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Consensus Submission Making

By Jason Rodgers



Many people want to be part of the herd, want submission within a mass. Now they want immersion with the nanotechnology mind. Maybe they were tricked. Maybe these are false desires. Maybe they suffer from false consciousness. Yet they still want them. Otherwise why would they march along so obediently? Shouldn't there at least be some recalcitrance? The internalization of authority makes it that much more difficult to resist. "The Mark Inside was coming up on him and that's a rumble nobody can cool" (Burroughs 9), as William Burroughs said.

In the comic book The Invisibles, Sir Miles, one of the primary villains, lectures: "You think you're fighting for 'freedom'. From what? From whom? Your chains are imaginary. The mass of people are free; free to live and work and die. How dare you presume to 'liberate' them from their comfortable lives?" (Morrison 62). Many anarchists assume that given the choice of freedom or control, that every person would choose freedom. It is not as simple as that. It is impossible to know what people would choose, but if one starts from the position of needing the consensus of the people, one will never start at all. Too many people want submission. Resistance must be based on individual will.

Devo paraphrased Erich Fromm when they sang "Freedom of choice, it's what you've got. Freedom from choice, it's what you want." With this statement they summed up the thesis of both Fromm and Wilhelm Reich: often, people are too scared of uncertainty and instead cling to authority for security. Fromm described this process as an "Escape from Freedom". Erich Fromm explained that people have "the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside of one's self" (Fromm 163) when the individual feels weak.

Reich started from a similar position to Fromm, but became even more pessimistic as his life progressed. His view of those who willingly submit is best summed up with the title of one of his last books, Listen, Little Man! Reich's cynicism had progressed to the point he could say "Your slave driver is yourself" (Reich 8) and "Only you yourself can be your liberator" (Reich 8). He placed the source of totalitarianism squarely on the masses: "For centuries you'll murder your friends and hail the fuhrers of all nations" (Reich 70). In desperation he declared "For this reason I am no longer willing to die for your freedom to be an indiscriminate slave" (Reich 11). Yet Reich did continue to fight, eventually finding himself in prison, accused of

There is a sick sort of ritualism to activism. It's almost parallel to the critique of passive nihilism. Rather than willing nothingness instead of willing nothing (as passive nihilism does), activism wills anything rather than wills nothing. Activism builds structure and organization for the sake of creating a mass that the activist can define themselves by. The structures are self-perpetuating, building themselves up regardless of what effect they achieve (certainly less than the amount of energy put in, in many cases functionally nothing).

In some cases this is done in an attempt to repeat past successes, but within a context in which they are no longer relevant. Previously I've referred to these as cargo cults, reproducing an aesthetic image in hopes that the substance will reappear. This is a failure of imagination, a way of avoiding critical thought by replicating clichés and prepackaged models.

In other cases this submission to organization is done out of fear of autonomous action. If one acts individually (or as part of a human scale affinity group), one is responsible for themselves. If one acts as part of a collective or federation then one is no longer responsible, the group is. Even worse, when one demands the consent of the people (or claims to act out of the consent of the people, which is divined in some most mysterious fashion). The people is a dangerous abstraction, a spook. This is done either to silence and stop those who act autonomously or to provide a sort of theological justification for a party's actions.

These activist, collectivist structures perform a strong recuperative function. Critiquing the Libertarian Party, Bob Black said "they turn potential revolutionaries into repairmen" (143). I think his critique applies just as well to the reforms on the left. That is, these schemes for social management use potentially destructive and negating actions, transforming them into actions which fix the totality; repair it, make it stronger. It is difficult to know what the motivation is. In some cases this could be motivated by the elites acting conspiratorially (probably often even on a micro level, such as a party official attempting to strengthen their minor domination). In

other cases is probably an unconscious motivation. It is hard to know, but the results are the same, people feel more secure in their productive activity, feel as if they are getting things done.

