

ANARCHISTS AND LABOR UNIONS: AN ANALYSIS USING NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES

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The goal of this article is to explore the characteristics of North American anarchists who are union members. New social movement (NSM) theories suggest that movements have changed in recent decades to focus less on economic issues and have divorced themselves from the working class. The union membership of anarchists is related to subjective working-class status, age, being from North America, economic anarchist ideology, anarchist movement participation, and activist identity. Given these findings, it is questionable how well the arguments offered by NSM theories—specifically a postmaterialist focus and emphasis upon collective cultural identity—are able to describe anarchists.

This article focuses on two questions. First, as a historically working-class movement, do contemporary anarchists still belong to unions? Second, if they do, in which ways do the characteristics of anarchists relate to new social movement (NSM) theories, which see a shift to postmaterialist activism? Anarchists constitute one of the most active, radical wings of many social movements throughout the world. Understanding who these anarchists are is important to seeing where these movements are headed.

Before we can explore these questions, it is important to know just who “anarchists” are. Anarchists—those who ascribe to a philosophy that rejects authority and domination—are active in various left-wing movements throughout North America and the world (Epstein 1991; Graeber 2002; Shantz 2003). There has been increased focus upon anarchists in recent years, particularly as participants of anticorporate globalization and anticapitalist protests. Much scholarly research has focused upon historic anarchist movements (see Ackelsberg 1991; Avrich 1995; Dirlik 1991; Fernandez 2001; Freire 2001; Hodges 1995), as well as some qualitative case studies of various present-day anarchistic organizations (Boehrer 2000; Graeber 2002; Ingalsbee 1996; Maiba 2005; O’Brien 1999; O’Connor 1999; Roy 2003; Shantz and Adam 1999).

However, most scholarly work on anarchism has been scarce and academics have only recently increased their focus on modern-day anarchism. An international community of anarchist scholars has grown in recent years, leading to the founding of the British peer-reviewed journal *Anarchist Studies*, a grant-giving

foundation for anarchist research called the Institute for Anarchist Studies, an annual theoretical conference called Renewing the Anarchist Tradition, various online forums for anarchist academics, and other projects. Yet, the English-speaking academy has rarely studied the anarchist movement itself *as a social movement*. Further, quantitative research on the current anarchist movement's composition, beliefs, and current political activities has been wholly nonexistent.

If anarchism today is an "NSM"—like the environmental, peace, or women's movements—then a large anarchist working-class constituency or a movement emphasis upon class and labor issues should be indiscernible. In particular, a major social movement organization in the past century—the labor union—ought to be invisible within anarchism. It is claimed that anarchists tend not to participate in unions and labor-oriented campaigns, for varied reasons including differing culture, backgrounds, organizations, and tactics (Sheppard 2002). Is this true? What *would* explain the participation of anarchists in labor unions? Additionally, there is much evidence suggesting that the middle class is the economic class most directly engaged in social and political change activism today (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989). Is the working class thus invisible in the current anarchist movement? In order to explore the above assumptions, responses from the survey of a prominent anarchist website are analyzed. The anarchist movement is explored through its membership in a commonplace organization, the labor union. The analysis uses some theoretical arguments from NSM theories. A more complete analysis of the relationship between NSM theories and the anarchist movement must remain a future research project.

Three connected research literatures need to be brought together to address the aforementioned research questions. First, anarchism and the anarchist movement will be discussed. Second, the theories loosely referred to as "NSMs" will be introduced. Finally, the interaction between anarchism and unions is briefly detailed.

Anarchism

Anarchism is a social and political philosophy that has formally been around since the mid-nineteenth century in the West, with the first modern anarchist sentiments expressed by William Godwin and Joseph-Pierre Proudhon. Anarchism is often viewed as an outgrowth of classical liberalism that seeks the liberation of people from authority and domination (Chomsky 1973). Anarchism advocates the removal of all unnecessary authoritarian and hierarchical social institutions (such as capitalism and the centralized nation-state), to be replaced by cooperative, horizontal, and egalitarian relationships (Ehrlich 1996; Ward 1996). This view of anarchism, held by anarchist activists themselves, contradicts the popular view expressed in the mass media and education system. Anarchists are usually portrayed as bomb-throwers, violent nihilists, or chaos-creators who advocate a dog-eat-dog world. Such a perception is predictable, given the long history of anti-anarchist propaganda and media presentation (Cobb-Reiley 1988; Hong 1992).

