the problem, namely the dependence on leaders which hierarchical society creates within people. Anarchists do not want people to follow the "best" leadership, they want them to govern themselves, to be **self**-active, manage their own affairs and not follow **any** would-be leaders. If you seriously think that the liberation of the oppressed is the task of the oppressed themselves (as Leninists claim to do) then you **must** reject this tactic in favour of ones that promote working class self-activity.

The third reason we reject this tactic is that it has been proven to fail time and time again. What most of its supporters seem to fail to notice is that voters have indeed put reformist parties into office many times. Lenin suggested this tactic in 1920 and there has been no general radicalisation of the voting population by this method, nor even in reformist party militants in spite of the many Labour Party governments in Britain which all attacked the working class. Moreover, the disillusionment associated with the experience of reformist parties often expresses itself as a demoralisation with socialism **as such**, rather than with the reformist's watered down version of it. If Lenin's position could be persuasive to some in 1920 when it was untried, the experience of subsequent decades should show its weakness.

This failure, for anarchists, is not surprising, considering the reasons why we reject this tactic. Given that this tactic does not attack hierarchy or dependence on leaders, does not attack the ideology and process of voting, it will obviously fail to present a real alternative to the voting population (who will turn to other alternatives available at election time and not embrace direct action). Also the sight of a so-called "socialist" or "radical" government managing

capitalism, imposing cuts, breaking strikes and generally attacking its supporters will damage the credibility of any form of socialism and discredit all socialist and radical ideas in the eyes of the population. If the experience of the Labour Government in Britain during the 1970s and New Labour after 1997 are anything to go by, it may result in the rise of the far-right who will capitalise on this disillusionment.

By refusing to argue that no government is "on our side," radicals who urge us to vote reformist "without illusions" help to disarm theoretically the people who listen to them. Working class people, surprised, confused and disorientated by the constant "betrayals" of left-wing parties may turn to right wing parties (who can be elected) to stop the attacks rather than turn to direct action as the radical minority within the working class did not attack voting as part of the problem. How many times must we elect the same party, go through the same process, the same betrayals before we realise this tactic does not work? Moreover, if it **is** a case of having to experience something before people reject it, few state socialists take this argument to its logical conclusion. We rarely hear them argue we must experience the hell of fascism or Stalinism or the nightmare of free market capitalism in order to ensure working class people "see through" them.

Anarchists, in contrast, say that we can argue against reformist politics without having to associate ourselves with them by urging people to vote for them. By arguing for abstentionism we can help to theoretically arm the people who will come into conflict with these parties once they are in office. By arguing that all governments will be forced to attack us (due to the pressure from capital and state) and that we have to rely on our own organisations and power to defend ourselves, we can promote working class self-confidence in its own abilities, and encourage the rejection of capitalism, the state and hierarchical leadership as well as the use of direct action.

Finally, we must add, it is not required for radicals to associate themselves with the farce of parliamentary propaganda in order to win people over to our ideas. Non-anarchists will see us use **direct action,** see us **act,** see the anarchistic alternatives we create and see our propaganda. Non-anarchists can be reached quite well without taking part in, or associating ourselves with, parliamentary action.

J.2.8 Will abstentionism lead to the right winning elections?

Possibly. However anarchists don't just say "don't vote", we say "organise" as well. Apathy is something anarchists have no interest in encouraging.

The reasons **why** people abstain is more important than the act. The idea that the USA is closer to anarchy because around 50% of people do not vote is nonsense. Abstentionism in this case is the product of apathy and cynicism, not political ideas. So anarchists recognise that apathetic abstentionism is **not** revolutionary or an indication of anarchist sympathies. It is produced by apathy and a general level of cynicism at **all** forms of political ideas and the possibility of change.

That is why anarchist abstentionism always stresses the need for direct action and organising economically and socially to change things, to resist oppression and exploitation. In such circumstances, the effect of an electoral strike would be fundamentally different than an

apathy induced lack of voting. *"If the anarchists"*, Vernon Richards argued, *"could persuade half the electorate to abstain from voting this would, from an electoral point of view, contribute to the victory of the Right. But it would be a hollow victory, for what government could rule when half the electorate by not voting had expressed its lack of confidence in all governments?"* The party in office would have to rule over a country in which a sizeable minority, even a majority, had rejected government as such. This would mean that the politicians *"would be subjected to real pressures from people who believed in their own power"* and acted accordingly. So anarchists call on people **not** to vote, but instead organise themselves and be conscious of their own power. Only this *"can command the respect of governments, can curb the power of government as millions of crosses on bits of paper never will."* [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 142]

For, as Emma Goldman pointed out, *"if the Anarchists were strong enough to swing the elections to the Left, they must also have been strong enough to rally the workers to a general strike, or even a series of strikes . . . In the last analysis, the capitalist class knows too well that officials, whether they belong to the Right or the Left, can be bought. Or they are of no consequence to their pledge."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 90] The mass of the population, however, cannot be bought off and if they are willing and able to resist then they can become a power second to none. Only by organising, fighting back and practicing solidarity where we live and work can we **really** change things. That is where **our** power lies, that is where we can create a **real** alternative. By creating a network of self-managed, pro-active community and workplace organisations we can impose by direct action that which politicians can never give us from Parliament. Only such a movement can stop the attacks upon us by whoever gets into office. A government (left or right) which faces a mass movement based upon direct action and solidarity will always think twice before proposing cuts or introducing authoritarian laws. Howard Zinn expressed it well:

> *"I think a way to behave is to think not in terms of representative government, not in terms of voting, not in terms of electoral politics, but thinking in terms of organising social movements, organising in the workplace, organising in the neighborhood, organising collectives that can become strong enough to eventually take over -- first to become strong enough to resist what has been done to them by authority, and second, later, to become strong enough to actually take over the institutions . . . the crucial question is not who is in office, but what kind of social movement do you have. Because we have seen historically that if you have a powerful social movement, it doesnâ€™t matter who is in office. Whoever is in office, they could be Republican or Democrat, if you have a powerful social movement, the person in office will have to yield, will have to in some ways respect the power of social movements . . . voting is not crucial, and organising is the important thing."* [**An Interview with Howard Zinn on Anarchism: Rebels Against Tyranny**]

Of course, all the parties claim that they are better than the others and this is the logic of this question -- namely, we must vote for the lesser evil as the right-wing in office will be terrible. But what this forgets is that the lesser evil is still an evil. What happens is that instead of the greater evil attacking us, we get the lesser evil doing what the right-wing was going to do. Let us not forget it was the "lesser evil" of the Democrats (in the USA) and Labour (in the UK) who first introduced, in the 1970s, the monetarist and other policies that Reagan and Thatcher made their own in the 1980s.

This is important to remember. The central fallacy in this kind of argument is the underlying assumption that "the left" will **not** implement the same kind of policies as the right. History does not support such a perspective and it is a weak hope to place a political strategy on. As such, when people worry that a right-wing government will come into power and seek to abolish previous social gains (such as abortion rights, welfare programmes, union rights, and so forth) they seem to forget that so-called left-wing administrations have also undermined such reforms. In response to queries by the left on how anarchists would seek to defend such reforms if their abstentionism aided the victory of the right, anarchists reply by asking the left how they seek to defend such reforms when their "left-wing" government starts to attack them.

Ultimately, voting for other politicians will make little difference. The reality is that politicians are puppets. As we argued in section J.2.2, real power in the state does not lie with politicians, but instead within the state bureaucracy and big business. Faced with these powers, we have seen left-wing governments from Spain to New Zealand introduce right-wing policies. So even if we elected a radical party, they would be powerless to change anything important and soon be forced to attack us in the interests of capitalism. Politicians come and go, but the state bureaucracy and big business remain forever! Simply put, we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react that differently to the same economic and political pressures and influences.

Therefore we cannot rely on voting for the lesser evil to safe us from the possible dangers of a right-wing election victory. All we can hope for is that no matter who gets in, the population will resist the government because it knows and can use its real power: **direct action**. For the *"only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 196] Hence Vernon Richards:

> *"If the anarchist movement has a role to play in practical politics it is surely that of suggesting to, and persuading, as many people as possible that their freedom from the Hitlers, Francos and the rest, depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes 'for the candidate of ones choice,' but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent weakening of the power, as well of the social role, of government in the life of the community."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176-87, **The Raven**, no. 14, pp. 177-8]

We discuss what this could involve in the next section.

J.2.9 What do anarchists do instead of voting?

While anarchists reject electioneering and voting, it does not mean that we are politically apathetic. Indeed, part of the reason why anarchists reject voting is because we think that voting is not part of the solution, it is part of the problem. This is because it endorses an unjust and unfree political system and makes us look to others to fight our battles for us. It **blocks** constructive self-activity and direct action. It **stops** the building of alternatives in our communities and workplaces. Voting breeds apathy and apathy is our worse enemy.

Given that we have had universal suffrage for some time in the West and we have seen the rise of Labour and Radical parties aiming to use that system to effect change in a socialistic direction, it seems strange that we are probably further away from socialism than when they started. The simple fact is that these parties have spent so much time trying to win elections that they have stopped even thinking about creating socialist alternatives in our communities and workplaces. That is in itself enough to prove that electioneering, far from eliminating apathy, in fact helps to create it.

So, because of this, anarchists argue that the only way to not waste your vote is to spoil it! We are the only political movement which argues that nothing will change unless you act for yourself, take back the power and fight the system **directly.** Only direct action breaks down apathy and gets results. It is the first steps towards real freedom, towards a free and just society. Unsurprisingly, then, anarchists are the first to point out that not voting is not enough: we need to actively struggle for an alternative to both voting **and** the current system. Just as the right to vote was won after a long series of struggles, so the creation of a free, decentralised, self-managed, libertarian socialist society will be the product of social struggle.

Anarchists are the last people to deny the importance of political liberties or the importance in wining the right to vote. The question we must ask is whether it is a more a fitting tribute to the millions of people who used direct action, fought and suffered for the right to vote to use that victory to endorse a deeply unfair and undemocratic system or to use other means (indeed the means they used to win the vote) to create a system based upon true popular self-government? If we are true to our (and their) desire for a real, meaningful democracy, we would have to reject political action in favour of direct action.

This obviously gives an idea of what anarchists do instead of voting, we agitate, organise and educate. Or, to quote Proudhon, the *"problem before the labouring classes . . . consists not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, -- that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them."* For, *"to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 398 and p. 397]

We do this by organising what Bakunin called *"antipolitical social power of the working classes."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 263] This activity which bases itself on the two broad strategies of encouraging direct action and building alternatives where we live and work.

Taking the first strategy, anarchists say that by using direct action we can force politicians to respect the wishes of the people. For example, if a government or boss tries to limit free speech, then anarchists would try to encourage a free speech fight to break the laws in question until such time as they are revoked. If a government or landlord refuses to limit rent increases or improve safety requirements for accommodation, anarchists would organise squats and rent strikes. In the case of environmental destruction, anarchists would support and encourage attempts at halting the damage by mass trespassing on sites, blocking the routes of developments, organising strikes and so on. If a boss refuses to introduce an 8 hour day, then workers should form a union and go on strike or simply stop working after 8 hours. Unlike laws, the boss cannot ignore direct action. Similarly, strikes combined with social protest would be effective means of stopping authoritarian laws being passed. For example,

anti-union laws would be best fought by strike action and community boycotts (and given the utterly ineffectual defence pursued by pro-labour parties using political action to stop anti-union laws who can seriously say that the anarchist way would be any worse?). Collective non-payment of taxes would ensure the end of unpopular government decisions. The example of the poll tax rebellion in the UK in the late in 1980s shows the power of such direct action. The government could happily handle hours of speeches by opposition politicians but they could not ignore social protest (and we must add that the Labour Party which claimed to oppose the tax happily let the councils controlled by them introduce the tax and arrest non-payers).

The aim would be to spread struggles and involve as many people as possible, for it is *"merely stupid for a group of workers -- even for the workers organised as a national group -- to invite the making of a distinction between themselves and the community. The real protagonists in this struggle are the community and the State -- the community as an organic and inclusive body and the State as the representatives of a tyrannical minority . . . The General Strike of the future must be organised as a strike of the community against the State. The result of that strike will not be in doubt."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, p. 52]

Such a counter-power would focus the attention of those in power far more than a ballot in a few years time (particularly as the state bureaucracy is not subject to even that weak form of accountability). As Noam Chomsky argues, *"[w]ithin the constraints of existing state institutions, policies will be determined by people representing centres of concentrated power in the private economy, people who, in their institutional roles, will not be swayed by moral appeals but by the costs consequent upon the decisions they make -- not because they are 'bad people,' but because that is what the institutional roles demands."* He continues: *"Those who own and manage the society want a disciplined, apathetic and submissive public that will not challenge their privilege and the orderly world in which it thrives. The ordinary citizen need not grant them this gift. Enhancing the Crisis of Democracy by organisation and political engagement is itself a threat to power, a reason to undertake it quite apart from its crucial importance in itself as an essential step towards social change."* [**Turning the Tide**, pp. 251-2]

In this way, by encouraging social protest, any government would think twice before pursuing authoritarian, destructive and unpopular policies. In the final analysis, governments can and will ignore the talk of opposition politicians, but they cannot ignore social action for very long. In the words of a Spanish anarchosyndicalist, anarchists *"do not ask for any concessions from the government. Our mission and our duty is to impose from the streets that which ministers and deputies are incapable of realising in parliament."* [quoted by Graham Kelsey, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 79] This was seen after the Popular Front was elected February 1936 and the Spanish landless workers, sick and tired of waiting for the politicians to act, started to occupy the land. The government *"resorted to the time-tested procedure of expelling the peasants with the Civil Guard."* The peasants responded with a *"dramatic rebellion"* which forced the politicians to *"legalise the occupied farms. This proved once again that the only effective reforms are those imposed by force from below. Indeed, direct action was infinitely more successful than all the parliamentary debates that took place between 1931 and 1933 about whether to institute the approved Agrarian Reform law."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 391]

The second strategy of building alternatives flows naturally from the first. Any form of campaign requires organisation and by organising in an anarchist manner we build

organisations that *"bear in them the living seed of the new society which is replace the old world."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 255] In organising strikes in the workplace and community we can create a network of activists and union members who can encourage a spirit of revolt against authority. By creating assemblies where we live and work we can create an effective countering power to the state and capital. Such a union, as the anarchists in Spain and Italy proved, can be the focal point for recreating self-managed schools, social centres and so on. In this way the local community can ensure that it has sufficient independent, self-managed resources available to educate its members. Also, combined with credit unions (or mutual banks), cooperative workplaces and stores, a self-managed infrastructure could be created which would ensure that people can directly provide for their own needs without having to rely on capitalists or governments. In the words of a C.N.T. militant:

> *"We must create that part of libertarian communism which can be created within bourgeois society and do so precisely to combat that society with our own special weapons."* [quoted by Kelsey, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

So, far from doing nothing, by not voting the anarchist actively encourages alternatives. As the British anarchist John Turner argued, we *"have a line to work upon, to teach the people self-reliance, to urge them to take part in non-political [i.e. non-electoral] movements directly started by themselves for themselves . . . as soon as people learn to rely upon themselves they will act for themselves . . . We teach the people to place their faith in themselves, we go on the lines of self-help. We teach them to form their own committees of management, to repudiate their masters, to despise the laws of the country."* [quoted by John Quail, **The Slow Burning Fuse**, p. 87] In this way we encourage self-activity, self-organisation and self-help -- the opposite of apathy and doing nothing.

Ultimately, what the state and capital gives, they can also take away. What we build by our own self-activity can last as long as we want it to and act to protect it:

> *"The future belongs to those who continue daringly, consistently, to fight power and governmental authority. The future belongs to us and to our social philosophy. For it is the only social ideal that teaches independent thinking and direct participation of the workers in their economic struggle. For it is only through the organised economic strength of the masses that they can and will do away with the capitalist system and all the wrongs and injustices it contains. Any diversion from this stand will only retard our movement and make it a stepping stone for political climbers."* [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, p. 92]

In short, what happens in our communities, workplaces and environment is too important to be left to politicians -- or the ruling elite who control governments. Anarchists need to persuade *"as many people as possible that their freedom . . . depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes . . . but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent weakening of the power, as well as of the social role, of government in the life of the community."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176-87, **The Raven**, No. 14, pp. 177-8] We discuss what new forms of economic and social organisations that this could involve in section J.5.

J.2.10 Does rejecting electioneering mean that anarchists are apolitical?

No. Far from it. The "apolitical" nature of anarchism is Marxist nonsense. As it desires to fundamentally change society, anarchism can be nothing but political. However, anarchism does reject (as we have seen) "normal" political activity as ineffectual and corrupting. However, many (particularly Marxists) imply this rejection of the con of capitalist politics means that anarchists concentrate on purely "economic" issues like wages, working conditions and so forth. By so doing, Marxists claim that anarchists leave the political agenda to be dominated by capitalist ideology, with disastrous results for the working class.

This view, however, is **utterly** wrong. Indeed, Bakunin explicitly rejected the idea that working people could ignore politics and actually agreed with the Marxists that political indifference only led to capitalist control of the labour movement:

> *"[some of] the workers in Germany . . . [were organised in] a kind of federation of small associations . . . 'Self-help' . . . was its slogan, in the sense that labouring people were persistently advised not to anticipate either deliverance or help from the state and the government, but only from their own efforts. This advice would have been excellent had it not been accompanied by the false assurance that liberation for the labouring people is possible under* ***current conditions of social organisation*** *. . . Under this delusion . . . the workers subject to [this] influence were supposed to disengage themselves systematically from all political and social concerns and questions about the state, property, and so forth . . . [This] completely subordinated the proletariat to the bourgeoisie which exploits it and for which it was to remain an obedient and mindless tool."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 174]

In addition, Bakunin argued that the labour movement (and so the anarchist movement) would have to take into account political ideas and struggles but to do so in a working class way:

> *"The International does not reject politics of a general kind; it will be compelled to intervene in politics so long as it is forced to struggle against the bourgeoisie. It rejects only bourgeois politics."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 313]

To state the obvious, anarchists only reject working class *"political action"* if you equate (as did the early Marxists) "political action" with electioneering, standing candidates for Parliament, local town councils and so on -- what Bakunin termed bourgeois politics. We do not reject "political action" in the sense of direct action to effect political changes and reforms. As two American syndicalists argued, libertarians use *"the term 'political action' . . . in its ordinary and correct sense. Parliamentary action resulting from the exercise of the franchise is political action. Parliamentary action caused by the influence of direct action tactics . . . is not political action. It is simply a registration of direct action."* They also noted that syndicalists *"have proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action."* [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 19f and p. 23]

So, anarchists reject capitalist politics (i.e. electioneering), but we do not ignore politics, wider political discussion or political struggles. Anarchists have always recognised the

importance of political debate and ideas in social movements. Bakunin asked should a workers organisation *"cease to concern itself with political and philosophical questions? Would [it] . . . ignore progress in the world of thought as well as the events which accompany or arise from the political struggle in and between states, concerning itself only with the economic problem?"* He rejected such a position: *"We hasten to say that it is absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions. An exclusive pre-occupation with economic questions would be fatal for the proletariat. Doubtless the defence and organisation of its economic interests . . . must be the principle task of the proletariat. But is impossible for the workers to stop there without renouncing their humanity and depriving themselves of the intellectual and moral power which is so necessary for the conquest of their economic rights."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 301]

Nor do anarchists ignore elections. As Vernon Richards suggested, anarchists *"cannot be uninterested in . . . election results, whatever their view about the demerits of the contending Parties. The fact that the anarchist movement has campaigned to persuade people not to use their vote is proof of our commitment and interest. If there is, say, a 60 per cent. poll we will not assume that the 40 per cent. abstentions are anarchists, but we would surely be justified in drawing the conclusion that among the 40 per cent. there are a sizeable minority who have lost faith in political parties and were looking for other instruments, other values."* [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 141] Nor, needless to say, are anarchists indifferent to struggles for political reforms and the need to stop the state pursuing authoritarian policies, imperialist adventures and such like.

Thus the charge anarchists are apolitical or indifferent to politics (even capitalist politics) is a myth. Rather, *"we are not concerned with choosing between governments but with creating the situation where government can no longer operate, because only then will we organise locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to satisfy real needs and common aspirations."* For *"so long as we have capitalism and government, the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176-87, **The Raven**, No. 14, p. 179]

Part of this process will be the discussion of political, social and economic issues in whatever self-managed organisations people create in their communities and workplaces (as Bakunin argued) and the use of these organisations to fight for (political, social and economic) improvements and reforms in the here and now using direct action and solidarity. This means, as Rudolf Rocker pointed out, anarchists desire a unification of political and economic struggles as the two as inseparable:

> *"Within the socialist movement itself the Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 11]

Such a unification must take place on the social and economic field, not the political, as that is where the working class is strongest. So anarchists are well aware of the need to fight for political issues and reforms, and so are *"not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle . . . must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic [and social] power which the working class has at its command are the most*

effective. The most trivial wage-fight shows clearly that, whenever the employers find themselves in difficulties, the state steps in with the police, and even in some cases with the militia, to protect the threatened interests of the possessing classes. It would, therefore, be absurd for them to overlook the importance of the political struggle. Every event that affects the life of the community is of a political nature. In this sense every important economic action . . . is also a political action and, moreover, one of incomparably greater importance than any parliamentary proceeding." In other words, *"just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country. Both in the struggle for his daily bread and for every kind of propaganda looking towards his social liberation he needs political rights and liberties, and he must fight for these himself with all his strength whenever the attempt is made to wrest them from him."* So the *"focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic [and social] fighting organisations of the workers."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77, p. 74 and p. 77] Hence the comments in the CNT's newspaper **Solidaridad Obrera**:

> *"Does anyone not know that we want to participate in public life? Does anyone not know that we have always done so? Yes, we want to participate. With our organisations. With our papers. Without intermediaries, delegates or representatives. No. We will not go to the Town Hall, to the Provincial Capitol, to Parliament."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 173]

Indeed, Rudolf Rocker makes the point very clear. *"It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism,"* he wrote, *"that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities entirely to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalist from the modern labour parties, both in principle and tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view . . . their efforts are also directed, even today, at restricting the activities of the state . . . The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism towards the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes towards the system of capitalist exploitation"* and *"pursue the same tactics in their fight against . . . the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 73-4]

As historian Bob Holton suggests, the notion that syndicalism is apolitical *"is certainly a deeply embedded article of faith among those marxists who have taken Lenin's strictures against syndicalism at face value. Yet it bears little relation to the actual nature of revolutionary industrial movements . . . Nor did syndicalists neglect politics and the state. Revolutionary industrial movements were on the contrary highly 'political' in that they sought to understand, challenge and destroy the structure of capitalist power in society, They quite clearly perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed."* For example, the *"vigorous campaign against the 'servile state' certainly disproves the notion that syndicalists ignored the role of the state in society. On the contrary, their analysis of bureaucratic state capitalism helped to make considerable inroads into prevailing Labourist and state socialist assumptions that the existing state could be captured by electoral means and used as an agent of through-going social reform."* [**British Syndicalism, 1900-1914**, pp. 21-2 and p. 204]

Thus anarchism is not indifferent to or ignores political struggles and issues. Rather, it fights for political change and reforms as it fights for economic ones -- by direct action and solidarity. If anarchists *"reject any participation in the works of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and most hopeless form of the political struggle."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 76] Anarchists reject the idea that political and economic struggles can be divided. Such an argument just reproduces the artificially created division of labour between mental and physical activity of capitalism within working class organisations and within anti-capitalist movements. We say that we should not separate out politics into some form of specialised activity that only certain people (i.e. our "representatives") can do. Instead, anarchists argue that political struggles, ideas and debates must be brought into the **social** and **economic** organisations of our class where they must be debated freely by all members as they see fit and that political and economic struggle and change must go hand in hand. Rather than being something other people discuss on behalf of working class people, anarchists, argue that politics must no longer be in the hands of so-called experts (i.e. politicians) but instead lie in the hands of those directly affected by it. Also, in this way the social struggle encourages the political development of its members by the process of participation and self-management.

In other words, political issues must be raised in economic and social organisations and discussed there, where working class people have real power. As Bakunin put it, *"the proletariat itself will pose"* political and philosophical questions in their own organisations and so the political struggle (in the widest scene) will come from the class struggle, for *"[w]ho can entertain any doubt that out of this ever-growing organisation of the militant solidarity of the proletariat against bourgeois exploitation there will issue forth the political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie?"* Anarchists simply think that the *"policy of the proletariat"* should be *"the destruction of the State"* rather than working within it and we argue for a union of political ideas and social organisation and activity. This is essential for promoting radical politics as it *"digs a chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and places the proletariat outside the activity and political conniving of all parties within the State . . . in placing itself outside all bourgeois politics, the proletariat necessarily turns against it."* So, by *"placing the proletariat outside the politics in the State and of the bourgeois world, [the working class movement] thereby constructed a new world, the world of the united proletarians of all lands."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302 p. 276, p. 303 and p. 305]

History supports Bakunin's arguments, as it indicates that any attempt at taking social and economic issues into political parties has resulting in wasted energy and their watering down into, at best, reformism and, at worse, the simple ignoring of them by politicians once in office (see section J.2.6). Only by rejecting the artificial divisions of capitalist society can we remain true to our ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity. Every example of radicals using electioneering has resulted in them being changed by the system instead of them changing it. They have become dominated by capitalist ideas and activity (what is usually termed "realistic" and "practical") and by working within capitalist institutions they have, to use Bakunin's words, *"filled in at a single stroke the abyss . . . between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie"* that economic and social struggle creates and, worse, *"have tied the proletariat to the bourgeois towline."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 290]

In addition, so-called "economic" struggles do not occur in a vacuum. They take place in a social and political context and so, necessarily, there can exist an separation of political and economic struggles only in the mind. Strikers or eco-warriors, for example, face the power of

the state enforcing laws which protect the power of employers and polluters. This necessarily has a "political" impact on those involved in struggle. By channelling any "political" conclusions drawn by those involved in struggle into electoral politics, this development of political ideas and discussion will be distorted into discussions of what is possible in the current system, and so the radical impact of direct action and social struggle is weakened. Given this, is it surprising that anarchists argue that the people *"must organise their powers apart from and against the State."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 376]

To conclude, anarchists are only "apolitical" about bourgeois elections and the dubious liberty and benefits associated with picking who will rule us and maintain capitalism for the next four or five years as well as the usefulness of socialists participating in them. We feel that our predictions have been confirmed time and time again. Anarchists reject electioneering not because they are "apolitical" but because they do not desire to see politics remain a thing purely for politicians and bureucrats. Political issues are far too important to leave to such people. Anarchists desire to see political discussion and change develop from the bottom up, this is hardly "apolitical" -- in fact with our desire to see ordinary people directly discuss the issues that affect them, act to change things by their own action and draw their own conclusions from their own activity anarchists are very "political." The process of individual and social liberation is the most political activity we can think of!

J.3 What kinds of organisation do anarchists build?

Anarchists are well aware of the importance of building organisations. Organisations allow those within them to multiply their strength and activity, becoming the means by which an individual can see their ideas, hopes and dreams realised. This is as true for getting the anarchist message across as for building a home, running a hospital or creating some useful product. Anarchists support two types of organisation -- organisations of anarchists and popular organisations which are not made up exclusively of anarchists such as industrial unions, co-operatives and community assemblies.

Here we will discuss the kinds, nature and role of the first type of organisation, namely explicitly anarchist organisations. In addition, we discuss anarcho-syndicalism, a revolutionary unionism which aims to create an anarchist society by anarchist tactics, as well as why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists. The second type of organisations, popular ones, are discussed in section J.5. Both forms of organisation, however, share the anarchist commitment to confederalism, decentralisation, self-management and decision making from the bottom up. In such organisations the membership plays the decisive role in running them and ensuring that power remains in their hands. They express the anarchist vision of the power and creative efficacy people have when they are self-reliant, when they act for themselves and manage their own lives directly. Only by organising in this way can we create a new world, a world worthy of human beings and unique individuals.

Anarchist organisation in all its forms reflects our desire to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"* and to empower the individual. We reject the notion that it does not really matter how we organise to change society. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. We are all the products of the influences and social relationships in our lives, this is a basic idea of (philosophical) materialism. Thus the way our organisations are structured has an impact on

us. If the organisation is centralised and hierarchical (no matter how "democratically" controlled officials or leaders are) then those subject to it will, as in any hierarchical organisation, see their abilities to manage their own lives, their creative thought and imagination eroded under the constant stream of orders from above. This in turn justifies the pretensions to power of those at the top, as the capacity of self-management of the rank and file is weakened by authoritarian social relationships. This means anarchist organisations are structured so that they allow everyone the maximum potential to participate. Such participation is the key for a free organisation. As Malatesta argued:

> *"The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity . . . if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiative, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society."* [**Anarchy**, p. 36]

Anarchist organisations exist to allow this development and expression of individual initiatives. This empowering of the individual is an important aspect of creating viable solidarity for sheep cannot express solidarity, they only follow the shepherd. Therefore, *"to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of co-operation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95]

As such, anarchist organisations reflect the sort of society anarchists desire. We reject as ridiculous the claim of Leninists that the form of organisation we build is irrelevant and therefore we must create highly centralised parties which aim to become the leadership of the working class. No matter how "democratic" such organisations are, they just reflect the capitalist division of labour between brain and manual work and the Liberal ideology of surrendering our ability to govern ourselves to an elected elite. In other words, they just mirror the very society we are opposed to and so will soon produce the very problems **within** so-called anti-capitalist organisations which originally motivated us to oppose capitalism in the first place (see section H.5). Given this, anarchists regard *"the Marxist party as another statist form that, if it succeeded in 'seizing power,' would preserve the power of one human being over another, the authority of the leader over the led. The Marxist party . . . was a mirror image of the very society it professed to oppose, an invasion of the camp of revolutionaries by bourgeois values, methods, and structures."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 179-80] As can be seen from the history of the Russian Revolution, this was the case with the Bolsheviks soon taking the lead in undermining workers' self-management, soviet democracy and, finally, democracy within the ruling party itself (see section H.6).

From an anarchist (i.e. materialist) point of view, this was highly predictable -- after all, *"facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower whose root lies in the material conditions of existence."* [Bakunin, **God and the State**, p. 9] So it is unsurprising that hierarchical parties helped to maintain a hierarchical society. In the words of the famous Sonvillier Circular: *"How could one want an egalitarian and free society to issue from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* [quoted in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 45]

We must stress here that anarchists are **not** opposed to organisation and are **not** opposed to organisations of anarchists (i.e. **political** organisations, although anarchists generally reject the term "party" due to its statist and hierarchical associations). Murray Bookchin made it clear when he wrote that the *"real question at issue here is not organisation versus non-organisation, but rather what **kind** of organisation"* Anarchist organisations are *"organic developments from below . . . They are social movements, combing a creative revolutionary lifestyle with a creative revolutionary theory . . . As much as is humanly possibly, they try to reflect the liberated society they seek to achieve"* and *"co-ordination between groups . . . discipline, planning, and unity in action . . . achieved **voluntarily**, by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 138-9]

Ultimately, centralised organisations are undemocratic and, equally as important, **ineffective.** Hierarchical organisations kill people's enthusiasm and creativity, where plans and ideas are not adopted because they are the best but simply because they are what a handful of leaders **think** are best for everyone else. Really effective organisations are those which make decisions based frank and open co-operation and debate, where dissent is **not** stifled and ideas are adopted because of their merit and not imposed from the top-down by a few party leaders. This is why anarchists stress federalist organisation. It ensures that co-ordination flows from below and there is no institutionalised leadership. By organising in a way that reflects the kind of society we want, we train ourselves in the skills and decision making processes required to make a free and classless society work. Means and ends are united and this ensures that the means used will result in the desired ends. Simply put, libertarian means must be used if you want libertarian ends (see section H.1.6 for further discussion).

In the sections that follow, we discuss the nature and role of anarchist organisation. Anarchists would agree with Situationist Guy Debord that a *"revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting people to listen to speeches by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves."* We organise their groups accordingly. In section J.3.1 we discuss the basic building block of specifically anarchist organisations, the ***"affinity group."*** Sections J.3.2, J.3.3, J.3.4 and J.3.5, we discuss the main types of federations of ***affinity groups*** anarchist create to help spread our message and influence. Then section J.3.6 highlights the role these organisations play in our struggles to create an anarchist society. In section J.3.7, we analyse Bakunin's unfortunate expression *"Invisible Dictatorship"* in order to show how many Marxists distort Bakunin's ideas on this matter. Finally, in sections J.3.8 and J.3.9 we discuss anarcho-syndicalism and other anarchists attitudes to it.

Anarchist organisations, therefore, aim to enrich social struggle by their ideas and suggestions but also, far more importantly, enrich the libertarian idea by practical experience and activity. In other words, a two way process by which life informs theory and theory aids life. The means by which this social dynamic is created and developed is the underlying aim of anarchist organisation and is reflected in its theoretical role. The power of ideas cannot be under estimated, for *"if you have an idea you can communicate it to a million people and lose nothing in the process, and the more the idea is propagated the more it acquires in power and effectiveness."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46] The right idea at the right time, one that reflects the needs of individuals and of required social change, can have a transforming effect on society. That is why organisations that anarchists create to spread their message are so important and why we devote a whole section to them.

J.3.1 What are affinity groups?

Affinity groups are the basic organisation which anarchists create to spread the anarchist idea. The term *"affinity group"* comes from the Spanish F.A.I. (**Iberian Anarchist Federation**) and refers to the organisational form devised in their struggles for freedom (from *"grupo de afinidad"*). At its most basic, it is a (usually small) group of anarchists who work together to spread their ideas to the wider public, using propaganda, initiating or working with campaigns and spreading their ideas **within** popular organisations (such as unions) and communities. It aims not to be a "leadership" but to give a lead, to act as a catalyst within popular movements. Unsurprisingly it reflects basic anarchist ideas:

> *"Autonomous, communal and directly democratic, the group combines revolutionary theory with revolutionary lifestyle in its everyday behaviour. It creates a free space in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 144]

The reason for this is simple, for a *"movement that sought to promote a liberatory revolution had to develop liberatory and revolutionary forms. This meant . . . that it had to mirror the free society it was trying to achieve, not the repressive one it was trying to overthrow. If a movement sought to achieve a world united by solidarity and mutual aid, it had to be guided by these precepts; if it sought to achieve a decentralised, stateless, non-authoritarian society, it had to be structured in accordance with these goals."* [Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 180]

The aim of an anarchist organisation is to promote a sense of community, of confidence in ones own abilities, to enable all to be involved in the identification, initiation and management of group needs, decisions and activities. They must ensure that individuals are in a position (both physically, as part of a group, and mentally, as an individual) to manage their own lives and take direct action in the pursuit of individual and communal needs and desires. Anarchist organisation is about empowering all, to develop "integral" or whole individuals and a community that encourages individuality (not abstract "individualism") and solidarity. It is about collective decision making from the bottom up, that empowers those at the "base" of the structure and only delegates the work of co-ordinating and implementing the members decisions (and not the power of making decisions for people). In this way the initiative and power of the few (government) is replaced by the initiative and empowerment of all (anarchy). Affinity groups exist to achieve these aims and are structured to encourage them.

The local affinity group is the means by which anarchists co-ordinate their activities in a community, workplace, social movement and so on. Within these groups, anarchists discuss their ideas, politics and hopes, what they plan to do, organise propaganda work, discuss how they are going to work within wider organisations like unions, how their strategies fit into their long term plans and goals and so on. It is the basic way that anarchists work out their ideas, pull their resources and get their message across to others. There can be affinity groups for different interests and activities (for example a workplace affinity group, a community affinity group, an anarcha-feminist affinity group, etc., could all exist within the same area, with overlapping members). Moreover, as well as these more "political" activities, the "affinity group" also stresses the *"importance of education and the need to live by Anarchist precepts -- the need . . . to create a counter-society that could provide the space for people to*

begin to remake themselves." [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 180] In other words, "affinity groups" aim to be the *"living germs"* of the new society in **all** aspects, not purely in a structurally way.

So affinity groups are self-managed, autonomous groupings of anarchists who unite and work on specific activities and interests. This means that *"[i]n an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 102] Such groups are a key way for anarchists to co-ordinate their activity and spread their message of individual freedom and voluntary co-operation. However, the description of what an "affinity group" is does not explain **why** anarchists organise in that way. Essentially, these affinity groups are the means by which anarchists actually intervene in social movements and struggles in order to win people to the anarchist idea and so help transform them from struggles **against** injustice into struggles **for** a free society. We will discuss the role these groups play in anarchist theory in section J.3.6.

These basic affinity groups are not seen as being enough in themselves. Most anarchists see the need for local groups to work together with others in a confederation. Such co-operation aims to pull resources and expand the options for the individuals and groups who are part of the federation. As with the basic affinity group, the anarchist federation is a self-managed organisation:

> *"Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it is useful to unite in co-operating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

To aid in this process of propaganda, agitation, political discussion and development, anarchists organise federations of affinity groups. These take three main forms, ***"synthesis"*** federations (see section J.3.2), ***"Platformist"*** federations (see section J.3.3 while section J.3.4 has criticism of this tendency) and ***"class struggle"*** groups (see section J.3.5). All the various types of federation are based on groups of anarchists organising themselves in a libertarian fashion. This is because anarchists try to live by the values of the future to the extent that this is possible under capitalism and try to develop organisations based upon mutual aid, in which control would be exercised from below upward, not downward from above. We must also note here that these types of federation are not mutually exclusive. Synthesis type federations often have "class struggle" and "Platformist" groups within them (although, as will become clear, Platformist federations do not have synthesis groups within them) and most countries have different federations representing the different perspectives within the movement. Moreover, it should also be noted that no federation will be a totally "pure" expression of each tendency. "Synthesis" groups merge into "class struggle" ones, Platformist groups do not subscribe totally to the Platform and so on. We isolate each tendency to show its essential features. In real life few, if any, federations will exactly fit the types we highlight. It would be more precise to speak of organisations which are descended from a given tendency, for example the French **Anarchist Federation** is mostly influenced by the synthesis tradition but

it is not, strictly speaking, 100% synthesis. Lastly, we must also note that the term "class struggle" anarchist group in no way implies that "synthesis" and "Platformist" groups do not support the class struggle or take part in it, they most definitely do -- it is simply a technical term to differentiate between types of organisation!

It must be stressed anarchists do not reduce the complex issue of political organisation and ideas into **one** organisation but instead recognise that different threads within anarchism will express themselves in different political organisations (and even within the same organisation). A diversity of anarchist groups and federations is a good sign and expresses the diversity of political and individual thought to be expected in a movement aiming for a society based upon freedom. All we aim to do is to paint a broad picture of the similarities and differences between the various perspectives on organising in the movement and indicate the role these federations play in libertarian theory, namely of an aid in the struggle, not a new leadership seeking power.

J.3.2 What are "synthesis" federations?

The "synthesis" federation acquired its name from the work of Voline (a Russian exile) and leading French anarchist Sebastien Faure in the 1920s. Voline published in 1924 a paper calling for *"the anarchist synthesis"* and was also the author of the article in Faure's **Encyclopedie Anarchiste** on the very same topic. Its roots lie in the Russian revolution and the **Nabat** federation created in the Ukraine during 1918 whose aim was *"organising all of the life forces of anarchism; bringing together through a common endeavour all anarchists seriously desiring of playing an active part in the social revolution which is defined as a process (of greater or lesser duration) giving rise to a new form of social existence for the organised masses."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 117]

The "synthesis" organisation is based on uniting all kinds of anarchists in one federation as there is, to use the words of the **Nabat**, *"validity in all anarchist schools of thought. We must consider all diverse tendencies and accept them."* The synthesis organisation attempts to get different kinds of anarchists *"joined together on a number of basic positions and with the awareness of the need for planned, organised collective effort on the basis of federation."* [quoted in *"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32-6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G. P. Maximoff (ed.), p. 32] These basic positions would be based on a synthesis of the viewpoints of the members of the organisation, but each tendency would be free to agree their own ideas due to the federal nature of the organisation.

An example of this synthesis approach is provided by the differing assertions that anarchism is a theory of classes (as stated by the Platform, among others), that anarchism is a humanitarian ideal for all people and that anarchism is purely about individuals (and so essentially individualist and having nothing to do with humanity or with a class). The synthesis of these positions would be to *"state that anarchism contains class elements as well as humanism and individualist principles . . . Its class element is above all its means of fighting for liberation; its humanitarian character is its ethical aspect, the foundation of society; its individualism is the goal of humanity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

So, as can be seen, the "synthesis" tendency aims to unite all anarchists (be they individualist, mutualist, syndicalist or communist) into one common federation. Thus the "synthesis" viewpoint is "inclusive" and obviously has affinities with the *"anarchism without adjectives"*

approach favoured by many anarchists (see section A.3.8). However, in practice many "synthesis" organisations are more restrictive (for example, they could aim to unite all **social** anarchists) and so there can be a difference between the general idea of the synthesis and how it is concretely applied.

The basic idea behind the synthesis is that the anarchist movement (in most countries, at most times, including France in the 1920s and Russia during the revolution and at this time) is divided into three main tendencies: communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and individualist anarchism. This division can cause severe damage to the movement simply because of the many (and often redundant) arguments and diatribes on why "my anarchism is best" can get in the way of working in common in order to fight our common enemies (state, capitalism and authority). The "synthesis" federations are defined by agreeing what is the common denominator of the various tendencies within anarchism and agreeing a minimum programme based on this for the federation. This would allow a *"certain ideological and tactical unity among organisations"* within the "synthesis" federation. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35] Moreover, as well as saving time and energy for more important tasks, there are technical and efficiency reasons for unifying into one organisation, namely allowing the movement to have access to more resources and being able to co-ordinate them so as to maximise their use and impact.

The "synthesis" federation, like all anarchist groups, aims to spread anarchist ideas within society as a whole. They believe that their role is to *"assist the masses only when they need such assistance . . . the anarchists are part of the membership in the economic and social mass organisations [such as trade unions]. They act and build as part of the whole. An immense field of action is opened to them for ideological [sic!], social and creative activity without assuming a position of superiority over the masses. Above all they must fulfil their ideological and ethical influence in a free and natural manner . . . [they] offer ideological assistance, but not in the role of leaders."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] This, as we shall see in section J.3.6, is the common anarchist position as regards the role of an anarchist group.

The great strength of "synthesis" federations, obviously, is that they allow a wide and diverse range of viewpoints to be expressed within the organisation which can allow the development of political ideas and theories by constant discussion and debate. They allow the maximum amount of resources to be made available to individuals and groups within the organisation by increasing the number of members. This is why we find the original promoters of the "synthesis" arguing that *"that first step toward achieving unity in the anarchist movement which can lead to serious organisation is collective ideological work on a series of important problems that seek the clearest possible collective solution,"* discussing *"concrete questions"* rather than *"philosophical problems and abstract dissertations"* and *"suggest that there be a publication for discussion in every country where the problems in our ideology [sic!] and tactics can be fully discussed, regardless of how 'acute' or even 'taboo' it may be. The need for such a printed organ, as well as oral discussion, seems to us to be a 'must' because it is the practical way to try to achieve 'ideological unity', 'tactical unity', and possibly organisation . . . A full and tolerant discussion of our problems . . . will create a basis for understanding, not only among anarchists, but among different conceptions of anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

The "synthesis" idea for anarchist organisation was taken up by those who opposed the Platform (see next section). For both Faure and Voline, the basic idea was the same, namely that the various tendencies in anarchism must co-operate and work in the same organisation.

However, there are differences between Voline's and Faure's points of view. The latter saw these various tendencies as a wealth in themselves and advocated that each tendency would gain from working together in a common organisation. From Voline's point of view, the emergence of these various tendencies was historically needed to discover the in-depth implications of anarchism in various settings (such as the economical, the social and individual life). However, it was the time to go back to anarchism as a whole, an anarchism considerably empowered by what each tendency could give it, and in which tendencies as such should dissolve. Moreover, these tendencies co-existed in every anarchist at various levels, so all anarchists should aggregate in an organisation where these tendencies would disappear (both individually and organisationally, i.e. there would not be an "anarcho-syndicalist" specific tendency inside the organisation, and so forth).

The "synthesis" federation would be based on complete autonomy (within the basic principles of the Federation and Congress decisions, of course) for groups and individuals, so allowing all the different trends to work together and express their differences in a common front. The various groups would be organised in a federal structure, combining to share resources in the struggle against state, capitalism and other forms of oppression. This federal structure is organised at the local level through a "local union" (i.e. the groups in a town or city), at the regional level (i.e. all groups in, say, Strathclyde are members of the same regional union) up to the "national" level (i.e. all groups in Scotland, say) and beyond.

As every group in the federation is autonomous, it can discuss, plan and initiate an action (such as campaign for a reform, against a social evil, and so on) without having to wait for others in the federation (or have to wait for instructions). This means that the local groups can respond quickly to issues and developments. This does not mean that each group works in isolation. These initiatives may gain federal support if local groups see the need. The federation can adopt an issue if it is raised at a federal conference and other groups agree to co-operate on that issue. Moreover, each group has the freedom **not** to participate on a specific issue while leaving others to do so. Thus groups can concentrate on what they are interested in most.

The programme and policies of the federation would be agreed at regular delegate meetings and congresses. The "synthesis" federation is managed at the federal level by "relations committees" made up of people elected and mandated at the federation congresses. These committees would have a purely administrative role, spreading information, suggestions and proposals coming from groups and individuals within the organisation, looking after the finances of the federation and so on. They do not have any more rights than any other member of the federation (i.e. they could not make a proposal as a committee, just as members of their local group or as individuals). These administrative committees are accountable to the federation and subject to both mandates and recall.

Most national sections of the **International Anarchist Federation** (IFA) are good examples of successful federations which are heavily influenced by "synthesis" ideas (such as the French and Italian federations). Obviously, though, how effective a "synthesis" federation is depends upon how tolerant members are of each other and how seriously they take their responsibilities towards their federations and the agreements they make.

Of course, there are problems with most forms of organisation, and the "synthesis" federation is no exception. While diversity can strengthen an organisation by provoking debate, a too diverse grouping can often make it difficult to get things done. Platformist and other critics of

the "synthesis" federation argue that it can be turned into a talking shop and any common programme difficult to agree, never mind apply. For example, how can mutualists and communists agree on the ends, never mind the means, their organisation supports? One believes in co-operation within a (modified) market system and reforming capitalism away, while the other believes in the abolition of commodity production and money, seeing revolution as the means of so doing. Ultimately, all they could do would be to agree to disagree and thus any joint programmes and activity would be somewhat limited. It could, indeed, be argued that both Voline and Faure forgot essential points, namely what is this common denominator between the different kinds of anarchism, how do we achieve it and what is in it? For without this agreed common position, many synthesist organisations do end up becoming little more than talking shops, escaping from any social or organisational perspective. This seems to have been the fate of many groups in Britain and America during the 1960s and 1970s, for example.

It is this (potential) disunity that lead the authors of the Platform to argue that *"[s]uch an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality."* [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 12] The Platform suggested *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* as a means of overcoming this problem, but that term provoked massive disagreement in anarchist circles (see section J.3.4). In reply to the Platform, supporters of the "synthesis" counter by pointing to the fact that "Platformist" groups are usually very small, far smaller that "synthesis" federations (for example, compare the size of the **French Anarchist Federation** with, say, the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** or the French-language **Alternative Libertaire**). This means, they argue, that the Platform does not, in fact, lead to a more effective organisation, regardless of the claims of its supporters. Moreover, they argue that the requirements for *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* help ensure a small organisation as differences would express themselves in splits rather than constructive activity. Needless to say, the discussion continues within the movement on this issue!

What can be said is that this potential problem within "synthesisism" has been the cause of some organisations failing or becoming little more than talking shops, with each group doing its own thing and so making co-ordination pointless as any agreements made would be ignored. Most supporters of the synthesis would argue that this is not what the theory aims for and that the problem lies in misunderstanding it rather than in the theory itself (as can be seen from mainland European, "synthesis" inspired federations can be **very** successful). Non-supporters are more critical, with some supporting the "Platform" as a more effective means of organising to spread anarchist ideas and influence (see the next section). Other social anarchists create the "class struggle" type of federation (this is a common organisational form in Britain, for example) as discussed in section J.3.5.

J.3.3 What is the "Platform"?

The Platform is a current within anarcho-communism which has specific suggestions on the nature and form which an anarchist federation should take. Its roots lie in the Russian anarchist movement, a section of which, in 1926, published ***"The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists"*** when in exile from the Bolshevik dictatorship. The authors of the work included Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov and Ida Mett. At the time it provoked intense debate (and still does in many anarchist circles) between supporters of the Platform

(usually called "Platformists") and those who oppose it (which includes other communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and supporters of the "synthesis"). We will discuss why many anarchists oppose the Platform in the next section. Here we discuss what the Platform argued for.

Like the "synthesis" federation (see last section), the Platform was created in response to the experiences of the Russian Revolution. The authors of the Platform (like Voline and other supporters of the "synthesis") had participated in that Revolution and saw all their work, hopes and dreams fail as the Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed any chances of socialism by undermining soviet democracy, workers' self-management of production, trade union democracy as well as fundamental individual freedoms and rights (see the section H.6 for details). Moreover, the authors of the Platform had been leading activists in the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine which had successfully resisted both White and Red armies in the name of working class self-determination and anarchism (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism? "). Facing the same problems of the Bolshevik government, the Makhnovists had actively encouraged popular self-management and organisation, freedom of speech and of association, and so on, whereas the Bolsheviks had not. Thus they were aware that anarchist ideas not only worked in practice, but that the claims of Leninists who maintained that Bolshevism (and the policies it introduced at the time) was the only "practical" response to the problems facing a revolution were false.

They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on its successes in gaining influence within the working class. As can be seen from libertarian participation in the factory committee movement, where workers organised self-management in their workplaces and anarchist ideas had proven to be both popular and practical. While repression by the Bolsheviks did play a part in this failure, it did not explain everything. Also important, in the eyes of the Platform authors, was the lack of anarchist organisation **before** the revolution:

> *"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared, very often, in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor."* [**Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 11]

This weakness in the movement derived, they argued, from a number of causes, the main one being *"the absence of organisational principles and practices"* within the anarchist movement. This resulted in an anarchist movement *"represented by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them."* This explained the *"contradiction between the positive and incontestable substance of libertarian ideas, and the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11] For anyone familiar with the anarchist movement in many countries, these words will still strike home. Thus the Platform still appears to many anarchists a relevant and important document, even if they are not Platformists.

The author's of the Platform proposed a solution to this problem, namely the creation of a new type of anarchist organisation. This organisation would be based upon communist-anarchist ideas exclusively, while recognising syndicalism as a principal method of struggle. Like most anarchists, the Platform placed class and class struggle as the centre of their analysis, recognising that the *"social and political regime of all states is above all the product of class struggle . . . The slightest change in the course of the battle of classes, in the relative locations of the forces of the class struggle, produces continuous modifications in the fabric and structure of society."* Again, like most anarchists, the Platform aimed to *"transform the present bourgeois capitalist society into a society which assures the workers the products of the labours, their liberty, independence, and social and political equality"*, one based on a *"workers organisations of production and consumption, united federatively and self-administering."* The *"birth, the blossoming, and the realisation of anarchist ideas have their roots in the life and the struggle of the working masses and are inseparable bound to their fate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14, p. 15, p. 19 and p. 15] Again, most anarchists (particularly social anarchists) would agree -- anarchist ideas will (and have) wither when isolated from working class life since only working class people, the vast majority, can create a free society and anarchist ideas are expressions of working class experience (remove the experience and the ideas do not develop as they should).

In order to create such a free society it is necessary, argue the Platformists, *"to work in two directions: on the one hand towards the selection and grouping of revolutionary worker and peasant forces on a libertarian communist theoretical basis (a specifically libertarian communist organisation); on the other hand, towards regrouping revolutionary workers and peasants on an economic base of production and consumption (revolutionary workers and peasants organised around production [i.e. syndicalism]; workers and free peasants co-operatives)."* Again, most anarchists would agree with this along with the argument that *"anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution . . . The leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution suggests an orientation of events after anarchist theory. However, this theoretical driving force should not be confused with the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 21]

This *"leadership of ideas"* (as it has come to be known) would aim at developing and co-ordinating libertarian feelings already existing within social struggle. *"Although the masses,"* explained the Platform, *"express themselves profoundly in social movements in terms of anarchist tendencies and tenets, these . . . do however remain dispersed, being uncoordinated, and consequently do not lead to the . . . preserving [of] the anarchist orientation of the social revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] The Platform argued that a specific anarchist organisation was required to ensure that the libertarian tendencies initially expressed in any social revolution or movement (for example, free federation, self-management in mass assemblies, mandating of delegates, decentralisation, etc.) do not get undermined by statists and authoritarians who have their own agendas. This would be done by actively working in mass organisation and winning people to libertarian ideas and practices by argument (see section J.3.6).

However, these principles do not, in themselves, determine a Platformist organisation. After all, most anarcho-syndicalists and non-Platformist communist-anarchists would agree with these positions. The main point which distinguishes the Platform is its position on how an anarchist organisation should be structured and work. This is sketched in the *"Organisational Section,"* the shortest and most contentious part of the whole work. They called this the **General Union of Anarchists** and where they introduced the concepts of ***"Theoretical and***

Tactical Unity" and ***"Collective Responsibility,"*** concepts which are unique to the Platform. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

By *"Theoretical Unity"* the Platform meant any anarchist organisation must come to an agreement on the theory upon which it is based. In other words, that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basic points, such as class struggle, social revolution and libertarian communism, and so on. An organisation in which half the members thought that union struggles were important and the other half that they were a waste of time would not be effective as the membership would spend all their time arguing with themselves. While most Platformists admit that everyone will not agree on everything, they think it is important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this into action. Once a theoretical position is reached, the members have to argue it in public (even if they initially opposed it within the organisation but they do have the right to get the decision of the organisation changed by internal discussion). Which brings us to *"Tactical Unity"* by which the Platform meant that the members of an organisation should struggle together **as an organised force** rather than as individuals. Once a strategy has been agreed by the Union, all members would work towards ensuring its success (even if they initially opposed it). In this way resources and time are concentrated in a common direction, towards an agreed objective.

Thus *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* means an anarchist organisation that agrees specific ideas and the means of applying them. The Platform's basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. By increasing the coherency of the organisation by making collective decisions and applying them, the Platform argues that this will increase the influence of anarchist ideas. Without this, they argue, more organised groups (such as Leninist ones) would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than anarchists would. Anarchists cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious strength and rightness of our ideas will shine through and win the day. As history shows, this rarely happens and when it does, the authoritarians are usually in positions of power to crush the emerging anarchist influence (this was the case in Russia, for example). Platformists argue that the world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organised and if the anarchist voice is weak, quiet and disorganised it will not be heard and other arguments, other perspectives, will win the day.

Which brings us to *"Collective Responsibility,"* which the Platform defines as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* In short, that each member should support the decisions made by the organisation and that each member should take part in the process of collective decision making process. Without this, argue Platformists, any decisions made will be paper ones as individuals and groups would ignore the agreements made by the federation (the Platform calls this *"the tactic of irresponsible individualism"*). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32] With *"Collective Responsibility,"* the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied.

The last principle in the *"Organisational Section"* of the Platform is *"Federalism,"* which it defined as *"the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards a common objective"* and which *"reconciles the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause."* However, the Platform argued that this principle has been *"deformed"* within the movement to mean the *"right"* to *"manifest one's 'ego,' without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation"* one is a

member of. In order to overcome this problem, they stress that *"the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while recognising each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative, requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33 and pp. 33-4]

As part of their solution to the problem of anarchist organisation, the Platform suggested that each group would have *"its secretariat, executing and guiding theoretically the political and technical work of the organisation."* Moreover, the Platform urged the creation of an *"**executive committee of the Union**"* which would *"be in charge"* of *"the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical lines of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisation."* The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34]

This suggestion, unsurprisingly, meet with strong disapproval by most anarchists, as we will see in the next section, who argued that this would turn the anarchist movement into a centralised, hierarchical party similar to the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, supporters of the Platform reject this argument and point out that the Platform itself is not written in stone and needs to be discussed fully and modified as required. In fact, few, if any, Platformist groups, do have this *"secretariat"* structure (it could, in fact, be argued that there are no actual "Platformist" groups, rather groups influenced by the Platform, namely on the issues of *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* and *"Collective Responsibility"*).

Similarly, most modern day Platformists reject the idea of gathering all anarchists into one organisation. The original Platform seemed to imply that the **General Union** would be an umbrella organisation, made up of different groups and individuals. Most Platformists would argue that not only will there never be one organisation which encompasses everyone, they do not think it necessary. Instead they envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible, a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a **General Union of Anarchists**.

As well as the original Platform, most Platformists place the **Manifesto of Libertarian Communism** by Georges Fontenis and **Towards a Fresh Revolution** by the *"Friends of Durruti"* as landmark texts in the Platformist tradition. A few anarcho-syndicalists question this last claim, arguing that the *"Friends of Durruti"* manifesto has strong similarities with the CNT's pre-1936 position on revolution and thus is an anarcho-syndicalist document, going back to the position the CNT ignored after July 19th, 1936. Alexandre Skirda's book **Facing the Enemy** contains the key documents on the original Platformists (including the original draft Platform, supplementary documents clarifying issues and polemics against critiques). There are numerous Platformist and Platformist influenced organisations in the world today, such as the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** and Italian **Federation of Anarchist Communists**.

In the next section we discuss the objections that most anarchists have towards the Platform.

J.3.4 Why do many anarchists oppose the "Platform"?

When the "Platform" was published it provoked a massive amount of debate and comment, the majority of it critical. Most of famous anarchists rejected the Platform. Indeed, only Nestor Makhno (who co-authored the work) supported its proposals, with (among others) Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Voline, G.P. Maximoff, Luigi Fabbri, Camilo Berneri and Errico Malatesta rejecting its suggestions on how anarchists should organise. Some argued that the Platform was trying to *"Bolshevise"* anarchism (*""They are only one step away from bolshevism."* [*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32-6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G.P. Maximoff (ed.), pp. 36]). Others, such as Malatesta, suggested that the authors were too impressed by the apparent "success" of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Since then, it has continued to provoke a lot of debate in anarchist circles. So why do so many anarchists oppose the Platform?

While many of the anti-Platformists made points about most parts of the Platform (both Maximoff and Voline pointed out that while the Platform denied the need of a *"Transitional Period"* in theory, it accepted it in practice, for example) the main bone of contention was found in the *"Organisational Section"* with its call for *"Tactical and Theoretical Unity," "Collective Responsibility"* and group and executive *"secretariats"* guiding the organisation. Here most anarchists found ideas they considered incompatible with libertarian ideas. We will concentrate on this issue as it is usually considered as the most important.

Today, in some quarters of the libertarian movement, the Platformists are often dismissed as "would-be leaders." Yet this was not where Malatesta and other critics of the Platform took issue. Malatesta and Maximoff both argued that, to use Maximoff's words, anarchists should *"go into the masses. . . , work[ing] with them, struggle for their soul, and attempt to win it **ideologically** [sic!] and give it guidance."* So the question was *"not the rejection of **leadership,** but making certain it is **free** and **natural.**"* [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19] Moreover, as Maximoff noted, the "synthesis" anarchists came to the same conclusion. Thus all sides of the debate accepted that anarchists should take the lead. The question, as Malatesta and the others saw it, was not whether to lead, but rather **how** you should lead - a fairly important distinction.

