

anchorage anarchy

Issue #20

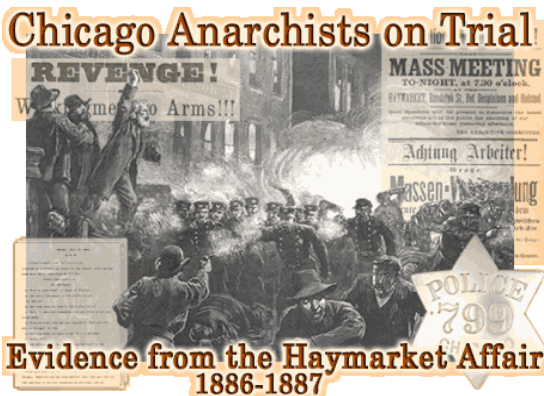
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For the Union Makes Us Strong?

Several times over the last few years I have participated in a Mayday pageant here in Anchorage. This is a staged reading of a script written by a local National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) staff attorney. The narrative traces the development of the American labor movement from the Knights of Labor in the nineteenth century through the 1930s, focusing on two key moments in the history of American labor unions: the Haymarket events in 1886 and the passage of the Wagner Act. It is a fun occasion where participants include labor union members, folks from Occupy Anchorage, and other local troublemakers. It is an opportunity to interact with other union members and movement activists and provides a bit of generally unknown and ignored labor history to those who attend. And to my mind, the positive depiction of anarchists in a performance geared toward regular working folks is more than welcome.

organizers involved, I disagree completely with the primary message that the author wishes to convey to the performers and audience—that the National Labor Relations, or Wagner, Act (NLRA) is the logical and appropriate culmination of the efforts of the radical labor movements of the past. This analysis is shared by virtually the entire labor union movement in the United States, which looks to government as the guardian of union “rights” and a kind of disinterested arbiter of disputes between labor and owners/managers. But this reliance on the authoritarian state to mediate labor disputes and safeguard workers’ interests has nothing in common with the goals and ideals of the Haymarket anarchists, who envisioned workplaces—and a society in general—that were free of bosses, free of laws—in short, free of the master/servant relationship which characterizes most jobs and is an inherent part of any form of government. Not only was the NLRA a betrayal of the libertarian roots of the labor movement, it has not even lived up to the limited promise of defending workers’ rights which it held out to the establishment unions. Union membership as a percentage of workers, at least in the private sector, is lower now than it was at the time that NLRA was enacted. Real wages are stagnant while corporate profits and management pay are through the roof. Negotiated pension plans, in both private companies and government jobs are being gutted. In short, workers continue to fare badly in the contest between them and owners/managers and government involvement has done little or nothing to assist the workers’ cause. It is time to take a new look at the history, current role and future of labor unions and add a bit of anarchist critique to the mix.

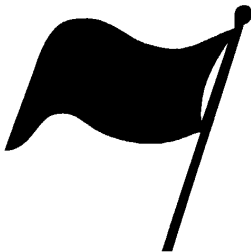


However, despite his largely accurate retelling of the circumstances surrounding Haymarket and sympathetic portrayal of the libertarian workers and

Unity Is Strength

I've been a member of, or represented by, a union in almost every job I have had since I began work at 16. These unions have included a retail clerks union, a shoeworkers' union, a service employees' union, a teachers' union, and my current union which is made up exclusively of registered nurses. Throughout my career as a nurse, I have also actively participated in these union organizations in various roles: negotiator, newsletter editor, secretary, shop steward, grievance officer, labor council member. In these various roles I have become very familiar with both the good and bad aspects of unions and collective bargaining.