Although anarchism is frequently lumped together in the same philosophical boat with communism for highly valuing equality, anarchism rejects state power (Chirot 1986). As such, anarchists and communists have often been politically at odds with one another. Anarchists advocate direct action, as opposed to indirect action (such as with elections) to accomplish the necessary functions of society (De Cleyre 2004). Direct action empowers people individually and collectively, to avoid reliance upon and restriction by authority figures. In the absence of authority figures, anarchists voluntarily associate with people and organizations of their choice in order to coordinate their participation in society (McKay 2008; Ward 1996). Anarchists offer mutual aid and solidarity to those who require assistance and assume that this will reciprocate to them if the need arises. Historically, anarchists believe that self-determination is best achieved at smaller scales, and thus often act within small organizations, one being the “affinity group” (Bookchin 2004). In these anarchist organizations, decisions are made by a consensus process or by direct democracy. Complex organizations are created for broader functions and needs, organizations such as collectives, coalitions, federations, and spokes-councils (Graeber 2002; Polletta 2002). Anarchists envision a decentralized world composed of interlocking networks and federations.

There has been a resurgence of anarchism—as a stateless, socialist alternative to capitalism—since the fall of the Soviet Union (Day 2003). The modern-day anarchist movement is a multicause movement that works toward the aforementioned ends and seeks to interject its radical ideas into other social movements. Anarchists have been active in the feminist, antiracist, global justice, environmental, and peace/antiwar movements. Increasingly widespread use of the Internet has also increased access to anarchist ideas and information, and allowed anarchists to communicate with each other (Owens and Palmer 2003)—ironically within a technological medium that is itself highly anarchistic.

Shantz (2003) argues that resistance movements (and anarchism in particular) that want “no part of the world order, new or otherwise” (90) have been neglected by social movement literature. He argues that most social movement theory only considers movements that are trying to influence or become part of the existing system, as opposed to replacing the entire order. This scholarly shortcoming is important because of heightened participation by anarchists in recent years in both North America and throughout the world, and increased media coverage (e.g., Elliott 1999; Kahn 2000) following demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle during 1999 that anarchists had a pivotal role in planning (Crass 2001). As such, anarchism as both a political tendency and as a movement deserves more attention by sociologists and social movement researchers. This article begins to address this deficit in research.

Why study the anarchist movement and why now? The reappearance of anarchists in the popular media is one reason for studying them. The anticorporate globalization or global justice movement is rife with the participation of anarchists and is accompanied by the deployment of anarchistic ideas and practices (Epstein 2001). A second reason for studying anarchists is the explicitly anticapitalist nature of their societal critique. Economic exploitation

via capitalism is presented as an ill as sinister as the white supremacist exploitation of racial differences, patriarchal domination via gender differences, or political oppression via the state. The radical critique of capitalism by anarchists is usually seen as out-of-step with popular, mainstream social movements. However, this view is being challenged, with the emergence of social movements that contain strong anticapitalist sentiments (Kirchner 2003; Martin 2004).

The range of concern for the anarchist movement is far more diverse than it was a century ago, when its primary focus was economic; the main groupings at that time were collectivists and individualists—who concerned themselves with collective and individual freedom, respectively (Nettlau 2001). Contemporary anarchists have ideologically branched out into other issues not widely part of social movements in the past. This new diversity can be seen in how anarchists sometimes identify with particular strains or tendencies, often noted in the prefix or suffix applied to their ideology label. People who call themselves “social anarchists” focus on general social injustices and hierarchy (Bookchin 1995, Ehrlich 1996). “Anarcha-feminists” deal with gender-related issues, such as reproductive choice, domestic violence, and forms of patriarchic domination (Dark Star 2002). “Eco-anarchists” emphasize a tandem focus upon environmental defense (of places such as old-growth forests), and protest of corporate and government destruction of the environment (Foreman and Bookchin 2001; Purchase 1997). “Anarcho-communists” emphasize egalitarian, communist values such as producer and consumer cooperatives and collective ownership of all the means of production in society (Berkman 2003). Finally, “anarcho-syndicalists” advocate worker control and ownership over the means of production in the workplace, often practiced in the form of radical unionism (Rocker 1990).

Presumably, if one chooses to claim a specific orientation as those mentioned above, such self-identification reflects a tendency toward certain actions. For example, those with an anarcho-syndicalist focus may be more likely to join and organize labor unions. There are also those who identify as “anarchists without adjectives,” which signifies a tolerance for all the various ideological strains (De Cleyre 2004; Nettla 1996). Although seemingly disparate in nature, all the aforementioned strains are linked and grounded by a common rejection of hierarchical authority and domination, and the desire to address society’s problems in a fashion that allows for self-determination and cooperation.