Malatesta posed two alternatives, either you *"provide leadership by advice and example leaving people themselves to . . . adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others"* or you can *"direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government."* He asked the Platformists: *"In which manner do you wish to direct?"* While he thought, from his knowledge of Makhno and his work, that the answer would be the first option, he was *"assailed by doubt that [Makhno] would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme for the revolution."* This was because of the *"Executive Committee"* in the Platform which would *"give ideological and organisational direction to the association."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108 and p. 110]

Maximoff made the same point, arguing that the Platform implied that anarchists in the unions are responsible to the anarchist federation, **not** to the union assemblies that elected them. As he put it, according to the Platform anarchists *"are to join the Trades Unions with ready-made recipes and are to carry out their plans, if necessary, against the will of the Unions themselves."* This was just one example of a general problem, namely that the Platform *"places its Party on the same height as the Bolsheviks do, i.e., it places the interests*

of the Party above the interests of the masses since the Party has the monopoly of understanding these interests." [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19 and p. 18] This flowed from the Platform arguing that anarchists must *"enter into revolutionary trade unions as an organised force, responsible to accomplish work in the union before the general anarchist organisation and orientated by the latter."* However, Maximoff's argument may be considered harsh as the Platform also argued that anarchism *"aspires neither to political power nor dictatorship"* and so they would hardly be urging the opposite principles within the trade union movement. [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 25 and p. 21] If we take the Platform's comments within a context informed by the *"leadership of ideas"* concept (see section J.3.6) then what they meant was simply that the anarchist group would convince the union members of the validity of their ideas by argument which was something Maximoff did not disagree with. In short, the disagreement becomes one of unclear (or bad) use of language by the Platform's authors.

Despite many efforts and many letters on the subject (in particular between Malatesta and Makhno) the question of "leadership" could not be clarified to either side's satisfaction, in part because there was an additional issue in dispute. This was the related issue of organisational principles (which in themselves make up the defining part of the original Platform). Malatesta argued that this did not conform with anarchist methods and principles, and so could not *"help bring about the triumph of anarchism."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 97] This was because of two main reasons, the first being the issue of the Platform's "secretariats" and "executive committee" and the issue of "Collective Responsibility." We will take each in turn.

With an structure based round "secretariats" and "executive committees" the *"will of the [General] Union [of Anarchists] can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the **Executive Committee** and decide on all important issues. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups . . . So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by a majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority."* This, Malatesta argued, *"comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism"* and so non-anarchist in nature. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As long as a Platformist federation is based on *"secretariats"* and *"executive committees"* directing the activity and development of the organisation, this critique is valid. In such a system, as these bodies control the organisation and members are expected to follow their decisions (due to *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility"*) they are, in effect, the government of the association. While this government may be elected and accountable, it is still a government simply because these bodies have executive power. As Maximoff argued, individual initiative in the Platform *"has a special character . . . Each organisation (i.e. association of members with the right to individual initiative) has its secretariat which . . . **directs** the ideological, political and technical activities of the organisation . . . In what, then, consists the self-reliant activities of the rank-and-file members? Apparently in one thing: initiative to obey the secretariat and carry out its directives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This seems to be the logical conclusion of the structure suggested by the Platform. *"The spirit,"* argued Malatesta, *"the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98]

Malatesta, in contrast, argued that an anarchist organisation must be based on the *"[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore the full responsibility of individuals and groups"*

with all organisational work done *"freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed."* The individual members of such an organisation *"express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* Moreover, the administrative bodies such organisations nominate would *"have no executive powers, have no directive powers"* leaving it up to the groups and their federal meetings to decide their own fates. The congresses of such organisations would be *"free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others . . . and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 101] Such an organisation does not exclude collective decisions and self-assumed obligations, rather it is based upon them.

Most groups inspired by the Platform, however, seem to reject this aspect of its organisational suggestions. Instead of "secretariats" and "executive committees" they have regular conferences and meetings to reach collective decisions on issues and practice unity that way. Thus the **really** important issue is of *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility,"* rather than ithe structure suggested by the Platform. Indeed, this issue was the main topic in Makhno's letter to Malatesta, for example, and so we would be justified in saying that this is the key issue dividing "Platformists" from other anarchists.

So in what way did Malatesta disagree with this concept? As we mentioned in the last section, the Platform defined the idea of "Collective Responsibility" as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* To which Malatesta replied:

> *"But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual member and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And, on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99]

In other words, the term *"collective responsibility"* (if taken literally) implies a highly inefficient and somewhat authoritarian mode of organisation. Before any action could be undertaken, the organisation would have to be consulted and this would crush individual, group and local initiative. The organisation would respond slowly to developing situations, if at all, and this response would not be informed by first hand knowledge and experience. Moreover, this form of organisation implies a surrendering of individual judgement, as members would have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, 101] In the end, all a member could do would be to leave the organisation if they disagree with a tactic or position and could not bring themselves to further it by their actions.

This structure also suggests that the Platform's commitment to federalism is in words only. As most anarchists critical of the Platform argued, while its authors affirm federalist principles they, in fact, *"outline a perfectly centralised organisation with an Executive Committee that has responsibility to give ideological and organisational direction to the different anarchist organisations, which in turn will direct the professional organisations of the workers."* [*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35-6]

Thus it is likely that "Collective Responsibility" taken to its logical conclusion would actually **hinder** anarchist work by being too bureaucratic and slow. However, let us assume that by applying collective responsibility as well as tactical and theoretical unity, anarchist resources and time will be more efficiently utilised. What is the point of being "efficient" if the collective decision reached is wrong or is inapplicable to many areas? Rather than local groups applying their knowledge of local conditions and developing theories and policies that reflect these conditions (and co-operating from the bottom up), they may be forced to apply inappropriate policies due to the "Unity" of the Platformist organisation. It is true that Makhno argued that the *"activities of local organisations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions"* but only if they are *"consonant with the pattern of the overall organisational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 62] Which still begs the question on the nature of the Platform's unity (however, it does suggest that the Platform's position may be less extreme than might be implied by the text, as we will discuss). That is why anarchists have traditionally supported federalism and free agreement within their organisations, to take into account the real needs of localities.

If we do not take the Platform's definition of "Collective Responsibility" literally or to its logical extreme (as Makhno's comments suggest) then the differences between Platformists and non-Platformists may not be that far. As Malatesta pointed out in his reply to Makhno's letter:

> *"I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others . . . and respect the agreements that have been made . . . [Moreover] I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.*
>
> *"Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts . . . to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 107-8]

This, indeed, seems to be the way that most Platformist organisations do operate. They have agreed broad theoretical and tactical positions on various subjects (such as, for example, the nature of trade unions and how anarchists relate to them) while leaving it to local groups to act within these guidelines. Moreover, the local groups do not have to report to the organisation before embarking on an activity. In other words, most Platformist groups do not take the Platform literally and so many differences are, to a large degree, a question of wording. As two supporters of the Platform note:

> *"The Platform doesn't go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that they don't represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthens both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs."* [Aileen O'Carroll and Alan MacSimoin, *"The Platform"*, pp. 29-31, **Red and Black Revolution**, no. 4, p. 30]

While many anarchists are critical of Platformist groups for being too centralised for their liking, it is the case that the Platform has influenced many anarchist organisations, even non-Platformist ones (this can be seen in the "class struggle" groups discussed in the next section). This influence has been both ways, with the criticism the original Platform was subjected to having had an effect on how Platformist groups have developed. This, of course, does not imply that there is little or no difference between Platformists and other anarchists. Platformist groups tend to stress "collective responsibility" and "theoretical and tactical unity" more than others, which has caused problems when Platformists have worked within "synthesis" organisations (as was the case in France, for example, which resulted in much bad-feeling between Platformists and others).

Constructive Anarchism by the leading Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximoff gathers all the relevant documents in one place. As well as Maximoff's critique of the Platform, it includes the "synthesis" reply, Malatesta's review and subssequent exchange of letters between him and Makhno. **The Anarchist Revolution** also contains Malatesta's article and the exchange of letters between him and Makhno.

J.3.5 Are there other kinds of anarchist federation?

Yes. Another type of anarchist federation is what we term the ***"class struggle"*** group. Many local anarchist groups in Britain, for example, organise in this fashion. They use the term "class struggle" to indicate that their anarchism is based on collective working class resistance as opposed to reforming capitalism via lifestyle changes and the support of, say, co-operatives (many "class struggle" anarchists do these things, of course, but they are aware that they cannot create an anarchist society by so doing). We follow this use of the term here. And just to stress the point again, our use of "class struggle" to describe this type of anarchist group does not imply that "synthesis" or "Platformist" do not support the class struggle. They do!

This kind of group is half-way between the "synthesis" and the "Platform." The "class struggle" group agrees with the "synthesis" in so far as it is important to have a diverse viewpoints within a federation and that it would be a mistake to try to impose a common-line on different groups in different circumstances as the Platform does. However, like the "Platform," the class struggle group recognises that there is little point in creating a forced union between totally different strands of anarchism. Thus the "class struggle" group rejects the idea that individualist or mutualist anarchists should be part of the same organisation as anarchist communists or syndicalists or that anarcho-pacifists should join forces with non-pacifists. Thus the "class struggle" group acknowledges that an organisation which contains

viewpoints which are dramatically opposed can lead to pointless debates and paralysis of action due to the impossibilities of overcoming those differences.

Instead, the "class struggle" group agrees a common set of ***"aims and principles"*** which are the basic terms of agreement within the federation. If an individual or group does not agree with this statement then they cannot join. If they are members and try to change this statement and cannot get the others to agree its modification, then they are morally bound to leave the organisation. In other words, there is a framework within which individuals and groups apply their own ideas and their interpretation of agreed policies. It means that individuals in a group and the groups within a federation have something to base their local activity on, something which has been agreed collectively. There would be a common thread to activities and a guide to action (particularly in situations were a group or federation meeting cannot be called). In this way individual initiative and co-operation can be reconciled, without hindering either. In addition, the ***"aims and principles"*** shows potential members where the anarchist group was coming from.

In this way the "class struggle" group solves one of the key problems with the "synthesis" grouping, namely that any such basic statement of political ideas would be hard to agree and be so watered down as to be almost useless (for example, a federation combining individualist and communist anarchists would find it impossible to agree on such things as the necessity for revolution, communal ownership, and so on). By clearly stating its ideas, the "class struggle" group ensures a common basis for activity and discussion.

Such a federation, like all anarchist groups, would be based upon regular assemblies locally and in frequent regional, national, etc., conferences to continually re-evaluate policies, tactics, strategies and goals. In addition, such meetings prevent power from collecting in the higher administration committees created to co-ordinate activity. The regular conferences aim to create federation policies on specific topics and agree common strategies. Such policies, once agreed, are morally binding on the membership, who can review and revise them as required at a later stage but cannot take action which would hinder their application (they do not have to apply them, if they consider them as a big mistake).

For example, minorities in such a federation can pursue their own policies as long as they clearly state that theirs is a minority position and does not contradict the federation's aims and principles. In this way the anarchist federation combines united action and dissent, for no general policy will be applicable in all circumstances and it is better for minorities to ignore policies which they know will make even greater problems in their area. As long as their actions and policies do not contradict the federation's basic political ideas, then diversity is an essential means for ensuring that the best tactic and ideas are be identified.

J.3.6 What role do these groups play in anarchist theory?

The aim of anarchist groups and federations is to spread libertarian ideas within society and within social movements. They aim to convince people of the validity of anarchist ideas and analysis, of the need for a libertarian transformation of society and of themselves by working with others as equals. Such groups are convinced that (to use Murray Bookchin's words) *"anarcho-communism cannot remain a mere mood or tendency, wafting in the air like a cultural ambience. It must be organised -- indeed **well-organised** -- if it is effectively articulate and spread this new sensibility; it must have a coherent theory and extensive*

literature; it must be capable of duelling with the authoritarian movements that try to denature the intuitive libertarian impulses of our time and channel social unrest into hierarchical forms of organisation." [*"Looking Back at Spain,"* pp. 53-96, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), **The Radical Papers**, p. 90]

These groups and federations play a key role in anarchist theory. This is because anarchists are well aware that there are different levels of knowledge and consciousness in society. While people learn through struggle and their own experiences, different people develop at different speeds, that each individual is unique and is subject to different influences. As one pamphlet by the British **Anarchist Federation** puts it, the *"experiences of working class life constantly lead to the development of ideas and actions which question the established order . . . At the same time, different sections of the working class reach different degrees of consciousness."* [**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation**, p. 13] This can easily be seen from any group of individuals of the same class or even community. Some are anarchists, others Marxists, some social democrats/labourites, others conservatives, others liberals, most "apolitical," some support trade unions, others are against and so on.

Because we are aware that we are one tendency among many, anarchists organise as anarchists to influence social struggle. Only when anarchists ideas are accepted by the vast majority will an anarchist society be possible. We wish, in other words, to win the most widespread understanding and influence for anarchist ideas and methods in the working class and in society, primarily because we believe that these alone will ensure a successful revolutionary transformation of society. Hence Malatesta:

> *"anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will be useful if won in that way . . . we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system . . . We must work with . . . [all the] masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 109]

Anarchist organisation exists to help the process by which people come to anarchist conclusions. It aims to make explicit the feelings and thoughts that people have (such as, wage slavery is hell, that the state exists to oppress people and so on) by exposing as wrong common justifications for existing society and social relationships by a process of debate and providing a vision of something better. In other words, anarchist organisations seek to explain and clarify what is happening in society and show why anarchism is the only real solution to social problems. As part of this, we also have combat wrong ideas such as Liberalism, Social Democracy, Leninism, right-wing popularism and so on, indicating why these proposed solutions are false. In addition, an anarchist organisation must also be a 'collective memory' for the oppressed, keeping alive and developing the traditions of the labour and radical movements as well as anarchism so that new generations of libertarians have a body of experience to build upon and use in their struggles.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, **not** leaders. As Voline argued, the minority which is politically aware *"should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, . . . [they] should freely participate in the common work, **as true collaborators, not as dictators.** It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves . . . without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone . . . Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated . . . should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution . . . As for the 'elite' [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to **help** the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action -- **but not to direct them governmentally.**"* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 177-8]

This role is usually called providing a ***"leadership of ideas"***. Anarchists stress the difference of this concept with authoritarian notions of "leadership" such as Leninist ones. While both anarchist and Leninist organisations exist to overcome the problem of "uneven development" within the working class, the aims, role and structure of these groups could not be more different (as discussed in section H.5, anarchists reject the assumptions and practice of vanguardism as incompatible with genuine socialism).

Anarchist groups are needed for, no matter how much people change through struggle, it is not enough in itself (if it were, we would be living in an anarchist society now!). So anarchists stress, as well as self-organisation, self-liberation and self-education through struggle developing libertarian socialist thought, the need for anarchist groups to work within popular organisations and in the mass of the population in general. These groups would play an important role in helping to clarify the ideas of those in struggle and undermining the internal and external barriers against these ideas.

The first of these are what Emma Goldman termed the *"internal tyrants,"* the *"ethical and social conventions"* of existing, hierarchical society which accustom people to authoritarian social relationships, injustice, lack of freedom and so on. [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 164-5] External barriers are what Chomsky terms *"the Manufacture of Consent,"* the process by which the population at large are influenced to accept the status quo and the dominant elites viewpoint via the education system and media. It is this "manufacture of consent" which helps explain why, relatively speaking, there are so few anarchists even though we argue that anarchism is the natural product of working class life. While, objectively, the experiences of life drives working class people to resist domination and oppression, they enter that struggle with a history behind them, a history of education in capitalist schools, of consuming capitalist media, and so on.

This means that while social struggle is radicalising, it also has to combat years of pro-state and pro-capitalist influences. So even if an anarchist consciousness springs from the real conditions of working class life, because we live in a class society there are numerous counter-tendencies that **inhibit** the development of that consciousness (such as religion, current morality, the media, pro-business and pro-state propaganda, state and business repression and so on). This explains the differences in political opinion within the working class, as people develop at different speeds and are subject to different influences and experiences. However, the numerous internal and external barriers to the development of anarchist opinions created our *"internal tyrants"* and by the process of *"manufacturing*

consent" can be, and are, weaken by rational discussion as well as social struggle and self-activity. Indeed, until such time as we have *"learned to defy them all [the internal tyrants], to stand firmly on [our] own ground and to insist upon [our] own unrestricted freedom"* we can never be free or successfully combat the "manufacture of consent." [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] And this is where the anarchist group can play a part, for there is an important role to be played by those who have been through this process already, namely to aid those going through it.

Of course the activity of an anarchist group does not occur in a vacuum. In periods of low class struggle, where there is little collective action, anarchist ideas will seem utopian and so dismissed by most. In these situations, only a few will become anarchists simply because the experiences of working people do not bred confidence that an alternative to the current system is possible. In addition, if anarchist groups are small, many who are looking for an alternative may join other groups which are more visible and express a libertarian sounding rhetoric (such as Leninist groups, who often talk about workers' control, workers' councils and so on while meaning something distinctly different from what anarchists mean by these terms). However, as the class struggle increases and people become more inclined to take collective action, they can become empowered and radicalised by their own activity and be more open to anarchist ideas and the possibility of changing society. In these situations, anarchist groups grow and the influence in anarchist ideas increases. This explains why anarchist ideas are not as widespread as they could be. It also indicates another important role for the anarchist group, namely to provide an environment and space where those drawn to anarchist ideas can meet and share experiences and ideas during periods of reaction.

The role of the anarchist group, therefore, is **not** to import a foreign ideology into the working class, but rather to help develop and clarify the ideas of those working class people who are moving towards anarchism and so aid those undergoing that development. They would aid this development by providing propaganda which exposes the current social system (and the rationales for it) as bankrupt as well as encouraging resistance to oppression and exploitation. The former, for Bakunin, allowed the *"bringing [of] a more just general expression, a new and more congenial form to the existent instincts of the proletariat . . . [which] can sometimes facilitate and precipitate development . . . [and] give them an awareness of what they have, of what they feel, of what they already instinctively desire, but never can it give to them what they don't have."* The latter *"is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda"* and *"awake[s] in the masses all the social-revolutionary instincts which reside deeply in the heart of every worker"* so allowing instinct to become transformed into *"reflected socialist thought."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 107, p. 108 and p. 141]

To quote the UK **Anarchist Federation**, again *"the [libertarian] organisation is not just a propaganda group: above all it must actively work in all the grassroots organisations of the working class such as rank and file [trade union] groups, tenants associations, squatters and unemployed groups as well as women's, black and gay groups."* It *"respects the independence of working class movements and (unlike] others) does not try to subordinate them to the revolutionary organisation. This does not mean that it does not seek to spread its ideas in these movements."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 15 and p. 16] Such an organisation is not vanguardist in the Leninist sense as it recognises that socialist politics derive from working class experience, rather than bourgeois intellectuals (as Lenin and Karl Kautsky argued), and that it does not aim to dominate popular movements but rather work within them as equals.

So while we recognise that "advanced" sections do exist within the working class and that anarchists are one such section, we also recognise that **central** characteristic of anarchism is that its politics are derived from the concrete experience of fighting capitalism and statism directly -- that is, from the realities of working class life. This means that anarchists must also learn from working class people in struggle. If we recognise that anarchist ideas are the product of working class experience and self-activity and that these constantly change and develop in light of new experiences and struggles then anarchist theory **must be open to change by learning from non-anarchists.** Not to recognise this fact is to open the door to vanguardism and dogma. Because of this fact, anarchists argue that the relationship between anarchists and non-anarchists must be an egalitarian one, based on mutual interaction and the recognition that no one is infallible or have all the answers -- including anarchists! With this in mind, while we recognise the presence of "advanced" groups within the working class (which obviously reflects the uneven development within it), anarchists aim to minimise such unevenness by the way anarchist organisations intervene in social struggle, intervention based on involving **all** in the decision making process (as we discuss below).

Thus the general aim of anarchist groups is to spread ideas -- such as general anarchist analysis of society and current events, libertarian forms of organisation, direct action and solidarity and so forth -- and win people over to anarchism (i.e. to "make" anarchists). This involves both propaganda and participating as equals in social struggle and popular organisation. Anarchists do not think that changing leaders is a solution to the problem of (bad) leadership. Rather, it is a question of making leaders redundant by empowering all. As Malatesta argued, we *"do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves.**"* Thus anarchists *"advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time functionaries."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 90 and p. 125]

This means that anarchists reject the idea that anarchist groups and federations must become the "leaders" of organisations. Rather, we desire anarchist ideas to be commonplace in society and in popular organisations, so that leadership by people from positions of power is replaced by the *"natural influence"* (to use Bakunin's term) of activists within the rank and file on the decisions made **by** the rank and file. While we will discuss Bakunin's ideas in more detail in section J.3.7, the concept of *"natural influence"* can be gathered from this comment of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

> *"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

This shows the nature of the "leadership of ideas." Rather than be elected to a position of power or responsibility, the anarchist presents their ideas at mass meetings and argues his or her case. This means obviously implies a two-way learning process, as the anarchist learns from the experiences of others and the others come in contact with anarchist ideas. Moreover, it is an egalitarian relationship, based upon discussion between equals rather than urging

people to place someone into power above them. It ensures that everyone in the organisation participants in making, understands and agrees with the decisions reached. This obviously helps the political development of all involved (including, we must stress, the anarchists). As Durruti argued: *"the man [or woman] who alienates his will, can never be free to express himself and follow his own ideas at a union meeting if he feel dominated by the feeblest orator . . . As long as a man doesn't think for himself and doesn't assume his own responsibilities, there will be no complete liberation of human beings."* [quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

Because of our support for the "leadership of ideas", anarchists think that all popular organisations must be open, fully self-managed and free from authoritarianism. Only in this way can ideas and discussion play an important role in the life of the organisation. Since anarchists *"do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force"* and *"want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90] Bakunin's words with regards the first International Workers Association indicate this clearly:

> *"It must be a people's movement, organised from the bottom up by the free, spontaneous action of the masses. There must be no secret governmentalism, the masses must be informed of everything . . . All the affairs of the International must be thoroughly and openly discussed without evasions and circumlocutions."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 408]

Given this, anarchists reject the idea of turning the organs created in the class struggle and revolutionary process into hierarchical structures. By turning them from organs of self-management into organs for nominating "leaders," the constructive tasks and political development of the revolution will be aborted before they really begin. The active participation of all will become reduced to the picking of new masters and the revolution will falter. For this reason, anarchists *"differ from the Bolshevik type of party in their belief that genuine revolutionaries must function* ***within the framework of the forms created by the revolution,*** *not within forms created by the party."* This means that *"an organisation is needed to propagate ideas systematically -- and not ideas alone, but* ***ideas which promote the concept of self-management.***" In other words, there *"is a need for a revolutionary organisation -- but its function must always be kept clearly in mind. Its first task is propaganda . . . In a revolutionary situation, the revolutionary organisation presents the most advanced demands: it is prepared at every turn of events to formulate -- in the most concrete fashion -- the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 140] What it does **not** do is to supplant those organs or decision-making process by creating institutionalised, hierarchical leadership structures.

Equally as important as **how** anarchists intervene in social struggles and popular organisations and the organisation of those struggles and organisations, there is the question of the nature of that intervention. We would like to quote the following by the British libertarian socialist group **Solidarity** as it sums up the underlying nature of anarchist action and the importance of a libertarian perspective on social struggle and change and how politically aware minorities work within them:

> *"**Meaningful action,** for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the egalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. **Sterile and harmful action** is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others -- even by those allegedly acting on their behalf."* [Maurice Brinton, **For Workers' Power**, p. 154]

Part of this "meaningful action" involves encouraging people to ***"act for yourselves"*** (to use Kropotkin's words). As we noted in section A.2.7, anarchism is based on **self**-liberation and self-activity is key aspect of this. Hence Malatesta's argument:

> *"Our task is that of 'pushing' the people to demand and to seize all the freedom they can and to make themselves responsible for providing their own needs without waiting for orders from any kind of authority. Our task is that of demonstrating the uselessness and harmfulness of government, provoking and encouraging by propaganda and action, all kinds of individual and collective activities.*
>
> *"It is in fact a question of education for freedom, of making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities. One must encourage people to do things for themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 178-9]

This "pushing" people to "do it themselves" is another key role for any anarchist organisation. The encouragement of direct action is just as important as anarchist propaganda and popular participation within social struggle and popular organisations.

As such social struggle developments, the possibility of revolution becomes closer and closer. While we discuss anarchists ideas on social revolution in section J.7, we must note here that the role of the anarchist organisation does not change. As Bookchin argued, anarchists *"seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies"* and other organisations created by people in struggle *"to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management**, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140] In this way, by encouraging self-management in struggle, anarchist lay the foundations of a self-managed society.

J.3.7 Doesn't Bakunin's *"Invisible Dictatorship"* prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?

No. While Bakunin did use the term *"invisible dictatorship"*, it does not prove that Bakunin or anarchists are secret authoritarians. The claim otherwise, often made by Leninists and other Marxists, expresses a distinct, even wilful, misunderstanding of Bakunin's ideas on the role revolutionaries should play in popular movements.

Marxists quote Bakunin's terms *"invisible dictatorship"* and *"collective dictatorship"* out of context, using it to "prove" that anarchists are secret authoritarians, seeking dictatorship over the masses. More widely, the question of Bakunin and his "invisible dictatorship" finds its way into sympathetic accounts of anarchist ideas. For example, Peter Marshall writes that it is

"not difficult to conclude that Bakunin's invisible dictatorship would be even more tyrannical than a . . . Marxist one" and that it expressed a *"profound authoritarian and dissimulating streak in his life and work."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 287] So, the question of setting the record straight about this aspect of Bakunin's theory is of more importance than just correcting a few Leninists. In addition, to do so will help clarify the concept of *"leadership of ideas"* we discussed in the last section. For both these reasons, this section, while initially appearing somewhat redundant and of interest only to academics, is of a far wider interest.

Anarchists have two responses to claims that Bakunin (and, by implication, all anarchists) seek an *"invisible"* dictatorship and so are not true libertarians. Firstly, and this is the point we will concentrate upon in this section, Bakunin's expression is taken out of context and when placed within context it takes on a radically different meaning than that implied by critics of anarchism. Secondly, even **if** the expression means what the critics claim it does, it does not refute anarchism as a political theory. This is because anarchists are **not** Bakuninists (or Proudhonists or Kropotkinites or any other person-ist). We recognise other anarchists for what they are, human beings who said lots of important and useful things but, like any other human being, made mistakes and often do not live up to all of their ideas. For anarchists, it is a question of extracting the useful parts from their works and rejecting the useless (as well as the downright nonsense!). Just because Bakunin said something, it does not make it right! This common-sense approach to politics seems to be lost on Marxists. Indeed, if we take the logic of these Marxists to its conclusion, we must reject everything Rousseau wrote (he was sexist), Marx and Engels (their comments against Slavs spring to mind, along with numerous other racist comments) and so on. But, of course, this never happens to non-anarchist thinkers when Marxists write their articles and books.

However, to return to our main argument, that of the importance of context. Significantly, whenever Bakunin uses the term "invisible" or "collective" dictatorship he also explicitly states his opposition to government power and **in particular** the idea that anarchists should seize it. For example, a Leninist quotes the following passage from *"a Bakuninist document"* to show *"the dictatorial ambitions of Bakunin"* and that the *"principle of anti-democracy was to leave Bakunin unchallenged at the apex of power"*: *"It is necessary that in the midst of popular anarchy, which will constitute the very life and energy of the revolution, unity of thought and revolutionary action should find an organ. This organ must be the secret and world-wide association of the international brethren."* [Derek Howl, *"The legacy of Hal Draper"*, pp. 137-49, **International Socialist**, no. 52, p. 147]

However, in the sentence **immediately before** those quoted, Bakunin stated that *"[t]his organisation rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* Strange that this part of the document was not quoted! Nor is Bakunin quoted when he wrote, in the same document, that *"[w]e are the natural enemies of those revolutionaries -- future dictators, regimentors and custodians of revolution -- who . . . [want] to create new revolutionary States just as centralist and despotic as those we already know."* Not mentioned either is Bakunin's opinion that the *"revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations . . . [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172, p. 169 and p. 172] Selective quoting is only convincing to those ignorant of the subject.

Similarly, when we look at the situations where Bakunin uses the terms *"invisible"* or *"collective"* dictatorship (usually in letters to comrades) we find the same thing -- the explicit denial **in these same letters** that Bakunin thought the revolutionary association should take governmental power. For example, in a letter to Albert Richard (a fellow member of the *"Alliance of Social Democracy"*) Bakunin stated that *"[t]here is only one power and one dictatorship whose organisation is salutary and feasible: it is that collective, invisible dictatorship of those who are allied in the name of our principle."* He then immediately adds that *"this dictatorship will be all the more salutary and effective for not being dressed up in any official power or extrinsic character."* Earlier in the letter he argued that anarchists must be *"like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest. . . steer[ing] it [the revolution] not by any open power but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies -- a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power."* Explicitly opposing *"Committees of Public Safety and official, overt dictatorship"* he explains his idea of a revolution based on *"workers hav[ing] joined into associations . . . armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, the federative commune."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181, p. 180 and p. 179] Hardly what would be expected from a would-be dictator. As Sam Dolgoff suggested:

> *"an organisation exercising no overt authority, without a state, without official status, without the machinery of institutionalised power to enforce its policies, cannot be defined as a dictatorship . . . Moreover, if it is borne in mind that this passage is part of a letter repudiating in the strongest terms the State and the authoritarian statism of the 'Robespierres, the Dantons, and the Saint-Justs of the revolution,' it is reasonable to conclude that Bakunin used the word 'dictatorship' to denote preponderant influence or guidance exercised largely by example . . . In line with this conclusion, Bakunin used the words 'invisible' and 'collective' to denote the underground movement exerting this influence in an organised manner."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 182]

This analysis is confirmed by other passages from Bakunin's letters. In a letter to the Nihilist Sergi Nechaev (within which Bakunin indicates exactly how far apart politically they were -- which is important as, from Marx onwards, many of Bakunin's opponents quote Nechaev's pamphlets as if they were "Bakuninist," when in fact they were not) we find him arguing that:

> *"These [revolutionary] groups would not seek anything for themselves, neither privilege nor honour nor power . . . [but] would be in a position to direct popular movements . . . and lead the people towards the most complete realisation of the social-economic ideal and the organisation of the fullest popular freedom. This is what I call **the collective dictatorship** of a secret organisation.*
>
> *"The dictatorship . . . does not reward any of the members that comprise the groups, or the groups themselves, with any profit or honour or official power. It does not threaten the freedom of the people, because, lacking any official character, it does not take the place of State control over the people, and because its whole aim . . . consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people.*
>
> *"This sort of dictatorship is not in the least contrary to the free development and the self-development of the people, nor its organisation from the bottom upward . . . for it influences the people exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power, . . . and . . . try . . . to direct the*

> *spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people towards . . . the organisation of popular liberty . . . This secret dictatorship would in the first place, and at the present time, carry out a broadly based popular propaganda . . . and by the power of this propaganda and also by **organisation among the people themselves** join together separate popular forces into a mighty strength capable of demolishing the State."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 193-4]

The key aspect of this is the notion of *"natural"* influence. In a letter to a Spanish member of the Alliance we find Bakunin arguing that it *"will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 387] This term was also used in his public writings, with Bakunin arguing that the *"very freedom of every individual results from th[e] great number of material, intellectual, and moral influences which every individual around him and which society . . . continually exercise on him"* and that *"everything alive . . . intervene[s] . . . in the life of others . . . [so] we hardly wish to abolish the effect of any individual's or any group of individuals' natural influence upon the masses."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140 and p. 141]

Thus *"natural influence"* simply means the effect of communicating which others, discussing your ideas with them and winning them over to your position, nothing more. This is hardly authoritarian, and so Bakunin contrasts this *"natural"* influence with *"official"* influence, which replaced the process of mutual interaction between equals with a fixed hierarchy of command and thereby induced the *"transformation of natural influence, and, as such, the perfectly legitimate influence over man, into a right."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 46]

As an example of this difference, consider the case of a union militant (as will become clear, this is the sort of example Bakunin had in mind). As long as they are part of the rank-and-file, arguing their case at union meetings or being delegated to carry out the decisions of these assemblies then their influence is *"natural."* However, if this militant is elected into a position with executive power in the union (i.e. becomes a full-time union official, for example, rather than a shop-steward) then their influence becomes *"official"* and so, potentially, corrupting for both the militant and the rank-and-file who are subject to the rule of the official.

Indeed, this notion of *"natural"* influence was also termed *"invisible"* by Bakunin: *"It is only necessary that one worker in ten join the [International Working-Men's] Association **earnestly** and **with full understanding of the cause** for the nine-tenths remaining outside its organisation nevertheless to be influenced invisibly by it."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] So, as can be seen, the terms *"invisible"* and *"collective"* dictatorship used by Bakunin in his letters is strongly related to the term *"natural influence"* used in his public works and seems to be used simply to indicate the effects of an organised political group on the masses. To see this, it is worthwhile to quote Bakunin at length about the nature of this *"invisible"* influence:

> *"It may be objected that this . . . influence on the popular masses suggests the establishment of a system of authority and a new government . . . Such a belief would be a serious blunder. The organised effect of the International on the masses . . . is nothing but the entirely natural organisation -- neither official nor clothed in any authority or political force whatsoever -- of the effect of a rather numerous group of individuals who are inspired by the same thought and headed toward the same goal, first of all on the opinion of the masses and only then, by the intermediary of this*

> *opinion (restated by the International's propaganda), on their will and their deeds. But the governments . . . impose themselves violently on the masses, who are forced to obey them and to execute their decrees . . . The International's influence will never be anything but one of opinion and the International will never be anything but the organisation of the natural effect of individuals on the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 139-40]

Therefore, from both the fuller context provided by the works and letters selectively quoted by Marxists **and** his other writings, we find that rather than being a secret authoritarian, Bakunin was, in fact, trying to express how anarchists could *"naturally influence"* the masses and their revolution:

> *"We are the most pronounced enemies of every sort of* ***official power*** *. . . We are the enemies of any sort of publicly declared dictatorship, we are social revolutionary anarchists . . . if we are anarchists, by what right do we want to influence the people, and what methods will we use? Denouncing all power, with what sort of power, or rather by what sort of force, shall we direct a people's revolution?* ***By a force that is invisible . . . that is not imposed on anyone . . . [and] deprived of all official rights and significance.****"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 191-2]

Continually opposing *"official"* power, authority and influence, Bakunin used the term *"invisible, collective dictatorship"* to describe the *"natural influence"* of organised anarchists on mass movements. Rather than express a desire to become a dictator, it in fact expresses the awareness that there is an "uneven" political development within the working class, an unevenness that can only be undermined by discussion within the mass assemblies of popular organisations. Any attempt to by-pass this "unevenness" by seizing or being elected to positions of power (i.e. by *"official influence"*) would be doomed to failure and result in dictatorship by a party -- *"triumph of the Jacobins or the Blanquists [or the Bolsheviks, we must add] would be the death of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 169]

So rather than seek power, the anarchists would seek **influence** based on the soundness of their ideas, what anarchists today term the *"leadership of ideas"* in other words. Thus the anarchist federation *"unleashes their [the peoples] will and gives wider opportunity for their self-determination and their social-economic organisation, which should be created by them alone from the bottom upwards . . . The [revolutionary] organisation . . . [must] not in any circumstances . . . ever be their master . . . What is to be the chief aim and pursue of this organisation?* ***To help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and fullest human freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination . . . that is without any sort of government control.****"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191]

This analysis can be seen from Bakunin's discussion on union bureaucracy and how anarchists should combat it. Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, Bakunin notes that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision-making to their committees . . . In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership."* To combat this bureaucracy, the union *"sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies . . . In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed."* Given that Bakunin considered *"the federative Alliance*

of all the workers' associations" would *"constitute the Commune"* by means of delegates with *"always responsible, and revocable mandates"*, we can easily see that the role of the anarchist federation would be to intervene in general assemblies of these associations and ensure, through debate, that the most progressive opinion prevailed. [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 246, p. 247 and p. 153]

Having shown that the role of Bakunin's revolutionary organisations is drastically different than that suggested by the selective quotations of Marxists, we need to address two more issues. One, the so-called hierarchical nature of Bakunin's organisations and, two, their secret nature. Taking the issue of hierarchy first, we can do no better than quote Richard B. Saltman's summary of the internal organisation of these groups:

> *"The association's 'single will,' Bakunin wrote, would be determined by 'laws' that every member 'helped to create,' or at a minimum 'equally approved' by 'mutual agreement.' This 'definite set of rules' was to be 'frequently renewed' in plenary sessions wherein each member had the 'duty to try and make his view prevail,' but then he must accept fully the decision of the majority. Thus the revolutionary association's 'rigorously conceived and prescribed plan,' implemented under the 'strictest discipline,' was in reality to be 'nothing more or less than the expression and direct outcome of the reciprocal commitment contracted by each of the members towards the others.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115]

While many anarchists would not totally agree with this set-up (although we think that most supporters of the "Platform" would) all would agree that it is **not** hierarchical. If anything, it appears quite democratic in nature. Moreover, comments in Bakunin's letters to other Alliance members support the argument that his revolutionary associations were more democratic in nature than Marxists suggest. In a letter to a Spanish comrade we find him suggesting that *"all [Alliance] groups. . . should. . . from now on accept new members not by majority vote, but unanimously."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 386] In a letter to Italian members of the IWMA he argued that in Geneva the Alliance did not resort to *"secret plots and intrigues."* Rather:

> *"Everything was done in broad daylight, openly, for everyone to see . . . The Alliance had regular weekly open meetings and everyone was urged to participate in the discussions . . . The old procedure where members sat and passively listened to speakers talking down to them from their pedestal was discarded.*
>
> *"It was established that all meetings be conducted by informal round-table conversational discussions in which everybody felt free to participate: not to be talked **at**, but to exchange views."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 405-6]

Moreover, we find Bakunin being out-voted within the Alliance, hardly what we would expect if they **were** top-down dictatorships run by him as Marxists claim. The historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates that after the Alliance was founded *"Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Worker's Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin's secrecy. Bakunin's view prevailed on the first question as he succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents."* [**Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 83]

Moreover, if Bakunin **did** seek to create a centralised, hierarchical organisation, as Marxists claim, he did not do a good job. We find him complaining that the Madrid Alliance was breaking up (*"The news of the dissolution of the Alliance in Spain saddened Bakunin. he intensified his letter-writing to Alliance members whom he trusted . . . He tried to get the Spaniards to reverse their decision"* [Juan Gomez Casa, **Anarchist Organisation**, pp. 37-8]). While the "Bakuninist" Spanish and Swiss sections of the IWMA sent delegates to its infamous Hague congress, the "Bakuninist" Italian section did not. Of course, Marxists could argue that these facts show Bakunin's cunning nature, but the more obvious explanation is that Bakunin did not create a hierarchical organisation with himself at the top.

The evidence suggests that the Alliance *"was not a compulsory or authoritarian body."* In Spain, it *"acted independently and was prompted by purely local situations. The copious correspondence between Bakunin and his friends . . . was at all times motivated by the idea of offering advice, persuading, and clarifying. It was never written in a spirit of command, because that was not his style, nor would it have been accepted as such by his associates."* Moreover, there *"is no trace or shadow or hierarchical organisation in a letter from Bakunin to Mora . . . On the contrary, Bakunin advises 'direct' relations between Spanish and Italian Comrades."* The Spanish comrades also wrote a pamphlet which *"ridiculed the fable of orders from abroad."* [Casa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25 and p. 40] This is confirmed by George R. Esenwein who argues that *"[w]hile it is true that Bakunin's direct intervention during the early days of the International's development in Spain had assured the pre-dominance of his influence in the various federations and sections"* of the organisation, *"it cannot be said that he manipulated it or otherwise used the Spanish Alliance as a tool for his own subversive designs."* Thus, *"though the Alliance did exist in Spain, the society did not bear any resemblance to the nefarious organisation that the Marxists depicted."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain**, p. 42] Indeed, as Max Nettlau points out, those Spaniards who did break with the Alliance were persuaded of its *"hierarchical organisation . . . not by their own direct observation, but by what they had been told about the conduct of the organisation"* in other countries. [quoted by Casa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 39-40]. In addition, if Bakunin **did** run the Alliance under his own personal dictatorship we would expect it to change or dissolve upon his death. However, *"the Spanish Alliance survived Bakunin, who died in 1876, yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way it had during Bakunin's lifetime."* [Esenwein, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

Moving on to the second issue, the question of why Bakunin favoured secret organisation. At the time many states where despotic monarchies, with little or no civil rights. As he argued, *"nothing but a secret society would want to take this [arousing a revolution] on, for the interests of the government and of the government classes would be bitterly opposed to it."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 188] For survival, Bakunin considered secrecy an essential. As Juan Gomez Casas noted: *"In view of the difficulties of that period, Bakunin believed that secret groups of convinced and absolutely trustworthy men were safer and more effective. They would be able to place themselves at the head of developments at critical moments, but only to inspire and to clarify the issues."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] Even Marxists, faced with dictatorial states, have organised in secret and as George R. Esenwein points out, the *"claim that Bakunin's organisation scheme was not the product of a 'hard-headed realism' cannot be supported in the light of the experiences of the Spanish Alliancists. It is beyond doubt that their adherence to Bakunin's program greatly contributed to the FRE's [Spanish section of the First International] ability to flourish during the early part of the 1870s and to survive the harsh circumstances of repression in the period 1874-1881."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224f] So Bakunin's personal experiences in Tsarist Russia and other illiberal states shaped his ideas

on how revolutionaries should organise (and let us not forget that he had been imprisoned in the Peter and Paul prison for his activities).

This is not to suggest that all of Bakunin's ideas on the role and nature of anarchist groups are accepted by anarchists today. Most anarchists would reject Bakunin's arguments for secrecy, for example (particularly as secrecy cannot help but generate an atmosphere of deceit and, potentially, manipulation). Anarchists remember that anarchism did not spring fully formed and complete from Bakunin's (or any other individual's) head. Rather it was developed over time and by many individuals, inspired by many different experiences and movements. As such, anarchists recognise that Bakunin was inconsistent in some ways, as would be expected from a theorist breaking new ground, and this applies to his ideas on how anarchist groups should work within and the role they should play in popular movements. Most of his ideas are valid, once we place them into context, some are not. Anarchists embrace the valid ones and voice their opposition to the others.

In summary, any apparent contradiction between the "public" and "private" Bakunin disappears once we place his comments into context within both the letters he wrote and his overall political theory. As Brian Morris argues, those who argue that Bakunin was in favour of despotism only come to *"these conclusions by an incredible distortion of the substance of what Bakunin was trying to convey in his letters to Richard and Nechaev"* and *"[o]nly the most jaundiced scholar, or one blinded by extreme antipathy towards Bakunin or anarchism, could interpret these words as indicating that Bakunin conception of a secret society implied a revolutionary dictatorship in the Jacobin sense, still less a 'despotism'"* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 144 and p. 149]

J.3.8 What is anarcho-syndicalism?

Anarcho-syndicalism (as mentioned in section A.3.2) is a form of anarchism which applies itself (primarily) to creating industrial unions organised in an anarchist manner, using anarchist tactics (such as direct action) to create a free society. To quote *"The Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism"* of the **International Workers Association**:

> *"Revolutionary Syndicalism is that movement of the working classes founded on the basis of class war, which strives for the union of manual and intellectual workers in economic fighting organisations, in order to prepare for and realise in practice their liberation from the yoke of wage-slavery and state oppression. Its goal is the reorganisation of social life on the basis of free communism through the collective revolutionary action of the working classes themselves. It takes the view that only the economic organisations of the proletariat are appropriate for the realisation of this task and turns therefore to the workers in their capacity as producers and generators of social value, in opposition to the modern political labour parties, which for constructive economic purpose do not come into consideration."* [quoted by Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 322]

The word *"syndicalism"* is an English rendering of the French for *"revolutionary trade unionism"* (*"syndicalisme revolutionarie"*). In the 1890s many anarchists in France started to work within the trade union movement, radicalising it from within. As the ideas of autonomy, direct action, the general strike and political independence of unions which where associated with the French **Confederation Generale du Travail** (CGT, or General Confederation of

Labour) spread across the world (partly through anarchist contacts, partly through word of mouth by non-anarchists who were impressed by the militancy of the CGT), the word "syndicalism" was used to describe movements inspired by the example of the CGT. Thus "syndicalism," "revolutionary syndicalism" and "anarcho-syndicalism" all basically mean "revolutionary unionism" (the term "industrial unionism" used by the IWW essentially means the same thing).

The main difference is between revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism, with anarcho-syndicalism arguing that revolutionary syndicalism concentrates too much on the workplace and, obviously, stressing the anarchist roots and nature of syndicalism more than the former. In addition, anarcho-syndicalism is often considered compatible with supporting a specific anarchist organisation to complement the work of the revolutionary unions. Revolutionary syndicalism, in contrast, argues that the syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create libertarian socialism and rejects anarchist groups along with political parties. However, the dividing line can be unclear and, just to complicate things even more, **some** syndicalists support political parties and are not anarchists (there have been a few Marxist syndicalists, for example) but we will ignore these in our discussion. We will use the term syndicalism to describe what each branch has in common.

The syndicalist union is a self-managed industrial union (see section J.5.2) which is committed to **direct action** and refuses links with political parties, even labour or "socialist" ones. A key idea of syndicalism is that of union autonomy -- the idea that the workers' organisation is capable of changing society by its own efforts, that it must control its own fate and not be controlled by any party or other outside group (including anarchist federations). This is sometimes termed ***"workerism"*** (from the French ***"ouverierisme"***), i.e. workers' control of the class struggle and their own organisations. Rather than being a cross-class organisation like the political party, the union is a **class** organisation and is so uniquely capable of representing working class aspirations, interests and hopes. *"The **syndicat**,"* Emile Pouget wrote, *"groups together those who work against those who live by human exploitation: it brings together interests and not opinions."* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, pp. 30-1] There is, then, *"no place in it for anybody who was not a worker. Professional middle class intellectuals who provided both the leadership and the ideas of the socialist political movement, were therefore at a discount. As a consequence the syndicalist movement was, and saw itself as, a purely working class form of socialism."* Syndicalism *"appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the first movement which took seriously"* the argument *"that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of labour unaided by middle class intellectuals or by politicians and aimed to establish a genuinely working class socialism and culture, free of all bourgeois taints. For the syndicalists, the workers were to be everything, the rest, nothing."* [Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 38]

Therefore syndicalism is *"consciously anti-parliamentary and anti-political. It focuses not only on the realities of power but also on the key problem of achieving its disintegration. Real power in syndicalist doctrine is economic power. The way to dissolve economic power is to make every worker powerful, thereby eliminating power as a social privilege. Syndicalism thus ruptures all the ties between the workers and the state. It opposes political action, political parties, and any participant in political elections. Indeed it refuses to operate in the framework of the established order and the state.* It *"turns to direct action -- strikes, sabotage, obstruction, and above all, the revolutionary general strike. Direct action not only perpetuates the militancy of the workers and keeps alive the spirit of revolt, but awakens in*

them a greater sense of individual initiative. By continual pressure, direct action tests the strength of the capitalist system at all times and presumably in its most important arena -- the factory, where ruled and ruler seem to confront each other most directly." [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 121]

This does not mean that syndicalism is "apolitical" in the sense of ignoring totally all political issues. This is a Marxist myth. Syndicalists follow other anarchists by being opposed to all forms of authoritarian/capitalist politics but do take a keen interest in "political" questions as they relate to the interests of working people. Thus they do not "ignore" the state, or the role of the state. Indeed, syndicalists (like all libertarians) are well aware that the state exists to protect capitalist property and power and that we need to combat it as well as fight for economic improvements. In short, syndicalism is deeply political in the widest sense of the word, aiming for a radical change in political, economic and social conditions and institutions. Moreover, it is political in the narrower sense of being aware of political issues and aiming for political reforms along with economic ones. It is only "apolitical" when it comes to supporting political parties and using bourgeois political institutions, a position which is "political" in the wider sense of course! This is obviously identical to the usual anarchist position (see section J.2.10).

Which indicates an importance difference between syndicalism and trade unionism. Syndicalism aims at changing society rather than just working within it. Thus syndicalism is revolutionary while trade unionism is reformist. For syndicalists the union *"has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital."* Thus syndicalism aims to win reforms by direct action and by this struggle bring the possibilities of a revolution, via the general strike, closer. Indeed any *"desired improvement is to be wrested directly from the capitalist"* and *"must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation."* [Emile Pouget, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 71 and p. 73] Thus Emma Goldman:

> *"Of course Syndicalism, like the old trade unions, fights for immediate gains, but it is not stupid enough to pretend that labour can expect humane conditions from inhumane economic arrangements in society. Thus it merely wrests from the enemy what it can force him to yield; on the whole, however, Syndicalism aims at, and concentrates its energies upon, the complete overthrow of the wage system.*
>
> *"Syndicalism goes further: it aims to liberate labour from every institution that has not for its object the free development of production for the benefit of all humanity. In short, the ultimate purpose of Syndicalism is to reconstruct society from its present centralised, authoritative and brutal state to one based upon the free, federated grouping of the workers along lines of economic and social liberty.*
>
> *"With this object in view, Syndicalism works in two directions: first, by undermining the existing institutions; secondly, by developing and educating the workers and cultivating their spirit of solidarity, to prepare them for a full, free life, when capitalism shall have been abolished.*
>
> *"Syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 91]

Which, in turn, explains why syndicalist unions are structured in such an obviously libertarian way. It reflects the importance of empowering every worker by creating a union which is decentralised and self-managed, a union which every member plays a key role in determining its policy and activities. Participation ensures that the union becomes a *"school for the will"* (to use Pouget's expression) and allows working people to learn how to govern themselves and so do without the state. After the revolution, the union can easily be transformed into the body by which production is organised. The aim of the union is workers' self-management of production and distribution after the revolution, a self-management which the union is based upon in the here and now. The syndicalist union is seen as *"the germ of the Socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of Socialism in general"* and we need to *"plant these germs while there is yet time and bring them to the strongest possible development, so as to make the task of the coming social revolution easier and to insure its permanence."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Thus, as can be seen, syndicalism differs from trade unionism in its structure, its methods and its aims. Its structure, method and aims are distinctly anarchist. Little wonder leading syndicalist theorist Fernand Pelloutier argued that the trade union, *"governing itself along anarchic lines,"* must become *"a practical schooling in anarchism."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 55 and p. 57] In addition, most anarcho-syndicalists support community organisations and struggle alongside the more traditional industry based approach usually associated within syndicalism. While we have concentrated on the industrial side here (simply because this is a key aspect of syndicalism) we must stress that syndicalism can and does lend itself to community struggles. It is a myth that anarcho-syndicalism ignores community struggles and organisation, as can be seen from the history of the Spanish CNT for example (see section J.5.1).

It must be stressed that a syndicalist union is open to all workers regardless of their political opinions (or lack of them). The union exists to defend workers' interests as workers and is organised in an anarchist manner to ensure that their interests are fully expressed. This means that an syndicalist organisation is different from an organisation of syndicalists. What makes the union syndicalist is its structure, aims and methods. Obviously things can change (that is true of any organisation which has a democratic structure) but that is a test revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalists welcome and do not shirk from. As the union is self-managed from below up, its militancy and political content is determined by its membership. As Pouget put it, the union *"offers employers a degree of resistance in geometric proportion with the resistance put up by its members."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71] That is why syndicalists ensure that power rests in the members of the union.

Syndicalists have two main approaches to building revolutionary unions -- ***"dual unionism"*** and ***"boring from within."*** The former approach involves creating new, syndicalist, unions, in opposition to the existing trade unions. This approach was historically and is currently the favoured way of building syndicalist unions (American, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and numerous other syndicalists built their own union federations in the heyday of syndicalism between 1900 and 1920). "Boring from within" simply means working within the existing trade unions in order to reform them and make them syndicalist. This approach was favoured by French and British syndicalists, plus a few American ones. However, these two approaches are not totally in opposition. Many of the dual unions were created by syndicalists who had first worked within the existing trade unions. Once they got sick of the bureaucratic union machinery and of trying to reform it, they split from the reformist unions and formed new, revolutionary, ones. Similarly, dual unionists will happily support trade unionists in

struggle and often be "two carders" (i.e. members of both the trade union and the syndicalist one). See section J.5.3 for more on anarchist perspectives on existing trades unions.

Syndicalists no matter what tactics they prefer, favour autonomous workplace organisations, controlled from below. Both tend to favour syndicalists forming networks of militants to spread anarchist/syndicalist ideas within the workplace. Indeed, such a network (usually called *"Industrial Networks"* -- see section J.5.4 for more details) would be an initial stage and essential means for creating syndicalist unions. These groups would encourage syndicalist tactics and rank and file organisation during struggles and so create the potential for building syndicalist unions as libertarian ideas spread and are seen to work.

Syndicalists think that such an organisation is essential for the successful creation of an anarchist society as it builds the new world in the shell of the old, making a sizeable majority of the population aware of anarchism and the benefits of anarchist forms of organisation and struggle. Moreover, they argue that those who reject syndicalism *"because it believes in a permanent organisation of workers"* and urge *"workers to organise 'spontaneously' at the very moment of revolution"* promote a *"con-trick, designed to leave 'the revolutionary movement,' so called, in the hands of an educated class . . . [or] so-called 'revolutionary party' . . . [which] means that the workers are only expected to come in the fray when there's any fighting to be done, and in normal times leave theorising to the specialists or students."* [Albert Meltzer, **Anarchism: Arguments for and Against**, pp. 82-3] A self-managed society can only be created by self-managed means, and as only the practice of self-management can ensure its success, the need for libertarian popular organisations is essential. Syndicalism is seen as the key way working people can prepare themselves for revolution and learn to direct their own lives. In this way syndicalism creates a true politics of the people, one that does not create a parasitic class of politicians and bureaucrats (*"We wish to emancipate ourselves, to free ourselves"*, Pelloutier wrote, *"but we do not wish to carry out a revolution, to risk our skin, to put Pierre the socialist in the place of Paul the radical"* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 17]).

This does not mean that syndicalists do not support organisations spontaneously created by workers' in struggle (such as workers' councils, factory committees and so on). Far from it. Syndicalists have played important roles in these kinds of organisation (as can be seen from the Russian Revolution, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920, the British Shop Steward movement and so on). This is because syndicalism acts as a catalyst to militant labour struggles and serves to counteract class-collaborationist tendencies by union bureaucrats and "socialist" politicians. Part of this activity must involve encouraging self-managed organisations where none exist and so syndicalists support and encourage all such spontaneous movements, hoping that they turn into the basis of a syndicalist union movement or a successful revolution. Moreover, most anarcho-syndicalists recognise that it is unlikely that every worker, nor even the majority, will be in syndicalist unions before a revolutionary period starts. This means **new** organisations, created spontaneously by workers in struggle, would have to be the framework of social struggle and the post-capitalist society rather than the syndicalist union as such. All the syndicalist union can do is provide a practical example of how to organise in a libertarian way within capitalism and statism and support spontaneously created organisations.

It should be noted that while the term "syndicalism" dates from the 1890s in France, the ideas associated with these names have a longer history. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas have developed independently in many different countries and times. Indeed, anyone familiar with Bakunin's

work will quickly see that much of his ideas prefigure what was latter to become known by these terms. Similarly, we find that the American **International Working People's Association** organised by anarchists in the 1880s *"anticipated by some twenty years the doctrine of anarcho-syndicalism"* and *"[m]ore than merely resembling the 'Chicago Idea' [of the **IWPA**], the IWW's principles of industrial unionism resulted from the conscious efforts of anarchists . . . who continued to affirm . . . the principles which the Chicago anarchists gave their lives defending."* [Salvatore Salerno, **Red November, Black November**, p. 51 and p. 79] See section H.2.8 for a discussion of why Marxist claims that syndicalism and anarchism are unrelated are obviously false.

(We must stress that we are **not** arguing that Bakunin "invented" syndicalism. Far from it. Rather, we are arguing that Bakunin expressed ideas already developed in working class circles and became, if you like, the "spokesperson" for these libertarian tendencies in the labour movement as well as helping to clarifying these ideas in many ways. As Emma Goldman argued, the *"feature which distinguishes Syndicalism from most philosophies is that it represents the revolutionary philosophy of labour conceived and born in the actual struggle and experience of workers themselves -- not in universities, colleges, libraries, or in the brain of some scientists."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88-9] This applies equally to Bakunin and the first International).

Given this, we must also point out here that while syndicalism has anarchist roots, not all syndicalists are anarchists. A few Marxists have been syndicalists, particularly in the USA where the followers of Daniel De Leon supported Industrial Unionism and helped form the **Industrial Workers of the World**. The Irish socialist James Connelly was also a Marxist-syndicalist, as was Big Bill Haywood who was a leader of the IWW and a leading member of the US Socialist Party. Marxist-syndicalists are generally in favour of more centralisation within syndicalist unions (the IWW was by far the most centralised syndicalist union) and often argue that a political party is required to complement the work of the union. Needless to say, anarcho-syndicalists disagree, arguing that centralisation kills the spirit of revolt and weakens a unions real strength and that political parties are both ineffective when compared to militant unionism and a constant source of corruption. [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 55-60] So not all syndicalists are anarchists, leading those anarchists who are syndicalists often use the term "anarcho-syndicalism" to indicate that they are both anarchists and syndicalists as well as to stress the libertarian roots and syndicalism. In addition, not all anarchists are syndicalists. We discuss the reasons for this in the next section.

For more information on anarcho-syndicalist ideas, Rudolf Rocker's **Anarcho-Syndicalism** is still the classic introduction to the subject. The collection of articles by British syndicalist Tom Brown entitled **Syndicalism** is also worth reading. Daniel Guerin's **No Gods, No Masters** contains articles by leading French syndicalist thinkers.

J.3.9 Why are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists?

Before discussing why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists, we must clarify a few points first. Let us be clear, non-syndicalist anarchists usually support the ideas of workplace organisation and struggle, of direct action, of solidarity and so on. Thus most non-syndicalist anarchists do not disagree with anarcho-syndicalists on these issues. Indeed, many even support the creation of syndicalist unions. Thus many anarcho-communists like Alexander Berkman, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman supported anarcho-syndicalist organisations and even, like Malatesta, helped form such revolutionary union federations (namely, the

FORA in Argentina) and urged anarchists to take a leading role in organising unions. So when we use the term "non-syndicalist anarchist" we are not suggesting that these anarchists reject all aspects of anarcho-syndicalism. Rather, they are critical of certain aspects of anarcho-syndicalist ideas while supporting the rest.

In the past, a few communist-anarchists **did** oppose the struggle for improvements within capitalism as "reformist." However, these were few and far between and with the rise of anarcho-syndicalism in the 1890s, the vast majority of communist-anarchists recognised that only by encouraging the struggle for reforms would people take them seriously as this showed the benefits of anarchist tactics and organisation in practice so ensuring anarchist ideas grow in influence. Thus syndicalism was a healthy response to the rise of "abstract revolutionarism" that infected the anarchist movement during the 1880s, particularly in France and Italy. Thus communist-anarchists agree with syndicalists on the importance of struggling for and winning reforms and improvements within capitalism by direct action and solidarity.

Similarly, anarchists like Malatesta also recognised the importance of mass organisations like unions. As he argued, *"to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas . . . An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore easily dominated . . . But we anarchists do not want to* ***emancipate*** *the people; we want the people to* ***emancipate themselves*** *. . . we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 90] This can only occur when there are popular organisations, like trade unions, within which people can express themselves, come to common agreements and act. Moreover, these organisations must be autonomous, self-governing, be libertarian in nature **and** be independent of all parties and organisations (including anarchist ones). The similarity with anarcho-syndicalist ideas is striking.

So why, if this is the case, are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists? There are two main reasons for this. First, there is the question of whether unions are, by their nature, revolutionary organisations. Second, whether syndicalist unions are sufficient to create anarchy by themselves. We will discuss each in turn.

