



Movement for a New Society and Contemporary Anarchism

The international anarchist movement found new footings in the wake of the global insurrections of 1968, nearly all of which were decidedly libertarian in character.¹ In the United States, the decade that followed was a time of experimentation and consolidation, as a surprising variety of groups sought to develop and adapt different aspects of the anarchist tradition to contemporary conditions. Sam Dolgoff and others worked to revitalize the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) alongside new syndicalist formations like the Chicago-based Resurgence group and Boston's Root and Branch. Murray Bookchin's *Anarchos* journal collective deepened the theoretical links between ecological and anarchist thought. The *Fifth Estate* magazine drew heavily on French ultraleftist thinking and began pursuing a critique of technology by the decade's end. Meanwhile, the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation connected individuals and circles across the

country through a mimeographed monthly discussion bulletin. Just as influential to the anarchist milieu that has taken shape in the decades that have followed, however, were the efforts of Movement for a New Society (MNS), a national network of feminist, radical pacifist collectives that existed from 1971 to 1988.²

Though MNS is rarely remembered by name today, its many new ways of doing radical politics have become central to contemporary antiauthoritarian social movements. MNS popularized consensus decision making, introduced the spokescouncil method of organization to radicals in the United States, and was a leading advocate of a variety of practices—such as communal living, unlearning oppressive behavior, and creating cooperatively owned businesses—that are now often subsumed under the rubric of prefigurative politics.³ MNS was significantly shaped by aspects of anarchist thought and practice developed both in the United States and abroad. Participants synthesized these elements with an array of others to develop an experimental revolutionary practice that attempted to combine multi-issue political analysis, organizing campaigns, and direct action with the creation of alternative institutions, community building, and personal transformation.⁴ Although MNS never claimed more than three hundred members, it bore an influence on 1970s' radicalism disproportionate to its size, owing to both the strategy and skills trainings in which the group specialized, and the ways in which MNS's vision overlapped with significant developments in the broader feminist and environmental movements.

As antiauthoritarians have widely adopted practices and

perspectives that MNS promoted, some—such as the use of consensus process and a focus on establishing new ways of living—have become so hegemonic within movement culture that they are frequently taken as transhistorical tenets of anarchist politics or radicalism more generally. A lack of critical historical evaluation has, unfortunately, led many groups to adopt basic elements that MNS tried out, without also taking up the important lessons that participants derived from the shortcomings of their political experiments. A brief exploration of MNS's history, then, may offer insights into dilemmas faced by our contemporary movements.

Radical Pacifism and Anarchism

MNS grew out of a Quaker antiwar organization in 1971, but it built on traditions that radical pacifists had developed throughout the twentieth century. After World War I, a new form of pacifist movement developed in the United States that was socialist and based on secular, rather than religious, rationales for opposing violence. While a commitment to ending all forms of war remained the movement's primary focus, participants recognized that this required them to oppose the underlying causes of war—namely, capitalism and the imperialism it spurred. Pacifists distinguished their methods from those of the major leftist parties by insisting on a correlation between means and ends, and encouraging adherents to live in a fashion as similar as possible to the ways they would in the ideal society they were striving for.⁵

By the onset of World War II, this radical pacifist movement had incorporated a variety of crucial anarchist influences. Gandhian philosophy, which became the movement's primary inspiration, was of course heavily influenced by Henry David Thoreau's individualism and Leo Tolstoy's Christian anarchism. Yet Dutch anarcho-pacifist Bart de Ligt's 1936 treatise *The Conquest of Violence* (with its none-too-subtle allusion to Peter Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*) was also of signal importance.⁶ These thinkers deepened the pacifist critique of war to question forms of institutional social violence, and highlighted the contradiction between the state's "monopoly on legitimate violence" and pacifist tenets. Domestically, radical pacifist circles overlapped considerably with those of a small cohort of anarchists in the 1940s, including figures such as Ammon Hennacy, Paul Goodman, and Audrey Goodfriend. Young male anarchists such as David Wieck, Cliff Bennett, and Lowell Naeve resisted conscription during World War II, and found themselves imprisoned with Gandhian pacifists such as David Dellinger and Bill Sutherland. These war resisters protested segregation and other conditions in the federal penitentiaries through noncooperation, influencing one another's politics in the process. Anarchists of this period departed from previous generations not only by embracing pacifism but also by devoting more energy to promoting avant-garde culture, preparing the ground for the beat generation in the process.⁷ The editors of the anarchist journal *Retort*, for instance, produced a volume of writings by draft resisters imprisoned in Danbury, Connecticut, while regularly publishing the poetry and prose of writers such

as Kenneth Rexroth and Norman Mailer. From the 1940s to the 1960s, the radical pacifist movement in the United States thus harbored both social democrats and anarchists, at a time when the anarchist movement itself seemed on its last legs. During these years, pacifists formed organizations such as the Committee for Nonviolent Revolution and Peacemakers, which experimented with network structures and consensus decision-making processes.⁸ A pacifist wing has existed alongside other anarchist tendencies in the United States ever since. The concerns and approach adopted by MNS derive in large measure from the different itineraries taken by members of this earlier radical milieu during the 1960s.

Radical pacifists created the Congress of Racial Equality in 1942, and were important conduits of participatory deliberative styles and the tactics of Gandhian nonviolence to leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King Jr. and members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).⁹ Meanwhile, the beat culture, incubated by anarchists in the 1940s, fed into the more explicitly political counterculture of the 1960s. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) drew on SNCC's participatory structure and the ethos of the counterculture to formulate two of the defining demands of the New Left: the implementation of participatory democracy, and the dissolution of alienating culture.¹⁰ Yet in the later 1960s, both the black freedom and student movements, smarting from repression, on the one hand, and elated by radical victories at home and abroad, on the other, moved away from this emergent,

anarchistic, political space distinguished from both liberalism and Marxism. Many civil rights organizers took up nationalist politics in hierarchical organizations, while some of the most committed SDS members turned to variants of Marxist-Leninism and democratic socialism.¹¹

If participatory democracy and cultural transformation could, together, be seen as a ball about to be dropped, MNS was one of the most important groups diving for it, working hard to keep it in play. The emergent women's liberation movement likewise placed a premium on developing egalitarian internal relationships and making changes in daily life; not surprisingly, feminism also left an enduring impact on MNS.¹²