NSMs

NSM theories offer the best vantage point to interrogate the popular claim alleged in the media that the anarchist movement is strictly middle class or that the movement is not active in class-related issues. NSM theories speak more directly of the individual characteristics of movement participants rather than just the organizational structures they utilize, which are expected to be network-oriented. A number of central NSM arguments are tested in this article. Yet, as Buechler (1995) points out, NSM theory is not really a cohesive theory, but is

best identified as a set of theories. This research is able to directly interrogate three key aspects of NSM theories found in the anarchist movement; according to Sutton and Vertigans (2006), these three aspects include postindustrial and postmaterial politics, new social constituencies, and new identities.

Touraine (1981) argues that western societies exist in an era of postindustrialism, and consequently, modern social movements differ from earlier movements. Conflict is categorically different today. Thus, as Habermas (1987) suggests, movements revolve less around matters of class, and more around politics and culture such as racial equality, feminism, peace, the environment, and local issues. In North America, most anarchistic franchise organizations fall into these categories: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), Anti-Racist Action, Animal Liberation Front, Earth First!, Earth Liberation Front, and Food Not Bombs.¹ A brief overview of the data used in this research confirms a wide variety of interests, goals, and campaigns for anarchists. As such, Cohen (1985) argues “Unlike the Old Left, actors involved in contemporary movements do not view themselves in terms of a socioeconomic class” (667).²

The NSMs are not well understood via traditional class analysis. The working class is less engaged in movement activism than the “new middle class,” persons who may come from the public service, educational, and artistic sectors of the economy (Offe 1985). NSM theories also focused upon identities, particularly new ones that are emergent within a cultural domain rather than an economic one. While identity is present in older and class-based movements, NSM theories argue that identity is used to create self-realization and autonomy outside of the existent system as opposed to be merely absorbed by that system.

While it is generally clear that the focus of anarchists themselves have changed from earlier generations, it is less clear how anarchist demographics or the anarchist movement itself have changed. Anarchists appear to be embracing a broader philosophy and issue-focus than in the past. Does this suggest that the anarchist movement belongs in the NSMs category? Or, if the picture is less clear, does it merely support part of the NSM theory, yet not others?

The most confusing—or perhaps misleading—part of NSM theories is the “new” in its name. It is the theories that are truly new, not the movements themselves, as Calhoun (1993) and others have shown (Tucker 1991; Bagguley 1992). It would be impossible to say whether the anarchist movement is an “NSM” as the environmental movement has been viewed in early interpretations of NSM theories. Pichardo (1997) also criticizes NSM for a number of reasons. He points out that NSM theories focus solely on left-wing movements, to the neglect of right-wing and reactionary movements. NSM ideas lack solid empirical evidence and as such tend to be more theoretical. Finally, Pichardo (1997) claims that NSM theory is less a brand new theory than just an *addition* to social movement theory.

Despite such misunderstandings and shortcomings, there are hints that a movement with a long and evolving history, like anarchism, is ripe for interpretation by NSM theories. Della Porta and Rucht (1995) note the strong left-libertarian nature of NSMs, an ideological orientation that is familiar to

most anarchists. Bookchin (1989) observes that “the new social movements share a libertarian ambience,” as well as other similarities such as the tendency for decentralization, affinity groups, confederation, and “anti-hierarchicalism” (270). Offe (1985) states that NSMs differ from traditional social movements by focusing on values of autonomy and identity, organizing with decentralization, self-government, and self-help in mind, and tend to be *ad hoc*, egalitarian, and nonhierarchical—incidentally all strong anarchist values. Bagguley (1992) argues that such values are not necessarily new tendencies, which is also true for the anarchist movement; classic anarchist theorists (like Proudhon [c.f. Guerin 2005] and Bakunin [1970]) wrote about these values well before disciplines like sociology were established to even debate them.

Yet, what of Touraine and Habermas’ suggestion that society is postindustrial and that conflict is non- or posteconomic? For example, Sheppard (2002) claims—albeit without quantitative analysis—that anarchists are less likely to organize and belong to unions than in the past, and that they instead choose to find other work if their current job is disagreeable. Sheppard hypothesizes that this is because of the class collusion and reformism of the modern labor movement, perpetual stereotypes of macho union members, and the punk subculture of rejection that contemporary anarchism draws heavily from. He opines that “Young anarchists often correctly see the organized labor movement as not radical at all, but as a backwards force embodying the worst kinds of provincialism and political maneuvering” (para. 6). Sheppard’s generalizations appear to place anarchism within the NSM framework. If anarchism *does* reject union activism, then Cohen’s (1985) observations would support the notion of the anarchist movement as an NSM: “Instead of forming unions or political parties . . . [NSMs] focus on grass-roots politics and create horizontal, directly democratic associations that are loosely federated on national levels” (667).