I believe that having union representation is, in almost all employment situations, better than not



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being represented. Unions can defend workers from particularly egregious conduct on the part of owners and managers, raise wages, protect benefits, promote a safe working environment, etc. In companies where only part of the workforce is union, the provisions of the contract the union negotiates commonly become the standard for the non-unionized employees as well. In addition, in localities where only some workplaces have unions, the wages, benefits and working conditions unionized workers are able to negotiate with some employers tend to set the bar for other, non-union workplaces as well. Unions thus tend to be beneficial, at least in terms of pay and benefits, to both their members and other workers. As the bumper sticker states, we are the folks who brought you the weekend.

But the power and influence of unions is limited in important ways. All contracts I am familiar with concede to the owners and managers of the enterprise the right to make all the important business decisions and continue to run the company, whatever concessions they may make on pay, health insurance, or pensions. The basic message of a management rights clause in a collective bargaining agreement is that the owners/managers still run the operation, set policy, and, most importantly, control the purse strings. In addition, contracts almost always contain a no-strike clause prohibiting withdrawal of labor while a contract is in force. Before the era of these time-limited agreements, spontaneous work stoppages were commonplace and could be remarkably effective, but would now usually be prohibited in the collective bargaining agreement. These restrictions on workers' power in the workplace which unions routinely agree to are an acknowledgement both of the unequal strength of the contending parties in labor struggles and negotiations, and of the unions' acceptance of the basic rules of state-supported capitalist society.

Company owners and managers are in position of strength vis-à-vis their employees, but not simply because they have more money, which can sustain them through a strike or other labor dispute

more readily than can the financial reserves of a union or its individual members. The main source of their power is the web of laws, rules and regulations which sustain their business model of profiting off the labor power of their employees by paying them less than the full value of what they produce. The government protects existing land titles, ownership structures, corporate personhood, and joint-stock schemes, whereby current owners and/or stockholders are recognized as the proprietors of an enterprise, no matter how little work, if any, they put into it, while the producers are simply “human resources” which are exploited, replaced, or discarded, like non-human resources, as suits the needs of the business’ bottom line or the whims of the managers and owners.

In the typical corporation, the person who invests their money is given an ownership share and a say in running the business, whereas the worker who actually creates the wealth that pays the dividends, salaries, and bonuses the top dogs enjoy is simply an employee who is paid a wage but has no permanent role or say in the company. Stockholders who invest money can get paid over and over for that one act, and can sell their shares and cash out. Workers, on the other hand, get paid only once for their work, and get no payout when they quit or are fired. The government supports this business model against any challenges. The state provides legal protections for corporations that shield stockholders from liability, while offering no similar safety net to employees. The state essentially socializes their risk by protecting individual investors and stockholders from the consequences of their business decisions, while privatizing the profits these same people gain by exploiting the labor of their employees. Governments generally recognize existent titles to land and other property, whatever the origins of this “ownership.” Police can arrest pickets who “trespass” on company property during a strike and evict workers who occupy their workplace during a dispute. The state is committed to upholding the basic structure and rules of the current economic arrangement, and that, by its nature, aggrandizes

the owners, stockholders, and managers at the expense of workers.



The NLRA and the other laws and rules that regulate labor relations were never meant to challenge this basic unequal relationship in the workplace. They were and are intended to regularize labor disputes, prevent “unscheduled” disruptions to production, and ultimately control labor unions and workers. In the past, many labor struggles were successful because of the ability to organize what were essentially general strikes, which would now generally be illegal. The government allows certain protections to unions and creates ground rules for representation elections and organizing drives which set some limits on employers’ ability to retaliate against organizers. Of course the trade-off is that unions have to recognize managers’ rights to run the business without input from the workers, are prohibited in many cases from organizing or utilizing secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes, and in some cases, primarily in the transportation industry, can be prohibited from striking at all.

