



by Mark Bray

The decades that have followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have witnessed a historic resurgence of directly democratic, federalist politics among global social movements on a scale unheard of since the first decades of the twentieth century. From the Zapatistas and Magonistas of southern Mexico, to the global justice movement, to the squares movements of Tahrir Square, 15M (15th of May), Occupy, Gezi Park, and many more around the world, to Black Lives Matter, we can see the powerful impact of the style of leaderless (or *leaderful*),² autonomous, direct action-oriented organizing that has characterized resistance from below during this era. Some of the groups and individuals that composed these movements were directly, or indirectly, influenced by the enduring anti-authoritarian legacy of anarchism, whose international popularity has surged over recent decades in conjunction with a heightened interest in federalist, anti-capitalist politics. Many more, however, came to reject the hierarchical party politics of authoritarian communism not as the result of an explicitly ideological influence, but rather because occupations, popular assemblies, and consensus decision making were widely considered to be the most ethically

and strategically appropriate forms of struggle given existing conditions. Such was the case for most of the Argentines who rose up to occupy their workplaces and organize neighborhood assemblies in the wake of the financial crisis of 2001. Out of this popular rebellion against neo-liberalism came the term “horizontalism” (*horizontalidad*). While this slippery term has meant slightly different things for different people, it generally connotes a form of “leaderless,” autonomous, directly democratic movement building whose adherents consider it to be nonideological. Since the Argentine uprising, the term “horizontalism” has established itself as the overarching label for this amorphous form of directly democratic organizing that has swept the globe.

Certainly horizontalism and anarchism overlap in their advocacy of federal, directly democratic, direct action-oriented, autonomous organizing. Long before the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, anarchists railed against the inherently deleterious effects of hierarchy and authoritarian leadership while building large-scale federal models of workers’ self-management in the form of anarcho-syndicalist unions with memberships in the hundreds of thousands, or even above a million in the

case of the Spanish CNT in the 1930s. In some cases, such as the French CGT in the early 20th century, anarchist unionists even endorsed creating non-sectarian revolutionary syndicalist unions that could group the working class beyond political divides (Maitron 1992, 326; Maura, 1975, 495). It is unsurprising that many anarchists have thrown their lot in with the horizontalist mass movements of the past decades in order to safeguard and promote their anti-authoritarian tendencies. The intense proximity that exists between these two currents raises some important questions: is horizontalism merely a new name for anarchism? Are they basically the same idea masquerading behind different histories? Given such a high level of overlap, are we simply quibbling about semantics if we insist on a distinction between the two?

To answer this question, I will draw a distinction between “horizontalism,” which I use as a historically specific term to demarcate the wave of directly democratic popular mobilization that has emerged over the past few decades, and “horizontal,” which I use as an analytical descriptor to describe any form of non-hierarchical activity, regardless of context. Once this distinction is drawn, it is apparent that although anarchism is inherently horizontal, the historical horizontalism of recent years is a fluid entity that occasionally promotes values and ideas that are at odds with anarchism as a result of its minimalist, “anti-ideological” ideology. Although some anarchists and others have characterized anarchism as “anti-ideological” as well, the history of the movement shows that most of its militants and theorists have viewed it as a solid, though flexible, doctrine anchored in a set of anti-authoritarian tenets. This stands in sharp contrast with the prevalent post-modern tendency of proponents of horizontalism to view it as a malleable set of practices disconnected from any specific political center. This “anti-ideological” focus on form over content, which is to say, its emphasis on how decisions are made over what is decided, has created significant tensions in the

context of more or less spontaneous popular horizontalism for anarchists who are supportive of mass organizing and hopeful about the political openings provided by such movements. Because horizontalism attempts to divorce itself from ideology, its structures and practices are susceptible to resignification in decidedly non-horizontal directions, such as participation in representative government.

It is important to clarify that this critique of the “anti-ideology” of horizontalism applies to essentially spontaneous popular movements where thousands of random people suddenly engage in direct democracy with each other for the first time, not to examples like the Zapatistas of southern Mexico whose horizontal practices developed slowly over generations and were inextricably bound to widely shared values. When assemblies emerge without the opportunity for such steady growth and development, their lack of formal ideology greatly reduces the barriers to entry for a mass of disaggregated, disaffected people, yet it also makes the movement’s content and trajectory capricious. The implicit horizontalist assumption that horizontal decision-making mechanisms are sufficient to yield egalitarian results stands in sharp contrast with the avowed anarchist commitment to both horizontal practices and anti-oppressive outcomes. This demonstrates that although anarchism is horizontal (in the analytical rather than the historically specific sense of the term), and horizontalism is anarchistic (meaning it bears many of the traits of anarchism), horizontalism and anarchism are not identical.