Still, anarchists have clearly offered critiques on economic issues. Anarchists are thoroughly opposed to the economic regime of capitalism; they view it as oppressive, alienating, brutal, inefficient, and unnecessary (see Sheppard 2003 for a summary). There is a highly visible presence of anarchists and anarchism within the global justice movement and its struggles against international financial institutions (like the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund). There has recently been a growth in so-called “platformist” anarchist organizations in North America founded on anarcho-communist principles, regularly engaging themselves in working-class economic struggles. Finally, specific anarchistic franchise organizations have overtly economic intentions: Food Not Bombs works with the homeless against misplaced economic priorities on war making in place of social needs; Homes Not Jails helps to squat unused housing as protest against the growing prison industrial complex and the lack of affordable housing in certain U.S. cities; and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—despite their name’s reference to “industrialism”—have taken to organizing syndicalist unions at workplaces that other unions have overlooked, including food cooperatives and Starbucks baristas.³ Even though class has not disappeared as an anarchist concern, are

working-class anarchists the ones doing this activism? Or is anarchist organizing within the working class being conducted by the middle class?

Unions

Unions are considered to be a central social movement organization of “old social movements.” By definition, unions are composed of individuals from the working classes. People who hold management status within corporations or other work organizations cannot be members of a labor union. Because of this, unions have very strong links to the “working class.” Although unions have traditionally been composed of people who do “blue-collar” labor, there has been a shift in recent decades toward more nonindustrial union organizing, specifically in service sector jobs and even professionals. For instance, in the anarcho-syndicalist IWW union, many chapters represent service workers (e.g., recyclers, coffee shop baristas, printers, pizza shop cooks, and public service workers). Yet, the phrase “working class” is an amorphous one. To be working class usually requires that one has a nonprofessional, nonmanagerial occupation. Others describe the class in terms of its overall location in the class structure—toward the bottom. Those who identify with this label may be manual laborers, or possibly anyone who works for a living and takes orders from someone else. These perceived differences will be discussed later.

A critique of unions is particularly relevant because of anarchism’s central place within the labor movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the importance anarchism placed upon working-class organizing (Berkman 2003; Brecher 1997; Goldman 1970; Rocker 1990). The IWW, for instance, was a major force in U.S. labor history, helping to unite native-born and immigrant workers in a wide range of industries into “One Big Union” that wielded substantial clout (Kornbluh 1998).

Anarchists have had a long-standing, working relationship with the labor movement and class issues. Famous anarchists like Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and Rudolf Rocker worked with unions. The Spanish Civil War in the 1930s involved an anarchist union called the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, under which millions organized during that country’s tumultuous political and social changes (Alexander 1998; Bookchin 1977). It is safe to say that nearly all of anarchism’s “Golden Age” activists and authors saw labor as the major point of societal conflict, although opinions differed on working with various unions.

The lack of present-day anarchist participation in unions and the labor movement that Sheppard (2002) refers could be symptomatic of larger trends, such as the move toward a more service-based economy and the widespread creation of “McJobs” (Klein 1999; Schlosser 2002). More generally, there has been a steady decline in union membership in the U.S. during the last two decades (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004). Anarchists like Sheppard and others (Chomsky 1973; Dolgoff 1977) have advocated a direct engagement with the labor movement, potentially along the lines of anarcho-syndicalism and radical trade unions (like the IWW), revolutionary working-class organizations

(Goodway 2004), or participation in wholly owned worker cooperatives (as detailed in Rothschild-Whitt 1979).

There are contemporary anarchists who organize with class in mind (particularly with the working class), such as the IWW in the U.S. and the Class War Federation of Great Britain (Class War Federation 1992). However, modern anarchists and radical Marxists (Goodway 2004; DeLeon 1996; Meltzer 1996; Pannekoek 2003) have frequently—and cynically—characterized modern trade union leaders as “class traitors,” noting leaders’ collusion with large corporations against workers’ class interests. This analysis is also present in Marxism (Robinson 1988). Aronowitz (1973) has argued that formally recognized unions also act as a pressure valve to release interclass tensions (like strikes), thus avoiding explosive situations, and today exist as a way to regulate conflict via “business unionism.” Additionally, unions today are subservient to both capital and major political parties, like the Democratic Party in the U.S. (Aronowitz 2005). Michels (1949) observed an “iron law of oligarchy”—which he saw present in large trade unions—where increases in size led organizations away from democracy toward oligarchy. All these critical characterizations are often moderated by the observation that the idea of a union is not itself the problem; the bureaucratic and hierarchical way in which many are run is enough to keep many anarchists at arm’s length. If unions are the central social movement organization of “old social movements,” do present-day anarchists belong to such organizations? If they do, what characteristics explain their memberships?