As can be seen from any country, the vast majority of unions are deeply reformist and bureaucratic in nature. They are centralised, with power resting at the top in the hands of officials. This suggests that in themselves unions are not revolutionary. As Malatesta argued, this is to be expected for *"all movements founded on material and immediate interests (and a mass working class movement cannot be founded on anything else), if the ferment, the drive and the unremitting efforts of men [and women] of ideas struggling and making sacrifices for an ideal future are lacking, tend to adapt themselves to circumstances, foster a conservative spirit, and fear of change in those who manage to improve their conditions, and often end up by creating new privileged classes and serving to support and consolidate the system one would want to destroy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 113-4]

If we look at the **role** of the union within capitalist society we see that in order for it to work, it must offer a reason for the boss to recognise and negotiate with it. This means that the union must be able to offer the boss something in return for any reforms it gets, namely labour discipline. In return for an improvement in wages or conditions, the union must be

able to get workers to agree to submit to the contracts the union signs with their boss. In other words, they must be able to control their members -- stop them fighting the boss -- if they are to have anything with which to bargain with. This results in the union becoming a third force in industry, with interests separate than the workers which it claims to represent. The role of unionism as a seller of labour power means that it often has to make compromises, compromises it has to make its members agree to. This necessities a tendency for power to be taken from the rank and file of the unions and centralised in the hands of officials at the top of the organisation. This ensures that *"the workers organisation becomes what it must perforce be in a capitalist society -- a means not of refusing to recognise and overthrowing the bosses, but simply for hedging round and limiting the bosses' power."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 29]

Anarcho-syndicalists are aware of this problem. That is why their unions are decentralised, self-managed and organised from the bottom up in a federal manner. As Durruti argued:

> *"No anarchists in the union committees unless at the ground level. In these committees, in case of conflict with the boss, the militant is forced to compromise to arrive at an agreement. The contracts and activities which come from being in this position, push the militant towards bureaucracy. Conscious of this risk, we do not wish to run it. Our role is to analyse from the bottom the different dangers which can beset a union organisation like ours. No militant should prolong his job in committees, beyond the time allotted to him. No permanent and indispensable people."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 183]

However, structure is rarely enough in itself to undermine the bureaucratic tendencies created by the role of unions in the capitalist economy. While such libertarian structures can slow down the tendency towards bureaucracy, non-syndicalist anarchists argue that they cannot stop it. They point to the example of the French CGT which had become reformist by 1914 (the majority of other syndicalist unions were crushed by fascism or communism before they had a chance to develop fully). Even the Spanish CNT (by far the most successful anarcho-syndicalist union) suffered from the problem of reformism, causing the anarchists in the union to organise the FAI in 1927 to combat it (which it did, very successfully). According to Jose Peirats, the *"participation of the anarchist group in the mass movement CNT helped to ensure that CNT's revolutionary nature."* This indicates the validity of Malatesta's arguments concerning the need for anarchists to remain distinct of the unions organisationally while working within them -- just as Peirat's comment that *"[b]linkered by participation in union committees, the FAI became incapable of a wider vision"* indicates the validity of Malatesta's warnings against anarchists taking positions of responsibility in unions! [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 241 and pp. 239-40]

Moreover, even the structure of syndicalist unions can cause problems: *"In modelling themselves structurally on the bourgeois economy, the syndicalist unions tended to become the organisational counterparts of the very centralised apparatus they professed to oppose. By pleading the need to deal effectively with the tightly knit bourgeoisie and state machinery, reformist leaders in syndicalist unions often had little difficulty in shifting organisational control from the bottom to the top."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 123]

In addition, as the syndicalist unions grow in size and influence their initial radicalism is usually watered-down. This is because, *"since the unions must remain open to all those who desire to win from the masters better conditions of life, whatever their opinions may be . . .,*

they are naturally led to moderate their aspirations, first so that they should not frighten away those they wish to have with them, and because, in proportion as numbers increase, those with ideas who have initiated the movement remain buried in a majority that is only occupied with the petty interests of the moment." [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchism and Syndicalism**, p. 150] Which, ironically given that increased self-management is seen as a way of reducing tendencies towards bureaucracy, means that syndicalist unions have a tendency towards reformism simply because the majority of their members will be non-revolutionary if the union grows in size in non-revolutionary times (as can be seen from the development of the Swedish syndicalist union the SAC).

So, if the union's militant strategy succeeds in winning reforms, more and more workers will join it. This influx of non-libertarians must, in a self-managed organisation, exert a de-radicalising influence on the unions politics and activities in non-revolutionary times. The syndicalist would argue that the process of struggling for reforms combined with the educational effects of participation and self-management will reduce this influence and, of course, they are right. However, non-syndicalist anarchists would counter this by arguing that the libertarian influences generated by struggle and participation would be strengthened by the work of anarchist groups and, without this work, the de-radicalising influences would outweigh the libertarian ones. In addition, the success of a syndicalist union must be partly determined by the general level of class struggle. In periods of great struggle, the membership will be more radical than in quiet periods and it is quiet periods which cause the most difficulties for syndicalist unions. With a moderate membership the revolutionary aims and tactics of the union will also become moderate. As one academic writer on French syndicalism put it, syndicalism *"was always based on workers acting in the economic arena to better their conditions, build class consciousness, and prepare for revolution. The need to survive and build a working-class movement had always forced syndicalists to adapt themselves to the exigencies of the moment."* [Barbara Mitchell, *"French Syndicalism: An Experiment in Practical Anarchism"*, pp. 25-41, **Revolutionary Syndicalism**, Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), p. 25]

As can be seen from the history of many syndicalist unions (and, obviously, mainstream unions too) this seems to be the case -- the libertarian tendencies are outweighed by the de-radicalising ones. This can also be seen from the issue of collective bargaining:

> *"The problem of collective bargaining foreshadowed the difficulty of maintaining syndicalist principles in developed capitalist societies. Many organisations within the international syndicalist movement initially repudiated collective agreements with employers on the grounds that by a collaborative sharing of responsibility for work discipline, such agreements would expand bureaucratisation within the unions, undermine revolutionary spirit, and restrict the freedom of action that workers were always to maintain against the class enemy. From an early date, however, sometimes after a period of suspicion and resistance, many workers gave up this position. In the early decades of the century it became clear that to maintain or gain a mass membership, syndicalist unions had to accept collective bargaining."* [Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

Thus, for most anarchists, *"the Trade Unions are, by their very nature reformist and never revolutionary. The revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work from within their ranks as well as from outside,*

but it cannot be the normal, natural definition of the Trade Unions function." [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 117]

This does not mean that anarchists should not work within labour organisations. Nor does it mean rejecting anarcho-syndicalist unions as an anarchist tactic. Far from it. Rather it is a case of recognising these organisations for what they are, reformist organisations which are not an end in themselves but one (albeit, important) means of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism. Neither does it mean that anarchists should not try to make labour organisations as anarchistic as possible or have anarchist objectives. Working within the labour movement (at the rank and file level, of course) is essential to gain influence for anarchist ideas, just as is working with unorganised workers. But this does not mean that the unions are revolutionary by their very nature, as syndicalism implies. As history shows, and as syndicalists themselves are aware, the vast majority of unions are reformist. Non-syndicalist anarchists argue there is a reason for that and syndicalist unions are not immune to these tendencies just because they call themselves revolutionary. Due to these tendencies, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists first and foremost in order to influence the class struggle and encourage the creation of autonomous workplace and community organisations to fight that struggle. Rather than fuse the anarchist and working class movement, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the importance of anarchists organising as anarchists to influence the working class movement.

All this does not mean that purely anarchist organisations or individual anarchists cannot become reformist. Of course they can (just look at the Spanish FAI which along with the CNT co-operated with the state during the Spanish Revolution). However, unlike syndicalist unions, the anarchist organisation is not pushed towards reformism due to its role within society. That is an important difference -- the institutional factors are not present for the anarchist federation as they are for the syndicalist union federation.

The second reason why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists is the question of whether syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create anarchy. Pierre Monatte, a French syndicalist, argued that *"Syndicalism, as the [CGT's] Congress of Amiens proclaimed in 1906, is sufficient unto itself"* as *"the working class, having at last attained majority, means to be self-sufficient and to rely on no-one else for its emancipation."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 219]

This idea of self-sufficiency means that the anarchist and the syndicalist movement must be fused into one, with syndicalism taking the role of both anarchist group and labour union. Thus a key difference between anarcho-syndicalists and other anarchists is over the question of the need for a specifically anarchist organisation. While most anarchists are sympathetic to anarcho-syndicalism, few totally subscribe to anarcho-syndicalist ideas in their pure form. This is because, in its pure form, syndicalism rejects the idea of anarchist groups and instead considers the union as **the** focal point of social struggle and anarchist activism. However, an anarcho-syndicalist may support a specific anarchist federation to work within the union and outside.

So anarchists critical of anarcho-syndicalism are also active in the labour movement, working with the rank and file while keeping their own identity as anarchists and organising as anarchists. Thus Malatesta: *"In the past I deplored that the comrades isolated themselves from the working-class movement. Today I deplore that many of us, falling into the contrary extreme, let themselves be swallowed up in the same movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 225] In the

eyes of other anarchists anarcho-syndicalism in its "pure" (revolutionary syndicalist) form makes the error of confusing the anarchist and union movement and so ensures that the resulting movement can do neither work well: *"Every fusion or confusion between the anarchist movement and the trade union movement ends, either in rendering the later unable to carry out its specific task or by weakening, distorting, or extinguishing the anarchist spirit."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 123]

Most anarchists agree with Malatesta when he argued that *"anarchists must not want the Trade Unions to be anarchist, but they must act within their ranks in favour of anarchist aims, as individuals, as groups and as federations of groups. . . [I]n the situation as it is, and recognising that the social development of one's workmates is what it is, the anarchist groups should not expect the workers' organisation to act as if they were anarchist, but should make every effort to induce them to approximate as much as possible to the anarchist method."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 124-5] Given that it appears to be the case that labour unions **are** by nature reformist, they cannot be expected to be enough in themselves when creating a free society. Hence the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** as well as alongside their fellow workers as workers in order to spread anarchist ideas on tactics and aims. This activity within existing unions does not necessarily mean attempting to "reform" the union in a libertarian manner (although some anarchists would support this approach). Rather it means working with the rank and file of the unions and trying to create autonomous workplace organisations, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and organised in a libertarian way.

This involves creating anarchist organisations separate from but which (in part) work within the labour movement for anarchist ends. Let us not forget that the syndicalist organisation is the union, it organises all workers regardless of their politics. A "union" which just let anarchists join would not be a union, it would be an anarchist group organised in the workplace. As anarcho-syndicalists themselves are aware, an anarcho-syndicalist union is not the same as a union of anarcho-syndicalists. How can we expect an organisation made up of non-anarchists be totally anarchist? Due to this, tendencies always appeared within syndicalist unions that were reformist and because of this most anarchists, including many anarcho-syndicalists we must note, argue that there is a need for anarchists to work within the rank and file of the unions to spread their anarchist ideals and aims, and this implies anarchist organisations separate from the labour movement, even if that movement is based on syndicalist unions.

As Bakunin argued, the anarchist organisation *"is the necessary complement to the International [i.e. the union federation]. But the International and the Alliance [the anarchist federation], while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses . . . regardless of nationality or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body: the Alliance, on the other hand, tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction."* This did not mean that the Alliance was imposing a foreign theory onto the members of the unions, because the *"programs of one and the other . . . differ only in the degree of their revolutionary development . . . The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 157] Nor did it imply that anarchists think that unions and other forms of popular organisations should be controlled by anarchists. Far from it! Anarchists are the strongest supporters of the autonomy of all popular organisations. As we indicated in section J.3.6, anarchists desire to influence popular organisations by the strength of our ideas within the rank and file and **not** by imposing our ideas on them.

In addition to these major points of disagreement, there are minor ones as well. For example, many anarchists dislike the emphasis syndicalists place on the workplace and see *"in syndicalism a shift in focus from the commune to the trade union, from all of the oppressed to the industrial proletariat alone, from the streets to the factories, and, in emphasis at least, from insurrection to the general strike."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] However, most anarcho-syndicalists are well aware that life exists outside the workplace and so this disagreement is largely one of emphasis. Similarly, many anarchists disagreed with the early syndicalist argument that a general strike was enough to create a revolution. They argued, with Malatesta in the forefront, that while a general strike would be *"an excellent means for starting the social revolution"* it would be wrong to think that it made *"armed insurrection unnecessary"* since the *"first to die of hunger during a general strike would not be the bourgeois, who dispose of all the stores, but the workers."* In order for this **not** to occur, the workers would need to *"take over production"* which are protected by the police and armed forces and this meant *"insurrection."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 223-4] Again, however, most modern syndicalists accept this to be the case and see the *"expropriatory general strike,"* in the words of French syndicalist Pierre Besnard, as *"clearly **insurrectional.**"* [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 288] We mention this purely to counter Leninist claims that syndicalists subscribe to the same ones they did in the 1890s.

Despite our criticisms we should recognise that the difference between anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are slight and (often) just a case of emphasis. Most anarchists support anarcho-syndicalist unions where they exist and often take a key role in creating and organising them. Similarly, many self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalists also support specific organisations of anarchists to work within and outwith the syndicalist union. Syndicalist unions, where they exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only are they democratic unions and create an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers. On its own this is very good but not good enough. For non-syndicalist anarchists, the missing element is an organisation winning support for anarchist ideas and tactics both within revolutionary unions and everywhere else working class people come together.

For a further information on the anarchist criticism of syndicalism, we can suggest no better source than the writings of Errico Malatesta. The books **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas** and **The Anarchist Revolution** contain Malatesta's viewpoints on anarchism, syndicalism and how anarchists should work within the labour movement. **The Anarchist Reader** contains the famous debate between the syndicalist Pierre Monatte and Malatesta at the International Anarchist conference in Amsterdam in 1907.

J.4 What trends in society aid anarchist activity?

In this section we will examine some modern trends which we regard as being potential openings for anarchists to organise and which point in an anarchist direction. These trends are of a general nature, partly as a product of social struggle, partly as a response to economic and social crisis, partly involving people's attitudes to big government and big business,

partly in relation to the communications revolution we are currently living through, and so on.

Of course, looking at modern society we see multiple influences, changes which have certain positive aspects in some directions but negative ones in others. For example, the business-inspired attempts to decentralise or reduce (certain) functions of governments should in the abstract be welcomed by anarchists for they lead to the reduction of government. In practice such a conclusion is deeply suspect simply because these developments are being pursued to increase the power and influence of capital as well as to increase wage-labour to, and exploitation by, the economic master class and to undermine working class power and autonomy. As such, there are as anti-libertarian as the status quo (as Proudhon stressed, anarchism is *"the denial of Government and of Property."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 100]). Similarly, increases in self-employment can be seen, in the abstract, as reducing wage slavery. However, if, in practice, this increase is due to corporations encouraging "independent" contractors in order to cut wages and worsen working conditions, increase job insecurity and undermine paying for health and other employee packages then it is hardly a positive sign. Obviously increases in self-employment would be different if it were the result of an increase in the number of co-operatives, for example.

Thus few anarchists celebrate many apparently "libertarian" developments as they are not the product of social movements and activism, but are the product of elite lobbying for private profit and power. Decreasing the power of the state in (certain) areas while leaving (or increasing) the power of capital is a retrograde step in most, if not all, ways. Needless to say, this "rolling back" of the state does not bring into question its role as defender of property and the interests of the capitalist class -- nor could it, as it is the ruling class who introduces and supports these developments.

In this section, we aim to discuss tendencies from **below**, not above -- tendencies which can truly "roll back" the state rather than reduce its functions purely to that of the armed thug of property. The tendencies we discuss here are not the be all nor end all of anarchist activism or tendencies. We discuss many of the more traditionally anarchist "openings" in section J.5 (such as industrial and community unionism, mutual credit, co-operatives, modern schools and so on) and so will not do so here. However, it is important to stress here that such "traditional" openings are not being downplayed -- indeed, much of what we discuss here can only become fully libertarian in combination with these more "traditional" forms of ***"anarchy in action."***

For a lengthy discussion of anarchistic trends in society, we recommend Colin Ward's classic book **Anarchy in Action**. Ward covers many areas in which anarchistic tendencies have been expressed, far more than we can cover here. The libertarian tendencies in society are many. No single work could hope to do them justice.

J.4.1 Why is social struggle a good sign?

Simply because it shows that people are unhappy with the existing society and, more importantly, are trying to change at least some part of it. It suggests that certain parts of the population have reflected on their situation and, potentially at least, seen that **by their own actions** they can influence and change it for the better.

Given that the ruling minority draws its strength by the acceptance and acquiescence of the majority, the fact that a part of that majority no longer accepts and acquiesces is a positive sign. After all, if the majority did not accept the status quo and acted to change it, the class and state system could not survive. Any hierarchical society survives because those at the bottom follow the orders of those above it. Social struggle suggests that some people are considering their own interests, thinking for themselves and saying "no" and this, by its very nature, is an important, indeed, the most important, tendency towards anarchism. It suggests that people are rejecting the old ideas which hold the system up, acting upon this rejection and creating new ways of doing thinks.

"Our social institutions," argued Alexander Berkman, *"are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built upon them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. xii]

Social struggle is the most obvious sign of this change of perspective, this change in ideas, this progress towards freedom.

Social struggle is expressed by direct action. We have discussed both social struggle (section J.1) and direct action (section J.2) before and some readers may wonder why we are covering this again here. We do so as we are discussing what trends in society help anarchist activity, it would be wrong **not** to highlight social struggle and direct action here. This is because these factors are key tendencies towards anarchism as social struggle is the means by which people create the new world in the shell of the old, transforming themselves and society.

So social struggle is a good sign as it suggests that people are thinking for themselves, considering their own interests and working together collectively to change things for the better. As the French syndicalist Emile Pouget argued:

> *"Direct action . . . means that the working class, forever bridling at the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its methodology . . . Direct Action thus implies that the working class subscribes to notions of freedom and autonomy instead of genuflecting before the principle of authority. Now, it is thanks to this authority principle, the pivot of the modern world -- democracy being its latest incarnation -- that the human being, tied down by a thousand ropes, moral as well as material, is bereft of any opportunity to display will and initiative."* [**Direct Action**, p. 1]

Social struggle means that people come into opposition with the boss and other authorities such as the state and the dominant morality. This challenge to existing authorities generates two related processes: the tendency of those involved to begin taking over the direction of their own activities and the development of solidarity with each other. Firstly, in the course of a struggle, such as a strike, occupation, boycott, and so on, the ordinary life of people, in which they act under the constant direction of the bosses or state, ceases, and they have to think, act and co-ordinate their actions for themselves. This reinforces the expression towards autonomy that the initial refusal that lead to the struggle indicates. Secondly, in the process of struggle those involved learn the importance of solidarity, of working with others in a similar

situation, in order to win. This means the building of links of support, of common interests, of organisation. The practical need for solidarity to help win the struggle is the basis for the solidarity required for a free society to be viable.

Therefore the real issue in social struggle is that it is an attempt by people to wrestle at least part of the power over their own lives away from the managers, state officials and so on who currently have it and exercise it themselves. This is, by its very nature, anarchistic and libertarian. Thus we find politicians and, of course, managers and property owners, often denouncing strikes and other forms of direct action. This is logical. As direct action challenges the real power-holders in society and because, if carried to its logical conclusion, it would remove them, social struggle and direct action can be considered in essence a revolutionary process.

Moreover, the very act of using direct action suggests a transformation within the people using it. *"Direct action's very powers to fertilise,"* argued Pouget, *"reside in such exercises in imbuing the individual with a sense of his own worth and in extolling such worth. It marshals human resourcefulness, tempers characters and focuses energies. It teaches self-confidence! And self-reliance! And self-mastery! And shifting for oneself!"* Moreover, *"direct action has an unmatched educational value: It teaches people to reflect, to make decisions and to act. It is characterised by a culture of autonomy, an exaltation of individuality and is a fillip to initiative, to which it is the leaven. And this superabundance of vitality and burgeoning of 'self' in no way conflicts with the economic fellowship that binds the workers one with another and far from being at odds with their common interests, it reconciles and bolsters these: the individual's independence and activity can only erupt into splendour and intensity by sending its roots deep into the fertile soil of common agreement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 2 and p. 5]

Social struggle is the beginning of a transformation of the people involved and their relationships to each other. While its external expression lies in contesting the power of existing authorities, its inner expression is the transformation of people from passive and isolated competitors into empowered, self-directing, self-governing co-operators. Moreover, this process widens considerably what people think is "possible." Through struggle, by collective action, the fact people **can** change things is driven home, that **they** have the power to govern themselves and the society they live in. Thus struggle can change people's conception of "what is possible" and encourage them to try and create a better world. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"since the times of the [first] International Working Men's Association, the anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of labour against capital and its protector -- the State.*
>
> *"Such a struggle . . . permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements . . ., while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by capitalism and the State . . . , and wakes up his [or her] thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Anarchism**, p. 171]

In other words, social struggle has a **radicalising** and **politicising** effect, an effect which brings into a new light existing society and the possibilities of a better world (direct action, in Pouget's words, *"develops the feeling for human personality as well as the spirit of initiative . . . it shakes people out of their torpor and steers them to consciousness."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 5]).

The practical need to unite and resist the boss also helps break down divisions within the working class. Those in struggle start to realise that they need each other to give them the power necessary to get improvements, to change things. Thus solidarity spreads and overcomes divisions between black and white, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, trades, industries, nationalities and so on. The real need for solidarity to win the fight helps to undermine artificial divisions and show that there are only two groups in society, the oppressed and the oppressors. Moreover, struggle as well as transforming those involved is also the basis for transforming society as a whole simply because, as well as producing transformed individuals, it also produces new forms of organisation, organisations created to co-ordinate their struggle and which can, potentially at least, become the framework of a libertarian socialist society (see section I.2.3).

Thus anarchists argue that social struggle opens the eyes of those involved to self-esteem and a sense of their own strength, and the groupings it forms at its prompting are living, vibrant associations where libertarian principles usually come to the fore. We find almost all struggles developing new forms of organisation, forms which are often based on direct democracy, federalism and decentralisation. If we look at every major revolution, we find people creating mass organisations such as workers' councils, factory committees, neighbourhood assemblies and so on as a means of taking back the power to govern their own lives, communities and workplaces. In this way social struggle and direct action lay the foundations for the future. By actively taking part in social life, people are drawn into creating new forms of organisation, new ways of doing things. In this way they educate themselves in participation, in self-government, in initiative and in asserting themselves. They begin to realise that the only alternative to management by others is self-management and organise to achieve it.

Given that remaking society has to begin at the bottom, this finds its expression in direct action, individuals taking the initiative and using the power they have just generated by collective action and organisation to change things by their own efforts. Social struggle is therefore a two way transformation -- the external transformation of society by the creation of new organisations and the changing of the power relations within it and the internal transformation of those who take part in the struggle. This is key:

> *"Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off . . . and immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the causes of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activism and they will in the end understand that to make their victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of the moral elevation and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Hence Nestor Makhno's comment that *"[i]n fact, it is only through that struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you reach an understanding of anarchism."* [**The Struggle Against the State and other Essays**, p. 71] The creation of an anarchist society is a **process** and social struggle is the key anarchistic tendency within society which anarchists look for,

encourage and support. Its radicalising and transforming nature is the key to the growth of anarchist ideas, the creation of libertarian structures and alternatives within capitalism (structures which may, one day, replace it) and the creation of anarchists and those sympathetic to anarchist ideas. Its importance cannot be underestimated!

J.4.2 Won't social struggle do more harm than good?

It is often argued that social struggle, resisting the powerful and the wealthy, will just do more harm than good. Employers often use this approach in anti-union propaganda, for example, arguing that creating a union will force the company to close and move to less "militant" areas.

There is some truth in this. Yes, social struggle can lead to bosses moving to more compliant workforces -- but this also happens in periods lacking social struggle too! If we look at the down-sizing mania that gripped the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s, we see companies firing tens of thousands of people during a period when unions were weak, workers scared about losing their jobs and class struggle basically becoming mostly informal, atomised and "underground." Moreover, this argument actually indicates the need for anarchism. It is a damning indictment of any social system that it requires people to kow-tow to their masters otherwise they will suffer economic hardship. It boils down to the argument *"do what you are told, otherwise you will regret it."* Any system based on that maxim is an affront to human dignity!

It would, in a similar fashion, be easy to "prove" that slave rebellions are against the long term interests of the slaves. After all, by rebelling the slaves will face the anger of their masters. Only by submitting without question can they avoid this fate and, perhaps, be rewarded by better conditions. Of course, the evil of slavery would continue but by submitting to it they can ensure their life can become better. Needless to say, any thinking and feeling person would quickly dismiss this reasoning as missing the point and being little more than apologetics for an evil social system that treated human beings as things. The same can be said for the argument that social struggles within capitalism do more harm than good. It betrays a slave mentality unfitting for human beings (although fitting for those who desire to live of the backs of workers or desire to serve those who do).

Moreover, this kind of argument ignores a few key points.

Firstly, by resistance the conditions of the oppressed can be maintained or even improved. If the boss knows that their decisions will be resisted they may be less inclined to impose speed-ups, longer hours and so on. If, on the other hand, they know that their employees will agree to anything then there is every reason to expect them to impose all kinds of oppressions, just as a state will impose draconian laws if it knows that it can get away with it. History is full of examples of non-resistance producing greater evils in the long term and of resistance producing numerous important reforms and improvements (such as higher wages, shorter hours, the right to vote for working class people and women, freedom of speech, the end of slavery, trade union rights and so on).

So social struggle has been proven time and time again to gain successful reforms. For example, before the 8 hour day movement of 1886 in America most companies argued they could not introduce that reform without doing bust. However, after displaying a militant

mood and conducting an extensive strike campaign, hundreds of thousands of workers discovered that their bosses had been lying and they got shorter hours. Indeed, the history of the labour movement shows what bosses say they can afford and the reforms workers can get via struggle are somewhat at odds. Given the asymmetry of information between workers and bosses, this is unsurprising as workers can only guess at what is available and bosses like to keep their actual finances hidden. Even the threat of labour struggle can be enough to gain improvements. For example, Henry Ford's $5 day is often used as an example of capitalism rewarding good workers. However, this substantial pay increase was largely motivated by the unionisation drive by the **Industrial Workers of the World** among Ford workers in the summer of 1913. [Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 144] More recently, it was the mass non-payment campaign against the poll-tax in Britain during the late 1980s and early 1990s which helped ensure its defeat. In the 1990s, France also saw the usefulness of direct action. Two successive prime ministers (Edouard Balladur and Alain Juppe) tried to impose large scale neo-liberal "reform" programmes that swiftly provoked mass demonstrations and general strikes amongst students, workers, farmers and others. Confronted by crippling disruptions, both governments gave in.

Secondly, and in some ways more importantly, the radicalising effect of social struggle can open new doors for those involved, liberate their minds, empower them and create the potential for deep social change. Without resistance to existing forms of authority a free society cannot be created as people adjust themselves to authoritarian structures and accept "what is" as the only possibility. By resisting, people transform and empower themselves as well as transforming society. New possibilities can be seen (possibilities before dismissed as "utopian") and, via the organisation and action required to win reforms, the framework for these possibilities (i.e. of a new, libertarian, society) created. The transforming and empowering effect of social struggle is expressed well by the Nick DiGaetano, a one-time Wobbly who had joined during the 1912 Lawrence strike and then became a UAW-CIO shop floor militant:

> *"the workers of my generation from the early days up to now [1958] had what you might call a labour insurrection in changing from a plain, humble, submissive creature into a man. The union made a man out of him . . . I am not talking about the benefits . . . I am talking about the working conditions and how they affected the men in the plant . . . Before they were submissive. Today they are men."* [quoted by David Brody, *"Workplace Contractualism in comparative perspective"*, pp. 176-205, Helson Lichtenstein and Howell John Harris (eds.), **Industrial Democracy in America**, p. 204]

Other labour historians note the same radicalising process elsewhere (modern day activists could give more examples!):

> *"The contest [over wages and conditions] so pervaded social life that the ideology of acquisitive individualism, which explained and justified a society regulated by market mechanisms and propelled by the accumulation of capital, was challenged by an ideology of mutualism, rooted in working-class bondings and struggles . . . Contests over pennies on or off existing piece rates had ignited controversies over the nature and purpose of the American republic itself."* [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 171]

This radicalising effect is far more dangerous to authoritarian structures than better pay, more liberal laws and so on as they need submissiveness to work. Little wonder that direct action is usually denounced as pointless or harmful by those in power or their spokespersons for direct action will, taken to its logical conclusion, put them out of a job! Struggle, therefore, holds the possibility of a free society as well as of improvements in the here and now. It also changes the perspectives of those involved, creating new ideas and values to replace the ones of capitalism.

Thirdly, it ignores the fact that such arguments do not imply the end of social struggle and working class resistance and organisation, but rather its **extension.** If, for example, your boss argues that they will move to Mexico if you do not "shut up and put up" then the obvious solution is to make sure the workers in Mexico are also organised! Bakunin argued this basic point over one hundred years ago, and it is still true: *"in the long run the relatively tolerable position of workers in one country can be maintained only on condition that it be more or less the same in other countries."* The *"conditions of labour cannot get worse or better in any particular industry without immediately affecting the workers in other industries, and that workers of all trades are inter-linked with real and indissoluble ties of solidarity."* Ultimately, *"in those countries the workers work longer hours for less pay; and the employers there can sell their products cheaper, successfully competing against conditions where workers working less earn more, and thus force the employers in the latter countries to cut wages and increase the hours of their workers."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 306-7] Bakunin's solution was to organise internationally, to stop this undercutting of conditions by solidarity between workers. As history shows, his argument was correct. Thus it is **not** social struggle or militancy which perhaps could have negative results, just **isolated** militancy, struggle which ignores the ties of solidarity required to win, extend and keep reforms and improvements. In other words, our resistance must be as transnational as capitalism is.

The idea that social struggle and working class organisation are harmful was expressed constantly in the 1970s and 80s. With the post-war Keynesian consensus crumbling, the "New Right" argued that trade unions (and strikes) hampered growth and that wealth redistribution (i.e. welfare schemes which returned some of the surplus value workers produced back into our own hands) hindered "wealth creation" (i.e. economic growth). Do not struggle over income, they argued, let the market decide and everyone will be better off.

This argument was dressed up in populist clothes. Thus we find the right-wing guru F.A. von Hayek arguing that, in the case of Britain, the *"legalised powers of the unions have become the biggest obstacle to raising the standards of the working class as a whole. They are the chief cause of the unnecessarily big differences between the best- and worse-paid workers."* He maintained that *"the elite of the British working class . . . derive their relative advantages by keeping workers who are **worse off** from improving their position."* Moreover, he *"predict[ed] that the average worker's income would rise fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, and where the exploitation of workers by monopolistic trade union organisations of specialised workers are effectively outlawed."* [**1980s Unemployment and the Unions**, p. 107, p. 108 and p. 110]

Now, if von Hayek's claims were true we could expect that in the aftermath of Thatcher government's trade union reforms we would have seen: a rise in economic growth (usually considered as **the** means to improve living standards for workers by the right); that this growth would be more equally distributed; a decrease in the differences between high and

low paid workers; a reduction in the percentage of low paid workers as they improved their positions when freed from union *"exploitation"*; and that wages rise fastest in countries with the highest wage flexibility. Unfortunately for von Hayek, the actual trajectory of the British economy exposed his claims as nonsense.

Looking at each of his claims in turn we discover that rather than "exploit" other workers, trade unions are an essential means to shift income from capital to labour (which is why capital fights labour organisers tooth and nail). And, equally important, labour militancy aids **all** workers by providing a floor under which wages cannot drop (non-unionised firms have to offer similar programs to prevent unionisation and be able to hire workers) and by maintaining aggregate demand. This positive role of unions in aiding **all** workers can be seen by comparing Britain before and after Thatcher's von Hayek inspired trade union and labour market reforms.

There has been a steady fall in growth in the UK since the trade union "reforms". In the "bad old days" of the 1970s, with its strikes and "militant unions" growth was 2.4% in Britain. It fell to 2% in the 1980s and fell again to 1.2% in the 1990s. A similar pattern of slowing growth as wage flexibility and market reform has increased can be seen in the US economy (it was 4.4% in the 1960s, 3.2% in the 1970s, 2.8% in the 1980s and 1.9% in the first half of the 1990s). [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 236] Given that the free-market right proclaims higher economic growth is the only way to make workers better off, growth rates have steadily fallen internationally since the domination of their ideology. Thus growth of output per head in the USA, Europe, Japan and the OECD countries between 1979 to 1990 was lower than in 1973-9, and 1990-2004 lower still. The deregulation, privatisation, anti-union laws and other neo-liberal policies have *"failed to bring an increase in the growth rate."* [Andrew Glyn, **Capitalism Unleashed**, p. 131] What growth spurts there have been were associated with speculative bubbles (in the American economy, dot.com stocks in the late 1990s and housing in the 2000s) which burst with disastrous consequences.

So the rate of "wealth creation" (economic growth) has steadily fallen as unions were "reformed" in line with von Hayek's ideology (and lower growth means that the living standards of the working class as a whole do not rise as fast as they did under the "exploitation" of the "monopolistic" trade unions).

If we look at the differences between the highest and lowest paid workers, we find that rather than decrease, they have in fact shown *"a dramatic widening out of the distribution with the best-workers doing much better"* since Thatcher was elected in 1979 [Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.), **Paying for Inequality**, p. 100] This is important, as average figures can hide how badly those in the bottom (80%!) are doing. In an unequal society, the gains of growth are monopolised by the few and we would expect rising inequality over time alongside average growth. In America inequality has dramatically increased since the 1970s, with income and wealth growth in the 1980s going predominately to the top 20% (and, in fact, mostly to the top 1% of the population). The bottom 80% of the population saw their wealth grow by 1.2% and their income by 23.7% in the 1980s, while for the top 20% the respective figures were 98.2% and 66.3% (the figures for the top 1% were 61.6% and 38.9%, respectively). [Edward N. Wolff, *"How the Pie is Sliced"*, **The American Prospect**, no. 22, Summer 1995] There has been a *"fanning out of the pay distribution"* with the gap between the top 10% of wage-earners increasing compared to those in the middle and bottom 10%. Significantly, in the neo-liberal countries the rise in inequality is *"considerably higher"* than in European ones. In America, for example, *"real wages at the top grew by 27.2% between*

1979 and 2003 as compared to 10.2% in the middle" while real wages for the bottom 10% *"did not grow at all between 1979 and 2003."* In fact, most of the gains in the top 10% *"occurred amongst the top 5%, and two-thirds of it within the top 1%."* Unsurprising, the neo-liberal countries of the UK, USA and New Zealand saw the largest increases in inequality. [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 116-8 and p. 168]

Given that inequality has increased, the condition of the average worker must have suffered. For example, Ian Gilmore states that *"[i]n the 1980s, for the first time for fifty years . . . the poorer half of the population saw its share of total national income shirk."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 113] According to Noam Chomsky, *"[d]uring the Thatcher decade, the income share of the bottom half of the population fell from one-third to one-fourth"* and the between 1979 and 1992, the share of total income of the top 20% grew from 35% to 40% while that of the bottom 20% fell from 10% to 5%. In addition, the number of UK employees with weekly pay below the Council of Europe's *"decency threshold"* increased from 28.3% in 1979 to 37% in 1994. [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 144 and p. 145] Moreover, *"[b]ack in the early 1960s, the heaviest concentration of incomes fell at 80-90 per cent of the mean . . . But by the early 1990s there had been a dramatic change, with the peak of the distribution falling at just 40-50 per cent of the mean. One-quarter of the population had incomes below half the average by the early 1990s as against 7 per cent in 1977 and 11 per cent in 1961."* [Elliot and Atkinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235] *"Overall,"* notes Takis Fotopoulos, *"average incomes increased by 36 per cent during this period [1979-1991/2], but 70 per cent of the population had a below average increase in their income."* [**Towards an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 113]

The reason for this rising inequality is not difficult to determine. When workers organise and strike, they can keep more of what they produce in their own hands. The benefits of productivity growth, therefore, can be spread. With unions weakened, such gains will accumulate in fewer hands and flood upwards. This is precisely what happened. Before (approximately) 1980 and the neo-liberal assault on unions, productivity and wages rose hand-in-hand in America, afterward productivity continued to rise while wages flattened. In fact, the value of the output of an average worker *"has risen almost 50 percent since 1973. Yet the growing concentration of income in the hands of a small minority had proceeded so rapidly that we're not sure whether the typical American has gained* ***anything*** *from rising productivity."* Rather than "trickle down" *"the lion's share of economic growth in America over the past thirty years has gone to a small, wealthy minority."* In short: *"The big winners . . . have been members of a very narrow elite: the top 1 percent or less of the population."* [Paul Krugman, **The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 124, p. 244 and p. 8]

Looking at America, after the Second World War the real income of the typical family ("exploited" by "monopolistic" trade unions) grew by 2.7% per year, with *"incomes all through the income distribution grew at about the same rate."* Since 1980 (i.e., after working people were freed from the tyranny of unions), *"medium family income has risen only about 0.7 percent a year"* Median household income *"grew modestly"* from 1973 to 2005, the total gain was about 16%. Yet this *"modest gain"* may *"overstate"* how well American families were doing, as it *was achieved in part through longer working hours.* For example, *"a gain in family income that occurs because a spouse goes to work isn't the same thing as a wage increase. In particular it may carry hidden costs that offset some of the gains in money."* This stagnation is, of course, being denied by the right. Yet, as Krugman memorably puts it: *"Modern economists debate whether American median income has risen or fallen since the early 1970s. What's really telling is the fact that we're even having this debate."* So while the average values may have went up, because of *"rising inequality, good performance in overall*

numbers like GDP hasn't translated into gains for ordinary workers." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 55, pp. 126-7, p. 124 and p. 201]

Luckily for American capitalism a poll in 2000 found that 39% of Americans believe they are either in the wealthiest 1% or will be there *"soon"*! [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 179] In fact, as we discussed in section B.7.2, social mobility has **fallen** under neo-liberalism -- perhaps unsurprisingly as it is easier to climb a hill than a mountain. This is just as important as the explosion in inequality as the â€œfree-marketâ€• right argue that dynamic social mobility makes up for wealth and income inequality. As Krugman notes, Americans *"may believe that anyone can succeed through hard work and determination, but the facts say otherwise."* In reality, mobility is *"highest in the Scandinavian countries, and most results suggest that mobility is lower in the United States than it is in France, Canada, and maybe even in Britain. Not only don't Americans have equal opportunity, opportunity is less equal here than elsewhere in the West."* Without the blinkers of free market capitalist ideology this should be unsurprising: *"A society with highly unequal results is, more or less inevitably, a society with highly unequal opportunity, too."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247 and p. 249]

Looking at the claim that trade union members gained their *"relative advantage by keeping workers who are **worse off** from improving their position"* it would be fair to ask whether the percentage of workers in low-paid jobs decreased in Britain after the trade union reforms. In fact, the percentage of workers below the Low Pay Unit's definition of low pay (namely two-thirds of men's median earnings) **increased** -- from 16.8% in 1984 to 26.2% in 1991 for men, 44.8% to 44.9% for women. For manual workers it rose by 15% to 38.4%, and for women by 7.7% to 80.7% (for non-manual workers the figures were 5.4% rise to 13.7% for men and a 0.5% rise to 36.6%). [Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.), **Op. Cit.**, p.102] If unions **were** gaining at the expense of the worse off, you would expect a **decrease** in the number in low pay, **not** an increase. An OECD study concluded that *"[t]ypically, countries with high rates of collective bargaining and trade unionisation tend to have low incidence of low paid employment."* [**OECD Employment Outlook**, 1996, p. 94] Within America, we also discover that higher union density is associated with fewer workers earning around the minimum wage and that "right-to-work" states (i.e., those that pass anti-union laws) *"tend to have lower wages, lower standard of living, and more workers earning around the minimum wage."* It is hard not to conclude that states *"passed laws aimed at making unionisation more difficult would imply that they sought to maintain the monopoly power of employers at the expense of workers."* [Oren M. Levin-Waldman, *"The Minimum Wage and Regional Wage Structure: Implications for Income Distribution"*, pp. 635-57, **Journal of Economic Issues**, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, p. 639 and p. 655]

As far as von Hayek's prediction on wage flexibility leading to the *"average worker's income"* rising fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, it has been proved totally wrong. Between 1967 and 1971, real wages grew (on average) by 2.95% per year in the UK (nominal wages grew by 8.94%) [P. Armstrong, A. Glyn and J. Harrison, **Capitalism Since World War II**, p. 272]. In comparison, real household disposable income grew by just 0.5 percent between June 2006 and 2007. Average weekly earnings rose 2.9% between April 2006 and 2007 while inflation rose by 3.6% (Retail Prices Index) and 2.8% (Consumer Prices Index). [Elliot and Atkinson, **The Gods That Failed**, p. 163] This is part of a general pattern, with UK Real Wages per employee being an average 3.17% per year between 1960 and 1974, falling to 1.8% between 1980 and 1999. In America, the equivalent figures are 2.37% and 1.02%. [Eckhard Hein and Thorsten Schulten, **Unemployment, Wages and Collective Bargaining in the European Union**, p. 9] Looking at the wider picture, during the early

1970s when strikes and union membership increased, *"real wage increases rose steadily to reach over 4% per year"* in the West. However, after von Hayek's anti-union views were imposed, *"real wages have grown very slowly."* In anti-union America, the median wage was $13.62 in 2003 compared to $12.36 in 1979 (reckoned in 2003 prices). In Europe and Japan *"average wages have done only a little better, having grown around 1% per year."* [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 5 and p. 116] It gets worse as these are average figures. Given that inequality soared during this period the limited gains of the neo-liberal era were not distributed as evenly as before (in the UK, for example, wage growth was concentrated at the top end of society. [Elliot and Atkinson, **Fantasy Island**, p. 99]).

Nor can it be said that breaking the unions and lower real wages translated into lower unemployment in the UK as the average unemployment rate between 1996 and 1997 was 7.1% compared to 4.5% between 1975 and 1979 (the year Thatcher took power). The average between 1960 and 1974 was 1.87% compared to 8.7% over the whole Thatcherite period of 1980 to 1999. Perhaps this is not too surprising, given that (capitalist economic theology aside) unemployment *"systematically weakens the bargaining power of trade unions."* In short: *"Neither on the theoretical nor empirical level can a strictly inverse relation between the real wage rate and the level of unemployment be derived."* [Hein and Schulten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 9, p. 3 and p. 2] As we discussed in section C.1.5 this should come as no surprise to anyone with awareness of the real nature of unemployment and the labour market. So unemployment did not fall after the trade union reforms, quite the reverse: *"By the time Blair came to power [in 1997], unemployment in Britain was falling, although it still remained higher than it had been when the [last Labour Government of] Callaghan left office in May 1979."* [Elliot and Atkinson, **Age of Insecurity**, p. 258] To be fair, von Hayek did argue that falls in unemployment would be *"a slow process"* but nearly 20 years of far higher unemployment is moving backwards!

So we have a stark contrast between the assertions of the right and the reality their ideology helped create. The reason for this difference is not hard to discover. As economist Paul Krugman correctly argues unions *"raise average wages for their membership; they also, indirectly and to a lesser extent, raise wages for similar workers . . . as nonunionised employers try to diminish the appeal of union drives to their workers . . . unions tend to narrow income gaps among blue-collar workers, by negotiating bigger wage increases for their worse-paid members . . . And nonunion employers, seeking to forestall union organisers, tend to echo this effect."* He argues that *"if there's a single reason blue-collar workers did so much better in the fifties than they had in the twenties, it was the rise of unions"* and that unions *"were once an important factor limiting income inequality, both because of their direct effect in raising their membersâ€™ wages and because the union pattern of wage settlements . . . was . . . reflected in the labour market as a whole."* With the smashing of the unions came rising inequality, with the *"sharpest increases in wage inequality in the Western world have taken place in the United States and in Britain, both of which experience sharp declines in union membership."* Unions restrict inequality because *"they act as a countervailing force to management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51, p. 49, p. 149 and p. 263]

So under the neo-liberal regime instigated by Thatcher and Reagan the power, influence and size of the unions were reduced considerably and real wage growth fell considerably -- which is the **exact** opposite of von Hayek's predictions. Flexible wages and weaker unions have harmed the position of **all** workers (Proudhon: *"Contrary to all expectation! It takes an economist not to expect these things"* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 203]). So

comparing the claims of von Hayek to what actually happened after trade union "reform" and the reduction of class struggle suggests that claims that social struggle is self-defeating are false (and self-serving, considering it is usually bosses, employer supported parties and economists who make these claims). A **lack** of social struggle has been correlated with low economic growth and often stagnant (even declining) wages. So while social struggle **may** make capital flee and other problems, lack of it is no guarantee of prosperity (quite the reverse, if the last quarter of the 20th century is anything to go by). Indeed, a lack of social struggle will make bosses be more likely to cut wages, worsen working conditions and so on -- after all, they feel they can get away with it! Which brings home the fact that to make reforms last it is necessary to destroy capitalism.

Of course, no one can **know** that struggle will make things better. It is a guess; no one can predict the future. Not all struggles are successful and many can be very difficult. If the *"military is a role model for the business world"* (in the words of an ex-CEO of Hill & Knowlton Public Relations), and it is, then **any** struggle against it and other concentrations of power may, and often is, difficult and dangerous at times. [quoted by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in **Toxic Sludge Is Good For You!**, p. 47] But, as Zapata once said, *"better to die on your feet than live on your knees!"* All we can say is that social struggle can and does improve things and, in terms of its successes and transforming effect on those involved, well worth the potential difficulties it can create. Moreover, without struggle there is little chance of creating a free society, dependent as it is on individuals who refuse to bow to authority and have the ability and desire to govern themselves. In addition, social struggle is always essential, not only to **win** improvements, but to **keep** them as well. In order to fully secure improvements you have to abolish capitalism and the state. Not to do so means that any reforms can and will be taken away (and if social struggle does not exist, they will be taken away sooner rather than later). Ultimately, most anarchists would argue that social struggle is not an option -- we either do it or we put up with the all the petty (and not so petty) impositions of authority. If we do not say "no" then the powers that be will walk all over us.

As the history of neo-liberalism shows, a lack of social struggle is fully compatible with worsening conditions. Ultimately, if you want to be treated as a human being you have to stand up for your dignity -- and that means thinking and rebelling. As Bakunin argued in **God and the State**, human freedom and development is based on these. Without rebellion, without social struggle, humanity would stagnate beneath authority forever and never be in a position to be free. So anarchists agree wholeheartedly with the Abolitionist Frederick Douglass:

> *"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.*
>
> *"This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what a people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."* [**The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass**, vol. 2, p. 437]

Of course, being utterly wrong has not dented von Hayek's reputation with the right nor stopped him being quoted in arguments in favour of flexibility and free market reforms (what can we expect? The right still quote Milton Friedman whose track-record was equally impressive). Still, why let the actual development of the economies influenced by von Hayek's ideology get in the way? Perhaps it is fortunate that he once argued that economic theories can *"never be verified or falsified by reference to facts. All that we can and must verify is the presence of our assumptions in the particular case."* [**Individualism and Economic Order**, p. 73] With such a position all is saved -- the obvious problem is that capitalism is still not pure enough and the "reforms" must not only continue but be made deeper... As Kropotkin stressed, *"economists who continue to consider economic forces alone . . . without taking into account **the ideology of the State**, or the forces that each State necessarily places at the service of the rich . . . remain completely outside the realities of the economic and social world."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change"*, pp. 67-86, **SubStance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 72-3]

And, needless to say, while three decades of successful capitalist class war goes without mention in polite circles, documenting its results gets you denounced as advocating "class war"! It is more than pass the time when working class people should make that a reality -- particularly given the results of not doing so.

J.4.3 Are the new social movements a positive development for anarchists?

When assessing the revolutionary potential of our own era, we must note again that modern civilisation is under constant pressure from the potential catastrophes of social breakdown, ecological destruction, and proliferating weapons of mass destruction. These crises have drawn attention as never before to the inherently counter-evolutionary nature of the authoritarian paradigm, making more and more people aware that the human race is headed for extinction if it persists in outmoded forms of thought and behaviour. This awareness produces a favourable climate for the reception of new ideas, and thus an opening for radical educational efforts aimed at creating the mass transformation of consciousness which must take place alongside the creation of new liberatory institutions.

This receptiveness to new ideas has led to a number of new social movements in recent years. From the point of view of anarchism, the four most important of these are perhaps the feminist, ecology, peace, and social justice movements. Each of these movements contain a great deal of anarchist content, particularly insofar as they imply the need for decentralisation and direct democracy. Since we have already commented on the anarchist aspects of the ecology and feminist movements, here we will limit our remarks to the peace and social justice movements.

It is clear to many members of the peace movement that international disarmament, like the liberation of women, saving the planet's ecosystem, and preventing social breakdown, can never be attained without a shift of mass consciousness involving widespread rejection of hierarchy, which is based on the authoritarian principles of domination and exploitation. As C. George Bennello argued: *"Since peace involves the positive process of replacing violence by other means of settling conflict . . . it can be argued that some sort of institutional change is necessary. For if insurgency is satisfied with specific reform goals, and does not seek to transform the institutional structure of society by getting at its centralised make-up, the war*

system will probably not go away. This is really what we should mean by decentralising: making institutions serve human ends again by getting humans to be responsible at every level within them." [**From the Ground Up**, p. 31]

When pursued along gender, class, racial, ethnic, or national lines, domination and exploitation are the primary causes of resentment, hatred, anger, and hostility, which often explode into individual or organised violence. Given this, both domestic and international peace depend on decentralisation, i.e. dismantling hierarchies, thus replacing domination and exploitation by the anarchist principles of co-operation and mutual aid.

Direct democracy is the other side of decentralisation. In order for an organisation to spread power horizontally rather than concentrating it at the apex of a hierarchy, all of its members have to have an equal voice in making the decisions that affect them. Hence decentralisation implies self-management. So, anarchists argue, the peace movement implies anarchism because world peace is impossible without both decentralisation and direct democracy (*"a federated people would be a people organised for peace; what would they do with armies?"* [Proudhon, **Du Principe FÃ©dÃ©ratif**, pp. 320-1]). As Benello correctly argued, the *"anarchist perspective has an unparalleled relevance today because prevailing nuclear policies can be considered as an ultimate stage in the divergence between the interests of governments and their peoples . . . the implications when revealed serve to raise fundamental questions regarding the advisability of entrusting governments with questions of life and death . . . There is thus a pressing impetus to re-think the role, scale, and structure of national governments."* Moreover, *"[s]o long as profits are tied to defence production, speaking truth to the elites involved is not likely to get very far"* as *"it is only within the boundaries of the profit system that the corporate elites would have any space to move."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 138 and p. 34] Thus the peace movement implicitly contains a libertarian critique of both forms of the power system -- the political and economical.

In addition, certain of the practical aspects of the peace movement also suggest anarchistic elements. The use of non-violent direct action to protest against the war machine can only be viewed as a positive development by anarchists. Not only does it use effective, anarchistic methods of struggle it also radicalises those involved, making them more receptive to anarchist ideas and analysis.

If we look at the implications of *"nuclear free zones"* we can detect anarchistic tendencies within them. A nuclear free zone involves a town or region declaring an end of its association with the nuclear military industrial complex. They prohibit the research, production, transportation and deployment of nuclear weapons as well as renouncing the right to be defended by nuclear power. This movement was popular in the 1980s, with many areas in Europe and the Pacific Basin declaring that they were nuclear free zones. As Benello pointed out, *"[t]he development of campaigns for nuclear free zones suggests a strategy which can educate and radicalise local communities. Indeed, by extending the logic of the nuclear free zone idea, we can begin to flesh out a libertarian municipalist perspective which can help move our communities several steps towards autonomy from both the central government and the existing corporate system."* While the later development of these initiatives did not have the radicalising effects that Benello hoped for, they did *"represent a local initiative that does not depend on the federal government for action. Thus it is a step toward local empowerment . . . Steps that increase local autonomy change the power relations between the centre and its colonies . . . The nuclear free zone movement has a thrust which is clearly congruent with anarchist ideas . . . The same motives which go into the declaration of a nuclear free zone*

would dictate that in other areas where the state and the corporate systems services are dysfunctional and involve excessive costs, they should be dispensed with." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137 and pp. 140-1]

The social justice movement is composed of people seeking fair and compassionate solutions to problems such as poverty, unemployment, economic exploitation, discrimination, poor housing, lack of health insurance, wealth and income inequalities, and the like. In the aftermath of decades of especially single-minded pursuit of this priority by neo-liberal administrations, the United States, for example, is reaping the grim harvest: wages stagnate, personal debt soars, homelessness stalks the streets; social welfare budgets are slashed to the bone while poverty, unemployment, and underemployment grow; sweatshops mushrooming in the large cities; millions of Americans without any health insurance while others face rocketing costs; obscene wealth inequalities and falling social mobility; and so on. Britain under the neo-liberal policies of Thatcher, Major and Blair experienced a social deterioration similar to that in the US.

It is not difficult to show that the major problems concerning the social justice movement can all be traced back to the hierarchy and domination. For, given the purpose of hierarchy, the highest priority of the elites who control the state is necessarily to maintain their own power and privileges, regardless of the suffering involved for subordinate classes.

In short, social injustice is inherent in the exploitative functions of the state, which are made possible by the authoritarian form of state institutions. Similarly, the authoritarian structure of capitalist companies gives rise to social injustice due to exploitation producing massive income differentials and wealth disparity between owners/management and labour. Hence the success of the social justice movement, like that of the feminist, ecology, and peace movements, depends on dismantling hierarchies. This means not only that these movements all imply anarchism but that they are related in such a way that it is impossible to conceive one of them achieving its goals in isolation from any of the others. To take just one example, let us consider the relationship between social justice and peace, which can be seen by examining a specific social justice issue: labour rights.

The production of advanced weapons systems is highly profitable for capitalists, which is why more technologically complex and precise weapons keep getting built with government help (with the public paying the tab by way of taxes). Now, we may reasonably argue that it is a fundamental human right to be able to choose freely whether or not one will personally contribute to the production of technologies that could lead to the extinction of the human race. Yet because of the authoritarian form of the capitalist corporation, rank-and-file workers have virtually no say in whether the companies for which they work will produce such technologies. (To the objection that workers can always quit if they don't like company policy, the reply is that they may not be able to find other work and therefore that the choice is not genuinely free). Hence the only way that ordinary workers can obtain the right to be consulted on life-or-death company policies is to control the production process themselves, through self-management as production for need and use will never come from the employer. The owners of production in a capitalist society will never begin to take social priorities into account in the production process. The pursuit of ever greater profits is not compatible with social justice and responsibility.

For these reasons, the peace and social justice movements are fundamentally linked through their shared need for a worker-controlled economy. Moreover, extreme poverty makes

military service one of the few legal options open for many individuals to improve their social situation. These considerations illustrate further links between the peace and social justice movements -- and between those movements and anarchism, which is the conceptual "glue" that can potentially unite all the new social movement in a single anti-authoritarian coalition.

J.4.4 What is the *"economic structural crisis"*?

There is an ongoing structural crisis in the global capitalist economy. Compared to the post-war "Golden Age" of 1950 to 1973, the period from 1974 has seen a continual worsening in economic performance in the West and for Japan. For example, growth is lower, unemployment is far higher, labour productivity lower as is investment. Average rates of unemployment in the major industrialised countries have risen sharply since 1973, especially after 1979. Unemployment *"in the advanced capitalist countries . . . increased by 56 per cent between 1973 and 1980 (from an average 3.4 per cent to 5.3 per cent of the labour force) and by another 50 per cent since then (from 5.3 per cent of the labour force in 1980 to 8.0 per cent in 1994)."* Job insecurity has increased with, for example, the USA, having the worse job insecurity since the depression of the 1930s. [Takis Fotopoulos, **Towards and Inclusive Democracy**, p. 35 and p. 141] In addition, the world economy have become far less stable with regular financial crises sweeping the world of de-regulated capitalism every few years or so.

This crisis is not confined to the economy. It extends into the ecological and the social, with the quality of life and well-being decreasing as GDP grows (as we noted in section C.10, economic factors cannot, and do not, indicate human happiness). However, here we discuss economic factors. This does not imply that the social and ecological crises are unimportant or are reducible to the economy. Far from it. We concentrate on the economic factor simply because this is the factor usually stressed by the establishment and it is useful to indicate the divergence of reality and hype we are currently being subjected to.

Ironically enough, as Marxist Robert Brenner points out, *"as the neo-classical medicine has been administered in even stronger doses, the economy has performed steadily less well. The 1970s were worse than the 1960s, the 1980s worse than the 1970s, and the 1990s have been worse than the 1980s."* [*"The Economics of Global Turbulence"*, **New Left Review**, no. 229, p. 236] This is ironic because during the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s the right argued that too much equality and democracy harmed the economy, and so us all worse-of in the long run (due to lower growth, sluggish investment and so on). However, after decades of pro-capitalist governments, rising inequality, increased freedom for capital and its owners and managers, the weakening of trade unions and so on, economic growth has become worse!

If we look at the USA in the 1990s (usually presented as an economy that "got it right") we find that the *"cyclical upturn of the 1990s has, in terms of the main macro-economic indicators of growth -- output, investment, productivity, and real compensation -- has been even less dynamic than its relatively weak predecessors of the 1980s and the 1970s (not to mention those of the 1950s and 1960s)."* [Brenner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 5] Of course, the economy is presented as a success -- inequality is growing, the rich are getting richer and wealth is concentrating into fewer and fewer hands and so for the rich and finance capital, it can be considered a "Golden Age" and so is presented as such by the media. As economist Paul Krugman summarises, in America while the bulk of the population are working longer and harder to make ends meet *"the really big gains went to the really, really rich."* In fact,

â€œonly the top 1 percent has done better since the 1970s than it did in the generation after World War II. Once you get way up the scale, however, the gains have been spectacular -- the top tenth of a percent saw its income rise fivefold, and the top .01 percent of American is seven times richer than they were in 1973." Significantly, *the top 0.1% of Americans, a class with a minimum income of about $1.3 million and an average of about $3.5 million, receives more than 7 percent of all income -- up from just 2.2 percent in 1979."* [**The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 129 and p. 259]

So it is for this reason that it may be wrong to term this slow rot a "crisis" as it is hardly one for the ruling elite as their share in social wealth, power and income has steadily increased over this period. However, for the majority it is undoubtedly a crisis (the term *"silent depression"* has been accurately used to describe this). Unsurprisingly, when the chickens came home to roost under the Bush Junta and the elite faced economic collapse, the state bailed them out.

The only countries which saw substantial and dynamic growth after 1973 where those which used state intervention to violate the eternal "laws" of neo-classical economics, namely the South East Asian countries (in this they followed the example of Japan which had used state intervention to grow at massive rates after the war). Of course, before the economic crisis of 1997, capitalist ideologues argued that these countries were classic examples of "free market" economies. Right-wing icon F.A von Hayek asserted that *"South Korea and other newcomers"* had *"discovered the benefits of free markets."* [**1980s Unemployment and the Unions**, p. 113] In 1995, the **Heritage Foundation** (a right-wing think-tank) released its index of economic freedom. Four of the top seven countries were Asian, including Japan and Taiwan. All the Asian countries struggling just a few years later qualified as "free." Yet, as mentioned in section C.10.1, such claims were manifestly false: *"it was not **laissez-faire** policies that induced their spectacular growth. As a number of studies have shown, the expansion of the Asian Tigers was based on massive state intervention that boosted their export sectors, by public policies involving not only heavy protectionism but even deliberate distortion of market prices to stimulate investment and trade."* [Fotopoulos, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Moreover, for a long period these countries also banned unions and protest, but then for the right "free markets" always seem compatible with lack of freedom for workers to organise.

