

Okay, here is my reply to Don. In general I would say that a feature of WSA's politics is that we don't believe in over-emphasizing the role of the political organization because we see the mass organizations as the instrument through which the working class emancipates itself. That said, we're "dual organizationalist", so we do see a role for a revolutionary political organization. I would also agree with Gambone that it would be desirable for such an organizing to have a certain theoretical and practical unity consistent with being a horizontal organization.

MYTH OF WORKER RULE IN RUSSIA

I'm not sure how Don conceives of "soviet power," but his references to the Russian revolution "degenerating" suggests he may think there was some time when the working class was actually in power in Russia. I think the working class was never in power in Russia.

Here it's necessary to examine the critique of the major soviets that Pete Rachleff provides in "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution." Rachleff shows that the major soviets in St. Petersburg and Moscow had been set up as entirely top down affairs by the Menshevik party leaders. Power was concentrated in the executive committee and later in the even smaller presidium. They tended to treat the plenaries as rubber stamps.

The Russian trade unions, set up by the Mensheviks, were also highly centralized. This is why the workers organized the shop committee movement, which was based on assemblies in the plants.

And the Bolsheviks never opposed this top down organization of the major soviets.

But not all soviets were organized this way. As Israel Getzler describes, the Kronstadt soviet was based on regular weekly assemblies in the ships and workplaces and the plenaries of the soviet were the actual place where decisions and deliberation took place. But in Kronstadt in 1917 the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were not dominant. The libertarian left was dominant...particularly the alliance of syndicalists and maximalists.

Sam Farber (a Marxist sociologist who is a member of Solidarity) points out in "Before Stalнизм" that Russian Marxism in its Menshevik and Bolshevik forms never advocated direct or participatory democracy. Farber says the Bolsheviks were so focused on capture of the central government they didn't emphasize participation of the people in the making of decisions.

We see this deficiency also in "State and Revolution". Lenin never advocates workers self-management. On the contrary he points to the German post office as a model for a socialist economy.

Russian Marxism seems to have taken over from social-democracy an interpretation of democracy as indirect or representative democracy...electing people to make decisions for you.

In 1908-09 there was a tendency in the Bolshevik power that did borrow from syndicalism an emphasis on direct worker management and direct worker participation. A Marxist-syndicalist group. This was the circle around Alexander Bogdanoff. But Lenin had them expelled. They later became the "Workers Truth" group.

I can't see that the Russian working class was ever actually in power. Why, then, the focus on Lenin?

Don refers to one-man management, Taylorist work organization, the top down professional army as aspects of the "degeneration" of the revolution. But these trends were, I think, in Bolshevism from the beginning. In Nov 1917 the Bolshevik government set up the Supreme Council for National Economy... a group entirely appointed from above, to work out a plan for the whole economy. It had various party members, experts and union officials. This body eventually became Gosplan. But a statist central planning body of this sort is already incompatible with workers' self-management of industry.

There was an alternative conception. The regional soviet of factory committees of St. Petersburg proposed a national congress of the factory committees to develop a national economic plan from below. This was fought out at the First All-Russian Trade Union Congress.

Only the libertarian left delegates...the syndicalist/maximalist alliance...supported this proposal. The Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates voted against it.

WHAT REPLACES THE STATE

Anarchism traditionally said ambiguous things about political power. I think among class struggle anarchists nowadays, this is no longer the case. I think we generally agree that the working class takes power, in the economy and in society in general.

I don't think Bookchin's idea of a loose confederation of self sufficient communities is an adequate conception of the new social regime. I think there would need to be a federation that consolidates its hold throughout the revolutionary territory...a unitary but horizontal form of control. This would not be a state if we understand "state" in the way Engels does, as a bureaucratic apparatus that is effectively separated from control by the mass of the people. I tend to envision the political power as rooted in base assemblies in workplaces and neighborhoods and then congresses of delegates from these assemblies...with the right to refer matters back to base assemblies in cases of controversial or very important issues.

SOCIAL INSERTION

Here I will point out that Don mis-interprets what I meant by "social insertion."

I did *not* assume that the activists are "declassed" elements. It's a question of focus. Anarchist activists with an inward focus on anarchist only projects or protest hopping may be from working class origins. Some of them are sort of declassed...students from middle class backgrounds...but not all.