Data and Methods

This work posits anarchism within a loose NSM framework and begins an analysis of the North American anarchists and their various characteristics and attitudes, analysis that until now has been severely lacking. The analysis aims to see how union members are associated with the independent variables measuring socioeconomic status, ideology, and identity.

Sample

For this study, data were extracted from a 2002 user survey of the prominent North American anarchist website, the Mid-Atlantic Infoshop (<http://www.infoshop.org>; herein referred to as “Infoshop”). Previous mass media research has shown that Infoshop is an online nexus for anarchist information (including “counterpropaganda”) and links to other anarchist websites (Owens and Palmer 2003). The full survey includes 968 responses.

Although some have expressed concern that Web surveys do not achieve representative samples comparable to the general population, Koch and Emrey (2001) determined that Web surveys *were* a suitable method for surveying marginalized populations, such as gays and lesbians in their study. Thus, studying another marginalized population like anarchists with an online survey

is appropriate. Yet, to use a survey with an unknown response rate, it is important to emphasize that the following results only summarize Infoshop users who took the survey, not anarchists more generally, although similarities should be expected. The Infoshop survey includes some respondents who are unemployed (the majority of whom are under eighteen years of age); these people are removed from the analysis based on the premise that it is not possible for them to be union members based on their employment status.

Measures

Dependent Variable. The variable of focus in this study is union membership. User responses were dummy coded; thus, if a respondent identified himself/herself as a union member, he/she is assigned a 1 value (true), or a 0 value (false) if not a union member. Respondents who answered affirmative to the union question in the Infoshop survey are compared to those who report not belonging to a union. The reader should note that union membership could be in a workplace union that engages in collective bargaining or in a voluntary association like the IWW that is not necessarily tied to an organized workplace.

Explanatory Variables. The following variables measuring ideology and identity are dummy coded. The variable “economic anarchist” is created from two possible responses to a question asking respondents to select their political ideology that are both economic and anarchist in focus: “anarcho-communist” or “anarcho-syndicalist” (1 = yes). These two ideologies emphasize the importance of attention to class and economic issues. All other responses to ideology were dummy coded as 0 = no, including “regular” anarchists. Those who simply called themselves “anarchists” might sympathize with the same values as economic anarchists or may *additionally* identify as such, but they are still dummy coded 0 as economic anarchists in this study.

People who identify as part of the anarchist movement are measured as a dummy code (1 = yes, 0 = no). Other responses included “I consider myself an anarchist, but am not part of any movement,” “I lean towards anarchism, but don’t call myself an anarchist,” and “I don’t consider myself to be an anarchist.” Also, if respondents answered “yes” to “do you consider yourself to be an activist?” they were coded 1 (0 = no).

The following socioeconomic status and demographic characteristics are used. The variable “working class” is from responses to economic background (includes “dirt poor” and “working class, blue/pink/white collar”) and is coded 1 = yes, while 0 = no, and includes both middle- and upper-class respondents. Because “class” is a subjective measure here—and not something derived from one’s income, family network, or lifestyle—it measures class *identification*. “Age” is a continuous variable. Other standard demographic variables are controlled for, such as race and gender: “White” (response to race): 1 = yes, while 0 includes Asian, African-American, Latino, indigenous, and “mixed”; “Female” (response to gender): 1 = yes, while 0 includes male and transgender/other.

The variable “North America” is drawn from responses to country of residence (includes “Canada,” “Mexico,” and “United States”) and is coded 1 = yes, and 0 for all other places of origin, predominantly European in the Infoshop survey.⁴ Although very few are in the survey, Mexicans are counted as North Americans because I assume that the proximity to the U.S. and other possible cultural similarities makes these respondents analogous to other North Americans (O’Connor 2003), despite the language difference (Infoshop.org is written overwhelmingly in English).

Results and Discussion

All Respondents

The first question presented at the outset of this article—*are anarchists still members of unions?*—is easily answered: yes. Twenty-four percent of respondents stated they belonged to a union. Although this percentage may seem higher than U.S. figures for union membership, one must take into account that this number is inflated by non-U.S. respondents (only 19 percent of U.S. respondents in the broader survey were in a union). Still, this is a higher figure than we would expect for a sample of the average working population. The other characteristics are equally telling. Nearly one-third of respondents placed their economic background in the working class. There may be a tendency for adherents to a radical political ideology like anarchism to consciously lean more toward a self-identification with the working class (as an oppressed group). Even if self-reported class is exaggerated, the survey still reflects remarkable levels of working-class participation in the larger movement. In general, the working class appeared more often in the survey than one would expect from a movement supposedly dominated by middle-class interests.

