

**ANARCHIST FEDERATION CONFERENCE | MELBOURNE, MARCH 2008**

This reader is compilation of thoughts, assorted articles & responses. Some directly relate to the federation proposal, some discuss important aspects of anti-authoritarian/anarchist organising, some reflect upon what it means to be a revolutionary today.

It's not meant to be an ideological blueprint for groups & individuals to follow, but hopefully a way of starting important & useful conversations that will be fleshed out, expanded and revisited over the next few days.

We hope you enjoy it!

*In solidarity,*

**The three editors.**

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|---|----|
| <b>A Proposal for a Regional Anarchist Federation</b><br>by some anarchists                         | 4  |
| <b>MAC Security Statement for the A-Fed Conference</b><br>Melbourne Anarchist Club                  | 8  |
| <b>A Safer Spaces Invitation</b><br>Sydney organisers crew  | 10 |
| <b>Aims and Principles of the Melbourne Anarchist Club</b><br>Melbourne Anarchist Club              | 12 |
| <b>Federation Ideas</b><br>from a Sydney Affinity Group   | 14 |
| <b>Some Thoughts on the Proposed Anarchist Federation</b><br>from the Mutiny Collective             | 16 |
| <b>A Proposal for a Regular Federation Publication</b><br>from two members of the Mutiny Collective | 18 |
| <b>Possible Community Building Activities for A-Fed</b><br>anon                                     | 20 |
| <b>What Would An Anarchist Federation Be Good For?</b><br>a proposal from Anarchist Direct Action   | 23 |
| <b>What We Think Revolution Is</b><br>by Anarchist Direct Action                                    | 24 |
| <b>Thoughts on the Anarchist Federation Proposal</b><br>by @ndy                                     | 26 |
| <b>The Practice of Hope</b><br>by Dave  | 26 |
| <b>Anarchist Federation: An argument for diversity</b><br>by Frew                                   | 30 |
| <b>The Federation of Australian Anarchists 1975-1977</b><br>by John Englehart                       | 36 |

#### Introduction

## A Proposal for a Regional Anarchist Federation.

by some anarchists. Posted on [afederation.wordpress.com](http://afederation.wordpress.com) 7/12/07

Even as many of us constantly engage in struggles to enact our revolutionary politics and ideas in collectives, as individuals, at work and at play, there is often an underlying sense of isolation from broader anarchist activity from which to draw knowledge and inspiration. We feel that this is a severe barrier on our ability to maintain effective struggle or to even propagate a revolutionary, anarchist politics on a larger-scale. We believe a Federation that collectives (and individuals) over the wide distances of this region can align with would begin to solve these problems.

Mostly the feeling that an Anarchist Federation is necessary emanates from a simple desire for solidarity amongst revolutionaries that cannot always be found in our local communities and workplaces. A Federation could provide strong support for campaigns and actions across the region. When organising around similar issues, collectives would gain a greater momentum from being able to share ideas and resources with others from across the continent and beyond. This is not a new idea but we hope that a new attempt can be made at solidifying such possibilities. That is what this proposal is for.

A solid, ongoing federation would help us look after each other. Solidarity with and support for those of us (and also those who aren't 'us'), who come under the repressive boot of the state is a crucial aspect of mutual aid and creating an anarchist community and will be an ongoing project for as long as we continue to resist.

Much of what communication currently takes place between anarchists happens on an ad-hoc basis at convergences, which are usually connected to major protests. This activist focus

tends to exclude those who, because of family or work responsibilities, geographic isolation, or other reasons, can't, or don't want to, attend such events. A federation would enable better communication and ongoing political development. It could be a useful point of reference for people who, for whatever reason, are unable to be involved in collectives but who want to stay in contact or who need support. This would be important in helping to ensure intergenerational continuity so that individuals are able to stay involved and connected to anarchist struggle while being able to pass on their knowledge.

We do not wish to see a federation replicate or 'override' networks that already exist. By wanting to organise more explicitly as anarchists we don't want to become inward-looking, purist or isolated. On the contrary, we hope that if we are more strongly organised, we will be better able to work alongside and be a part of social struggles that do not define themselves as anarchist.

One of the points we've discussed frequently is the tension between openness and political commonality. We don't think it's necessary or desirable to try to form an organisation of every activist, or even everyone who calls themselves an anarchist, in the region. Without a certain level of shared politics we won't be able to go beyond talking about what we're against and begin to talk about, and work towards, what we want. Alternately, we don't want to define too narrowly a particular type of anarchism. One of the benefits we see of a federation is the possibility that different strands of anarchism can learn more about each other, and that we can further develop both our common and our separate politics. We want as much as possible that our contacts be your contacts, our networks your networks, our resources your resources and that internal strength can be translated into an outward focus.

This proposal is very much a draft. We're putting forward our ideas in the hope that other people will consider and discuss the idea of a federation, not because we know for sure what it should be like. It was written by a small group of anarchists in Sydney. We've been helped a lot by discussion with others from Sydney and elsewhere, from looking at other models and from discussion that happened around previous proposals for a federation here. The people who wrote this are involved in anarchist projects such as Mutiny and the Black Rose Books collective, but it hasn't been endorsed by these groups.

Over the next few months, we hope that people will discuss the idea of an Anarchist Federation in their groups, in their cities, through existing forums & through an email list and a blog set up for such discussion.

<http://afederation.wordpress.com>

[anarchist.federation.discussion@gmail.com](mailto:anarchist.federation.discussion@gmail.com)

Within the first half of next year we would like to help organise a convergence with the explicit purpose of discussing, and hopefully forming, the federation.

The fundamental politics for participation in the federation would be that members:

- Seek the abolition of capitalism and class society in all its forms.
- Support an organisational philosophy based on decentralisation, mutual aid and autonomy, and reject domination and hierarchical/authoritarian organising.
- Oppose all forms of oppression and power over others and recognise that these rarely play out in isolation but are strongly interwoven and connected.
- Believe that an anarchist society is desirable, necessary and possible. Revolutionary change isn't going to come from leaders, experts or professional activists but can only come from below: from the collective self-organisation of 'ordinary' people.
- Believe in solidarity across and against borders and are internationalists. We reject the state and all its functions such as the police and military.

#### How We Might Get From Proposal To Federation:

#### Common Politics

**Some further points**

Here are some more thoughts that we've been discussing, and which inform our understanding of what the 5 points mean. These are provided for the purpose of discussion, not to be limits on the basis of federation.

**Radical Struggles,  
Capitalism and Class**

There are many different important elements in revolutionary and radical struggle. These include, but are not limited to, class, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, feminism and queer liberation. Some see one liberatory movement - such as the class struggle - as most important, whilst others choose not to create such a hierarchy. We hope that through working together we can discuss these differences in helpful ways.

When we talk about class struggle, we don't simply mean the actions of the 'traditional' blue-collar working class. We recognise that the class composition of today has changed - largely as a product of neoliberal economic policies - and is characterised by conditions of casualisation and precarity. The unpaid and unrecognised labourer, the unemployed, the casually and underemployed, are all integral to revolutionary change. This class is diverse, but interconnected and we realise that all these struggles are affecting the same global capitalist system.

We further understand that capitalism is not just multinational corporations, economic summits or secret meetings of the very rich; it is a social relation and system that is played out and produced in our everyday lives.

**Living Without  
Hierarchy**

The language of 'non-hierarchical' organising can still be used to implement the centralised control of a few. We believe that radicals should create structures that are genuinely decentralised and leaderless. Some frameworks for this include rotating and recallable delegates, consensus-based process and spokescouncils.

Although we may formally understand that racism, sexism, etc are an oppressive part of capitalism we still need to consciously 'unlearn' these concrete ideas and ways of social interaction in our own political organising and daily lives. This cannot be achieved by merely writing a paper - we need to create a liberatory culture everyday. That there are many ways of resisting all these forms of oppression is a strength, and we want to find ways of connecting our politics with these struggles.

**Some Thoughts on  
Contemporary Struggles**

The struggle against the global environmental crisis is inextricably linked to that against capitalism, and is a significant part of contemporary radical action. Environmental crises will necessarily affect those already marginalised and excluded more than those who are economically and socially privileged. 'Green capitalism' is not an answer, and we understand that a truly sustainable society will necessarily be decentralised, anti-capitalist and radically democratic.

We support Indigenous struggles for true sovereignty, dignities and against the theft of land and resources and ongoing genocide. We understand that many modern states were built on a brutal and ongoing colonialism, which continues to be upheld and imposed by police and the military.

Our struggles are internationalist and directed against the nation state. Nationalism and patriotism are barriers that are used to divide and repress 'ordinary' people, and prevent our own autonomous self-organisation. Permitted and unpermitted migration is a pivotal part of contemporary capitalism, dividing rich and poor, and the vast bulk of people on the basis of a false nationality. We accept the slogan that "No One is Illegal".

**Direct Action, Not  
Lobbying or Negotiation**

We don't want to negotiate with the representatives of the state or the functionaries of capital. We realise that the dominant global institutions are so intrinsically undemocratic, pervasive and directed by profit-making that lobbying has little or no effect. We see direct action and mutual aid as occurring in many different forms and as the most practical and realistic way of building our power, our autonomy and achieving revolutionary change.

**Rough thoughts  
on structure**

1. When we talk about a regional federation, we are deliberately unclear about where in particular we are talking about. To limit ourselves to Australian borders seems silly; we would like to be

- open to comrades from Aotearoa and further. On the other hand, perhaps it would be more practical to begin with a smaller geographic region. There has already been some discussion about forming an Asian Anarchist Network as well.
2. The federation would be horizontal and based upon already existing affinity groups or collectives that choose to align themselves with it. We see this as one way of ensuring a rejection of top-down politics.
  3. We do see there as being some solid requirements for participating individuals and collectives. We believe that there should be some kind of dues structure. This would give us some financial reserve and could be used on, among other things, a publication, jail solidarity and travel expenses for delegates. There would be an e-mail list or a message board for discussion.
  4. Anarchist spaces that already exist, such as infoshops throughout the country, could be supported more effectively. They could link up more frequently, and could provide an alternative space for organizing rather than through establishment-controlled structures like universities or student unions.
  5. A regular publication, either quarterly or biannually, could be produced. We see this as crucial to furthering both internal communication and propagating anarchist ideas to a wider audience. A website could be established.
  6. An annual convergence (that isn't centred around a major protest) to bring together anarchists from across the region, to strengthen networks, share information and skills and to improve collective campaigns.
  7. Collectives would nominate rotating delegates or spokes that would meet either quarterly or every six months. This would be to further communication and facilitate the better functioning of the federation. We believe these would operate by a consensus-based model, with details to be decided at the foundation convergence.
  8. These people could be a contact point for the federation in their geographical area. A phone tree for urgent contact and discussion would be established.
  9. When there is a cross-over between collective work on certain important issues, federation working groups could be established. For instance this could include an Indigenous Solidarity working group or one against Australian Imperialism. We see collectives across the region working on these issues, and believe that there could be better co-operation and development of ideas. An outreach working group could be set up to better spread our shared philosophy.
  10. We hope for a safer spaces policy to come out of a foundation convergence and we believe that there should be a grievance committee delegated at each convergence.