Horizontalism

In late 2001, a spontaneous rebellion erupted in Argentina when the government decided to freeze bank accounts to forestall a mounting financial crisis precipitated by the IMF-mandated privatization and austerity measures of the 1990s. In under two weeks, popular mobilizations ousted four governments. Against the hierarchical machinations of the political elite, social

movements organized democratic neighborhood assemblies and workplace occupations around principles that were increasingly encapsulated in the concept of horizontalism. Occupied workplaces forged networks of mutual aid and assemblies formed locally before establishing inter-neighborhood organisms of direct democracy guided by both the sentiment and the practice of consensus decision-making. This uprising was eminently prefigurative as it sought to embody the society it desired in its everyday practices. As Marina Sitrin (2006, 4) argues in her influential *Horizontalism: Voices of Power in Argentina*, horizontalism “is desired and is a goal, but it is also the means – the tool – for achieving this end.” For many, it was “more than an organizational form,” it was “a culture” that promoted new affective relationships and communal solidarity (Sitrin 2006, 49). This culture of openness and rejection of dogma could even impinge upon the consolidation of horizontalism as a fixed entity since, as the Argentine Colectivo Situaciones argued, “*horizontalidad* should [not] be thought of as a new model, but rather *horizontalidad* implies that there are no models.... *Horizontalidad* is the normalization of the multiplicity ... The risk is that *horizontalidad* can silence us, stop our questions, and become an ideology” (Sitrin 2006, 55).

The accounts Sitrin gathered from the direct participants in the Argentine uprising demonstrate that for many, horizontalism was perhaps an anti-ideological ideology composed of a fluid mixture of flexible, participatory, non-dogmatic values and practices oriented around consensus, federalism, and self-management. However, these attitudes and outlooks emerged in a number of different groups and movements long before they were associated with the term “horizontalism.” In *Unruly Equality: U. S. Anarchism in the 20th Century*, Andrew Cornell (2016) demonstrates how the diffuse remnants of early twentieth-century anarchism that were increasingly inclined toward pacifism and the avant-garde in the

1940s and 1950s

“provided theories, values, tactics, and organizational forms, which activists in the antiwar, countercultural, and feminist movements took up [over the following decades]; in turn, these mass movements radicalized hundreds of thousands of people, a portion of whom adopted anarchism as their ideological outlook.” (245)

The destruction of the American anarchist movement in the middle of the century and the polarization of the Cold War led many American anarchists to experiment with new tactics and strategies. This included consensus, which was first used by American anarchists in the radical anti-war organization Peacemakers in the late 1940s (Cornell 2016, 180–181). More than a decade later, consensus was introduced into the civil rights organization Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) by Peacemakers organizer James Lawson (Cornell 2016, 229; Carmichael 2003, 300). This influence carried through Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other groups into the 1970s and 1980s where the New Hampshire Clamshell Alliance pioneered the use of spokescouncils and affinity groups in the anti-nuclear movement, feminist consciousness-raising circles experimented with non-hierarchical organization, and the Movement for a New Society (MNS) incorporated Quaker consensus methods (Farrell 1997, 241; Anarcho-Feminism 1977; Cornell 2011). During the same decades, similar tendencies were at play in Europe with elements of the feminist, anti-nuclear, and autonomous movements (Katsiaficas 1997). The tradition that these groups forged was adopted by subsequent groups such as the direct action AIDS group ACT UP, the radical environmentalist Earth First!, Food Not Bombs, and others feeding into the global justice movement at the turn of the twenty-first century (Gould 2009; Wall 2002; McHenry 2012). The squares movements of the Arab Spring, 15M,

Occupy, Gezi Park, Nuit Debout, and others were in part a reboot of the assemblies, spokescouncils, affinity groups and direct actions of the global justice movement oriented around a specific geographic space in the form of the plaza. Others have been influenced by the concept of rhizomatic organizing put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987; Chalcraft 2012; Anderson 2013). While the specific practices of these groups and movements varied,