MNS emerged in 1971 as the new face of A Quaker Action Group (AQAG), a Philadelphia-based direct action group that had carried out creative "witnesses" against the devastation of the Vietnam War, hoping to "undermine the legitimacy of the [U.S.] government."¹³ Perhaps most famously, members piloted a fifty-foot ship, the *Phoenix*, on three trips to North and South Vietnam in 1967 and 1968 with cargoes of donated medical supplies.¹⁴ By 1969, however, AQAG leaders began to recognize that the movement should aim not only to end the war in Vietnam but also to fundamentally reshape all aspects of U.S. life. AQAG presented a proposal to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in March 1971, arguing that the times—and Quaker principles—called for a broad program to combat ecological devastation, militarism, "corporate capitalism," racism, and sexism. The statement succinctly laid out a new vision for creating "fundamental change":

We hope to catalyze a movement for a new society, which will feature a vision of the new society, and how to get there; a critical analysis of the American political-economic system; a focus on expanding the consciousness and organizing the commitment of the middle class toward fundamental change through nonviolent struggle, often in concert with other change movements; the organization and development of nonviolent revolutionary groups and life centers as bases for sustained struggle on the local as well as national and international levels; training for non-violent struggle; and a program rooted in changed lives and changed values.¹⁵

Although some members expressed considerable sympathy for the proposal, the AFSC declined to adopt it. Undeterred, the coterie of approximately two-dozen radicals continued to meet, renaming themselves MNS to reflect the broader aims and secular status of their new initiative. Beginning with small collectives in Philadelphia and Eugene, Oregon, they set to work building membership and developing a program.

Analysis, Action, Community, and Training

Even though it was not officially sanctioned by the AFSC, MNS was able to draw on the support of an established network of Quaker institutions to enlist a critical mass of members in the new organization. This broader network

helped ensure the group's legitimacy, spread information, and provided monetary support crucial to attracting enough participants early on. Nevertheless, reliance on such a network for recruiting also contributed to the predominantly white and middle-class character of the organization's membership in its early years.¹⁶

MNS founders also undertook recruiting tours that presented the group's approach as an alternative to the style and pace of 1960s' movement work, which had taken a significant personal toll in the form of widespread burnout by the early 1970s. Returning from one such trip, Berit Lakey and Paul Morrissey reported that "people were so varied—old people looking for new hope and young people trying not to become cynical. . . . The wholeness of the MNS approach—from analysis to action to community generated excitement. More and more people are questioning the value of their scattered activities. Fewer and fewer are willing to put off their personal growth until 'after the revolution.'"¹⁷

Analysis

MNS's multi-issue, multisided approach to radical change was first developed through a study group and collective writing project among AQAG leaders that resulted in two books, which then served as the primary statements of MNS's politics: *Moving toward a New Society* and *Strategy for a Living Revolution*.¹⁸ As the organization took shape, the founders expanded the process of collective political education and analysis to include any member who was interested by developing "macroanalysis

seminars"—long-term collaborative study groups modeled after the popular education initiatives of the civil rights movement and the ideas of Paulo Freire.¹⁹ MNS's focus on an overarching analysis that sought to link seemingly disparate social problems and forms of inequality was innovative for a period in which theorists fought to assert the primacy of racial, gender, or class oppression, and the concept of "intersectionality" was not yet widely accepted.²⁰

Revolutionary nonviolence formed the bedrock of MNS's political analysis and strategy. The group believed that war is inherent to capitalism and social inequality is itself a form of violence, maintained by the threat of direct state violence; this requires those who morally reject violence to become social revolutionaries. Members synthesized these core principles with recent developments in leftist thought. Foremost, this entailed a commitment to the principles of ecology and environmental sustainability emerging at the time. MNS, additionally, placed the United States's neocolonial relationship with the countries of the global South at the center of its indictment of contemporary society. The group insisted on the need to "de-develop" the United States and other capitalist countries, as the members of these nations lived at consumption rates unattainable for the majority of the world's population and unsustainable given ecological limits.²¹ Influenced by the nascent women's liberation movement, MNS incorporated from the outset a critique of sexism alongside its indictment of racism (shaped by some members' work in the civil rights movement). Yet white supremacy and patriarchy were given considerably less extensive treatment

than political-economic concerns in the group's early publications and statements.²² Bringing together a mix of Gandhians, anarchists, and unaffiliated democratic socialists, MNS promoted the idea of a "decentralized socialism" that had much in common with the "participatory economics" others were developing at the time.²³

Economic enterprises, as we see it, would be socially owned, decentralized and democratically controlled. . . . Political decisions would be made by participatory means, starting with the smallest face-to-face communities of citizens and extending upward to the global level. Nation-states as we now know them would cease to exist, supplanted by regional groupings, perhaps of those with common economic interests.²⁴

MNS members were significantly influenced by a variety of anarchist titles published in the 1970s. Bookchin's 1971 *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* was a mainstay of the group's macroanalysis seminars, not only for its ecological arguments, but also for the history of alternative forms of radical organizing described in the essay "Listen, Marxist!" Seminar participants also read selections from the Black Rose volume *The Case for Participatory Democracy*, edited by Dimitri Roussopoulos, early works on libertarian socialism by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, and even selections from Alexander Berkman and Kropotkin. The discovery of Dolgoff's *The Anarchist Collectives*, a history of worker self-management during the Spanish Civil War,

was important to MNS members' ability to imagine a process by which its collectives might develop into an entire social system.²⁵

Still, many members were unaware of the influence of anarchist ideas on their organization, as attested to by a paper circulated internally in 1976, in which Bob Irwin, a member of the Philadelphia Macroanalysis Collective, argued that "the time has come to make explicit and evaluate the organization theory by which we have been operating.... That organization theory, I contend, is anarchism."²⁶ Although some members individually identified as anarchists, MNS never did so as an organization, and it doesn't appear to have had direct ties with any of the self-identified anarchist organizations of the 1970s. In its early years, MNS was sympathetic toward socialist initiatives such as the New American Movement and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. Yet MNS hewed toward anarchist strategy by expressing "grave reservations" about electoralism or the potential for reradicalizing the labor movement in the United States.²⁷ The group believed that it could best contribute to the goal of establishing a self-managed economy by creating worker-owned cooperatives and other alternative institutions while working to foment a broad nonviolent insurrection, organized on the basis of directly democratic councils, capable of toppling the current political-economic order.