Needless to say, **after** the crisis of the late 1990s, the free-marketeers discovered the statism that had always been there and danced happily on the grave of what used to be called *"the Asian miracle"*. It was perverse to see the supporters of "free-market" capitalism concluding that history was rendering its verdict on the Asian model of capitalism while placing into the Memory Hole the awkward fact that until the crisis they themselves had taken great pains to deny that such a model existed! Such hypocrisy is not only truly sickening, it also undermines their own case for the wonders of "the market." For until the crisis appeared, the world's investors -- which is to say "the market" -- saw nothing but golden opportunities ahead for these "free" economies. They showed their faith by shoving billions into Asian equity markets, while foreign banks contentedly handed out billions in loans. If Asia's problems were systemic and the result of these countries' statist policies, then investors' failure to recognise this earlier is a blow against the market, not for it.

So, as can be seen, the global economy has been marked by an increasing stagnation, the slowing down of growth, weak (and jobless) recoveries, speculative bubbles driving what growth there is and increasing financial instability producing regular and deepening crisis. This is despite (or, more likely, **because of**) the free market reforms imposed and the

deregulation of finance capital (we say "because of" simply because neo-classical economics argue that pro-market reforms would increase growth and improve the economy, but as we noted in section C.1 such economics has little basis in reality and so their recommendations are hardly going to produce positive results). Of course as the ruling class have been doing well this underlying slowdown has been ignored and obviously claims of crisis are only raised when economic distress reach the elite.

Crisis (particularly financial crisis) has become increasingly visible, reflecting the underlying weakness of the global economy (rising inequality, lack of investment in producing real goods in favour of speculation in finance, etc.). This underlying weakness has been hidden by the speculator performance of the world's stock markets, which, ironically enough, has helped create that weakness to begin with! As one expert on Wall Street argues, *"Bond markets . . . hate economic strength . . . Stocks generally behave badly just as the real economy is at its strongest . . . Stocks thrive on a cool economy, and wither in a hot one."* In other words, real economic weakness is reflected in financial strength. Unsurprisingly, then, *"[w]hat might be called the rentier share of the corporate surplus -- dividends plus interest as a percentage of pre-tax profits and interest -- has risen sharply, from 20-30% in the 1950s to 60% in the 1990s."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 124 and p. 73]

This helps explain the stagnation which has afflicted the economies of the west. The rich have been placing more of their ever-expanding wealth in stocks, allowing this market to rise in the face of general economic torpor. Rather than being used for investment, surplus is being funnelled into the finance market (retained earnings in the US have decreased as interest and dividend payments have increased [Brenner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]). However, such markets do concentrate wealth very successfully even if *"the US financial system performs dismally at its advertised task, that of efficiently directing society's savings towards their optimal investment pursuits. The system is stupefyingly expensive, gives terrible signals for the allocation of capital, and has surprisingly little to do with real investment."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3] As most investment comes from internal funds, the rise in the rentiers share of the surplus has meant less investment and so the stagnation of the economy. The weakening economy has increased financial strength, which in turn leads to a weakening in the real economy. A vicious circle, and one reflected in the slowing of economic growth over the last 30 years.

The increasing dominance of finance capital has, in effect, created a market for government policies. As finance capital has become increasingly global in nature governments must secure, protect and expand the field of profit-making for financial capital and transnational corporations, otherwise they will be punished by dis-investment by global markets (i.e. finance capital). These policies have been at the expense of the underlying economy in general, and of the working class in particular:

> *"Rentier power was directed at labour, both organised and unorganised ranks of wage earners, because it regarded rising wages as a principal threat to the stable order. For obvious reasons, this goal was never stated very clearly, but financial markets understood the centrality of the struggle: protecting the value of their capital required the suppression of labour incomes."* [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 302]

For example, *"the practical effect of finance capital's hegemony was to lock the advanced economies and their governments in a malignant spiral, restricting them to bad choices. Like*

bondholders in general, the new governing consensus explicitly assumed that faster economic growth was dangerous -- threatening to the stable financial order -- so nations were effectively blocked from measures that might reduce permanent unemployment or ameliorate the decline in wages . . . The reality of slow growth, in turn, drove the governments into their deepening indebtedness, since the disappointing growth inevitably undermined tax revenues while it expanded the public welfare costs. The rentier regime repeatedly instructed governments to reform their spending priorities -- that is, withdraw benefits from dependent citizens." [Greider, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 297-8]

Of course, industrial capital **also** hates labour, so there is a basis of an alliance between the two sides of capital, even if they do disagree over the specifics of the economic policies implemented. Given that a key aspect of the neo-liberal reforms was the transformation of the labour market from a post-war sellers' market to a nineteenth century buyers' market with its related effects on workplace discipline, wage claims and proneness to strike, industrial capital could not but be happy even if its members quibbled over details. Doug Henwood correctly argues that *"Liberals and populists often search for potential allies among industrialists, reasoning that even if financial interests suffer in a boom, firms that trade in real, rather than fictitious, products would thrive when growth is strong. In general, industrialists are less sympathetic to these arguments. Employers in any industry like slack in the labour market; it makes for a pliant workforce, one unlikely to make demands or resist speedups."* In addition, *"many non-financial corporations have heavy financial interests."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123 and p. 135]

Thus the general stagnation afflicting much of the world, a stagnation which regularly develop into open crisis as the needs of finance undermine the real economy which, ultimately, it is dependent upon. The contradiction between short term profits and long term survival inherent in capitalism strikes again.

Crisis, as we have noted above, has appeared in areas previously considered as strong economies and it has been spreading. An important aspect of this crisis is the tendency for productive capacity to outstrip effective demand, which arises in large part from the imbalance between capitalists' need for a high rate of profit and their simultaneous need to ensure that workers have enough wealth and income so that they can keep buying the products on which those profits depend. Inequality has been increasing particularly in neo-liberal countries like the UK and USA, which means that the economy faces as realisation crisis (see section C.7), a crisis which was avoided in the short-term by deepening debt for working people (debt levels more than doubled between the 1950s to the 1990s, from 25% to over 60%). In 2007, the chickens came hole to roost with a global credit crunch much worse than the previous finance crises of the neo-liberal era.

Over-investment has been magnified due to the East-Asian Tigers and China which, thanks to their intervention in the market (and repressive regimes against labour), ensured they were a more profitable place to invest than elsewhere. Capital flooded into the area, ensuring a relative over-investment was inevitable. As we argued in section C.7.2, crisis is possible simply due to the lack of information provided by the price mechanism -- economic agents can react in such a way that the collective result of individually rational decisions is irrational. Thus the desire to reap profits in the Tiger economies resulted in a squeeze in profits as the aggregate investment decisions resulted in over-investment, and so over-production and falling profits.

In effect, the South East Asian economies suffered from the "fallacy of composition." When you are the first Asian export-driven economy, you are competing with high-cost Western producers and so your cheap workers, low taxes and lax environmental laws allow you to under-cut your competitors and make profits. However, as more tigers joined into the market, they end up competing against **each other** and so their profit margins would decrease towards their actual cost price rather than that of Western firms. With the decrease in profits, the capital that flowed into the region flowed back out, thus creating a crisis (and proving, incidentally, that free markets are destabilising and do not secure the best of all possible outcomes). Thus, the rentier regime, after weakening the Western economies, helped destabilise the Eastern ones too.

So, in the short-run, many large corporations and financial companies solved their profit problems by expanding production into "underdeveloped" countries so as to take advantage of the cheap labour there (and the state repression which ensured that cheapness) along with weaker environmental laws and lower taxes. Yet gradually they are running out of third-world populations to exploit. For the very process of "development" stimulated by the presence of Transnational Corporations in third-world nations increases competition and so, potentially, over-investment and, even more importantly, produces resistance in the form of unions, rebellions and so on, which tend to exert a downward pressure on the level of exploitation and profits.

This process reflects, in many ways, the rise of finance capital in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, existing industrialised nations experienced increased competition from Japan and Germany. As these nations re-industrialised, they placed increased pressure on the USA and other nations, reducing the global "degree of monopoly" and forcing them to compete with lower cost producers. In addition, full employment produced increasing resistance on the shop floor and in society as a whole (see section C.7.1), squeezing profits even more. Thus a combination of class struggle and global over-capacity resulted in the 1970s crisis. With the inability of the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector, to provide an adequate return, capital shifted into finance. In effect, it ran away from the success of working people asserting their rights at the point of production and elsewhere. This, combined with increased international competition, ensured the rise of finance capital which in return ensured the current stagnationist tendencies in the economy (tendencies made worse by the rise of the Asian Tiger economies in the 1980s).

From the contradictions between finance capital and the real economy, between capitalists' need for profit and human needs, between over-capacity and demand, and others, there has emerged what appears to be a long-term trend toward **permanent** stagnation of the capitalist economy with what growth spurts which do exist being fuelled by speculative bubbles as well as its benefits being monopolised by the few (so refuting the notion of "trickle down" economics). This trend has been apparent for several decades, as evidenced by the continuous upward adjustment of the rate of unemployment officially considered to be "normal" or "acceptable" during those decades, and by other symptoms as well such as falling growth, lower rates of profit and so on.

This stagnation has became even more obvious by the development of deep crisis in many countries at the end of the 2000s. This caused central banks to intervene in order to try and revive the real economies that have suffered under their rentier inspired policies since the 1970s. Such action may just ensure continued stagnation and reflated bubbles rather than a real-up turn. One thing is true, however, and that is the working class will pay the price of

any "solution" -- unless they organise and get rid of capitalism and the state. Ultimately, capitalism need profits to survive and such profits came from the fact that workers do not have economic liberty. Thus any "solution" within a capitalist framework means the increased oppression and exploitation of working class people.

J.4.5 Why is this *"economic structural crisis"* important to social struggle?

The ***"economic structural crisis"*** we out-lined in the last section has certain implications for anarchists and social struggle. Essentially, as C. George Benello argued, *"[i]f economic conditions worsen . . . then we are likely to find an openness to alternatives which have not been thought of since the depression of the 1930s . . . It is important to plan for a possible economic crisis, since it is not only practical, but also can serve as a method of mobilising a community in creative ways."* [**From the Ground Up**, p. 149]

In the face of economic stagnation and depression, attempts to generate more profits (i.e., increase exploitation) by increasing the authority of the boss grow. In addition, more people find it harder to make ends meet, running up debts to survive, face homelessness if they are made unemployed, and so on. This makes exploitation ever more visible and tend to push oppressed strata together in movements that seek to mitigate, and even remove, their oppression. As the capitalist era has worn on, these strata have become increasingly able to rebel and gain substantial political and economic improvements, which have, in addition, lead to an increasing willingness to do so because of rising expectations (about what is possible) and frustration (about what actually is). It is true that libertarians, the left and labour have suffered setbacks since the 1970s, but with increasing misery of the working class due to neo-liberal policies (and the *"economic structural crisis"* they create), it is only a matter of time before there is a resurgence of radicalism.

Anarchists will be in the forefront of this resurgence. For, with the discrediting and eventual fall of authoritarian state capitalism ("Communism") in Eastern Europe, the anti-authoritarian faction of the left will increasingly be seen as its only credible one. Thus the ongoing structural crisis of the global capitalist economy, combined with the other developments springing from what Takis Fotopoulos calls (in his book **Towards an Inclusive Democracy**) a *"multidimensional crisis"* (which includes economic, political, social, ecological and ideological aspects), could (potentially) lead to a new **international** anti-authoritarian alliance linking together the new (and not so new) social movements in the West (feminism, the Green movement, rank-and-file labour militancy, etc.) with non-authoritarian liberation movements in the Third World and new movements in formerly Stalinist countries. However, this is only likely to happen if anarchists take the lead in promoting alternatives and working with the mass of the population. Ways in which anarchist can do this are discussed in some detail in section J.5.

Thus the *"economic structural crisis"* can aid social struggle by placing the contrast of *"what is"* with what *"could be"* in a clear light. Any crisis brings forth the contradictions in capitalism, between the production of use values (things people need) and of exchange value (capitalist profits), between capitalism's claims of being based on liberty and the authoritarianism associated with wage labour (*"The general evidence of repression poses an ancient contradiction for capitalism: while it claims to promote human freedom, it profits concretely from the denial of freedom, most especially freedom for the workers employed by*

capitalist enterprise." [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 388]) and so on. It shakes to the bone popular faith in capitalism's ability to "deliver the goods" and gets more and more people thinking about alternatives to a system that places profit above and before people and planet. The crisis also, by its very nature, encourages workers and other oppressed sections of the population to resist and fight back, which in turn generates collective organisation (such as unions or workplace-based assemblies and councils), solidarity and direct action -- in other words, collective self-help and the awareness that the problems of working class people can only be solved by ourselves, by our own actions and organisations. The 1930s in the USA is a classic example of this process, with very militant struggles taking place in very difficult situations (see Howard Zinn's **A People's History of the United States** or Jeremy Brecher's **Strike!** for details).

In other words, the "economic structural crisis" gives radicals a lot potential to get their message across, even if the overall environment may make success seem difficult at times!

As well as encouraging workplace organisation due to the intensification of exploitation and authority provoked by the economic stagnant/depression, the "economic structural crisis" can encourage other forms of libertarian alternatives. For example, the *"economic structural crisis"* has resulted in the erosion of the welfare state (at least for the working class, for the elite state aid is never far away). This development has potential libertarian possibilities. *"The decline of the state,"* argues L. Gambone, *"makes necessary a revitalisation of the notions of direct action and mutual aid. Without Mama State to do it for us, we must create our own social services through mutual aid societies."* [**Syndicalism in Myth and Reality**, p. 12] As we argue in more depth in section J.5.16, such a movement of mutual aid has a long history in the working class and, as it is under our control, it cannot be withdrawn from us to enrich and empower the ruling class as state run systems have been. Thus the decline of state run social services could, potentially, see the rise of a network of self-managed, working class alternatives (equally, of course, it could see the end of all services to the weakest sections of our society -- which possibility comes about depends on what we do in the here and now. See section J.5.15 for an anarchist analysis of the welfare state).

Food Not Bombs! (FNB) is an excellent example of practical libertarian alternatives being generated by the economic crisis we are facing. FNB is a community-based group which helps the homeless through the direct action of its members. It also involves the homeless in helping themselves. It serves free food in public places to expose the plight of the homeless, the callousness of the system and our capacity to solve social problems through our own actions without government or capitalism. The constant harassment of FNB by the police, middle classes and the government illustrates their callousness to the plight of the poor and the failure of their institutions to build a society which cares for people more than money and property (and the police and prisons to protect them). The fact is that in the US many working and unemployed people have no **feeling** that they are entitled to basic human needs such as medicine, clothes, shelter, and food. FNB encourages poor people to make these demands, provides a space in which these demands can be voiced, and helps to breakdown the wall between hungry and not-hungry. The repression directed towards FNB by local police forces and governments also demonstrates the effectiveness of their activity and the possibility that it may radicalise those who get involved with the organisation. Charity is obviously one thing, mutual aid is something else. FNB is a politicised movement from below, based on solidarity, **not** charity as, in Kropotkin's words, charity *"bears a character of inspiration from above, and, accordingly, implies a certain superiority of the giver upon the receiver."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 222]

The last example of how economic stagnation can generate libertarian tendencies can be seen from the fact that, *"[h]istorically, at times of severe inflation or capital shortages, communities have been forced to rely on their own resources. During the Great Depression, many cities printed their own currency; this works to the extent that a community is able to maintain a viable internal economy which provides the necessities of life, independent of transactions with the outside."* [Benello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150]

These local currencies could be the basis of a mutual bank (see section J.5.5), providing interest-free loans to workers to form co-operatives and so build libertarian alternatives to capitalist firms, so eliminating the profits of capitalists by allowing workers to exchange the product of their labour with other workers. Moreover, *"local exchange systems strength local communities by increasing their self-reliance, empowering community members, and helping to protect them from the excesses of the global market."* [Frank Lindenfield, *"Economics for Anarchists,"* **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 24] In this way self-managing communes could be created, communes that replace hierarchical, top-down, government with collective decision making of community affairs based on directly democratic community assemblies. These self-governing communities and economies could federate together to co-operate on a wider scale and so create a counter-power to that of state and capitalism.

This confederal system of self-managing communities could also protect jobs as the *"globalisation of capital threatens local industries. A way has to be found to keep capital at home and so preserve the jobs and the communities that depend upon them. Protectionism is both undesirable and unworkable. But worker-ownership or workers' co-operatives are alternatives."* [Gambone, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 12-13] Local communities could provide the necessary support structures which could protect co-operatives from the corrupting effects of working in the capitalist market (see section J.5.11). They could also demand that rather than nationalise or bailout failing companies (or, for that matter, privatise state services or public works), they should be turned over (as Proudhon constantly argued) to workers co-operatives by aiding *"the **Labour Unions** to enter into a temporary possession of the industrial concerns"*, anarchists would provide *"an effective means to check the State Nationalisation"* in the period before a social revolution when *"State phases which we are traversing now seems to be unavoidable."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change"*, pp. 67-86, **SubStance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 77] In this way, economic liberty (self-management) could replace capitalism (wage slavery) and show that anarchism is a practical alternative to the chaos and authoritarianism of capitalism, even if these examples are initially fragmentally and limited in nature.

However, these developments should **not** be taken in isolation of collective struggle in the workplace or community. It is in the class struggle that the real potential for anarchy is created. The work of such organisations as **Food Not Bombs!** and the creation of local currencies and co-operatives are supplementary to the important task of creating workplace and community organisations that can create effective resistance to both state and capitalists, resistance that can overthrow both (see sections J.5.2 and J.5.1 respectively). *"Volunteer and service credit systems and alternative currencies by themselves may not be enough to replace the corporate capitalist system. Nevertheless, they can help build the economic strength of local currencies, empower local residents, and mitigate some of the consequences of poverty and unemployment . . . By the time a majority [of a community are involved it] will be well on its way to becoming a living embodiment of many anarchist ideals."* [Lindenfield, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28] And such a community would be a great aid in any strike or other social struggle which is going on!

The general economic crisis which we are facing has implications for social struggle and anarchist activism. It could be the basic of libertarian alternatives in our workplaces and communities, alternatives based on direct action, solidarity and self-management. These alternatives could include workplace and community unionism, co-operatives, mutual banks and other forms of anarchistic resistance to capitalism and the state.

Finally, we must stress that we are **not** arguing that working class people need an economic crisis to force them into struggle. Such "objectivism" (i.e. the placing of tendencies towards socialism in the development of capitalism, of objective factors, rather than in the class struggle, i.e. subjective factors) is best left to orthodox Marxists and Leninists as it has authoritarian implications. Rather we are aware that the class struggle, the subjective pressure on capitalism, is not independent of the conditions within which it takes place (and helps to create, we must add). Subjective revolt is always present under capitalism and, in the case of the 1970s, played a role in creating crisis. Faced with an economic crisis we are indicating what we can do in response to it and how it could, potentially, generate libertarian tendencies within society. Economic crisis could, in other words, provoke social struggle, collective action and generate anarchic tendencies in society. Equally, it could cause apathy, rejection of collective struggle and, perhaps, the embracing of **false** "solutions" such as right-wing populism, Leninism, or Fascism. We cannot predict how the future will develop, but it is true that if we do nothing then, obviously, libertarian tendencies will not grow and develop.

J.4.6 What are implications of anti-government and anti-big business feelings?

Public opinion polls show increasing feelings of disappointment and lack of confidence in governments and big business.

Some of the feelings of disappointment with government can be blamed on the anti-big-government rhetoric of conservatives and right-wing populists. Of course the Right would never dream of **really** dismantling the state, as is evident from the fact that government was as bureaucratic and expensive under "conservative" administrations. So this "decentralist" element of right-wing rhetoric is a con (and quickly jettisoned as required by the capitalist class). The "anti-Government" rhetoric is combined with the pro-business, pro-private tyranny, racist, anti-feminist, and homophobic hogwash disseminated by right-wing radio and TV propagandists and the business-backed media which shows that capitalism is not **genuinely** anti-authoritarian (nor could it ever be), as a social system based on liberty must entail.

When a right-wing politician, economist or business "leader" argues that the government is too big, they are rarely thinking of the same government functions you are. You may be thinking of subsidies for tobacco farmers or defence firms; they are thinking about pollution controls. You may be thinking of reforming welfare for the better; their idea is to dismantle the welfare state (for working class people). Moreover, with their support for "family values", "wholesome" television, bans on abortion and so on, their victory would see an increased level of government intrusion in many personal spheres as well as increased state support for the power of the boss over the worker and the landlord over the tenant.

If you look at what the Right has done and is doing, rather than what it is saying, you quickly see the ridiculous of claims of right-wing "libertarianism" (as well as who is really in charge).

Obstructing pollution and health regulations; defunding product safety laws; opening national parks to logging and mining, or closing them entirely; reducing taxes for the rich; eliminating the capital gains tax; allowing companies to fire striking workers; making it easier for big telecommunications companies to dominate the media; limiting companies' liability for unsafe products -- the objective here is obviously to help big business and the wealthy do what they want without government interference, helping the rich get richer and increasing "freedom" for private power combined with a state whose sole role is to protect that "liberty."

Such right-wing tendencies do not have anarchistic elements. The "anti-government" propaganda of big business is hardly anarchistic. What anarchists try to do is point out the hypocritical and contradictory nature of such rhetoric. The arguments against big government are equally applicable to business. **If** people are capable of making their own decisions, then why should this capability be denied in the workplace? As Noam Chomsky points out, while there is a *"leave it alone"* and *"do your own thing"* current within society, it in fact *"tells you that the propaganda system is working full-time, because there is no such ideology in the US. Business, for example, doesn't believe it. It has always insisted upon a powerful interventionist state to support its interests -- still does and always has -- back to the origins of American society. There's nothing individualistic about corporations. Those are big conglomerate institutions, essentially totalitarian in character, but hardly individualistic. Within them you're a cog in a big machine. There are few institutions in human society that have such strict hierarchy and top-down control as a business organisation. Nothing there about 'Don't tread on me.' You're being tread on all the time. The point of the ideology is to try to get other people, outside of the sectors of co-ordinated power, to fail to associate and enter into decision-making in the political arena themselves. The point is to atomise everyone else while leaving powerful sectors integrated and highly organised and of course dominating resources."* He goes on to note that there is *"a streak of independence and individuality in American culture which I think is a very good thing. This 'Don't tread on me' feeling is in many respects a healthy one. It's healthy up to the point where it atomises and keeps you from working together with other people. So it's got its healthy side and its negative side. It's the negative side that's emphasised naturally in the propaganda and indoctrination."* [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, pp. 279-80]

As opinion polls show, most people direct their dislike and distrust of institutions equally to Big Business, which shows that people are not stupid. Unfortunately, as Goebbels was well aware, tell a lie often enough and people start to believe it. Given the funds available to big business, its influence in the media, its backing of "think-tanks," the use of Public Relations companies, the support of economic "science," its extensive advertising and so on, it says a lot for the common sense of people that so many see big business for what it is. You simply cannot fool all the people all of the time!

However, these feelings can easily be turned into cynicism as well as a hopelessness that things can change for the better and that you cannot help change society. Or, even worse, they can be twisted into support for right, authoritarian, populism. The job for anarchists is to combat this and help point the healthy distrust people have for government and business towards a real solution to society's problems, namely a decentralised, self-managed anarchist society.

J.4.7 What about the communications revolution?

Another important factor working in favour of anarchists is the existence of a sophisticated global communications network and a high degree of education and literacy among the populations of the core industrialised nations. Together these two developments make possible nearly instantaneous sharing and public dissemination of information by members of various progressive and radical movements all over the globe -- a phenomenon that tends to reduce the effectiveness of repression by central authorities. The electronic-media and personal-computer revolutions also make it more difficult for elitist groups to maintain their previous monopolies of knowledge. Copy-left software and text, user-generated and shared content, file-sharing, all show that information, and its users, reaches its full potential when it is free. In short, the advent of the Information Age is potentially extremely subversive.

The very existence of the Internet provides anarchists with a powerful argument that decentralised structures can function effectively in a highly complex world. For the net has no centralised headquarters and is not subject to regulation by any centralised regulatory agency, yet it still manages to function effectively. Moreover, the net is also an effective way of anarchists and other radicals to communicate their ideas to others, share knowledge, work on common projects and co-ordinate activities and social struggle. By using the Internet, radicals can make their ideas accessible to people who otherwise would not come across anarchist ideas. In addition, and far more important than anarchists putting their ideas across, the fact is that the net allows everyone with access to express themselves freely, to communicate with others and get access (by visiting webpages and joining mailing lists and newsgroups) and give access (by creating webpages and joining in with on-line arguments) to new ideas and viewpoints. This is very anarchistic as it allows people to express themselves and start to consider new ideas, ideas which may change how they think and act.

Obviously we are aware that the vast majority of people in the world do not have access to telephones, never mind computers, but computer access is increasing in many countries, making it available, via work, libraries, schools, universities, and so on to more and more working class people.

Of course there is no denying that the implications of improved communications and information technology are ambiguous, implying Big Brother as well the ability of progressive and radical movements to organise. However, the point is only that the information revolution in combination with the other social developments **could** (but will not **necessarily**) contribute to a social paradigm shift. Obviously such a shift will not happen automatically. Indeed, it will not happen at all unless there is strong resistance to governmental and corporate attempts to limit public access to information, technology (e.g. encryption programs), censor peoples' communications and use of electronic media and track them on-line.

This use of the Internet and computers to spread the anarchist message is ironic. The rapid improvement in price-performance ratios of computers, software, and other technology today is often used to validate the faith in free market capitalism but that requires a monumental failure of historical memory as not just the Internet but also the computer represents a spectacular success of public investment. As late as the 1970s and early 1980s, according to Kenneth Flamm's **Creating the Computer**, the federal government was paying for 40 percent of all computer-related research and 60 to 75 percent of basic research. Even such modern-seeming gadgets as video terminals, the light pen, the drawing tablet, and the mouse evolved from Pentagon-sponsored research in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Even software was not without state influence, with databases having their root in US Air Force and Atomic

Energy Commission projects, artificial intelligence in military contracts back in the 1950s and airline reservation systems in 1950s air-defence systems. More than half of IBM's Research and Development budget came from government contracts in the 1950s and 1960s.

The motivation was national security, but the result has been the creation of comparative advantage in information technology for the United States that private firms have happily exploited and extended. When the returns were uncertain and difficult to capture, private firms were unwilling to invest, and government played the decisive role. And not for want of trying, for key players in the military first tried to convince businesses and investment bankers that a new and potentially profitable business opportunity was presenting itself, but they did not succeed and it was only when the market expanded and the returns were more definite that the government receded. While the risks and development costs were socialised, the gains were privatised. All of which make claims that the market would have done it anyway highly unlikely.

Looking beyond state aid to the computer industry we discover a *"do-it-yourself"* (and so self-managed) culture which was essential to its development. The first personal computer, for example, was invented by amateurs who wanted their own cheap machines. The existence of a "gift" economy among these amateurs and hobbyists was a necessary precondition for the development of PCs. Without this free sharing of information and knowledge, the development of computers would have been hindered and so socialistic relations between developers and within the working environment created the necessary conditions for the computer revolution. If this community had been marked by commercial relations, the chances are the necessary breakthroughs and knowledge would have remained monopolised by a few companies or individuals, so hindering the industry as a whole.

Encouragingly, this socialistic "gift economy" is still at the heart of computer/software development and the Internet. For example, the **Free Software Foundation** has developed the **General Public Licence** (GPL). GPL, also know as ***"copyleft"***, uses copyright to ensure that software remains free. Copyleft ensures that a piece of software is made available to everyone to use and modify as they desire. The only restriction is that any used or modified copyleft material must remain under copyleft, ensuring that others have the same rights as you did when you used the original code. It creates a commons which anyone may add to, but no one may subtract from. Placing software under GPL means that every contributor is assured that she, and all other uses, will be able to run, modify and redistribute the code indefinitely. Unlike commercial software, copyleft code ensures an increasing knowledge base from which individuals can draw from and, equally as important, contribute to. In this way everyone benefits as code can be improved by everyone, unlike commercial code.

Many will think that this essentially anarchistic system would be a failure. In fact, code developed in this way is far more reliable and sturdy than commercial software. Linux, for example, is a far superior operating system than DOS precisely **because** it draws on the collective experience, skill and knowledge of thousands of developers. Apache, the most popular web-server, is another freeware product and is acknowledged as the best available. The same can be said of other key web-technologies (most obviously PHP) and projects (Wikipedia springs to mind, although that project while based on co-operative and free activity is owned by a few people who have ultimate control). While non-anarchists may be surprised, anarchists are not. Mutual aid and co-operation are beneficial in the evolution of life, why not in the evolution of software? For anarchists, this "gift economy" at the heart of the communications revolution is an important development. It shows both the superiority of

common development as well as the walls built against innovation and decent products by property systems. We hope that such an economy will spread increasingly into the "real" world.

Another example of co-operation being aided by new technologies is Netwar. This refers to the use of the Internet by autonomous groups and social movements to co-ordinate action to influence and change society and fight government or business policy. This use of the Internet has steadily grown over the years, with a Rand corporation researcher, David Ronfeldt, arguing that this has become an important and powerful force (Rand is, and has been since its creation in 1948, a private appendage of the military industrial complex). In other words, activism and activists' power and influence has been fuelled by the advent of the information revolution. Through computer and communication networks, especially via the Internet, grassroots campaigns have flourished, and the most importantly, government elites have taken notice.

Ronfeldt specialises in issues of national security, especially in the areas of Latin American and the impact of new informational technologies. Ronfeldt and another colleague coined the term ***"netwar"*** in a Rand document entitled *"Cyberwar is Coming!"*. Ronfeldt's work became a source of discussion on the Internet in mid-March 1995 when Pacific News Service correspondent Joel Simon wrote an article about Ronfeldt's opinions on the influence of netwars on the political situation in Mexico after the Zapatista uprising. According to Simon, Ronfeldt holds that the work of social activists on the Internet has had a large influence -- helping to co-ordinate the large demonstrations in Mexico City in support of the Zapatistas and the proliferation of EZLN communiquÃ©s across the world via computer networks. These actions, Ronfeldt argues, have allowed a network of groups that oppose the Mexican Government to muster an international response, often within hours of actions by it. In effect, this has forced the Mexican government to maintain the facade of negotiations with the EZLN and has on many occasions, actually stopped the army from just going in to Chiapas and brutally massacring the Zapatistas.

Given that Ronfeldt was an employee of the Rand Corporation his comments indicate that the U.S. government and its military and intelligence wings are very interested in what the Left is doing on the Internet. Given that they would not be interested in this if it were not effective, we can say that this use of the "Information Super-Highway" is a positive example of the use of technology in ways un-planned of by those who initially developed it (let us not forget that the Internet was originally funded by the U.S. government and military). While the internet is being hyped as the next big marketplace, it is being subverted by activists -- an example of anarchistic trends within society worrying the powers that be.

A good example of this powerful tool is the incredible speed and range at which information travels the Internet about events concerning Mexico and the Zapatistas. When Alexander Cockburn wrote an article exposing a Chase Manhattan Bank memo about Chiapas and the Zapatistas in **Counterpunch**, only a small number of people read it because it is only a newsletter with a limited readership. The memo, written by Riordan Roett, argued that *"the [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and of security policy"*. In other words, if the Mexican government wants investment from Chase, it would have to crush the Zapatistas. This information was relatively ineffective when just confined to print but when it was uploaded to the Internet, it suddenly reached a very large number of people. These people in turn co-ordinated protests against the U.S and Mexican governments and especially Chase

Manhattan. Chase was eventually forced to attempt to distance itself from the Roett memo that it commissioned. Since then net-activism has grown.

Ronfeldt's research and opinion should be flattering for the Left. He is basically arguing that the efforts of activists on computers not only has been very effective (or at least has that potential), but more importantly, argues that the only way to counter this work is to follow the lead of social activists. Activists should understand the important implications of Ronfeldt's work: government elites are not only watching these actions (big surprise) but are also attempting to work against them. Thus Netwars and copyleft are good examples of anarchistic trends within society, using communications technology as a means of co-ordinating activity across the world in a libertarian fashion for libertarian goals.

J.5 What alternative social organisations do anarchists create?

Anarchism is all about ***"do it yourself"***: people helping each other out in order to secure a good society to live within and to protect, extend and enrich their personal freedom. As such anarchists are keenly aware of the importance of building alternatives to both capitalism and the state in the here and now. Only by creating practical alternatives can we show that anarchism is a viable possibility and train ourselves in the techniques and responsibilities of freedom:

> *"If we put into practice the principles of libertarian communism within our organisations, the more advanced and prepared we will be on that day when we come to adopt it completely."* [C.N.T. member, quoted by Graham Kelsey, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**,p. 79]

This idea (to quote the IWW) of *"building a new world in the shell of the old"* is a long standing one in anarchism. Proudhon during the 1848 revolution *"propose[d] that a provisional committee be set up"* in Paris and *"liaise with similar committees"* elsewhere in France. This would be *"a body representative of the proletariat . . ., a state within the state, in opposition to the bourgeois representatives."* He proclaimed to working class people that *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"* for *"the government can do nothing for you. But you can do everything for yourselves."* [*"Aux Pariotes"*, **La ReprÃ©santant du Peuple**, No. 33] This was echoed by Bakunin (see section H.2.8) while for revolutionary syndicalists the aim was *"to constitute within the bourgeois State a veritable socialist (economic and anarchic) State."* [Fernand Pelloutier, quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 22] By so doing we help create the environment within which individuals can manage their own affairs and develop their abilities to do so. In other words, we create ***"schools of anarchism"*** which lay the foundations for a better society as well as promoting and supporting social struggle against the current system. Make no mistake, the alternatives we discuss in this section are not an alternative to direct action and the need for social struggle - they are an expression of social struggle and a form of direct action. They are the framework by which social struggle can build and strengthen the anarchist tendencies within capitalist society which will ultimately replace it.

Therefore it is wrong to think that libertarians are indifferent to making life more bearable, even more enjoyable, under capitalism. A free society will not just appear from nowhere, it

will be created be individuals and communities with a long history of social struggle and organisation. For as Wilheim Reich so correctly pointed out:

> *"Quite obviously, a society that is to consist of 'free individuals,' to constitute a 'free community' and to administer itself, i.e. to 'govern itself,' cannot be suddenly created by decrees. It has to **evolve** organically."* [**The Mass Psychology of Fascism**, p. 241]

It is this organic evolution that anarchists promote when they create libertarian alternatives within capitalist society. These alternatives (be they workplace or community unions, co-operatives, mutual banks, and so on) are marked by certain common features such as being self-managed, being based upon equality, decentralised and working with other groups and associations within a confederal network based upon mutual aid and solidarity. In other words, they are **anarchist** in both spirit and structure and so create a practical bridge between now and the future free society.

Anarchists consider the building of alternatives as a key aspect of their activity under capitalism. This is because they, like all forms of direct action, are ***"schools of anarchy"*** and also because they make the transition to a free society easier. *"Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests,"* in Malatesta's words, *"the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95] By creating viable examples of ***"anarchy in action"*** we can show that our ideas are practical and convince people that they are not utopian. Therefore this section of the FAQ will indicate the alternatives anarchists support and **why** we support them.

The approach anarchists take to this activity could be termed ***"social unionism"*** -- the collective action of groups to change certain aspects (and, ultimately, all aspects) of their lives. This takes many different forms in many different areas (some of which, not all, are discussed here) -- but they share the same basic aspects of collective direct action, self-organisation, self-management, solidarity and mutual aid. These are a means *"of raising the morale of the workers, accustom them to free initiative and solidarity in a struggle for the good of everyone and render them capable of imagining, desiring and putting into practice an anarchist life."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28] Kropotkin summed up the anarchist perspective well when he argued that working class people had *"to form their own organisations for a direct struggle against capitalism"* and to *"take possession of the necessaries for production, and to control production."* [**Memiors of a Revolutionist**, p. 359] As historian J. Romero Maura correctly summarised, the *"anarchist revolution, when it came, would be essentially brought about by the working class. Revolutionaries needed to gather great strength and must beware of underestimating the strength of reaction"* and so anarchists *"logically decided that revolutionaries had better organise along the lines of labour organisations."* [*"The Spanish case"*, pp. 60-83, **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 66]

As will quickly become obvious in this discussion (as if it had not been so before!) anarchists are firm supporters of ***"self-help,"*** an expression that has been sadly corrupted (like freedom) by the right in recent times. Like freedom, self-help should be saved from the clutches of the right who have no real claim to that expression. Indeed, anarchism was created from and based itself upon working class self-help -- for what other interpretation can be gathered from

Proudhon's 1848 statement that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself"*? [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 125] So Anarchists have great faith in the abilities of working class people to work out for themselves what their problems are and act to solve them.

Anarchist support and promotion of alternatives is a **key** aspect of this process of self-liberation, and so a key aspect of anarchism. While strikes, boycotts, and other forms of high profile direct action may be more "sexy" than the long and hard task of creating and building social alternatives, these are the nuts and bolts of creating a new world as well as the infrastructure which supports the other activities. These alternatives involve both combative organisations (such as community and workplace unions) as well as more defensive and supportive ones (such as co-operatives and mutual banks). Both have their part to play in the class struggle, although the combative ones are the most important in creating the spirit of revolt and the possibility of creating an anarchist society.

We must also stress that anarchists look to organic tendencies within social struggle as the basis of any alternatives we try to create. As Kropotkin put it, anarchism is based *"on an analysis of **tendencies of an evolution that is already going on in society**, and on **induction** therefrom as to the future."* It is *"representative . . . of the creative, instructive power of the people themselves who aimed at developing institutions of common law in order to protect them from the power-seeking minority."* Anarchism bases itself on those tendencies that are created by the self-activity of working class people and while developing within capitalism are **in opposition** to it -- such tendencies are expressed in organisational form as unions and other forms of workplace struggle, co-operatives (both productive and credit), libertarian schools, and so on. For anarchism was *"born among the people -- in the struggles of real life and not in the philosopher's studio"* and owes its *"origin to the constructive, creative activity of the people . . . and to a protest -- a revolt against the external force which had thrust itself upon"* social institutions. [**Anarchism**, p. 158, p. 147, p. 150 and p. 149] This *"creative activity"* is expressed in the organisations created in the class struggle by working people, some of which we discuss in this section of the FAQ. Therefore, the alternatives anarchists support should not be viewed in isolation of social struggle and working class resistance to hierarchy -- the reverse in fact, as these alternatives are almost always expressions of that struggle.

Lastly, we should note we do not list all the forms of organisation anarchists create. For example, we have ignored solidarity groups (for workers on strike or in defence of struggles in other countries) and organisations which are created to campaign against or for certain issues or reforms. Anarchists are in favour of such organisations and work within them to spread anarchist ideas, tactics and organisational forms. However, these interest groups (while very useful) do not provide a framework for lasting change as do the ones we highlight below (see section J.1.4 for more details on anarchist opinions on such "single issue" campaigns). We have also ignored what have been called *"intentional communities."* This is when a group of individuals squat or buy land and other resources within capitalism and create their own anarchist commune in it. Most anarchists reject this idea as capitalism and the state must be fought, not ignored. In addition, due to their small size, they are rarely viable experiments in communal living and nearly always fail after a short time (for a good summary of Kropotkin's attitude to such communities, which can be taken as typical, see Graham Purchase's **Evolution & Revolution** [pp. 122-125]). Dropping out will not stop capitalism and the state and while such communities may try to ignore the system, they will find that the system will not ignore them -- they will come under competitive and ecological

pressures from capitalism whether they like it or not assuming they avoid direct political interference.

So the alternatives we discuss here are attempts to create anarchist alternatives within capitalism and which aim to **change** it (either by revolutionary or evolutionary means). They are based upon **challenging** capitalism and the state, not ignoring them by dropping out. Only by a process of direct action and building alternatives which are relevant to our daily lives can we revolutionise and change both ourselves and society.

J.5.1 What is community unionism?

Community unionism is our term for the process of creating participatory communities (called "communes" in classical anarchism) within the current society in order to transform it.

Basically, a community union is the creation of interested members of a community who decide to form an organisation to fight against injustice and improvements locally. It is a forum by which inhabitants can raise issues that affect themselves and others and provide a means of solving these problems. As such, it is a means of directly involving local people in the life of their own communities and collectively solving the problems facing them as both individuals and as part of a wider society. In this way, local people take part in deciding what effects them and their community and create a self-managed "dual power" to the local and national state. They also, by taking part in self-managed community assemblies, develop their ability to participate and manage their own affairs, so showing that the state is unnecessary and harmful to their interests. Politics, therefore, is not separated into a specialised activity that only certain people do (i.e. politicians). Instead, it becomes communalised and part of everyday life and in the hands of all.

As would be imagined, like the participatory communities that would exist in an anarchist society (see section I.5), the community union would be based upon a mass assembly of its members. Here would be discussed the issues that effect the membership and how to solve them. Thus issues like rent increases, school closures, rising cost of living, taxation, cuts and state-imposed "reforms" to the nature and quality of public services, utilities and resources, repressive laws and so on could be debated and action taken to combat them. Like the communes of a future anarchy, these community unions would be confederated with other unions in different areas in order to co-ordinate joint activity and solve common problems. These confederations would be based upon self-management, mandated and recallable delegates and the creation of administrative action committees to see that the memberships decisions are carried out.

The community union could also raise funds for strikes and other social protests, organise pickets, boycotts and generally aid others in struggle. By organising their own forms of direct action (such as tax and rent strikes, environmental protests and so on) they can weaken the state while building an self-managed infrastructure of co-operatives to replace the useful functions the state or capitalist firms currently provide. So, in addition to organising resistance to the state and capitalist firms, these community unions could play an important role in creating an alternative economy within capitalism. For example, such unions could have a mutual bank or credit union associated with them which could allow funds to be gathered for the creation of self-managed co-operatives and social services and centres. In

this way a communalised co-operative sector could develop, along with a communal confederation of community unions and their co-operative banks.

Such community unions have been formed in many different countries in recent years to fight against numerous attacks on the working class. In the late 1980s and early 1990s groups were created in neighbourhoods across Britain to organise non-payment of the Conservative government's Community Charge (popularly known as the poll tax, this tax was independent on income and was based on the electoral register). Federations of these groups were created to co-ordinate the struggle and pull resources and, in the end, ensured that the government withdrew the hated tax and helped push Thatcher out of government. In Ireland, similar groups were formed to defeat the privatisation of the water industry by a similar non-payment campaign in the mid-1990s.

However, few of these groups have been taken as part of a wider strategy to empower the local community but the few that have indicate the potential of such a strategy. This potential can be seen from two examples of libertarian community organising in Europe, one in Italy and another in Spain, while the neighbourhood assemblies in Argentina show that such popular self-government can and does develop spontaneously in struggle.

In Southern Italy, anarchists organised a very successful **Municipal Federation of the Base** (FMB) in Spezzano Albanese. This organisation, in the words of one activist, is *"an alternative to the power of the town hall"* and provides a *"glimpse of what a future libertarian society could be."* Its aim is *"the bringing together of all interests within the district. In intervening at a municipal level, we become involved not only in the world of work but also the life of the community . . . the FMB make counter proposals [to Town Hall decisions], which aren't presented to the Council but proposed for discussion in the area to raise people's level of consciousness. Whether they like it or not the Town Hall is obliged to take account of these proposals."* In addition, the FMB also supports co-operatives within it, so creating a communalised, self-managed economic sector within capitalism. Such a development helps to reduce the problems facing isolated co-operatives in a capitalist economy -- see section J.5.11 -- and was actively done in order to *"seek to bring together all the currents, all the problems and contradictions, to seek solutions"* to such problems facing co-operatives. [*"Community Organising in Southern Italy"*, pp. 16-19, **Black Flag**, no. 210, p. 17 and p. 18]

Elsewhere in Europe, the long, hard work of the C.N.T. in Spain has also resulted in mass village assemblies being created in the Puerto Real area, near Cadiz. These community assemblies came about to support an industrial struggle by shipyard workers. One C.N.T. member explains: *"Every Thursday of every week, in the towns and villages in the area, we had all-village assemblies where anyone connected with the particular issue [of the rationalisation of the shipyards], whether they were actually workers in the shipyard itself, or women or children or grandparents, could go along . . . and actually vote and take part in the decision making process of what was going to take place."* With such popular input and support, the shipyard workers won their struggle. However, the assembly continued after the strike and *"managed to link together twelve different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting . . . various aspects"* of capitalism including health, taxation, economic, ecological and cultural issues. Moreover, the struggle *"created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make*

decisions at the base and take them upwards." [**Anarcho-Syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control**, p. 6]

More recently, the December 2001 revolt against neo-liberalism in Argentina saw hundreds of neighbourhood assemblies created across the country. These quickly federated into *inter-barrial* assemblies to co-ordinate struggles. The assemblies occupied buildings, created communal projects like popular kitchens, community centres, day-care centres and built links with occupied workplaces. As one participant put it: *"The initial vocabulary was simply: Let's do things for ourselves, and do them right. Let's decide for ourselves. Let's decide democratically, and if we do, then let's explicitly agree that we're all equals here, that there are no bosses . . . We lead ourselves. We lead together. We lead and decide amongst ourselves . . . no one invented it . . . It just happened. We met one another on the corner and decided, enough! . . . Let's invent new organisational forms and reinvent society."* Another notes that this was people who *"begin to solve problems themselves, without turning to the institutions that caused the problems in the first place."* The neighbourhood assemblies ended a system in which *"we elected people to make our decisions for us . . . now we will make our own decisions."* While the *"anarchist movement has been talking about these ideas for years"* the movement took them up *"from necessity."* [Marina Sitrin (ed.), **Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina**, p. 41 and pp. 38-9]

The idea of community organising has long existed within anarchism. Kropotkin pointed to the directly democratic assemblies of Paris during the French Revolution> These were *"constituted as so many mediums of popular administration, it remained of the people, and this is what made the revolutionary power of these organisations."* This ensured that the local revolutionary councils *"which sprang from the popular movement was not separated from the people."* In this popular self-organisation *"the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was described later on as Direct Self-Government."* These assemblies federated to co-ordinate joint activity but it was based on their permanence: *"that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly."* In short, *"the Commune of Paris was not to be a governed State, but a people governing itself directly -- when possible -- without intermediaries, without masters"* and so *"the principles of anarchism . . . had their origin, not in theoretic speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution."* This *"laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation"*and Kropotkin predicted that *"the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."* [**Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 201, p. 203, pp. 210-1, p. 210, p. 204 and p. 206]

In Chile during 1925 *"a grass roots movement of great significance emerged,"* the tenant leagues (*ligas do arrendatarios*). The movement pledged to pay half their rent beginning the 1st of February, 1925, at huge public rallies (it should also be noted that *"Anarchist labour unionists had formed previous ligas do arrendatarios in 1907 and 1914."*). The tenants leagues were organised by ward and federated into a city-wide council. It was a vast organisation, with 12,000 tenants in just one ward of Santiago alone. The movement also *"press[ed] for a law which would legally recognise the lower rents they had begun paying . . . the leagues voted to declare a general strike . . . should a rent law not be passed."* The government gave in, although the landlords tried to get around it and, in response, on April 8th *"the anarchists in Santiago led a general strike in support of the universal rent reduction of 50 percent."* Official figures showed that rents *"fell sharply during 1915, due in part to the rent strikes"* and for the anarchists *"the tenant league movement had been the first step toward a new social order in Chile."* [Peter DeShazo, **Urban Workers and Labor Unions in**

Chile 1902-1927, p. 223, p. 327, p. 223, p. 225 and p. 226] As one Anarchist newspaper put it:

> *"This movement since its first moments had been essentially revolutionary. The tactics of direct action were preached by libertarians with highly successful results, because they managed to instil in the working classes the idea that if landlords would not accept the 50 percent lowering of rents, they should pay nothing at all. In libertarian terms, this is the same as taking possession of common property. It completes the first stage of what will become a social revolution."* [quoted by DeShazo, **Op. Cit.**, p. 226]

A similar concern for community organising and struggle was expressed in Spain. While the collectives during the revolution are well known, the CNT had long organised in the community and around non-workplace issues. As well as neighbourhood based defence committees to organise and co-ordinate struggles and insurrections, the CNT organised various community based struggles. The most famous example of this must be the rent strikes during the early 1930s in Barcelona. In 1931, the CNT's Construction Union organised a **"Economic Defence Commission"** to organise against high rents and lack of affordable housing. Its basic demand was for a 40% rent decrease but it also addressed unemployment and the cost of food. The campaign was launched by a mass meeting on May 1st, 1931. A series of meetings were held in the various working class neighbourhoods of Barcelona and in surrounding suburbs. This culminated in a mass meeting held at the Palace of Fine Arts on July 5th which raised a series of demands for the movement. By July, 45,000 people were taking part in the rent strike and this rose to over 100,000 by August. As well as refusing to pay rent, families were placed back into their homes from which they had been evicted. The movement spread to a number of the outlying towns which set up their own Economic Defence Commissions. The local groups co-ordinated actions their actions out of CNT union halls or local libertarian community centres. The movement faced increased state repression but in many parts of Barcelona landlords had been forced to come to terms with their tenants, agreeing to reduced rents rather than facing the prospect of having no income for an extended period or the landlord simply agreed to forget the unpaid rents from the period of the rent strike. [Nick Rider, *"The Practice of Direct Action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931"*, **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (ed.), pp. 79-105] As Abel Paz summarised:

> *"Unemployed workers did not receive or ask for state aid . . . The workers' first response to the economic crisis was the rent, gas, and electricity strike in mid-1933, which the CNT and FAI's Economic Defence Committee had been laying the foundations for since 1931. Likewise, house, street, and neighbourhood groups began to turn out en masse to stop evictions and other coercive acts ordered by the landlords (always with police support). The people were constantly mobilised. Women and youngsters were particularly active; it was they who challenged the police and stopped the endless evictions."* [**Durrutu in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 308]

In Gijon, the CNT *"reinforced its populist image by . . . its direct consumer campaigns. Some of these were organised through the federation's Anti-Unemployment Committee, which sponsored numerous rallies and marches in favour of 'bread and work.' While they focused on the issue of jobs, they also addressed more general concerns about the cost of living for poor families. In a May 1933 rally, for example, demonstrators asked that families of unemployed workers not be evicted from their homes, even if they fell behind on the rent."* The *"organisers made the connections between home and work and tried to draw the entire family into the struggle."* However, the CNT's *"most concerted attempt to bring in the larger*

community was the formation of a new syndicate, in the spring of 1932, for the Defence of Public Interests (SDIP). In contrast to a conventional union, which comprised groups of workers, the SDIP was organised through neighbourhood committees. Its specific purpose was to enforce a generous renters' rights law of December 1931 that had not been vigorously implemented. Following anarchosyndicalist strategy, the SDIP utilised various forms of direct action, from rent strikes, to mass demonstrations, to the reversal of evictions." This last action involved the local SDIP group going to a home, breaking the judge's official eviction seal and carrying the furniture back in from the street. They left their own sign: *"**opened by order** of the CNT."* The CNT's direct action strategies *"helped keep political discourse in the street, and encouraged people to pursue the same extra-legal channels of activism that they had developed under the monarchy."* [Pamela Beth Radcliff, **From mobilization to civil war**, pp. 287-288 and p. 289]

In these ways, grassroots movements from below were created, with direct democracy and participation becoming an inherent part of a local political culture of resistance, with people deciding things for themselves directly and without hierarchy. Such developments are the embryonic structures of a world based around participation and self-management, with a strong and dynamic community life. For, as Martin Buber argued, *"[t]he more a human group lets itself be represented in the management of its common affairs . . . the less communal life there is in it and the more impoverished it becomes as a community."* [**Paths in Utopia**, p. 133]

Anarchist support and encouragement of community unionism, by creating the means for communal self-management, helps to enrich the community as well as creating the organisational forms required to resist the state and capitalism. In this way we build the anti-state which will (hopefully) replace the state. Moreover, the combination of community unionism with workplace assemblies (as in Puerto Real), provides a mutual support network which can be very effective in helping winning struggles. For example, in Glasgow, Scotland in 1916, a massive rent strike was finally won when workers came out in strike in support of the rent strikers who been arrested for non-payment. Such developments indicate that Isaac Puente was correct:

> *"Libertarian Communism is a society organised without the state and without private ownership. And there is no need to invent anything or conjure up some new organisation for the purpose. The centres about which life in the future will be organised are already with us in the society of today: the free union and the free municipality [or Commune].*
>
> *"**The union**: in it combine spontaneously the workers from factories and all places of collective exploitation.*
>
> *"And **the free municipality**: an assembly . . . where, again in spontaneity, inhabitants . . . combine together, and which points the way to the solution of problems in social life . . .*
>
> *"Both kinds of organisation, run on federal and democratic principles, will be sovereign in their decision making, without being beholden to any higher body, their only obligation being to federate one with another as dictated by the economic requirement for liaison and communications bodies organised in industrial federations.*

> *"The **union and the free municipality** will assume the collective or common ownership of everything which is under private ownership at present [but collectively used] and will regulate production and consumption (in a word, the economy) in each locality.*
>
> *"The very bringing together of the two terms (communism and libertarian) is indicative in itself of the fusion of two ideas: one of them is collectivist, tending to bring about harmony in the whole through the contributions and co-operation of individuals, without undermining their independence in any way; while the other is individualist, seeking to reassure the individual that his independence will be respected."* [**Libertarian Communism**, pp. 6-7]

The combination of community unionism, along with industrial unionism (see next section), will be the key to creating an anarchist society, Community unionism, by creating the free commune within the state, allows us to become accustomed to managing our own affairs and seeing that an injury to one is an injury to all. In this way a social power is created in opposition to the state. The town council may still be in the hands of politicians, but neither they nor the central government would be able to move without worrying about what the people's reaction might be, as expressed and organised in their community assemblies and federations.

J.5.2 Why do anarchists support industrial unionism?

Simply because it is effective in resisting capitalist exploitation and winning reforms, ending capitalist oppression and expresses our ideas on how industry will be organised in an anarchist society. For workers *"have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once become thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing could withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there."* [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 116] Industrial unionism is simply libertarian workplace organisation and is the best way of organising and exercising this power.

Before discussing why anarchists support industrial unionism, we must point out that the type of unionism anarchists support has very little in common with that associated with reformist unions like the TUC in Britain or the AFL-CIO in the USA (see next section). In such unions, as Alexander Berkman pointed out, the *"rank and file have little say. They have delegated their power to leaders, and these have become the boss . . . Once you do that, the power you have delegated will be used against you and your interests every time."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 205] Reformist unions, even if they do organise by industry rather than by trade or craft, are top-heavy and bureaucratic. Thus they are organised in the same manner as capitalist firms or the state -- and like both of these, the officials at the top have different interests than those at the bottom. Little wonder anarchists oppose such forms of unionism as being counter to the interests of their members. The long history of union officials betraying their members is proof enough of this.

Anarchists propose a different kind of workplace organisation, one that is organised in a different manner than the mainstream unions. We will call this new kind of organisation ***"industrial unionism"*** (although perhaps industrial syndicalism, or just syndicalism, might be a better name for it). Some anarchists (particularly communist-anarchists) reject calling

these workplace organisations "unions" and instead prefer such terms as workplace resistance groups, workplace assemblies and workers councils. No matter what they are called, all class struggle anarchists support the same organisational structure we are going to outline. It is purely for convenience that we term this industrial unionism.

An industrial union is a union which organises all workers in a given workplace and so regardless of their actual trade everyone would be in the one union. On a building site, for example, brick-layers, plumbers, carpenters and so on would all be a member of the Building Workers Union. Each trade may have its own sections within the union (so that plumbers can discuss issues relating to their trade for example) but the core decision making focus would be an assembly of all workers employed in a workplace. As they all have the same employer, the same exploiter, it is logical for them to have the same union.

It is organised by the guiding principle that workers should directly control their own organisations and struggles. It is based upon workplace assemblies because workers have *"tremendous power"* as the *"creator of all wealth"* but *"the strength of the worker is not in the union meeting-hall; it is in the shop and factory, in the mill and mine. It is **there** that he [or she] must organise; there, on the job."* It is there that workers *"decide the matters at issue and carry their decisions out through the shop committees"* (whose members are *"under the direction and supervision of the workers"* and can be *"recalled at will"*). These committees are *"associated locally, regionally and nationally"* to produce *"a power tremendous in its scope and potentialities."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 205-6] This confederation is usually organised on two directions, between different workplaces in the same industry as well as between different workplaces in the same locality.

So industrial unionism is different from ordinary trade unionism (usually called business unionism by anarchists and syndicalists as it treats the union's job purely as the seller of its members' labour power). It is based on unions managed directly by the rank and file membership rather than by elected officials and bureaucrats. The industrial union is not based on where the worker lives (as is the case with many trade unions). Instead, the union is based and run from the workplace. It is there that union meetings are held, where workers are exploited and oppressed and where their economic power lies. Industrial unionism is based on local branch autonomy, with each branch managing its own affairs. No union officials have the power to declare strikes "unofficial" as every strike is decided upon by the membership is automatically "official" simply because the branch decided it in a mass meeting.

Power in such an organisation would be decentralised into the hands of the membership, as expressed in local workplace assemblies. To co-ordinate strikes and other forms of action, these autonomous branches are part of a federal structure. The mass meeting in the workplace mandates delegates to express the wishes of the membership at "labour councils" and "industrial federations." The labour council (*"Brouse du Travail"*, in French) is the federation of all workplace branches of all industries in a geographical area (say, for example, in a city or region) and it has the tasks of, among other things, education, propaganda and the promotion of solidarity between the different workplaces in its area. Due to the fact it combines all workers into one organisation, regardless of industry or union, the labour council plays a key role in increasing **class** consciousness and solidarity. The industrial federation organises all workplaces in the same industry so ensuring that workers in one part of the country or world are not producing goods so that the bosses *"can supply the market and lose nothing by the strike"*. So these federations are *"organised not by craft or trade but*

by industries, so that the whole industry -- and if necessary the whole working class -- could strike as one man." If that were done *"would any strike be lost?"* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 82] In practice, of course, the activities of these dual federations would overlap: labour councils would support an industry wide strike or action while industrial unions would support action conducted by its member unions called by labour councils.

However, industrial unionism should **not** be confused with a closed shop situation where workers are forced to join a union when they become a wage slave in a workplace. While anarchists do desire to see all workers unite in one organisation, it is vitally important that workers can leave a union and join another. The closed shop only empowers union bureaucrats and gives them even more power to control (and/or ignore) their members. As anarchist unionism has no bureaucrats, there is no need for the closed shop and its voluntary nature is essential in order to ensure that a union be subject to "exit" as well as "voice" for it to be responsive to its members wishes. As Albert Meltzer argued, the closed shop means that *"the [trade union] leadership becomes all-powerful since once it exerts its right to expel a member, that person is not only out of the union, but out of a job."* Anarcho-syndicalism, therefore, *"rejects the closed shop and relies on voluntary membership, and so avoids any leadership or bureaucracy."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 56] Without voluntary membership even the most libertarian union may become bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of its members and the class struggle (also see Tom Wetzel's excellent article *"The Origins of the Union Shop"*, [**Ideas & Action** no. 11]). Needless to say, if the union membership refuses to work with non-union members then that is a different situation. Then this is an issue of free association (as free association clearly implies the right **not** to associate). This issue rarely arises and most syndicalist unions operate in workplaces with other unions (the excepts arise, as happened frequently in Spanish labour history with the Marxist UGT, when the other union scabs when workers are on strike).