“their investment in deliberation, consensus-building, individual participation, diversity, novel technologies, and creative engagement stands as a self-conscious counterpoint to doctrinaire and hierarchical models of mobilization, political, and religious sectarianisms, polarizing debates over national identity, and even representative forms of democracy.” (Anderson 2013, 154)

Horizontalist opposition to representative democracy usually comes in the form of consensus decision-making. Rather than formulating a proposal and simply concerning oneself with accumulating enough votes to push it through, consensus requires participants to take the concerns of the minority seriously and cater proposals to their outlooks. The idea is not that everyone has to agree all the time (the strawman portrayal of consensus), but rather that the majority is forced to make concessions to the minority and, for the group to function, the minority must grow accustomed to tolerating decisions that it finds less than ideal. Consensus seeks to promote not only the formal practice of assuring that proposals will satisfy the minority, but more deeply, a sense of unity within the group and a culture of care that can all too easily get trampled in the pursuit of a voting majority.

This form of decision-making works best when all members of a group have a shared sense of purpose. When they don't, the process grinds to a halt. For example, Occupy Wall Street implemented modified

consensus, only requiring 90% rather than 100% agreement, to provide a little breathing room for such occasions. Nevertheless, when members of a body are working at cross purposes it only takes 11% to shut down the objectives of the other 89%. Occupy Wall Street and many of the other squares movements encountered such problems when spontaneously incorporating thousands of random individuals into their decisionmaking bodies. Even when consensus is practiced by a cohesive group with a shared purpose it carries an inherent bias toward the status quo by making it more difficult to pass a proposal or resolution. As George Lakey of Movement for a New Society remarked, “consensus can be a conservative influence, stifling the prospects of organizational change” (Cornell 2011, 47). Clearly consensus carries a number of pitfalls, but so does majority voting. Ultimately it is very difficult to navigate conflict which is why anarchists place such a great emphasis on voluntary association (and, therefore, voluntary disassociation). Sometimes the only solution is for two groups to go their separate ways rather than forcing them to coexist.

Many of horizontalism's most energetic advocates view it as means and ends wrapped together into a unified set of practices and values. From this perspective, values inform practices which shift as they encounter varied circumstances. In turn, the horizontalist hostility to “dogma” allows values to adjust to the needs of the people as movement contexts twist and turn. Horizontalism's “non-ideological,” “apolitical” focus on form, practice, and immediate problem-solving over largescale “sectarian” conflicts has endowed this historically specific tendency with a portability and adaptability that has allowed it to flourish in contexts as different as rural Greece and lower Manhattan, Istanbul and Hong Kong. Unsurprisingly, the politics undergirding horizontalism have varied drastically. This is unproblematic if one has no predetermined goal; if one adheres to the liberal notion I have referred to elsewhere as “outcome neutrality” (Bray 2014). Yet,

anarchism has always been about much more than direct democracy; it is a revolutionary socialist ideology grounded in anti-domination politics as well as non-hierarchical practice.

Anarchism and Horizontalism

Anarchist responses to the growth of popular horizontalism have ranged from elation to disgust, with many in between. Those who have been more enthusiastic have viewed horizontalist movements as opportunities for the mass promotion of non-hierarchical politics while critics have seen them as betrayals of truly horizontal principles especially as they have ventured into electoralism. There are a range of anarchist responses to horizontalism, as the examples below from Spain, the United States, and Turkey will demonstrate.

The shared federalism [3] of anarchism and horizontalism can be traced back to the eighteenth century. While one can also trace it back even further, in terms of the history of socialism it makes sense to start with the influence of the dictatorial Jacobin “republic of virtue” during the French Revolution, which pioneered elements of central planning and modern conscription. Over the following decades, the European republican movement was split between Jacobins and their sympathizers who longed for a renewed “reign of terror” and federal republicans who were aghast at the bloody consequences of centralized authority, even in the hands of republicans, and instead advocated local and regional autonomy. Unsurprisingly, many of the first disciples of the anti-authoritarian works of Proudhon and Bakunin began their political lives as federal republicans while many Marxists have hailed the Jacobin dictatorship as a preview of their desired dictatorship of the proletariat (Zimmer 2015, 73; Esenwein 1989, 16–17; Maura 1975, 68; Toledo and Biondi 2010, 365; Lenin 1975; Mayer 1999).

