

## **Informal self- organisation**

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**And it's war we're talking about.**

# **AGAINST ASSEMBLIES**

Organisation, Democracy & the Left



OPAQUE EDITIONS

ASSEMBLIES  
AGAINST

In the UK, though we are a long way from there, all the brightest examples of recent rebellion we know, including recent anti-gentrification struggles, have been largely self-organised and informal. We won't let The Left suck up these sparks into a machine of boredom and control.

However, informal self-organisation only works if everyone involved can take initiative and take responsibility. We need to be on guard against allowing leaders to emerge — or becom-

ing leaders ourselves. We need to be on guard against becoming passive followers, too, sinking into the comfort of letting others guide us. This means developing, supporting, caring for ourselves and each other.

This isn't easy. It means striking against the cultures of domination and dependency we are brought up in, that are dug deep into our bodies. It means creating new cultures that empower us all to become free individuals. It means daring to fight to live freely.

## **Anarchy, a journey and an adventure.**

Points of encounter are crucial: places where we can meet new people, get to know them, find affinities and alliances, also challenge ourselves and each other. Where we share ideas and experiences, learn and train, inspire each other. These could be gatherings, debates, social events, demos, riots.

But if we hold a gathering, we don't need to take a majority decision or find "consensus". It's a place to meet each other and find others who want to work on an action or project together. Those who don't can do something else.

We can develop other infrastructure to spread information and make wider connections. For example, counter-information websites post news, call-outs, reports of actions, letters from prisoners, ideas and discussions, maybe from their local circles or received from afar. They spread each others' info further, replicating what interests and inspires them.

Does it work? We have seen and lived many beautiful and powerful examples of informal self-organised networks. Flash-mobs, demos and riots spreading virally. Words and acts of solidarity spreading across borders and around the globe.

Informal self-organisation is particularly powerful in war. Modern states can easily crush weaker opposing armies, but struggle to contain loose informal insurgencies. *And it's war we're talking about.*

Where anarchy is powerful and alive today, it organises in these ways. In Greece or Chile, the insurrectional groups and networks on the knife edge of the fight against state and capital are informal. In Spain, the vibrant new re-growth of anarchism there has cast off the rigid old structures of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and blossomed in loose networks of squats, social centres, ateneos, occupied banks, groups of defence and attack, etc.

# Death to Assemblies

*"The history of the working class movement is littered with paper bodies, based on so-called delegates, which actually substitute building organisations based on activists prepared to fight"*

*"-assembly +orge"*

The applause. The slogans. The predictability. The enemy infrastructure of the University. The hierarchies. These assemblies are depressing.

And they are tied to a particular way of understanding what we do. The assembly is not just any meeting but one that brings together different people or organisations. It is a form used by 'movements' like the one people voted in the last 'radical assembly' to build. Lenin thought in terms of movements - the mass movement of workers which needed leadership from the party.

Since then the term has been used more to describe different people and groups who, while not in the same situations and not in direct communication, act against

some common enemy or with some common method. Like the UK student movement of 2010 or the international squares movement of 2011.

But there are better ways of understanding the relationship between the material situations people are in, diffuse or spontaneous resistances, and the groups of us self-consciously trying to make this resistance more powerful. Maybe the mass engaged in practices of refusal and appropriation is the subject dictating strategy and the party should be their assistant, developing tactics through confrontation. Or maybe all subversion and defection are acts of the party itself.

Those interested in thinking in terms of movements still want to engage a force in

need of directing. They want to unify an object that they can speak for and lead. They ape the past forms of organising of workers who are no longer a growing force, who can sweep into power and transform the world. It would be better to think of ourselves, rather than as the people who move forward, dragging others behind us, as the people who, unable to co-exist any longer with capital, stop it dead.

It would be better to think of ourselves, not as becoming united, but as working with the different ways we are determined by our circumstances and histories, even if some plans need the tight coordination of large numbers of people.

Better than sitting around making speeches to each other, would be to try out practical ways to re-take our means of living and defending ourselves, that can be shared with others. We need practical experimentation and careful thought about what is being tried and how it is working.