In industrial unionism, the membership, assembled in their place of work, are the ones to decide when to strike, when to pay strike pay, what tactics to use, what demands to make, what issues to fight over and whether an action is "official" or "unofficial". In this way the rank and file is in control of their union and, by confederating with other assemblies, they co-ordinate their forces with their fellow workers. As syndicalist activist Tom Brown made clear:

> *"The basis of the Syndicate is the mass meeting of workers assembled at their place of work . . . The meeting elects its factory committee and delegates. The factory Syndicate is federated to all other such committees in the locality . . . In the other direction, the factory, let us say engineering factory, is affiliated to the District Federation of Engineers. In turn the District Federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Engineers . . . Then, each industrial federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Labour . . . how the members of such committees are elected is most important. They are, first of all, not representatives like Members of Parliament who air their own views; they are delegates who carry the message of the workers who elect them. They do not tell the workers what the 'official' policy is; the workers tell them.*
>
> *"Delegates are subject to instant recall by the persons who elected them. None may sit for longer than two successive years, and four years must elapse before his [or her] next nomination. Very few will receive wages as delegates, and then only the district rate of wages for the industry . . .*

> *"It will be seen that in the Syndicate the members control the organisation -- not the bureaucrats controlling the members. In a trade union the higher up the pyramid a man is the more power he wields; in a Syndicate the higher he is the less power he has.*
>
> *"The factory Syndicate has full autonomy over its own affairs."* [**Syndicalism**, pp. 35-36]

Such federalism exists to co-ordinate struggle, to ensure that solidarity becomes more than a word written on banners. We are sure that many radicals will argue that such decentralised, confederal organisations would produce confusion and disunity. However, anarchists maintain that the statist, centralised form of organisation of the trades unions would produce indifference instead of involvement, heartlessness instead of solidarity, uniformity instead of unity, and elites instead of equality. The centralised form of organisation has been tried and tried again -- it has always failed. This is why the industrial union rejects centralisation, for it *"takes control too far away from the place of struggle to be effective on the workers' side."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] Centralisation leads to disempowerment, which in turn leads to indifference, **not** solidarity. Rudolf Rocker reminds us of the evil effects of centralism when he wrote:

> *"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 61]

Centralised unions ensure that it is the highest level of union officialdom which decides when workers are allowed to strike. Instead of those affected acting, *"the dispute must be reported to the district office of the union (and in some cases to an area office) then to head office, then back again . . . The worker is not allowed any direct approach to, or control of the problem."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] The end result is that *"through the innate conservatism of officialdom"* officials in centralised unions *"ordinarily use their great powers to prevent strikes or to drive their unions' members back to work after they have struck in concert with other workers."* The notion that a centralised organisation will be more radical *"has not developed in practice"* and the key problem *"is due not to the autonomy of the unions, but to the lack of it."* [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 38] So the industrial union *"is based on the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination . . . above everything else"* and so rejects centralism as an *"artifical organisation from above downwards which turns over the affairs of everybody in*

a lump to a small minority" and is *"always attended by barren official routine"* as well as *"lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 60]

This implies that as well as being decentralised and organised from the bottom up, the industrial union differs from the normal trade union by having no full-time officials. All union business is conducted by elected fellow workers who do their union activities after work or, if it has to be done during work hours, they get the wages they lost while on union business. In this way no bureaucracy of well paid officials is created and all union militants remain in direct contact with their fellow workers. Given that it is **their** wages, working conditions and so on that are effected by their union activity they have a real interest in making the union an effective organisation and ensuring that it reflects the interests of the rank and file. In addition, all part-time union "officials" are elected, mandated and recallable delegates. If the fellow worker who is elected to the local labour council or other union committee is not reflecting the opinions of those who mandated him or her then the union assembly can countermand their decision, recall them and replace them with someone who **will** reflect these decisions. In short, *"the Syndicalist stands firmly by these things -- mass meetings, delegates not bosses, the right of recall . . . Syndicalism is organised from the bottom upwards . . . all power comes from below and is controlled from below. This is a revolutionary principle."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

As can be seen, industrial unionism reflects anarchist ideas of organisation -- it is organised from the bottom up, it is decentralised and based upon federation and it is directly managed by its members in mass assemblies. It is anarchism applied to industry and the needs of the class struggle. By supporting such forms of organisations, anarchists are not only seeing *"anarchy in action"*, they are forming effective tools which can win the class war. By organising in this manner, workers are building the framework of a co-operative society within capitalism:

> *"the syndicate . . . has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life . . . It has, therefore, a double purpose: 1. As the fighting organisation of the workers against their employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding of their standard of living; 2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 56-7]

So *"[a]t the same time that syndicalism exerts this unrelenting pressure on capitalism, it tries to build the new social order within the old. The unions and the 'labour councils' are not merely means of struggle and instruments of social revolution; they are also the very structure around which to build a free society. The workers are to be educated in the job of destroying the old propertied order and in the task of reconstructing a stateless, libertarian society. The two go together."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 121] The industrial union is seen as prefiguring the future society, a society which (like the union) is decentralised and self-managed in all aspects.

Given the fact that workers wages have been stagnating (or, at best, falling behind productivity increases) across the world as the trade unions have been weakened and

marginalised (partly because of their own tactics, structure and politics) it is clear that there exists a great need for working people to organise to defend themselves. The centralised, top-down trade unions we are accustomed to have proved themselves incapable of effective struggle (and, indeed, the number of times they have sabotaged such struggle are countless -- a result not of "bad" leaders but of the way these unions organise and their role within capitalism). Hence anarchists support industrial unionism as an effective alternative to the malaise of official trade unionism. How anarchists aim to encourage such new forms of workplace organisation and struggle will be discussed in the section J.5.4.

One last point. We noted that many anarchists, particularly communist-anarchists, consider unions, even anarchosyndicalist ones, as having a strong reformist tendency (as discussed in section J.3.9). However, all anarchists recognise the importance of autonomous class struggle and the need for organisations to help fight that struggle. Thus anarchist-communists, instead of trying to organise industrial unions, apply the ideas of industrial unionism to workplace struggles. They would agree with the need to organise all workers into a mass assembly and to have elected, recallable administration committees to carry out the strikers wishes. This means that while such anarchists do not call their practical ideas "anarcho-syndicalism" nor the workplace assemblies they desire to create "unions," there are **extremely** similar in nature and so we can discuss both using the term "industrial unionism". The key difference is that many (if not most) anarcho-communists consider that permanent workplace organisations that aim to organise **all** workers would become reformist. Because of this they also see the need for anarchist to organise **as anarchists** in order to spread the anarchist message within them and keep their revolutionary aspects at the forefront.

Spontaneously created organisations of workers in struggle play an important role in both communist-anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist theory. Since both advocate that it is the workers, using their own organisations who will control their own struggles (and, eventually, their own revolution) in their own interests, not a vanguard party of elite political theorists, this is unsurprising. It matters little if the specific organisations are revolutionary industrial unions, factory committees, workers councils, or other labour formations. The important thing is that they are created and run by workers themselves. Meanwhile, anarchists are industrial guerrillas waging class war at the point of production in order to win improvements in the here and now and strengthen tendencies towards anarchism by showing that direct action and libertarian organisation is effective and can win partial expropriations of capitalist and state power. So while there are slight differences in terminology and practice, all anarchists would support the ideas of industrial organisation and struggle we have outlined above.

J.5.3 What attitude do anarchists take to existing unions?

As noted in the last section, anarchists desire to create organisations in the workplace radically different from the existing unions. The question now arises, what attitude do anarchists take to trade unions?

Before answering that question, we must stress that anarchists, no matter how hostile to trade unions as bureaucratic, reformist institutions, **are** in favour of working class struggle. This means that when trade union members or other workers are on strike anarchists will support them (unless the strike is reactionary -- for example, no anarchist would support a strike which is racist in nature). This is because anarchists consider it basic to their politics that you do not scab and you do not crawl. So, when reading anarchist criticisms of trade unions do

not for an instant think we do not support industrial struggles -- we do, we are just very critical of the unions that are sometimes involved.

So, what do anarchists think of the trade unions?

For the most part, one could call the typical anarchist opinion toward them as one of "hostile support." It is hostile insofar as anarchists are well aware of how bureaucratic these unions are and how they continually betray their members. Given that they are usually little more than "business" organisations, trying to sell their members labour-power for the best deal possible, it is unsurprising that they are bureaucratic and that the interests of the bureaucracy are at odds with those of its membership. However, our attitude is "supportive" in that even the worse trade union represents an attempt at working class solidarity and self-help, even if the organisation is now far removed from the initial protests and ideas that set the union up. For a worker to join a trade union means recognising, to some degree, that he or she has different interests from their boss (*"If the interests of labour and capital are the same, why the union?"* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 76]).

There is no way to explain the survival of unions other than the fact that there are different class interests and workers have understood that to promote their own interests they have to organise collectively. No amount of conservatism, bureaucracy or backwardness within the unions can obliterate this. The very existence of trade unions testifies to the existence of some level of basic class consciousness and the recognition that workers and capitalists do not have the same interests. Claims by trade union officials that the interests of workers and bosses are the same theoretically disarms both the union and its members and so weakens their struggles (after all, if bosses and workers have similar interests then any conflict is bad and the decisions of the boss must be in workers' interests!). That kind of nonsense is best left to the apologists of capitalism (see section F.3.2).

It is no surprise, then, the *"extreme opposition to the existing political and economic power"* to unions as they *"not only suspected every labour organisation of aiming to improve the condition of its members within the limits of the wage system, but they also looked upon the trade union as the deeply enemy of wage-slavery -- and they were right. Every labour organisation of sincere character must needs wage war upon the existing economic conditions, since the continuation of the same is synonymous with the exploitation and enslavement of labour."* [Max Baginski, *"Aim and Tactics of the Trade-Union Movement"*, pp. 297-306, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, Peter Glassgold (ed.), pp. 302-3] Thus anarchist viewpoints on this issue reflect the contradictory nature of trade unions -- on the one hand they are products of workers' struggle, but on the other they are bureaucratic, unresponsive, centralised and their full-time officials have no real interest in fighting against wage labour as it would put them out of a job. Indeed, the very nature of trade unionism ensures that the interests of the union (i.e. the full-time officials) come into conflict with the people they claim to represent.

This can best be seen from the disgraceful activities of the TGWU with respect to the Liverpool dockers in Britain. The union officials (and the TUC itself) refused to support their members after they had been sacked in 1995 for refusing to cross a picket line. The dockers organised their own struggle, contacting dockers' unions across the world and organised global solidarity actions. Moreover, a network of support groups sprung up across Britain to gather funds for their struggle (and, we are proud to note, anarchists have played their role in

supporting the strikers). Many trade unionists could tell similar stories of betrayal by "their" union.

This occurs because trade unions, in order to get recognition from a company, must be able to promise industrial peace. They need to enforce the contracts they sign with the bosses, even if this goes against the will of its members. Thus trade unions become a third force in industry, somewhere between management and the workers and pursuing its own interests. This need to enforce contracts soon ensures that the union becomes top-down and centralised -- otherwise its members would violate the unions agreements. They have to be able to control their members -- which usually means stopping them fighting the boss -- if they are to have anything to bargain with at the negotiation table. This may sound odd, but the point is that the union official has to sell the employer labour discipline and freedom from unofficial strikes as part of its side of the bargain otherwise the employer will ignore them.

The nature of trade unionism, then, is to take power away from out of local members and centralise it into the hands of officials at the top of the organisation. Thus union officials sell out their members because of the role trade unions play within society, not because they are nasty individuals (although some are). They behave as they do because they have too much power and, being full-time and highly paid, are unaccountable, in any real way, to their members. Power -- and wealth -- corrupts, no matter who you are (see *Chapter XI* of Alexander Berkman's **What is Anarchism?** for an excellent introduction to anarchist viewpoints on trade unions).

While, in normal times, most workers will not really question the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, this changes when workers face some threat. Then they are brought face to face with the fact that the trade union has interests separate from theirs. Hence we see trade unions agreeing to wage cuts, redundancies and so on -- after all, the full-time trade union official's job is not on the line! But, of course, while such a policy is in the short term interests of the officials, in the longer term it goes against their interests -- who wants to join a union which rolls over and presents no effective resistance to employers? Little wonder Michael Moore had a chapter entitled *"Why are Union Leaders So F#!@ing Stupid?"* in his book **Downsize This!** -- essential reading on how moronic trade union bureaucrats can actually be. Sadly trade union bureaucracy seems to afflict all who enter it with short-sightedness -- although the chickens do, finally, come home to roost, as the bureaucrats of the AFL, TUC and other trade unions are finding out in this era of global capital and falling membership. So while the activities of trade union leaders may seem crazy and short-sighted, these activities are forced upon them by their position and role within society -- which explains why they are so commonplace and why even radical leaders end up doing exactly the same thing in time.

However, few anarchists would call upon members of a trade union to tear-up their membership cards. While some anarchists have nothing but contempt (and rightly so) for trade unions (and so do not work within them -- but will support trade union members in struggle), the majority of anarchists take a more pragmatic viewpoint. If no alternative syndicalist union exists, anarchists will work within the existing unions (perhaps becoming shop-stewards -- few anarchists would agree to be elected to positions above this in any trade union, particularly if the post were full-time), spreading the anarchist message and trying to create a libertarian undercurrent which would hopefully blossom into a more anarchistic labour movement. So most anarchists "support" the trade unions only until we have created a viable libertarian alternative. Thus we will become trade union members while trying to spread anarchist ideas within and outwith them. This means that anarchists are flexible in

terms of our activity in the unions. For example, many IWW members were "two-carders" which meant they were also in the local AFL branch in their place of work and turned to the IWW when the AFL hierarchy refused to back strikes or other forms of direct action.

Anarchist activity within trade unions reflects our ideas on hierarchy and its corrupting effects. We reject the response of left-wing social democrats, Stalinists and mainstream Trotskyists to the problem of trade union betrayal, which is to try and elect 'better' officials. They see the problem primarily in terms of the individuals who hold the posts so ignoring the fact that individuals are shaped by the environment they live in and the role they play in society. Thus even the most left-wing and progressive individual will become a bureaucrat if they are placed within a bureaucracy.

We must note that the problem of corruption does not spring from the high-wages officials are paid (although this is a factor), but from the power they have over their members (which partly expresses itself in high pay). Any claim that electing "radical" full-time officials who refuse to take the high wages associated with the position will be better is false. The hierarchical nature of the trade union structure has to be changed, not side-effects of it. As the left has no problem with hierarchy as such, this explains why they support this form of "reform." They do not actually want to undercut whatever dependency the members have on leadership, they want to replace the leaders with "better" ones (i.e. themselves or members of their party) and so endlessly call upon the trade union bureaucracy to act **for** its members. In this way, they hope, trade unionists will see the need to support a "better" leadership -- namely themselves. Anarchists, in stark contrast, think that the problem is not that the leadership of the trade unions is weak, right-wing or does not act but that the union's membership follows them. Thus anarchists aim at undercutting reliance on leaders (be they left or right) by encouraging self-activity by the rank and file and awareness that hierarchical leadership as such is bad, not individual leaders. Anarchists encourage rank and file self-activity, **not** endless calls for trade union bureaucrats to act for us (as is unfortunately far too common on the left).

Instead of "reform" from above (which is doomed to failure), anarchists work at the bottom and attempt to empower the rank and file of the trade unions. It is self-evident that the more power, initiative and control that lies on the shop floor, the less the bureaucracy has. Thus anarchists work within and outwith the trade unions in order to increase the power of workers where it actually lies: at the point of production. This is usually done by creating networks of activists who spread anarchist ideas to their fellow workers (see next section). Hence Malatesta:

> *"The anarchists within the unions should strive to ensure that they remain open to all workers of whatever opinion or party on the sole condition that there is solidarity in the struggle against the bosses. They should oppose the corporatist spirit and any attempt to monopolise labour or organisation. They should prevent the Unions from becoming the tools of the politicians for electoral or other authoritarian ends; they should preach and practice direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and free initiative. They should strive to help members learn how to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to do without leaders and permanent officials.*
>
> *"They must, in short, remain anarchists, remain always in close touch with anarchists and remember that the workers' organisation is not the end but just one of the means,*

however important, of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism." [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 26-7]

As part of this activity anarchists promote the ideas of Industrial Unionism we highlighted in the last section -- namely direct workers control of struggle via workplace assemblies and recallable committees -- during times of struggle. However, anarchists are aware that economic struggle (and trade unionism as such) *"cannot be an end in itself, since the struggle must also be waged at a political level to distinguish the role of the State."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p, 115] Thus, as well as encouraging worker self-organisation and self-activity, anarchist groups also seek to politicise struggles and those involved in them. Only this process of self-activity and political discussion between equals **within** social struggles can ensure the process of working class self-liberation and the creation of new, more libertarian, forms of workplace organisation.

The result of such activity may be a new form of workplace organisation (either workplace assemblies or an anarcho-syndicalist union) or a reformed, more democratic version of the existing trade union (although few anarchists believe that the current trade unions can be reformed). Either way, the aim is to get as many members of the current labour movement to become anarchists as possible or, at the very least, take a more libertarian and radical approach to their unions and workplace struggle.

J.5.4 What are industrial networks?

Industrial networks are the means by which revolutionary industrial unions and other forms of libertarian workplace organisation can be created. The idea of Industrial Networks originated with the British section of the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** in the late 1980s. It was developed as a means of promoting libertarian ideas within the workplace, so creating the basis on which a workplace movement based upon the ideas of industrial unionism (see section J.5.2) could grow and expand.

The idea is very simple. An Industrial Network is a federation of militants in a given industry who support the ideas of anarchism and/or anarcho-syndicalism, namely direct action, solidarity and organisation from the bottom up (the difference between purely anarchist networks and anarcho-syndicalist ones will be highlighted later). It would *"initially be a political grouping in the economic sphere, aiming to build a less reactive but positive organisation within the industry. The long term aim . . . is, obviously, the creation of an anarcho-syndicalist union."* [**Winning the Class War**, p. 18]

The Industrial Network would be an organisation of groups of libertarians within a workplace united on an industrial basis. They would pull their resources together to fund a regular bulletin and other forms of propaganda which they would distribute within their workplaces. These bulletins and leaflets would raise and discuss issues related to work, how to fight back and win as well as placing workplace issues in a social and political context. This propaganda would present anarchist ideas of workplace organisation and resistance as well as general anarchist ideas and analysis. In this way anarchist ideas and tactics would be able to get a wider hearing and anarchists can have an input **as anarchists** into workplace struggles.

Traditionally, many syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists advocated the ***One Big Union*** strategy, the aim of which was to organise all workers into one organisation representing the

whole working class. Today, however, most anarcho-syndicalists, like other revolutionary anarchists, advocate workers assemblies for decision making during struggles which are open to all workers (union members or not) as they recognise that they face dual unionism (which means there are more than one union within a given workplace or country). This was the case, historically, in all countries with a large syndicalist union movement there were also socialist unions. Therefore most anarcho-syndicalists do not expect to ever get a majority of the working class into a revolutionary union before a revolutionary situation develops. In addition, revolutionary unions do not simply appear, they develop from previous struggles and require a lot of work and experience of which the Industrial Networks are but one aspect. The most significant revolutionary unions (such as the IWW, USI and CNT) were originally formed by unions and union militants with substantial experience of struggle behind them, some of whom were part of existing trade union bodies.

Thus industrial networks are intended to deal with the actual situation that confronts us, and provide a strategy for moving from our present reality toward out ultimate goals. The role of the anarchist group or syndicalist union would be to call workplace assemblies and their federation into councils, argue for direct workers control of struggle by these mass assemblies, promote direct action and solidarity, put across anarchist ideas and politics and keep things on the boil, so to speak. When one has only a handful of anarchists and syndicalists in a workplace or scattered across several workplaces there is a clear need for developing ways for these fellow workers to effectively act in union, rather than be isolated and relegated to more general agitation. A handful of anarchists cannot meaningfully call a general strike but we can agitate around specific industrial issues and organise our fellow workers to do something about them. Through such campaigns we demonstrate the advantages of rank-and-file unionism and direct action, show our fellow workers that our ideas are not mere abstract theory but can be implemented here and now, attract new members and supporters, and further develop our capacity to develop revolutionary unions in our workplaces. Thus the creation of Industrial Networks and the calling for workplace assemblies is a recognition of where we are now -- with anarchist ideas very much in the minority. Calling for workers assemblies is not an anarchist tactic per se, we must add, but a working class one developed and used plenty of times by workers in struggle (indeed, it was how the current trade unions were created). It also puts the onus on the reformists unions by appealing directly to their members as workers and exposing their bureaucrat organisations and reformist politics by creating an effective alternative to them.

A few anarchists reject the idea of Industrial Networks and instead support the idea of ***"rank and file"*** groups which aim to put pressure on the current trade unions to become more militant and democratic. Some even think that such groups can be used to reform the trade-unions into libertarian, revolutionary organisations -- called *"boring from within"* -- but most reject this as utopian, viewing the trade union bureaucracy as unreformable as the state's (and it is likely that rather than change the trade union, "boring from within" would change the syndicalists by watering down their ideas). Moreover, opponents of "rank and file" groups argue that they direct time and energy **away** from practical and constructive activity and instead waste them *"[b]y constantly arguing for changes to the union structure . . . the need for the leadership to be more accountable, etc., [and so] they not only [offer] false hope but [channel] energy and discontent away from the real problem -- the social democratic nature of reformist trade unions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11]

Supporters of the "rank and file" approach fear that the Industrial Networks will isolate anarchists from the mass of trade union members by creating tiny "pure" syndicalist groups.

Such a claim is rejected by supporters of Industrial Networks who argue that rather than being isolated from the majority of trade unionists they would be in contact with them where it counts, in the workplace and in struggle rather than in trade union meetings which many workers do not even attend:

> *"We have no intention of isolating ourselves from the many workers who make up the rest of the rank and file membership of the unions. We recognise that a large proportion of trade union members are only nominally so as the main activity of social democratic unions is outside the workplace . . .* ***We aim to unite and not divide workers.***
>
> *"It has been argued that social democratic unions will not tolerate this kind of activity, and that we would be all expelled and thus isolated. So be it. We, however, don't think that this will happen until . . . workplace militants had found a voice independent of the trade unions and so they become less useful to us anyway. Our aim is not to support social democracy, but to show it up as irrelevant to the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

Whatever the merits and disadvantages of both approaches are, it seems likely that the activity of both will overlap in practice with Industrial Networks operating within trade union branches and "rank and file" groups providing alternative structures for struggle.

As noted above, there is a slight difference between anarcho-syndicalist supporters of Industrial Networks and communist-anarchist ones. This is to do with how they see the function and aim of these networks. In the short run, both agree that such networks should agitate in their industry and call mass assemblies to organise resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression. They disagree on who can join the network groups and what their medium term aims should be. Anarcho-syndicalists aim for the Industrial Networks to be the focal point for the building of permanent syndicalist unions and so aim for the Industrial Networks to be open to all workers who accept the general aims of the organisation. Anarcho-communists, however, view Industrial Networks as a means of increasing anarchist ideas within the working class and are not primarily concerned about building syndicalist unions (while many anarcho-communists would support such a development, some do not). In the long term, they both aim for social revolution and workers' self-management of production.

These anarchists, therefore, see the need for workplace-based branches of an anarchist group along with the need for networks of militant 'rank and file' workers, but reject the idea of something that is one but pretends to be the other. They argue that, far from avoiding the problems of classical anarcho-syndicalism, such networks seem to emphasise one of the worst problems -- namely that of how the organisation remains anarchist but is open to non-anarchists. However, the similarities between the two positions are greater than the differences and so can be summarised together, as we have done here.

J.5.5 What forms of co-operative credit do anarchists support?

Anarchists tend to support must forms of co-operation, including those associated with credit and money. This co-operative banking takes many forms, such as credit unions, LETS

schemes and so on. In this section we discuss two main forms of co-operative credit, ***mutualism*** and ***LETS***.

Mutualism is the name for the ideas associated with Proudhon and his **Bank of the People**. Essentially, it is a confederation of credit unions in which working class people pool their funds and savings so allowing credit to be supplied at cost (no interest), so increasing the options available to them. LETS stands for **Local Exchange Trading Schemes** and is a similar idea in many ways (see **Bringing the Economy Home from the Market** by Ross V.G. Dobson on LETS). From its start in Canada, LETS has spread across the world and there are now hundreds of schemes involving hundreds of thousands of people.

Both schemes revolve around creating an alternative form of currency and credit within capitalism in order to allow working class people to work outwith the capitalist money system by creating a new circulating medium. In this way, it is hoped, workers would be able to improve their living and working conditions by having a source of community-based (very low interest) credit and so be less dependent on capitalists and the capitalist banking system. Supporters of mutualism considered it as the ideal way of reforming capitalism away for by making credit available to the ordinary worker at very cheap rates, the end of wage slavery could occur as workers would work for themselves by either purchasing the necessary tools required for their work or by buying the capitalists out.

Mutual credit, in short, is a form of credit co-operation, in which individuals pull their resources together in order to benefit themselves as individuals and as part of a community. It has the following key aspects:

> -- **Co-operation**: No-one owns the network. It is controlled by its members democratically.
>
> -- **Non-exploitative**: No interest is charged on account balances or credit. At most administrative costs are charged, a result of it being commonly owned and managed.
>
> -- **Consent**: Nothing happens without it, there is no compulsion to trade.
>
> -- **Labour-Notes**: They use their own type of money as a means of aiding "honest exchange."

It is hoped, by organising credit, working class people will be able to work for themselves and slowly but surely replace capitalism with a co-operative system based upon self-management. While LETS schemes do not have such grand schemes, historically mutualism aimed at working within and transforming capitalism to socialism. At the very least, LETS schemes reduce the power and influence of banks and finance capital within society as mutualism ensures that working people have a viable alternative to such parasites.

These ideas have had a long history within the socialist movement, originating in Britain in the early 19th century when Robert Owen and other Socialists raised the idea of labour notes and labour-exchanges as both a means of improving working class conditions within capitalism and of reforming capitalism into a society of confederated, self-governing communities. Such *"Equitable Labour Exchanges"* were *"founded at London and Birmingham in 1832"* with *"Labour notes and the exchange of small products."* [E. P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 870] Apparently independently

of these attempts in Britain at what would later be called mutualism, Proudhon arrived at the same ideas decades later in France: *"The People's Bank quite simply embodies the financial and economic aspects of the principle of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.'"* [**Selected Writings of P-J Proudhon**, p. 75] Similarly, in the USA (partly as a result of Joshua Warren's activities, who got the idea from Robert Owen) there was extensive discussion on labour notes, exchanges and free credit as a means of protecting workers from the evils of capitalism and ensuring their independence and freedom from wage slavery. When Proudhon's works appeared in North America, the basic arguments were well known and they were quickly adopted by radicals there.

Therefore the idea that mutual banking using labour money as a means to improve working class living conditions, even, perhaps, to achieve industrial democracy, self-management and the end of capitalism has a long history in Socialist thought. Unfortunately this aspect of socialism became less important with the rise of Marxism (which called these early socialists *"utopian"*). Attempts at such credit unions and alternative exchange schemes were generally replaced with attempts to build working class political parties and so constructive socialistic experiments and collective working class self-help was replaced by working within the capitalist state. Fortunately, history has had the last laugh on Marxism with working class people yet again creating anew the ideas of mutualism (as can be seen by the growth of LETS and other schemes of community money).

J.5.6 Why are mutual credit schemes important?

Mutual credit schemes are important because they are a way to improve working class life under capitalism and ensure that what money we do have is used to benefit ourselves rather than the elite. By organising credit, we retain control over it and so rather than being used to invest in capitalist schemes it can be used for socialist alternatives.

For example, rather than allow the poorest to be at the mercy of loan sharks a community, by organising credit, can ensure its members receive cheap credit. Rather than give capitalist banks bundles of cash to invest in capitalist firms seeking to extract profits from a locality, it can be used to fund a co-operative instead. Rather than invest pension schemes into the stock market and so help undermine workers pay and living standards by increasing rentier power, it can be used to invest in schemes to improve the community and its economy. In short, rather than bolster capitalist power and so control, mutual credit aims to undermine the power of capitalist banks and finance by placing as much money as much possible in working class hands.

This point is important, as the banking system is often considered "neutral" (particularly in capitalist economics). However, as Malatesta correctly argued, it would be *"a mistake to believe . . . that the banks are, or are in the main, a means to facilitate exchange; they are a means to speculate on exchange and currencies, to invest capital and to make it produce interest, and to fulfil other typically capitalist operations."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 100] Within capitalism, money is still to a large degree a commodity which is more than a convenient measure of work done in the production of goods and services. It can and does go anywhere in the world where it can get the best return for its owners, and so it tends to drain out of those communities that need it most (why else would a large company invest in a community unless the money it takes out of the area handsomely exceeds that put it?). It is the means by which capitalists can buy the liberty of working people and get them to

produce a surplus for them (wealth is, after all, *"a power invested in certain individuals by the institutions of society, to compel others to labour for their benefit."* [William Godwin, **The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, p. 130]). From this consideration alone, working class control of credit and money is an important part of the class struggle as having access to alternative sources of credit can increase working class options and power.

As we discussed in section B.3.2, credit is also an important form of social control -- people who have to pay their mortgage or visa bill are more pliable, less likely to strike or make other forms of political trouble. Credit also expands the consumption of the masses in the face of stagnant or falling wages so blunting the impact of increasing exploitation. Moreover, as an added bonus, there is a profit to be made as the *"rich need a place to earn interest on their surplus funds, and the rest of the population makes a juicy lending target."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 65]

Little wonder that the state (and the capitalists who run it) is so concerned to keep control of money in its own hands or the hands of its agents. With an increase in mutual credit, interest rates would drop, wealth would stay more in working class communities, and the social power of working people would increase (for people would be more likely to struggle for higher wages and better conditions -- as the fear of debt repayments would be less). By the creation of community-based credit unions that do not put their money into "Capital Markets" or into capitalist Banks working class people can control their own credit, their own retirement funds, and find ways of using money as a means of undermining capitalist power and supporting social struggle and change. In this way working people are controlling more and more of the money supply and using it in ways that will stop capital from using it to oppress and exploit them.

An example of why this can be important can be seen from the existing workers' pension fund system which is invested in the stock market in the hope that workers will receive an adequate pension in their old age. However, the only people actually winning are bankers and big companies. Unsurprisingly, the managers of these pension fund companies are investing in those firms with the highest returns, which are usually those who are downsizing or extracting most surplus value from their workforce (which in turn forces other companies to follow the same strategies to get access to the available funds in order to survive). Basically, if your money is used to downsize your fellow workers or increase the power of capital, then you are not only helping to make things harder for others like you, you are also helping making things worse for yourself. No person is an island, and increasing the clout of capital over the working class is going to affect you directly or indirectly. As such, the whole scheme is counter-productive as it effectively means workers have to experience insecurity, fear of downsizing and stagnating wages during their working lives in order to have slightly more money when they retire (assuming that they are fortunate enough to retire when the stock market is doing well rather than during one of its regular periods of financial instability, of course).

This highlights one of the tricks the capitalists are using against us, namely to get us to buy into the system through our fear of old age. Whether it is going into lifelong debt to buy a home or putting our money in the stock market, we are being encouraged to buy into the system which exploits us and so put its interests above our own. This makes us more easily controlled. We need to get away from living in fear and stop allowing ourselves to be deceived into behaving like "stakeholders" in a Plutocratic system where most shares really are held by an elite. As can be seen from the use of pension funds to buy out firms, increase

the size of transnationals and downsize the workforce, such "stakeholding" amounts to sacrificing both the present and the future while others benefit.

The real enemies are **not** working people who take part in such pension schemes. It is the people in power, those who manage the pension schemes and companies, who are trying to squeeze every last penny out of working people to finance higher profits and stock prices -- which the unemployment and impoverishment of workers on a world-wide scale aids. They control the governments of the world. They are making the "rules" of the current system. Hence the importance of limiting the money they have available, of creating community-based credit unions and mutual risk insurance co-operatives to increase our control over our money which can be used to empower ourselves, aid our struggles and create our own alternatives (see section B.3.2 for more anarchist views on mutual credit and its uses). Money, representing as it does the power of capital and the authority of the boss, is not "neutral" and control over it plays a role in the class struggle. We ignore such issues at our own peril.

J.5.7 Do most anarchists think mutual credit is sufficient to abolish capitalism?

The short answer is no, they do not. While the Individualist and Mutualist Anarchists do think that mutual banking is the only sure way of abolishing capitalism, most anarchists do not see it as an end in itself. Few think that capitalism can be reformed away in the manner assumed by Proudhon or Tucker.

In terms of the latter, increased access to credit does not address the relations of production and market power which exist within the economy and so any move for financial transformation has to be part of a broader attack on all forms of capitalist social power in order to be both useful and effective. In short, assuming that Individualist Anarchists do manage to organise a mutual banking scheme it cannot be assumed that as long as firms use wage-labour that any spurt in economic activity will have a long term effect of eliminating exploitation. What is more likely is that an economic crisis would develop as lowering unemployment results in a profits squeeze (as occurred in, say, the 1970s). Without a transformation in the relations of production, the net effect would be the usual capitalist business cycle.

For the former, for mutualists like Proudhon, mutual credit **was** seen as a means of transforming the relations of production (as discussed in section G.4.1, unlike Proudhon, Tucker did not oppose wage-labour and just sought to make it non-exploitative). For Proudhon, mutual credit was seen as the means by which co-operatives could be created to end wage-labour. The organisation of labour would combine with the organisation of credit to end capitalism as workers would fund co-operative firms and their higher efficiency would soon drive capitalist firms out of business. Thus *"the Exchange Bank is the organisation of labour's greatest assetâ€•* as it allowed *"the new form of society to be defined and created among the workers."* [Proudhon, **Correspondance**, vol. 2, pp. 307-8] *"To organise credit and circulation is to increase production,"* Proudhon stressed, *"to determine the new shapes of industrial society."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 6, p. 372] So, overtime, co-operative credit would produce co-operative production while associated labour would increase the funds available to associated credit. For Proudhon the *"organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same"* and by recognising this the workers *"would soon have wrested*

alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 59-60]

Bakunin, while he was *"convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future"* and could *"hardly oppose the creation of co-operatives associations"* now as *we find them necessary in many respects,"* argued that Proudhonâ€™s hope for gradual change by means of mutual banking and the higher efficiency of workersâ€™ co-operatives were unlikely to be realised. This was because such claims *"do not take into account the vast advantage that the bourgeoisie enjoys against the proletariat through its monopoly on wealth, science, and secular custom, as well as through the approval -- overt or covert but always active -- of States and through the whole organisation of modern society. The fight is too unequal for success reasonably to be expected."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153 and p. 152] Thus capitalism *"does not fear the competition of workers' associations -- neither consumers', producers', nor mutual credit associations -- for the simple reason that workers' organisations, left to their own resources, will never be able to accumulate sufficiently strong aggregations of capital capable of waging an effective struggle against bourgeois capital."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 293]

So, for most anarchists, it is only in combination with other forms of working class self-activity and self-management that mutualist institutions could play an important role in the class struggle. In other words, few anarchists think that mutualist credit or co-operatives are enough in themselves to end capitalism. Revolutionary action is also required -- such as the expropriation of capital by workers associations.

This does not mean anarchists reject co-operation under capitalism. By creating a network of mutual banks to aid in creating co-operatives, union organising drives, supporting strikes (either directly by gifts/loans or funding consumer co-operatives which could supply food and other essentials free or at a reduced cost), mutualism can be used as a means of helping build libertarian alternatives within the capitalist system. Such alternatives, while making life better under the current system, also play a role in overcoming that system by aiding those in struggle. Thus Bakunin:

> *"let us co-operate in our common enterprise to make our lives a little bit more supportable and less difficult. Let us, wherever possible, establish producer-consumer co-operatives and mutual credit societies which, though under the present economic conditions they cannot in any real or adequate way free us, are nevertheless important inasmuch they train the workers in the practices of managing the economy and plant the precious seeds for the organisation of the future."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 173]

So while few anarchists think that mutualism would be enough in itself, it can play a role in the class struggle. As a compliment to direct action and workplace and community struggle and organisation, mutualism has an important role in working class self-liberation. For example, community unions (see section J.5.1) could create their own mutual banks and money which could be used to fund co-operatives and support social struggle. In this way a healthy communalised co-operative sector could develop within capitalism, overcoming the problems of isolation facing workplace co-operatives (see section J.5.11) as well as providing solidarity for those in struggle.

Mutual banking can be a way of building upon and strengthening the anarchistic social relations within capitalism. For even under capitalism and statism, there exists extensive mutual aid and, indeed, anarchistic and communistic ways of living. For example, communistic arrangements exist within families, between friends and lovers and within anarchist organisations. Mutual credit could be a means of creating a bridge between this alternative (gift) "economy" and capitalism. The mutualist alternative economy would help strength communities and bonds of trust between individuals, and this would increase the scope of the communistic sector as more and more people help each other without the medium of exchange. In other words, mutualism will help the gift economy that exists within capitalism to grow and develop.

J.5.8 What would a modern system of mutual banking look like?

One scenario for an updated system of mutual banking would be for a community to begin issuing an alternative currency accepted as money by all individuals within it. Let us call this currency-issuing association a "mutual barter clearinghouse," or just "clearinghouse" for short.

The clearinghouse would have a twofold mandate: first, to extend credit at cost to members; second, to manage the circulation of credit-money within the system, charging only a small service fee (one percent or less) sufficient to cover its costs of operation, including labour costs involved in issuing credit and keeping track of transactions, insuring itself against losses from uncollectable debts, and so forth. Some current experiments in community money use labour time worked as their basis (thus notes would be marked one-hour) while others have notes tied to the value of the state currency (thus, say, a Scottish town would issue pounds assumed to be the same as a British pound note).

The clearinghouse would be organised and function as follows. People could join the clearinghouse by pledging a certain amount of property (including savings) as collateral. On the basis of this pledge, an account would be opened for the new member and credited with a sum of mutual pounds equivalent to some fraction of the assessed value of the property pledged. The new member would agree to repay this amount plus the service fee into their account by a certain date. The mutual pounds could then be transferred through the clearinghouse to the accounts of other members, who have agreed to receive mutual money in payment for all debts or work done.

The opening of this sort of account is, of course, the same as taking out a "loan" in the sense that a commercial bank "lends" by extending credit to a borrower in return for a signed note pledging a certain amount of property as security. The crucial difference is that the clearinghouse does not purport to be "lending" a sum of money that it **already has,** as is fraudulently claimed by commercial banks. Instead it honestly admits that it is creating new money in the form of credit. New accounts can also be opened simply by telling the clearinghouse that one wants an account and then arranging with other people who already have balances to transfer mutual money into one's account in exchange for goods or services.

Another form of mutual credit are LETS systems. In this a number of people get together to form an association. They create a unit of exchange (which is equal in value to a unit of the national currency usually), choose a name for it and offer each other goods and services

priced in these units. These offers and wants are listed in a directory which is circulated periodically to members. Members decide who they wish to trade with and how much trading they wish to do. When a transaction is completed, this is acknowledged with a "cheque" made out by the buyer and given to the seller. These are passed on to the system accounts administration which keeps a record of all transactions and periodically sends members a statement of their accounts. The accounts administration is elected by, and accountable to, the membership and information about balances is available to all members.

Unlike the first system described, members do not have to present property as collateral. Members of a LETS scheme can go into "debt" without it, although "debt" is the wrong word as members are not so much going into debt as committing themselves to do some work within the system in the future and by so doing they are creating spending power. The willingness of members to incur such a commitment could be described as a service to the community as others are free to use the units so created to trade themselves. Indeed, the number of units in existence exactly matches the amount of real wealth being exchanged. The system only works if members are willing to spend. It runs on trust and builds up trust as the system is used.

It is likely that a fully functioning mutual banking system would incorporate aspects of both these systems. The need for collateral may be used when members require very large loans while the LETS system of negative credit as a commitment to future work would be the normal function of the system. If the mutual bank agrees a maximum limit for negative balances, it may agree to take collateral for transactions that exceed this limit. However, it is obvious that any mutual banking system will find the best means of working in the circumstances it finds itself.

J.5.9 How does mutual credit work?

Let us consider an example of how business would be transacted using mutual credit within capitalism. There are two possibilities, depending on whether the mutual credit is based upon whether the creditor can provide collateral or not. We will take the case with collateral first.

Suppose that A, an organic farmer, pledges as collateral a certain plot of land that she owns and on which she wishes to build a house. The land is valued at, say, Â£40,000 in the capitalist market and by pledging the land, A is able to open a credit account at the clearinghouse for, say, Â£30,000 in mutual money. She does so knowing that there are many other members of the system who are carpenters, electricians, plumbers, hardware suppliers, and so on who are willing to accept mutual pounds in payment for their products or services.

It is easy to see why other subscriber-members, who have also obtained mutual credit and are therefore in debt to the clearinghouse, would be willing to accept such notes in return for their goods and services. They need to collect mutual currency to repay their debts. Why would someone who is not in debt for mutual currency be willing to accept it as money?

To see why, let us suppose that B, an underemployed carpenter, currently has no account at the clearinghouse but that he knows about it and the people who operate and use it. After examining its list of members and becoming familiar with the policies of the new organisation, he is convinced that it does not extend credit frivolously to untrustworthy recipients who are likely to default. He also knows that if he contracts to do the carpentry on

A's new house and agrees to be paid for his work in mutual money, he will then be able to use it to buy groceries, clothes, and other goods and services from various people in the community who already belong to the system.

Thus B will be willing, and perhaps even eager (especially if the economy is in recession and regular money is tight) to work for A and receive payment in mutual credit. For he knows that if he is paid, say, Â£8,000 in mutual money for his labour on A's house, this payment constitutes, in effect, 20 percent of a mortgage on her land, the value of which is represented by her mutual credit. B also understands that A has promised to repay this mortgage by producing new value -- that is, by growing organic fruits and vegetables and selling them to other members of the system -- and that it is this promise to produce new wealth which gives her mutual credit its value as a medium of exchange.

To put this point slightly differently, A's mutual credit can be thought of as a lien against goods or services which she will create in the future. As security of this guarantee, she agrees that if she is unable for some reason to fulfil her obligation, the land she has pledged will be sold to other members. In this way, a value sufficient to cancel her debt (and probably then some) will be returned to the system. This provision insures that the clearinghouse is able to balance its books and gives members confidence that mutual money is sound.

It should be noticed that since new wealth is continually being created, the basis for new mutual credit is also being created at the same time. Thus, suppose that after A's new house has been built, her daughter, C, along with a group of friends D, E, F, . . . , decide that they want to start a co-operative restaurant but that C and her friends do not have enough collateral to obtain a start-up loan. A, however, is willing to co-sign a note for them, pledging her new house (valued at say, Â£80,000) as security. On this basis, C and her partners are able to obtain Â£60,000 worth of mutual credit, which they then use to buy equipment, supplies, furniture, advertising, etc. to start their restaurant.

This example illustrates one way in which people without property are able to obtain credit in the new system. Another way -- for those who cannot find (or perhaps do not wish to ask) someone with property to co-sign for them -- is to make a down payment and then use the property which is to be purchased on credit as security, as in the current method of obtaining a home or other loan. With mutual credit, however, this form of financing can be used to purchase anything, including the means of production and other equipment required for workers to work for themselves instead of a boss.

Which brings us to the case of an individual without means for providing collateral -- say, for example Z, a plumber, who currently does not own the land she uses. In such a case, Z, who still desires work done, would contact other members of the mutual bank with the skills she requires. Those members with the appropriate skills and who agree to work with her commit themselves to do the required tasks. In return, Z gives them a check in mutual dollars which is credited to their account and deducted from hers. She does not pay interest on this issue of credit and the sum only represents her willingness to do some work for other members of the bank at some future date.

The mutual bank does not have to worry about the negative balance, as this does not create a loss within the group as the minuses which have been incurred have already created wealth (pluses) within the system and it stays there. It is likely, of course, that the mutual bank

would agree an upper limit on negative balances and require some form of collateral for credit greater than this limit, but for most exchanges this would be unlikely to be relevant.

It is important to remember that mutual money has no **intrinsic** value, since they cannot be redeemed (at the mutual bank) in gold or anything else. All they are promises of future labour. They are a mere medium for the facilitation of exchange used to facilitate the increase production of goods and services (as discussed in section G.3.6, it is this increase which ensures that mutual credit is not inflationary). This also ensures enough work for all and, ultimately, the end of exploitation as working people can buy their own means of production and so end wage-labour by self-employment and co-operation.

For more information on how mutual banking is seen to work see the collection of Proudhon's works collected in **Proudhon's Solution to the Social Problem**. William B. Greene's **Mutual Baking** and Benjamin Tucker's **Instead of a Book** should also be consulted.

J.5.10 Why do anarchists support co-operatives?

Support for co-operatives is a common feature in anarchist writings. In fact, support for democratic workplaces is as old as use of the term anarchist to describe our ideas. So why do anarchists support co-operatives? It is because they are the only way to guarantee freedom in production and so *"the co-operative system . . . carries within it the germ of the future economic order."* [Bakunin, **The Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 385]

Anarchists support all kinds of co-operatives: housing, food, consumer, credit and workplace ones. All forms of co-operation are useful as they accustom their members to work together for their common benefit as well as ensuring extensive experience in managing their own affairs. As such, all forms of co-operatives are (to some degree) useful examples of self-management and anarchy in action. Here we will concentrate on producer co-operatives as only these can **replace** the capitalist mode of production. They are examples of a new mode of production, one based upon associated, not wage, labour. As long as wage-labour exists within industry and agriculture then capitalism remains and no amount of other kinds of co-operatives will end it. If wage slavery exists, then so will exploitation and oppression and anarchy will remain but a hope.

Co-operatives are the *"germ of the future"* for two reasons. Firstly, co-operatives are based on one worker, one vote. In other words those who do the work manage the workplace within which they do it (i.e. they are based on workers' self-management). Thus co-operatives are an example of the "horizontal" directly democratic organisation that anarchists support and so are an example of *"anarchy in action"* (even if in an imperfect way) within capitalism. Secondly, they are an example of working class self-help and self-activity. Instead of relying on others to provide work, co-operatives show that production can be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of order takers.

Workplace co-operatives also present evidence of the viability of an anarchist economy. It is well established that co-operatives are usually more productive and efficient than their capitalist equivalents. This indicates that hierarchical workplaces are **not** required in order to produce useful goods and indeed can be harmful. It also indicates that the capitalist market does not actually allocate resources efficiently nor has any tendency to do so.

So why should co-operatives be more efficient? Firstly, there are the positive effects of increased liberty. Co-operatives, by abolishing wage slavery, obviously increase the liberty of those who work in them. Members take an active part in the management of their working lives and so authoritarian social relations are replaced by libertarian ones. Unsurprisingly, this liberty also leads to an increase in productivity -- just as wage labour is more productive than slavery, so associated labour is more productive than wage slavery. As Kropotkin argued: *"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour . . . man really produces most when he works in freedom, when he has a certain choice in his occupations, when he has no overseer to impede him, and lastly, when he sees his work bringing profit to him and to others who work like him, but bringing in little to idlers."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145]

There are also the positive advantages associated with participation (i.e. self-management, liberty in other words). Within a self-managed, co-operative workplace, workers are directly involved in decision making and so these decisions are enriched by the skills, experiences and ideas of all members of the workplace. In the words of Colin Ward:

> *"You can be **in** authority, or you can be **an** authority, or you can **have** authority. The first derives from your rank in some chain of command, the second derives special knowledge, and the third from special wisdom. But knowledge and wisdom are not distributed in order of rank, and they are no one person's monopoly in any undertaking. The fantastic inefficiency of any hierarchical organisation -- any factory, office, university, warehouse or hospital -- is the outcome of two almost invariable characteristics. One is that the knowledge and wisdom of the people at the bottom of the pyramid finds no place in the decision-making leadership hierarchy of the institution. Frequently it is devoted to making the institution work in spite of the formal leadership structure, or alternatively to sabotaging the ostensible function of the institution, because it is none of their choosing. The other is that they would rather not be there anyway: they are there through economic necessity rather than through identification with a common task which throws up its own shifting and functional leadership.*

"Perhaps the greatest crime of the industrial system is the way it systematically thwarts the investing genius of the majority of its workers." [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 41]

Also, as workers also own their place of work, they have an interest in developing the skills and abilities of their members and, obviously, this also means that there are few conflicts within the workplace. Unlike capitalist firms, there is no conflict between bosses and wage slaves over work loads, conditions or the division of value created between them. All these factors will increase the quality, quantity and efficiency of work, increase efficient utilisation of available resources and aids the introduction of new techniques and technologies.

Secondly, the increased efficiency of co-operatives results from the benefits associated with co-operation itself. Not only does co-operation increase the pool of knowledge and abilities available within the workplace and enriches that source by communication and interaction, it also ensures that the workforce are working together instead of competing and so wasting time and energy. As Alfie Kohn notes (in relation to investigations of in-firm co-operation):

> *"Dean Tjosvold . . . conducted [studies] at utility companies, manufacturing plants, engineering firms, and many other kinds of organisations. Over and over again,*

> *Tjosvold has found that 'co-operation makes a work force motivated' whereas 'serious competition undermines co-ordination' . . . Meanwhile, the management guru . . . T. Edwards Demming, has declared that the practice of having employees compete against each other is 'unfair [and] destructive. We cannot afford this nonsense any longer . . . [We need to] work together on company problems [but] annual rating of performance, incentive pay, [or] bonuses cannot live with team work . . . What takes the joy out of learning . . . [or out of] anything? Trying to be number one.'"* [**No Contest**, p. 240]

Thirdly, there are the benefits associated with increased equality. Studies prove that business performance deteriorates when pay differentials become excessive. In a study of over 100 businesses (producing everything from kitchen appliances to truck axles), researchers found that the greater the wage gap between managers and workers, the lower their product's quality. [Douglas Cowherd and David Levine, *"Product Quality and Pay Equity,"* **Administrative Science Quarterly**, No. 37, pp. 302-30] Businesses with the greatest inequality were plagued with a high employee turnover rate. Study author David Levine said: *"These organisations weren't able to sustain a workplace of people with shared goals."* [quoted by John Byrne, *"How high can CEO pay go?"* **Business Week**, April 22, 1996] The negative effects of income inequality can also be seen on a national level as well. Economists Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini conducted a thorough statistical analysis of historical inequality and growth, and found that nations with more equal incomes generally experience faster productive growth. [*"Is Inequality Harmful for Growth?"*, **American Economic Review** no. 84, pp. 600-21] Numerous other studies have also confirmed their findings (the negative impacts on inequality on all aspects of life are summarised by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better**). Real life yet again disproves the assumptions of capitalism: inequality harms us all, even the capitalist economy which produces it.

This is to be expected. Workers, seeing an increasing amount of the value they create being monopolised by top managers and a wealthy elite and not re-invested into the company to secure their employment prospects, will hardly be inclined to put in that extra effort or care about the quality of their work. Bosses who use the threat of unemployment to extract more effort from their workforce are creating a false economy. While they will postpone decreasing profits in the short term due to this adaptive strategy (and enrich themselves in the process) the pressures placed upon the system will bring harsh long term effects -- both in terms of economic crisis (as income becomes so skewed as to create realisation problems and the limits of adaptation are reached in the face of international competition) and social breakdown.

As would be imagined, co-operative workplaces tend to be more egalitarian than capitalist ones. This is because in capitalist firms, the incomes of top management must be justified (in practice) to a small number of individuals (namely, those shareholders with sizeable stock in the firm), who are usually quite wealthy and so not only have little to lose in granting huge salaries but are also predisposed to see top managers as being very much like themselves and so are entitled to comparable incomes (and let us not forget that *"corporate boards, largely selected by the CEO, hire compensation experts, almost always chosen by the CEO, to determine how much the CEO is worth."* [Paul Krugman, **The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 144]). In contrast, the incomes of management in worker controlled firms have to be justified to a workforce whose members experience the relationship between management incomes and their own directly and who, no doubt, are predisposed to see their elected managers as

being workers like themselves and accountable to them. Such an egalitarian atmosphere will have a positive impact on production and efficiency as workers will see that the value they create is not being accumulated by others but distributed according to work actually done (and not control over power). In the Mondragon co-operatives, for example, the maximum pay differential is 9 to 1 (increased from 3 to 1 after much debate in a response to outside pressures from capitalist firms hiring away workers) while (in the USA) the average CEO is paid well over 100 times the average worker (up from 41 times in 1960).

Therefore, we see that co-operatives prove the advantages of (and the inter-relationship between) key anarchist principles such as liberty, equality, solidarity and self-management. Their application, whether all together or in part, has a positive impact on efficiency and work -- and, as we will discuss in section J.5.12, the capitalist market actively **blocks** the spread of these more egalitarian and efficient productive techniques instead of encouraging them. Even by its own standards, capitalism stands condemned -- it does not encourage the efficient use of resources and actively places barriers in their development.

From all this it is clear to see why co-operatives are supported by anarchists. We are *"convinced that the co-operative could, potentially, replace capitalism and carries within it the seeds of economic emancipation . . . The workers learn from this precious experience how to organise and themselves conduct the economy without guardian angels, the state or their former employers."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399] Co-operatives give us a useful insight into the possibilities of a free, socialist, economy. Even within the hierarchical capitalist economy, co-operatives show us that a better future is possible and that production can be organised in a co-operative fashion and that by so doing we can reap the individual and social benefits of working together as equals.

However, this does not mean that all aspects of the co-operative movement find favour with anarchists. As Bakunin pointed out, *"there are two kinds of co-operative: bourgeois co-operation, which tends to create a privileged class, a sort of new collective bourgeoisie organised into a stockholding society: and truly Socialist co-operation, the co-operation of the future which for this very reason is virtually impossible of realisation at present."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 385] In other words, while co-operatives are the germ of the future, in the present they are often limited by the capitalist environment they find themselves, narrow their vision to just surviving within the current system and so adapt to it.

For most anarchists, the experience of co-operatives has proven without doubt that, however excellent in principle and useful in practice, if they are kept within capitalism they cannot become the dominant mode of production and free the masses (see section J.5.11). In order to fully develop, co-operatives must be part of a wider social movement which includes community and industrial unionism and the creation of a anarchistic social framework which can encourage *"truly Socialist co-operation"* and discourage *"bourgeois co-operation."* As Murray Bookchin correctly argued: *"Removed from a libertarian municipalist [or other anarchist] context and movement focused on achieving revolutionary municipalist goals as a* ***dual power*** *against corporations and the state, food [and other forms of] co-ops are little more than benign enterprises that capitalism and the state can easily tolerate with no fear of challenge."* [**Democracy and Nature**, no. 9, p. 175]

So while co-operatives are an important aspect of anarchist ideas and practice, they are not the be all or end all of our activity. Without a wider social movement which creates all (or at

least most) of the future society in the shell of the old, co-operatives will never arrest the growth of capitalism or transcend the narrow horizons of the capitalist economy.

J.5.11 If workers really want self-management then why are there so few co-operatives?

Supporters of capitalism suggest that producer co-operatives would spring up spontaneously if workers really wanted them. To quote leading propertarian Robert Nozick, under capitalism *"it is open to any wealthy radical or group of workers to buy an existing factory or establish a new one, and to . . . institute worker-controlled, democratically-run firms."* If *"they are superior, by market standards, to their more orthodox competitors"* then *"there should be little difficulty in establishing successful factories of this sort."* Thus there is *"a means of realising the worker-control scheme that can be brought about by the voluntary actions of people in a free [sic!] society."* [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 250-2] So if such co-operatives were really economically viable and desired by workers, they would spread until eventually they undermined capitalism. Propertarians conclude that since this is not happening, it must be because workers' self-management is either economically inefficient or is not really attractive to workers, or both.

David Schweickart has decisively answered this argument by showing that the reason there are not more producer co-operatives is structural:

> *"A worker-managed firm lacks an expansionary dynamic. When a capitalist enterprise is successful, the owner can increase her profits by reproducing her organisation on a larger scale. She lacks neither the means nor the motivation to expand. Not so with a worker-managed firm. Even if the workers have the means, they lack the incentive, because enterprise growth would bring in new workers with whom the increased proceeds would have to be shared. Co-operatives, even when prosperous, do not spontaneously grow. But if this is so, then each new co-operative venture (in a capitalist society) requires a new wealthy radical or a new group of affluent radical workers willing to experiment. Because such people doubtless are in short supply, it follows that the absence of a large and growing co-operative movement proves nothing about the viability of worker self-management, nor about the preferences of workers."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 239]

This means that in, say, a mutualist economy there would be more firms of a smaller size supplying a given market compared to capitalism. So a free economy, with the appropriate institutional framework, need not worry about unemployment for while individual co-operatives may not expand as fast as capitalist firms, more co-operatives would be set up (see section I.3.1 for why the neo-classical analysis of co-operatives which Nozick implicitly invokes is false). In short, the environment within which a specific workplace operates is just as important as its efficiency.

This is important, as the empirical evidence is strong that self-management **is** more efficient than wage-slavery. As economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson summarises, support for *"the proposition that participatory and co-operatives firms enjoy greater productivity and longevity comes from a large amount of . . . case study and econometric evidence"* and *"the weight of testimony"* is *"in favour or [indicates] a positive correlation between participation and productivity."* [*"Organizational Form and Economic Evolution: A critique of the*

Williamsonian hypothesis", pp. 98-115, **Democracy and Efficiency in Economic Enterprises**, U. Pagano and R. E. Rowthorn (eds.), p. 100] This is ignored by the likes of Nozick in favour of thought-experiments rooted in the dubious assumptions of bourgeois economics. He implicitly assumed that because most firms are hierarchical today then they must be more efficient. In short, Nozick abused economic selection arguments by simply assuming, without evidence, that the dominant form of organisation is, *ipso facto*, more efficient. In reality, this is not the case.

The question now becomes one of explaining why, if co-operation is more efficient than wage-slavery, does economic liberty not displace capitalism? The awkward fact is that individual efficiency is not the key to survival as such an argument *"ignores the important point that the selection of the 'fitter' in evolution is not simply relative to the less successful but is dependent upon the general circumstances and environment in which selection takes place."* Moreover, an organism survives because it birth rate exceeds its death rate. If more capitalist firms secure funding from capitalist banks then, obviously, it is more likely for them to secure dominance in the economy simply because there are more of them rather than because they are more efficient. As such, large numbers do not imply greater efficiency as the *"rapid flow of new entrants of hierarchical form"* may *"swamp the less hierarchical firms even if other selection processes are working in favour of the latter."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100 and p. 103] Thus:

> *"The degree of fitness of any organism can only be meaningfully considered in relation to its environment . . . the market may help to select firms that are fit for the market, but these surviving firms needn't be the most 'efficient' in some absolute sense. In fact, the specification of 'the market' as a selection process is incomplete because the market is only one institution of many needed to specify an environment."* [Michael J. Everett and Alanson P. Minkler, *"Evolution and organisational choice in nineteenth-century Britain"*, pp. 51-62, **Cambridge Journal of Economics** vol. 17, No. 1, p. 53]

As an obvious example there are the difficulties co-operatives can face in finding access to credit facilities required by them from capitalist banks and investors. As Tom Cahill notes, co-operatives in the nineteenth century *"had the specific problem of . . . **giving credit**"* while *"**competition with price cutting capitalist** firms . . . highlighting the inadequate reservoirs of the under-financed co-ops."* [*"Co-operatives and Anarchism: A contemporary Perspective"*, pp 235-58, **For Anarchism**, Paul Goodway (ed.), p. 239] This points to a general issue, namely that there are often difficulties for co-operatives in raising money:

> *"Co-operatives in a capitalist environment are likely to have more difficulty in raising capital. Quite apart from ideological hostility (which may be significant), external investors will be reluctant to put their money into concerns over which they will have little or no control -- which tends to be the case with a co-operative. Because co-operatives in a capitalist environment face special difficulties, and because they lack the inherent expansionary dynamic of a capitalist firm, it is hardy surprising that they are far from dominant."* [Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, p 240]

In addition, the *"return on capital is limited"* in co-operatives. [Tom Cahill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] This means that investors are less-likely to invest in co-operatives, and so co-operatives will tend to suffer from a lack of investment. So despite *"the potential efficiency of such [self-managed] workplaces"*, capitalism *"may be systematically biased against participatory*

workplaces" and as *"a result the economy can be trapped in a socially suboptimal position."* Capital market issues, amongst others, help explain this as such firms *"face higher transaction costs for raising equity and loans."* [David I. Levine and Laura D'Andrea Tyson, *"Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment"*, pp. 183-237, **Paying for Productivity**, Alan S. Blinder (ed.), pp. 235-6 and p. 221]

Tom Cahill outlines the investment problem when he writes that the *"financial problem"* is a major reason why co-operatives failed in the past, for *"basically the unusual structure and aims of co-operatives have always caused problems for the dominant sources of capital. In general, the finance environment has been hostile to the emergence of the co-operative spirit."* He also notes that they were *"unable to devise structuring to **maintain a boundary** between those who work and those who own or control . . . It is understood that when outside investors were allowed to have power within the co-op structure, co-ops lost their distinctive qualities."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 238-239] So even **if** co-operative do attract investors, the cost of so doing may be to transform the co-operatives into capitalist firms. So while all investors experience risk, this *"is even more acute"* in co-operatives *"because investors must simultaneously cede control **and** risk their entire wealth. Under an unlimited liability rule, investors will rationally demand some control over the firm's operations to protect their wealth. Since [co-operatives] cannot cede control without violating one of the organisation's defining tenets, investors will demand an investment premium, a premium not required from equity investments."* [Everett and Minkler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] Needless to say, such a premium is a strain on a co-operative and makes it harder to survive simply because it has higher costs for debt repayment. If such external investment is not forthcoming, then the co-operative is dependent on retained earnings and its members' savings which, unsurprisingly, are often insufficient.