We have to talk and think about ways to make the Federation and its events spaces in which we respect and support each other: because this doesn't just happen automatically. It is everyone's responsibility to think about how their behaviour and the behaviour of others affect people's ability to participate and feel safe in a space. We all have to constantly work to ensure our spaces are free from physical violence and sexual assault, from intimidation and discrimination. There will be people involved in the Federation from various backgrounds and with various identities and people will have different experiences of the same spaces. We want to be able to vigorously disagree with each other while still making sure that everyone is listened to and is able to talk.

We want to set aside significant time at the initial convergence to talk about these issues. Any founding document would highlight such concepts as a necessary element of revolutionary struggle. We hope that collectives and individuals will bring concrete ideas and proposals to participate in this dialogue.

As we have tried to make clear, all parts of this proposal are open for discussion and change. To facilitate discussion over the next few months - hopefully leading to a convergence - we have created a blog and email account. We see the blog as a public forum for discussion while the email would originally be for direct queries/responses/getting in contact. If it becomes necessary we would possibly also look at creating an egroup for more practical matters such as organising a formation convergence.

**A**

#### Ideas on Safer spaces

#### Moving Forward

## **MAC Security Statement**

### for the A-Fed Conference

by the Melbourne Anarchist Club

To enjoy the benefits of using this space you also need to take on some responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is the security of the space and others using the space. If you do not take on this responsibility then you can not access the benefits.

It is the expectation of the Melbourne Anarchist Club that you consider how your conduct might affect others before acting. Any conduct injurious to the practice of solidarity and mutual aid will not be tolerated. Consequences range from warnings, removal from the space up to a permanent ban. All consequences are subject to appeal and you have the right to know why MAC might find your conduct unacceptable or presence in the space untenable.

MAC will not enforce the bans or decisions of other groups unless requested to do so and an open and transparent process is subsequently followed. Enforcing your own group's decisions (i.e. banning) within the MAC space without prior agreement may be interpreted as an attack on our autonomy and will be treated very seriously.

MAC does seek advice and wants to work co-operatively in matters of conduct, safety and freedom. This is necessary for any security and safer spaces policies to be effective.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour include physical intimidation, bullying, recording/broadcasting without permission or racism. It does not include passionate debate, differences of opinion, the reasonable elevation of voices, refusal to engage in discussion or wild gesticulation. We are not interested in intervening in simple disagreements.

If you see a clear breach of civilised conduct and you are able to do something, do not wait for our permission to do so. Perpetrators should be removed from the situation so we can then create the space necessary for resolution. In extreme cases (such as the use of violence) it would be acceptable to immediately remove a person from the space.

We are also aware of attempts by fascists to obtain photos and personal details of anarchists. They have recently attempted to infiltrate, taken photos and published them along with threats. There have also been similar attempts of infiltration by corporate interests, who are especially interested in pro-environment groups. Be wary of being asked about identifying others (e.g. "Is that such-and-such?" or "Have you seen this person?") to someone you don't know.

If you suspect someone of being a fascist or an informant, please tell someone from MAC if you are unsure or it is unsafe to ask directly. If you see anyone trying to spy on us, act appropriately and be creative in your response.

**A**

## A Safer Spaces

### Invitation

from the Sydney Organisers of the A-Fed Conference

This is an invitation to be a part of making our convergence a safer space.

We say safer, not 'safe', recognising that not all spaces will be safe at all times for all people. But that together we want to work to constantly challenge our own behaviours and the behaviours of others to create a space that is safer.

Safety is not just about feeling physically safe from harm but also about being emotionally and socially comfortable. We recognise that what we need to feel safe and comfortable will be different for all of us.

Creating safer spaces is not about imposing a set of rules or restrictions for the convergence.

Safer Spaces is an invitation to participate in making this event as safe for everyone as possible. It invites you to think about your privileges, your behaviour, your words and the impact they have on others. To consider and open your mind to the possibilities that you may make others feel unsafe, to recognise that that is not okay and to challenge and change that. To create an environment where people feel safe enough to speak up when they feel unsafe, to call others

out on things that they are doing, to say NO, to say STOP, to ask what they want, they need, they desire. It is a process that goes beyond this convergence. Safer space is not this invitation but the culture we create.

To make the convergence a safer space we are inviting people to take this on as their own responsibility.

The invitation is to:

- Respect other's space, this means space to talk, space to dance, space to move, space to be silent, space to be themselves, to make their own decisions, physical space and emotional space.
- If you are drinking throughout the convergence, be conscious of the effects alcohol has on you and your ability to be aware of your behaviour.
- Be aware of privilege based on sexuality/gender, race, class, age, ability, religion, parental or relationship status. We can actively say NO to any discrimination, oppression, exclusion or marginalisation based upon this in our spaces.
- Actively listen to people if they approach you about your behaviour. Validate what they are saying by not being defensive or dismissive about how others are feeling. Be open to criticism and asking for support.
- Seek active verbal consent before touching, hugging, kissing or being in someone's personal space. Ask people what their boundaries are and respect them.
- If you are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable you could try some of the following: Let the person know what they are doing, how you are feeling and ask that they stop.
- Have a friend or friends approach the person with you or on your behalf about feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.

If something happens seek support from friends or from someone around you - there will be a grievance committee set up throughout the convergence that can also help if that is what you want.

**A**

## Aims and Principles of the Melbourne Anarchist Club

Ratified at the MAC Annual General Meeting 28/10/07

### Introduction

Anarchism is both a political philosophy and a social movement. As a social movement, anarchism aims to create a classless, non-hierarchical society; that is, a society 'without rulers' (*anarchy*). As a political philosophy, anarchism maintains that the creation of such a society is both possible and desirable. Anarchists are those who actively work towards realising this possibility.

### Principles

#### Liberty

The concept of individual human freedom lies at the heart of anarchist philosophy. As such, anarchists seek to maximise the ability of individuals to live freely, in the absence of the arbitrary constraints imposed by illegitimate forms of authority. Anarchists therefore oppose all forms of domination and exploitation, and work, through both individual and collective struggle, to subvert all social structures based on these practices.

#### Equality

The anarchist concept of freedom is intrinsically linked to the notion of equality. That is, anarchists maintain that individuals are most free in a society in which there is economic, political and social equality. 'From each according to their ability; to each according to their need'.

'An injury to one is an injury to all.' Anarchists oppose the false principle of the survival of the fittest, and believe that human survival and social development can best be secured through co-operation among individuals and groups to their mutual benefit.

'The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves'. An anarchist society can only be achieved through direct action; that is, through forms of social struggle unmediated by political authority (government).

Anarchists advocate the creation of directly democratic forms of social organization, in which individual members have an equal right to take part in decision-making processes. As such, anarchists oppose forms of representative democracy, and agitate for their replacement by directly democratic ones.

Anarchists advocate the establishment of voluntary, non-hierarchical associations between directly democratic organisations. By the same token, anarchists also maintain the right of members of federated bodies to leave such associations, if and when they deem them to be contrary to their interests.

### Aims

Anarchists regard the state as an oppressive institution, the abolition of which is necessary to human liberation.

"The state is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."  
— Gustav Landauer.

The destruction of the state is a collective responsibility which will be achieved through social revolution.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger, want and boredom are found among billions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish capitalism and the state, and live in harmony with the Earth.

The ideal economic system, one that is consistent with the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity, is anarchist or libertarian communism. Libertarian communism means the common ownership of the means of production and the free association of producers. The implementation of Anarchism can only be through the free federation of productive and communal organizations.

'Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice; socialism without freedom is slavery.' — Mikhail Bakunin.

### Goals

M.A.C. aims to facilitate the establishment of a federation of anarchist groups with the object of transferring custodianship of the building to a functioning federation. **A**

Solidarity

Direct Action

Direct Democracy

Federation

Abolition of the State

Social Revolution

Anarchist Economics

## Federation

### Ideas

#### from a Sydney Affinity Group

We are a small affinity group in Sydney who came together to talk about the Federation proposal. We want to say thanks to the people who initiated the proposal and who have been working to organise the convergence in Melbourne. We are excited to be having this discussion and have some ideas and thoughts to contribute, prior to the Melbourne meeting.

We think that the proposal is great and we have a couple considerations to add, starting with the very term federation. We think it's important in the convergence that we discuss what different assumptions and understandings there are. Do people think federation means organisation, network or something else? We imagine a federation that is created by the cooperation between collectives and affinity groups, rather than one that acts as an organization seeking to generate cooperation. We see the federation being a forum for discussion and support internally before we can embark on any national or regional strategy, and recognise that this could take some time.

In terms of common politics we think that our organising spaces should reflect a world we want to create. We believe that important core values in these spaces are respect and a commitment to recognising privilege and maintaining awareness of how we behave and communicate

with each other. And in terms of objectives for the federation we need better and clearer internal communication between anarchists, more local collective organising and support for self-organising.

We've noticed there is a bit of discussion about the participation of individuals. Our two cents is that the federation should see collective work as desirable. We should prioritise facilitating spaces for collectives to form, with the aim of generating more collective processes, exchanging experiences and strategies, hooking people up with each other and identifying geographical isolation. The federation could encourage individuals to think about who they usually talk about organising with and to think about starting an affinity group with those people. We think that individuals should be able to participate and it's inevitable that they will. However, we think that federation proposals should be fleshed out in collective spaces or at the very least between a few people.

We don't want the federation to become an entity in and of itself but rather the sum of its parts. That is, we don't want the federation to become some peoples' project we want it to come out of all of our organising. We reckon that collectives can be more accountable. As an example we think that any working groups formed to work on particular projects or issues should be largely made up by the presence of collectives, this could be a rotating person. Also for this reason we don't like the idea of a dues structure or accumulation of funds without pre-forecast projects. We think it would be better to decide on projects on a case-by-case basis and then raise funds.

The federation should not be endorsed to sign onto anything, make statements or call for actions unless it's agreed upon at a national convergence. Just like we don't think anyone should be able to talk in the name of the federation.

We suppose that a federation e-group will be proposed during the convergence. We recognise the importance of efficient communication between groups but have found that e-groups can become overwhelming and defunct. There should be tight subscriptions and the list should function as a virtual spokes council (as all communication in the federation would ideally be). If collectives discuss posts together and nominate a person to respond to a list on a rotational basis, it would dramatically reduce the number of posts while also facilitating more effective communication.

The list would be a useful forum to post proposals and responses to them. Announcements and call-outs should be posted only to the blog. It is important that there is also a forum where people can discuss issues and more personal responses or thoughts, and suggest that the blog be used for this purpose.

In the interest of security culture we should operate on a need-to-know basis. Any exchanges that are not relevant to everyone else on the list should happen off the list between the people involved. We recognise that we need to be protective of our own, and other people's personal information and suggest that sharing of contacts should be done at convergences or with people's permission.

Security culture often depends on assumptions. We shouldn't assume that we have a common understanding about what our security culture is or should be, but that we should articulate clearly and from the beginning, what we want and how we want to create it in the federation.

In the interest of continuity at each convergence collectives should bring proposals for when and where the next convergence could be held.

Cheers. See yas in Melbourne!