I'm from the Government and I'm Here to Help You

Who has really gained from state interference in and regulation of labor relations? Certainly not the individual worker or union organizer. In 2011 only 11.8% of employees were union members, with an additional 1.2% who were represented by unions but opted out of membership. This is less than half the percentage of union penetration in the workforce in 1973. In the private sector the 2011 numbers were even more dismal: 6.9% of private employees were members, with an addition 0.7% represented. The only real beneficiaries of state-regulated labor-management relations on the labor side are the union bureaucrats and many of the elected officers. Unions are usually organized hierarchically, despite their democratic façade, and officers and paid staff generally believe they have the right, if not the duty, to make all the important decisions on how the union is run and what ends up on the negotiating table and ultimately in the contract. This is partly due to sloth and apathy on the part of rank-and-file members, but has been promoted by state interference which encourages politicking and reliance on lawyers and other “experts” instead of member involvement. And the granting of monopolies to individual unions in specific, state-defined “bargaining units” minimizes the need for unions to be responsive to the concerns of individual members, while guaranteeing a steady cash-flow in the form of mandatory dues. State-supported and regulated unions come more and more to resemble state-supported and regulated corporations.

The only true growth area for unions is in the government (often inaccurately referred to as public) sector. The numbers look better here with 37% of employees being union members and another 3.7% represented but not joining. Unlike those for private sector workers, these numbers are higher than those in 1973, largely because the rules and regulations in the government labor relations arena are different from those for private companies. In addition, the economics work quite differently for government workers. Their

employer has less incentive to squeeze workers in lean times since they have the power to extort money from other workers in the form of taxes, while the politicians who control the budget in government workplaces are responsive to political pressure since disaffected teachers and cops can organize to vote them out of office if they are not sufficiently cooperative with the unions.



Even in government employment, however, unions are currently under attack, as evidenced by the drama in Wisconsin over the last couple of years. But the issues here are different from those in a typical private sector business, where the company produces a product or service which people willingly consume and has plenty of money to share with employees, even though they would prefer to spend it on executive bonuses or stockholder dividends. The union in that case flexes its muscles to convince the owners it can make their lives difficult unless they agree to redistribute their wealth a bit more equitably.

The situation for government employees is not the same. Commonly they work in an area where there is no real competition, like government schools, fire departments, police forces, etc. Their employer, the state, provides a “service” which people are essentially forced to accept or utilize. If funds are short, the contest between labor and management may lead to the unions advocating increased taxes to fund their contract demands.

So the “public” sector unions end up supporting unnecessary and abusive institutions, such as the police, TSA, and government schools, or monopoly businesses like firefighting, which should not be provided by the state. They then go on to promote the extortion of more money from

other working people to pay for them. Workers in government agencies, however one feels about government, deserve fair treatment and the protection of unions, but for anarchists, the contradictions presented by government employment and unions must be acknowledged and confronted when discussing the labor movement.



An Injury to One Is an Injury to All

Although unions are currently in decline, are riddled with authoritarianism and corruption, and are in bed with various levels of government, the labor movement was not always in this sorry state. There is a long history of labor activism and workers' associations in this country, and labor organizations of the past often looked quite different from those of today. Many were structured much less simply, with little if any bureaucracy, and often saw their role much more broadly than today's unions. They combined workplace advocacy with mutual aid among members and their families and kept their independence for the state. And when they confronted employers, they did not demand that the government step in to help them—instead they called for the state to simply back off, to pull back their cops and national guards, and let the workers and employers fight it out on their own. They had faith that workers could organize themselves into a force strong enough to struggle with rapacious employers and win, as long as the government did not back up the employers with their armed thugs,

funded of course with money stolen from the very workers the cops and soldiers were hired to beat and shoot. Some unionists even formed their own armed militias, believing they were capable of defending themselves against the company-hired goons of their employers in labor disputes, instead of appealing to the state to protect them.