This is not a call for pessimism. I believe in pessimism no more than I believe in hope. We know humans can live in freedom, they have in the past. At the same time, I see no reason to believe in the inevitability of victory. Life is unfolding on an infinite horizon. Anything is possible, both wonders and horrors. I'd rather the uncertainty of rejecting submission, gamble myself. We know what to do, reject submission. That anonymous insurrectionary classic At Daggers Drawn told us how to do this "the secret is to really begin" (5). The war of attrition against us occurs on the level of everyday life. Our asymmetrical battle occurs micropolitically as well.

famous example of this is The Freedom Fighter's Manual, a comic book format propaganda piece that was distributed in Nicaragua anonymously by the CIA. This document has been reprinted a number of times in small press editions since it was first surfaced in the 1980s. This encouraged numerous forms of sabotage, often in forms that could be described as work refusal, such as "Steal, hide key documents" and "Drop typewriters". What if we threw a coup and no state formed as replacement? Reich pointed out that our participation is what allows authority to continue, "No police force in the world would have had the power to crush you if you had an ounce of self-respect in your daily life, if you were aware, really aware, that without you life could not go on for one hour" (Reich 16). He reminded that we build the structures that command and control, "Do you think Prince Blowhard makes atom bombs? No, they're made by little men who shout hurrah, hurrah, instead of refusing to make them" (Reich 119).

It seems peculiar to me that the activist wing of the anarchist movement (a term I'm hesitant to even credit them with) believe that their participation in these systems is capable of creating progress or reversal of perspective, but that refusal is incapable of weakening these systems. They want it both ways, where these systems are both powerful enough to create change, but too weak to be worth refusing. But of course, their concepts of social change are mere justifications for their submission. Freedom is so terrifying that they need to run to the loving strangle hold of authority, just like Fromm's "escape from freedom". In this case they don't need charismatic leaders, they have submission to organization, an alienated reified community of mutual discipline. They sit through long drawn out consensus based meetings with rigid, formalized procedure, easily prone to abuse by the politico-pervo authoritarian types drawn to these sorts of structures. They join a community of peer pressure and shame, where comrades will pressure them into engaging in behavior they don't want to engage in, just like they were initially pressure by mass society. They confront the alienation of mass society by submerging themselves into a hive, reduced to a number on a membership roll.



selling fraudulent medical equipment. Actually, most likely he was targeted for one of his other unpopular causes: sexual liberation, anti-authoritarianism, or for sounding the alarm on the dangers of radiation. Who knows why, but he died in prison.

Often excluded from conversations on Reich is his concept of Red Fascism. The point being that he felt that his critique of Nazism and Italian Fascism applied equally to communists and most socialists. Obviously there are certain contextual differences, but many points remain stable.

After a fascist crashed his car into a group of anti-fascist protesters in Charlottesville, VA (on August 12, 2017), murdering one in the process; there was an anti-fascist rally in Albany, NY. I went to this. I was very disheartened by the fact that not only were the usual cast of social justice warriors and social democrats speaking, but also outright Leninists. Classical Italian Fascism was a fucking outgrowth of Leninism (and national syndicalism). By now people should know better. Yet when the desperation of the situation becomes apparent, many people jump on board Leninist, Maoist, Revolutionary Communist Party, or Green Party groups. This is done to get things done in response to what seems like a desperate situation, like fascist creep or war. Maybe some of these are fronts, so the folks getting involved are marginally tricked. Yet the rhetoric remains the same. They should know better. In the face of Fascism, the left only has the solution of submitting to the red fascist party: "wherever he acquires power 'in the name of the people', he misuses it and transforms into something more cruel than the tyranny he had previously suffered at the hands of upper class sadists" (Reich ix).

The red fascists party provides a safe way to channel rage and discontent. The party offers pragmatic programs that repair and preserve totality, happily maintaining the planetary work machine. Vaneigem said:

"They organize peaceful demonstrations at which their trade-union police force treats anyone who questions their orders as an agent provocateur. The new-style police are already with us, waiting to take over. Psychosociological cops have need neither of truncheon nor of morgues. Oppressive violence is about to be transformed into a host of equitably distributed pin pricks" (35).

The management strategy of the planetary work machine is rendered

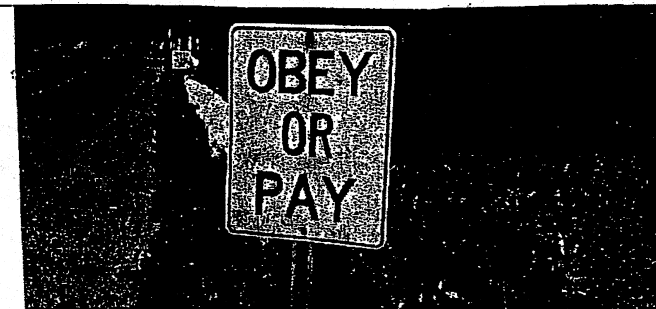


Fig. 4.6. Society

democratic, so that the participants now oppress themselves.