## Some Thoughts on the Proposed Anarchist Federation from the Mutiny Collective

Please note that the Mutiny Collective is a separate and larger entity than the anarchist federation proposal authors, although they are also members of the collective. During this discussion we attempted to focus on the thoughts of those less involved in the proposal writing. We hope that this is not perceived as a self-endorsement of our own idea!

Firstly we would like to say that we endorse the proposal and the suggested process. We are looking forward to the meeting that is scheduled to take place at Black Rose at 1pm on Monday the 28th (public holiday for Invasion day) for regional groups to discuss how we can move forward with such things as structure for the convergence.

The Melbourne Anarchist Club has generously offered their space for the Easter long weekend.

We would like to see as many people as possible at the Easter convergence, though we acknowledge that not everyone who comes may wish to federate. We understand that there may be difficulties for people who want to attend but live a long way away, so we need to account for this.

A few points that could be added to the proposal would be Ableism in the list of oppressions as it is often ignored. Another point to add in the Living with Hierarchy section would be transparency: i.e. '...genuinely leaderless and transparent organising'.

For the convergence itself we see the need for organising things like childcare and accessibility, and also perhaps a template for people who cannot make the convergence about how discussion may be framed so that they can respond and comment.

In response to some of the comments on the blog, we feel that the issue that many have raised as to whether or not it would work to have both groups and individuals involved in the federation, need not be so huge a problem.

We feel that we will have to make an effort to create and upkeep communication so that there are no inequalities. We believe that it is a positive step to include those who may not be involved with groups for whatever reason, such as geographic isolation.

Overall the aim of the federation seems to be about promoting solidarity with anarchists from all parts of the region, and opening up communication about anarchist practice. In that regard, the possibilities of this Federation along with the proposed and slowly coming together Asian Anarchist Network are exciting.

The debate about class is never-ending, we feel that it would be impossible to resolve, and therefore wish to endorse the proposal as written in that respect.

There is always a concern over security that comes from living outside of a bubble, of which is definitely something to be aware. We understand however that we are going to be surveilled anyway, and specific details of what each collective is doing need not be passed on. It is important that our actions as individual and autonomous collectives and individuals should not be curtailed by the federation.

We agreed that in terms of our collective, we would be very interested in opening a dialogue with other groups that maybe have different politics from us; we wish to participate with others who may not always agree with us in order to learn, and share experiences. It could be a space to talk about what other groups are doing that we don't do. That said, we acknowledge that there will be a level of difficulty in communicating if there is too extreme a difference in terms of a shared politics.

We believe also that while the federation should not have control over what individual groups/people do, there may be times when the federation may question what is being organised: e.g. if a group is running for federal elections with no other reason than to gain bourgeois political positions.

We look forward to working together with many new people in the future. **A**

**Reasons for  
a Publication**

## **A Proposal for a Regular Federation Publication**

**from two members of the Mutiny Collective  
(but not on behalf of that collective)**

This is a proposal for a regular publication, to be assembled by interested collectives and individuals, if a Federation were to be formed out of the convergence. We believe that this is one tangible activity that can definitely emerge.

An example of this type of publication is the joint effort between Mutiny and Anarchist Direct Action, coinciding with the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

These ideas are very much provisional and we encourage feedback and criticism. We also support the creation of a specific publication working group at the convergence, to flesh out ideas and to begin much needed discussions and debates.

To improve sharing and communication of politics and experiences between collectives and individuals that participate in a Federation. We believe that this is an important part of ensuring that the Federation is a living, breathing organism.

- To disseminate revolutionary, anarchist ideas to a wider segment of the population.
- To be a space to discuss ongoing movements, struggles and campaigns and to reflect upon how they can be improved.
- A way of escaping geographical isolation & the confines of a single city or region.

- Fairly irregular, perhaps every 6 months, but should be high quality. There are already some regular anarchist zines and papers and we don't want to just replicate them

So it can be distributed as widely as possible. Also avoids the dynamics of 'recruiter' and purchaser seen in some revolutionary parties' publications and prevents paper-selling from becoming fetishised.

Should welcome and actively encourage participation from individuals and groups that don't identify as anarchists or aren't in the Federation.

Should be overseen by a publication collective that is open to anyone (even 'associate members' if such a structure is formed).

The publication collective's meeting place should rotate between different cities and regional centres for each issue, though individuals and collectives in areas other than the host of that issue's can participate via mail (both 'e' and 'snail'). This central meeting space would ensure that printing and layout occur.

Examples of other publications that we have been looking at include:

*Upping the Anti*

[uppingtheanti.org](http://uppingtheanti.org)

*Turbulence*

[turbulence.org.uk/turb\\_home.html](http://turbulence.org.uk/turb_home.html)

*Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*

[anarchiststudies.org/perspectives](http://anarchiststudies.org/perspectives)

*Left Turn*

[leftturn.org](http://leftturn.org)

Though we would intend for it to be less academic than most of these. **A**

Form/Content

Free

## Possible Community Building Activities for the Anarchist Federation Convergence

anon

Anarchism has a strategic political commitment to building networks organised by principles of mutual aid, reciprocity, non-hierarchy, diversity, and collaboration. These principles need to inform the practical organisation of the Anarchist Federation convergence. To this end we thought that we could contribute a few activities that might help to compose a more caring and hospitable environment for all of those present (in conjunction with a consideration of a safer spaces policy and a grievances collective). Activities constructed specifically to help build and negotiate an open and non-threatening environment must be sensitive to a diversity of participants. A lot of people might not feel comfortable talking in front of a large group of people; whether its because they're shy, or don't know anyone, or don't feel informed enough, or are scared of feeling judged, or for any number of reasons. Anarchism is principled in its approach to community building and encouraging people to assist one another collectively. The foundation for any kind of collaborative work is predicated on relationships, friendships, solidarity, trust. The Anarchist Federation is likely to draw quite a lot of participants, from within the already known anarchist community and hopefully from beyond.

Such activities can be incredibly useful for establishing connections and beginning relationships of trust, caring and camaraderie between people. All of these activities are arranged so that people are introduced to others outside of their prior social networks. Furthermore because these activities

take place on quite a personal level and people are encouraged to talk subjectively with others, it becomes possible to discern if there are any participants whose politics are unwelcome at the convergence; national anarchists, fascists, racist, sexist, homophobic sentiments etc. And because people are guided to mingle a lot in these activities it is likely that a few people will catch on if such people are around. If we have a grievances crew set up, people can talk about their suspicions and we can further check out the matter. Also, this way people that might just not be very articulate with their politics won't get immediately branded as a fascist.

We think it is really important to include these sorts of tactics in this event. Important from its inception so that we can begin from a place more comfortable than potentially having people being strangers to one another. If we are to successfully work together we need to facilitate a space where people have, from the outset, the chance to talk to each other about their motivations, politics, and desires in a manner that doesn't put them on the spot or make them feel like they have to live up to a certain expectation or standard of 'activism'. The activities that follow are possible tactics to help enable this, however this list is certainly not exhaustive and should be seen as preliminary suggestions.

Organise room into two circles: an inner and outer circle with chairs facing each other. Get people to sit in pairs. After 3 minutes the person sitting in the inner circle moves to their right. Each question is addressed 3 times (so each person talks about the question with 3 people and each question gets around 9 minutes).

Questions such as:

- What do you understand by anarchism?
- What attracts you to anarchist politics?
- What inspired you to come to this convergence?
- What do you hope will be the outcome of the convergence? Etc.

Get people to stand in the room together. Get one person to make a personal statement such as "I identify as queer" or "I have never worked in a collective before" or something to that level. Each person that agrees with the statement puts up a finger. Someone goes around the room and winds a piece of string around all the fingers up. Then someone else makes a statement, and the process continues until everyone is joined together in a vast network of string. Then the person with the string goes through cutting the bonds between people saying something along the lines of: "this is what capitalism does to our relationships between one another. We forget that we are all connected in myriads of ways, and with other people but capitalism alienates us from each other etc" (this is not scripted and someone can probably think of a more eloquent way to phrase it but just as an example).

Get people to break into pairs (preferably with people they don't know). Ask them to spend 5 minutes talking about what they do, what they want to do and what they hope to get out of the event. Then reconvene the larger group and get each member of the pair to briefly introduce the other to the group and rearticulate the main points of what they said. Get people to break into small groups of 4 (preferably with people they don't know). Get the group to discuss and then write down on butchers' paper three common reasons they are attending the event, and what they hope to get out of it. Reconvene the larger group and put all the reasons together, and as a large group pull out the most recurring answers. Then open the floor to discussion around the answers.

This is a form of anarchist therapy and trust building coming out of the work of Brazilian anarchist activist Roberto Freire. Freire believed that micro-social relationships are the genesis for macro-social authoritarianism and he aimed for understanding the politics of modern society through people's behavior in their everyday life. He realized that the fact that one believes in a certain ideology and has a libertarian view of the world doesn't always lead one to have a libertarian behaviour in her personal relationships with her fellows – there is something else,

**Speed Dating Format**  
(30 mins)

**String network building**  
(10 min)

**Getting to know you activities**  
(15 min or longer)  
(ways to avoid the painful and alienating activist competition)

**Soma**  
A bit of background

**Good things for  
us to consider:**

like an unconscious barrier, that determines the attitudes of the individuals towards life and other people. Freire, then, broke with psychoanalysis and over the next decades researched and developed Somatherapy - a therapy form in shape of a pedagogy, or a kind of pedagogy with therapeutic effects. That means that the way of dealing with neurosis is shifted from a medical perspective to an educational one. The goal is to liberate those who have been subjected to repression (all of us).

There are heaps of exercises in soma, but I would have to consult with someone that is actually experienced in explaining them etc. it is a possible option, a few of us have been to a workshop on it and could run it. If anyone is keen on this for the Anarchist Federation please let me know asap so I can try to organise some activities etc.

Small break out groups are always more comfortable in a situation where people don't know each other well, or when the group is really large. A good format when working this way is to structure the discussion as an intro, then break into smaller groups, report-back, discussion, then a recapitulation of the discussion in relation to the original theme or objective. Also in small groups it is always helpful to have someone scribing, even very informally, so that ideas are not forgotten. **A**

# What Would An Anarchist Federation Be Good For?

## a proposal from Anarchist Direct Action

Anarchist Direct Action would benefit from participating in a regional Anarchist Federation if such a federation included other groups that are actively engaged in direct action as a means of creating revolutionary change.

Members of ADA recognise that individuals may wish to somehow participate in a federation structure.

ADA is concerned about the role that individuals may or may not have in the federation structure. We understand and accept that a significant tension must be acknowledged and negotiated. On the one hand, the decisions of a federative structure may be railroaded by individuals if individuals and groups have equal voting rights. On the other hand, people who are committed to anarchist principles and have a lot to offer, may be excluded by their inability to be in a group due to geographical location or other limitations beyond their control.

We therefore propose two networks, one for groups to federate as they see fit, and another information network for individuals and members of groups to be part of. This information network could have an e-list and a web blog and would be a much more open network than the federative group structure. Furthermore, we wish to play a pro-active role in ensuring that isolated individuals are assisted to be in regular contact with groups. We see this as being possible through a web blog where groups can post decisions, information, announcements and actions. We may be able to work with people from other groups to instigate these two blogs and e-lists.