Better than letting a team of people up on a stage coordinate the speech of others, would be to build relationships which undermine situations of order. We need to do hard everyday work with people who are not activists and stay in touch with what other organised groups are doing (which is the easy part since we all use the social media). And we can come across them accidentally in moments different struggles collide.

### **Death to assemblies.**

## **What do we propose instead?**

In place of The Mass, free relations of solidarity. Free Association. We come together with friends, neighbours, whoever, when we share projects and struggles, or just when we desire to be together; we stay together so long as that's so; when it's not, we go our sep-

arate ways. We respect each others' difference and individualities, so we respect and enable our freedom to go our own ways.

In place of the Mass Organisation, informal self-organisation.

**Self-organisation means:** we are all free and able to decide and act for ourselves, and to form and leave associations freely.

**Informality means:** we avoid creating fixed, permanent, formalised institutions, with set programmes, officers, bureaucracies, membership lists, annual meetings, etc., because these easily turn into systems of domination manipulated by leaders.

Also, and this is not unrelated, they are easily infiltrated and controlled by the state.

There is no specific recipe for informal self-organisation. Rather, what we are talking about is a dynamic tension: we are always developing our own freedom and ability to act independently, and helping others to do so; we are always on guard that our structures don't freeze into hierarchies.

Informal self-organisation may involve affinity groups: groups of close comrades who share some desires, understandings and projects over a period of time — we say, who have an affinity — and so choose to work and fight together on these projects.

read the great books, know the One Direction we need to go in.

Then they need to get their hands on the levers of a Mass Organisation, so that they can instruct and guide us along the right path. The organisational structure can take many forms, but might involve committees, assemblies, plenaries, annual meetings, officers, stewards, party newspapers, etc.

The other key piece of the Mass Organisation machine is: symbols and rituals that display the legitimacy of the leaders. The Left, on the whole, is democratic, so the legitimacy rituals it uses are conferences, assemblies, debates, votes (ballots or hand-raising, etc.), or maybe

“consensus decision making” processes, etc. E.g.: we have to all follow this rule and do this thing because we put our hands up in a room last year, or waved our hands in a square, after the allotted hour of debating time.

Democracy, representative or direct, is nothing more than another way of legitimising domination. In other times it might have been: because the Bible says, or because someone pulled a sword out of a stone. The basic principle is the same: all of us (The Mass), must do the same thing because God said / the majority voted for the fuckers / the Assembly agreed / etc.

## *Fuck that shit.*

Anarchists fight against all domination: all relationships that make some masters and some slaves, some leaders and some followers. Including relationships amongst so-called comrades. The Left, wherever it tries to organise us into a Mass, is yet another System of Domination, and so our enemy.

# **We Don't Want a Mass Organisation**

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*Why not?*

## **Because we're not a mass, and we don't want anyone to organise us.**

The idea of The Mass has taken many forms. “The Nation”, “The People”, “The Working Class”, “The 99%”, whatever. In any case it is a homogeneous body of people, all identical in some basic way. Maybe because we share a “national identity”, or the same “class interests”, or a fixed “human nature”. Whatever, in this key respect we are all one.

This is a lie. We are not a mass, we are multiple. We are very different individuals and groups with

many different backgrounds, needs, desires, beliefs, cultures, allegiances. We have a million different projects and directions of our own.

Sure, we share some things and can unite and form alliances in particular situations. E.g., in London many of us who aren't rich fuckers might get together around a shared hatred of bastard property developers, or of the cops. But even then we'll have very different ideas about how to do things.

## **The Left Mass Organisation machine.**

The idea of The Mass is a power tool for the leaders of The Left. If we all have the same interests, then we should unite and move together on the same path.

Anyone who doesn't is a problem. The leaders of the Left—politicians, careerists, officials, journalists, professional activists, etc.—who are wise and clever and have

[www.bit.ly/GiveUpActivism](http://www.bit.ly/GiveUpActivism)

[www.bit.ly/DeathToAssemblies](http://www.bit.ly/DeathToAssemblies)

Silence in a meeting isn't a licence for the dominant people to speak. Maybe stay quiet, see what happens...

[www.bit.ly/ThePartyIsOver](http://www.bit.ly/ThePartyIsOver)

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