Anarchists advanced the federal republican opposition to

centralization by forming a critique of the state, whether federal or centralized, and developing modes of struggle and methods of self-organizing that reflected the world they sought to create. Most Marxists reject the notion that anything approximating communism could be enacted in a capitalist society and therefore conclude that the form that an organization or party takes is only of instrumental value. For Marxist-Leninists, for example, this essentially amounts to the position that it is acceptable for a vanguard party to act in the best interest of the proletariat – to act as the proletariat would allegedly act if it had already achieved full class consciousness – as long as the same end result of communism is eventually achieved (though, of course, it never was). For most anarchists, however, the society of the future will inevitably reflect the values, principles, and practices that went into making it.

To understand how anarchists have attempted to put this idea into prefigurative practice, it’s important to distinguish between what David Graeber (2002) and others have come to refer to as “capital-A” and “small-a” anarchism. Although the gap that separates the two tendencies is often vastly overstated, the distinction can help us identify the connection between consensus and majority decision making and the areas of overlap that exist between anarchism and horizontalism. The anarchists that Graeber referred to as “capital-A” anarchists are much more self-consciously influenced by the legacy of “classical” anarchism (from roughly the 1860s to 1940). They tend to focus on the construction of large federal organizations, such as anarcho-syndicalist unions or anarchist communist federations, that operate by majority voting with a strong focus on class struggle and mass resistance. Historically such organizations have operated by federating local unions or political groups into regional, national, and even international bodies that operate by majority voting as carried out by recallable mandated delegates. As opposed to parliamentary democracy where elected representatives decide on behalf of their constituents, anarchist

delegates are only empowered to express the perspective of their union or locality. Legislative power remains at the base level while allowing collective self-management to scale up. This does not mean that such systems become hierarchical, rather they allow locally-grounded decision-making bodies to coordinate across large regions. Lately consensus has become so ubiquitous in certain horizontalist/anarchist circles that some don't realize that the majority of anarchists throughout history have implemented majoritarian voting.

The anarchists that Graeber referred to as “small-a” anarchists are generally those whose anarchism has grown out of the anti-authoritarian and countercultural currents of the Cold War era rather than “classical” anarchism. They tend to create smaller, less formally structured groups and collectives that operate by consensus, associate with more countercultural milieux, and focus on non-class politics such as environmentalism or feminism. “Small-a” anarchist collectives are essentially examples of small-scale horizontalism infused with anarchist politics. This is unsurprising considering the fact that horizontalism and “small-a” anarchism grew out of the same post-war constellation of non-hierarchical, consensus oriented groups discussed above, and “small-a” anarchists were among the original organizers of many recent manifestations of popular horizontalism. This demonstrates that, to some extent, horizontalism grew out of certain strains of anarchism. They part ways, however, when horizontal practice is divorced from anti-authoritarian politics. Certainly some anarchists eventually disowned the horizontalist movements they helped create because they allegedly strayed too far in a popular and/ or reformist direction away from the more intentional and explicitly radical designs some of their early organizers had envisioned. Yet, pro-mass-movement anarchists (whether of a “smaller” orientation or not) have continued to play important roles in horizontalist movements because they see them as opportunities to promote elements of anarchist politics

on a large scale.

I was certainly among those who joined Occupy Wall Street in order to advance the movement's non-hierarchical agenda and infuse it with more anarchist content while maintaining its popular appeal. I made a case for such an approach in my book *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* where I documented how 72% of OWS organizers in New York City had explicitly anarchist or implicitly anarchistic politics (Bray 2013). For these anarchist(ic) organizers, and their counterparts in other movements, the horizontalist movement is a broad, dynamic space where popular struggles can interact with revolutionary politics, ideally shifting through such comingling. Such struggles are opportunities for anarchists to reclaim the mantle of democracy and attack what they consider to be the fraud of hierarchical, capitalist, representative government. In the United States, for example, anarchists have had some of their greatest successes winning liberals and centrists over to their ideas by arguing that nonhierarchical direct democracy is the only true democracy. In a country where the ideal, if not the actual practice, of democracy is universally revered, such arguments can strike a popular chord.