We wish to ensure that skills are shared and passed on within, and moreover beyond, our own communities. The strength of the Anarchist movement relies on our ability to pass on skills and collectively develop our politics of mutual aid, reciprocity and non-hierarchical self-organisation. In doing this we see it as vital to engage with existing social struggles and act in solidarity with others.

**A**

**Suggestions towards the structure and components of an Anarchist Federation**

## What We Think Revolution Is, What We Should Be Doing As Revolutionaries In The Here-And-Now by Anarchist Direct Action

ADA begins from an opposition to capitalist systems of subjugation and exploitation, from a belief that fundamental structural change is both desirable and necessary. We use the concept of revolution to signify a shared commitment to the idea that this cannot come through the reformation of capitalism but its abolishment which must start on the level of the everyday. Our response to this begins with anarchist principles of mutual aid, solidarity, reciprocity and self-determination. It begins with forms of organisation that reject relationships of domination through hierarchy, specialisation and a politics of representation. And it begins, foremostly, with us acting and organising ourselves in ways that reflect these common positions through direct action.

From this basis ADA also begins with questions. We do not claim to have all the answers that are necessary. Nor do we claim to have a politics that can be sovereign and without tension. In acting and organising together we ask questions:

What do we understand by Anarchism? What would revolution involve and what does it mean to use this concept today? What do we understand by class and how does class operate in the present contexts that we find ourselves, both local and global? How do we have meaning,

dialogue around the relationship between anarchist politics and indigenous self-determination? How might we act in solidarity in ways that foster sustainable and ongoing relationships, and that pay respect to diverse communities and value practices?

While trying to work through these questions, and recognising our limitations, we are seeking to act and organise around our shared commitment to self-determination, solidarity, mutual aid and reciprocity. We are committed to working together while embracing these political differences.

We choose a strategy of direct action because we believe that in Australia, in there here and now, the best and most realistic way to engage in revolutionary political praxis is through sustained direct action, both in small collectives and on a mass scale.

Direct action does not pertain to the level of militancy different individuals are willing or able to live up to in their activism. It means that we act on behalf of ourselves and do not seek to 'represent' others in our political action. We encourage others to do the same instead of leaving political action up to others, be they politicians, bureaucrats, officials or other representative institutions. Our approach derives not only from the belief that in a free society institutions should be directly controlled by their members, but that in working against illegitimate social hierarchies we must also actively oppose new, unnecessary hierarchies from establishing themselves. This is relevant in our unions, student organisations, protest groups, campaigns, and even in direct action groups. In the struggle against capitalism we must also maintain a critique of power in all its forms, not simply that which amounts to economic exploitation.

As a group, we believe that in the here and now, the best way to participate in revolutionary direct action is through action that:

- Highlights and undermines the oppressive and exploitative nature of capitalist social relations;
- Refutes the authority and legitimacy of the state in all its manifestations, and refutes its use of violence as a tool of subjugation; and
- Creates viable economic and social alternatives for people and groups to live well outside of oppressive state and capitalist structures.

To date, the actions we have engaged in as a group have been:

- Production of a zine-style publication, *Outlaw*, and collaboration with the Mutiny group on a publication titled *Unless You Are Free* to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war;
- Public stalls at music festivals and Universities;
- Prominent, visual displays of anti-fascist propaganda targeting relevant local fascist activity;
- Prominent, visual displays of anti-election propaganda during the recent Federal election.
- Ongoing self-reflection and analysis on the efficacy of our actions, and the future of our activities and collective organisation.

**A**

## Thoughts on the Anarchist Federation Proposal

by @ndy

In December last year, some anarchists from Sydney floated a proposal to form a regional anarchist federation in Oceania. In brief, the proposal was made out of a desire to create closer links between anarchists in the region.

The following are some of my own thoughts in response.

To begin with, there are some obvious definitional issues. The first is "what is anarchism?" The second is "what is a federation?" And the third is to do with what is meant by 'Oceania'.

### Anarchism

As for the first question, the proposal contains a statement of 'common politics'. These are contained in five points. Thus according to the proposal's authors, anarchists:

1. Seek to abolish capitalism and class society;
2. Support libertarian forms of organisation;
3. Oppose all forms of oppression;
4. Believe an anarchist society is possible, desirable (and necessary) and;
5. Oppose the state and support internationalist struggle.

Or something like that. (The above is a summation.) The five points are elaborated upon at length in the proposal, and the following section is a response, both to these further reflections and the five points which are presented as forming the core of an anarchist politics.

So, in respect of 1): Capitalism is a form of class society – but not the only one, obviously. In which case, it may be simpler to state that anarchists seek to abolish class society. On the other hand, to my mind, the most obvious and first principle of an anarchist politic is opposition to hierarchy; that is, anarchists wish to create anarchy, a society without rulers. In which case 4) would assume the highest priority. That is, in terms of arriving at a definition of ‘anarchism’, anarchists are those who maintain an anarchist society is both possible and desirable (the question of whether or not it is ‘necessary’ is a question of secondary importance in my opinion). From this commitment also flows the other points: opposition to capitalism and all forms of domination and exploitation, whether their bases are economic, racial or sexual. Beyond this, I think it would be worthwhile committing the federation to an explicitly revolutionary political framework.

The roots of anarchist federalism lie in the late nineteenth century, in particular debates within the IWMA (The First International, 1864). Those debates are relevant only insofar as they concerned, in part, the question of the relationship between an organisation and its parts; in this case, the International and its (largely) national branches. One of the central features of this debate was the question of state power and the relationship of workers’ movements towards its conquest. For the anarchists – sometimes also referred to as the autonomists – the ‘economic’ struggle always took precedence over the ‘political’ one. In the end, the differences between the (broadly) Marxist position and that of the (broadly) anarchist position proved too great to be reconciled within the one organisation, and the International dissolved (1872).

In essence, the theory and practice of federation developed in opposition to the theory and practice of political centralisation. That is, federation developed as a means by which such conflicts, in the absence of a central authority, could be best resolved – or perhaps left unresolved – while minimising the effects upon the pursuit of common interests. Instead, decisions made by a federation require the agreement of each of its member parts. By one definition, then, federalism means “free agreement of individuals and organizations upon collective endeavour geared towards a common objective”. In Australia, the last attempt to create such a structure was the Federation of Australian Anarchists, or FAA, established in January 1975.

The FAA lasted several years before collapsing. The reasons for this are many, but it’s notable that the structure of the FAA allowed membership by both groups and individuals (see below).

There are a number of arguments in favour of allowing both existing groups of anarchists and unaffiliated individuals to participate in and to form part of an anarchist ‘federation’. The first and most obvious is that, of the hundreds if not thousands of people who describe themselves as being anarchist (or highly sympathetic to anarchism), the majority are not members of any anarchist group. In which case, excluding individuals from joining and participating in a federation (if not a discussion concerning its merits), is to effectively exclude the majority of (self-described) anarchists from the organisation. To the extent that the purpose of the federation is to overcome the political, social and even geographical isolation of anarchists, this is obviously a problem.

One reason why the inclusion of individuals (as individuals) within the federation is problematic proceeds from an understanding of the distinctive nature of a federation. In general usage, a federation is composed of groups which nominate delegates – authorised representatives of the group’s collectively-determined position(s). Delegates meet with delegates from other groups, and do so with a mandate. That is, with a clearly-defined purpose in meeting and in order to address specific questions. Further, whatever agreements are reached by delegates are not confirmed until such time as groups then proceed to ratify those decisions. That is, delegate agreements require ratification by the groups which comprise the federation. This process is intended to limit the potential for the abuse of authority granted to delegates, and to ensure that ultimate decision-making authority rests with the groups which form the federation’s organisational basis.

In the context of a federation comprised of groups and individuals, such a process is obviously unworkable. Rather, either individuals assume the same authority as groups, or decisions made by the federation as a whole are made as a result of the deliberations of each of the individuals which

## Federation

## Process

comprise its membership. In which case, the federation more closely resembles a political party than it does a federation of groups in the anarchist sense of the term.

As it stands, the following groups have expressed some interest in and might possibly comprise the groups from which a federation is drawn: Alarm Youth Anarchist Collective, Black Rose, Just Mutiny, Wollongong Autonomous Collective (NSW); Anarchist Direct Action, Barricade, Melbourne Anarchist Club (Victoria). To the best of my knowledge, there are no functioning anarchist groups in the ACT, Northern Territory, South Australia or Tasmania. In Queensland, Bastard, Beating Heart and/or Black & Green infoshop exist as functioning collective(s), and may (or may not) be interested in the federation, but have yet to formally express any; in Western Australia, the Black Dog collective appears to have dissolved, and I'm unaware of any other functioning groups. (As an aside, the sites of both the Brisbane and Perth Social Forums have lapsed, while those for Melbourne and Sydney remain.) On a geographical basis then, and assuming the federation is a federation of groups, a more appropriate title for it might be the East Coast Anarchist Federation.

The situation in Aotearoa is a little different...

Questions of political accountability are often thorny ones. To whom should one account for one's actions in any case?

#### Accountability

In my experience, but also that of many others, 'anarchism' attracts more than its fair share of cranks. That is, individuals for whom 'anarchism' functions as a kind of shelter or substitute for therapeutic treatment. This is not a new phenomenon, and its occurrence is closely-related both to the political marginality of anarchism to contemporary Australian politics and social life, and also its strong associations with various (largely antiquated) cultural avant-gardes (eg, punk). In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell famously (and humorously) wrote:

One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist in England...

We have reached a stage when the very word 'Socialism' calls up, on the one hand, a picture of aeroplanes, tractors, and huge glittering factories of glass and concrete; on the other, a picture of vegetarians with wilting beards, of Bolshevik commissars (half gangster, half gramophone), of earnest ladies in sandals, shock-headed Marxists chewing polysyllables, escaped Quakers, birth-control fanatics, and Labour Party backstairs-crawlers...

If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly!

Before I'm accused of opposition to drinking fruit juice, nudism, wearing sandals, sex, Quakers, pacifism, feminism or even quackery, I'll make two points: first, some of my best friends are fruit juice-drinking, naked, sandal-wearing, sex-addicted, pacifistic, feminist Quakers, and I love them all dearly. Secondly, my point is that if anarchists wish to have their ideas examined more seriously by a broader range of people, then the inessential aspects of contemporary anarchist practice - so-called 'lifestylism' - should not be allowed to prevent this discussion taking place. In other words, the idea that a commitment to certain fashions or lifestyles is an essential requirement for effective anarchist politics needs to be addressed, and shown, in both theory and practice, to be incorrect. In this context, I'd suggest that one of the ways of doing so is to take the idea that anarchism is or rather can be a genuinely popular movement more seriously. (As an aside, I think at least some of Orwell's apparent hostility to various forms of social deviance may be related to his being an Old Etonian; but that's another story.)

In any case, the question of accountability is also a useful one in terms of the requirement to have some idea of goals, and also political - meaning organisational - structure. That is, accountability

has at least two dimensions: one may be described in terms of an individual's relationship to the collective of which she is a member (the micro-political); another is the relationship between the individual, group or project, and the broader movement, one composed of elements with similar if not identical political and organisational perspectives (the macro-political). In the first case, I think it's possible to establish (more) formal arrangements; in the second, accountability - and the extension of solidarity to others - is a more flexible concept.