The average age was twenty-five years old. This result suggests that either anarchists are on average younger than the general population or that those anarchists who are likely to take an online survey about their politics are apt to be younger in age. The respondents appear to be a cohort of only one actual generation and that a minority of middle-age and older respondents skew the mean age to appear older than one might expect at first glance. Incidentally, as evidenced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (2004) study, this younger age group also tends to have the lowest union membership.

Respondents to the Infoshop survey differ from the general U.S. population in a number of other key ways—only 20 percent were female and 80 percent identified as white. North Americans constituted 85 percent of respondents, which reflects that nature of the orientation of the website and the fact that the survey was asked only in English.⁵ The descriptive statistics for all the variables in this study are shown in Table 1.

Respondents who specified an economic anarchist ideology (anarcho-communist or anarcho-syndicalist) accounted for 15 percent of responses. There may be far more who *would* identify or sympathize with these ideologies, but

Table 1. Infoshop Survey Respondent Union Membership and Other Characteristics

	N	Mean	SD
Union member	690	0.223	0.417
Working class	681	0.310	0.463
White	599	0.800	0.401
Female	630	0.202	0.402
Age	672	25.509	8.318
North American	684	0.854	0.354
Economic anarchist	688	0.148	0.356
Anarchist movement	675	0.542	0.499
Activist	692	0.710	0.454

Source: Infoshop 2002 User Survey.

Note: All variables except Age are coded 1 = yes and 0 = no.

Table 2. Means and Differences between Union and Nonunion Members from Infoshop Survey Respondents

Variable	Union member	Nonunion member
Working class	0.412**	0.282**
White	0.779	0.807
Female	0.166	0.214
Age	28.704***	24.453***
North American	0.776**	0.875**
Economic anarchist	0.265***	0.116***
Anarchist movement	0.620*	0.510*
Activist	0.771 [†]	0.690 [†]

***significant at the 0.1% level; **significant at the 1.0% level; *significant at the 5.0% level; [†]significant at the 10.0% level.

Source: Infoshop 2002 User Survey.

Note: All variables except Age are coded 1 = yes and 0 = no.

chose to respond simply with the more general answer of “anarchist” or “anarchist without adjective” (overall, 30 percent in the Infoshop survey chose such responses). Over one-half (54 percent) considered themselves to be part of the anarchist movement and 71 percent identified as activists. It is clear that anarchists in the Infoshop survey are overwhelmingly movement-oriented activists.

Differences by Union Membership

How did Infoshop survey respondents differ between those in unions and those not in unions? Table 2 presents mean differences between union and nonunion members. Predictably, those who self-identify as working class are significantly more likely to be in unions (41 percent) than nonunion members. The high working-class response to the Infoshop survey suggests that not all anarchists are middle-class activists, evidence contradicting the NSM assertion that modern movements are primarily composed of elements of the “new middle class.” These findings are made all the more curious given that the working class is likely to have restricted access to the Internet to complete Web surveys. However, it is interesting to note that the percentage of working-class union

members is not *higher* given the typical nature of unions as a working-class organization. It is conceivable that anarchist union members are drawn more from the public sector (such as teachers) and who thus may have a higher level of education and thus a more middle-class identity. Perhaps a more representative sample (if it were possible to obtain within a marginalized population like anarchists) would be helpful. A clearer question that distinguishes between self-identified and actual class status, or measures class differently perhaps via a typology like Wright's (1997) could make a better approach. Still, the logic would hold that people who relate more to the working class will act more on its behalf, particularly when that class status is self-identified and coupled with an activist identity.

Neither race nor gender differed significantly for respondents. This differs from mainstream union membership, which varies by race depending on union type and which tends to be more male than female (particularly in blue-collar, manufacturing work). In the Infoshop survey, there were more nonwhites and males in unions, but these levels compared to nonunion members were not significantly different.

Union members were older on average than nonunion members, nearly twenty-nine years old for members and twenty-four years old for nonmembers. The Infoshop survey includes many respondents who are young adults that have not perhaps begun "career jobs" that are more likely to have union representation. The standard deviation of respondents to age is roughly eight years (above or below twenty-five), and thus the survey is not capturing more than one generation. Young respondents are more likely to work at lower paying jobs, and as mentioned previously, jobs that are usually not represented by labor unions. This finding may also be partially explained by the need for security that increases with age due to familial obligations, health concerns, and the like. The need for security tends to lead people to find stable work, something provided by labor unions. Still, because these respondents are overwhelmingly anarchists—and not people who are likely to have an interest in becoming part of the corporate or state-world—there may be other explanations. Perhaps age causes an evolution in one's view of how change must occur in society. Youth tend to be more inclined toward impatience and want immediate, perhaps insurrectionary revolution—something unions are unlikely to provide. Also, there could be attrition within the anarchist movement and those attached to stable organizations like unions (whether anarcho-syndicalist or mainstream) are more likely to remain engaged and continuously supplied with resources, inspiration, and new members.