Yet not all anarchists have been equally enamored with the squares movements. Some anarchists rejected Occupy either because their local encampment truly was reformist (the politics of the many Occupy encampments ranged widely) or because they were hostile to popular politics that was not explicitly anarchist (Bray 2013, 168). In Spain, for instance, many anarchists supported and participated in their 15M movement for similar reasons as the anarchists of Occupy, but a significant number withheld their full support because they considered the movement to be reformist (Taibo 2011; 2014). Even when some of the anarchist unions wanted to support a 15M march, for example, they were frustrated by the movement's refusal to have unions and parties march with their flags which

stemmed from the 15M's desire to remain "non-sectarian."

Another interesting element of the relationship between the 15M and Spanish anarchists is that they generally don't attempt to reclaim the mantle of "democracy" from the political parties and government. For example, a popular 15M chant goes "They call it democracy, *and it isn't*." Once, however, I was marching near a group of anarchists who sarcastically chanted "They call it democracy, and it is!" Here, the intent of the chant is to convince listeners that the corruption and disregard for the masses that epitomized the government is inherent to its very nature. From an anarchist perspective, that is what governmental "democracy" is and will always be. In part this stems from the popular association between the post-Franco parliamentary regime and the term "democracy." For many Spaniards, the government that has been in power since the 1970s is "*la democracia*," and therefore the term has more of a specific meaning than in the United States, where it is understood more as an egalitarian decision-making method that the government allegedly happens to embody.

In 2013, the Spanish Grupos Anarquistas Coordinados (Coordinated Anarchist Groups) published a little book called *Contra la democracia* (Against Democracy). This book created quite a stir in Spain in December 2014 when it was cited as evidence to support the arrest in Catalonia and Madrid of eleven people from Spain, Italy, Uruguay, and Austria accused of being members of what the state claimed was "a terrorist organization of an anarchist nature" responsible for "several bomb attacks" ("Catalan Police" 2014). In what came to be known as Operation Pandora, seven of the original eleven were held on terrorist charges because they had "Riseup" e-mail accounts, owned copies of *Contra la democracia*, and were found with a canister of camping gas. Later, the Chilean anarchist Francisco Javier Solar, who was ultimately convicted with fellow Chilean Mónica Caballero of bombing the Pilar Basilica in

Zaragoza in 2013, denied accusations of being one of the text's main authors (Pérez 2016).

Given the importance that the authorities placed on this text, one might assume that it's a bloodthirsty bomb-making manual, but in fact, it's simply a historical analysis and critique of democracy. The book's introduction concludes by arguing that "If we believe that democracy is liberty we will never stop being slaves. We will unmask this great lie! We will construct anarchy" (Grupos Anarquistas Coordinados 2013, 8). Later, in its only reference to the 15M, the text attacks the movement, because it "asks for electoral reforms that benefit the small political parties ... it propagates citizenism (*ciudadanismo*) as ideology; a 'democratization' of the police ... [and] the total pacification of conflicts through mediation and delegation by a corps of social services professionals" (Grupos Anarquistas Coordinados 2013, 68). Yet, despite these critiques of "*democracia*" and the 15M, the authors of this text are not against all directly democratic organizing. They advocate the creation of networks of social centers, free schools, and other bodies "to build a new society capable of freely self-managing (the only real sense that the term 'democracy' could have) ..." (Grupos Anarquistas Coordinados 2013, 66). That, of course, is exactly what anarchists who call for true direct democracy have in mind. *Contra la democracia* shows us that although many anarchists in Spain and elsewhere may have a very similar vision of the future self-management of a post-capitalist society, some find it strategically useful to fight to reclaim "democracy" while others seek to permanently discard it.