Anarchism was perhaps most influential on the organization's structure. MNS saw that in starting fresh, it had the chance to incorporate in its structure the principle—expressed most recently by the New Left, but earlier by

anarchists and radical pacifists—that the movement should prefigure, or anticipate and model, its goals in its own work. MNS's introductory pamphlet declared its opposition to “traditional forms of organization, from [the multinational corporation] ITT to the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] . . . for they exhibit the sexism and authoritarianism we seek to supplant. Our goals must be incorporated into the way we organize. Thus the movement we build must be egalitarian and non-centralized.”²⁸ Accordingly, the group developed a network structure that was directly influenced by a Dutch anarchist federation, Shalom, which had impressed founding member George Lakey during his travels across Europe in 1969.²⁹

From the outset, MNS members relied on a consensus decision-making process and rejected the domineering forms of leadership prevalent in 1960s' radical groups. The impetus to change the internal dynamics of radical organizations stemmed from a variety of sources. Inspired by SNCC—which in turn, had been influenced by pacifists such as James Lawson and Bayard Rustin—SDS had promoted the demand for a participatory form of democracy, but had never formalized the concept into a procedure. The early women's liberation movement responded to the sexism that marred New Left groups by roundly criticizing patriarchal leadership tendencies and attempting to craft egalitarian organizations of its own. The MNS founders sought to build on both these initiatives by developing and teaching a formal model of “democratic group process” that drew on the Quaker tradition in which many were steeped, as well as the conflict resolution techniques that some

early MNS members practiced as professional mediators.³⁰ Beyond adopting a formal consensus procedure with delineated roles, MNS drew on “sensitivity training” techniques, “role playing . . . listening exercises, and trust games” to increase awareness of group dynamics and challenge members to excise oppressive aspects of their traditional patterns of behavior.³¹ Members saw at least three benefits to this process: it helped empower more reserved and less experienced participants; it kept in check the sometimes-competing egos of movement veterans involved in the organization; and finally, the highly deliberative aspect of consensus was useful in the group's early stage when it was “searching” for new ideas and building unity among its members.³²

MNS's commitment to prefiguration was most frequently expressed in its injunction to “live the revolution now”—a reformulation of Mahatma Gandhi's classic instruction for his followers to “be the change you want to see.” In its early statements, however, MNS was clear that “living the revolution” served as only one practical aspect of a multipronged revolutionary strategy, not an end in itself. “We need to simplify and organize our life together so there is time for the confrontations that are needed if the old order is to fall,” begins the “Community” section of the group's introductory pamphlet. Like many other radical theorists in the early 1970s, the MNS founders believed that structural contradictions would create a crisis situation in the United States by the end of the century, if not the end of the decade.³³ Whether that crisis could be turned to revolutionary ends, though, would depend on the consciousness of the majority of the U.S. population.

MNS members believed they could serve as a “leaven in the bread” of the mass social movements responding to this crisis, giving them the tools and nonviolent principles they would need to effectively make a social revolution.³⁴ In the short term, they believed, radicals needed to develop strategic campaigns that combined organizing and direct action to win “revolutionary reforms” while simultaneously building alternative institutions based on radical principles, which could serve to model the future society.³⁵ For these efforts to be sustained throughout a long struggle and to ultimately be successful, organizers needed training and to experience new kinds of community supportive of their work.

Action

MNS demonstrated its approach to activism almost immediately. In July 1971, the newly minted group launched itself into the Baltimore harbor in a fleet of canoes and kayaks to blockade a Pakistani ship from docking to take on a shipment of military supplies. The confrontation grew out of a “study-action team” that began researching the impact of U.S. policies and business ties abroad. The team decided to focus on the Nixon administration’s financial and military support for the Pakistani military dictatorship, known for its brutal suppression of political opponents and the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Though its first attempt at blocking a weapons shipment was defeated by police and Coast Guard officers, who hauled the peace fleet out of the water and into jail cells, the action received wide coverage in national print, radio, and television reportage.³⁶

Neither discouraged nor satisfied with their results, MNS expanded the campaign. The group joined forces with the Philadelphia Friends of East Bengal, whose members were more directly impacted by the crisis in the subcontinent, and appealed to the International Longshoremen’s Association, convincing the union to refuse to load military material bound for Pakistan. When MNS and its allies discovered another Pakistani ship was to take on supplies in Philadelphia in August, they again mobilized a sea blockade, but this time paired it with a picket on the docks. After an intense effort by the MNS fleet to evade police boats and place itself in the freighter’s path, the *Al-Ahmadi* managed to dock. Still, following the lead of their local union president, the longshoremen refused to cross a picket line that MNS maintained continuously until the ship sailed away empty twenty-eight hours later.³⁷

MNS deployed similar tactics in April 1972, when it allied with Vietnam Veterans against the War and local Quaker groups to block the *USS Nitro* from loading munitions bound for the Gulf of Tonkin. Though ultimately unsuccessful in blocking the ship, the skirmishes on land and sea proved so inspiring to the *Nitro*’s reluctant crew that five sailors literally jumped from the ship and attempted to join the war resisters in their canoes.³⁸

These actions grew out of campaign models taught by MNS members with extensive experience in the civil rights and antiwar movements, including Bill Moyer and Richard Taylor, both of whom had held staff positions in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization led by King. The blockades reconfirmed the MNS

strategists' belief that direct action could yield tangible results and educate the public through media coverage, but needed to be rooted in organizing campaigns and coalition building to be effective.³⁹

If the port blockades demonstrated the commitment of Philadelphia MNS members to well-planned action, other developments showcased MNS as a national organization that was able to mobilize in solidarity with radical struggles on a moment's notice. When federal officials seemed poised to violently oust American Indian Movement members occupying the hamlet of Wounded Knee in March of 1973, MNS implemented a phone tree to contact participants throughout the network. Collectives in Madison, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Des Moines, Denver, Portland, and Philadelphia responded by organizing carloads of people to converge on Wounded Knee within two days. On arrival, MNS members organized "observer teams" to position themselves between the troops and occupiers. Although the members may have forestalled violence in the first days, the government eventually forced their withdrawal.⁴⁰ MNS later launched nationally coordinated protests less than twenty-four hours after news broke of the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster in 1979.⁴¹