Fewer union members were North American (78 percent) than nonunion members (88 percent). This difference is also statistically significant. Because three-fifths of the non-North Americans in the Infoshop survey are Europeans, this difference could suggest varying intra-movement attitudes across the Atlantic Ocean, varying levels of unionization in the workforce, or higher numbers of labor-oriented organizations with the European anarchist movement. To give supporting evidence to the latter possibility, the Anarchist Yellow Pages

directory of anarchist organizations lists large numbers of class-based organizations (including syndicalist unions, IWW branches, or International Workers Association chapters) in countries like France, Spain, and Sweden—far more per capita than in either the U.S. or Canada (Williams and Lee 2008).

NSM theories place an emphasis upon ideology and identity—even if “economic” in nature. It is clear that when anarchists identify specifically with an economic ideology, they are more likely to belong to labor unions. There is a large and statistically significant difference between the percentage of economic anarchist union members and nonunion members. Those who identify as anarcho-communist or anarcho-syndicalist constitute 27 percent of members and less than 12 percent of nonmembers. This finding suggests that one’s political ideology—particularly the emphasis upon economics—is related to membership in unions. If an individual actively identifies as an economic anarchist—as opposed to just an anarchist—this commitment would seem to lead to acting on that “class struggle” ideology, at least by joining a union. However, there is the question of causal order here: does ideology cause union membership or vice-versa? It is possible that someone may take a job at a unionized workplace and begins to identify with an economic anarchist’s ideology, just as someone who possesses an ideology that drives him/her to seek out unionized employment, perhaps with the intention of influencing and radicalizing the union.

But there is an important caveat here that may explain a substantial part of this question. The IWW is the only explicitly anarchist union in the U.S. However, not all IWW members are organized in their workplace. Many general membership branches exist in the U.S.; thus, it is possible for anyone to be an IWW member without being part of a collective workplace bargaining unit. There are workplaces organized under the auspices of the IWW, but not all IWW members or chapters are affiliated with workplace unions. This possibility would suggest an even greater tendency (not to mention ease) for anarchists to ideologically affiliate themselves with unions even outside of their own economic interests. If this is the case, IWW members could base their membership upon identity as suggested by NSM theories. Given the structural inhibitors that prevent workers from joining unions (see a discussion of the American context in Clawson and Clawson (1999), it is amazing to note that a majority of workers would join a union if there was one to join. Perhaps having an ideologically inspired and general membership union has facilitated anarchist involvement in labor struggles.⁶

Infoshop respondents who saw themselves as active participants in an anarchist movement were more prevalent in unions (62 percent) than outside unions (51 percent). Additionally, 77 percent of union members identified as “activists” while 70 percent of nonmembers identified as such, although the difference for activists is only marginally significant (at the $P < 0.10$ level). Self-identified movement members and activists usually see themselves as doing things in social movements and are more likely to be involved in an organization oriented around shared goals.

Conclusions

Union members represent a sizable sector of the anarchist movement (as per the Infoshop data). Yet, how do various aspects of NSM theories explain characteristics of the modern anarchists found in the Infoshop survey? There are points of convergence and departure with the theories and empirical observations. The level of union membership of employed Infoshop respondents in the U.S. (19 percent) was somewhat higher than in the general American population. This unionization level is half that of employed respondents from Europe (40 percent). Compared to the height of the anarchist movement in the early 1900s, these levels of union membership are likely to be lower than in the past. NSM theories apply to developed western nations, and thus the higher European membership rate should be included when considering anarchism and NSMs. This suggests that other regions may deviate from the NSM framework more clearly than North Americans. The Infoshop survey was dominated by North American respondents, and thus the focus is upon anarchists in that region who were only slightly more likely to be in a labor union than their fellow, mainstream citizens.

While NSM theories emphasize the importance of new, emergent collective identities, anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism are nothing “new” per se. They are, however, oriented toward the goals of achieving autonomy from the dominant economic order, as other collective identities like “feminism” or “gay liberation” might infer. Neither of the economic anarchist ideologies wishes to be embedded within a “business union movement,” but rather wish to see the economy transformed into a more equal, liberatory, and cooperative institution. Yet, because the types of unions that Infoshop respondents belong to are unavailable, it is possible that even these respondents with nonassimilation ideologies are members of assimilated and reformist unions.