Much of the reluctance that anarchists have had in getting involved in the Spanish 15M and other movements has had to do with the prevalent tendency of horizontalist mass movements to be siphoned into non-horizontal, electoral politics. The allure of representative government is so powerful that although early on movements may proclaim "*¡Que se vayan todos!*" ("Get

rid of them all!”) in Argentina or “*¡Que no nos representan!*” (“They don’t represent us!”) in Spain, frequently such cries are transformed into calls for horizontalism to be extended into office through the ballot box. Often such arguments are couched in terms of the perspective that after the initial wave of protest has raised awareness about an issue, what is necessary is to transition into the “serious work of making concrete change” through governing. In Spain, the most significant party that grew out of the 15M was *Podemos* (We can) which has formed electoral coalitions with other similar parties and platforms like Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) and *Ganemos Madrid* (Let’s win Madrid) which calls for the promotion of “democratic municipalism” and the creation of political structures that are “democratic, horizontal, inclusive, and participatory ...” (Ganemos Madrid 2016). Their rhetoric is rife with horizontalist references to “autonomy” and “*autogestión*” (self-management). They essentially claim to be merging the spirit and ideals of horizontalist assembly with the lamentable “necessity” of taking office. Moreover, they fully embrace horizontalism’s antagonism toward formal ideology by rejecting the left/right binary and eschewing the usual trappings of leftism. Yet, within a year *Podemos* had already drastically moderated its platform to cater to the electoral center, thereby alienating a number of the party’s more leftist leaders who later resigned (“Spain’s Poll-Topping” 2014; Hedgecoe 2016). After the June 2016 elections *Podemos* leader Pablo Iglesias announced that it was time for his unconventional horizontalist party to become “normalized,” and enter a phase “of much more conventional politics.” He even went so far as to argue that “this idiocy that we used to say when we were of the extreme left that things change in the street and not in the institutions is a lie” (Ríos 2016).

Turkish anarchists also formulated critiques of horizontalism. As the Gezi Park occupation movement of 2013 in Istanbul’s Taksim Square developed, the Turkish anarchist organization *Devrimci Anarşist*

Faaliyet (Revolutionary Anarchist Action, DAF) distributed hundreds of copies of a pamphlet it had written called “An anarchist criticism to ‘Occupy’ as an activity of ‘99%.’” The pamphlet sought to diagnose what the group perceived to be the reformism and depoliticization of Occupy. It argued that the tactics of Occupy have “worn a libertarian discourse but [are] far far away from practicing it ...” and instead the movement tended, in their eyes, “to consume concepts such as occupy, direct democracy, freedom, action etc.” While the pamphlet contains many insightful critiques of Occupy, certain elements of the authors’ analysis suffered from the extreme distance separating them from events on the ground. At a meeting with several of the pamphlet’s authors years later at the DAF office in Istanbul, I had the opportunity to answer their questions and clarify some misconceptions that they and many others had developed about Occupy Wall Street through the press and speak about the centrality of anarchist organizers. Nevertheless, the heart of their critique about the misapplication of libertarian principles applied to many (if not most) Occupy encampments and horizontalist movements in general. Despite the presence of DAF and their pamphlet, the Gezi Park movement also experienced electoral spinoffs such as the Gezi Party. Seeking to remain true to the movement’s horizontalism, the party claimed that its leaders would only act as “spokespersons” (“Official Gezi Party” 2013).

Similar developments would have unfolded during the Occupy movement in the United States if it weren’t for the narrowness of the two party system. Yet, several years later, many former Occupiers campaigned for Bernie Sanders in his failed bid for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Certainly many who participated in Occupy before supporting Sanders were simply leftists who travel from one manifestation of left populism to the next without any allegiance to (or often direct knowledge of) horizontalism. Others, however, attempted to argue that the Sanders campaign was an

extension of Occupy. This was manifest in an article titled “Occupy the Party” from the Not An Alternative collective that appealed to former Occupiers to treat the campaign “like any street or park and occupy it” (Not An Alternative 2016). In the name of pragmatic populism, this article sought to drain the term “occupy” of its associations with direct action, direct democracy, “leaderlessness,” and revolutionary politics to convince readers that it can be used as a catchy shorthand for buying into the cult of personality developing around a moderate social democrat attempting to burrow into a stratified, capitalist political party. From an anarchist perspective, parks and streets are terrain of struggle that can be occupied because non-hierarchical, direct action politics can be transplanted onto them. Working within political parties, especially those like the Democratic Party, requires jettisoning those practices and incorporating oneself into the party structure. As the Irish Workers Solidarity Movement organizer Andrew Flood (2014) argued in his essay “An anarchist critique of horizontalism,” “horizontalism without a vision and method for revolution simply provides protest fodder behind which one government can be replaced with another.” Indeed, many anti-horizontal organizers, have been perfectly willing to humor the directly democratic “quirks” of horizontalist movements while biding their time waiting for opportunities to convert popular upheavals into “protest fodder” for reformist objectives cloaked in the imagery of rebellion.