Unions once had mutual insurance plans of various sorts, survivor benefits, and dues-funded healthcare schemes. Some unionists, for example, contracted directly with a physician to provide primary care services to members and their families. But over time, when they were able to accomplish it, they transferred such programs over to employers, so that most union workers ended up with company-sponsored pensions, health insurance, sick pay and so on. This has turned out, in large part, to be a devil's bargain. Companies are now increasing worker premiums for insurance, defaulting on pension commitments, restricting use of sick time, and otherwise trying to maintain their inflated profits and executive salaries by nickel-and-dimeing the workers. Unions are trying their best to fight against these cuts in worker benefits at the negotiating table, but are also increasingly looking, once again, to the state to help them in their hour of need.

Unions have sought government bailouts of underfunded company pension plans and some supported the government takeover of General Motors which protected the inflated salaries and profits of the owners and executives more than the jobs of workers on assembly lines. Big unions like the California Nurses Association even support universalizing Medicare to address problems with expensive health care and health insurance. If I wasn't so jaded, this would astound me: nurses advocating that we all be subjected to a wasteful, corrupt health insurance plan which rations healthcare, continually increases costs, and treats its customers shoddily and disrespectfully—exactly the things they accuse private insurers and hospitals of doing. But the idea of appealing to the government to fix all our problems is so ingrained in Americans, unionists included, that no one even

considers the alternative—returning to the roots of the labor movement, when it was independent, self-assured, and most importantly, self-reliant.

A New Vision for Labor

There may well be a growth opportunity for unions today if they change their strategy and approach. First order of business should be to resurrect the old mutualist tradition in labor organizations. There is no reason why unions with thousands and millions of members could not sponsor health insurance plans that would better serve the needs of their members than those provided by employers, and could easily outdo the wretched plans offered and imposed by government. If we abandoned the approach of having the employers purchase and manage our insurance and took it on ourselves, we would be in a position to demand higher wages in lieu of insurance. The workers would then have more money which they could use to pay for a union-sponsored health plan if they wished, or purchase their health care or insurance elsewhere. The same goes for pension and disability plans.



And there is no justification for restricting union membership to people working for an employer with whom the union has a collective bargaining agreement. Opening up dues-paying membership to a larger group would increase the pool of people covered by these various insurance plans, increasing contributions and thus making these plans and funds more sustainable. Some unions already allow membership for non-contract

and retired workers, so this is not a very great leap. And with membership not tied to employment status, workers could maintain their benefits through periods in which they were out of a job.

Another source of funds to make these mutual insurance and support programs viable would come from restructuring and redirecting the unions themselves. Get rid of paid staff and return to the old model of workers self-managing their own organizations. Stop paying lobbyists and raising money for congressthings and other politicians. Stop buying and renting palatial union headquarters buildings. All dues should be directed to organizing, negotiating, working grievances, supporting mutual aid plans, and maintaining a robust strike fund so workers are not afraid to strike if and when necessary.

Such an approach would not only revitalize and grow the labor movement, it would promote independence among members and likely produce a better safety net for workers than that which is available to them today, either through their employer or the government. It would also encourage more people to get involved in their labor organizations, thus broadening the base of support for unions when they are organizing new work places or negotiating contracts.

With a larger membership and a stronger, member-focused organization, unions could then look at other ways of changing the workplace, and society in general, in ways that would benefit working people. Organizing workplaces and negotiating for pay and benefits would continue to be top priorities for the foreseeable future, but it is high time that workers begin looking at creative new ways of structuring production of goods and services and take advantage of the failures of the current economic system to advocate and organize alternative, libertarian enterprises. Unions need to drop their knee-jerk approach of turning to big sister and brother for help to fix workers' problems.

When GM "failed," or more properly was financially disemboweled by its shareholders and executives, the auto unions supported a government takeover, which not only failed to save the jobs of

many of the company's workers, but allowed the folks who run GM to keep all their ill-gotten lucre and end up with a solvent company again. A self-confident workforce supported by a vibrant and involved labor movement, could instead have insisted on allowing the workers to assume ownership of the company and set up a worker-run cooperative, defaulting on all contracts the previous owners had with the vultures they hired to run the company and cutting their losses. But the workers and unions were so schooled in outdated approaches that this idea would never have occurred to them.