To take an example, the organization Amanecer in California has the "social insertion" concept.

For them this means a focus on workplace organizing at rank and file level and community organizing. They are of working class origin. Some of them here in the Bay Area are salting targeted workplaces. They also have a substantial people of color membership...more so than the typical class struggle anarchist group.

Due to this kind of misconception, I see that it would perhaps be best if I avoided the term "social insertion" in the future.

VANGUARD AND MASS

Don refers to types of situations where the revolutionary activists may be in a setting, such as a workplace, where they have a different view of what should be done, or are confronted with conservative attitudes and ideas. I agree that critiquing such attitudes and ideas is one of the tasks for a revolutionary organization. I also agree that a revolutionary organization, to be effective, needs to have a kind of horizontal discipline and unity...a certain level of unity in theory and practice.

And publicizing our ideas generally in society as well as in particular organizational contexts is one of the tasks we face.

However, I think there are two errors that need to be avoided:

1. Over-intellectualizing the nature of the problem.
2. Seeing the separation between vanguard and mass as a static situation that continues into the revolution.

Here is what we say in the WSA's political statement:

"We advocate an approach where activists work to spread widely within the rank and file of movements and mass organizations the self-confidence, knowledge, skills and opportunities for decision-making participation needed to make self-management an effective reality. We want mass organizations to be self-managing and we work for this aim in such organizations and to counteract bureaucratic or authoritarian tendencies."

The point about developing broadly within the working class the knowledge, self-confidence and skills to be activists, organizers is about both the "organic" process of working class leadership development and also is essential for mass organizations to continue to be self-managing.

The anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain in the '30s were run through mass assemblies and elected shop steward committees...they had few staff or paid officials, who were basically just clerks or organizational coordinators. This type of mass self-managed form of unionism could not have survived without widespread agreement with revolutionary ideas and many rank and file workers having developed the ability to participate effectively. In this context, the Spanish anarchist concept of *capacitacion* -- developing capacities of rank and file working class people -- is relevant.

This was part of their conception of the development of the class into a class "for itself." One of the things that supported this were the neighborhood centers or ateneos where there were classes, debates, talks, literacy classes, and so on.

"REPRESENTING"

Don talks about the revolutionary organization having the responsibility to "represent" the broader class interest, or interest of all the exploited and oppressed, and an internationalist perspective. Although we should strive to do this, it is unrealistic to expect that we would not make mistakes. Any small group consists of people who have had only certain kinds of experiences... been subject only to certain forms of oppression. Thus I think we have to allow that there may never be a single vanguard organization that "represents" everyone adequately.

The point to the diversity of social movements is that it is the participation of the oppressed themselves who develop an understanding of their situation.

Thus I think that an adequate overall "representation" can only be created by the kind of mass process that I called a "labor/social movement alliance." This is where the various mass organizations that have arisen in the various areas of struggle come together and gain acceptance of their agenda, their concerns, among the others...the reality of "an injury to one is an injury to all." We can work towards that sort of process happening...such as organizing venues where people from different backgrounds come together and exchange their views in a mutually respectful manner.

But a complete and adequate representation in this sense is only likely to emerge in a revolutionary situation.

Also, I would point out that the idea of "class" or "solidarity" unionism is also to represent the interests of the working class as a whole in this way. It need not be a feature of only a vanguard organization.

INSURRECTION

I don't see why a vanguard political organization has to take the responsibility for organizing an insurrection...in a situation where this would make sense. We are of course very far away from anything like this occurring here in the USA...and so I don't see a need to talk about it...certainly not publicly.

But in the case of Barcelona in July 1936, the smashing of the army was organized by the workers defense committee of the CNT. They coordinated the efforts of the 3,000 armed workers of the CNT neighborhood defense groups, and even the rank and file police who sided with the working class took direction from them. And the workers defense committee was set up by a mass syndicalist union federation with 350,000 members.

It's always been a syndicalist position that any armed force of the revolution has to be controlled by the democratic mass organizations of the working class...if the working class is to end up in power when the dust settles.

Even in the case of the insurrection in Russia in Oct 1917, this took place under the auspices of the St. Petersburg and Kronstadt soviets, not the party.