All of which suggests that Nozick's assertion that *"don't say that its against the class interest of investors to support the growth of some enterprise that if successful would end or diminish the investment system. Investors are not so altruistic. They act in personal and not their class interests"* is false. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 252-3] Nozick is correct, to a degree, but he forgets that class interest is a fusion of individual interests. Given a choice between returns from investments in capitalist firms because a management elite has similar interests in maximising unpaid labour and workers in a co-operative which controls any surplus, the investor will select the former. Moreover, lack of control by investors plays its role as they cannot simply replace the management in a co-operative -- that power lies in the hands of the workforce. The higher premiums required by investors to forsake such privileges place a burden on the co-operative, so reducing their likelihood of getting funds in the first place or surviving and, needless to say, increasing the risk that investors face. Thus the personal and class interest of investors merge, with the personal desire to make money ensuring that the class position of the individual is secured. This does not reflect the productivity or efficiency of the investment -- quite the reverse! -- it reflects the social function of wage labour in maximising profits and returns on capital (see next section for more on this). In other words, the personal interests of investors will generally support their class interests (unsurprisingly, as class interests are not independent of personal interests and will tend to reflect them!).

There are other structural problems as well. Co-operatives face the negative externalities generated by the capitalist economy they operate within. For one thing, since their pay levels are set by members' democratic vote, co-operatives tend to be more egalitarian in their income structure. This means that in a capitalist environment, co-operatives are in constant danger of having their most skilled members hired away by capitalist firms who can, due to

their resources, out-bid the co-operative. While this may result in exploitation of the worker, the capitalist firm has the resources to pay higher wages and so it makes sense for them to leave (*"As to the employer who pays an engineer twenty times more than a labourer, it is simply due to personal interest; if the engineer can economise $4000 a year on the cost of production; the employer pays him $800 . . . He parts with an extra $40 when he expects to gain $400 by it; and this is the essence of the Capitalist system."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 165]). However, in a co-operative system there would not be the inequalities of economic wealth (created by capitalist firms and finance structures) which allows such poaching to happen.

There are cultural issues as well. As Jon Elster points out, it is a *"truism, but an important one, that workers' preferences are to a large extent shaped by their economic environment. Specifically, there is a tendency to adaptive preference formation, by which the actual mode of economic organisation comes to be perceived as superior to all others."* [*"From Here to There"*, pp. 93-111, **Socialism**, Paul, Miller Jr., Paul, and Greenberg (eds.), p. 110] In other words, people view "what is" as given and feel no urge to change to "what could be." In the context of creating alternatives within capitalism, this can have serious effects on the spread of alternatives and indicates the importance of anarchists encouraging the spirit of revolt to break down this mental apathy.

This acceptance of "what is" can be seen, to some degree, by some companies which meet the formal conditions for co-operatives, for example ESOP owned firms in the USA, but lack effective workers' control. ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plans) enable a firm's workforce to gain the majority of a company's shares but the unequal distribution of shares amongst employees prevents the great majority of workers from having any effective control or influence on decisions. Unlike real co-operatives (based on "one worker, one vote") these firms are based on "one share, one vote" and so have more in common with capitalist firms than co-operatives.

Finally, there is the question of history, of path dependency. Path dependency is the term used to describe when the set of decisions one faces for any given circumstance is limited by the decisions made in the past, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant. This is often associated with the economics of technological change in a society which depends quantitatively and/or qualitatively on its own past (the most noted example this is the QWERTY keyboard, which would not be in use today except that it happened to be chosen in the nineteenth century). Evolutionary systems are path dependent, with historical events pushing development in specific directions. Thus, if there were barriers against or encouragement for certain forms of organisational structure in the past then the legacy of this will continue to dominate due to the weight of history rather than automatically being replaced by new, more efficient, forms.

This can be seen from co-operatives, as *"labour managed firms were originally at a substantial disadvantage compared to their capitalist counterparts"* as the law *"imposed additional risks and costs"* on them while *"early financial instruments were ill-suited to the establishment and continuation of worker co-operatives. The subsequent coevolution of firms and supporting institutions involved a path-dependent process where labour-managed firms were at a continual disadvantage, even after many of the earlier impediments were removed."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] *"Historically,"* argue Everett and Minkler *"both company and co-operative law were incompatible with democratic decision-making by workers."* The law ensured that the *"burden was more costly"* to labour-managed firms and these *"obstacles led*

to an environment dominated by investor-controlled firms (capitalist firms) in which informal constraints (behaviours and routines) emerged to reinforce the existing institutions. A path-dependent process incorporating these informal constraints continued to exclude [their] widespread formation." When the formal constraints which prevented the formation of co-operatives were finally removed, the *"informal constraints"* produced as a result of these *"continued to prevent the widespread formation"* of co-operatives. So the lack of co-operatives *"can thus be explained quite independently of any of the usual efficiency criteria."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58 and p. 60] Nor should we forget that the early industrial system was influenced by the state, particularly by rewarding war related contracts to hierarchical firms modelled on the military and that the state rewarded contracts to run various state services and industries to capitalist firms rather than, as Proudhon urged, to workers associations.

However, *"there are several good reasons why more efficient firms need not always be selected in a competitive and 'evolutionary' process."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] So it is not efficiency as such which explains the domination of capitalist firms for *"empirical studies suggest that co-operatives are at least as productive as their capitalist counterparts,"* with many having *"an excellent record, superior to conventionally organised firms over a long period."* [Jon Elster, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96] So all things being equal, co-operatives are more efficient than their capitalist counterparts -- but when co-operatives compete in a capitalist economy, all things are **not** equal. As David Schweickart argues:

> *"Even if worker-managed firms are preferred by the vast majority, and even if they are more productive, a market initially dominated by capitalist firms may not select for them. The common-sense neo-classical dictum that only those things that best accord with people's desires will survive the struggle of free competition has never been the whole truth with respect to anything; with respect to workplace organisation it is barely a half-truth."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]

It is illuminating, though, to consider why Nozick ignored the substantial empirical evidence that participation **is** more efficient than hierarchy and, as a result, why *"market criteria"* does not result in the more productive and efficient co-operative production displacing the authoritarian workplace. Far better, it must be supposed, to just assume that the dominant form of workplace is more "efficient" and implicitly invoke a quasi-Darwinian individualistic selection mechanism in an ahistorical and institution-less framework. So people like Nozick who suggest that because worker co-operatives are few in number that this means they are forced out by competition because they are inefficient miss the point. A key reason for this lack of co-operative firms, argues Hodgson, *"is that competitive selection depends on the economic context, and while the institutional context of a capitalist system may be more conducive for the capitalist firm, a different context may favour the co-operative firm."* [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 288]

As discussed in section I.3.5, Proudhon was well aware that for mutualism to prosper and survive an appropriate institutional framework was required (the *"agro-industrial federation"* and mutual banking). So an organisation's survival also depends on the co-evolution of supporting informal constraints. If a co-operative is isolated within a capitalist economy, without co-operative institutions around it, it comes as no great surprise to discover that they find it difficult to survive never mind displace its (usually larger and well-established) capitalist competitors.

Yet in spite of these structural problems and the impact of previous state interventions, co-operatives do exist under capitalism but just because they can survive in such a harsh environment it does not automatically mean that they shall **replace** that economy. Co-operatives face pressures to adjust to the dominant mode of production. The presence of wage labour and investment capital in the wider economy will tempt successful co-operatives to hire workers or issue shares to attract new investment. In so doing, however, they may end up losing their identities as co-operatives by diluting ownership (and so re-introducing exploitation by having to pay non-workers interest) or by making the co-operative someone's boss (which creates *"a new class of workers who exploit and profit from the labour of their employees. And all this fosters a bourgeois mentality."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399]).

Hence the pressures of working in a capitalist market may result in co-operatives pursuing activities which may result in short term gain or survival, but are sure to result in harm in the long run. Far from co-operatives slowly expanding within and changing a capitalist environment it is more likely that capitalist logic will expand into and change the co-operatives that work in it (this can be seen from the Mondragon co-operatives, where there has been a slight rise in the size of wage labour being used and the fact that the credit union has, since 1992, invested in non-co-operative firms). These externalities imposed upon isolated co-operatives within capitalism (which would not arise within a fully co-operative context) block local moves towards anarchism. The idea that co-operation will simply win out in competition within well developed capitalist economic systems is just wishful thinking. Just because a system is more liberatory, just and efficient does not mean it will survive or prosper in an authoritarian economic and social environment.

So both theory and history suggests that isolated co-operatives will more likely adapt to capitalist realities than remain completely true to their co-operative promise. For most anarchists, therefore, co-operatives can reach their full potential only as part of a social movement aiming to change society. Only as part of a wider movement of community and workplace unionism, with mutualist banks to provide long terms financial support and commitment, can co-operatives be communalised into a network of solidarity and support that will reduce the problems of isolation and adaptation. Hence Bakunin:

> *"We want co-operation too . . . But at the same time, we know that it prosper, developing itself fully and freely, embracing all human industry, only when it is based on equality, when all capital and every instrument of labour, including the soil, belong to the people by right of collective property . . . Once this is acknowledged we hardly oppose the creation of co-operative associations; we find them necessary in many respects . . . they accustom the workers to organise, pursue, and manage their interests themselves, without interference either by bourgeois capital or by bourgeois control . . . [they must be] founded on the principle of solidarity and collectivity rather than on bourgeois exclusivity, then society will pass from its present situation to one of equality and justice without too many great upheavals."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153]

Until then, co-operatives will exist within capitalism but not replace it by market forces -- only a **social** movement and collective action can fully secure their full development. This means that while anarchists support, create and encourage co-operatives within capitalism, we understand *"the impossibility of putting into practice the co-operative system under the existing conditions of the predominance of bourgeois capital in the process of production and*

distribution of wealth." Because of this, most anarchists stress the need for more combative organisations such as industrial and community unions and other bodies *"formed,"* to use Bakunin's words, *"for the organisation of toilers against the privileged world"* in order to help bring about a free society. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 385]

Finally, we must note an irony with Nozick's argument, namely the notion that capitalism (his *"free society"*) allows a *"voluntary"* path to economic liberty. The irony is two-fold. First, the creation of capitalism was the result of state action (see section F.8). While working class people are expected to play by the rules decreed by capitalism, capitalists have never felt the urge to do so. It is this state coercion which helped create the path-dependency which stops *"the market"* selecting more efficient and productive ways of production. Secondly, Nozick's own theory of (property) rights denies that stolen wealth can be legitimately transferred. In other words, expecting workers to meekly accept previous coercion by seeking investors to fund their attempts at economic liberty, as Nozick did, is implicitly accepting that theft is property. While such intellectual incoherence is to be expected from defenders of capitalism, it does mean that propertarians really have no ground to oppose working class people following the advice of libertarians and expropriating their workplaces. In other words, transforming the environment and breaking the path-dependency which stops economic liberty from flowering to its full potential.

J.5.12 If self-management were more efficient then surely the market would force capitalists to introduce it?

Some supporters of capitalism argue that if self-management really were more efficient than hierarchy, then capitalists would be forced to introduce it by the market. As propertarian Robert Nozick argued, if workers' control meant that *"the productivity of the workers in a factory **rises** . . . then the individual owners pursuing profits will reorganise the productive process. If the productivity of workers **remains the same** . . . then in the process of competing for labourers firms will alter their internal work organisation."* This meant that *"individual owners pursuing profits . . . will reorganise the productive process."* [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 248] As this has not happened then self-management cannot be more efficient.

While such a notion seems plausible in theory, in practice it is flawed as *"there is a vast quantity of empirical evidence demonstrating that participatory workplaces tend to be places of higher morale and greater productivity than authoritarian workplaces."* [David Schweickart , **Against Capitalism**, p. 228] So Nozick's thought experiment is contradicted by reality. Capitalism places innumerable barriers to the spread of worker empowering structures within production, in spite (perhaps, as we will see, **because**) of their (well-documented) higher efficiency and productivity. This can be seen from the fact that while the increased efficiency associated with workers' participation and self-management has attracted the attention of many capitalist firms, the few experiments conducted have failed to spread even though they were extremely successful. This is due to the nature of capitalist production and the social relationships it produces.

As we noted in section D.10, capitalist firms (particularly in the west) made a point of introducing technologies and management structures that aimed to deskill and disempower workers. In this way, it was hoped to make the worker increasingly subject to "market discipline" (i.e. easier to train, so increasing the pool of workers available to replace any specific worker and so reducing workers power by increasing management's power to fire

them). Of course, what actually happens is that after a short period of time while management gained the upper hand, the workforce found newer and more effective ways to fight back and assert their productive power again. While for a short time the technological change worked, over the longer period the balance of forces changed, so forcing management to continually try to empower themselves at the expense of the workforce.

It is unsurprising that such attempts to reduce workers to order-takers fail. Workers' experiences and help are required to ensure production actually happens at all. When workers carry out their orders strictly and faithfully (i.e. when they "work to rule") production stops. So most capitalists are aware of the need to get workers to "co-operate" within the workplace to some degree. A few capitalist companies have gone further. Seeing the advantages of fully exploiting (and we do mean exploiting) the experience, skills, abilities and thoughts of their employers which the traditional authoritarian capitalist workplace denies them, some have introduced various schemes to "enrich" and "enlarge" work, increase "co-operation" between workers and their bosses, to encourage workers to "participate" in their own exploitation by introducing *"a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice -- at best secondary -- in the control of conditions of the workplace."* [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 81] The management and owners still have the power and still reap unpaid labour from the productive activity of the workforce.

David Noble provides a good summary of the problems associated with experiments in workers' self-management within capitalist firms:

> *"Participation in such programs can indeed be a liberating and exhilarating experience, awakening people to their own untapped potential and also to the real possibilities of collective worker control of production. As one manager described the former pilots [workers in a General Electric program]: 'These people will never be the same again. They have seen that things can be different.' But the excitement and enthusiasm engendered by such programs, as well as the heightened sense of commitment to a common purpose, can easily be used against the interests of the work force. First, that purpose is not really 'common' but is still determined by management alone, which continues to decide what will be produced, when, and where. Participation in production does not include participation in decisions on investment, which remains the prerogative of ownership. Thus participation is, in reality, just a variation of business as usual -- taking orders -- but one which encourages obedience in the name of co-operation.*
>
> *"Second, participation programs can contribute to the creation of an elite, and reduced, work force, with special privileges and more 'co-operative' attitudes toward management -- thus at once undermining the adversary stance of unions and reducing membership . . .*
>
> *"Third, such programs enable management to learn from workers -- who are now encouraged by their co-operative spirit to share what they know -- and, then, in Taylorist tradition, to use this knowledge against the workers. As one former pilot reflected, 'They learned from the guys on the floor, got their knowledge about how to optimise the technology and then, once they had it, they eliminated the Pilot Program, put that knowledge into the machines, and got people without any knowledge to run them -- on the Company's terms and without adequate compensation. They kept all the gains for themselves.' . . .*

> *"Fourth, such programs could provide management with a way to circumvent union rules and grievance procedures or eliminate unions altogether."* [**Forces of Production**, pp. 318-9]

Capitalist introduced and supported "workers' control" is very like the situation when a worker receives stock in the company they work for. If it goes a little way toward redressing the gap between the value produced by that person's labour and the wage they receive for it, that in itself cannot be a totally bad thing (although this does not address the issue of workplace hierarchy and its social relations). The real downside of this is the "carrot on a stick" enticement to work harder -- if you work extra hard for the company, your stock will be worth more. Obviously, though, the bosses get rich off you, so the more you work, the richer they get, the more you are getting ripped off. It is a choice that anarchists feel many workers cannot afford to make -- they need or at least want the money -- but we believe that it does not work as workers simply end up working harder, for less. After all, stocks do not represent all profits (large amounts of which end up in the hands of top management) nor are they divided just among those who labour. Moreover, workers may be less inclined to take direct action, for fear that they will damage the value of "their" company's stock, and so they may find themselves putting up with longer, more intense work in worse conditions.

Be that as it may, the results of such capitalist experiments in "workers' control" are interesting and show **why** self-management will not spread by market forces. According to one expert: *"There is scarcely a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or . . .productivity increases occur from a genuine increase in worker's decision-making power. Findings of such consistency . . . are rare in social research."* [Paul B. Lumberg, quoted by Herbert Gintis, *"The nature of Labour Exchange and the Theory of Capitalist Production"*, **Radical Political Economy**, vol. 1, Samuel Bowles and Richard Edwards (eds.), p. 252] In spite of these findings, a *"shift toward participatory relationships is scarcely apparent in capitalist production"* and this is *"not compatible with the neo-classical assertion as to the efficiency of the internal organisation of capitalist production."* [Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252] Economist William Lazonick indicates the reason when he writes that *"[m]any attempts at job enrichment and job enlargement in the first half of the 1970s resulted in the supply of more and better effort by workers. Yet many 'successful' experiments were cut short when the workers whose work had been enriched and enlarged began questioning traditional management prerogatives inherent in the existing hierarchical structure of the enterprise."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 282]

This is an important result, as it indicates that the ruling sections within capitalist firms have a vested interest in **not** introducing such schemes, even though they are more efficient methods of production. As can easily be imagined, managers have a clear incentive to resist participatory schemes (as David Schweickart notes, such resistance, *"often bordering on sabotage, is well known and widely documented"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 229]). As an example of this David Noble discusses a scheme ran by General Electric in the late 1960s:

> *"After considerable conflict, GE introduced a quality of work life program . . . which gave workers much more control over the machines and the production process and eliminated foremen. Before long, by all indicators, the program was succeeding -- machine use, output and product quality went up; scrap rate, machine downtime, worker absenteeism and turnover when down, and conflict on the floor dropped off considerably. Yet, little more than a year into the program -- following a union demand that it be extended throughout the shop and into other GE locations -- top*

> *management abolished the program out of fear of losing control over the workforce. Clearly, the company was willing to sacrifice gains in technical and economic efficiency in order to regain and insure management control."* [**Progress Without People**, p. 65f]

Simply put, managers and capitalists can see that workers' control experiments expose the awkward fact that they are not needed, that their role is not related to organising production but exploiting workers. They have no urge to introduce reforms which will ultimately make themselves redundant. Moreover, most enjoy the power that comes with their position and have no desire to see it ended. This also places a large barrier in the way of workers' control. Interestingly, this same mentality explains why capitalists often support fascist regimes: *"The anarchist Luigi Fabbri termed fascism a **preventative counter-revolution**; but in his essay he makes the important point that the employers, particularly in agriculture, were not so much moved by fear of a general revolution as by the erosion of their own authority and property rights which had already taken place locally: 'The bosses felt they were no longer bosses.'"* [Adrian Lyttelton, *"Italian Fascism"*, pp. 81-114, **Fascism: a Reader's Guide**, p. 91]

However, it could be claimed that owners of stock, being concerned by the bottom-line of profits, could **force** management to introduce participation. By this method, competitive market forces would ultimately prevail as individual owners, pursuing profits, reorganise production and participation spreads across the economy. Indeed, there are a few firms that **have** introduced such schemes but there has been no tendency for them to spread. This contradicts "free market" capitalist economic theory which states that those firms which introduce more efficient techniques will prosper and competitive market forces will ensure that other firms will introduce the technique.

This has not happened for three reasons.

Firstly, the fact is that within "free market" capitalism **keeping** (indeed strengthening) skills and power in the hands of the workers makes it harder for a capitalist firm to maximise profits (i.e. unpaid labour). It strengthens the power of workers, who can use that power to gain increased wages (i.e. reduce the amount of surplus value they produce for their bosses). Workers' control also leads to a usurpation of capitalist prerogatives -- including their share of revenues and their ability to extract more unpaid labour during the working day. While in the short run workers' control may lead to higher productivity (and so may be toyed with), in the long run, it leads to difficulties for capitalists to maximise their profits:

> *"given that profits depend on the integrity of the labour exchange, a strongly centralised structure of control not only serves the interests of the employer, but dictates a minute division of labour irrespective of considerations of productivity. For this reason, the evidence for the superior productivity of 'workers control' represents the most dramatic of anomalies to the neo-classical theory of the firm: worker control increases the effective amount of work elicited from each worker and improves the co-ordination of work activities, while increasing the solidarity and delegitimising the hierarchical structure of ultimate authority at its root; hence it threatens to increase the power of workers in the struggle over the share of total value."* [Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264]

A workplace which had extensive workers participation would hardly see the workers agreeing to reduce their skill levels, take a pay cut or increase their pace of work simply to

enhance the profits of capitalists. Simply put, profit maximisation is not equivalent to efficiency. Getting workers to work longer, more intensely or in more unpleasant conditions can increase profits but it does not yield more output for the **same** inputs. Workers' control would curtail capitalist means of enhancing profits by changing the quality and quantity of work. It is **this** requirement which also aids in understanding why capitalists will not support workers' control -- even though it is more efficient, it reduces capitalist power in production. Moreover, demands to change the nature of workers' inputs into the production process in order to maximise profits for capitalists would provoke a struggle over the intensity of work, working hours, and over the share of value added going to workers, management and owners and so destroy the benefits of participation.

Thus power within the workplace plays a key role in explaining why workers' control does not spread -- it reduces the ability of bosses to extract more unpaid labour from workers.

The second reason is related to the first. It too is based on the power structure within the company but the power is related to control over the surplus produced by the workers rather than the ability to control how much surplus is produced in the first place (i.e. power over workers). Hierarchical management is the way to ensure that profits are channelled into the hands of a few. By centralising power, the surplus value produced by workers can be distributed in a way which benefits those at the top (i.e. management and capitalists). This explains the strange paradox of workers' control experiments being successful but being cancelled by management. This is easily explained once the hierarchical nature of capitalist production (i.e. of wage labour) is acknowledged. Workers' control, by placing (some) power in the hands of workers, undermines the authority of management and, ultimately, their power to control the surplus produced by workers and allocate it as they see fit. Thus, while workers' control does reduce costs, increase efficiency and productivity (i.e. maximise the difference between prices and costs) it (potentially) reduces the power of management and owners to allocate that surplus as they see fit. Indeed, it can be argued that hierarchical control of production exists solely to provide for the accumulation of capital in a few hands, **not** for efficiency or productivity (see Stephan A. Margin, *"What do Bosses do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 178-248).

As David Noble argues, power is the key to understanding capitalism, **not** the drive for profits as such:

> *"In opting for control [over the increased efficiency of workers' control] . . . management . . . knowingly and, it must be assumed, willingly, sacrificed profitable production. . . . [This] illustrates not only the ultimate management priority of power over both production and profit within the firm, but also the larger contradiction between the preservation of private power and prerogatives, on the one hand, and the social goals of efficient, quality, and useful production, on the other . . .*
>
> *"It is a common confusion, especially on the part of those trained in or unduly influenced by formal economics (liberal and Marxist alike), that capitalism is a system of profit-motivated, efficient production. This is not true, nor has it ever been. If the drive to maximise profits, through private ownership and control over the process of production, has served historically as the primary means of capitalist development, it has never been the end of that development. The goal has always been domination (and the power and privileges that go with it) and the preservation of domination. There is little historical evidence to support the view that, in the final*

> *analysis, capitalists play by the rules of the economic game imagined by theorists. There is ample evidence to suggest, on the other hand, that when the goals of profit-making and efficient production fail to coincide with the requirements of continued dominance, capital will resort to more ancient means: legal, political, and, if need be, military. Always, behind all the careful accounting, lies the threat of force. This system of domination has been legitimated in the past by the ideological invention that private ownership of the means of production and the pursuit of profit via production are always ultimately beneficial to society. Capitalism delivers the goods, it is argued, better, more cheaply, and in larger quantity, and in so doing, fosters economic growth . . . The story of the Pilot Program -- and it is but one among thousands like it in U.S. industry -- raises troublesome questions about the adequacy of this mythology as a description of reality."* [**Forces of Production**, pp. 321-2]

Hierarchical organisation (domination) is essential to ensure that profits are controlled by a few and can, therefore, be allocated by them in such a way to ensure their power and privileges. By undermining such authority, workers' control also undermines that power to maximise profits in a certain direction even though it increases "profits" (the difference between prices and costs) in the abstract. As workers' control starts to extend (or management sees its potential to spread) into wider areas such as investment decisions, how to allocate the surplus (i.e. profits) between wages, investment, dividends, management pay and so on, then they will seek to end the project in order to ensure their power over both the workers and the surplus they, the workers, produce (this is, of course, related to the issue of lack of control by investors in co-operatives raised in the last section).

As such, the opposition by managers to workers' control will be reflected by those who actually own the company who obviously would not support a regime which will not ensure the maximum return on their investment. This would be endangered by workers' control, even though it is more efficient and productive, as control over the surplus rests with the workers and not a management elite with similar interests and aims as the owners -- an egalitarian workplace would produce an egalitarian distribution of surplus, in other words (as proven by the experience of workers' co-operatives). In the words of one participant of the GE workers' control project: *"If we're all one, for manufacturing reasons, we must share in the fruits equitably, just like a co-op business."* [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 295] Such a possibility is one few owners would agree to.

Thirdly, to survive within the "free" market means to concentrate on the short term. Long terms benefits, although greater, are irrelevant. A free market requires profits **now** and so a firm is under considerable pressure to maximise short-term profits by market forces. Participation requires trust, investment in people and technology and a willingness to share the increased value added that result from workers' participation with the workers who made it possible. All these factors would eat into short term profits in order to return richer rewards in the future. Encouraging participation thus tends to increase long term gains at the expense of short-term ones (to ensure that workers do not consider participation as a con, they must experience **real** benefits in terms of power, conditions and wage rises). For firms within a free market environment, they are under pressure from share-holders and their financiers for high returns as soon as possible. If a company does not produce high dividends then it will see its stock fall as shareholders move to those companies that do. Thus the market **forces** companies to act in such ways as to maximise short term profits.

If faced with a competitor which is not making such investments (and which is investing directly into deskilling technology or intensifying work loads which lowers their costs) and so wins them market share, or a downturn in the business cycle which shrinks their profit margins and makes it difficult for the firm to meet its commitments to its financiers and workers, a company that intends to invest in people and trust will usually be rendered unable to do so. Faced with the option of empowering people in work or deskilling them and/or using the fear of unemployment to get workers to work harder and follow orders, capitalist firms have consistently chosen (and probably preferred) the latter option (as occurred in the 1970s).

Thus, workers' control is unlikely to spread through capitalism because it entails a level of working class consciousness and power that is incompatible with capitalist control: *"If the hierarchical division of labour is necessary for the extraction of surplus value, then worker preferences for jobs threatening capitalist control will not be implemented."* [Gintis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 253] The reason why it is more efficient, ironically, ensures that a capitalist economy will not select it. The "free market" will discourage empowerment and democratic workplaces, at best reducing "co-operation" and "participation" to marginal issues (and management will still have the power of veto).

The failure of moves towards democratic workplaces within capitalism are an example of that system in conflict with itself -- pursuing its objectives by methods which constantly defeat those same objectives. As Paul Carden argued, the *"capitalist system can only maintain itself by trying to reduce workers into mere order-takers . . . At the same time the system can only function as long as this reduction is never achieved . . . [for] the system would soon grind to a halt . . . [However] capitalism constantly has to **limit** this **participation** (if it didn't the workers would soon start deciding themselves and would show in practice now superfluous the ruling class really is)."* [**Modern Capitalism and Revolution**, pp. 45-46] Thus "workers' control" within a capitalist firm is a contradictory thing -- too little power and it is meaningless, too much and workplace authority structures and capitalist share of, and control over, value added can be harmed. Attempts to make oppressed, exploited and alienated workers work if they were neither oppressed, exploited nor alienated will always fail.

For a firm to establish committed and participatory relations internally, it must have external supports -- particularly with providers of finance (which is why co-operatives benefit from credit unions and co-operating together). The price mechanism proves self-defeating to create such supports and that is why we see "participation" more fully developed within Japanese and German firms (although it is still along way from fully democratic workplaces), who have strong, long term relationships with local banks and the state which provides them with the support required for such activities. As William Lazonick notes, Japanese industry had benefited from the state ensuring *"access to inexpensive long-term finance, the sine qua non of innovating investment strategies"* along with a host of other supports, such as protecting Japanese industry within their home markets so they could *"develop and utilise their productive resources to the point where they could attain competitive advantage in international competition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 305] The German state provides its industry with much of the same support.

Therefore, "participation" within capitalist firms will have little or no tendency to spread due to the actions of market forces. In spite of such schemes almost always being more efficient, capitalism will not select them because they empower workers and make it hard for capitalists to generate and control their profits. Hence capitalism, by itself, will have no

tendency to produce more libertarian organisational forms within industry. Those firms that do introduce such schemes will be the exception rather than the rule (and the schemes themselves will be marginal in most respects and subject to veto from above). For such schemes to spread, collective action is required (such as state intervention to create the right environment and support network or -- from an anarchist point of view -- union and community direct action).

Such schemes, as noted above, are just forms of self-exploitation, getting workers to help their robbers and so **not** a development anarchists seek to encourage. We have discussed this here just to be clear that, firstly, such forms of structural reforms are **not** self-management, as managers and owners still have the real power, and, secondly, even if such forms are somewhat liberatory and more efficient, market forces will not select them precisely **because** the latter is dependent on the former. Thirdly, they would still be organised for exploitation as workers would not be controlling all the goods they produced. As with an existing capitalist firm, part of their product would be used to pay interest, rent and profit. For anarchists *"self-management is not a new form of mediation between workers and their bosses . . . [it] refers to the very process by which the workers themselves **overthrow** their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace."* [Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Hence our support for co-operatives, unions and other self-managed structures created and organised from below by and for working class people by their own collective action.

J.5.13 What are Modern Schools?

Modern schools are alternative schools, self-managed by students, teachers and parents which reject the authoritarian schooling methods of the modern "education" system. Such schools have been a feature of the anarchist movement since the turn of the 20th century while interest in libertarian forms of education has existed in anarchist theory from the beginning. All the major anarchist thinkers, from Godwin through Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin to modern activists like Colin Ward, have stressed the importance of libertarian (or rational) education, education that develops all aspects of the student (mental and physical -- and so termed integral education) as well as encouraging critical thought and mental freedom. The aim of such education is ensure that the *"industrial worker, the man [sic!] of action and the intellectual would all be rolled into one."* [Proudhon, quoted by Steward Edward, **The Paris Commune**, p. 274]

Anyone involved in radical politics, constantly and consistently challenges the role of the state's institutions and their representatives within our lives. The role of bosses, the police, social workers, the secret service, managers, doctors and priests are all seen as part of a hierarchy which exists to keep us, the working class, subdued. It is relatively rare, though, for the left-wing to call into question the role of teachers. Most left wing activists and a large number of libertarians believe that education is always good.

Those involved in libertarian education believe the contrary. They believe that national education systems exist only to produce citizens who will be blindly obedient to the dictates of the state, citizens who will uphold the authority of government even when it runs counter to personal interest and reason, wage slaves who will obey the orders of their boss most of the time and consider being able to change bosses as freedom. They agree with William Godwin (one of the earliest critics of national education systems) when he wrote that *"the project of a national education ought to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national*

government . . . Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions . . . Their views as instigator of a system will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity." [quoted by Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 81]

With the growth of industrialism in the 19th century state schools triumphed, not through a desire to reform but as an economic necessity. Industry did not want free thinking individuals, it wanted workers, instruments of labour, and it wanted them punctual, obedient, passive and willing to accept their disadvantaged position. According to Nigel Thrift, many employers and social reformers became convinced that the earliest generations of workers were almost impossible to discipline (i.e. to get accustomed to wage labour and workplace authority). They looked to children, hoping that *"the elementary school could be used to break the labouring classes into those habits of work discipline now necessary for factory production . . . Putting little children to work at school for very long hours at very dull subjects was seen as a positive virtue, for it made them habituated, not to say naturalised, to labour and fatigue."* [quoted by Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 61]

Thus supporters of Modern Schools recognise that the role of education is an important one in maintaining hierarchical society -- for government and other forms of hierarchy (such as wage labour) must always depend on the opinion of the governed. Francisco Ferrer (the most famous libertarian educator) argued that:

> *"Rulers have always taken care to control the education of the people. They know their power is based almost entirely on the school and they insist on retaining their monopoly. The school is an instrument of domination in the hands of the ruling class."* [quoted by Clifford Harper, **Anarchy: A Graphic Guide**, p. 100]

Little wonder, then, that Emma Goldman argued that *"modern methods of education"* have *"little regard for personal liberty and originality of thought. Uniformity and imitation is [its] motto."* The school *"is for the child what the prison is for the convict and the barracks for the solder -- a place where everything is being used to break the will of the child, and then to pound, knead, and shape it into a being utterly foreign to itself."* Hence the importance of Modern Schools. It is a means of spreading libertarian education within a hierarchical society and undercut one of the key supports for that society -- the education system. Instead of hierarchical education, Modern schools exist to *"develop the individual through knowledge and the free play of characteristic traits, so that [the child] may become a social being, because he had learned to know himself, to know his relation to his fellow[s]."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 141-2, p. 140 and p. 145] It would be an education for freedom, not for subservience:

> *"Should the notion of freedom but awaken in man, free men dream only of freeing themselves now and for all time: but instead, all we do is churn out learned men who adapt in the most refined manner to every circumstance and fall to the level of slavish, submissive souls. For the most part, what are our fine gentlemen brimful of intellect and culture? Sneering slavers and slaves themselves."* [Max Stirner, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 12]

The Modern School Movement (also known as the Free School Movement) over the past century has been an attempt to represent part of this concern about the dangers of state and church schools and the need for libertarian education. The idea of libertarian education is that knowledge and learning should be linked to real life processes as well as personal usefulness

and should not be the preserve of a special institution. Thus Modern Schools are an attempt to establish an environment for self development in an overly structured and rationalised world. An oasis from authoritarian control and as a means of passing on the knowledge to be free:

> *"The underlying principle of the Modern School is this: education is a process of drawing out, not driving in; it aims at the possibility that the child should be left free to develop spontaneously, directing his own efforts and choosing the branches of knowledge which he desires to study . . . the teacher . . . should be a sensitive instrument responding to the needs of the child . . . a channel through which the child may attain so much of the ordered knowledge of the world as he shows himself ready to receive and assimilate."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146]

The Modern School bases itself on libertarian education techniques. Libertarian education, very broadly, seeks to produce children who will demand greater personal control and choice, who think for themselves and question all forms of authority:

> *"We don't hesitate to say we want people who will continue to develop. People constantly capable of destroying and renewing their surroundings and themselves: whose intellectual independence is their supreme power, which they will yield to none; always disposed for better things, eager for the triumph of new ideas, anxious to crowd many lives into the life they have. It must be the aim of the school to show the children that there will be tyranny as long as one person depends on another."* [Ferrer, quoted by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Thus the Modern School insists that the child is the centre of gravity in the education process -- and that education is just that, **not** indoctrination:

> *"I want to form a school of emancipation, concerned with banning from the mind whatever divides people, the false concepts of property, country and family so as to attain the liberty and well-being which all desire. I will teach only simple truth. I will not ram dogma into their heads. I will not conceal one iota of fact. I will teach not what to think but how to think."* [Ferrer, quoted by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 99-100]

The Modern School has no rewards or punishments, exams or mark -- the everyday tortures of conventional schooling. And because practical knowledge is more useful than theory, lessons were often held in factories, museums or the countryside. The school was also used by parents, and Ferrer planned a Popular University.

> *"Higher education, for the privileged few, should be for the general public, as every human has a right to know; and science, which is produced by observers and workers of all countries and ages, ought not be restricted to class."* [Ferrer, quoted by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Thus Modern Schools are based on encouraging self-education in a co-operative, egalitarian and libertarian atmosphere in which the pupil (regardless of age) can develop themselves and their interests to the fullest of their abilities. In this way Modern Schools seek to create anarchists by a process of education which respects the individual and gets them to develop their own abilities in a conducive setting.

Modern Schools have been a constant aspect of the anarchist movement since the late 1890s. The movement was started in France by Louise Michel and Sebastien Faure, where Francisco Ferrer became acquainted with them. He founded his Modern School in Barcelona in 1901, and by 1905 there were 50 similar schools in Spain (many of them funded by anarchist groups and trade unions and, from 1919 onward, by the C.N.T. -- in all cases the autonomy of the schools was respected). In 1909, Ferrer was falsely accused by the Spanish government of leading an insurrection and executed in spite of world-wide protest and overwhelming proof of his innocence. His execution, however, gained him and his educational ideas international recognition and inspired a Modern School progressive education movement across the globe.

However, for most anarchists, Modern Schools are not enough in themselves to produce a libertarian society. They agree with Bakunin:

> *"For individuals to be moralised and become fully human . . . three things are necessary: a hygienic birth, all-round education, accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for labour, reason, equality, and freedom and a social environment wherein each human individual will enjoy full freedom and really by,* ***de jure*** *and* ***de facto****, the equal of every other.*
>
> *"Does this environment exist? No. Then it must be established. . . [otherwise] in the existing social environment . . . on leaving [libertarian] schools they [the student] would enter a society governed by totally opposite principles, and, because society is always stronger than individuals, it would prevail over them . . . [and] demoralise them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p, 174]

Because of this, Modern Schools must be part of a mass working class revolutionary movement which aims to build as many aspects of the new world as possible in the old one before, ultimately, replacing it. Otherwise they are just useful as social experiments and their impact on society marginal. Thus, for anarchists, this process of education is **part of** the class struggle, not in place of it and so *"the workers [must] do everything possible to obtain all the education they can in the material circumstances in which they currently find themselves . . . [while] concentrat[ing] their efforts on the great question of their economic emancipation, the mother of all other emancipations."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Before finishing, we must stress that hierarchical education (like the media), cannot remove the effects of actual life and activity in shaping/changing people and their ideas, opinions and attitudes. While education is an essential part of maintaining the status quo and accustoming people to accept hierarchy, the state and wage slavery, it cannot stop individuals from learning from their experiences, ignoring their sense of right and wrong, recognising the injustices of the current system and the ideas that it is based upon. This means that even the best state (or private) education system will still produce rebels -- for the **experience** of wage slavery and state oppression (and, most importantly, **struggle**) is shattering to the **ideology** spoon-fed children during their "education" and reinforced by the media.

For more information on Modern Schools see Paul Avrich's **The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and education in the United States**, Emma Goldman's essays *"Francisco Ferrer and the Modern School"* (in **Anarchism and Other Essays**) and *"The Social Importance of the Modern School"* (in **Red Emma Speaks**) as well as A.S Neil's **Summerhill**. For a good introduction to anarchist viewpoints on education see *"Kropotkin and technical education: an anarchist voice"* by Michael Smith (in **For Anarchism**, David

Goodway (ed.),) and Michael Bakunin's *"All-Round Education"* (in **The Basic Bakunin**). For an excellent summary of the advantages and benefits of co-operative learning, see Alfie Kohn's **No Contest**.

J.5.14 What is Libertarian Municipalism?

As we noted in section J.2, most anarchists reject participating in electoral politics. A notable exception was Murray Bookchin who not only proposed voting but also a non-parliamentary electoral strategy for anarchists. He repeated this proposal in many of his later works, such as **From Urbanisation to Cities**, and has made it -- at least in the USA -- one of the many alternatives anarchists are involved in.

According to Bookchin, *"the proletariat, as do all oppressed sectors of society, comes to life when it sheds its industrial habits in the free and spontaneous activity of **communising,** or taking part in the political life of the community."* In other words, Bookchin thought that democratisation of local communities may be as strategically important, or perhaps more important, to anarchists than workplace struggles. Since local politics is humanly scaled, Bookchin argued that it can be participatory rather than parliamentary. Or, as he put it, the *"anarchic ideal of decentralised, stateless, collectively managed, and directly democratic communities -- of confederated municipalities or 'communes' -- speaks almost intuitively, and in the best works of Proudhon and Kropotkin, consciously, to the transforming role of libertarian municipalism as the framework of a liberatory society." "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism"*, pp. 9-22, **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.),p. 10] He also pointed out that, historically, the city has been the principle countervailing force to imperial and national states, haunting them as a potential challenge to centralised power and continuing to do so today, as can be seen in the conflicts between national government and municipalities in many countries.

Despite the libertarian potential of urban politics, "urbanisation" -- the growth of the modern megalopolis as a vast wasteland of suburbs, shopping malls, industrial parks, and slums that foster political apathy and isolation in realms of alienated production and private consumption -- is antithetical to the continued existence of those aspects of the city that might serve as the framework for a libertarian municipalism: *"When urbanisation will have effaced city life so completely that the city no longer has its own identity, culture, and spaces for consociation, the bases for democracy -- in whatever way the word in defined -- will have disappeared and the question of revolutionary forms will be a shadow game of abstractions."* Despite this danger Bookchin argued that a libertarian politics of local government is still possible, provided anarchists get our act together: *"The Commune still lies buried in the city council; the sections still lie buried in the neighbourhood; the town meeting still lies buried in the township; confederal forms of municipal association still lie buried in regional networks of towns and cities."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 16 and p. 21]

What would anarchists do electorally at the local level? Bookchin proposed that libertarians stand in local elections in order to change city and town charters to make them participatory: *"An organic politics based on such radical participatory forms of civic association does not exclude the right of anarchists to alter city and town charters such that they validate the existence of directly democratic institutions. And if this kind of activity brings anarchists into city councils, there is no reason why such a politics should be construed as parliamentary, particularly if it is confined to the civic level and is consciously posed against the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21]

In short, Libertarian Muncipalism *"depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life . . . municipalities would [then] confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such."* [**Democracy and Nature** no. 9, p. 158] This would be part of a social wide transformation, whose *"[m]inimal steps . . . include initiating Left Green municipalist movements that propose neighbourhood and town assemblies -- even if they have only moral functions at first -- and electing town and city councillors that advance the cause of these assemblies and other popular institutions. These minimal steps can lead step-by-step to the formation of confederal bodies . . . Civic banks to fund municipal enterprises and land purchases; the fostering of new ecologically-orientated enterprises that are owned by the community."* Thus Bookchin saw Libertarian Muncipalism as a process by which the state can be undermined by using elections as the means of creating popular assemblies. Part of this would be the *"municipalisation of property"* which would *"bring the economy **as a whole** into the orbit of the public sphere, where economic policy could be formulated by the **entire** community."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 266 and p. 235]

In evaluating Bookchin's proposal, several points come to mind.

Firstly, it is clear that Libertarian Muncipalism's arguments in favour of community assemblies is important and cannot be ignored. Bookchin was right to note that, in the past, many anarchists placed far too much stress on workplace struggles and workers' councils as the framework of a free society. Many of the really important issues that affect us cannot be reduced to workplace organisations, which by their very nature disenfranchise those who do not work in industry (such as housewives, the old, and so on). And, of course, there is far more to life than work and so any future society organised purely around workplace organisations is reproducing capitalism's insane glorification of economic activity, at least to some degree. So, in this sense, Libertarian Muncipalism has a very valid point -- a free society will be created and maintained within the community as well as in the workplace. However, this perspective was hardly alien to such anarchist thinkers as Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin who all placed communes at the centre of their vision of a free society.

Secondly, Bookchin and other Libertarian Muncipalists are correct to argue that anarchists should work in their local communities. Many anarchists are doing just that and are being very successful as well. However, most anarchists reject the idea of a *"confederal muncipalist movement run[ning] candidates for municipal councils with demands for the institution of public assemblies"* as viable means of *"struggle toward creating new civic institutions out of old ones (or replacing the old ones altogether)."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 229 and p. 267]

The most serious objection to this has to do with whether politics in most cities has already become too centralised, bureaucratic, inhumanly scaled, and dominated by capitalist interests to have any possibility of being taken over by anarchists running on platforms of participatory democratisation. Merely to pose the question seems enough to answer it. There is no such possibility in the vast majority of cities, and hence it would be a waste of time and energy for anarchists to support libertarian municipalist candidates in local elections -- time and energy that could be more profitably spent in direct action. If the central governments are too bureaucratic and unresponsive to be used by Libertarian Municipalists, the same can be said of local ones too -- particularly as the local state has become increasingly controlled by the central authorities (in the UK, for example, the Conservative government of the 1980s

successfully centralised power away from local councils to undercut their ability to resist the imposition of its neo-liberal policies).

The counter-argument to this is that even if there is no chance of such candidates being elected, their standing for elections would serve a valuable educational function. The answer to this is: perhaps, but would it be more valuable than direct action? Would its educational value, if any, outweigh the disadvantages of electioneering discussed in section J.2? Given the ability of major media to marginalise alternative candidates, we doubt that such campaigns would have enough educational value to outweigh these disadvantages. Moreover, being an anarchist does not make one immune to the corrupting effects of electioneering. History is littered with radical, politically aware movements using elections and ending up becoming part of the system they aimed to transform. Most anarchists doubt that Libertarian Muncipalism will be any different -- after all, it is the circumstances the parties find themselves in which are decisive, not the theory they hold. Why would libertarians be immune to this but not Marxists or Greens?

Lastly, most anarchists question the whole process on which Libertarian Muncipalism bases itself on. The idea of communes is a key one of anarchism and so strategies to create them in the here and now are important. However, to think that using alienated, representative institutions to abolish these institutions is wrong. As Italian activists who organised a neighbourhood assembly by non-electoral means argue *"[t]o accept power and to say that the others were acting in bad faith and that we would be better, would **force** non-anarchists towards direct democracy. We reject this logic and believe that organisations must come from the grassroots."* [*"Community Organising in Southern Italy"*, pp. 16-19, **Black Flag** no. 210, p. 18]

Thus Libertarian Municipalism reverses the process by which community assemblies will be created. Instead of anarchists using elections to build such bodies, they must work in their communities directly to create them (see section J.5.1 for more details). Using the catalyst of specific issues of local interest, anarchists could propose the creation of a community assembly to discuss the issues in question and organise action to solve them. Rather than stand in local elections, anarchists should encourage people to create these institutions themselves and empower themselves by collective self-activity. As Kropotkin argued, *"Laws can only **follow** the accomplished facts; and even if they do honestly follow them -- which is usually **not** the case -- a law remains a dead letter so long as there are not on the spot the living forces required for making the **tendencies** expressed in the law an accomplished **fact**."* [**Anarchism**, p. 171] Most anarchists, therefore, think it is far more important to create the *"living forces"* within our communities directly than waste energy in electioneering and the passing of laws creating or "legalising" community assemblies. In other words, community assemblies can only be created from the bottom up, by non-electoral means, a process which Libertarian Muncipalism confuses with electioneering.

So, while Libertarian Muncipalism **does** raise many important issues and correctly stresses the importance of community activity and self-management, its emphasis on electoral activity undercuts its liberatory promise. For most anarchists, community assemblies can only be created from below, by direct action, and (because of its electoral strategy) a Libertarian Municipalist movement will end up being transformed into a copy of the system it aims to abolish.

J.5.15 What attitude do anarchists take to the welfare state?

The period of neo-liberalism since the 1980s has seen a rollback of the state within society by the right-wing in the name of "freedom," "individual responsibility" and "efficiency." The position of anarchists to this process is mixed. On the one hand, we are all in favour of reducing the size of the state and increasing individual responsibility and freedom but, on the other, we are well aware that this rollback is part of an attack on the working class and tends to increase the power of the capitalists over us as the state's (direct) influence is reduced. Thus anarchists appear to be on the horns of a dilemma -- or, at least, apparently.

So what attitude **do** anarchists take to the welfare state and attacks on it?

First we must note that this attack on "welfare" is somewhat selective. While using the rhetoric of "self-reliance" and "individualism," the practitioners of these "tough love" programmes have made sure that the major corporations continue to get state hand-outs and aid while attacking social welfare. In other words, the current attack on the welfare state is an attempt to impose market discipline on the working class while increasing state protection for the ruling class. Therefore, most anarchists have no problem defending social welfare programmes as these can be considered as only fair considering the aid the capitalist class has always received from the state (both direct subsidies and protection and indirect support via laws that protect property and so on). And, for all their talk of increasing individual choice, the right-wing remain silent about the lack of choice and individual freedom during working hours within capitalism.

Secondly, most of the right-wing inspired attacks on the welfare state are inaccurate. For example, Noam Chomsky notes that the *"correlation between welfare payments and family life is real, though it is the reverse of what is claimed [by the right]. As support for the poor has declined, unwed birth-rates, which had risen steadily from the 1940s through the mid-1970s, markedly increased. 'Over the last three decades, the rate of poverty among children almost perfectly correlates with the birth-rates among teenage mothers a decade later,' Mike Males points out: 'That is, child poverty seems to lead to teenage childbearing, not the other way around.'"* [*"Rollback III"*, **Z Magazine**, April, 1995] The same charge of inaccurate scare-mongering can be laid at the claims about the evil effects of welfare which the rich and large corporations wish to save others (but not themselves) from. Such altruism is truly heart warming. For those in the United States or familiar with it, the same can be said of the hysterical attacks on "socialised medicine" and health-care reform funded by insurance companies and parroted by right-wing ideologues and politicians.

Thirdly, anarchists are just as opposed to capitalism as they are the state. This means that privatising state functions is no more libertarian than nationalising them. In fact, less so as such a process **reduces** the limited public say state control implies in favour of more private tyranny and wage-labour. As such, attempts to erode the welfare state without other, pro-working class, social reforms violates the anti-capitalist part of anarchism. Similarly, the introduction of a state supported welfare system rather than a for-profit capitalist run system (as in America) would hardly be considered any more a violation of libertarian principles as the reverse happening. In terms of reducing human suffering, though, most anarchists would oppose the latter and be in favour of the former while aiming to create a third (self-managed) alternative.

Fourthly, we must note that while most anarchists **are** in favour of collective self-help and welfare, we are opposed to the state. Part of the alternatives anarchists try and create are self-managed and community welfare projects (see next section). Moreover, in the past, anarchists and syndicalists were at the forefront in opposing state welfare schemes. This was because they were introduced **not** by socialists but by liberals and other supporters of capitalism to undercut support for radical alternatives and to aid long term economic development by creating the educated and healthy population required to use advanced technology and fight wars. Thus we find that:

> *"Liberal social welfare legislation . . . were seen by many [British syndicalists] not as genuine welfare reforms, but as mechanisms of social control. Syndicalists took a leading part in resisting such legislation on the grounds that it would increase capitalist discipline over labour, thereby undermining working class independence and self-reliance."* [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900-1914**, p. 137]

Anarchists view the welfare state much as some feminists do. While they note, to quote Carole Pateman, the *"patriarchal structure of the welfare state"* they are also aware that it has *"also brought challenges to patriarchal power and helped provide a basis for women's autonomous citizenship."* She goes on to note that *"for women to look at the welfare state is merely to exchange dependence on individual men for dependence on the state. The power and capriciousness of husbands is replaced by the arbitrariness, bureaucracy and power of the state, the very state that has upheld patriarchal power."* This *"will not in itself do anything to challenge patriarchal power relations."* [**The Disorder of Women**, p. 195 and p. 200]

Thus while the welfare state does give working people more options than having to take **any** job or put up with **any** conditions, this relative independence from the market and individual capitalists has came at the price of dependence on the state -- the very institution that protects and supports capitalism in the first place. And has we have became painfully aware in recent years, it is the ruling class who has most influence in the state -- and so, when it comes to deciding what state budgets to cut, social welfare ones are first in line. Given that such programmes are controlled by the state, **not** working class people, such an outcome is hardly surprising. Not only this, we also find that state control reproduces the same hierarchical structures that the capitalist firm creates.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists have no great love of such state welfare schemes and desire their replacement by self-managed alternatives. For example, taking municipal housing, Colin Ward writes:

> *"The municipal tenant is trapped in a syndrome of dependence and resentment, which is an accurate reflection of his housing situation. People care about what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve themselves. They must have a direct responsibility for it . . . The tenant take-over of the municipal estate is one of those obviously sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the groves of nineteenth-century paternalism."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 73]

Looking at state supported education, Ward argues that the *"universal education system turns out to be yet another way in which the poor subsidise the rich."* Which is the least of its problems, for *"it is in the **nature** of public authorities to run coercive and hierarchical*

institutions whose ultimate function is to perpetuate social inequality and to brainwash the young into the acceptance of their particular slot in the organised system." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83 and p. 81] The role of state education as a means of systematically indoctrinating the working class is reflected in William Lazonick words:

> *"The Education Act of 1870 . . . [gave the] state . . . the facilities . . . to make education compulsory for all children from the age of five to the age of ten. It had also erected a powerful system of ideological control over the next generation of workers . . . [It] was to function as a prime ideological mechanism in the attempt by the capitalist class through the medium of the state, to continually* ***reproduce*** *a labour force which would passively accept [the] subjection [of labour to the domination of capital]. At the same time it had set up a public institution which could potentially be used by the working class for just the contrary purpose."* [*"The Subjection of Labour to Capital: The rise of the Capitalist System"*, **Radical Political Economy** Vol. 2, p. 363]

Lazonick, as did Pateman, indicates the contradictory nature of welfare provisions within capitalism. On the one hand, they are introduced to help control the working class (and to improve long term economic development). On the other hand, these provisions can be used by working class people as weapons against capitalism and give themselves more options than "work or starve" (the fact that the attacks on welfare in the UK during the 1990s -- called, ironically enough, **welfare to work** -- involves losing benefits if you refuse a job is not a surprising development). Thus we find that welfare acts as a kind of floor under wages. In the US, the two have followed a common trajectory (rising together and falling together). And it is **this**, the potential benefits welfare can have for working people, that is the **real** cause for the current capitalist attacks upon it. As Noam Chomsky summarises:

> *"State authority is now under severe attack in the more democratic societies, but not because it conflicts with the libertarian vision. Rather the opposite: because it offers (weak) protection to some aspects of that vision. Governments have a fatal flaw: unlike the private tyrannies, the institutions of state power and authority offer to the public an opportunity to play some role, however limited, in managing their own affairs."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 193]

Because of this contradictory nature of welfare, we find anarchists like Noam Chomsky arguing that (using an expression popularised by South American rural workers unions) *"we should 'expand the floor of the cage.' We know we're in a cage. We know we're trapped. We're going to expand the floor, meaning we will extend to the limits what the cage will allow. And we intend to destroy the cage. But not by attacking the cage when we're vulnerable, so they'll murder us . . . You have to protect the cage when it's under attack from even worse predators from outside, like private power. And you have to expand the floor of the cage, recognising that it's a cage. These are all preliminaries to dismantling it. Unless people are willing to tolerate that level of complexity, they're going to be of no use to people who are suffering and who need help, or, for that matter, to themselves."* [**Expanding the Floor of the Cage**]

Thus, even though we know the welfare state is a cage and part of an instrument of class power, we have to defend it from a worse possibility -- namely, the state as "pure" defender of capitalism with working people with few or no rights. At least the welfare state does have

a contradictory nature, the tensions of which can be used to increase our options. And one of these options is its abolition **from below**!

For example, with regards to municipal housing, anarchists will be the first to agree that it is paternalistic, bureaucratic and hardly a wonderful living experience. However, in stark contrast with the right who desire to privatise such estates, anarchists think that *"tenants control"* is the best solution as it gives us the benefits of individual ownership **along with** community (and so without the negative points of property, such as social atomisation). The demand for *"tenant control"* must come from below, by the *"collective resistance"* of the tenants themselves, perhaps as a result of struggles against *"continuous rent increases"* leading to *"the demand . . . for a change in the status of the tenant."* Such a *"tenant take-over of the municipal estate is one of those sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the grooves of nineteenth century paternalism."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73]

And it is here that we find the ultimate irony of the right-wing, "free market" attempts to abolish the welfare state -- neo-liberalism wants to end welfare **from above,** by means of the state (which is the instigator of this individualistic "reform"). It does not seek the end of dependency by self-liberation, but the shifting of dependency from state to charity and the market. In contrast, anarchists desire to abolish welfare from **below**. This the libertarian attitude to those government policies which actually do help people. While anarchists would *"hesitate to condemn those measures taken by governments which obviously benefited the people, unless we saw the immediate possibility of people carrying them out for themselves. This would not inhibit us from declaring at the same time that what initiatives governments take would be more successfully taken by the people themselves if they put their minds to the same problems . . . to build up a hospital service or a transport system, for instance, from local needs into a national organisation, by agreement and consent at all levels is surely more economical as well as efficient than one which is conceived at top level [by the state] . . . where Treasury, political and other pressures, not necessarily connected with what we would describe as **needs**, influence the shaping of policies."* So *"as long as we have capitalism and government the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176-87, **The Raven**, No. 14, p. 179]

Ultimately, unlike the state socialist/liberal left, anarchists reject the idea that the cause of socialism, of a free society, can be helped by using the state. Like the right, the left see political action in terms of the state. All its favourite policies have been statist -- state intervention in the economy, nationalisation, state welfare, state education and so on. Whatever the problem, the left see the solution as lying in the extension of the power of the state. They continually push people in relying on **others** to solve their problems for them. Moreover, such state-based "aid" does not get to the core of the problem. All it does is fight the symptoms of capitalism and statism without attacking their root causes -- the system itself.

Invariably, this support for the state is a move away from working class people, from trusting and empowering them to sort out their own problems. Indeed, the left seem to forget that the state exists to defend the collective interests of the ruling class and so could hardly be considered a neutral body. And, worst of all, they have presented the right with the opportunity of stating that freedom from the state means the same thing as the freedom of the market (so ignoring the awkward fact that capitalism is based upon domination -- wage

labour -- and needs many repressive measures in order to exist and survive). Anarchists are of the opinion that changing the boss for the state (or vice versa) is only a step sideways, **not** forward! After all, it is **not** working people who control how the welfare state is run, it is politicians, "experts", bureaucrats and managers who do so (*"Welfare is administered by a top-heavy governmental machine which ensures that when economies in public expenditure are imposed by its political masters, they are made in reducing the service to the public, not by reducing the cost of administration."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.** p. 10]). Little wonder we have seen elements of the welfare state used as a weapon in the class war **against** those in struggle (for example, in Britain during the miners strike in 1980s the Conservative Government made it illegal to claim benefits while on strike, so reducing the funds available to workers in struggle and helping bosses force strikers back to work faster).

Anarchists consider it far better to encourage those who suffer injustice to organise themselves and in that way they can change what **they** think is actually wrong, as opposed to what politicians and "experts" claim is wrong. If sometimes part of this struggle involves protecting aspects of the welfare state (*"expanding the floor of the cage"*) so be it -- but we will never stop there and will use such struggles as a stepping stone in abolishing the welfare state **from below** by creating self-managed, working class, alternatives. As part of this process anarchists also seek to **transform** those aspects of the welfare state they may be trying to "protect". They do not defend an institution which **is** paternalistic, bureaucratic and unresponsive. For example, if we are involved in trying to stop a local state-run hospital or school from closing, anarchists would try to raise the issue of self-management and local community control into the struggle in the hope of going beyond the status quo.