And when the state complains it can't afford to fund police, schools, firefighting and ambulance services, or hospitals, unions should demand they stop running these businesses entirely. Police forces should simply be eliminated—they enforce unjust laws, bully and brutalize regular people, and support the prevailing political and economic systems which empower business owners and managers at the expense of workers, whether union members or not. In the case of firefighting, hospitals, and ambulances, these enterprises should be turned over to the experts—the firefighters,

paramedics, nurses, technicians, etc—to be organized and run. As for the schools, they should just be shut down, as they are breeding grounds for authoritarian attitudes and behavior and fail in their purported core mission of helping young people gain the knowledge and skills they need to function independently. Former students and their families could then figure out some better way to acquire the learning they want and need but which government schools have shown themselves incapable of providing.

Unions, and the guilds which preceded them, have historically provided training in various crafts and specialty occupations. If the state pulls out of the miseducation business, perhaps the unions could step in and sponsor other learning opportunities for folks both young and old. They could also expand their occupational and technical training programs to include nursing and various technological occupations, either independently or in cooperation with employers. Unions could even help facilitate the creation of independent cooperative businesses for production and consumption of both goods and services utilizing the expertise of their members. The possibilities are endless.

The Road to Freedom

I believe that an approach such as that I have advocated above would lead to better, more efficient, more humane workplaces and institutions than those that currently exists. But I am an anarchist and do not believe that simply creating worker-run, mutualist institutions is enough. Truly libertarian organizations can and should function without hierarchies, without leaders and followers. It is very clear that just because a business operation is worker-owned, worker-run, or organized cooperatively, it does not follow that it is equitable, fair or anarchistic.

There are many kinds of businesses that are considered employee-owned (an oxymoron if I ever heard one) in the united states, simply because they have some kind of employee stock-ownership program. These include Publix supermarkets and

engineering firm CH2M Hill, neither of which is known for pioneering libertarian workplaces. This goes as well for credit unions, which were all the rage among Occupy folks last year, but really are nearly indistinguishable from banks in their structure and the services they provide.

Nor should the Mondragón cooperative enterprises in Spain be considered adequate models for those who desire anarchic relationships in all areas of life. While Mondragón is set up as a cooperative with membership and profit-sharing, there is a definite class system and hierarchy in its council structure as well as wage differentials which favor managers. While unions are allowed, most of the activity a union would engage in in a conventional business is funneled through the in-house elected social council, which negotiates with the management group around wages and working conditions and grievances. Members have been fired for labor organizing and the company has employees in other countries who do not have the option of membership. Contrary to the hype of leftists of various sorts, the Mondragón model is not terribly different at core from other hierarchical institutions. There are managers and workers, employers and employees. As is typical of most cooperatives, some members are more equal than others.



A libertarian undertaking would have no hierarchies, no managers, no employees, no representative councils. Free people would utilize free methods of interacting, face-to-face, as equals. There is no need for “experts” to dictate the running of a business. The people who do the work, who

assemble the product, who provide the service, who make the doughnuts, these are the people who should decide how business is conducted. This is possible in projects big or small, as long as people are committed to an anarchist approach to real cooperation.

Liberating the Unions

Before unionists would be in a position to promote and work within this kind of organization, there would have to be fundamental change within the unions themselves. Such a change would, in turn, presupposes a new attitude and perspective on the part of individual workers. Unions need to look within and change the way they operate. They should minimize representative structures and be driven by the rank-and-file. They need to stop employing staff members and run themselves.