Community

Beginning with its first collective statement, MNS emphasized that a major component of its program would be the creation of intentional communities of activists. As first conceived, the movement would be made up of six-to-twelve person Nonviolent Revolutionary Groups (NRGs,

or "Energies") that would work on issues as teams and "share their lives as well as work, sometimes living communally."⁴² In *Strategy for a Living Revolution*, published in 1973, Lakey explicitly described NRGs as a contemporary form of affinity group, though he did not cite the anarchist origins of that organizational form.⁴³ MNS's founding document explained, "Through NRGs, individuals can seek to live the revolution now by giving up the characteristic scatter of liberal activities which results in fragmented selves and soulless organizations, and substitute concentration and community." MNS, then, was conceptualized as a "network of small groups rather than of individual members" that would coordinate their activities on the local, regional, and national levels. In areas where numerous groups were clustered, the movement would develop Life Centers: "more sizable, collective living arrangements for ongoing training and direct action campaigns."⁴⁴

Members organized collective living situations in cities such as Savannah and Seattle, and smaller towns like Ann Arbor and Madison. Participants typically lived in communal households, and participated in one or more collectives focused on an aspect of the work (such as direct actions, trainings, or macroanalysis seminars). Citywide meetings and informal social gatherings knit the collectives together. Members dispersed geographically and involved in an expanding array of campaigns shared their ideas and experiences with one another through a lively internal newsletter, variously titled *Dandelion Wine*, *Wine*, and *Grapevine*, published monthly by an internal communications collective that rotated between MNS groups in different cities

each year. The entire network met for a week, once a year, at Whole Network Meetings to socialize, strategize, and hash out policies affecting the entire organization. Whole Network Meetings in the mid-1970s brought together 100 to 120 people, usually about half of those participating in the organization in a given year.⁴⁵ The NRG terminology fell out of use after the first year, because rather than finding a primary political home in one specific affinity group, members tended to participate in multiple collectives as well as their households and the local MNS community; commitment to the network had trumped commitment to the individual NRG.

While many cities hoped to develop Life Centers, only Philadelphia was able to maintain a community large and stable enough to offer the number of activities, collectives, and alternative institutions originally envisioned. In January 1976, when an internal census was completed, a ten-block area of West Philadelphia was home to nineteen collective households composed of four to eleven people each, with names such as "The Gathering," "Kool Rock Amazons," and "Sunflower." Members of these households worked in twenty-two different MNS collectives, including the Feminist Collective, the Training Organizing Collective, the Simple Living Group, and the Peace Conversion/B-1 Bomber Collective.⁴⁶ Households operated independently—choosing their own members, and establishing policies about what was purchased jointly and how much members were required to contribute to expenses. Household cultures varied: some collectives shared religious practices, and others shared their entire incomes.⁴⁷ Until the mid-1980s, MNS did

not pay anyone for movement work. Members were encouraged to work part-time jobs to earn the "bread money" they needed for monthly household expenses and personal items. Some members worked retail jobs, sometimes at cooperative enterprises, while others took on construction work, taught college courses, or staffed Quaker-related organizations.

MNS strategy prioritized the creation of alternative institutions that modeled egalitarian and anticapitalist values. Philadelphia members created a worker-owned print shop and a member-run food cooperative, while a Baltimore collective opened a toy store. Later, the MNS publications committee launched a commercial press, called New Society Publishers. These businesses provided jobs to MNS members along with services to the movement and others in the neighborhood. After a series of rapes, members also helped organize a block association that worked to prevent crime through community building. The block association rejected an increased police presence in favor of teams of neighbors that patrolled on foot, armed only with air horns. The association also offered victim counseling, which it believed was "helpful to prevent over-reaction in the longer run," meaning the racism underlying the crime fears of white people living in racially mixed areas of West Philadelphia.⁴⁸ Alternative institutions were meant to demonstrate that radical activity could create immediate, concrete improvements in people's daily lives—improvements, the founders believed, that would give organizers confidence, and were more likely than its seemingly remote utopian visions to attract neighbors and those not already radicalized to participate in MNS.⁴⁹

Beyond serving as a base for alternative institutions, collective living was meant to allow members to live “simply” and inexpensively, permitting them to dedicate more time to movement work and reduce their environmental impact. Moreover, living in community was expected to promote the “personal growth” of MNS members. This commitment to individual transformation was perhaps the most ambiguous aspect of the MNS project, as it combined personal empowerment exercises with spirituality and the unlearning of oppressive behavior through a variety of radical therapy practices emergent at the time. Initially, members’ commitment to personal growth meant involvement in self-help and self-care activities, such as yoga or learning to become “active listeners”—activities intended to aid them in becoming more effective in their daily lives and organizing work. Within the organization’s first year, MNS members in Philadelphia began an extended process of understanding and rooting out sexism—and later homophobia, classism, and racism—within the organization as well as in members’ personal lives.

As these discussions progressed, personal growth came to mean shedding the internalized strictures of an unjust society—racist and ageist conditioning, patriarchal gender roles, and bourgeois “hang-ups.” Though this process started with discussions internal to the group, it grew to take on other forms, including the development of “theory papers” and educational work. A Philadelphia men’s group, for instance, took steps to publicly challenge traditional gender roles by holding street meetings. Recounting an early experience, the group asked *Dandelion* readers

to “imagine twenty men, speaking very personally about men’s liberation, holding hands and hugging, giving each other the needed support for such a scary situation, singing loudly and proudly about how we don’t want society’s ‘John Wayne Image.’”⁵⁰ MNS understood that the personal was political, and therefore, saw the process of individuals developing aspects of their personality not sanctioned or encouraged by social expectations as a victory in itself. They also understood that unlearning oppressive assumptions and behavior was crucial to becoming better organizers.

Complicating each of these aspects of personal growth was the penchant most MNS members shared for “radical therapy” practices such as transactional analysis and especially reevaluation counseling (RC, also known as “cocounseling”).⁵¹ Invented by former Communist Party member Harvey Jackins, RC seeks to overcome oppression through reciprocal psychological counseling sessions among nonprofessional individuals trained in the process. The theory proposes that all people have been oppressed, and suggests that the path to overcoming that oppression is through emoting about individual painful and shameful experiences, including those from childhood, in order for the cocounselor to move past emotional “blockages” and think in a fully rational manner. Jackins believed that after dissolving all such blockages, practitioners could inhabit a childlike state of joy and innocence.