One of the classic texts on this subject is *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* by Jo Freeman (1970). See also Ken Knabb's thoughts on *Consensus, Majority Rule and Unavoidable Hierarchies*.

Based on my reading of the online discussions that've taken place, including those based on meetings in Sydney and Brisbane, one other concern is the naming of the federation, and the question of political prescription. In other words, whether or not a project of this kind should be explicitly anarchist, and whether or not it should be a requirement of those wishing to participate that they identify themselves and/or the groups to which they belong as anarchist.

My feeling is that the politics of the federation should be designated as being anarchist, and so too the groups of which it is composed. In explaining why I think this, I think it also useful to consider some common objections.

First, such a demand is exclusionary. More than this, it excludes those who share the same politics (at least insofar as these are expressed in some form of minimum definition, whatever its precise contents) but who, for whatever reason, choose either to assign some other label to their political perspective or who eschew, or who claim to eschew, labels altogether. To my mind, this is a problem, but one of most relevance to those committed to such a political perspective, but who at the same time refuse its (otherwise) obvious debt to anarchism.

To put it another way: anyone can assign any meaning they like to the term 'anarchism', and many use it in a manner far removed from its actual meaning as employed by self-defined anarchists and anarchist movements, both contemporary and historical. The political purpose of proclaiming anarchism to be composed of x, y and z, in the case of an anarchist federation, is to claim a certain political heritage, in a manner not unlike that which other 'anarchists' have been doing for several centuries, and irrespective of its bourgeois distortions (including Marxist-derived impositions). And for those who identify as Marxist, there's no shortage of groups which they may consider joining.

Incidentally by way of example of a group assuming an 'anarchist' identity, it's possible to cite the "national anarchists". Assuming the agreement of such individuals with the draft expression of common politics, it would be unfair to exclude them on the basis of their presumed racism (an accusation which is of course denied by them).

But leaving aside such matters, I think the purpose of having an anarchist federation speaks to a real need on the part of those who already consider themselves as belonging to this historical tradition and who feel a greater affinity to this political philosophy than they do others. As such, and in keeping with the notion of political autonomy, it makes sense, to me at least, for those of us who feel similarly inclined to seek ways and means of working more closely together, and thereby making our politics more effective.

Regarding the relationship between those who consider themselves anarchist and those who do not, I think it's worth reiterating the fact that, if some kind of anarchist federation does emerge, this by no means precludes the emergence or establishment of other forms of political cooperation, whether these remain purely an 'anarchist' affair or comprise a range of different groups, individuals or projects. In other words, I think it would be mistaken to seek a consensus from all those who have an opinion on these and other questions regarding what is to be done. Rather, I think the gathering in Melbourne should be viewed in the same manner as a spokescouncil might: that is, as a forum in which different possibilities for action are presented, and those who feel drawn towards one form of action or another be free to pursue this course.

Why "anarchist"?

Conclusion

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.

— Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology Pt.1*, 3rd ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 56-57.

Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian 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.

— Solidarity, *As We See It*, available from libcom.org

## The Practice of Hope by Dave

The status of what we could, with reservations, call the "Left" in Australia is one of atrophy, denial, confusion and crass opportunism.<sup>1</sup> The various institutions of social democracy have little of their previous popular character and have been largely integrated into the neo-liberal consensus. The various tendencies of the far-left (though often full of people of good intentions) remain small and marginalised and equipped with deeply outdated ideologies. Whilst over the last decade there have been some brilliant moments, some decent manifestations and rebellions, there have been few, if any, real victories. There have been stunning defeats.

Broadly speaking revolutionaries in Australia are caught in two traps that are forced on them by the context they live in. One is that due to the intolerable conditions of capital they engage in forms of activity that seem to offer immediate solutions but conform to the general co-ordinates of the society they live in: we must "do something!" Slavoj Žižek likens this to the Amish tradition of *rumspringa* : apparent rebellions that actually work to solidify the power of society. To quote "all (that) is needed is a light shift in our perspective, and all the activity of 'resistance,' of bombarding those in power with impossible 'subversive' (ecological feminist, antiracist, anti-globalist...) demands, looks like an internal process of feeding that machine of power,

<sup>1</sup> For a beautiful description of the ambiguities of using the term the "Left" see Retort et al., *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London & New York: Verso, 2005), 13-14.

providing the material to keep it in motion."<sup>2</sup> The other error is to maintain a kind of capital 'R' revolutionary purity which means you never get involved in actual struggles but are permanently immobilised waiting for a tomorrow that never comes. The challenge rather is to work out a way to act today that actually breaks with the dominate co-ordinates and thus opens the possibility of emancipation: to have both a foot in this world and to step into one that we want.

It is therefore a great thing for comrades to come together and begin to discuss ways of co-operating that will help us discover and carry out meaningful revolutionary activity. What is the one of the dangers facing such useful co-operation is that comrades will create an ideological group. That is the kind of organisation that builds itself around an abstract and ahistorical set of ideas that it then tries to carry into the world. Such a group sees itself as bringing the radical catalyst to society, and winning people to its position. This is one of the core mistakes of the myriad Leninist groupings – their logic is based on the promotion of their own ideology and ideological organisation irrespective of the general conditions and struggles in society. Success is measured by indicators such as papers sold, members recruited, dominance of slogans etc. An Anarchist Federation which apart from having a formally different ideology and a different internal organisational culture (democratic centralism vs a federation and so on) yet is beholden to a similar ideological logic will probably be as counter-productive as any Leninist group.<sup>3</sup> Despite all the hullabaloo the differences between the two are really not that great.

Here I hope to present some broad ideas about what meaningful activity could actually be. These are limited suggestions and comrades should view them as a just a few sentences in a conversation.

Our attempts to challenge capitalism are confounded by our apparent powerlessness. The dominant liberal-democratic ideology has long celebrated the apparent end of history: that the only possible society is this one and any attempt at social transformation leads straight to the Gulag. The narrative capitalism tells us sees history powering forward driven by great acts, states, corporations, politicians and entrepreneurs. Also the spectacle in late-capitalism creates an all encompassing world-view that ascribes any sense of agency to commodities, super-stars and abstract entities such as "market-forces."<sup>4</sup> The vast masses of people are presented as followers or fodder: those subjected to history not its subjects.

However many on the Left also argue that we have limited agency. They tell the same story as capitalist ideologies do – they just reverse the moral implications. The most banal versions transform functionaries of capital into grotesque super-villains (take for example anti-"HoWARd"ism). More sophisticated versions try to unearth the structural logics of capitalist development, technology, civilisation etc. These still largely ascribe to us the role of victim – capitalism is something that happens to the masses. Thus radical theories have to develop some special 'outside' where rebellion and agency can come from – human nature, or the correct ideology, the wild, etc.

Plus our daily subjective experience of capitalism is most often one of incapacity: be that the inertia of feeling totally dominated by society or trapped in a hyper-activity that eludes our control. Partly this is due to the way that the ideologies of capitalism entrap our lives, draw us in and structure our reality. Partly it is because our daily activity is one of creating capitalism and investing our individual and collective creativity (labour) in its forms and structures – most

#### Without Power

2 Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 2006), p334.

3 Debord's perhaps overly caustically worded critique that the great failing of anarchism – that it privileges ideology over actual material conditions and struggles – still carries weight; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press), p48-50.

4 "Spectacle" does not just mean the all pervasive media, but rather the general image(s) of a society that is produced by the alienated creativity of all that live in it, all the time. Cf. *ibid*.

### The Material Reality of Hope

notably the commodity.<sup>5</sup> We constantly create and recreate our subordination. Capital is fetishised against ourselves. This explains our agony: the more we do in capitalism the more we are imprisoned.

We are quite ordinary women and men, children and old people, that is, rebellious, non-conformist, uncomfortable, dreamers.<sup>6</sup>

But if we stop at this point we fail to see the *radical chains* that encase us. Contradictorily at this last point, that capitalism is the creation of our efforts, which is also the basis for our hope. Simply, since we make capitalism we can stop making it. But to really grasp this we need what the Zapatistas call an "inverted periscope".<sup>7</sup> We need to grasp that beneath the spectacle that covers our lives and constructs social reality, capital is torn by revolt and antagonism. This perspective sees labour not as something that is encased in capitalism, but actually something constantly in struggle, in rebellion: it is excessive of its bonds. A radical perspective starts with our revolt. It sees the world from the point of view of resistance and creation. As Mario Tronti writes:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class.<sup>8</sup>

Of course this is more obvious in moments of great upsurge and struggle. But even in times of apparent social peace right across society there are moments of refusal, rebellion and disobedience. This is what is often called "auto-valorisation" – the acts we do to stop making value for capital and create it for ourselves. Perhaps these gestures are small, even seemingly invisible, but they are the molecules of communism that exist in the tensions and contradictions of capitalism. They are the material reality of hope. John Holloway describes this condition beautifully:

The theoretical challenge is to be able to look at the person walking next to us in the street or sitting next to us in a bus and see the stifled volcano inside them. Living in capitalist society does not necessarily make us insubordinate, but it does inevitably mean that our existence is torn by the antagonism between subordination and insubordination. Living in capitalism means that we are self-divided, not just that we stand on one side of the antagonism between classes, but that the class antagonism tears each of us apart.<sup>9</sup>

5 The word 'labour' may seem restricted and archaic to many people, calling to mind an image of work and politics that seems far behind us. Here labour means our creative activity that produces value. This extends far beyond work in the work place proper and wage labour. There is a brilliant radical current of feminist and autonomist writers that argue clearly how the reproductive work of women outside the wage relationship create the essential commodity: labour power. See for example Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labour and Capital* trans. H. Creek (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia 1995). For a contemporary example see Precarias a la Deriva, "A Very Careful Strike: Four Hypotheses" *The Commoner: A Web Journal For Other Values*, no. 11 Spring (2006). Silvia Federici adds to this argument by showing how the creation of a hierarchy of differences within the proletariat are an *a priori* requirement for actually creating proletariat that will work for capital, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban & the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004). As such a radical concept of labour should not be used to sideline struggles over gender, sexuality, colour, desires, the personal etc – as it so often did and continues to do. This can be completed by the various writers who work to show that show creativity on a whole, not just wage-labour, is what creates value for capital. Cf. Paulo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles, CA New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 2004). & Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

6 Subcomandante Marcos, quoted in John Holloway, *Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels* (2005); available from [info.interactivist.net](http://info.interactivist.net)

7 El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* (Durham, North Carolina: Paperboat Press, 2007), p9.

8 Mario Tronti, *Lenin in England* (1964); available from [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

9 John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (2002), p157.

Thus whilst capitalist society appears to be solid, it is actually torn in multiple lines by antagonism. This is not a clear split between capitalists on one side, proletariat on the other (one in top hats, the other cloth caps) that then run at each other like some class war version of the Somme. It is mass of lines of flight, contradictions, apparatus of control and capture, molecular rebellions, possible explosions. And here, existing in a complicated and problematic form, is the fact that just as we make capital, we rebel against it, as much as we cooperate for capital we can cooperate against. Rebellion is ordinary and everyday, as is submission and exploitation. Emancipatory politics arises from and in this tension and struggles in a way that transforms the social order.