And if they were going to challenge, and ultimately force if necessary, government and corporations to change their practices and ultimately step out of the way, they would need to reject their own practices that mimic those of the politicians and capitalists. Unions would have to reject monopoly unionism and promote free competition between competing organizations which seek to represent workers. They’d need to eschew mandatory membership and dues arrangements, while also declining to represent those who do not join voluntarily. They would have to rely only on argument and moral suasion to convince other workers to join strikes and other work actions. They’d need to reject overly long occupational training and apprenticeships, as well as licensure laws, both of which limit entry into certain fields of work and thus prevent competition and create labor shortages. And it would be essential they stop demonizing immigrant workers and workers in other countries, and instead embrace them and do their best to organize them into unions.

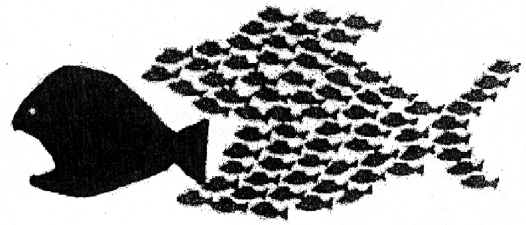
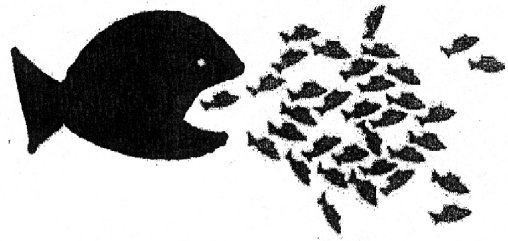
If unionists seriously wished to change the workplace, they would also need to be prepared to reject and ignore the laws which empower those who are currently considered the owners of our workplaces. Shareholders and their managers have

no right to declare ownership in these enterprises when it is the labor of others which creates the products or services that generate the wealth which lines the pockets of the managers and owners, while only a portion of it ever gets back to those who produced it. Workers would need to be prepared at some point to simply occupy and run these businesses if they cannot work out a more friendly transition plan with the legal proprietors.

Naturally, the unions could not look to the government to help them in this endeavor, since such an approach is anathema to the state and the capitalists it supports. Since the long term goal of an anarchist workers movement would be the elimination of the state, it would be good training to start rejecting the state now and declaring our independence. We need to counter the myth that the state is a better guarantor of our wants and desires than are our fellow workers and other people we choose to cooperate and work with. We should get rid of all the laws that purport to protect workers, but in fact facilitate the continuation of the economic status quo. Workers can take on capitalism and the state on their own if they only find the will to do so.

What's an Anarchist To Do?

Given the attitude of most workers, getting from here to there would be a long journey indeed. It is very hard if not impossible to convince most people that the state has no constructive role to play in social relations. Even when people are willing to concede that when it is not frankly coercive, it is inept, inefficient, and corrupt, they cannot seem to part with the idea that government is some kind of necessary evil. I find it difficult to envision how or when a fundamental change in this outlook could ever take place in a sufficient number of people to lead to a real revolution in the way we all relate to each other. Looking back at social change movements of the past and even "anarchist" unions does not reassure me very much either. Except for some very small, short-lived communities where a form of equitable commerce really did take place, historical experiments in reorganizing society have



come up wanting, and the revolutionary unions of the past have often been plagued with authority, leaders and followers, and even politicians who have taken part in government.

But despite the fact that unions may never become a force for anarchist social change, they have a positive role to play. Unions give workers the opportunity to stand up to absurd company policies and stupid, dictatorial bosses. They help workers get better pay and benefits. And I believe that in my role of grievance officer I am able to help people find the courage to come forward and advocate better for themselves, to speak truth to power. Individual employees have much less power in the workplace to negotiate pay and working conditions than do managers and owners, who are invested by the state with rights and privileges denied to regular workers. Unions, whatever their drawbacks and failings, are the only means currently available to most workers to level the playing field even a little, by pooling the strength of many individuals and creating a countervailing power to that of the employers. That is why they are worth having, and why, despite my lengthy critique, I will continue to participate in and promote unions, even in their current form.

The Labor Movement and Anarchism

This open letter by Errico Malatesta was addressed to the editors of El Productor, an anarchist journal published in Barcelona.