In this, we follow the suggestion made by Proudhon that rather than *"fatten certain contractors,"* libertarians should be aiming to create *"a new kind of property"* by *"granting the privilege of running"* public utilities, industries and services, *"under fixed conditions, to responsible companies, not of capitalists, but of workmen."* Municipalities would take the initiative in setting up public works but actual control would rest with workers' co-operatives for *"it becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 151 and p. 276-7] Thus, for example, rather than nationalise or privatise railways, they should be handed over workers' co-operatives to run. The same with welfare services and such like: *"the abolition of the State is the last term of a series, which consists of an incessant diminution, by political and administrative simplification the number of public functionaries and to put into the care of responsible workers societies the works and services confided to the state."* [Proudhon, **Carnets**, vol. 3, p. 293]

Not only does this mean that we can get accustomed to managing our own affairs collectively, it also means that we can ensure that whatever "safety-nets" we have do what we want and not what capital wants. In the end, what we create and run by ourselves will be more responsive to our needs, and the needs of the class struggle, than reformist aspects of the capitalist state. This much, we think, is obvious. And it is ironic to see elements of the "radical" and "revolutionary" left argue against this working class self-help (and so ignore the **long** tradition of such activity in working class movements) and instead select for the agent of their protection a state run by and for capitalists!

There are two traditions of welfare within society, one of *"fraternal and autonomous associations springing from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] While sometimes anarchists are forced to defend the latter

against the greater evil of "free market" capitalism, we never forget the importance of creating and strengthening the former. As Chomsky suggests, libertarians have to *"defend some state institutions from the attack against them [by private power], while trying at the same time to pry them open to meaningful public participation -- and ultimately, to dismantle them in a much more free society, if the appropriate circumstances can be achieved."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 194] A point we will discuss more in the next section when we highlight the historical examples of self-managed communal welfare and self-help organisations.

J.5.16 Are there any historical examples of collective self-help?

Yes, in all societies we see working class people joining together to practice mutual aid and solidarity. This takes many forms, such as trade and industrial unions, credit unions and friendly societies, co-operatives and so on, but the natural response of working class people to the injustices of capitalism was to practice collective "self-help" in order to improve their lives and protect their friends, communities and fellow workers.

There are, as Colin Ward stresses, *"in fact several quite separate traditions of social welfare: the product of totally different attitudes to social needs . . . One of these traditions is that of a service given grudgingly and punitively by authority, another is the expression of social responsibility, or of mutual aid and self-help. One is embodied in **institutions**, the other in **associations**."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 112] Anarchists, needless to say, favour the latter. Unfortunately, this *"great tradition of working class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state . . . The contribution that the recipients had to make to all this theoretical bounty was ignored as a mere embarrassment -- apart, of course, for paying for it . . . The socialist ideal was rewritten as a world in which everyone was entitled to everything, but where nobody except the providers had any actual say about anything. We have been learning for years, in the anti-welfare backlash, what a vulnerable utopia that was."* This self-managed working class self-help was the *"welfare road we failed to take."* [Ward, **Social Policy: an anarchist response**, p. 11-2 and p. 9]

Anarchists would argue that self-help is the natural side effect of freedom. There is no possibility of radical social change unless people are free to decide for themselves what their problems are, where their interests lie and are free to organise for themselves what they want to do about them. Self-help is a natural expression of people taking control of their own lives and acting for themselves. Anyone who urges state action on behalf of people is no socialist and any one arguing against self-help as "bourgeois" is no anti-capitalist. It is somewhat ironic that it is the right who have monopolised the rhetoric of "self-help" and turned it into yet another ideological weapon against working class direct action and self-liberation (although, saying that, the right generally likes individualised self-help -- given a strike, squatting or any other form of **collective** self-help movement they will be the first to denounce it):

> *"The political Left has, over the years, committed an enormous psychological error in allowing this kind of language ["self-help", "mutual aid", "standing on your own two feet" and so on] to be appropriated by the political Right. If you look at the exhibitions of trade union banners from the last century, you will see slogans like Self*

> *Help embroidered all over them. It was those clever Fabians and academic Marxists who ridiculed out of existence the values by which ordinary citizens govern their own lives in favour of bureaucratic paternalising, leaving those values around to be picked up by their political opponents."* [Ward, **Talking Houses**, p. 58]

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive list of working class collective self-help and social welfare activity here, all we can do is present an overview of collective welfare in action (for a discussion of working class self-help and co-operation through the centuries we can suggest no better source than Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid**). In the case of Britain, we find that the *"newly created working class built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous federated enterprises like the trade union movement and the Co-operative movement."* [Ward, **Social Policy**, pp. 10-1] The historian E.P. Thompson confirmed this picture of a wide network of working class self-help organisations. *"Small tradesmen, artisans, labourers"* he summarised, *"all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses through membership of . . . friendly societies."* These were *"authentic evidence of independent working-class culture and institutions . . . out of which . . . trade unions grew, and in which trade union officers were trained."* Friendly societies *"did not 'proceed from' an idea: both the ideas and institutions arose from a certain common experience . . . In the simple cellular structure of the friendly society, with its workaday ethos of mutual aid, we see many features which were reproduced in more sophisticated and complex form in trade unions, co-operatives, Hampden clubs, Political Unions, and Chartist lodges . . . Every kind of witness in the first half of the nineteenth century -- clergymen, factory inspectors, Radical publicists -- remarked upon the extent of mutual aid in the poorest districts. In times of emergency, unemployment, strikes, sickness, childbirth, then it was the poor who 'helped every one his neighbour.'"* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 458, pp. 460-1 and p. 462] Sam Dolgoff gave an excellent summary of similar self-help activities by the American working class:

> *"Long before the labour movement got corrupted and the state stepped in, the workers organised a network of co-operative institutions of all kinds: schools, summer camps for children and adults, homes for the aged, health and cultural centres, credit associations, fire, life, and health insurance, technical education, housing, etc."* [**The American Labour Movement: A New Beginning**, p. 74]

Dolgoff, like all anarchists, urged workers to *"finance the establishment of independent co-operative societies of all types, which will respond adequately to their needs"* and that such a movement *"could constitute a realistic alternative to the horrendous abuses of the 'establishment' at a fraction of the cost."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74 and pp. 74-75] In this way a network of self-managed, communal, welfare associations and co-operatives could be built -- paid for, run by and run for working class people. Such a system *"would not . . . become a plaything of central government financial policy."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16] Such a network could be initially build upon, and be an aspect of, the struggles of both workers in and claimants, patients, tenants, and other users of the current welfare state. So a *"multiplicity of mutual aid organisations among claimants, patients, victims, represents the most potent lever for change in transforming the welfare state into a genuine welfare society, in turning community care into a caring community."* [Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 125]

The creation of such a co-operative, community-based, welfare system will not occur over night, nor will it be easy. But it **is** possible, as history shows. It will, of course, have its problems, but as Colin Ward notes, *"the standard argument against a localist and decentralised point of view, is that of universalism: an equal service to all citizens, which it is thought that central control achieves. The short answer to this is that it doesn't!"* [Colin Ward, **Social Policy**, p. 16] He notes that richer areas generally get a better service from the welfare state than poorer ones, thus violating the claims of equal service. A centralised system (be it state or private) will most likely allocate resources which reflect the interests and (lack of) knowledge of bureaucrats and experts, **not** on where they are best used or the needs of the users.

Anarchists are sure that a **confederal** network of mutual aid organisations and co-operatives, based upon local input and control, can overcome problems of localism far better than a centralised one -- which, due to its lack of local input and participation will more likely **encourage** parochialism and indifference than a wider vision and solidarity. If you have no real say in what affects you, why should you be concerned with what affects others? This is unsurprising, for what else is global action other than the product of thousands of local actions? Solidarity within our class is the flower that grows from the soil of our local self-activity, direct action and self-organisation. Unless we act and organise locally, any wider organisation and action will be hollow. Thus **local** organisation and empowerment is essential to create and maintain wider organisations and mutual aid.

To take another example of the benefits of a self-managed welfare system, we find that it *"was a continual complaint of the authorities"* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century *"that friendly societies allowed members to withdraw funds when on strike."* [Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 461f] The same complaints were voiced in Britain about the welfare state allowing strikers to claim benefit will on strike. The Conservative Government of the 1980s changed that by passing a law barring those in industrial dispute to claim benefits -- and so removing a potential support for those in struggle. Such a restriction would have been far harder (if not impossible) to impose on a network of self-managed mutual aid co-operatives. Such institutions would have not become the plaything of central government financial policy as the welfare state and the taxes working class people have to pay have become.

All this means that anarchists reject the phoney choice between private and state capitalism we are usually offered. We reject both privatisation **and** nationalisation, both right and left wings (of capitalism). Neither state nor private health care are user-controlled -- one is subject to the requirements of politics and the other places profits before people. As we have discussed the welfare state in the last section, it is worthwhile to quickly discuss privatised welfare and why anarchists reject this option even more than state welfare.

Firstly, all forms of private healthcare/welfare have to pay dividends to capitalists, fund advertising, reduce costs to maximise profits by standardising the "caring" process - i.e. McDonaldisation - and so on, all of which inflates prices and produces substandard service across the industry as a whole. According to Alfie Kohn, *"[m]ore hospitals and clinics are being run by for-profit corporations; many institutions, forced to battle for 'customers,' seem to value a skilled director of marketing more highly than a skilled caregiver. As in any other economic sector, the race for profits translates into pressure to reduce costs, and the easiest way to do it here is to cut back on services to unprofitable patients, that is, those who are more sick than rich . . . The result: hospital costs are actually **higher** in areas where there is*

more competition for patients." [**No Contest**, p. 240] In the UK, attempts to introduce "market forces" into the National Health Service has also lead to increased costs as well as inflating the size and cost of its bureaucracy.

Looking at Chile, hyped by those who desire to privatise Social Security, we find similar disappointing results (well, disappointing for the working class at least, as we will see). Seemingly, Chile's private system has achieved impressive average returns on investment. However, once commissions are factored in, the real return for individual workers is considerably lower. For example, although the average rate of return on funds from 1982 through 1986 was 15.9 percent, the real return after commissions was a mere 0.3 percent! Between 1991 and 1995, the pre-commission return was 12.9 percent, but with commissions it fell to 2.1 percent. According to Doug Henwood, the *"competing mutual funds have vast sales forces, and the portfolio managers all have their vast fees. All in all, administrative costs . . . are almost 30% of revenues, compared to well under 1% for the U.S. Social Security system."* [**Wall Street**, p. 305] In addition, the private pension fund market is dominated by a handful of companies.

Even if commission costs were lowered (by regulation), the impressive returns on capital seen between 1982 and 1995 (when the real annual return on investment averaged 12.7 percent) are likely not to be sustained. These average returns coincided with boom years in Chile, complemented by government's high borrowing costs. Because of the debt crisis of the 1980s, Latin governments were paying double-digit real interest rates on their bonds -- the main investment vehicle of social security funds. In effect, government was subsidising the "private" system by paying astronomical rates on government bonds. Another failing of the system is that only a little over half of Chilean workers make regular social security contributions. While many believe that a private system would reduce evasion because workers have a greater incentive to contribute to their own personal retirement accounts, 43.4 percent of those affiliated with the new system in June of 1995 did not contribute regularly. [Stephen J. Kay, *"The Chile Con: Privatizing Social Security in South America,"* **The American Prospect** no. 33, pp. 48-52] All in all, privatisation seems to be beneficial only to middle-men and capitalists, if Chile is anything to go by. As Henwood argues, while the *"infusion of money"* resulting from privatising social security *"has done wonders for the Chilean stock market" "projections are that as many as half of future retirees will draw a poverty-level pension."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 304-5]

Suffice to say, all you really need to know about privatisation of pensions and healthcare in Chile is that the military dictatorship which imposed it excluded the military from its dubious benefits. Such altruism is truly touching.

So, anarchists reject private welfare as a con (and an even bigger one than state welfare). As Colin Ward suggests, it *"is the question of how we get back on the mutual aid road **instead of** commercial health insurance and private pension schemes."* [**Social Policy**, p. 17] As anarchists are both anti-state and anti-capitalist, swapping private power for the state power is, at best, a step sideways. Usually, it is worse for capitalist companies are accountable only to their owners and the profit criteria. This means, as Chomsky suggests, *"protecting the state sector today is a step towards abolishing the state because it maintains a public arena in which people can participate and organise, and affect policy, and so on, though in limited ways. If that's removed, we'd go back to a . . . private dictatorship, but that's hardly a step towards liberation."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 213] Instead anarchists try to create **real** alternatives to hierarchy, be it state or capitalist, in the here and now which reflect our ideas

of a free and just society. For, when it boils down to it, freedom cannot be given, only taken and this process of **self**-liberation is reflected in the alternatives we build to help win the class war.

The struggle **against** capitalism and statism requires that we build **for** the future and, moreover, we should remember that *"he who has no confidence in the creative capacity of the masses and in their capability to revolt doesn't belong in the revolutionary movement. He should go to a monastery and get on his knees and start praying. Because he is no revolutionist. He is a son of a bitch."* [Sam Dolgoff, quoted by Ulrike Heider, **Anarchism: left, right, and green**, p. 12]

J.6 What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?

Anarchists have long been aware of the importance of child rearing and education. We are aware that child rearing should aim to develop *"a well-rounded individuality"* and not *"a patient work slave, professional automaton, tax-paying citizen, or righteous moralist."* In this section of the FAQ we will discuss anarchist approaches to child rearing bearing in mind *"that it is through the channel of the child that the development of the mature man [or woman] must go, and that the present ideas of . . . educating or training . . . are such as to stifle the natural growth of the child."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 131 and p. 130]

If one accepts the thesis that the authoritarian family is the breeding ground for both individual psychological problems and political reaction, it follows that anarchists should try to develop ways of raising children that will not psychologically cripple them but instead enable them to accept freedom and responsibility while developing natural self-regulation. We will refer to children raised in such a way as ***"free children."***

Work in this field is still in its infancy (no pun intended). Wilhelm Reich was the main pioneer in this field (an excellent, short introduction to his ideas can be found in Maurice Brinton's **The Irrational in Politics**). In **Children of the Future**, Reich made numerous suggestions, based on his research and clinical experience, for parents, psychologists, and educators striving to develop libertarian methods of child rearing (although he did not use the term "libertarian").

In this and the following sections we will summarise Reich's main ideas as well as those of other libertarian psychologists and educators who have been influenced by him, such as A.S. Neill and Alexander Lowen. We will examine the theoretical principles involved in raising free children and will illustrate their practical application with concrete examples. Finally, we will examine the anarchist approach to the problems of adolescence.

Such an approach to child rearing is based upon the insight that children *"do not constitute anyone's property: they are neither the property of the parents nor even of society. They belong only to their own future freedom."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 327] As such, what happens to a child when they are growing up **shapes** the person they become and the society they live in. The key question for people interested in freedom is whether *"the child [is] to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be*

moulded according to the whims and fancies of those about it?" [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Libertarian child rearing is the means by which the individuality of the child is respected and developed.

This is in stark contrast to standard capitalist claim that children are the **property** of their parents. If we accept that children **are** the property of their parents then we are implicitly stating that a child's formative years are spent in slavery, hardly a relationship which will promote the individuality and freedom of the child or the wider society. Little wonder that most anarchists reject such assertions. Instead we argue that the *"rights of the parents shall be confined to loving their children and exercising over them . . . authority [that] does not run counter to their morality, their mental development, or their future freedom."* Being someone's property (i.e. slave) runs counter to all these and *"it follows that society, the whole future of which depends upon adequate education and upbringing of children . . . has not only the right but also the duty to watch over them."* Hence child rearing should be **part** of society, a communal process by which children learn what it means to be an individual by being respected as one by others: *"real freedom -- that is, the full awareness and the realisation thereof in every individual, pre-eminently based upon a feeling of one's dignity and upon the genuine respect for someone else's freedom and dignity, i.e. upon justice -- such freedom can develop in children only through the rational development of their minds, character and will."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 327]

We wish to re-iterate again that a great deal of work remains to be done in this field. Therefore our comments should be regarded merely as tentative bases for further reflection and research by those involved with raising and educating children. There is, and cannot be, any "rule book" for raising free children, because to follow an inflexible rule book is to ignore the fact that each child and their environment is unique and therefore demands unique responses from their parents. Hence the principles of libertarian child rearing to which we will refer should not be thought of as rules, but rather, as experimental hypotheses to be tested by parents within their own situation by applying their intelligence and deriving their own individual conclusions.

Bringing up children must be like education, and based on similar principles, namely *"upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 139] Indeed, child rearing and education **cannot** be separated as life itself is an education and so must share the same principles and be viewed as a process of *"development and exploration, rather than as one of repressing a child's instincts and inculcating obedience and discipline."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 166]

Moreover, the role of parental example is very important to raising free children. Children often learn by mimicking their parents -- children do what their parents do, not as they say. If their mother and father lie to each other, scream, fight and so on, then the child will probably do so as well. Children's behaviour does not come out thin air, they are a product of the environment they are brought up in. Children can only be encouraged by example, not by threats and commands. So how parents act can be an obstacle to the development of a free child. Parents must do more than just **say** the right things, but also act as anarchists in order to produce free children.

The sad fact is that most modern people have lost the ability to raise free children, and regaining this ability will be a long process of trial and error as well as **parent** education in which it is to be hoped that each succeeding generation will learn from the failures and successes of their predecessors and so improve. In the best-case scenario, over the course of a few generations the number of progressive parents will continue to grow and raise ever freer children, who in turn will become even more progressive parents themselves, thus gradually changing mass psychology in a libertarian direction. Such changes **can** come about very fast, as can be seen from various communes all over the world where society is organised according to libertarian principles. As Reich put it:

> *"We have learned that instead of a jump into the realm of the Children of the Future, we can hope for no more than a steady advance, in which the healthy new overlaps the sick old structure, with the new slowly outgrowing the old."* [**Children of the Future**, pp. 38-39]

By means of freedom-based child rearing and education, along with other methods of consciousness raising, as well as encouraging resistance to the existing social order anarchists hope to prepare the psychological foundation for a social paradigm shift, from authoritarian to libertarian institutions and values. And indeed, a gradual cultural evolution toward increasing freedom does seem to exist. For example, as A.S. Neill suggested there is *"a slow trend to freedom, sexual and otherwise. In my boyhood, a woman went bathing wearing stockings and a long dress. Today, women show legs and bodies. Children are getting more freedom with every generation. Today, only a few lunatics put cayenne pepper on a baby's thumb to stop sucking. Today, only a few countries beat their children in school."* [**Summerhill**, p. 115]

Most anarchists believe that we must practice what we preach and so the anarchist revolution begins at home. As anarchists raise their own children in capitalist society and/or are involved in the raising and education of the children of other parents, we can practice in part libertarian principles even before the revolution. As such, we think it is important to discuss libertarian child rearing.

J.6.1 What are the main obstacles to raising free children?

The biggest obstacle is the training and character of most parents, physicians, and educators. Individuals within a hierarchical society create psychological walls/defences around themselves and these will obviously have an effect both on the mental and physical state of the individual and so their capacity for living a free life and experiencing pleasure. Such parents then try (often unconsciously) to stifle the life-energy in children. There are, for example, the child's natural vocal expressions (shouting, screaming, bellowing, crying, etc.) and natural body motility. As Reich noted:

> *"Small children go through a phase of development characterised by vigorous activity of the voice musculature. The joy the infant derives from loud noises (crying, shrieking, and forming a variety of sounds) is regarded by many parents as pathological aggressiveness. The children are accordingly admonished not to scream, to be 'still,' etc. The impulses of the voice apparatus are inhibited, its musculature becomes chronically contracted, and the child becomes quiet, 'well-brought-up,' and withdrawn. The effect of such mistreatment is soon manifested in eating disturbances,*

> *general apathy, pallor of the face, etc. Speech disturbances and retardation of speech development are presumably caused in this manner. In the adult we see the effects of such mistreatment in the form of spasms of the throat. The automatic constrictions of the glottis and the deep throat musculature, with subsequent inhibition of the aggressive impulses of the head and neck, seems to be particularly characteristic."* [**Children of the Future**, p. 128]

"Clinical experience has taught us," Reich concluded, *"that small children must be allowed to 'shout themselves out' when the shouting is inspired by pleasure. This might be disagreeable to some parents, but questions of education must be decided* ***exclusively in the interests of the child,*** *not in those of the adults."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

Besides deadening life energy in the body, such stifling also inhibits the anxiety generated by the presence of anti-social, cruel, and perverse impulses within the psyche -- for example, destructiveness, sadism, greed, power hunger, brutality, etc. (impulses referred to by Reich as *"secondary"* drives). In other words, this reduces our ability to empathise with others and so the internal ethical guidelines we all develop are blunted, making us more likely tp express such secondary, anti-social, drives. So, ironically, these secondary drives result from the **suppression of the primary drives** and the sensations of pleasure associated with them. These secondary drives develop because the only emotional expressions that can get through a person's defences are distorted, harsh, and/or mechanical. In other words, compulsive morality (i.e. acting according to externally imposed rules) becomes necessary to control the secondary drives **which compulsion itself creates.** By such processes, authoritarian child-rearing becomes self-justifying:

> *"Psychoanalysts have failed to distinguish between primary natural and secondary perverse, cruel drives, and they are continuously killing nature in the new-born while they try to extinguish the 'brutish little animal.' They are completely ignorant of the fact that it is* ***exactly this killing of the natural principle which creates the secondary perverse and cruel nature,*** *human nature so called, and that these artificial cultural creations in turn make compulsive moralism and brutal laws necessary."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17-18]

Moralism, however, can never get at the root of the problem of secondary drives, but in fact only increases the pressure of crime and guilt. The real solution is to let children develop what Reich calls **natural self-regulation.** This can be done only by not subjecting them to punishment, coercion, threats, moralistic lectures and admonitions, withdrawal of love, etc. in an attempt to inhibit their spontaneous expression of natural life-impulses. The systematic development of the emphatic tendencies of the young infant is the best way to "socialise" and restrict activities that are harmful to the others. As A.S. Neill pointed out *"self-regulation implies a belief in the goodness of human nature; a belief that there is not, and never was, original sin."* [**Summerhill**, p. 103]

According to Neill, children who are given freedom from birth and not forced to conform to parental expectations spontaneously learn how to keep themselves clean and develop social qualities like courtesy, common sense, an interest in learning, respect for the rights of others, and so forth. However, once the child has been armoured through authoritarian methods intended to **force** it to develop such qualities, it becomes out of touch with its living core and therefore no longer able to develop self-regulation. In this stage it becomes harder and harder for the pro-social emotions to shape the developing mode of life of the new member of

society. At that point, when the secondary drives develop, parental authoritarianism becomes a **necessity.**

This oppression produces an inability to tolerate freedom. The vast majority of people develop this **automatically** from the way they are raised and is what makes the whole subject of bringing up children of crucial importance to anarchists. Reich concluded that if parents do not suppress nature in the first place, then no anti-social drives will be created and no authoritarianism will be required to suppress them: *"**What you so desperately and vainly try to achieve by way of compulsion and admonition is there in the new-born infant ready to live and function. Let it grow as nature requires, and change our institutions accordingly**."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 47] So in order to raise psychologically healthy children, parents need to acquire self-knowledge, particularly of how internal conflicts develop in family relationships, and to free themselves as much as possible from neurotic forms of behaviour. The difficulty of parents acquiring such self-knowledge and sufficiently de-conditioning themselves is obviously another obstacle to raising self-regulated children.

However, the greatest obstacle is the fact that twisting mechanisms set in so very early in life, i.e. soon after birth. Hence it is important for parents to obtain a thorough knowledge of what rigid suppressions are and how they function, so that from the beginning they can prevent (or at least decrease) them from forming in their children. Finally, Reich cautioned that it is crucial to avoid any mixing of concepts: *"One cannot mix a bit of self-regulation with a bit of moral demand. Either we trust nature as basically decent and self-regulatory or we do not, and then there is only one way, that of training by compulsion. It is essential to grasp the fact that the two ways of upbringing do not go together."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

J.6.2. What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods?

According to Reich, the problems of parenting a free child actually begin before conception, with the need for a prospective mother to free herself as much as possible from chronic muscular tensions. It has been found in many studies that not only the physical health of the mother can influence the foetus. Various psychological stresses influence the chemical and hormonal environment, affecting the foetus.

Immediately after birth it is important for the mother to establish contact with her child. This means, basically, constant loving attention to the baby, expressed by plenty of holding, cuddling, playing, etc., and especially by breast feeding. By such *"orgonotic"* contact (to use Reich's term), the mother is able to establish the initial emotional bonding with the new born, and a non-verbal understanding of the child's needs. This is only possible, however, if she is in touch with her own emotional and cognitive internal processes: *"**Orgonotic contact is the most essential experiential and emotional element in the interrelationship between mother and child,** particularly prenatally and during the first days and weeks of life. The future fate of the child depends on it. It seems to be the core of the new-born infant's emotional development."* [**Children of the Future**, p. 99] It is important for the father to establish orgonotic contact as well.

Reich amaintained that the practice of bottle feeding is harmful, particularly if it completely replaces breast feeding from the day of birth, because it eliminates one of the most important forms of establishing physical and emotional contact between mother and child. This lack of

contact can then contribute in later life to *"oral"* forms of neurotic character structure or traits (see Chapter 9 of Alexander Lowen's **Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**). Another harmful practice in infant care is the compulsive-neurotic method of feeding children on schedule, invented by Pirquet in Vienna, which was devastatingly wrong and harmful to countless children. Frustration of oral needs through this practice (which is fortunately less in vogue now than it was fifty years ago), is guaranteed to produce neurotic armouring in infants. As Reich put it: *"As long as parents, doctors, and educators approach infants with false, unbending behaviour, inflexible opinions, condescension, and officiousness, instead of with orgonotic contact, infants will continue to be quiet, withdrawn, apathetic, 'autistic,' 'peculiar,' and, later, 'little wild animals,' whom the cultivated feel they have to 'tame.'"* [**Op. Cit.** p. 124]

Another harmful practice is allowing the baby to "cry itself out." Thus: *"Parking a baby in a baby carriage in the garden, perhaps for hours at a time, is a dangerous practice. No one can know what agonising feelings of fear and loneliness a baby can experience on waking up suddenly to find himself alone in a strange place. Those who have heard a baby's screams on such occasions have some idea of the cruelty of this stupid custom."* [Neill, **Summerhill**, p. 336] Indeed, in **The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**, Alexander Lowen has traced specific neuroses, particularly depression, to this practice. Hospitals also have been guilty of psychologically damaging sick infants by isolating them from their mothers, a practice that has undoubtedly produced untold numbers of neurotics and psychopaths.

Neill summed up the libertarian attitude toward the care of infants as follows: *"**Self-regulation means the right of a baby to live freely without outside authority in things psychic and somatic**. It means that the baby feeds when it is hungry; that it becomes clean in habits only when it wants to; that it is never stormed at nor spanked; that it is always loved and protected."* Obviously self-regulation does not mean leaving the baby alone when it heads toward a cliff or starts playing with an electrical socket. Libertarians do not advocate a lack of common sense. We recognise that adults must override an infant's will when it is a question of protecting their physical safety: *"Only a fool in charge of young children would allow unbarred bedroom windows or an unprotected fire in the nursery. Yet, too often, young enthusiasts for self-regulation come to my school as visitors, and exclaim at our lack of freedom in locking poison in a lab closet, or our prohibition about playing on the fire escape. The whole freedom movement is marred and despised because so many advocates of freedom have not got their feet on the ground."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105 and p. 106]

Nevertheless, the libertarian position does not imply that a child should be **punished** for getting into a dangerous situation. Nor is the best thing to do in such a case to shout in alarm (unless that is the only way to warn the child before it is too late), but simply to remove the danger without any fuss: *"Unless a child is mentally defective, he will soon discover what interests him. Left free from excited cries and angry voices, he will be unbelievably sensible in his dealing with material of all kinds."* [Neil, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] Provided, of course, that he or she has been allowed self-regulation from the beginning, and thus has not developed any irrational, secondary drives.

The way to raise a free child becomes clear when one considers how an **un**free child is raised. Thus imagine the typical infant whose upbringing A.S. Neill described:

*"His natural functions were left alone during the diaper period. But when he began to crawl and perform on the floor, words like **naughty** and **dirty** began to float about the house, and a grim beginning was made in teaching him to be clean.*

"Before this, his hand had been taken away every time it touched his genitals; and he soon came to associate the genital prohibition with the acquired disgust about faeces. Thus, years later, when he became a travelling salesman, his story repertoire consisted of a balanced number of sex and toilet jokes.

*"Much of his training was conditioned by relatives and neighbours. Mother and father were most anxious to be correct -- to do the proper thing -- so that when relatives or next-door neighbours came, John had to show himself as a well-trained child. He had to say **Thank you** when Auntie gave him a piece of chocolate; and he had to be most careful about his table manners; and especially, he had to refrain from speaking when adults were speaking . . .*

"All his curiosity about the origins of life were met with clumsy lies, lies so effective that his curiosity about life and birth disappeared. The lies about life became combined with fears when at the age of five his mother found him having genital play with his sister of four and the girl next door. The severe spanking that followed (Father added to it when he came home from work) forever conveyed to John the lesson that sex is filthy and sinful, something one must not even think of." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96-7]

Of course, parents' ways of imparting negative messages about sex are not necessarily this severe, especially in our allegedly enlightened age. However, it is not necessary for a child to be spanked or even scolded or lectured in order to acquire a sex-negative attitude. Children are very intuitive and will receive the message "sex is bad" from subtle parental cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, embarrassed silence, avoidance of certain topics, etc. Mere "toleration" of sexual curiosity and play is far different in its psychological effects from positive affirmation.

Along the same lines, to prevent the formation of sex-negative attitudes means that nakedness should never be discouraged: *"The baby should see its parents naked from the beginning. However, the child should be told when he is ready to understand that some people don't like to see children naked and that, in the presence of such people, he should wear clothes."* Neill maintains that not only should parents never spank or punish a child for genital play, but that spanking and other forms of punishment should never be used in **any** circumstances, because they instil fear, turning children into cowards and often leading to phobias. *"Fear must be entirely eliminated -- fear of adults, fear of punishment, fear of disapproval, fear of God. Only hate can flourish in an atmosphere of fear."* Punishment also turns children into sadists: *"The cruelty of many children springs from the cruelty that has been practised on them by adults. You cannot be beaten without wishing to beat someone else."* (*"Every beating makes a child sadistic in desire or practice."* [Neil **Op. Cit.**, p. 229, p. 124, p. 269 and p. 271] This is obviously an important consideration to anarchists, as sadistic drives provide the psychological ground for militarism, war, police brutality, and so on. Such drives are undoubtedly also part of the desire to exercise hierarchical authority, with its possibilities for using negative sanctions against subordinates as an outlet for sadistic impulses.

Child beating is particularly cowardly because it is a way for adults to vent their hatred, frustration, and sadism on those who are unable to defend themselves. Such cruelty is, of course, always rationalised with excuse like "it hurts me more than it does you," etc., or explained in moral terms, like "I don't want my boy to be soft" or "I want him to prepare him for a harsh world" or "I spank my children because my parents spanked me, and it did me a hell of a lot of good." But despite such rationalisations, the fact remains that punishment is always an act of hate. To this hate the child responds in kind by hating the parents, followed by fantasy, guilt, and repression. For example, the child may fantasise the father's death, which immediately causes guilt, and so is repressed. Often the hatred induced by punishment emerges in fantasies that are seemingly remote from the parents, such as stories of giant killing -- always popular with children because the giant represents the father. Obviously, the sense of guilt produced by such fantasies is very advantageous to organised religions that promise redemption from "sin." It is surely no coincidence that such religions are enthusiastic promoters of the sex-negative morality and disciplinarian child rearing practices that keep supplying them with recruits.

What is worse, however, is that punishment actually **creates** "problem children." This is so because the parent arouses more and more hatred (and diminishing trust in other human beings) in the child with each spanking, which is expressed in still worse behaviour, calling for more spankings, and so on, in a vicious circle. In contrast, the *"self-regulated child does not need any punishment,"* Neill argued, *"and he does not go through this hate cycle. He is never punished and he does not need to behave badly. He has no use for lying and for breaking things. His body has never been called filthy or wicked. He has not needed to rebel against authority or to fear his parents. Tantrums he will usually have, but they will be short-lived and not tend toward neurosis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 166]

We could cite many further examples of how libertarian principles of child-rearing can be applied in practice, but we must limit ourselves to these few. The basic principles can be summed up as follows: Get rid of authority, moralising, and the desire to "improve" and "civilise" children. Allow them to be themselves, without pushing them around, bribing, threatening, admonishing, lecturing, or otherwise forcing them to do anything. Refrain from action unless the child, by expressing their "freedom" restricts the freedom of others and **explain** what is wrong about such actions and never mechanically punish.

This is, of course, a radical philosophy, which few parents are willing to follow. It is quite amazing how people who call themselves libertarians in political and economic matters draw the line when it comes to their behaviour within the family -- as if such behaviour had no wider social consequences!

J.6.3 If children have nothing to fear, how can they be good?

Obedience that is based on fear of punishment, this-worldly or other-worldly, is not really goodness, it is merely cowardice. True morality (i.e. respect for others and one-self) comes from inner conviction based on experience, it cannot be imposed from without by fear. Nor can it be inspired by hope of reward, such as praise or the promise of heaven, which is simply bribery. If children are given as much freedom as possible from the day of birth, if parents respect them as individuals and give a positive example as well as not being forced to conform to parental expectations, they will spontaneously learn the basic principles of social

behaviour, such as cleanliness, courtesy, and so forth. But they must be allowed to develop them **at their own speed,** at the natural stage of their growth, not when parents think they should develop them. What is "natural" timing must be discovered by observation, not by defining it a priori based on one's own expectations.

Can a child really be taught to keep themselves clean without being punished for getting dirty? According to many psychologists, it is not only possible but **vitally important** for the child's mental health to do so, since punishment will give the child a fixed and repressed interest in their bodily functions. As Reich and Lowen have shown various forms of compulsive and obsessive neuroses can be traced back to the punishments used in toilet training. As Neill observed: *"When the mother says **naughty** or **dirty** or even **tut tut**, the element of right and wrong arises. The question becomes a **moral** one -- when it should remain a **physical** one."* He suggested that the **wrong** way to deal with a child who likes to play with faeces is to tell him he is being dirty. The right way *"is to allow him to live out his interest in excrement by providing him with mud or clay. In this way, he will sublimate his interest without repression. He will live through his interest; and in doing so, kill it."* [**Summerhill**, p. 174]

Similarly, sceptics will probably question how children can be induced to eat a healthy diet without threats of punishment. The answer can be discovered by a simple experiment: set out on the table all kinds of foods, from sweets and ice cream to whole wheat bread, lettuce, sprouts, and so on, and allow the child complete freedom to choose what is desired or to eat nothing at all if he or she is not hungry. Parents will find that the average child will begin choosing a balanced diet after about a week, after the desire for prohibited or restricted foods has been satisfied. This is an example of what can be called "trusting nature." That the question of how to "train" a child to eat properly should even be an issue says volumes about how little the concept of freedom for children is accepted or even understood, in our society. Unfortunately, the concept of "training" still holds the field in this and most other areas.

The disciplinarian argument that that children must be **forced** to respect possessions is also defective, because it always requires some sacrifice of a child's play life (and childhood should be devoted to play, not to "preparing for adulthood," because playing is what children spontaneously do). The libertarian view is that a child should arrive at a sense of value out of his or her own free choice. This means not scolding or punishing them for breaking or damaging things. As they grow out of the stage of preadolescent indifference to possessions, they learn to respect it naturally.

"But shouldn't a child at least be punished for stealing?" it will be asked. Once again, the answer lies in the idea of trusting nature. The concept of "mine" and "yours" is adult, and children naturally develop it as they become mature, but not before. This means that normal children will "steal" -- though that is not how they regard it. They are simply trying to satisfy their acquisitive impulses; or, if they are with friends, their desire for adventure. In a society so thoroughly steeping in the idea of respect for property as ours, it is no doubt difficult for parents to resist societal pressure to punish children for "stealing." The reward for such trust, however, will be a child who grows into a healthy adolescent who respects the possessions of others, not out of a cowardly fear of punishment but from his or her own self-nature.

Most parents believe that, besides taking care of their child's physical needs, the teaching of ethical/moral values is their main responsibility and that without such teaching the child will grow up to be a "little wild animal" who acts on every whim, with no consideration for

others. This idea arises mainly from the fact that most people in our society believe, at least passively, that human beings are naturally bad and that unless they are "trained" to be good they will be lazy, mean, violent, or even murderous. This, of course, is essentially the idea of "original sin" and because of its widespread acceptance, nearly all adults believe that it is their job to "improve" children. Yet according to libertarian psychologists there is no original sin. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that there is "original virtue." Wilhelm Reich found that externally imposed, compulsive morality actually **causes** immoral behaviour by creating cruel and perverse *"secondary drives."* Neill put it this way: *"I find that when I smash the moral instruction a bad boy has received, he becomes a good boy."* [, p. 250]

Unconscious acceptance of some form of the idea of original sin is the main recruiting tool of organised religions, as people who believe they are born "sinners" feel a strong sense of guilt and need for redemption. Parents to should eliminate any need for redemption, by telling the child that he is born good, not born bad. This will help keep them from falling under the influence of life-denying religions, which are inimical to the growth of a healthy character structure. Citing ethnological studies, Reich argued the following:

> *"Among those primitive peoples who lead satisfactory, unimpaired sexual lives, there is no sexual crime, no sexual perversion, no sexual brutality between man and woman; rape is unthinkable because it is unnecessary in their society. Their sexual activity flows in normal, well-ordered channels which would fill any cleric with indignation and fear . . . They love the human body and take pleasure in their sexuality. They do not understand why young men and women should not enjoy their sexuality. But when their lives are invaded by the ascetic, hypocritical morass and by the Church, which bring them 'culture' along with exploitation, alcohol, and syphilis, they begin to suffer the same wretchedness as ourselves. They begin to lead 'moral' lives, i.e. to suppress their sexuality, and from then on they decline more and more into a state of sexual distress, which is the result of sexual suppression. At the same time, they become sexually dangerous; murders of spouses, sexual diseases, and crimes of all sorts start to appear."* [**Children of the Future**, p. 193]

Such crimes in our society would be greatly reduced if libertarian child rearing practices were widely followed. These are obviously important considerations for anarchists, who are frequently asked to explain how crime can be prevented in an anarchist society. The answer is that if people are not suppressed during childhood there will be far less anti-social behaviour, because the secondary-drive structure that leads to it will not be created in the first place. In other words, the solution to the so-called crime problem is not more police, more laws, or a return to the disciplinarianism of "traditional family values," as conservatives claim, but depends mainly on **getting rid** of such values.

There are other problems as well with the moralism taught by organised religions. One danger is making the child a hater: *"If a child is taught that certain things are sinful, his love of life must be changed to hate. When children are free, they never think of another child as being a sinner."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] From the idea that certain people are sinners, it is a short step to the idea that certain classes or races of people are more "sinful" than others, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and persecution of minorities as an outlet for repressed anger and sadistic drives -- drives that are created in the first place by moralistic training during early childhood. Once again, the relevance for anarchism is obvious.

A further danger of religious instruction is the development of a fear of life: *"Religion to a child most always means only fear. God is a mighty man with holes in his eyelids: He can see you wherever you are. To a child, this often means that God can see what is being done under the bedclothes. And to introduce fear into a child's life is the worst of all crimes. Forever the child says nay to life; forever he is an inferior; forever a coward."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 246] People who have been threatened with fear of an afterlife in hell can never be entirely free of neurotic anxiety about security in **this** life. In turn, such people become easy targets of ruling-class propaganda that plays upon their material and emotional insecurity, e.g. the rationalisation of imperialist wars, the Military-Industrial Complex, increased state powers, and so on as necessary to "preserve jobs", for security against external threats and so forth.

J.6.3 But how will a free child ever learn unselfishness?

Another common objection to self-regulation is that children can only be taught to be **"unselfish"** through punishment and admonition. Again, however, such a view comes from a distrust of nature and is part of the common attitude that nature is mere "raw material" to be shaped by human beings according to their own wishes. The libertarian attitude is that empathy for others develops at the proper time:

> *"To ask a child to be unselfish is wrong. Every child is an egoist and the world belongs to him. When he has an apple, his one wish is to eat that apple. The chief result of mother's encouraging him to share it with his little brother is to make him hate the little brother. Altruism comes later -- comes naturally --* ***if the child is not taught to be unselfish.*** *It probably never comes at all if the child has been forced to be unselfish. By suppressing the child's selfishness, the mother is fixing that selfishness forever."* [Neill, **Summerhill**, pp. 250-251]

Unfulfilled wishes live on in the unconscious so children who are pressured too hard -- "taught" -- to be unselfish will, while conforming outwardly with parental demands, unconsciously repress part of their real, selfish wishes, and these repressed infantile desires will make the person selfish (and possibly neurotic) throughout life. Moreover, telling children that what they want to do is "wrong" or "bad" is equivalent to teaching them to hate themselves, and it is a well-known principle of psychology that people who do not love themselves cannot love others. Thus moral instruction, although it aims to develop altruism and love for others, is actually self-defeating, having just the opposite result. Moreover, such attempts to produce "unselfish" children (and so adults) actually works **against** developing the individuality of the child and they developing their own abilities (in particular their ability of critical thought). As Erich Fromm put it:

> *"Not to be selfish implies not to do what one wishes, to give up one's own wishes for the sake of those in authority . . . Aside from its obvious implication, it means 'don't love yourself,' 'don't be yourself', but submit yourself to something more important than yourself, to an outside power or its internalisation, 'duty.' 'Don't be selfish' becomes one of the most powerful ideological tools in suppressing spontaneity and the free development of personality. Under the pressure of this slogan one is asked for every sacrifice and for complete submission: only those acts are 'unselfish' which do not serve the individual but somebody or something outside himself."* [**Man for Himself**, p. 127]

While such "unselfishness" is ideal for creating "model citizens" and willing wage slaves, it is not conducive for creating anarchists or even developing individuality. Little wonder Bakunin celebrated the urge to rebel and saw it as the key to human progress! Fromm goes on to note that selfishness and self-love, *"far from being identical, are actually opposites"* and that *"selfish persons are incapable of loving others . . . [or] loving themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 131] Individuals who do not love themselves, and so others, will be more willing to submit themselves to hierarchy than those who do love themselves and are concerned for their own, and others, welfare. Thus the contradictory nature of capitalism, with its contradictory appeals to selfish and unselfish behaviour, can be understood as being based upon lack of self-love, a lack which is promoted in childhood and one which libertarians should be aware of and combat.

Indeed, much of the urge to "teach children unselfishness" is actually an expression of adults' will to power. Whenever parents feel the urge to impose directives on their children, they would be wise to ask themselves whether the impulse comes from their own power drive or their own selfishness. For, since our culture strongly conditions us to seek power over others, what could be more convenient than having a small, weak person at hand who cannot resist one's will to power? Instead of issuing directives, libertarians believe in letting social behaviour develop naturally, which it will do after other people's opinions becomes important **to the child.** As Neill pointed out:

> *"Everyone seeks the good opinion of his neighbours. Unless other forces push him into unsocial behaviour, a child will naturally want to do that which will cause him to be well-regarded, but this desire to please others develops at a certain stage in his growth. The attempt by parents and teachers to artificially accelerate this stage does the child irreparable damage."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

Therefore, parents should allow children to be "selfish" and "ungiving", free to follow their own childish interests throughout their childhood. Every interpersonal conflict of interest should be grounds for a lesson in dignity on one side and consideration on the other. Only by this process can a child develop their individuality. By so doing they will come to recognise the individuality of others and this is the first step in developing ethical concepts (which rest upon mutual respect for others and their individuality).

J.6.4 Isn't "libertarian child-rearing" just another name for spoiling the child?

No. This objection confuses the distinction between freedom and license. To raise a child in freedom does not mean letting him or her walk all over you or others; it does not mean never saying "no." It is true that free children are not subjected to punishment, irrational authority, or moralistic admonitions, but they are not "free" to violate the rights of others. As Neill put it: *"in the disciplined home, the children have **no** rights. In the spoiled home, they have **all** the rights. The proper home is one in which children and adults have equal rights."* Or again: *"To let a child have his own way, or do what he wants to **at another's expense,** is bad for the child. It creates a spoiled child, and the spoiled child is a bad citizen."* [**Summerhill**, p. 107 and 167]

There will inevitably be conflicts of will between parents and children, and the healthy way to resolve them is discussion and coming to an agreement. The unhealthy ways are either to

resort to authoritarian discipline or to spoil the child by allowing them to have all the social rights. Libertarian psychologists argue that no harm is done to children by insisting on one's individual rights, but that the harm comes from moralism, i.e. when one introduces the concepts of right and wrong or words like "naughty," "bad," or "dirty," which produce guilt.

Therefore it should not be thought that free children are free to "do as they please." Freedom means doing what one likes so long as it does not infringe on the freedom of others. Thus there is a big difference between compelling a child to stop throwing stones at others and compelling him or her to learn geometry. Throwing stones infringes on others' rights, but learning geometry involves only the child. The same goes for forcing children to eat with a fork instead of their fingers; to say "please" and "thank you"; to tidy up their rooms, and so on. Bad manners and untidiness may be annoying to adults, but they are not a violation of adults' rights. One could, of course, define an adult "right" to be free of annoyance from **anything** one's child does, but this would simply be a license for authoritarianism, emptying the concept of children's rights of all content.

As mentioned, giving children freedom does not mean allowing them to endanger themselves physically. For example, a sick child should not be asked to decide whether he wants to go outdoors or take his prescribed medicine, nor a run-down and overtired child whether she wants to go to bed. But the imposition of such forms of necessary authority is compatible with the idea that children should be given as much responsibility as they can handle at their particular age. Only in this way can they develop self-assurance. And, again, it is important for parents to examine their own motives when deciding how much responsibility to give their child. Parents who insist on choosing their children's clothes for them, for example, are generally worried that the child might select clothes that would reflect badly on their parents' social standing.

As for those who equate "discipline" in the home with "obedience," the latter is usually required of a child to satisfy the adults' desire for power. Self-regulation means that there are no power games being played with children, no loud voice saying "You'll do it because I say so, or else!" But, although this irrational, power-seeking kind of authority is absent in the libertarian home, there still remains what can be called a kind of "authority," namely adult protection, care, and responsibility, as well as the insistence on one's own rights. As Neill observed: *"Such authority sometimes demands obedience but at other times gives obedience. Thus I can say to my daughter, 'You can't bring that mud and water into our parlour.' That's no more than her saying to me, 'Get out of my room, Daddy. I don't want you here now,' a wish that I, of course, obey without a word."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 156]. So there will still be "discipline" in the libertarian home, but it will be of the kind that protects the individual rights of each family member.

Raising children in freedom also does not imply giving them a lot of toys, money, and so on. Reich's followers have argued that children should not be given everything they ask for and that it is better to give them too little than too much. Under constant bombardment by commercial advertising campaigns, parents today generally tend to give their children far too much, with the result that the children stop appreciating gifts and rarely value any of their possessions. This same applies to money, which, if given in excess, can be detrimental to children's' creativity and play life. If children are not given too many toys, they will derive creative joy out of making their own toys out of whatever free materials are at hand -- a joy of which they are robbed by overindulgence. Psychologists point out that parents who give too many presents are often trying to compensate for giving too little love.

There is less danger in rewarding children than there is in punishing them, but rewards can still undermine a child's morale. This is because, firstly, rewards are superfluous and in fact often **decrease** motivation and creativity, as several psychological studies have shown (see section I.4.11). Creative people work for the pleasure of creating; monetary interests are not central (or necessary) to the creative process. Secondly, rewards send the wrong message, namely, that doing the deed for which the reward is offered is not worth doing for its own sake and the pleasure associated with productive, creative activity. Thirdly, rewards tend to reinforce the worst aspects of the competitive system, leading to the attitude that money is the only thing which can motivate people to do the work that needs doing in society.

These are just a few of the considerations that enter into the distinction between spoiling children and raising them in freedom. In reality, it is the punishment and fear of a disciplinarian home that **spoils** children in the most literal sense, by destroying their childhood happiness and creating warped personalities. As adults, the victims of disciplinarianism will generally be burdened with one or more anti-social secondary drives such as sadism, destructive urges, greed, sexual perversions, etc., as well as repressed rage and fear. The presence of such impulses just below the surface of consciousness causes anxiety, which is automatically defended against by psychological walls which leave the person stiff, frustrated, bitter and burdened with feelings of inner emptiness. In such a condition people easily fall victim to the capitalist gospel of super-consumption, which promises that money will enable them to fill the inner void by purchasing commodities -- a promise that, of course, is hollow.

The neurotically enclosed person also tends to look for scapegoats on whom to blame his or her frustration and anxiety and against whom repressed rage can be vented. Reactionary politicians know very well how to direct such impulses against minorities or "hostile nations" with propaganda designed to serve the interests of the ruling elite. Most importantly, however, the respect for authority combined with sadistic impulses which is acquired from a disciplinarian upbringing typically produces a submissive/authoritarian personality -- a man or woman who blindly follows the orders of "superiors" while at the same time desiring to exercise authority on "subordinates," whether in the family, the state bureaucracy, or the company. Ervin Staub's **Roots of Evil** includes interviews of imprisoned SS men, who, in the course of extensive interviews (meant to determine how ostensibly "normal" people could perform acts of untold ruthlessness and violence) revealed that they overwhelmingly came from authoritarian, disciplinarian homes.

In this way, the "traditional" (e.g., authoritarian, disciplinarian, patriarchal) family is the necessary foundation for authoritarian civilisation, reproducing it and its attendant social evils from generation to generation.

J.6.5 What is the anarchist position on teenage sexual liberation?

One of the biggest problems of adolescence is sexual suppression by parents and society in general. The teenage years are the time when sexual energy is at its height. Why, then, the absurd demand that teenagers "wait until marriage," or at least until leaving home, before becoming sexually active? Why are there laws in "advanced" countries like the United States that allow a 19-year-old "boy" who makes love with his 17-year-old girlfriend, with her full consent, to be **arrested** by the girl's parents (!) for "statutory rape"?

To answer such questions, let us recall that the ruling class is not interested in encouraging mass tendencies toward liberty, independence and pleasure not derived from commodities but instead supports whatever contributes to mass submissiveness, docility, dependence, helplessness, and respect for authority -- traits that perpetuate the hierarchies on which ruling-class power and privileges depend.

As sex is one of the most intense forms of pleasure and one of the most prominent contributors for intimacy and bonding with people emotionally, repression of sexuality is the most powerful means of psychologically crippling people and giving them a submissive/authoritarian character structure (as well as alienating people from each other). As Reich observed, such a character is composed of a mixture of *"sexual impotence, helplessness, a need for attachments, a nostalgia for a leader, fear of authority, timidity, and mysticism"* and *"people structured in this manner are incapable of democracy. All attempts to build up or maintain genuine democratically directed organisations come to grief when they encounter these character structures. They form the psychological soil of the masses in which dictatorial strivings and bureaucratic tendencies of democratically elected leaders can develop."* Sexual suppression *"produces the authority-fearing, life-fearing vassal, and thus constantly creates new possibilities whereby a handful of men in power can rule the masses."* [**The Sexual Revolution**, p. 82]

No doubt most members of the ruling elite are not fully conscious that their own power and privileges depend on the mass perpetuation of sex-negative attitudes. Nevertheless, they unconsciously sense it. Sexual freedom is the most basic and powerful kind, and every conservative or reactionary instinctively shudders at the thought of the "social chaos" it would unleash -- that is, the rebellious, authority-defying type of character it would nourish. This is why "family values," and "religion" (i.e. discipline and compulsive sexual morality) are the mainstays of the conservative/reactionary agenda. Thus it is crucially important for anarchists to address every aspect of sexual suppression in society. This means affirming the right of adolescents to an unrestricted sex life.

There are numerous arguments for teenage sexual liberation. For example, many teen suicides could be prevented by removing the restrictions on adolescent sexuality. This becomes clear from ethnological studies of sexually unrepressive tribal peoples:

> *"All reports, whether by missionaries or scholars, with or without the proper indignation about the 'moral depravity' of 'savages,' state that the puberty rites of adolescents lead them immediately into a sexual life; that some of these primitive societies lay great emphasis on sexual pleasure; that the puberty rite is an important social event; that some primitive peoples not only do not hinder the sexual life of adolescents but encourage it is every way, as, for instance, by arranging for community houses in which the adolescents settle at the start of puberty in order to be able to enjoy sexual intercourse. Even in those primitive societies in which the institution of strict monogamous marriage exists, adolescents are given complete freedom to enjoy sexual intercourse from the beginning of puberty to marriage. None of these reports contains any indication of sexual misery or suicide by adolescents suffering from unrequited love (although the latter does of course occur). The contradiction between sexual maturity and the absence of genital sexual gratification is non-existent."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

Teenage sexual repression is also closely connected with crime. If there are teenagers in a neighbourhood who have no place to pursue intimate sexual relationships, they will do it in dark corners, in cars or vans, etc., always on the alert and anxious lest someone discover them. Under such conditions, full gratification is impossible, leading to a build-up of tension and frustration. Thus they feel unsatisfied, disturb each other, become jealous and angry, get into fights, turn to drugs as a substitute for a satisfying sex life, vandalise property to let off "steam" (repressed rage), or even murder someone. As Reich noted, *"juvenile delinquency is the visible expression of the subterranean sexual crisis in the lives of children and adolescents. And it may be predicted that no society will ever succeed in solving this problem, the problem of juvenile psychopathology, unless that society can muster the courage and acquire the knowledge to regulate the sexual life of its children and adolescents in a sex-affirmative manner."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271]

For these reasons, it is clear that a solution to the "gang problem" also depends on adolescent sexual liberation. We are not suggesting, of course, that gangs themselves suppress sexual activity. Indeed, one of their main attractions to teens is undoubtedly the hope of more opportunities for sex as a gang member. However, gangs' typical obsessiveness with the promiscuous, pornographic, sadistic, and other "dark" aspects of sex shows that by the time children reach gang age they have already developed unhealthy secondary drives due to the generally sex-negative and repressive environment in which they have grown up. The expression of such drives is **not** what anarchists mean by "sexual freedom." Rather, anarchist proposals for teenage liberation are based on the premise that a libertarian childhood is the necessary condition for a **healthy** sexual freedom in adolescence.

Applying these insights to our own society, it is clear that teenagers should have ample access to a private room where they can be undisturbed with their sexual partners. Parents should also encourage the knowledge and use of contraceptives and safe sex in general as well as respect for the other person involved in the relationship. This does not mean encouraging promiscuity or sex for the sake of it. Rather, it means encouraging teenagers to know their own minds and desires, refusing to be pressured by anyone into anything. As can be seen from experience of this anarchist activist during the 1930s:

> *"One time, a companero from the Juventudes [libertarian youth organisation] came over to me and said, 'You, who say you're so liberated. You're not so liberated.' (I'm telling you this so youâ€™ll see the mentality of these men.) 'Because if I ask you to give me a kiss, you wouldn't.*
>
> *"I just stood there staring at him, and thinking to myself, 'How do I get out of this one?" And then I said to him, 'Listen, when I want to go to bed with a guy, I'm the one that has to choose him. I don't go to bed with just anyone. You don't interest me as a man. I don't feel anything for you... Why should you want me to 'liberate myself,' as you put it, by going to bed with you? That's no liberation for me. That's just making love simply for the sake of making love.' 'No,' I said to him, 'love is something that has to be like eating: if you're hungry, you eat, and if you want to go to bed with a guy, then... Besides, I'm going to tell you something else . . . Your mouth doesn't appeal to me... And I don't like to make love with a guy without kissing him.'*
>
> *"He was left speechless! But I did it with a dual purpose in mind... because I wanted to show him that that's not the way to educate companeros... That's what the struggle of women was like in Spain -- even with men from our own group -- and I'm not even*

talking about what it was like with other guys." [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 116-7]

So respecting yourself and others, it must be stressed, is essential. As Maurice Brinton pointed out, attempts at sexual liberation will encounter two kinds of responses from established society -- direct opposition and attempts at recuperation. The second response takes the form of *"first alienating and reifying sexuality, and then of frenetically exploiting this empty shell for commercial ends. As modern youth breaks out of the dual stranglehold of repressive traditional morality and of the authoritarian patriarchal family it encounters a projected image of free sexuality which is in fact a manipulatory distortion of it."* This can be seen from the use of sex in advertising to the successful development of sex into a major consumer industry. However, such a development is the opposite of the healthy sexuality desired by anarchists. This is because *"sex is presented as something to be consumed. But the sexual instinct differs from certain other instincts"* as it can be satisfied only by *"another human being, capable of thinking, acting, suffering. The alienation of sexuality under the conditions of modern capitalism is very much part of the general alienating process, in which people are converted into objects (in this case, objects of sexual consumption) and relationships are drained of human content. Undiscriminating, compulsive sexual activity, is not sexual freedom -- although it may sometimes be a preparation for it (which repressive morality can never be). The illusion that alienated sex is sexual freedom constitutes yet another obstacle on the road to total emancipation. Sexual freedom implies a realisation and understanding of the autonomy of others."* [*"The Irrational in Politics"*, pp. 257-92, **For Workers' Power**, p. 277]

Therefore, anarchists see teenage sexual liberation as a means of developing free individuals **as well as** reducing the evil effects of sexual repression (which, we must note, also helps dehumanise individuals by encouraging the objectification of others, and in a patriarchal society particularly of women).

J.6.6 But isn't this concern with sexual liberation just a distraction from revolution?

It would be insulting to teenagers to suggest that sexual freedom is, or should be, their **only** concern. Many teens have a well-developed social conscience and are keenly interested in problems of economic exploitation, poverty, social breakdown, environmental degradation, and the like. The same can be said of people of any age!

It is essential for anarchists to guard against the attitude typically found in Marxist-Leninist parties that spontaneous discussions about sexual problems are a "diversion from the class struggle." Such an attitude is economistic (not to mention covertly ascetic), because it is based on the premise that economic class must be the focus of all revolutionary efforts toward social change. No doubt transforming the economy is important, but without mass sexual liberation no working class revolution be complete as there will not be enough people around with the character structures necessary to create a **lasting** self-managed society and economy (i.e., people who are capable of accepting freedom with responsibility). Instead, the attempt to force the creation of such a system without preparing the necessary psychological soil for its growth will lead to a reversion to some new form of hierarchy and exploitation. Equally, society would be "free" in name only if repressive social morals existed and people were not able to express themselves as they so desire.

Moreover, for many people breaking free from the sexual suppression that threatens to cripple them psychologically is a major issue in their lives. For this reason, few of them are likely to be attracted to the anarchist "freedom" movement if its exponents limit themselves to dry discussions of surplus value, alienated labour, and so forth. Instead, addressing sexual questions and problems must be integrated into a multi-faceted attack on the total system of domination. People should feel confident that anarchists are on the side of sexual pleasure and are not revolutionary ascetics demanding self-denial for the "sake of the revolution." Rather, it should be stressed that the capacity for full sexual enjoyment is the an essential part of the revolution. Indeed, *"incessant questioning and challenge to authority on the subject of sex and of the compulsive family can only complement the questioning and challenge to authority in other areas (for instance on the subject of who is to dominate the work process -- or the purpose of work itself). Both challenges stress the autonomy of individuals and their domination over important aspects of their lives. Both expose the alienated concepts which pass for rationality and which govern so much of our thinking and behaviour. The task of the conscious revolutionary is to make both challenges explicit, to point out their deeply subversive content, and to explain their inter-relation."* [Maurice Brinton, *"The Irrational in Politics"*, pp. 257-92, **For Workers' Power**, p. 278]

We noted previously that in pre-patriarchal society, which rests on a communistic/communal social order, children have complete sexual freedom and that the idea of childhood asceticism develops as such societies turn toward patriarchy in the economic and social structure (see section B.1.5). This sea-change in social attitudes toward sexuality allows the authority-oriented character structure to develop instead of the formerly non-authoritarian ones. Ethnological research has shown that in pre-patriarchal societies the general nature of work life in the community corresponds with the free development of children and adolescents -- that is, there are no rules coercing children and adolescents into specific forms of sexual life, and this creates the psychological basis for voluntary integration into the community and voluntary discipline in all forms of collective activity. This supports the premise that widespread sex-positive attitudes are a necessary condition of a viable libertarian socialism.