Conclusion

Debates over electoral participation within horizontalist movements are merely the latest rounds of a conflict that has challenged the broader socialist movement since the nineteenth century. Although his position changed several times, ever since Proudhon advocated electoral abstention in 1857 in response to the authoritarianism of Napoleon III, conflicts over electoralism have raged (Graham 2015, 62). Historically anarchists have opposed parliamentary participation for a variety of reasons, including their opposition to the hierarchical

nature of representation, their rejection of the social democratic notion that it is possible to vote away capitalism (a goal that social democrats eventually discarded), and their argument that, as Mikhail Bakunin phrased it, “worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment ... will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become ... perhaps even more bourgeois than the Bourgeois themselves” (quoted in Graham 2015, 116).

In 1979 a group of German radicals attempted to bypass the dichotomy of socialist workers’ parties and anarchist abstentionism to create a non-hierarchical “anti-party” that would operate based on consensus and rotate their representatives to preserve their commitment to direct democracy. This attempt to stuff horizontalism into the ballot box was called the Green Party. Despite the best of intentions, internal conflicts and “realist” calls for “pragmatism” doomed the party once it entered parliament. Within less than a decade it had become simply another left party (Katsiaficas 1997, 205–208).

In the wake of the sectarian strife of the twentieth century, many radicals have found refuge in the anti-ideological ideology of horizontalism. Yet, as we can see, it is often insufficient to guarantee truly horizontal and non-hierarchical outcomes. Even apart from electoralism, horizontalist movements have at times struggled to counteract the encroachment of patriarchal, homophobic, transphobic, white supremacist, and ableist tendencies that inevitably come when broad swaths of society are suddenly brought together. I can still hear the common refrain of many white men in Occupy Wall Street that we had “lost sight of Wall Street” as our main focus when we addressed race or gender. Horizontalist movements spread notions of direct democracy, direct action, mutual aid, and autonomy far and wide. This is incredibly important insofar as they influence broader cultures of resistance and extend beyond the standard reach of most ^{radicalism}. Since political ideologies are digested whole only by

their most committed militants, shifting political sentiments and practices in mass contexts is essential. Yet, the horizontalist reliance on form over content runs the risk of producing a muddled populism that is easily redirected away from its non-hierarchical origins. As the work of Michael Freeden (1996) suggests, the meaning of horizontalism shifts depending on its political content. From an anarchist perspective, this illustrates the value of anarchism's holistic analysis of the

interrelatedness of all forms of domination and the interconnectedness of forms of self-management and their political outcomes. While they differed on the details, anarchists from Mikhail Bakunin to Errico Malatesta, from Nestor Makhno to the creators of the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (FAI) in Spain have agreed on the need for anarchists to collectively engage with mass movements to disseminate their truly horizontal political visions.



Notes

1. I would like to thank Stephen Roblin, Deric Shannon, Miguel Pérez, Özgür Oktay, and Yesenia Barragan for their insightful feedback and helpful information.
2. By “leaderless,” Occupy and others really referred to the absence of institutional leadership, not the absence of those who lead. Hence the shift some made toward the term “leaderful” which implied that in a horizontalist movement anyone could become a leader by getting involved.
3. I use the terms “federal” and “federalism” to refer to broadly decentralized forms of organization. Certainly the anarchist use of the terms “federation” or “confederation” to describe their organizations, such as the *Fédération Anarchiste* in France and Belgium or the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* in Spain, entails a greater level of decentralization than the federal state advocated by federalist republicans. Nevertheless, there is a shared tendency

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Our Vision

We are an organization of revolutionaries who share common visions of a new world – a world where people collectively control their own workplaces, communities and land and where all basic needs are met. A world where power and participation flow from the bottom upwards and society is organized for peoples’ aspirations, passions, and needs rather than profit, white supremacy and racial domination, patriarchy, or imperialism; and where we live sustainably with the planet.

About Us

Black Rose Anarchist Federation / Federación Anarquista Rosa Negra (BRRN) is a revolutionary political organization with locals in over a dozen cities sharing a common set of politics and working towards a shared strategic vision of how to build “popular power” in workplaces, neighborhoods and all sectors of society. Contact us for more info.

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