Dear comrades,

In your journal I came across the following sentence: 'If we must choose between Malatesta, who calls for class unity, and Rocker, who stands for a labor movement with anarchist aims, we choose our German comrade.'

This is not the first time that our Spanish language press has attributed to me ideas and intentions I do not have, and although those who wish to know what I really think can find it clearly set out in what I myself have written, I have decided to ask you to publish the following explanation of my position.

Firstly, if things were really as you present them, I too would opt for Rocker against your 'Malatesta,' whose ideas on the labor movement bear little resemblance to my own.

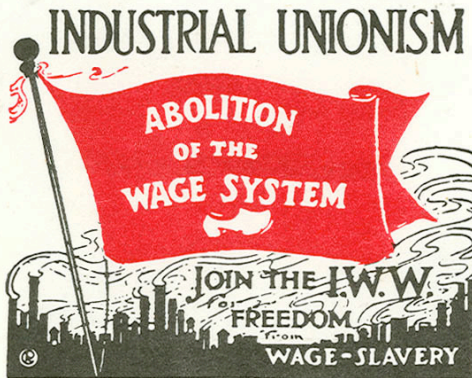
Let's get one thing clear: a labor movement with anarchist objectives is not the same thing as an anarchist labor movement. Naturally everyone desires the former. It is obvious that in their activities anarchists look to the final triumph of anarchy—the more so when such activities are carried out within the labor movement, which is of such great importance in the struggle for human progress and emancipation. But the latter, a labor movement which is not only involved in propaganda and the gradual winning over of terrain to anarchism, but which is already avowedly anarchist, seems to me to be impossible and would in every way lack the purpose which we wish to give to the movement.

What matters to me is not 'class unity' but the triumph of anarchy, which concerns everybody; and in the labor movement I see only a means of raising the morale of the workers, accustom them to free initiative and solidarity in a struggle for the good of everyone and render them capable of imagining, desiring and putting into practice an anarchist life.

Thus, the difference there may be between us

concerns not the ends but the tactics we believe most appropriate for reaching our common goals. Some believe anarchists must assemble the anarchist workers, or at the least those with anarchist sympathies, in separate associations. But I, on the contrary, would like all wage-earners, whatever their social, political or religious opinions—or non-opinions—bound only in solidarity and in struggle against the bosses, to belong to the same organizations, and I would like the anarchists to remain indistinguishable from the rest even while seeking to inspire them with their ideas and example. It could be that specific circumstances involving personalities, environment or occasion would advise, or dictate the breaking up of the mass of organized workers into various different tendencies, according to their social and political views. But it seems to me in general that there should be a striving towards unity, which brings workers together in comradeship and accustoms them to solidarity, gives them greater strength for today's struggles or prepares them





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better for the final struggle and the harmony we shall need in the aftermath of victory.

Clearly, the unity we have to fight for must not mean suppression of free initiative, forced uniformity or imposed discipline, which would put a brake on or altogether extinguish the movement of liberation. But it is only our support for a unified movement that can safeguard freedom in unity. Otherwise unity comes about through force and to the detriment of freedom.

