

Objections to Councilism

In response to “More Minneapolis Anarchy”

John Zerzan
E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

FE Note: This is a response to “More Minneapolis Anarchy,” the letters beginning on page 15 of this issue.

The desire to maintain the technology developed under Capital’s reign after a libertarian revolution demands that it continue to be administered. The very scope of the productive process means that a similarly large deliberative and decision-making apparatus would exist to coordinate its functions. Those within the anti-authoritarian milieu, usually anarcho-syndicalists or councilists, advocate worker self-management through a system of councils as the best way to democratically and non-bureaucratically administer the capitalist means of production in a manner consistent with a revolutionary vision.

However, to many of us, the very existence of the productive apparatus at the center of human activity, with its accompanying productivist world view, maintains the separation it has created and negates the possibility of constructing a human community. No matter how strident the call for councils may seem within the context of capitalist relationships, in revolutionary terms, it should be seen as fundamentally conservative in the precise meaning of the word—conserving what is.

The following, by John Zerzan, is an outline of a large and complex subject, and, hence, inadequate for a full discourse on self-management and syndicalism. Hopefully, it will serve as the basis for further discussion. Letter-length replies are welcomed.

Objections to Councilism (short form)

(A) The Adorno-type objection to ideological imposition on the future, which says the shape of freedom is not theorizable because that blueprinting closes off other (possibly more radical) departures.

(B) As a definition of anarchy, councilism is rejected: if emancipation consists of no rule, rule by councils is not emancipatory. Anarchy is not democracy insofar as it disallows any form of government.

(C) The critique of technological civilization and division of labor seeks to dissolve production; councilism is a means of directing industrial production. A world in which technology is absent has obviously no need of such coordination of specialization and economy.

(D) If the condition of worker is to be abolished, as it is already being refused in partial ways, workers councils are backward because they perpetuate it in their fundamental workerism.

(E) If representation is a negative value, councilism fails on a strictly “organizational” level. To be represented is a humiliation. Further, delegates and recall have always been, in practice, direct routes to bureaucratization and the rule of experts,(consult all trade union history).

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