Struggle is also what provides capitalism its dynamism. Capital is reliant on and a product of a force that it exploits but one that *in the very processes of exploitation* poses the possibility of its destruction. Capital thus tries to flee from labour – but it can never escape without nullifying itself too. It thus constantly tries to develop new arrangements of power and state forms; and works to disarm labour and force it to work harder. As Tronti writes:

The increasing organisation of exploitation, its continual reorganisation at the very highest levels of industry and society are, then, again responses by capital to workers' refusal to submit to the process.<sup>10</sup>

We can understand something like neo-liberalism, for example, not as a product simply of capitalists' avarice, but rather capital's response to the struggles and rebellions of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>11</sup> This means at different stages of capitalism's development a *class composition* is produced by struggle. We work, fight, are ruled and resist differently at different historical moments. Different regimes of power, race, gender, the body, ideologies and discourses come into play. As the fight heats up we either develop the forms of self-organisation that allow us to overturn capital and radically recreate social life, or capital breaks our power, recuperates our desires and imposes a new matrix of exploitation on us.

There are no guarantees, no certainties; rather there is the material possibility of hope on which we must make a wager.

If the sources of rebellion and the creation of communism exist generally throughout society as a constant, living potential how then are we to make the next step, to crystallise, fuse, grow and/or weave the many multiple rebellions into forms of activity that can create lives with dignity? At a certain level we don't know. Our history is sadly one of defeat and failure: there are no clear models from the past. Historically mass revolts have always surprised the revolutionaries: they are an event that whilst arises from the material reality, and turn everything upside down – including the most radical of ideologies. From where we stand now we don't know what the next wave of emancipatory politics will look like, or what revolution really means today. There is probably not one answer. Across the globe the multitude will struggle under a number of flags, with different names and different tactics. Each political process will undoubtedly be contradictory – for our condition is contradictory. Even outright rebellions always contain in them elements that point to freedom and communism and practices that stitch us back into the world of capital.

But still I would like to posit that radical, anti-capitalist, communist activity is neither activism within the coordinates of liberal-capitalism, nor simply propagandising for a better world tomorrow. (Though sometimes we might do both) Rather it is, within very concrete and specific sites, struggles that form a collectivity out of our already existing antagonisms in a way that makes social life *other*. It is literally the construction of the future in the present; it is the practice

The Practice of Hope

<sup>10</sup> Mario Tronti, *The Strategy of Refusal*, available from libcom.org

<sup>11</sup> For two different narratives of this see Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England Harvard University Press, 2000). & Midnight Notes Collective, "Introduction to the New Enclosures," *Midnight Notes* #10: *The New Enclosures* (Fall 1990).

of freedom today. As the *Malgré Tout* Collective write: "...Freedom is not a state that can be reached, but rather an act that it is necessary to incarnate."<sup>12</sup>

And since communism already exists as a potential in our ordinary everyday lives, the efforts of struggle, of coming together creating and rebelling, are the tasks of the multitude on a whole. We can reject the idea that a special revolutionary group is necessary to overturn capitalism. As such militant organisations can behave in ways to aid the creation of the conditions of their own dissolution. Both in a general sense: we seek to abolish capitalism, and when capitalism is over there is no need for revolutionary groups - also that we don't not only want to free ourselves from capital, eventually we will need to free ourselves from the struggle against capital (*the negation of negation*). But also in a more precise sense: we seek to help create practical cultures and structures of co-operation and self-rule amongst the multitude - thus the existence of small militant groups will be irrelevant. In the here and now, this should also be our aim. Militants form a group so they have a political collectivity that helps them struggle - because otherwise they would be isolated and miserable - in the actual struggles these groups involve themselves in they can constantly try to abolish themselves. In countless small and informal ways bonds of trust and understanding should be formed with others (at the same time we are unbinding ourselves from the roles capital has produced for us) - comradely relations - that break down divisions. But also militants can argue for more horizontal structures, more participation, more spaces of debate, more democracy, more power from the ground up to reshape our lives in short to deepen internal class organisation. Into this strange brew militant organisation should melt away, and whilst maintaining our friendships and love, we can open ourselves to being seized by the unpredictable adventures of struggle. We come together and act to work to create the space so others can come together and act - as equals. We can see this in Zapatista practice - the existing leadership acts in ways to aid self-organisation, to make themselves less and less a leadership. This is what French Maoists used to call building "a stage for the masses" - we (revolutionaries) are not the main act - we (the multitude) is.<sup>13</sup>

But are there more concrete practises we can engage in to aid the general recomposition of the rebellious collectivity and power of the multitude? The Zapatista maxim of *preguntando caminamos* (walking we ask questions) is not just a suggestion for political plurality. Rather it is a way of relating to the world. Its instruction is that those who would define themselves as revolutionaries do not enter struggle with a preformed programme but rather become porous to the contradictions and creativity of rebellion; to grasp praxis as praxis, as the constant interplay of thought and action. Thus revolution, the eruption of our ordinary rebelliousness is fecund - we constantly generate more thought, more questions, more desires, more insights and more doubts. The question is also aimed outwards. To rebel one does not try to win others to a solid position but rather works to produce moments of collective questioning. As Holloway writes: "The problem is not to bring consciousness from outside, but to draw out the knowledge that is already present, albeit in repressed and contradictory form."<sup>14</sup> Thus we can work together in ways that try to generate practices and spaces of collective questioning.

If the composition of class and struggle changes, if it is dynamic, then organisational strategies must change too. The debates over organisation are often viewed ahistorically - the party, the affinity group, the spokes council - are often seen as suggestions for all seasons. Rather when such tactics do work it is because they correspond to a certain material reality. Part of the failure of revolutionary activity in Australia is the constant importing of forms that may seem ideologically pleasant but do not correspond to the actual substance of our lives. I think a process of *militant research* is needed. Rather than constructing models in the ether we could instead try and look at actually what is going on around us. How does work and power function

<sup>12</sup> El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* (2007), p9.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London & New York: Verso, 2002), p97.

<sup>14</sup> Holloway, *Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels*.

in contemporary capitalism, how is the social factory organised? What is the deployment of hierarchy and division? And what are the forms of rebellion that are going on. How are our own daily lives torn? And from a process of questioning with each other we could perhaps begin to see a few threads of possibility that we can then experiment with to see what works and what fails, and then share this knowledge with the multitude on a whole. Such research is not just the research into the idea of organisation – it is actually organising in and of itself. This is how we can “encounter” each other, the conditions we live in and the possibilities they hold.<sup>15</sup>

This could be complimented by trying to circulate the experiences of struggle. We are held back by the isolation and invisibility of struggles. Such struggles could be overtly political protests, sabotage, cultural rebellions, daily insubordinations, moments of creativity and escape and so on. It would be useful activity to spread the experiences of these struggles; to communicate the methods and aims and open up the debates going on within them. The point is not to reduce the diversity of struggle, but rather to increase the collective experience and knowledge of rebellion. And, again, this open ended sharing of experiences is part of how the multitude organises itself.

And if we reject *ideology* that does not mean we reject *ideas*. In fact the refusal of all dogmas allows us to open up the space of ideas. There exists very few space of collective self education. Revolutionary groups can try to open up spaces of radical education that allow a diversity of thought and debate. A proliferation of websites, newspapers, meetings, conferences, graffiti, etc whose motivation is not to win converts or establish a hegemony but rather to help a kind of rebellious intellectual culture develop.

This is a vision of an organisation (or maybe more than one?) that sees itself as a set of interlinked practices and spaces that tries to open up more explicit room for discussion, reflection and co-ordination. Our enthusiasm and hope lies in the immanent possibilities of emancipatory politics that is the work of the multitude generally. It is because we are ordinary that we are special. Such an organisation would be characterised by openness, humility, good humour and love – as well as determination and commitment. It would be full of life, for it is in our lives that communism lives. I understand that this vision of revolutionary and/or militant organisation is limited. It sees it as a useful aid to the processes of class recomposition. It is not the total group that drives the struggle; it is not the carrier of liberation. Rather it is but a set of practices some of us may chose to carry out that may compliment struggles that are much bigger and greater. And this, I think, is a good thing. **A**

<sup>15</sup> El Kilombo Intergalactico identify in the activity of the Zapatistas a practice of encounter, assemble, create and rebel which has deeply influenced the writing of this piece. „ Cf. El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos*.

## Anarchist Federation:

An argument for diversity.

by Frew

In the lead-up to the convergence for Anarchist Federation a lot of people have been arguing for the Anarchist Federation to be formed around a common ideological platform. I think this is a mistake that will hamper the development of a movement capable of challenging capital and the state. The greater "ideological coherency" an organisation requires, the greater the need for indoctrination (and the need to purge people for impure thoughts) and the more authoritarian it becomes.

A more open approach to organisation has many benefits. Ideas are more likely to be open to challenge and everyone can come to a better understanding of the hurdles we face in overcoming oppression. This is based on the premise that if you look at a problem from different angles you will understand it better than if you only look at it one way. Opposition to hierarchy, belief in autonomous organisation and that people both can and should govern themselves is a better basis for solidarity than over-arching ideological agreement.

An Anarchist Federation worthy of the name needs to be an example of what we are fighting for, a truly participatory, autonomous organisation. This provides us with a living piece of propaganda that demonstrates that a truly free society is possible and desirable.

A narrow organisation demonstrates the opposite; that even in the face of serious climate change, globalised war and repression, people who want the same things cannot work together in solidarity. The last thing we need is yet another small, ideologically driven, leftist sect.

Wollongong Autonomous Collective is a diverse organisation made up of Anarchists, Autonomists and other libertarian socialists. Our basis for solidarity is around a combination of agreement about the need for a revolution to overthrow capitalism and all hierarchical systems of control and the practical organisation required to do this, the publication of a Zine, fund-raising, discussions and organising actions. Being in a small city, we don't have the numbers to only work with other Anarchists (or whatever) and through engagement in various organising collectives, (which generally means arguing against Socialist Alliance and the Greens,) we know we are on the same side. Through discussions we came to the conclusion that whilst we use different languages to describe what we want and how to get there, the underlying concepts are basically the same.

Even within activist circles, what motivates each participant can be substantially different. Each person has the capacity to govern themselves, so they should be given the space to pursue whatever issue it is that motivates them. An Anarchist Federation should be capable of providing this space.

The CNT in Spain, in the lead up to the 1936 revolution was made up of quite a diverse range of people. There were groups of Esperantists (people who wanted to propagate a global language), Tee-Totalitarians (essentially Straight Edge), art collectives etc. as well as workplace organisers and political activists that people usually associate with Anarcho-Syndicalism. This was (in my opinion) the CNT's strength. It was able to facilitate a diverse range of activities and approaches all under one umbrella.

My favourite concept from *Multitude* is that of the swarm, where (to use the language presented by Negri) the Empire sinks under the assault of a million stings. If we wait for everyone to agree on a course of action, we could end up waiting forever. Equally, limiting yourself to working with people with the same system of belief significantly narrows the scope for action.