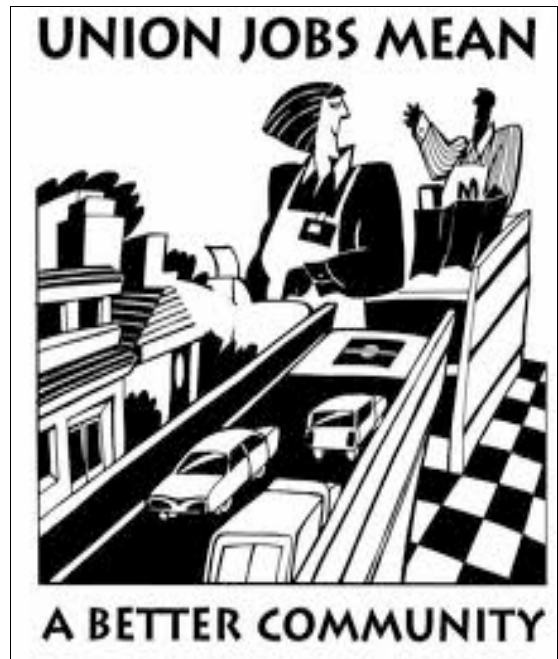
The labor movement is not the artificial creation of ideologists designed to support and put into effect a given social and political programme, whether anarchist or not, and which can therefore, in the attitudes it strikes and the actions it takes, follow the line laid down by that programme. The labor movement springs from the desire and urgent need of the workers to improve their conditions of life or at least to prevent them getting worse. It must, therefore, live and develop within the environment as it is now, and necessarily tends to limit its claims to what seems possible at the time.

It can happen—indeed, it often happens—that the founders of workers' associations are men of ideas about radical social change and who profit from the needs felt by the mass of the people to arouse a desire for change that would suit their own goals. They gather round them comrades of like mind: activists determined to fight for the interests of others even at the expense of their own, and form workers' associations that are in reality political

groups, revolutionary groups, for which questions of wages, hours, internal workplace regulations, are a side issue and serve rather as a pretext for attracting the majority to their own ideas and plans.

But before long, as the number of members grows, short-term interests gain the upper hand, revolutionary aspirations become an obstacle and a danger, 'pragmatic' men, conservatives, reformists, eager and willing to enter into any agreement and accommodation arising from the circumstances of the moment, clash with the idealists and hardliners, and the workers' organization becomes what it perforce must be in a capitalist society—a means not for refusing to recognize and overthrowing the bosses, but simply for hedging round and limiting the bosses' power.

This is what always has happened and could not happen otherwise since the masses, before taking on board the idea and acquiring the strength to transform the whole of society from the bottom up, feel the need for modest improvements, and for an organization that will defend their immediate interests while they prepare for the ideal life of the future.





So what should the anarchists do when the workers' organization, faced with the inflow of a majority driven to it by their economic needs alone, ceases to be a revolutionary force and becomes involved in a balancing act between capital and labor and possibly even a factor in preserving the status quo?

There are comrades who say—and have done so when this question is raised—that the anarchists should withdraw and form minority groupings. But this, to me, means condemning ourselves to going back to the beginning. The new grouping, if it is not to remain a mere affinity group with no influence in the workers' struggle, will describe the same parabola as the organization it left behind. In the meantime the seeds of bitterness will be sown among the workers and its best efforts will be squandered in competition with the majority organization. Then, in a spirit of solidarity, in order not to fall into the trap of playing the bosses' game and in order to pursue the interests of their own members, it will come to terms with the majority and bow to its leadership.

A labor organization that were to style itself anarchist, that was and remained genuinely anarchist and was made up exclusively of dyed-in-the-wool anarchists could be a form—in some circumstances an extremely useful one—of anarchist grouping; but it would not be the labor movement and it would lack the purpose of such a movement, which is to attract the mass of the workers into the struggle, and, especially for us, to create a vast field for propaganda and to make new anarchists.

For these reasons I believe that anarchists must remain—and where possible, naturally, with dignity and independence—within those organizations as

they are, to work within them and seek to push them forward to the best of their ability, ready to avail themselves, in critical moments of history, of the influence they may have gained, and to transform them swiftly from modest weapons of defense to powerful tools of attack.

Meanwhile, of course, the movement itself, the movement of ideas, must not be neglected, for this provides the essential base for which all the rest provides the means and tools.

Yours for anarchy,
Errico Malatesta
December 1925

**WHOEVER YOU VOTE FOR,
THE GOVERNMENT ALWAYS WINS.**

**VOTE
NOBODY**



***Voting is not an expression
of power, but an admission
of powerlessness.***

myspace.com/votenobody