Despite the therapy movement’s hierarchical structure and revelations that Jackins had engaged in a pattern of sexual improprieties with female cocounselors, RC language and practice came to pervade MNS’s work. When

deliberating about sensitive issues, for example, members might remind each other that it was alright to act “on our feelings,” but unhelpful to “act on our distress as it blurs good thinking.”⁵² In difficult meetings, facilitators often called for breaks to allow members to pair up for brief counseling sessions. In MNS, then, the Gandhian dictum that the revolutionaries must change as they change society merged with the growing interest in popular psychology, new age spirituality, and gurus that occupied many former radicals in the 1970s.⁵³ If the focus on personal development didn’t depoliticize MNS members, as it did to many of their contemporaries, it did shift MNS work in an individualistic direction that would have serious consequences for the organization in years to come.

Beyond developing personal skills, MNS communities were intended to shape movement culture by changing how participants interacted with each other. In an attempt to correct for the harsh style of many 1960s’ initiatives, MNS sought to model a form of radical politics that shunned aggressive and egoist behavior, and included emotional support for one’s comrades as central to the mission of social change organizations. This culture of support manifested itself in many ways: the practice of physical affection, both platonic and romantic, through hugging and snuggling (nonmonogamy was widespread among members); collective singing and other forms of self-entertainment in the collective homes; and the habit of engaging in “light and livelies”—seemingly childish games (similar to today’s icebreakers) to keep energy and spirits up during long meetings.

MNS, in summary, saw its form of collective living as an extension of the work undertaken in consciousness-raising groups and central to realizing the democratic ideal of individuals developing themselves to their greatest potential. A 1974 *Dandelion* article titled “MNS Support Communities” explained it this way:

As members of the community gradually free themselves from oppressive roles and patterns of relating to each other (i.e., from sexist, ageist or racist conditioning), they provide an atmosphere of greater equality and openness for others. New members joining the community find themselves in an increasingly creative environment where they are being “asked”—simply by interacting with others—to be fully themselves, fully rational and loving human beings.⁵⁴

Training

The concentration of MNS members in West Philadelphia also made it possible for the Life Center to serve as a training hub for organizers from around the world. MNS’s primary and most enduring contribution to 1970s’ social movements was the trainings that it provided to radicals in democratic group process, strategic campaign planning, and direct action tactics. Training collectives devised a series of learning experiences that varied in length from one day to two weeks to an entire year in residence at the Life Center. Other trainers traveled throughout the country, offering “4 x 4” workshops (two intensive four-day

sessions with a break in the middle) to groups of nonviolent organizers working together on a specific campaign or simply living in the same town.⁵⁵ Beyond the specific content of these trainings, MNS's model of movement education helped establish a culture of training within the antiauthoritarian Left that continues to the present day in the form of DIY skill shares, workshops at anarchist book fairs, and tactical trainings at convergence centers prior to large demonstrations.⁵⁶

The antinuclear power movement came to national attention in the mid-1970s on the heels of a campaign of mass nonviolent direct action to resist the development of the Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire. As the movement gained momentum, MNS was instrumental in both helping participants train for actions and encouraging the movement to structure itself on the basis of decentralized affinity groups coordinated through directly democratic spokescouncils.⁵⁷ Bookchin, who also played an important role in the Seabrook campaign, had discovered the tradition of organizing in affinity groups—small groups of people with commonalities—in his research into the Spanish Civil War. At nearly the same time, MNS began independently promoting small group organizing, based on observations of how radicals had behaved in mass antiwar protests in the 1960s and the findings of group psychology studies that interested some members. Lakey recalls that MNS first learned of the spokescouncil technique from a Swedish organizer attending a training at the Life Center who had used the method in actions to block highway construction in his own country.⁵⁸ MNS trainers traveled

throughout New England in early 1977, facilitating workshops on nonviolent direct action with members and supporters of the largest antinuclear organization on the East Coast, the Clamshell Alliance, which was coordinating the action. On April 30, approximately fourteen hundred people—many of them self-identified anarchists—occupied the site of the proposed power plant, with a thousand or more doing support work. The occupiers were arrested en masse on May 1 and held at five armories nearby.⁵⁹

The mass occupation, which occurred without violence or injury, was a stunning organizational feat in itself. Yet the MNS considered what happened next to be just as powerful and significant. In the armories, MNS members and other action coordinators worked to build jail solidarity—the practice of prisoners bargaining collectively for conditions of their release, rather than being treated individually—and an egalitarian community in microcosm arose during the two weeks that the protesters were held. By facilitating collective decision making on legal strategy using spokescouncils, holding trainings, and encouraging dance parties and other celebrations among the hundreds of detainees, MNS helped turn the incarceration from a repressive act meant to discourage resistance into one of excitement, empowerment, and networking.⁶⁰ The Seabrook occupation marked the first time that the three organizational components that have since become de rigueur for antiauthoritarian mass actions—affinity groups, spokescouncils, and consensus process—were used together in the United States. After Seabrook, MNS trainers traveled throughout the country training antinuke organizations in

consensus and encouraging them to adopt the spokescouncil model that had worked so well in New Hampshire.

Challenges Arise

By 1976, a number of interrelated problems and tensions had begun to develop within the MNS network. Despite the excitement of the burgeoning antinuke movement, many members felt frustrated with a lack of strategic direction in the organization. While in agreement with MNS's long-term vision, participants were frequently unsure how to best contribute to the variety of movements active at the time. In towns with only a dozen or so MNS members, this led to a high rate of turnover, as committed organizers moved on to more clearly defined projects; in Philadelphia, some left the Life Center, but many others stayed on, viewing its internal life as the defining aspect of their involvement with radical social change.