In practical terms, this could easily be facilitated through having different 'caucuses' (e.g. Womens', Black, Climate Change etc) where participation is voluntary and based around interest. All members of the Federation should be able to call a caucus on what-ever issue that motivates them. The success or otherwise of any particular campaign or strategy will be determined by its participants through activity. This is a practical way to experiment with what works and what doesn't. Successful caucuses will breed interest, participation and more action, unsuccessful caucuses will fall by the way-side. This is an organic approach to struggle, where actions are facilitated and take place in the lab of the streets.

The same approach should be taken to tactical considerations. Different anarchists have different tactical approaches to the struggle. These different approaches can complement each other as long as the space is provided for the diversity of tactics. Take the anti-war movement for example: Some people may put together and distribute an anti-war zine, whilst others organise a piece of street theatre (say a die-in in a shopping centre) and others occupy the Corporate HQ of war profiteers. Each action is an act of propaganda, the zine being overtly propaganda and the occupation being the propaganda of the deed (a demonstration that direct resistance is possible). I don't think that any one of these actions in isolation is correct and the others wrong, they all point to the same things and work best when they are tied in together.

I (to cannibalise a term from the Marxist movement) am a crypto-Kropotkinist. *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* and *Anarchism and Modern Science*, both by Kropotkin, influence my approach to anarchist politics more than any other texts. In these two books, he uses scientific research from biology (*Mutual Aid*) and a survey of sciences (*Anarchism and Modern Science*), to build an anarchist view of the world. Kropotkin is considered by many evolutionary psychologists

#### Diversity in Tactics

#### Diversity in Theory

as their forefather and *Mutual Aid* the first book on the field of evolutionary psychology. Much of the science in *Anarchism and Modern Science* itself is dated, because it was written before the theory of relativity (well, almost exactly the same time), quantum mechanics and genetics. That is by the by, what is important about these books and Kropotkin's approach to revolutionary theory in general was the approach not the content.

What Kropotkin did was fundamentally break from Marxist tradition of treating human society as a separate thing from the rest of the world. Marx argued that human society was so complex that material scientific method needed to be disregarded and replaced with Dialectical method. Kropotkin put forward an alternative thesis, that human society could be observed through the same prism as the rest of the natural world. We are after all, biological organisms and subject to the same biological conditions as other species. *Mutual Aid* was a thorough survey of sociability as a factor in the evolution of species, with many examples offered from amongst various species as well as a detailed study of human co-operation throughout history.

The field of evolutionary psychology carries on the work of Kropotkin, taking into account modern evidence. The more progressive scientists in this field all view Kropotkin as the founder of their science and back up his central thesis, that struggle amongst members of the same species is counterproductive and that co-operation is a good survival tactic. Even conservative evolutionary psychologists, tend to begrudge Kropotkin the title of the founder of their field although they tend to believe that people are more selfish. (It has to be noted that there are more progressive evolutionary psychologists than conservative ones).

Language is a tool developed by humans so we can communicate. People's language influences the way they think about the world. Everyone has a linguistic (semantic) reality that exists in their own heads. This is determined by language, culture, education, religion, friends etc. The most important thing to note here, is that words are not what they describe. All words are abstractions and (with the exception of the word, 'word') they are not what they describe. In the words of Alfred Korzybski, "The map is not the territory, the menu is not the meal."

The largest and most obvious example of this is the existence of many world languages. There are many words that describe the same things, depending on whether you speak English, Mandarin, Spanish, Farsi etc. If you know only one language, someone speaking to you in another will be incomprehensible. Does this make what they say wrong? Of course not, language is abstraction. The reason that people can speak multiple languages is that they all have the same reference point, i.e. observed reality. A 'cat' in English, is a 'mao' in Mandarin. The creature itself is the reference point. Learning another language is an act of learning the linguistic reference points.

When it comes to politics and social organisation there are many ways of saying essentially the same thing. In the discussion on the A-Fed blog, I got told to go and join the Greens by someone because I don't really believe that social classes exist. This is purely a question of semantics. In all other fields, classes of 'things' are set in stone. Within the field of human relations it is much more fluid. Capitalists are powerful by virtue (if that is the right word) of having enough money to own organisations and its workers' labour. Should they lose their money, they lose their power and become workers for others. Equally, a person can rise to the position of owning a corporation and being a capitalist starting out with next to nothing. From my perspective it has little resemblance to class in the rest of the world. Alpha males amongst Gorillas aren't considered a class, despite their position as rulers of their groups. Being fluid, power in social relations is based on the role the individual plays and is dependent on social context.

I do believe that there are groups of powerful people and powerless people and that the powerful systematically exploit the powerless. They are however, roles not classes. This is my subjective opinion. Whilst I think that I am right and prefer my view of the world to anyone else's, I don't think that people who use class analysis are wrong, just different. This gets back to the point that understanding a problem from different angles, gives you a better understanding of

the problem itself. An Anarchist Federation should facilitate these types of discussions so that we can all grow to have a deeper understanding of the problems we face, and come up with better solutions.

Talking to people about the subordinate role they play in society and the unequal access to power generated by an unequal distribution of wealth is a more effective way (in my experience) to talk to people about politics and Anarchist politics. Most people know that they are appendages of the corporation or government department they work for and they don't like it. They just don't know what they can do about it, which is where we need to step in.

The struggle against all hierarchy needs to be carried forward on all fronts. It is a political struggle, a social struggle and a cultural struggle. Focusing on one and neglecting others (as an organisation) seems to be short sighted.

I was first politicised by Public Enemy, the Disposable Heroes of Hip-hopracry and Boogie Down Productions. With out their influence I wouldn't be writing stuff like this. How many people have been radicalised by Rage Against the Machine? (I am a musician, so I am biased towards music, the argument still stands for radical art in all forms).

Equally, organising music festivals is fun and sometimes useful, but focusing on it without any engaging in overt politics isn't going to get us anywhere either. Without a direct challenge to the whole damn system, nothing will change. Organising protests, direct actions, unions etc. is the bread and butter of any real movement for change.

Social struggle can, when done in isolation, achieve precisely nothing (except for the individuals involved). By social struggle, I mean creating space for a different type of life. Squatting, setting up rural communes, participating in the open source movement etc. are all examples of doing things another way. They are examples of what we fight for. Like direct actions, they too are propaganda of the deed. With the exception of the open source movement, these social experiments do nothing to advertise what they are doing (often to avoid repression), which is what limits their value. As examples of what is possible through mutual aid, they are excellent. If there is a way to publicise such activities without getting the people involved in trouble it would be valuable.

The distinction between the different forms of struggle I have used is kinda arbitrary. All of the activity can be seen as political, cultural or social depending on how you look at it, and linking all of the struggle together into a web of liberation (to steal the WOL of Melbourne's AWOL [*Autonomous Web of Liberation – Eds*]) is the best approach to the struggle against oppression.

**A**

Diversity in Strategy

**The Sydney Anarchist  
Conference (1975)**

# The Federation of Australian Anarchists

Extract from *Anarchism In Sydney, 1975-1981*

by John Englehart, November 1981

Activity at organizing the Sydney Anarchist Group did not restart till 1974, and that activity was a result of a number of Sydney individuals and Melbourne groups agitating for a national conference of anarchists. A preliminary Anarchist/Libertarian Conference was held in Sydney on 22 September 1974 with fifty comrades present to organize and plan the continental conference. Groups represented included the ABC; CNT; La Trobe Anarchist Group; ROE (Student-Worker Resistance Uruguay); Brisbane SMG; SAG; and Canberra Anarchists. Much discussion was held on the structure of the conference, to be held for a week in January 1975. Two predominant attitudes came to the fore - the degree of organization and the structure of the conference and of the Federation. These two attitudes were typified by the Brisbane SMG and the Sydney Anarchist Group:

Sydney comrades remarked that national strategy for libertarians in this country would evolve out of a national conference. Brisbane comrade replied that if unity and coherence can't be worked out on a regional basis, they will not be worked out on a national basis.<sup>1</sup>

And so it was decided that Sydney should host the conference - being the most central of the centres of anarchist activity. The months leading up to the conference served to solidify

<sup>1</sup> FAAB, new series issue no 1

a diverse group of people with as much diversity in ideology, around the Sydney Anarchist Group. The group itself had no ideology beyond being anarchist, just the purpose of organizing this conference.

The conference itself - held over nine days in January 1975 - proved to be a watershed in recent Australian Anarchism. The following is one account of the conference, published in an FAAB.

Over 250 people attended the conference and the following groups were represented: Brisbane SMG 8; Canberra 9 from the Woodstock Anarchist Party, ANU Anarchists, Canberra Anarcho-feminists, and Humanists; Melbourne from the La Trobe Anarchists 20, Feminist SMG 4, Monash University Anarchists 6, Strawberry Press Group 4; Flinders University Anarchists, Adelaide 1. There was a large number of people from Sydney anarchist and libertarian groups, plus many others not associated with any group, who went along to get more involved with the anarchist movement.

The conference was considered by most people present to have been a success. There were several achievements, one of these being the setting up of a national organization - the Federation of Australian Anarchists. Despite some opposition to both the idea of anarchists organizing, and to the verbalization of anarchist aims and principles, a draft document presented by A. from La Trobe Anarchists was accepted (with minor revision) as a basis for both a minimum definition of anarchism and national organization.

Following on from the acceptance of this document, there was discussion about the nature and production of the *FAA Bulletin*, with the result that this bulletin will become the internal communications bulletin of the FAA. It will be produced on a rotating basis by the federated groups... There was discussion concerning the feasibility of a national anarchist newspaper.

Another achievement of the conference was the development of personal relationships between people from different places, with many strong friendships being made. One disappointing feature was that of the numerous papers (31) prepared for the conference, only 3 were actually read and discussed... Thus some of the discussions, without having a clear focal point, tended to be disorderly.

There was also debate over the format of large meetings e.g. whether a chair person was needed, how can a person's right to speak be respected, and what should be done with troublemakers? While these structural problems were never really resolved, most participants made a conscious effort to try not to dominate the discussion.<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, the conference appeared to me to have a minimal structure, was fraught with ideological argument and proved to be little more than a week long getting to know your fellow anarchist. The only formal things to come out of the conference were the formation of the FAA and the organizing of the FAAB. A number of the more serious people with prior organizational experience deemed the conference as a failure. What the conference did provide was better communications between the eastern seaboard groups, and a definite resurgence of anarchist activity, especially in Sydney and Melbourne. The conference was the start of a period of 'anything goes' carnival anarchism among some Melbourne and Brisbane people and the SAG.

Spontaneity was essentially the name of the game during 1975 and early 1976 in Sydney. Situations like a room full of stoned people suddenly deciding to go out and do a paint up on the local billboards and buildings often occurred. The local Police Station and Commonwealth Bank and the Medical Association building were often targets.

Virtually all of the activity was centred around one house - 130 Glebe Point Road, Glebe. This house, with 9 bedrooms, was the main sleeping quarters during the anarchist conference.

#### Carnival Anarchism

2 D.W., FAAB, new series, Jan/Feb 1975

## Dairy Liberation Front

After the conference the house became anarchist and a short struggle was had to deprive our intermediate landlord of his profits from this house. Then ensued a lengthy and protracted fight with the owner, the Federal Government, and the amount of rent payable. A rent strike was initiated; widespread publicity was gained by painting our case on the front of our home, and the use of leaflets. A compromise solution was eventually worked out in September 1975 after recourse to the Labor Cabinet Minister responsible, Tom Uren. The house remained anarchist for over 18 months till about August 1976.

