

group consensus, the majority. These create the faceless domination, the disembodied hierarchy, in which the group rules over the individual. The rejection of all rule in our practice, thus requires the rejection of the collectivist model and all that it imposes. In other words, it must start from my choice neither to be ruled nor to rule, and to create my life against every form of rule to the extent that I am able to do so.

Thus, each of us decides for ourselves what she will do and does this with those who agree with him on what to do and how to do it. In this way, those who act together do so in full unanimity, and the project is not tainted by reservations or resignation to a decision that was not one's own. In practice, this inevitably means that we will come together in small, temporary groups based on affinity. These groups will be fluid, constantly changing, coming together and breaking apart. Those who value large-scale unity, a single front to present to the world, will look upon this as a lack of organization, a weakness preventing "us" from having a continuous influence over time, from presenting a "real alternative" to people in struggle. But behind this critique lies the political program, the preordained schema of how to go about overturning this world, that can only seek followers, not accomplices.

Acting in small, temporary groups in which the desires and the will of each individual is fully realized because the group itself forms out of the coming together of the individual wills is a completely different way of conceiving revolutionary transformation. The point is no longer to bring together the masses to storm the Winter Palace, but rather to act immediately against the forces of domination we confront in our daily lives and to organize this activity in a way that expresses our refusal to be ruled, to submit to any form of higher authority. By not submitting ourselves to any sort of collective will in the way we carry on our struggle, we subvert those tendencies toward centralization, representation and hierarchy that exist even among anarchists, and remain free to act even when the various so-called revolutionary groups say to wait, to submit to the times. This is how we express our aim to destroy all domination in the methods by which we go about our struggle. Each of us starts from ourselves and find accomplices through the immediate practice of struggle in life here and now.

Retrieved from Willful Disobedience Volume 4, number 2 at theanarchistlibrary.org (Willful Disobedience is also available from littleblackcart.com)

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DECIDING
FOR ONESELF:
DEMOCRACY,
CONSENSUS
AND
UNANIMITY
IN ANARCHIST
PRACTICE

BY WOLF LANDSTREICHER

One of the distinguishing principles of anarchist practice is that if we are to achieve our aims, they must already exist in the methods we use to attain them. The most basic aim of all anarchist revolutionary activity is the destruction of every structure of authority, every hierarchy, domination in all its forms. But to understand what this means in the immediate practice of struggle, it is necessary to have some idea of what this means beyond the negations. I am not speaking here about utopian blueprints or political (or even anti-political) programs, but rather about how we can relate to each other in a way that is truly free of hierarchy and domination in our projects aimed at the destruction of this society and the creation of different ways of living and being together. It is important to keep in mind that the anarchist project is not to be a political program among political programs, another ideology in the marketplace of opinion (and thus, the eternal loser it is bound to be in that arena), but rather to develop a practice of social subversion here and now that is in perpetual conflict with the social order that surrounds us.

The absence of any sort of domination, of any sort of hierarchy, of any imposed order would manifest in practice as the practical capacity for every individual to decide for themselves how they are going to live their life and to freely choose with whom they are going to share it and how. This is the meaning of self-organization — that most fundamental of anarchist principles. If instead we were to interpret the self that is organizing as a collective entity, then we would have to recognize that every state, every corporation, every institution is technically “self-organized”. Self-organization in the anarchist sense starts from individual self-determination and develops itself from there.

The application of this idea to our practice of revolt has significant implications in terms of the way we organize our projects and decide how to carry them out. Perhaps the first principle to be drawn from this is that organization in itself has no value. The value of organization lies in the use that each of us can make of it in carrying out the tasks necessary for creating her life and struggles in solidarity with others. Thus, the point is not to create massive organizations that seek members and that represent a particular perspective (anarchist, anarcho-communist, revolutionary or whatever label is chosen for the group), but rather to bring together the time, the space, the tools and the accomplices for carrying out the projects and activities we desire, the projects that can combine to form that “collective movement of individual realization” that is revolution in its fullest sense.

Unfortunately, many anarchists — even some who may claim to reject formal organization — organize their projects on a collectivist model. The desire to carry out a project together and the need to organize that project is transformed into the creation of a collective entity that represents that project. This collective entity and the project it represents come to have priority over the individuals who first had the desire to do the project. The contradiction between this model and the anarchist principle of self-organization as described above becomes

most evident in the way decisions are made in these collectives. As soon as a collective entity formalizes, it becomes necessary for decisions to be made as a collective, and this requires a decision-making process. Thus, in joining the collective, the individual must sacrifice her capacity to decide for himself to the need of the collective for a decision-making process that is incumbent on all. The two processes most commonly used in collectives formed by anarchists are direct democracy (majority decision) and consensus.

Consensus has been described quite well as a method for obtaining people’s support without allowing them to express themselves autonomously. Starting from the idea that the needs of the collective take priority over the individuals involved, it seeks a decision that no one in the group will actively oppose, and once such a decision is reached (usually through hours and hours of tedious discussion that, as likely as not, merely wears down some of those in the group), everyone is expected to abide by it. Achieving consensus among any more than a few people is necessarily a matter of finding the lowest common denominator between all involved and accepting this lowest common denominator as the highest level of action. Thus, if we are talking specifically of anarchist revolutionary projects, the consensus process operates by lowering the level of critique that can be actively expressed. It is easy to get people to accept and rally around superficial critiques, but deep, radical critiques — and the kind of activity they call for — tend to frighten people and cause division. Thus, consensus best corresponds to a gradualist, piece-meal approach, to a reformist approach that does not require one to be able to act on one’s own and to make decisions quickly in the moment of action.

One of the critiques some anarchists have made of the consensus process — a critique that is correct as far as it goes — is that if complete consensus were always required in order to act, nothing would ever get done, because it requires only one person to block it. But if those who make this critique don’t also reject the collectivist model, then they have to turn to another decision-making process, that of direct democracy, i.e., majority rule. From an anarchist perspective, the problem with this should be obvious. We are opposed to all rule, that of the majority as well as that of a minority. Even when it is the desires of the majority that prevail over the rest, even if that majority comprises 99% of those involved, if this decision is mandatory over those who do not agree, it is an imposition, a form of rule.

The real problem with the processes of consensus and direct democracy is that they are based on the assumption that the collective will, however it is determined, is to prevail over the will of the individual. But this has always been the basis of every form of rule, of every institution of authority. It is an act of self-deception to think that one has eradicated domination and hierarchy simply because one has eliminated its human face. The most insidious forms of domination are precisely those invisible concepts that stand above us and determine our existence — invisible concepts such as the collective will, the