This article has begun the task of creating quantitative research looking at North American anarchists in regard to NSMs. The statistics presented suggest a number of key socioeconomic, demographic, ideological, and identity-based differences for anarchist union members within the Infoshop survey. It has sought to address the assumptions of anarchists as participants in a middle-class movement, as is the case with NSMs generally. As for the portion of anarchists who are also union members, the working class is more likely to be the participating class—insofar as self-identification matches an empirical reality. This strengthens the NSM argument about the so-called old social movements (like labor), as the working class, and not the middle class, is labor’s main constituency. Yet, the current anarchist movement still *does* belong, in part, to this old social movement.

It should be noted that although this research has tested the characteristics of anarchists who do or do not belong to labor unions, it does not suggest anything beyond that. Active participation or activism within unions is unknown for these individuals. Because NSM theory suggests that traditional movements were active labor and class-based movements, it is not possible to claim that simple membership in a union constitutes *participation* in a labor *movement*.

Other organizations that also engage in class-focused activism include Food Not Bombs, Homes Not Jails, or others.

Future research should consider the philosophical and real support of unions as part of anarchist ideology, not just that which is economic in focus. It may be that “anarchists without adjective” are equally likely to participate in unions as their economic-focused counterparts, a conclusion impossible to derive from the way the Infoshop survey was conducted. Questions that expand on simple union membership, such as activity within a union or union-organizing itself, would be useful.

Unions are not the only working class or economic-focused organization that exist, but they are the most prevalent and prominent. Future research should consider other organizations that derive from the working class or focus on economic issues. Anarchist participation in such organizations is likely to be different than membership or participation in labor unions. This possibility would strengthen the confidence that other structures of traditional movement values are still being utilized, even if in new organizational forms with new strategies, not just unions. The extent to which unions may be viewed as “social movement organizations” also needs to be considered, because some unions are remarkably more activist-oriented and radical than others. Clawson (2003) also differentiates between unions and the labor movement—the former being a “circumscribed institution” while the latter is a “fluid formation . . . [which] depends on high-risk activism, mass solidarity, and collective experiences” (24).

Using a different measure for class, such as annual income, may provide a different result than the question used by the Infoshop survey, which asked respondents to determine their own class background. Anarchists may have ideologically aligned themselves with the working class, regardless of the economic background of their parents or their current occupation. The ability to separate certain sectors of the middle class—nonprofit workers, students and academics, and retirees—would aid in testing who in the middle class is supportive of the anarchist movement according to NSM. Educational status would facilitate analysis of NSM theory’s traditional characterization of middle-class activists as intellectuals. Finally, efforts to seek out anarchists of older generations to further test the impact of age upon union membership would help provide a richer context for how anarchism has changed.

More importantly, future research may wish to seek a better way to more comprehensively explore connections between the anarchist movement and NSM theories. This study did not test anarchist values and attitudes, so a comparison based upon these criteria is not possible. It is difficult to answer these larger questions with just one survey, especially a limited one. One way to evaluate anarchist beliefs and action in lieu of other NSM characteristics is to consider the other characteristics suggested by Sutton and Vertigans (2006), such as antihierarchical organization, symbolic direct action, and self-limited radicalism.

Subsequent work on this highly underanalyzed movement should heed these considerations. Anarchism’s complex, contentious, and sometimes contradictory advocates and organizations deserve greater study.

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Notes

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1. I am calling anarchistic “franchise” organizations those groups with identical names that exist in multiple places, and have the same general focus and purpose.
2. This does not mean to suggest that NSM participants do not act on class interests or that such movements are devoid of material concerns; rather, economic class is not the salient and common identity.
3. Rosemont (2005) also thinks social movements are providing most impetus for change, particularly in the area of class inequality and homelessness, than are mainstream labor unions.
4. Such regional variation is also reflected in the types of anarchist organizations (see Williams and Lee 2008) and ideological variation, such as Williams's (2009) study of red and green anarchist variation in the U.S.
5. Evidence suggests that the anarchist movement is likely larger and thriving in other places, particularly in European countries (as evidenced in Williams and Lee 2008).
6. It is important to note that IWW membership is still rather low, particularly when compared to its heyday in the 1910s. Gordon (2007) observes an IWW membership in 2005 of 1,298 which, although potentially representing a large portion in terms of anarchist cadre, also places it among the smallest national unions in the U.S. Using Gordon's original source, the Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration (<http://erds.dol-esa.gov/query/orgReport.do>) shows 922 IWW members during the Infoshop survey year.

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