One action that proved highly successful in terms of media coverage was a simultaneous action by the Dairy Liberation Front in Sydney and Melbourne. The purpose was to publicise the division between rich and poor by a token measure of stealing milk from upper class suburbs and redistributing it to community organizations in working class suburbs.

Another successful situationist style action was the printing and distribution of the Leichardt Town Council Mayor's resignation letter. This was carried out at a time when allegations against council officers were being made about rezoning areas for high rise development. The fake letter caused a furore in council, made the headlines of one of the afternoon daily papers, and sent the police questioning all the left groups, except the anarchists. The letter was written in a style advocating an anarchist revolution and encouraging workers and residents councils.

There was also a move during 1975 to set up small anarchist bookshops in Melbourne and Sydney - both doomed to fail through disorganization, mismanagement and lack of commitment. In October 1975 a National Women's Anarchist Feminist Conference took place in Canberra. This proved successful and discussed, amongst other things, methods of anarchist organization, concerns of particular groups of women, and a feminist critique of capitalist society.

The Brisbane SMG, by 1975, already had a well established bookshop - Red and Black - and a printshop. In Melbourne Strawberry Press became Slash Asterisk and provided an outlet for anarchist pamphlets. In Sydney a small offset press was brought secondhand and printing started in early 1976. Only three separate items were printed before the Sydney group split into roughly two factions at the June 1976 anarchist conference. After the split the press remained unused until a deal was worked out with Brisbane and an equipment trade was made.

In Canberra there were three distinct groups during 1975/76 - the Woodstock Anarchist Party (WAP) active in High School circles, ANU Anarchists in university circles, and Canberra Anarcho-feminists. The WAP had about twelve members in Canberra, all high school students, who started the Students Action Movement which had a number of successful campaigns on conditions in Canberra schools. The WAP also had members in Tasmania, Melbourne, and Sydney and during 1975 published an Australian bulletin, *The Phantom*.

## Leaflet by the DLF

Dear Householder,

This is to inform you that it was not your milkman who failed you this morning. Your milk was delivered but has been redirected.

While you were snoring in your cosy beds, Sydney members of the Dairy Liberation Front have struck! This activity is in conjunction with simultaneous action interstate. The material comfort we have seen here is in sharp contrast to the lives of the people to whom we are redelivering this milk. We pay the cost of your wealth in poverty and alienated labour.

*Today your milk, tomorrow your "bread"!*

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was another international organization, which recruited new members in the anarchist resurgence of 1975. A Sydney Group IWW was started in January 1976 and in May the Australian and New Zealand General Organizing Committee was formed. New members were signed up in Melbourne and Adelaide but the Sydney Group IWW has continued to be the only group of members in Australia and has continued to maintain a presence in Sydney ever since.

On May 1st 1976, the Sydney Anarchist Group organized a Mayday march. "This year the first of May (the real Mayday) coincided with the NSW State election as well as the May 1st marchfestival organized by the Anarchists. The bureaucratically run official Mayday march is now held on the first Sunday in May with police permission and has little to do with the original idea of Mayday being a day of general strike by the people. So this year we decided to take the streets on May 1st and have a march and then a festival.

We assembled at the Haymarket and then moved off. The 40 of us took to the road and seized one lane of George Street and marched half a mile up to the (Sydney) Town Hall polling booth. There we urged people not to vote, sang songs, read poems and handed out anarchist literature. At this stage the pigs noticed us and began to hassle us but there were no arrests.

The afternoon ended with our festival in Hyde Park with free food, wine, dancing, and music. Everyone had fun and enjoyed themselves while other people in the city gave their lives away to the politicians for another 3 years.<sup>3</sup>

From March to June 76 four issues of a monthly newspaper, *Rising Free*, were published. The paper folded through lack of distribution, lack of funds, and the alienating comments throughout the paper. While carrying some excellent articles, it simultaneously derided our own politics through 'in' political jokes. The paper was in many senses an ego trip by certain individuals in SAG - the 'chaotists' or 'carnival' anarchists as they became known at the Melbourne conference.

The Second FAA conference was organized by Melbourne groups and provided another turning point for organized Anarchism in Australia. This conference, held in June 1976, precipitated in a split between the 'Carnival Anarchists' and the 'Serious Anarchists'.

On Sunday the 13th of June, 35 people, from Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide, met with the expressed desire to establish a libertarian/ syndicalist organization. Out of this meeting was formed the Libertarian Socialist Federation (LSF).

The formation of this organization was in response to the inability of the FAA to seriously consider, let alone adopt, an orientation towards the working class and organization. This was particularly shown at the National Anarchist Conference held on the 12th to 14th of June in Melbourne. The tone of the whole conference was set when, upon arrival at the opening session, people were confronted with spray-painted slogans on the outside walls of the conference venue, the Unitarian Hall (e.g. smash greedy doctors, Anerkist Conference, Here & There, All non-intellectuals welcome. etc) This provocative act was done by a group of Sydney 'Chaotists', who continued in the same vein throughout the proceedings.

Session after session was marred by high-pitched screaming, playing of musical instruments, drinking and continuous acrimonious opposition to the concept of a chair-person, abuse of the conference facilities, general unruly behavior and disorganization. In addition, personal threats were made and anyone who tried to bring some order to the conference was abused and denounced as authoritarian and some comrades were accused of being social fascists. There was a general suspicion of any form of organization from this minority group.

The F.A.A. Split – June 1976

<sup>3</sup> *Rising Free*, no. 4, June 1976

Those people who were arguing for the Anarchist movement to become involved in trade union and industrial work were accused of neglecting other forms of struggle. Wherever this position was advanced the people doing so were denounced for idolizing the working class, ignoring its conservatism, 'laying heavy moral views', and pressurizing others to become factory workers. In fact our position was based on an analysis of the existing economic system and the immense actual and potential power of the forces of 'labour'. We were arguing that no fundamental social change was possible without trade union work and the development of rank and file autonomous labour movements leading to the people's self-management of the economy and society. This does not mean that we deny the influence of conservative values amongst working people, on the contrary, it is precisely because of these conservative values that we argue for a working class orientation since it is by being involved in the labour movement that anarchists can best help to combat these tendencies.

These disputes finally came to a head on the Sunday afternoon when most of the workers present and some students left the conference and held a successful orderly meeting at a comrade's house. Here the failings of the conference were discussed, reports were given on the situation of anarchist groups in each state and an attempt was made to analyze the faults of the FAA. The comrades present decided there was no consensus between themselves and the others at the conference; that the FAA was far too broad, incorporating people with conflicting ideologies (individualism, carnival anarchism, syndicalism and so on); and that opposition to the state is not a sufficient basis for a united anarchist movement. Given the above factors, we believe that serious work is either made difficult or impossible....

...We ask that other anarchists seriously evaluate the history of the FAA and the criticisms that we have briefly outlined. While the LSF itself is separate from the FAA, individuals and affiliated groups are quite free, if they so desire, to also remain in the FAA. As well, we are quite prepared to hold discussions with FAA members who are not in the LSF and to engage in commonly agreed upon work on certain specific objectives.<sup>4</sup>

The walkout on the second day motivated the remaining people to reaffirm the all-embracing principles of the FAA and to issue the 'Third Day Manifesto':

That the meeting on the 3rd day of the National conference of the FAA agreed by consensus to the following propositions:

- That the aims and objectives of the FAA were reaffirmed as being sufficiently broad to include all forms of anarchism and any restriction of these aims would cut off important sections of the anarchist movement.
- The aims of the anarchist groups only have meaning in action. The important thing is whether groups take their ideas into action, whether this is on an industrial, community or personal basis.
- That all anarchists will work together on a practical basis.
- That it is implicit in the concept of anarchism that political liberation must be accompanied by personal liberation.
- The FAA actively supports anarcho-syndicalist movements and activities.
- The FAA believes in the interaction of practice and theory.<sup>5</sup>

The split was most effected in the Sydney Anarchist Group. A week after the National Anarchist Conference, a Political Economy conference was held at Sydney University. The Sydney 'chaoticists' proceeded to attempt to disrupt this conference through any method available, including a political denunciation of the conference circulated in the name of the visiting guest

<sup>4</sup> Statement by 7 participants on the formation of the LSF, from the *Libertarian Socialist Bulletin*, July 1976.

<sup>5</sup> FAAB - Monash Edition, July 1976.

speakers and authorized in the name of a well-known Melbourne anarchist (and academic). This action alienated not only known anarchists and sympathizers in Sydney but also provided a bitterness and hatred between certain individuals for a number of years.

At the same time as the Political Economy conference a number of members of the LSF from Melbourne and Sydney met and proceeded to set up, and plan as a long term activity, the Jura Literature Service. The Literature Service was named after the anarchist workers federation in the Jura Mountains of France/Switzerland, active at the time of Bakunin's expulsion from the First International last century.

The FAA lingered on for one last *FAA Bulletin* and one last conference - the Brisbane Anarchist Jamboree held in January 1977. Over the two previous years a second anarchist group had formed in Brisbane centred around the Learning Exchange/ Friends of the Earth. The LSF in January 1977 had as affiliates the entire Adelaide Anarchist Group, a number of groups in Melbourne including the entire La Trobe Group, and a small group in Sydney. The western Australian SMG, because it had not been able to have personal contact with the other groups, was wondering what the hell was going on. The Brisbane SMG had enough foresight to stay away from the Melbourne conference and had certain internal problems.

At the FAA Anarchist Jamboree, approximately fifty people were in attendance from the Brisbane Anarchist Group, Sydney Anarchists (the 'Chaoticists'), and Monash Anarchists and an assortment of individuals from the three eastern states. The activities of FAA affiliates was summarized in the FAAB:

BRISBANE: Over the last six months there has been an upsurge of interest in anarchism. As well there has been greater interworking between the 'non-aligned' anarchists and the SMG. The divisions in the SMG were discussed and it was noted that very few members of SMG representing SMG as such attended. Their lack of attendance was attributed to the fact that the conference was not closed. The Red and Black Bookshop and the Learning Exchange were also mentioned.

SYDNEY: It was noted that the Sydney Anarchists had not been very active. Most activities are now based on interpersonal relationships rather than any obvious framework. One specific interest area was squatting as many anarchists are currently involved in the squatting movement.

MELBOURNE: The participants from Melbourne were largely, but not totally, based at Monash University. Comrades from the Melbourne LSF were conspicuous by their absence. Personal and political antagonisms between people attending the jamboree and the members of the LSF were mentioned. The Melbourne movement was seen to have a very strong university base rather than a community base.<sup>6</sup>

The Libertarian Socialist Federation survived slightly longer than the FAA but after a couple of delegates meetings met a similar quiet death during 1977. The Melbourne LSF during 1977 consisted of two groups - the La Trobe Anarchists active in the Jura Literature Service; and the Libertarian Socialist Collective, a discussion group which grew out of *Free* newspaper published in late 1976.

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#### A State Rundown - January 1977

<sup>6</sup> FAAB - Brisbane Anarchist Group Edition, January 1977.