At the 1976 Whole Network Meeting, members worked to address the "Philly-centric" way in which MNS was developing by adopting a five-year plan, which encouraged Life Center members to move to promising regions to establish MNS on stronger, less centralized footings. Owing to the plan and interest generated by the important contributions that MNS had made to Seabrook and other high-profile events, the movement grew to a peak of approximately three hundred active members with many more supporters by the decade's end.⁶¹ This thickening of the ranks wouldn't last, however. By the early 1980s, MNS

collectives in cities from Chicago to Baltimore had gone through what Twin Cities MNS member Betsy Raasch-Gilman identified as a series of "boom and bust cycles" owing to unresolved questions plaguing the group's work in most parts of the country. "The tension between utopian community and a group of involved activists; the push for perfection in personal and political relationships; the confusion about membership and strategy all could be traced directly to Philadelphia's model," she claimed in retrospect.⁶²

In fact, according to Raasch-Gilman, the decline and eventual disbanding of MNS can be attributed to four interrelated factors: a growing emphasis on lifestyle over strategic organizing, the manner in which members carried out antioppression work, weaknesses in the group's decentralized structure, and a fetishization of the consensus decision-making process. Evaluating each of these aspects of MNS's history is complicated because of the decidedly mixed impact each had on the group and the wider antiauthoritarian milieu. MNS pioneered means to respond to problems and limitations that had developed in previous movements, and those methods have had lasting value. At the same time, the group's own history indicates that these innovations included shortcomings of their own, unanticipated by their advocates.

While many found the sense of community that MNS offered the most rewarding part of their involvement, it also led to serious tensions that eventually contributed to the organization's demise. MNS's prefigurative community attracted some people whose conception of social change diverged sharply from early members' assumptions, while

it kept others with shared political commitments away. Its rationale for group living differed in several respects from the often-depoliticized communes and intentional communities formed by counterculturalists in the late 1960s, but this wasn't always obvious. Some visitors believed that an alternative, communal lifestyle constituted a sufficient form of activism. In line with the utopian socialist tradition, they argued that egalitarian communities could serve as a model of the new society, which through their obvious superiority to other ways of life, would naturally attract more participants and inspire imitations.⁶³

Lahey remembers encountering newcomers to the Philadelphia Life Center in the mid-1970s who saw it as another intentional community and “wanted lifestyle to be *the* leading edge of change.” He had to explain to them that “the cutting edge of [MNS’s] understanding of revolution is not lifestyle change. We think of it like ashrams in Gandhi’s ideas, which were base camps for revolution. So what do you do in the base camp for revolution? You get ready to go on the barricades.”⁶⁴ Yet by the late 1970s, the idea that lifestyle change formed the centerpiece of MNS strategy was pervasive both outside and within the organization. A writer for the *Progressive*, for example, described MNS as “Quakers gone counter-cultural.”⁶⁵ Similarly, when Richard Taylor, a founding member, did not immediately list lifestyle change after being asked to describe aspects of MNS strategy during an interview in the late 1970s, the interviewer prompted him: “One would be lifestyle and modeling.” Taylor corrected her, remarking, “Well, one would be working with alternative institutions . . .

creating your own.” After further prodding, Taylor conceded, “Lifestyle is important, but it’s only one of 5 or 10 key things . . . it’s not more important than non-violent direct action, or radical caucuses, or alternative institutions.”⁶⁶

While the place of lifestyle in MNS strategy was clear to its founding theorists, not all members and potential participants were as unambiguous in their thinking, and the understanding of the role of community building eventually became muddled. By the late 1970s, Raasch-Gilman saw MNS members fitting into two different categories: the “hard-bitten shop floor organizers,” and the “new age hippie flakes.”⁶⁷ Members of the former group spent long hours encouraging others to participate in pressure campaigns and building coalitions with other organizations, while the latter prioritized thoroughly changing their own perceptions and ways of being in the world. The playfully hyperbolic language in which Raasch-Gilman expressed this distinction indicates that she (and other members) saw value in both tendencies, but points to a conceptually useful tension nonetheless.

MNS’s commitments to simple living, expanding intramovement jargon, and counterculture-derived social norms created a subculture that served to glue members together, but also threatened to alienate nonmembers in the broader Left and the public at large. In September 1976, Madison, Wisconsin, MNS member Janet Hilliker caustically voiced her concerns regarding the subcultural tendencies growing in MNS in a letter to the network’s internal newsletter. “What responsibility do we have to the many people who are culturally unlike us?” she asked. “Is our

aim a new uniform society: everyone living in communes, working in food co-ops for lower prices, smoking marijuana, practicing nudity and free love, eating vegetarian, and changing their last names?"⁶⁸ It took time for members to see that rather than creating a model of *the* new society, they were establishing one of many possible new lifestyles that grew out of a specific configuration of values that they prioritized. One former member insightfully reflects, "A lot of what was defining our culture was our rebellion against white culture. So, we *were* a counterculture, but we were actually counter to white culture."⁶⁹ This made MNS's internal culture less appealing and transformative to people of color, and some white working-class people, who had a different relationship to the dominant, white middle-class culture to begin with.

MNS members certainly were not alone in viewing personal practices and the creation of alternative communities as touchstones of radicalism during the 1970s. Besides the movement centered on establishing rural communes, the ecological and feminist movements that MNS contributed to as well as overlapped with were increasingly focusing on developing alternative culture and community. Prominent members of the Clamshell Alliance, such as Cathy Wolff, "blamed the deterioration of the Clamshell on the turn toward pursuit of community for its own sake," according to Barbara Epstein.⁷⁰ Likewise, Alice Echols argues that "cultural feminism"—a form that promoted "new lifestyles within a women's culture, emphasizing personal liberation and growth"—supplanted a more politically confrontational "radical feminism" by 1975.⁷¹ In part, the shift toward

new lifestyles was due to exhaustion from the sustained confrontation with political enemies that had marked the second half of the 1960s; it also partly constituted an experiment in innovative approaches to social change for antiauthoritarians within the "new social movements" who sought different goals than traditional leftists had forwarded.