At this point it might be useful to look at John Zerzan's article "Organized Labor vs. the Revolt Against Work". He should know a thing or two about the subject, John is a former union activist. At one point he saw his role as working in the union in order to radicalize workers. Soon however he came to realize that the function of the union was to discipline and control workers. This article dealt with the tension between these unions and workers who would rather not work. He brought up management literature that advocated "liberalizing work management in order to contain employee pressure" (188). He also discussed the "necessarily anti-union nature of this revolt" (189) against work. In the 1930s there was widespread revolt against work, which was contained when "the hierarchical, national unions of the CIO finally appeared and stabilized relations" (198). Structures such as parties and unions provide structures for red fascists to latch themselves on. Zerzan's article had a hopeful aspect to it as well, there are many people who do not want to participate, who do not want to be controlled. When a chance arises some will revolt. Unfortunately, more often than not such options are rendered seemingly impossible by the institutions they are enmeshed in.

So far this critique has been addressed towards out of the ordinary situations, people joining extreme groups in reaction. I have said little about the majority of willing submission, the banal submission and resignation in the face of everyday life. "Obedience is the mother of command" (269) stated Renzo Ferrari (son of insurrectionary, egoist, bandit Renzo Novatore). Without the obedience, authority would be limp. Large portions of authority are consensus hallucinations. Even the very real manifestations are outgrowths of our general acceptance of illusions of authority. It is very real when a cop executes a person of color. But if we hadn't accepted the underlying hallucinations of power the cop couldn't exist. The institutions would have been dismantled and a psychotic vigilante would never have been tolerated.

Someday social anarchists will purge Emma Goldman's books of their willful content, eliminating passages such as "that Stirner's individualism contains the greatest social possibilities is utterly ignored. Yet, it is nevertheless true that if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society" (44). Or her related statement in defense of Nietzsche, that what he was really envisioning was "a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves" (44). Classical anarchism contained the critique of willing submission.

Over time this submission is entirely internalized. The submission becomes a given, common sense. Sufi Idrie Shah presented a tale of a kingdom where all able bodied people began to

walk with crutches, and "When it was found that, having used crutches for so many generations, few people could in fact walk without crutches, the majority 'proved that they were necessary' (Shah 354). The conditioning of the banal and mundane aspects of everyday life provide more control than the spectacular aspects of authority. Occultist Aleister Crowley described how people are conditioned through "Worrying about clothes, food, money, what people think, how and why, and above all the fear of consequences, clog nearly everyone" (Crowley 33).

Nearly all of us engage in a level of willing submission. Why else would we allow ourselves to be degraded each morning by an alarm clock and rendered little Eichman through the workplace? Many times indigenous groups have fought to the death rather than be enslaved by colonists. Why are we willing (or even eager) to be enslaved? Few are willing to gamble everything, adopt amor fati in the face of hopelessness. The classical examples of people making this gamble, from the heroic period, are Renzo Novatore, Jules Bonnot, and maybe Louis Ling (who did not die fighting, but rather dynamited himself and his jail cell rather than allow the state to murder him). Who are our heroes?

But it is not necessary to make a single all or nothing stand against totality. Instead it may be just as useful to adopt a longer term asymmetrical strategy. Morale is low all over, and that's good. The trick is to transform this from a passive form to an active form. Every day there are numerous chances to disobey. Sometimes we might do this quietly or pretend we are making accidents. Other times it may be openly conducted. We can always spread a bad attitude, negations. The workplace can be rendered inefficient. Electoral systems are an obvious open sham. Refusal of electoral politics is the easiest, just stay in bed rather than go to cast a ballot. Definitely this calls for a rejection of the standard left anarchist activism of acting as an adjunct social worker to repair and strengthen the totality, the black iron prison.

These are tactics that Marcuse called "the Great Refusal" (257). The symptoms of social collapse John Zerzan called "elements of refusal". "The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and the future," said Marcuse, "holding no promise and showing no success it remains negative" (Marcuse 257). Before class struggle social democrats denounce this as lifestylist, I would point out that this sort of refusal and noncompliance has been encouraged as part of special operations to destabilize countries for coup d'etat. The most