Lilith

Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now: Support and Anarchist Communities

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The necessity of support becomes more dire every day. The state continues its attempts to dismantle and destroy anti-authoritarian struggle through grand juries, harsh sentences, federal investigations, and a wide range of other heinous tactics. Economic failure, ecological collapse, mass psychoses, and general widespread personal and societal instability makes coping with the reality of our everyday lives difficult The anarchist community has done what it can with the little resources it has to curb some of these problems. This often takes the form of legal support, with the Anarchist Black Cross and various other prisoner support projects, work to support incarcerated comrades and keep others out of jail. In some areas, the anarchist community has been able to offer support, but it is difficult to find evidence of some infrastructure of emotional support.

As a disclaimer, I do not wish to disparage any people or projects. We all have our own priorities; no one is obligated to work toward projects of emotional support if that is not of their interest. I merely wish to point out what I see as a gap in the ability of our community to respond to instability and distress (thus making us more prone to burn-out and even complete disenchantment) and utilize my own experiences as a jumping-off point for suggestions for how to change this.

Why is it that "political" work is given importance over "personal" work? Why are projects of support for prisoners seen as more important than personal support for loved ones? These questions are difficult to answer, but I feel they lie in the reluctance of anarchists to acknowledge internal struggles as vital to the wider scope of resistance. Even in anarchist persuasions that realize the importance of personal revolt and unlearning the dominant culture's socialization, individual struggles for mental wellness or recovery are derided if they interfere with the person's ability or desire work on other projects. But can we be a healthy community if our priorities are structured in that way? Can we be a resilient and able to cope with the stress of living in a dying world if we do not see the value in all types to work? If we are to survive, we must destroy the physical manifestations of domination culture, but also its psychic ones.

I have been involved in projects of both definite and questionable value over the past years. From this, I have gained a respect for

the amount of time, effort, and money some people put toward support for arrestees and prisoners. Being arrested and having a group of friends there upon release with money on hand to pay bail showed me the solidarity and support that the anarchist community is capable of. However, I rarely hear anywhere of the importance of emotional support. With some exceptions (The Icarus Project, zines such as *Support*), this goes ignored.

But isn't it more necessary than ever? In this world of omnipresent alienation, postmodern disconnection, and generalized psychosis, we all require the love and care of others to survive. If, as our manifestos and polemics say, this society is destructive to our bodies and minds, then shouldn't healing and recovery be a priority? Shouldn't we place as much value on helping each other through breakdowns and depression as we do on helping each other pay legal fees?

I became romantically involved with someone while still engaged in other projects. Ze was in recovery from a particularly bad fight with anorexia and bulimia, and being involved with hir meant learning and relearning how to be a positive force in someone else's healing. Having never had an eating disorder or dealt with the emotional turbulence of severe mental "illness," this required intense engagement in personal interaction, reading as much as possible on the subjects, and learning to let compassion and empathy curb frustration. In short, this took a great deal of time and energy that, had I not been involved with it, would otherwise have been put toward other things. I did not want to be applauded for my desire to support hir, I just wished for this project of support to be viewed with as much value as the projects I had been engaged in before. This did not happen and I responded to the antipathy by withdrawing and eventually dropping those projects from my life. The separation from close friends that resulted from this left me with little support for my own personal struggles, now magnified by the difficulty of supporting a partner in recovery.

I learned a great deal from this experience. Emotional support is as necessary as anything else anarchists are doing. We cannot accomplish anything unless we are stable, and this requires the compassion and support of others. How this plays out practically is limited only by our imagination and will.

Some suggestions and possibilities for the expansion and facilitation of support within anarchist communities:

- Group Therapy: Being able to talk with others and feel you are not alone can be helpful. Having this happen on a weekly or monthly basis, free of charge, and within our community would give a stable place for people to go when they need help.
- Openness: If we all remained open to our friends and made it a priority to be available for conversation or even just distraction, we could create stronger bonds and have more options when we are in pain.
- Rewilding: In addition to the skills of wild living, an added emphasis on emotional recovery from domestication would add new aspects to the anarcho-primitivist community. The critique of civilization's creation and perpetuation of mental "illness" is vital, but a praxis of recovery from that needs to be established.
- Alternative/Holistic Health Care: Skillshares, zines, etc on ways to remain emotionally stable outside of psychiatry and capitalism. Tips and tricks, information on exercise and anxiety management, herbal remedies, vitamin supplementation, etc.
- Open Discourse on Recovery: Ending stigmatization of mental illness. Talks and discussions in radical spaces and conferences on recovery and support.
- Patience, Understanding, Dedication: Until this society is gone, these problems will continue to exist. We need to realize our limits as supporters, learn to cope with relapses and setbacks, and remain beacons of support.