Lifestyle was a strategy advocated in crucial theoretical treatises of the period, including those offered by anarchists. Though in the 1990s he would famously denounce the tendency toward "lifestyle anarchism," Bookchin stated in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* that "in a more advanced stage of technological development than Marx could have clearly anticipated, a new critique is necessary, which in turn yields new modes of struggle, of organization, of propaganda and of lifestyle." He asserted, "To the degree that workers, vocational students and high school students link their lifestyles to various aspects of the anarchic youth culture, to that degree will the proletariat be transformed from a force for the conservation of the established order into a force for revolution."⁷² Bookchin and like-minded thinkers of the time were unable to predict the intensity with which advertising executives of the 1970s would work to recuperate alternative lifestyles, harnessing the desire for self-expression to the needs of capitalism to develop specialized niche markets for its ever-larger array of consumer products, as Thomas Frank and Naomi Klein have since demonstrated.⁷³

As the MNS subculture solidified, members noted with growing anxiety that "the center of gravity was no longer in work in popular movements. . . . A quality of introspection became dominant."⁷⁴ In part, this inward turn

resulted from the increasing focus on what MNS called “oppression/liberation work,” or “fighting the -isms.” From the outset, MNS members had dedicated energy to developing a deeper collective understanding and approach to combating sexism, gay and lesbian oppression, classism, and racism in the organization as well as their personal lives. These conversations took up more of the group’s time and energy as the decade wore on. Committees developed sophisticated analysis of gender, gay and lesbian, and class oppression that sought to understand each within the context of one another, and identified ways in which these social hierarchies were detrimental to all involved, if in different ways and to different degrees. By adding antioppression trainings, based on the group’s own experiences, to the workshops it continued to lead, MNS became one of the first organizations to insist that members’ “working on their shit”—challenging forms of oppressive personal behavior—was a central task of every radical group, regardless of the immediate concern of its work.

Perhaps inevitably, given the exploratory nature of these efforts, MNS also took wrong turns. At times internal discussions evidenced a tone “shrill in moral judgment,” where tendencies soon to be identified with political correctness—such as guilt-inducing righteousness—began to emerge and test the bonds of many local MNS collectives.⁷⁵ Simplistic analyses and solutions to social inequalities arose, which indirectly contradicted key aspects of the group’s original program. For example, as critiques of classism progressed, the macroanalytic theoretical work that MNS originally prided itself on was

increasingly critiqued as middle-class intellectualizing alienating to the working-class members. Strategic campaign planning, meanwhile, was sometimes written off as “a masculine trip” and a “big-bang theory of revolution” where a transfer of power was likened to the male orgasm. (These members argued that as in their idea of a more women-centered sexual practice, more attention should be paid to the process of social change as opposed to simply the end result.)⁷⁶ MNS eventually sought to refine ways of accomplishing the goals of soul-searching and changing personal habits, while avoiding the “spiritual dead-end of the blame-and-shame approach.” As Lakey put it, this required MNS to make the “decision to become less fascinated with oppression than with liberation.”⁷⁷

The growing focus on lifestyle and the emergent critique of strategy in the name of combating privilege amplified challenges arising from MNS’s decentralized structure. As a network of semiautonomous collectives, the organization found itself without formal bodies to continue developing theory and political analysis of current events, establish long-term strategy, or help collectives coordinate their activities nationally. Without such structures, long-term campaigns to win reforms and redistribute power to everyday people were on the wane. In January 1977, Dion Lerman wrote, “I feel that MNS needs to be more politically active and more relevant. . . . We are not putting the time and energy that we need to into community and workplace organizing. When we do direct action organizing, which isn’t half often enough, we tend to stay in [the] Peace Ghetto, where many MNS people are from, organizing with liberals.”⁷⁸

Later that year, in a *Dandelion* article worth quoting at length, Pamela Haines linked MNS's lack of strategic organizing to an unnuanced perspective on leadership developing in the organization:

Another thing that seems to hold us back is our attitudes about leadership. We have identified the dangers of authoritarian leadership and exposed the sexism that intertwines with it. We have developed more human forms of working together. We have demanded that people change oppressive behavior. But giving up on leadership altogether is a step backwards. The world needs all the good leadership it can get. If each of us avoids taking leadership because we identify it with male chauvinism or authoritarianism or elitism, then we give up part of our human potential—and we give in to our feelings of powerlessness. The result in MNS has been that people have at times held back from taking initiative or stating clearly where they thought the organization should be moving. An unspoken “do-your-own-thingism” has meant that hardheaded decisions about the most effective use of energy have not been made.⁷⁹

Some members tried to combat this tendency by issuing publications such as the pamphlet *Leadership for Change: Toward a Feminist Model*, which insisted on the need for an explicit model of “shared leadership.”⁸⁰ They noted that despite the disavowal of leaders that had become

widespread, various members still carried out what they believed were essential leadership tasks. They did so informally and covertly, though, making the work less accountable and those completing it feel underappreciated.⁸¹ But movement inertia worked against such interventions.

The commitment to consensus decision making also began to hinder the organization. Lakey now states unequivocally: “I think one of the reasons that MNS isn’t still around is the downside of consensus.”⁸² While an organization is new and vital,” he argued retrospectively, “consensus decision making can be valuable for encouraging unity. In the longer run, however, consensus can be a conservative influence, stifling the prospects of organizational change.”⁸³ Indeed, the MNS founders originally viewed consensus as a tool that could be useful *in specific situations*. Taylor explained in the late 1970s that consensus had worked for MNS in its early years because those involved in the process shared specific commitments from the outset. Nevertheless, he observed, “I certainly don’t feel that consensus ought to be conceived of as sacrosanct, the only way to make decisions, or something like that. . . . I certainly couldn’t see operating all of society on the basis of consensus.”⁸⁴

Yet members of MNS elected to use consensus in making all decisions that impacted the network as a whole—including the writing of “official” literature. This process was severely hampered by the principle that any one member could block a group decision, the dispersed and constantly fluctuating nature of the membership, and the state of communication technology. MNS members, of course, did not yet have access to the Internet, but neither did they

use conference calling or even speakerphones until the 1980s.⁸⁵ Decisions between Whole Network Meetings had to be debated through the internal newsletter and personal mail. This sometimes slowed work to a snail's pace. The refusal to delegate tasks and decisions led, for instance, to MNS taking more than two years to update a brief pamphlet describing the organization's politics.⁸⁶ Consensus and full decentralization, innovations designed to make the organization more effective, were beginning to visibly impede the achievement of its goals.