Psychology also clearly shows that every impediment to free expression of children by parents, teachers, or administrative authorities must be stopped. As anarchists, our preferred way of doing so is by direct action. Thus we should encourage all to feel that they have every chance of building their own personal lives. This will certainly not be an obstacle to or a distraction from their involvement in the anarchist movement. On the contrary, if they can gradually solve the problems facing their private lives, they will work on other social projects with greatly increased pleasure and concentration.

Besides engaging in direct action, anarchists can also support legal protection free expression and sexuality (repeal of the insane statutory rape laws and equal rights for gays, for example), just as they support legislation that protects workers' right to strike, family leave, and so forth. However, as Reich observed, *"under no circumstances will the new order of sexual life be established by the decree of a central authority."* [**The Sexual Revolution**, p. 279] That was a Leninist illusion. Rather, it will be established from the bottom up, by the gradual process of ever more widespread dissemination of knowledge about the adverse personal and social effects of sexual repression, and the benefits of libertarian child-rearing and educational methods.

A society in which people are capable of sexual happiness will be one where they prefer to *"make love, not war,"* and so will provide the best guarantee for the general security. Then

the anarchist project of restructuring the economic and political systems will proceed spontaneously, based on a spirit of joy rather than hatred and revenge. Only then can it be defended against reactionary threats, because the majority will be on the side of freedom and capable of using it responsibly, rather than unconsciously longing for an authoritarian father-figure to tell them what to do.

Therefore, concern and action upon sexual liberation, libertarian child rearing and libertarian education are **key** parts of social struggle and change. In no way can they be considered as "distractions" from "important" political and economic issues as some "serious" revolutionaries like to claim. As Martha A. Ackelsberg notes in relation to the practical work done by the ***Mujeres Libres*** group during the Spanish Revolution:

> *"Respecting children and educating them well was vitally important to the process of revolutionary change. Ignorance made people particularly vulnerable to oppression and suffering. More importantly, education prepared people for social life. Authoritarian schools (or families), based upon fear, prepared people to be submissive to an authoritarian government [or within a capitalist workplace]. Different schools and families would be necessary to prepare people to live in a society without domination."* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 133]

The personal **is** political and there is little point in producing a free economy if the people in it are not free to lead a full and pleasurable life! As such, the issue of sexual freedom is as important as economic and social freedom for anarchists. This can be seen when Emma Goldman recounted meeting Kropotkin who praised a paper she was involved with but proclaimed *"it would do more if it would not waste so much space discussing sex."* She disagreed and a heated argument ensured about *"the place of the sex problem in anarchist propaganda."* Finally, she remarked *"All right, dear comrade, when I have reached your age, the sex question may no longer be of importance to me. But it is now, and it is a tremendous factor for thousands, millions even, of young people."* This, Goldman recalled, made Kropotkin stop short with *"an amused smile lighting up his kindly face. 'Fancy, I didn't think of that,' he replied. 'Perhaps you are right, after all.' He beamed affectionately upon me, with a humorous twinkle in his eye."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 253]

J.7 What do anarchists mean by social revolution?

In anarchist theory, ***social revolution*** means far more than just revolution. For anarchists, a true revolution is far more than just a change in the political makeup, structure or form of a society. It must transform all aspects of a society -- political, economic, social, interpersonal relationships, and so on -- and the individuals who comprise it. Indeed, these two transformations go hand in hand, complementing each other and supporting each other. People, while transforming society, transform themselves. As Alexander Berkman put it:

> *"there are revolutions and revolutions. Some revolutions change only the governmental form by putting a new set of rulers in place of the old. These are political revolutions, and as such they are often meet with little resistance. But a revolution that aims to abolish the entire system of wage slavery must also do away with the power of one class to oppress another. That is, it is not any more a mere*

> *change of rulers, of government, not a political revolution, but one that seeks to alter the whole character of society. That would be a **social** revolution."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 176]

It means two related things. First, it means transforming all parts of society and not just tinkering with certain aspects of the current system. Where political revolution means, in essence, changing bosses, social revolution means changing society, a transformation in the way society is organised and run. Social revolution, in other words, does not aim to change one form of subjection for another, but to do away with everything that can enslave and oppress the individual. Second, it means bringing about this fundamental change **directly** by the mass of people in society, rather than relying on political means of achieving this end, in the style of Marxist-Leninists and other authoritarian socialists. For anarchists, such an approach is a political revolution only and doomed to failure. The *"actual, positive work of the social revolution must . . . be carried out by the toilers themselves, by the labouring people"* as *"the worse victims of present institutions, it is to their own interest to abolish them."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189 and p. 187]

That is not to say that an anarchist social revolution is not political in content -- far from it; it should be obvious to anyone familiar with anarchist theory that there are political theories and goals at work within anarchism. With an analysis of the state which proclaims it to be an instrument of minority class rule, designed to exclude participation by the many, it should be obvious that we aim to abolish it. What we **are** saying, however, is that anarchists do not seek to seize power and attempt, through control of law enforcement and the military (in the style of governments) to bring change about from the top-down. Rather, we seek to bring change upward from below, and in so doing, make such a revolution inevitable and not contingent on the machinations of a political vanguard (unsurprisingly, as we noted in section H.3.3, Lenin dismissed talk of change exclusively from below as anarchist and saw the need for change from above by government). As Durruti argued: *"We never believed that the revolution consisted of the seizure of power by a minority which would impose a dictatorship on the people . . . We want a revolution by and for the people. Without this no revolution is possible. It would be a Coup d'Etat, nothing more."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, pp. 135-7]

For anarchists, a social revolution is a movement from below, of the oppressed and exploited struggling for their own freedom. Moreover, such a revolution does not appear as if by magic. Rather, it is the case that revolutions *"are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals nor even by the most powerful associations. They come independently of all will and all conspiracies, and are always brought on by the natural force of circumstance."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 323] Revolutions break-out when the conditions are ripe and cannot be artificially produced (by, say, a union leadership proclaiming out of the blue such-and-such a day for a general strike). However, the actions of individuals and associations can make revolution more likely by their propaganda, struggles and organising so that when the circumstances change, people are able and willing to act in a revolutionary manner (by, say, spontaneously going on strike and their unions expanding the struggle into a general strike). This means that there is no mechanical, objective, process at work but rather something which we can influence but not command. Revolutions are a product of social evolution and of the social struggle which is an inevitable part of it:

> *"the oppressed masses . . . have never completely resigned themselves to oppression and poverty, and who today more than ever show themselves thirsting for justice,*

> *freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world. And they also understand that the indispensable condition for their emancipation which cannot be neglected is the possession of the means of production, of the land and of the instruments of labour."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 33]

Thus any social revolution proceeds from the daily struggles of working class people (just as anarchism does). It is not an event, rather it is a **process** -- a process which is occurring at this moment. So a social revolution is not something in the future which we wait for but an process which is occurring in the here and now which we influence along side other tendencies as well as objective factors. This means that *"evolution and revolution are not two separate and different things. Still less are they opposites . . . Revolution is merely the boiling point of evolution."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 179] This means how we act **now** matters as we shape the future by our struggles today. As German Anarchist Gustav Landauer put it:

> *"The State is not something that can be destroyed by a revolution, but it is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 421]

This does not mean that anarchists do not recognise that a revolution will be marked by, say, specific events (such as a general strike, wide scale occupations of land, housing, workplaces, actual insurrections and so on). Of course not. It means that we place these events in a process, within social movements recognising that they do not occur in isolation from history nor the evolution of ideas and movements within society.

Berkman echoed this point when he argued that while *"a social revolution is one that entirely changes the foundation of society, its political, economic and social character"* such a change *"must **first** take place in the ideas and opinions of the people, in the minds of men [and women]."* This means that *"the social revolution must be prepared. Prepared in these sense of furthering evolutionary process, of enlightening the people about the evils of present-day society and convincing them of the desirability and possibility, of the justice and practicability of a social life based on liberty."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180-1] Such preparation would be the result of social struggle in the here and now, social struggle based on direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations. While Berkman concentrated on the labour movement, his comments are applicable to all social movements:

> *"In the daily struggle of the proletariat such an organisation [a syndicalist union] would be able to achieve victories about which the conservative union, as at present built, cannot even dream . . . Such a union would soon become something more than a mere defender and protector of the worker. It would gain a vital realisation of the meaning of unity and consequent power, of labour solidarity. The factory and shop would serve as a training camp to develop the worker's understanding of his [or her] proper role in life, to cultivate his [or her] self-reliance and independence, teach him [or her] mutual help and co-operation, and make him [or her] conscious of his [or her] responsibility. He [or she] will learn to decide and act on his [or her] own judgement, not leaving it to leaders or politicians to attend to his [or her] affairs and look out for his [or her] welfare . . . He [or she] will grow to understand that present economic and social arrangements are wrong and criminal, and he [or she] will*

determine to change them. The shop committee and union will become the field of preparation for a new economic system, for a new social life." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 206-7]

In other words, the struggle against authority, exploitation, oppression and domination in the here and now is the start of the social revolution. It is this daily struggle, Bakunin stressed, which creates free people and the organisations it generates *"bear . . . the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* Therefore (libertarian) socialism will be attained only *"through the development and organisation of the non-political or anti-political social power of the working classes in city and country."* [**Bakunin On Anarchism**, p. 255 and p. 263] Such social power is expressed in economic and community organisations such as self-managed unions and workplace/community assemblies (see section J.5) and these form the organisational framework of a free society (see section I.2.3).

Anarchists try and follow the example of our Spanish comrades in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. who, when *"faced with the conventional opposition between reformism and revolution, they appear, in effect, to have put forward a third alternative, seeking to obtain immediate practical improvements through the actual development, in practice, of autonomous, libertarian forms of self-organisation."* [Nick Rider, *"The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931"*, pp. 79-105, **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (ed.), p. 99] While doing this, anarchists must also *"beware of ourselves becoming less anarchist because the masses are not ready for anarchy."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 162]

So revolution and anarchism is the product of struggle, a social process in which anarchist ideas spread and develop.*"This does not mean,"* argued Malatesta, *"that to achieve anarchy we must wait till **everyone** becomes an anarchist. On the contrary . . . under present conditions only a small minority, favoured by specific circumstances, can manage to conceive what anarchy is. It would be wishful thinking to hope for a general conversion before a change actually took place in the kind of environment in which authoritarianism and privilege now flourish. It is precisely for this reason that [we] . . . need to organise for the bringing about of anarchy, or at any rate that degree of anarchy which could become gradually feasible, as soon as a sufficient amount of freedom has been won and a nucleus of anarchists somewhere exists that is both numerically strong enough and able to be self-sufficient and to spread its influence locally."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 83-4]

Thus anarchists influence social struggle, the revolutionary process, by encouraging anarchistic tendencies within those who are not yet anarchists but are instinctively acting in a libertarian manner. Anarchists spread our message to those in struggle and support libertarian tendencies in it as far as we can. In this way, more and more people will become anarchists and anarchy will become increasingly possible (we discuss the role of anarchists in a social revolution in section J.7.4). For anarchists, a social revolution is the end product of years of struggle. It is marked by the transformation of a given society, the breaking down of all forms of oppression and the creation of new ways of living, new forms of self-managed organisation, a new attitude to life itself. Moreover, we do not wait for the future to introduce such transformations in our daily life. Rather, we try and create as many anarchistic tendencies in today's society as possible in the firm belief that in so doing we are pushing the creation of a free society nearer.

So anarchists, including revolutionary ones, try to make the world today more libertarian and so bring us closer to freedom. Few anarchists think of anarchy as something in (or for) the distant future, rather it is something we try and create in the here and now by living and struggling in a libertarian manner. Once enough people do this, then a more extensive change towards anarchy (i.e. a revolution) is possible.

J.7.1 Why are most anarchists revolutionaries?

While most anarchists do believe that a social revolution is required to create a free society, some reject the idea. This is because they think that revolutions are by their very nature coercive and so are against anarchist principles. In the words of Proudhon (in reply to Marx):

> *"Perhaps you still hold the opinion that no reform is possible without a helping **coup de main,** without what used to be called a revolution but which is quite simply a jolt. I confess that my most recent studies have led me to abandon this view, which I understand and would willingly discuss, since for a long time I held it myself. I do not think that this is what we need in order to succeed, and consequently we must not suggest **revolutionary** action as the means of social reform because this supposed means would simply be an appeal to force and to arbitrariness. In brief, it would be a contradiction."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 151]

Also they point to the fact that the state is far better armed than the general population, better trained and (as history proves) more than willing to slaughter as many people as required to restore "order." In face of this power, they argue, revolution is doomed to failure.

Those opposed to revolution come from all tendencies of the movement. Traditionally, Individualist anarchists are usually against the idea of revolution, as was Proudhon. However, with the failure of the Russian Revolution and the defeat of the CNT-FAI in Spain, some social anarchists have rethought support for revolution. Rather than seeing revolution as the key way of creating a free society they consider it doomed to failure as the state is too strong a force to be overcome by insurrection. Instead of revolution, such anarchists support the creation of alternatives, such as co-operatives, mutual banks and so on, which will help transform capitalism into libertarian socialism by *"burn[ing] Property little by little"* via *"some system of economics"* which will *"put back into society . . . the wealth which has been taken out of society by another system of economics."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] Such alternative building, combined with pressurising the state to, say, use co-operatives to run public services and industries as well as civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes, is seen as the best way to creating anarchy. This may take time, they argue, but such gradual change will be more successful in the long run.

Most revolutionary anarchists agree on the importance of building libertarian alternatives in the here and now. They would agree with Bakunin when he argued that such organisations as libertarian unions, co-operatives and so on are essential *"so that when the Revolution, brought about by the natural force of circumstances, breaks out, there will be a real force at hand which knows what to do and by virtue thereof is capable of taking the Revolution into its own hands and imparting to it a direction salutary for the people: a serious, international organisation of worker's organisations of all countries, capable of replacing the departing political world of the States and the bourgeoisie."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 323] Thus, for most anarchists, the difference of evolution and revolution is one of little

import -- anarchists should support libertarian tendencies within society as they support revolutionary situations when they occur.

However, revolutionary anarchists argue that, ultimately, capitalism cannot be reformed away nor will the state wither away under the onslaught of libertarian institutions and attitudes. Neither mutual banking (see section J.5.7) nor co-operatives (see section J.5.11) can out-compete capitalist institutions. This means that these alternatives, will important, are insufficient to the task of creating a free society. This suggests that while libertarian tendencies within capitalism may make life better under that system, they cannot get rid of it. This requires a social revolution, they argue. Such anarchists agree with Alexander Berkman that there *"is no record of any government or authority, of any group or class in power having given up its mastery voluntarily. In every instance it required the use of force, or at least the threat of it."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 174] Even the end of State capitalism ("Communism") in Eastern Europe did not contradict this argument. Without the mass action of the population, the regime would have continued. Faced with a massive popular revolt, the Commissars realised that it was better to renounce (some) power than have it all taken from them (and they were right, as this allowed many of them to become part of the new, private capitalist, ruling class). Thus mass rebellion, the start of any true revolution, was required.

The argument that the state is too powerful to be defeated has been proven wrong time and time again. Every revolution has defeated a military machine which previously had been proclaimed to be unbeatable (most obviously, the people armed in Spain defeated the military in two-thirds of the country). Ultimately, the power of the state rests on its troops following orders. If those troops rebel, then the state is powerless. That is why anarchists have always produced anti-militarist propaganda urging troops to join strikers and other people in revolt. Revolutionary anarchists argue that any state can be defeated, if the circumstances are right and the work of anarchists is to encourage those circumstances.

In addition, revolutionary anarchists argue that even if anarchists did not support revolutionary change, this would not stop such events happening. Revolutions are the product of developments in human society and occur whether we desire them or not. They start with small rebellions, small acts of refusal by individuals, groups, workplaces and communities, then grow. These acts of rebellion are inevitable in any hierarchical society, as is their spreading wider and wider. Revolutionary anarchists argue that anarchists must, by the nature of our politics and our desire for freedom, support such acts of rebellion and, ultimately, social revolution. Not to do so means ignoring people in struggle against our common enemy and ignoring the means by which anarchists ideas and attitudes will grow within existing society. Thus Alexander Berkman was right when he wrote:

> *"That is why it is no prophecy to foresee that some day it must come to decisive struggle between the masters of life and the dispossessed masses.*
>
> *"As a matter if fact, that struggle is going on all the time.*
>
> *"There is a continuous warfare between capital and labour. That warfare generally proceeds within so-called legal forms. But even these erupt now and then in violence, as during strikes and lockouts, because the armed fist of government is always at the service of the masters, and that fist gets into action the moment capital feels its profits threatened: then it drops the mask of 'mutual interests' and 'partnership' with labour and resorts to the final argument of every master, to coercion and force.*

> *"It is therefore certain that government and capital will not allow themselves to be quietly abolished if they can help it; nor will they miraculously 'disappear' of themselves, as some people pretend to believe. It will require a revolution to get rid of them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 174]

However, all anarchists are agreed that any revolution should be as non-violent as possible. Violence is the tool of oppression and, for anarchists, violence is only legitimate as a means of self-defence against authority. Therefore revolutionary anarchists do not seek "violent revolution" -- they are just aware that when people refuse to kow-tow to authority then that authority will use violence against them. This use of violence has been directed against non-violent forms of direct action and so those anarchists who reject revolution will not avoid state violence directed against them unless they renounce **all** forms of resistance to state and capitalist authority. So when it comes to effective action by the subjects of an authority, the relevant question quickly becomes how much does our freedom depend on us **not** exercising it?

Nor do revolutionary anarchists think that revolution is in contradiction to the principles of anarchism. As Malatesta put it, *"[f]or two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged, in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 54] Under any hierarchical system, those in authority do not leave those subject to them in peace. The boss does not treat his/her workers as equals, working together by free agreement without differences in power. Rather, the boss orders the worker about and uses the threat of sanctions to get compliance. Similarly with the state. Under these conditions, revolution cannot be authoritarian -- for it is not authoritarian to destroy authority! To quote Rudolf Rocker:

> *"We . . . know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done -- let us be clear on this -- without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship."* [*"Anarchism and Sovietism"*, pp. 53-74, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 73]

It should also be noted that those who proclaim that a revolution is inherently authoritarian like, say, Engels (see section H.4.7) are confused. They fail to see that it is hardly "authoritarian" to stop someone ruling you! It is an act of liberation to free oneself from those oppressing you. Malatesta comments reflect well the position of revolutionary anarchists with regards to the use of force:

> *"We neither seek to impose anything by force nor do we wish to submit to a violent imposition.*

"We intend to use force against government, because it is by force that we are kept in subjection by government.

"We intend to expropriate the owners of property because it is by force that they withhold the raw materials and wealth, which is the fruit of human labour, and use it to oblige others to work in their interest.

"We shall resist with force whoever would wish by force, to retain or regain the means to impose his will and exploit the labour of others . . .

"With the exception of these cases, in which the use of violence is justified as a defence against force, we are always against violence, and for self-determination." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

This is the reason why most anarchists are revolutionaries. They do not think it against the principles of anarchism and consider it the only real means of creating a free society -- a society in which the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of humanity in servitude can be ended once and for all.

J.7.2 Is social revolution possible?

One objection to the possibility of social revolution is based on what we might call "the paradox of social change." This argument goes as follows: authoritarian institutions reward and select people with an authoritarian type of personality for the most influential positions in society; such types of people have both (a) an interest in perpetuating authoritarian institutions (from which they benefit) and (b) the power to perpetuate them; hence they create a self-sustaining and tightly closed system which is virtually impervious to the influence of non-authoritarian types. Therefore, institutional change presupposes individual change, which presupposes institutional change, and so on. Unless it can be shown, then, that institutions and human psychology can both be changed **at the same time**, hope for a genuine social revolution (instead of just another rotation of elites) appears to be unrealistic.

Connected with this problem is the fact that the psychological root of the hierarchical society is addiction to power -- over other people, over nature, over the body and human emotions -- and that this addiction is highly contagious. That is, as soon as any group of people anywhere in the world becomes addicted to power, those within range of their aggression also feel compelled to embrace the structures of power, including centralised control over the use of deadly force, in order to protect themselves from their neighbours. Once these structures of power are adopted, authoritarian institutions become self-perpetuating.

In this situation, fear becomes the underlying emotion behind the conservatism, conformity, and mental inertia of the majority, who in that state become vulnerable to the self-serving propaganda of authoritarian elites alleging the necessity of the state, strong leaders, militarism, "law and order," capitalists, rulers, etc. The simultaneous transformation of institutions and individual psychology becomes even more difficult to imagine.

Serious as these obstacles may be, they do not warrant despair. To see why, let us note first that "paradigm shifts" in science have not generally derived from new developments in one field alone but from a convergence of cumulative developments in several different fields at

once. For example, the Einsteinian revolution which resulted in the overthrow of the Newtonian paradigm was due to simultaneous progress in mathematics, physics, astronomy and other sciences that all influenced, reacted on, and cross-fertilised each other (see Thomas Kuhn's **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**). Similarly, if there is going to be a "paradigm shift" in the social realm, i.e. from hierarchical to non-hierarchical institutions, it is likely to emerge from the convergence of a number of different socio-economic and political developments at the same time. In a hierarchical society, the oppression authority produces also generates resistance, and so hope. The *"instinct for freedom"* cannot be repressed forever.

That is why anarchists stress the importance of direct action (section J.2) and self-help (section J.5). By the very process of struggle, by practising self-management, direct action and solidarity, people create the necessary "paradigm shift" in both themselves and society as a whole. Thus the struggle against authority is the school of anarchy -- it encourages libertarian tendencies in society and the transformation of individuals into anarchists (*"Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 59]). In a revolutionary situation, this process is accelerated. It is worth quoting Murray Bookchin at length on this subject:

> *"Revolutions are profoundly educational processes, indeed veritable cauldrons in which all kinds of conflicting ideas and tendencies are sifted out in the minds of a revolutionary people . . .*
>
> *"Individuals who enter into a revolutionary process are by no means the same after the revolution as they were before it began. Those who encounter a modicum of success in revolutionary times learn more within a span of a few weeks or months than they might have learned over their lifetime in non-revolutionary times. Conventional ideas fall away with extraordinary rapidity; values and prejudices that were centuries in the making disappear almost overnight. Strikingly innovative ideas are quickly adopted, tested, and, where necessary, discarded. Even newer ideas, often flagrantly radical in character, are adopted with an elan that frightens ruling elites -- however radical the latter may profess to be -- and they soon become deeply rooted in the popular consciousness. Authorities hallowed by age-old tradition are suddenly divested of their prestige, legitimacy, and power to govern . . .*
>
> *"So tumultuous socially and psychologically are revolutions in general that they constitute a standing challenge to ideologues, including sociobiologists, who assert that human behaviour is fixed and human nature predetermined. Revolutionary changes reveal a remarkable flexibility in 'human nature,' yet few psychologists have elected to study the social and psychological tumult of revolution as well as the institutional changes it so often produces. Thus much must be said with fervent emphasis:* ***to continue to judge the behaviour of a people during and after a revolution by the same standards one judged them by beforehand is completely myopic.***
>
> *"I wish to argue that the capacity of a revolution to produce far-reaching ideological and moral changes in a people stems primarily from the opportunity it affords ordinary, indeed oppressed, people to exercise popular self-management -- to enter directly, rapidly, and exhilaratingly into control over most aspects of their social and personal lives. To the extent that an insurrectionary people takes over the reins of*

> *power from the formerly hallowed elites who oppressed them and begins to restructure society along radically populist lines, individuals grow aware of latent powers within themselves that nourish their previously suppressed creativity, sense of self-worth, and solidarity. They learn that society is neither immutable nor sanctified, as inflexible custom had previously taught them; rather, it is malleable and subject, within certain limits, to change according to human will and desire."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 6-7]

In short, *"it is only through th[e] struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you will reach an understanding of anarchism."* [Nestor Makhno, **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 71]

So, social revolutions are possible. Anarchists anticipate successful revolts within certain circumstance. People who are in the habit of taking orders from bosses are not capable of creating a new society. Tendencies towards freedom, self-management, co-operation and solidarity are not simply an act of ethical will which overcomes the competitive and hierarchical behaviour capitalism generates within those who live in it. Capitalism is, as Malatesta noted, based on competition -- and this includes **within** the working class. However, ***co-operation*** is stimulated within our class by our struggles to survive in and resist the system. This tendency for co-operation generated by struggle against capitalism also produces the habits required for a free society -- by struggling to change the world (even a small part of it), people also change themselves. Direct action produces empowered and self-reliant people who can manage their own affairs themselves. It is on the liberating effects of struggle, the tendencies towards individual and collective self-management and direct action it generates, the needs and feelings for solidarity and creative solutions to pressing problems it produces that anarchists base their positive answer on whether social revolution is possible. History has shown that we are right. It will do so again.

J.7.3 Doesn't revolution mean violence?

While many try and paint revolutions (and anarchists) as being violent by their very nature, the social revolution desired by anarchists is essentially non-violent. This is because, to quote Bakunin, *"[i]n order to launch a radical revolution, it is . . . necessary to attack positions and things and to destroy property and the State, but there will be no need to destroy men and to condemn ourselves to the inevitable reaction which is unfailingly produced in every society by the slaughter of men."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 168-9] Equally, to destroy the institution of private property there is no need to destroy the actual useful things monopolised by the few:

> *"How to smash the tyranny of capital? Destroy capital? But that would be to destroy all the riches accumulated on earth, all primary materials, all the instruments of labour, all the means of labour . . . Thus capital cannot and must not be destroyed. It must be preserved . . . there is but a single solution --* ***the intimate and complete union of capital and labour*** *. . . the workers must obtain not individual but* ***collective*** *property in capital . . . the collective property of capital . . . [is] the absolutely necessary conditions of the emancipation* ***of labour and of the workers.****"* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90-1]

The essentially non-violent nature of anarchist ideas of social revolution can be seen from the Seattle General Strike of 1919. Here is a quote from the Mayor of Seattle (we do not think we need to say that he was not on the side of the strikers):

> *"The so-called sympathetic Seattle strike was an attempted revolution. That there was no violence does not alter the fact . . . The intent, openly and covertly announced, was for the overthrow of the industrial system; here first, then everywhere . . . True, there were no flashing guns, no bombs, no killings. Revolution, I repeat, doesn't need violence. The general strike, as practised in Seattle, is of itself the weapon of revolution, all the more dangerous because quiet. To succeed, it must suspend everything; stop the entire life stream of a community . . . That is to say, it puts the government out of operation. And that is all there is to revolt -- no matter how achieved."* [quoted by Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 370-1]

If the strikers had occupied their workplaces and local communities had created popular assemblies then the attempted revolution would have become an actual one without any use of violence at all. In Italy, a year later, the occupations of the factories and land started. As Malatesta pointed out, *"in **Umanita Nova** [the daily anarchist newspaper] we . . . said that if the movement spread to all sectors of industry, that is workers and peasants followed the example of the metallurgists, of getting rid of the bosses and taking over the means of production, the revolution would succeed without shedding a single drop of blood."* Thus the *"occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 135] Sadly the workers followed their socialist trade union leaders and stopped the occupations rather than spreading them.

These events indicate the strength of ordinary people and the relative weakness of government and capitalism -- they only work when they can force people to respect them. After all, a government is *"only a handful of men"* and is strong *"when the people are with it. Then they supply the government with money, with an army and navy, obey it, and enable it to function."* Remove that support and *"no government can accomplish anything."* The same can be said of capitalists, whose wealth *"would do them no good but for the willingness of the people to work for them and pay tribute to them."* Both would *"find out that all their boasted power and strength disappear when the people refuse to acknowledge them as masters, refuse to let them lord it over them."* In contrast, *"the people's power"* is *"**actual**: it cannot be taken away . . . It cannot be taken away because it does not consist of possessions but in ability. It is the ability to create, to produce."* To achieve a free society we need to *"be conscious of its tremendous power."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 84, p. 86, p. 87 and p. 83]

Therefore the notion that a social revolution is necessarily violent is a false one. For anarchists, social revolution is essentially an act of self-liberation (of both the individuals involved and society as a whole). It has nothing to do with violence, quite the reverse, as anarchists see it as the means to end the rule and use of violence in society. Anarchists hope that any revolution is essentially non-violent, with any violence being defensive in nature. As Malatesta stressed, *"Anarchists are opposed to violence"* and it *"is justifiable only when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 53]

Of course, many revolutions are marked by violence. It has two sources. First, and most obviously, the violent resistance of those protecting their power and wealth against those seeking liberty. Unsurprisingly, this violence is usually downplayed in history books and the media. Second, acts of revenge resulting from the the domination and repression of the system the revolution seeks to end. Such violence is not desired nor the aim of anarchism nor of the revolution. As Berkman argued:

> *"We know that revolution begins with street disturbances and outbreaks; it is the initial phase which involves force and violence. But that is merely the spectacular prologue of the real revolution. The age long misery and indignity suffered by the masses burst into disorder and tumult, the humiliation and injustice meekly borne for decades find vents in acts of fury and destruction. That is inevitable, and it is solely the master class which is responsible for this preliminary character of revolution. For it is even more true socially than individually that 'whoever sows the wind will reap the whirlwind'; the greater the oppression and wretchedness to which the masses had been made to submit, the fiercer will rage the social storm. All history proves it, but the lords of life have never harkened to its warning voice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195]

"Most people have very confused notions about revolution," Berkman suggested. *"To them it means just fighting, smashing things, destroying. It is the same as if rolling up your sleeves for work should be considered the work itself that you have to do. The fighting bit of the revolution is merely the rolling up of your sleeves."* The task of the revolution is the *"destruction of the existing conditions"* and *"**conditions** are not destroyed [by] breaking and smashing things. You can't destroy wage slavery by wrecking the machinery in the mills and factories . . . You won't destroy government by setting fire to the White House."* To think of revolution *"in terms of violence and destruction is to misinterpret and falsify the whole idea of it. In practical application such a conception is bound to lead to disastrous results."* For what is there to destroy? *"The wealth of the rich? Nay, that is something we want the whole of society to enjoy."* The means of production are to be made *"useful to the entire people"* and *"serve the needs of all."* Thus the aim of revolution is *"to **take over** things for the general benefit, not to destroy them. It is to reorganise conditions for public welfare . . . to reconstruct and rebuild."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 183-4]

Thus when anarchists like Bakunin speak of revolution as "destruction" they mean that the idea of authority and obedience must be destroyed, along with the institutions that are based on such ideas. We do not mean, as can be clearly seen, the destruction of people or wealth. Nor do we imply the glorification of violence -- quite the reserve, as anarchists seek to limit violence to that required for self-defence against oppression and authority.

Therefore a social revolution **may** involve some violence. It may also mean no violence at all. It depends on the revolution and how widely anarchist ideas are spread. One thing is sure, for anarchists social revolution is **not** synonymous violence. Indeed, violence usually occurs when the ruling class resists the action of the oppressed -- that is, when those in authority act to protect their social position.

The wealthy and their state will do anything in their power to prevent having a large enough percentage of anarchists in the population to simply "ignore" the government and property out of existence. If things got that far, the government would suspend the legal rights, elections and round up influential subversives. The question is, what do anarchists do in response to these actions? If anarchists are in the majority or near it, then defensive violence

would likely succeed. For example, *"the people armed"* crushed the fascist coup of July 19th, 1936 in Spain and resulted in one of the most important experiments in anarchism the world has ever seen (see section A.5.6). This should be contrasted with the aftermath of the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 and the fascist terror which crushed the labour movement (see section A.5.5). In other words, you cannot just ignore the state even if the majority are acting, you need to abolish it and organise self-defence against attempts to re-impose it or capitalism.

We discuss the question of self-defence and the protection of the revolution in section J.7.6.

J.7.4 What would a social revolution involve?

Social revolution necessitates putting anarchist ideas into daily practice. Therefore it implies that direct action, solidarity and self-management become increasingly the dominant form of living in a society. It implies the transformation of society from top to bottom. We can do no better than quote Errico Malatesta on what revolution means:

> *"The Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all of coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to co-ordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts -- and lasts so long as freedom lasts."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 153]

This, of course, presents a somewhat wide vision of the revolutionary process. We will need to give some more concrete examples of what a social revolution would involve. However, before so doing, we stress that these are purely examples drawn from previous revolutions and are not written in stone. Every revolution creates its own forms of organisation and struggle. The next one will be no different. As we argued in section I.2, an anarchist revolution will create its own forms of freedom, forms which will share features with organisations generated in previous revolutions, but which are unique to this one. Thus the Paris Commune of 1871 had mandated and recallable delegates as did the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, but the first was based on geographical delegation and the later on workplaces. All we do here is give a rough overview of what we expect (based on previous revolutions) to see occur in a future social revolution. We are not predicting the future. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"A question which we are often asked is: 'How will you organise the future society on Anarchist principles?' If the question were put to . . . someone who fancies that a*

> *group of men [or women] is able to organise society as they like, it would seem natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist, it sounds very strangely, and the only answer we can give to it is: 'We cannot organise you. It will depend upon **you** what sort of organisation you choose.'"* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 32]

And organise themselves they have. In every social revolution, the oppressed have created many different self-managed organisations. These bodies include the directly democratic neighbourhood Sections of the Great French Revolution, the neighbourhood clubs of the 1848 French Revolution and the Paris Commune, the workers councils and factory committees of the Russian and German revolutions, the industrial and rural collectives of the Spanish Revolution, the workers councils of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, assemblies and action committees of the 1968 revolt in France, the neighbourhood assemblies and occupied workplaces of the 2001 revolt in Argentina, and so on. These bodies were hardly uniform in structure and some were more anarchistic than others, but the tendency towards self-management and federation existed in them all. This tendency towards anarchistic solutions and organisation is not unsurprising, for, as Nestor Makhno argued, *"[i]n carrying through the revolution, under the impulsion of the anarchism that is innate in them, the masses of humanity search for free associations. Free assemblies always command their sympathy. The revolutionary anarchist must help them to formulate this approach as best they can."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 85]

In addition, we must stress that we are discussing an **anarchist** social revolution in this section. As we noted in section I.2.2, anarchists recognise that any revolution will take on different forms in different areas and develop in different ways and at different speeds. We leave it up to others to describe their vision of revolution (for Marxists, the creation of a "workers' state" and the seizure of power by the "proletarian" vanguard or party, and so on).

So what would a libertarian revolution involve?

Firstly, a revolution *"is not the work of one day. It means a whole period, mostly lasting for several years, during which the country is in a state of effervescence; when thousands of formerly indifferent spectators take a lively part in public affairs."* It *"criticises and repudiates the institutions which are a hindrance to free development . . . it boldly enters upon problems which formerly seemed insoluble."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 25-6] Thus, it would be a **process** in which revolutionary attitudes, ideas, actions and organisations spread in society until the existing system is overthrown and a new one takes its place. It does not come overnight. Rather it is an accumulative development, marked by specific events of course, but fundamentally it goes on in the fabric of society.

So the **real** Russian revolution occurred during the period between the 1917 February and October insurrections when workers took over their workplaces, peasants seized their land, new forms of social life (soviets, factory committees, co-operatives, etc.) were formed and people lost their previous submissive attitudes to authority by using direct action to change their lives for the better (see section A.5.4). Similarly, the Spanish Revolution occurred after the 19th of July, 1936, when workers again took over their workplaces, peasants formed collectives and militias were organised to fight fascism (see section A.5.6)

Secondly, *"there **must** be a rapid modification of outgrown economical and political institutions, an overthrow of the injustices accumulated by centuries past, a displacement of wealth and political power."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25] This aspect is the key one. Without

the abolition of the state and capitalism, no real revolution has taken place. As Bakunin argued, *"the program of social revolution"* is *"the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes through the equalisation of economic conditions, and the abolition of their last buttress, the state."* That is, *"the total and definitive liberation of the proletariat from economic exploitation and state oppression."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48-9]

We should stress here that, regardless of what Marxists may say, anarchists see the destruction of capitalism occurring **at the same time as** the destruction of the state. We do not aim to abolish the state first, then capitalism as Engels asserted we did (see section H.2.4). This perspective of a simultaneous political and economic revolution is clearly seen when Bakunin wrote that a city in revolt would *"naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour and every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers,** they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers,** the federative commune"* All *"the revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary services and arrangements for production and exchange . . . and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 179]

As can be seen, an essential part of a social revolution is the *"expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 198] This would be done by workers occupying their workplaces and placing them under workers' self-management. As Voltairine de Cleyre argued in 1910 *"the weapon of the future will be the general strike"* and its it not clear that *"it must be the strike which will **stay in** the factory, not **go out**? which will guard the machines and allow no scab to touch them? which will organise, not to inflict deprivation on itself, but on the enemy? which will take over industry and operate it for the workers, not for franchise holder, stockholders, and officeholders?"* [*"A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia"*, pp. 307-14, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, Peter Glassgold (ed.), p. 311] Individual self-managed workplaces would then federate on a local and industrial basis into workers' councils to co-ordinate joint activity, discuss common interests and issues as well as ensuring common ownership and universalising self-management: *"We must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165]

In this way capitalism is replaced by new economic system based the end of hierarchy, on self-managed work. These workplace assemblies and local, regional, etc., federations would start to organise production to meet human needs rather than capitalist profit. While most anarchists would like to see the introduction of communistic relations begin as quickly as possible in such an economy, most are realistic enough to recognise that tendencies towards libertarian communism will be depend on local conditions. As Malatesta argued:

> *"It is then that graduation really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country, the utilisation for the benefit of everyone of all natural*

> *resources of the different regions [and so on] . . . And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements, which other solutions might not."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173]

No central government could organise such a transformation. No centralised body could comprehend the changes required and decide between the possibilities available to those involved. Hence the very complexity of life, and the needs of social living, will push a social revolution towards anarchism. *"Unavoidably,"* argued Kropotkin, *"the Anarchist system of organisation -- free local action and free grouping -- will come into play."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Unless the economy is transformed from the bottom up by those who work within it, socialism is impossible. If it is re-organised from the top-down by a centralised body all that will be achieved is state capitalism and rule by bureaucrats instead of capitalists. Without local action and free agreement between local groups to co-ordinate activity, a revolution would be dead in the water and fit only to produce a new bureaucratic class structure, as the experience of the Russian Revolution proves (see section H.6).

Therefore, the key economic aspect of a social revolution is the end of capitalist oppression by the direct action of the workers themselves and their re-organisation of their work and the economy by their own actions, organisations and initiative from the bottom-up:

> *"To destroy radically this oppression without any danger of it re-emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production, and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the landowners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 167]

However, the economic transformation is but part of the picture. As Kropotkin argued, *"throughout history we see that each change in the economic relations of a community is accompanied by a corresponding change in what may be called political organisation . . . Thus, too, it will be with Socialism. If it contemplates a new departure in economics it **must** be prepared for a new departure in what is called political organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 39] Thus the anarchist social revolution also aims to abolish the state and create a confederation of self-governing communes to ensure its final elimination. This destruction of the state is essential as *"those workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be forced to defend themselves from the government . . . which by legalising the right to property and protecting it with brute force, constitutes a barrier to human progress, which must be beaten down . . . if one does not wish to remain indefinitely under present conditions or even worse."* Therefore, *"[f]rom the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195]

Thus a social revolution will have to destroy the state bureaucracy and its forces of violence and coercion (the police, armed forces, intelligence agencies, and so on). If this is not done then the state will come back and crush the revolution. As the CNT newspaper put it in the 1930s, the *"first step in the social revolution is to take control of Town Hall and proclaim the free commune. Once this occurs, self-management spreads to all areas of life and the people exercise their sovereign executive power through the popular assembly."* This free commune *"is the basic unit of libertarian communism . . . and, federated, it provides the basic structure*

of the new society in all its aspects: administrative, economic and political." [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durrutu in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 312]

Such a destruction of the state does not involve violence against individuals, but rather the end of hierarchical organisations, positions and institutions. It would involve, for example, the disbanding of the police, army, navy, state officialdom, etc. It would mean the transformation of police stations, military bases, the offices used by the bureaucracy into something more useful (or, as in the case of prisons, their destruction). Town halls would be occupied and used by community and industrial groups, for example. Offices of the mayor could be turned into crÃ¨ches. Police stations, if they have not been destroyed, could be turned into storage centres for goods (William Morris, in his utopian novel **News from Nowhere**, imagined the Houses of Parliament being turned into a manure storage facility). And so on. Those who used to work in such occupations would be asked to pursue a more fruitful way of life or leave the community. In this manner, all harmful and useless institutions would be destroyed or transformed into something of benefit to society.

In addition, as well as the transformation/destruction of the buildings associated with the old state, the decision making process for the community previously usurped by the state would come back into the hands of the people. Alternative, self-managed organisations would be created in every community to manage community affairs. From these community assemblies, confederations would spring up to co-ordinate joint activities and interests. These neighbourhood assemblies and confederations would be means by which power would be dissolved in society and government finally eliminated in favour of freedom (both individual and collective).

Ultimately, anarchism means creating positive alternatives to those existing institutions which provide some useful function. For example, we propose self-management as an alternative to capitalist production. We propose self-governing communes to organise social life instead of the state. *"One only destroys, and effectively and permanently,"* argued Malatesta, *"that which one replaces by something else; and to put off to a later date the solution of problems which present themselves with the urgency of necessity, would be to give time to the institutions one is intending to abolish to recover from the shock and reassert themselves, perhaps under other names, but certainly with the same structure."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 159] This was the failure of the Spanish Revolution, which ignored the state rather than abolish it via new, self-managed organisations (see section I.8.13). It must be stressed that this was not due to anarchist theory (see section I.8.11).

Hence a social revolution would see the *"[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of overriding necessity, voluntarily submits."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184] A revolution organises itself from the bottom up, in a self-managed way. As Bakunin summarised:

> *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune . . . The Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates . . . all provinces, communes and associations . . .*

> ***reorganising*** *on revolutionary lines . . . [would send] their representatives to an agreed meeting place . . . vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces in the name of the same principles and to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution . . . There can no longer be any successful revolution unless the political revolution is transformed into social revolution . . . Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170-2]

Thus we have a dual framework of revolution, the federation of self-managed workplace and community assemblies based on mandated and recallable delegates. *"Through its class organisations,"* Makhno argued, *"the people yearned to lay the foundations of a new, free society intended, as it develops without interference, to eliminate from the body of society all the parasites and all the power exercised by some over others, these being deemed by the toilers to be stupid and harmful."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79] These organisations, as we stressed in section I.2.3, are the products of the social struggle and revolution themselves:

> *"Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must* ***be*** *the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as* ***modes of struggle*** *against existing society . . . The future assemblies of people in the block, the neighbourhood or the district -- the revolutionary sections to come -- will stand on a higher social level than all the present-day committees, syndicates, parties and clubs adorned by the most resounding 'revolutionary' titles. They will be the living nuclei of utopia in the decomposing body of bourgeois society . . . The specific gravity of society . . . must be shifted to its base -- the armed people in permanent assembly."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 104-5]

Such organisations are required because *"[f]reedom has its forms . . . a liberatory revolution always poses the question of what social forms will replace existing ones. At one point or another, a revolutionary people must deal with how it will manage the land and the factories from which it requires the means of life. It must deal with the manner in which it will arrive at decisions that affect the community as a whole. Thus if revolutionary thought is to be taken at all seriously, it must speak directly to the problems and forms of social management."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] If this is not done, capitalism and the state will not be destroyed and the social revolution will fail. Only by destroying hierarchical power, by abolishing state and capitalism by self-managed organisations, can individuals free themselves and society.

As well as these economic and political changes, there would be other changes as well -- far too many to chronicle here. For example: *"We will see to it that all empty and under-occupied houses are used so that no one will be without a roof over his [or her] head. We will hasten to abolish banks and title deeds and all that represents and guarantees the power of the State and capitalist privilege. And we will try to reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165] Similarly, free associations will spring up on a whole range of issues, interests and needs. Social life

will become transformed, as will many aspects of personal life and personal relationships. We cannot say in which way, bar there will be a general libertarian movement in all aspects of life as women resist and overcome sexism, gays resist and end homophobia, the young will expect to be treated as individuals, not property, and so on.

Society will become more diverse, open, free and libertarian in nature. And, hopefully, it and the struggle that creates it will be **fun** -- anarchism is about making life worth living and so any struggle must reflect that. The use of fun in the struggle is important. There is no incongruity in conducting serious business and having fun. We are sure this will piss off the "serious" Left no end. The aim of revolution is to emancipate **individuals** not abstractions like "the proletariat," "society," "history" and so on. Having fun is part and parcel of that liberation. As Emma Goldman argued (and was paraphrased in the 1970s to *"If I cannot dance, it is not my revolution!"*), anarchism stands for *"release and freedom from conventions and prejudice"* and so she could *"not believe"* that it *"should demand the denial of life and joy"* (*"If it meant that, I did not want it"*): *"I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 56] As Bookchin suggested: *"Can we resolve the anarchic, intoxicating phase that opens all the great revolutions of history merely into an expression of class interest and the opportunity to redistribute social wealth?"* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189f]

Therefore a social revolution involves a transformation of society from the bottom up by the creative action of working class people. This transformation would be conducted through self-managed organisations which will be the basis for abolishing hierarchy, state and capitalism: *"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. **A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration** . . . If we define 'power' as the power of man over man, power can only be destroyed by the very process in which man acquires power over his own life and in which he not only 'discovers' himself, but, more meaningfully, formulates his selfhood in all its social dimensions."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

J.7.5 What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?

All the great social revolutions have been spontaneous. Indeed, it is clichÃ© that the revolutionaries are usually the most surprised when a revolution breaks out. Nor do anarchists assume that a revolution will initially be totally libertarian in nature. All we assume is that there will be libertarian tendencies which anarchists work within to try and strengthen. Therefore the role of anarchists and anarchist organisations is to push a revolution towards a social revolution by encouraging the tendencies we discussed in the last section and by arguing for anarchist ideas and solutions. In the words of Vernon Richards:

> *"We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44]

For anarchists, our role in a social revolution is clear -- we try to spread anarchist ideas and encourage autonomous organisation and activity by the oppressed. For example, during the Russian Revolution anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists played a key role in the factory

committee movement for workers' self-management. They combated Bolshevik attempts to substitute state control for workers' self-management and encouraged workplace occupations and federations of factory committees (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for a good introduction to this movement and Bolshevik hostility to it). Similarly, they supported the soviets (councils elected by workers in their workplaces) but opposed their transformation from revolutionary bodies into state organs (and so little more than organs of the Communist Party, rubber-stamping the decisions of the party leadership). The anarchists tried to *"work for their conversion from centres of authority and decrees into non-authoritarian centres, regulating and keeping things in order but not suppressing the freedom and independence of local workers' organisations. They must become centres which link together these autonomous organisations."* [G. P. Maksimov, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 105]

Therefore, the role of anarchists, as Murray Bookchin put it, is to *"**preserve and extend the anarchic phase that opens all the great social revolutions**"* by working *"**within the framework of the forms created by the revolution,** not within the forms created by the party. What this means is that their commitment is to the revolutionary organs of self-management . . . to the **social** forms, not the **political** forms."* Revolutionary anarchists *"seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies or soviets to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management,** not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party,"* to organise to *"propagate ideas systematically . . . **ideas which promote the concept of self-management**."* The revolutionary organisation *"presents the most advanced demands"* and *"formulate[s] -- in the most concrete fashion -- the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 139-140]

Equally as important, *"is that the people, all people, should lose their sheep-like instincts and habits with which their minds have been inculcated by an age-long slavery, and that they should learn to think and act freely. It is to this great task of spiritual liberation that anarchists must especially devote their attention."* Unless people think and act for themselves, no social revolution is possible and anarchy will remain just an opposition tendency within authoritarian societies. Practically, this means the encouragement of self-management and direct action. Anarchists thus *"push the people to expropriate the bosses and put all goods in common and organise their daily lives themselves, through freely constituted associations, without waiting for orders from outside and refusing to nominate or recognise any government or constituted body in whatever guise . . . even in a provisional capacity, which ascribes to itself the right to lay down the law and impose with force its will on others."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 160-1 and p. 197] This is because, to quote Bakunin, anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237]

The history of every revolution confirms Kropotkin (who echoed Proudhon) that *"revolutionary government"* is a contradiction in terms. Government bodies mean *"the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle*

and its objectives [are] also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could have no other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters." [Richards, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 42-3] Such a centralisation of power means the suppression of local initiatives, the replacing of self-management with bureaucracy and the creation of a new, exploitative and oppressive class of officials and party hacks. Only when power rests in the hands of everyone can a social revolution exist and a free society created. If this is not done, if the state replaces the self-managed associations of a free people, all that happens is the replacement of one class system by another. This is because the state is an instrument of minority rule -- it can never become an instrument of majority empowerment as its centralised, hierarchical and authoritarian nature excludes such a possibility (see section H.3.7 for more discussion on this issue).

Therefore an important role of anarchists is to undermine hierarchical organisation by creating self-managed ones, by keeping the management and direction of a struggle or revolution in the hands of those actually conducting it. It is **their** revolution, **not** a party's and so they should control and manage it. They are the ones who have to live with the consequences of it. As Bakunin argued, social revolution *"should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] *"The revolution is safe, it grows and becomes strong,"* correctly argued Alexander Berkman, *"as long as the masses feel that they are direct participants in it, that they are fashioning their own lives, that **they** are making the revolution, that they **are** the revolution. But the moment that their activities are usurped by a political party or are centred in some special organisation, revolutionary effort becomes limited to a comparatively small circle from which the large masses are practically excluded. The natural result is that popular enthusiasm is dampened, interest gradually weakens, initiative languishes, creativeness wanes, and the revolution becomes the monopoly of a clique which presently turns dictator."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 213] The history of every revolution proves this point, we feel, and so the role of anarchists is clear -- to keep a revolution revolutionary by encouraging libertarian ideas, organisation, tactics and activity.

Anarchists, therefore, organise to influence social struggle in a libertarian manner and our role in any social revolution is to combat authoritarian tendencies and parties while encouraging working class self-organisation, self-activity and self-management (how we organise to achieve this is described in section J.3). Only by the spreading of libertarian ideas and values within society, encouraging libertarian forms of social organisation (i.e., self-management, decentralisation, federalism, etc.) and continually warning against centralising power into a few hands can a revolution become more than a change of masters.

J.7.6 How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?

To some, particularly Marxists, this section may seem in contradiction with anarchist ideas. As we discussed in section H.2.1, Marxists tend to assume, incorrectly, that anarchists are either against defending a revolution or see no need to. However, as will become very clear, nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists have always argued for defending a revolution -- by force, if necessary. Anarchists argue that Marx (and Marxists) confuse self-defence by *"the people armed"* with the state, a confusion which has horrific implications (as the history of the Russian Revolution shows).

So how would an anarchist revolution (and by implication, society) defend itself? Firstly, we should note that it will **not** defend itself by creating a centralised body, a new state. If it did

this then the revolution will have failed and a new class society would have been created (a society based on state bureaucrats and oppressed workers as in the Soviet Union). Thus we reject the Marxist notion of a so-called "workers" or "revolutionary" state as confused in the extreme (as should be obvious from our analysis in section H). Rather, we seek libertarian means to defend a libertarian revolution. What would these libertarian means be?

In short, this would involve the *"creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution."* The creation of a free militia would be part of the general social transformation as the *"most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeois the economic means on which their power rests, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throw away their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 166 and p. 173] As Bakunin stressed:

> *"let us suppose . . . it is Paris that starts [the revolution] . . . Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune . . . All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services . . . and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda, the weapon of revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends in all countries against enemies in all countries."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 178-9]

So anarchists have always seen the necessity to defend a revolution. There is no theoretical contradiction implied by this for while anarchism *"is opposed to any interference with your liberty"* and *"against all invasion and violence"*, it recognises that when *"any one attacks **you**, then it is **he** who is invading you, he who is employing violence against you. You have a right to defend yourself. More than that, it is your duty, as an anarchist to protect your liberty, to resist coercion and compulsion . . . In other words, the social revolution will attack no one, but it will defend itself against invasion from any quarter."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 231] These militias, in other words, do not seek to impose a revolution, for you cannot impose freedom or force people to be free against their will: *"The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrifices."* [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44]

Such activity, Berkman stressed, *"must be in consonance with th[e] spirit [of anarchism]. Self-defence excludes all acts of coercion, of persecution or revenge. It is concerned only with repelling attack and depriving the enemy of opportunity to invade you."* Any defence would be based on *"the strength of the revolution . . . First and foremost, in the support of the people . . . If they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare, then in that very sentiment you have the greatest strength of the revolution . . . Let them believe in the revolution, and they will defend it to the death."* Thus the *"armed workers and peasants*

are the only effective defence of the revolution." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 231-2] Malatesta stressed that a government is not required to defend freedom:

> *"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear."* [**Anarchy**, p. 42]

As can be seen, anarchist theory has always addressed the necessity of defending a social revolution and proposed a solution -- the voluntary, self-managed militia organised by the free communes and federations of workers' associations. The militias would be unified and co-ordinated by federations of communes while delegates from each militia unit would co-ordinate the actual fighting. In times of peace the militia members would be living and working among the rest of the populace, and, thus, they would tend to have the same outlook and interests as their fellows. Moreover, in the case of foreign intervention, the importance of international solidarity is important (*"a social revolution cannot be a revolution in one nation alone. It is by nature an international revolution."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49]). Thus any foreign intervention would face the problems of solidarity actions and revolts on its own doorstep and not dare send its troops abroad for long, if at all. Ultimately, the only way to support a revolution is to make your own.

Within the revolutionary area, it is the actions of liberated people than will defend it. Firstly, the population would be armed and so counter-revolutionaries would face stiff opposition to their attempts to recreate authority. Secondly, they would face liberated individuals who would reject and resist their attempts Thus, as we discuss in section I.5.11, any authoritarian would face the direct action of a free people, of free individuals, who would refuse to co-operate with the would-be authorities and join in solidarity with their friends and fellow workers to resist them. The only way a counter-revolution could spread internally is if the mass of the population had become alienated from the revolution and this is impossible in an anarchist revolution as power remains in their hands. A free society need not fear internal counter-revolutionaries gaining support.

History, as well as theory, points to such libertarian forms of self-defence. In all the major revolutions which anarchists took part in they formed militias to defend freedom. For example, anarchists in many Russian cities formed *"Black Guards"* to defend their expropriated houses and revolutionary freedoms. In the Ukraine, Nestor Makhno helped organise a peasant-worker army to defend the social revolution against authoritarians of right and left. In the Spanish Revolution, the CNT organised militias to free those parts of Spain under fascist rule after the military coup in 1936.

These anarchist militias were as self-managed as possible, with any "officers" elected and accountable to the troops and having the same pay and living conditions as them. Nor did they impose their ideas on others. When a militia liberated a village, town or city they called upon the population to organise their own affairs, as they saw fit. All the militia did was

present suggestions and ideas to the population. For example, when the Makhnovists passed through a district they would put on posters announcing:

> *"The freedom of the workers and the peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants to act, to organise themselves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they themselves see fit and desire . . . The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel . . . In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 473]

Needless to say, the Makhnovists counselled the workers and peasants *"to set up free peasants' and workers' councils"* as well as to expropriate the land and means of production. They argued that *"[f]reedom of speech, of the press and of assembly is the right of every toiler and any gesture contrary to that freedom constitutes an act of counter-revolution."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 157-8] The Makhnovists also organised regional congresses of peasants and workers to discuss revolutionary and social issues. The army's declared principles were voluntary enlistment, the election of officers and self-discipline according to the rules adopted by each unit themselves. Remarkably effective, the Makhnovists were the force that defeated Denikin's army and helped defeat Wrangel. After the Whites were defeated, the Bolsheviks turned against the Makhnovists and betrayed them. However, while they existed the Makhnovists defended the freedom of the working class to organise themselves against both right and left statists (see Voline's **The Unknown Revolution**, Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement** or Alexandre Skirda's **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack** for more information).

A similar situation developed in Spain. After defeating the fascist military coup on 19th of July, 1936, the anarchists organised self-managed militias to liberate those parts of Spain under Franco. These groups were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

> *"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one* ***centuria,*** *which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty* ***centurias*** *make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the* ***centurias*** *have their say . . . although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 256-7]

Like the Makhnovists, the anarchist militias in Spain were not only fighting against reaction, they were fighting for a better world. As Durruti argued: *"Our comrades on the front know for whom and for what they fight. They feel themselves revolutionaries and they fight, not in defence of more or less promised new laws, but for the conquest of the world, of the factories, the workshops, the means of transportation, their bread and the new culture."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248] When they liberated towns and villages, the militia columns urged workers and peasants to collectivise the land and means of production, to re-organise life in a libertarian fashion. All across anti-Fascist Spain workers and peasants did exactly that. The militias only defended the workers' and peasants' freedom to organise their own lives as they saw fit and did not force them to create collectives or dictate their form.

In this, the CNT was not only following the suggestions of the likes of Bakunin and Malatesta, it was implementing its own stated policies. Thus before the revolution we find leading FAI member D. A. Santillan arguing that the *"local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat"* in the *"cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution."* These Local Councils would be a federation of workplace councils and would be members of the Regional Council of the Economy which, like the Local Council, would be *"constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 80 and pp. 82-83] Thus defence of a free society is based on the federation of workers' councils and so directly controlled by the revolutionary population. This can also be seen in the Spanish CNT's 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism in the section entitled ***"Defence of the Revolution"***:

> *"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution . . . So . . . the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion . . . or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution . . . The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without . . . Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence . . . the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence. . . .*
>
> *"1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*
>
> *"2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world's exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

Which was precisely what the CNT did do in July 1936 when faced with the fascist coup. Unfortunately, like the Makhnovists, the CNT militias were betrayed by their so-called allies on the left. The anarchist troops were not given enough arms and were left on the front to rot in inaction. The "unified" command by the Republican State preferred not to arm libertarian troops as they would use these arms to defend themselves and their fellow workers against the Republican and Communist led counter-revolution. Ultimately, the *"people in arms"* won the revolution and the *"People's Army"* which replaced it lost the war (see Jose Peirats' **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, Abel Paz's **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, Vernon Richard's **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** or Noam Chomsky's **Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship**).

While the cynic may point out that, in the end, these revolutions and militias were defeated, it does not mean that their struggle was in vain or a future revolution will not succeed. That would be like arguing in 1940 that democracy is inferior to fascism because most democratic

states had been (temporarily) defeated by the Axis powers. It does not mean that these methods will fail in the future or that we should embrace apparently more "successful" approaches which end in the creation of a society the total opposite of what we desire (means determine ends, after all, and statist means will create statist ends and apparent "successes" -- like Bolshevism -- are the greatest of failures in terms of our ideas and ideals). All we are doing here is pointing how anarchists have defended revolutions in the past and that these methods were successful for a long time in face of tremendous opposition forces.

Thus, in practice, anarchists have followed libertarian theory and created self-managed forms of self-defence against attempts to re-enslave a free people. In the end, an anarchist revolution can be defended only by applying its ideas as widely as possible. Its defence rests in those who make it. If the revolution is an expression of their needs, desires and hopes then it will be defended with the full passion of a free people. Such a revolution **may** be defeated by superior force, who can tell? But the possibility is that it will not and that is what makes it worth trying. To not act because of the possibility of failure is to live half a life.

Anarchism calls upon everyone to live the kind of life they deserve as unique individuals and desire as human beings. Individually we can make a difference, together we can change the world.