These factors had the combined effect of drawing MNS away from its vision of nonviolent revolution. As Philadelphia member Alan Tuttle wrote in 1977, "The theory and practice of MNS do not coincide. Probably the main area of disparity was in the *talk* of the need for a mass movement and the practice."⁸⁷ As early as 1976, Hilliker noted with exasperation that "the aspect of our strategy which encourages active nonviolent revolution is being lost in rhetoric instead of tried out in practice. The multifaceted, balanced strategy we have supported is one for which I've begun to feel an almost desperate need, merging personal with political concerns."⁸⁸

While MNS delved into the lived experience of oppression and focused on ways to not reproduce microhierarchies through its own efforts, the organization devoted less time to a structural analysis of how the same issues were playing out in the larger society. This left MNS insufficiently prepared to strategically respond to developments such as the Reagan administration's assault on the labor movement and welfare state, or the growing right-wing backlash

against the gains of the civil rights and feminist movements. As Raasch-Gilman admits, "We did so much difficult internal work because we had such a hard time confronting the larger social, political, and economic world in which we lived. It was easier to try to change ourselves and our immediate comrades than it was to devise long-term campaigns and strategies for changing the outside world."⁸⁹

An Antiauthoritarian Cadre Organization?

In 1982, MNS entered into lengthy discussions about the future of the organization touched off by a statement written by the Baltimore-based Pandora's Collective. The booms and busts that had occurred in many cities shook members' faith that the network was healthy and growing steadily. Meanwhile, the inward gaze of the previous years left many unsure of what MNS's contribution to broader movements was or should be. Two position papers significantly shaped the discussion and decisions that MNS eventually made at its Whole Network Meeting in 1982. The first, drafted by Bill Moyer, encouraged the group to develop from its current "spontaneous" organizational model to an "empowerment" one. The latter would combine the benefits of traditional bureaucratic organizations with those of the spontaneous type that MNS had been up to this point. The new model would seek to develop the abilities and leadership skills of all the group's members, while creating structures allowing the group to establish priorities and carry out long-term work on a national level.⁹⁰

A second paper, Steve Chase's "Reorganizers Manual," provided a useful analysis of tensions within MNS. Chase claimed that when it was formed, MNS intended to be both an "exemplary" and "adversarial" organization. It would be exemplary by living the revolution now through collective living, democratic group process, a rejection of oppressive roles, and support for member's personal growth. It would be adversarial by participating in and training others for strategic campaigns along with direct actions against exploitative corporations, the government war machine, and other unjust institutions. As Chase saw it, by the mid-1970s MNS had begun to lean much more heavily toward the pole of exemplary organization. The intense scrutiny of structure, leadership, and "group dynamics" represented the implicit prioritization of getting the MNS house—the showroom of the new society—in proper order. Chase concluded that this tension left MNS with a fundamental choice about what type of organization it would be: either a loose network of radicals supporting each other's work and commitments to live in a principled fashion, or a "movement-building" cadre organization committed to strategically developing the power of radical social movements in the 1980s.⁹¹

After considerable discussion, the network meeting accepted core elements of Moyer's and Chase's analyses, agreeing to reshape MNS into a movement-building organization based on an empowerment model. In terms of practical steps, this meant that members committed to carry out three types of work: participation in grassroots organizations, resource sharing with social movements (such as

conducting trainings, raising funds, and promoting them in MNS publications), and the building and maintenance of MNS itself. Though an exact definition of an empowerment model of organization was never agreed on, Raasch-Gilman sees it as "one with clear structure, form, goals, and politics which also placed decision-making and control with the lowest possible levels of the group."⁹²

During the early 1980s, MNS members devoted considerable energy to new efforts, including Take Back the Night marches, women's peace encampments, and a campaign against the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles coordinated with European organizers. In 1986, however, when members opened a discussion in the pages of the *Grapevine* evaluating the success of becoming a movement-building organization, most were unsatisfied with their progress. The *Organizational Handbook* had been rewritten to reflect the new orientation, and the structure had been finagled, but MNS participation in outside work still occurred individually. Members of MNS put in long hours, for example, in establishing the Pledge of Resistance, an effort to organize thousands of U.S. citizens to commit to nonviolent resistance to direct U.S. military intervention in Central America. But MNS lacked clear ways of contributing to developing struggles *as an organization*. The group, some charged, had not created the means of establishing its own political program or agreeing to specific strategies that members were expected to carry out.⁹³ With a declining focus on macroanalysis seminars and even informal political conversations, MNS's analysis had not only atrophied but also devolved throughout the 1980s. Chase commented

with exasperation, "Ecology . . . was dropped from our official description of the core elements of our philosophy, along with decentralization, cooperative economics, and racial and cultural diversity, when, in 1984, the majority of MNSers agreed to only describe feminism and revolutionary nonviolence as the core elements of our philosophy."⁹⁴

Through another round of searching, participants illuminated a number of underlying causes for the group's inability to meet its goals. Some suggested that many members feared growing, which would threaten the intimate, familial feel that had developed within the tiny organization. Nancy Brigham pointed to an unstated philosophical sticking point: "I think we may have a fundamental contradiction between our agreement to be a movement building organization and a deep belief that having influence is elitist or a misuse of power."⁹⁵ Finally, MNS had made little progress in bringing in new members and diversifying itself, due to the defining role that its own movement subculture played in the organization. As Raasch-Gilman perceptively concluded, "We couldn't really expand our cultural boundaries, because our cultural boundaries were what made us who we were."⁹⁶

Despite clarifications and recommitments put forward in 1986, MNS was not able to overcome these internal contradictions. At its network meeting in 1988, the forty assembled members came to consensus to "lay the group down," in the tradition of Quaker committees that have outlasted their usefulness. Doing so, they agreed, would allow them to devote their energy to new efforts able to more effectively meet the political challenges of the 1990s.⁹⁷

MNS and Anarchism, 1988-2008

In 1973, Lakey wrote that MNS was proposing "a revolution which is decisively on the side of life against death, of affirmation rather than destruction. The revolution for life confronts the old order, but confronts lies with openness and repression with community. It shows in its very style how different it is from the necrophilic American Empire."⁹⁸ In passages like these, one finds the hippie vocabulary of "affirmation" and "openness" crossed with indictments of the "necrophilic American Empire" that could have been lifted from the lyric sheets of the anarchist punk bands that sprung up in the 1980s. The common thread holding these seemingly different cultural milieus and approaches to change together was the centrality of building community, and the attempt to embody in their "very style" of action how they were different from the present system. Such rhetorical linkages are indicative of the role that MNS played in bridging, transmitting, and transforming the antiauthoritarian politics of the late 1960s into the practices, priorities, assumptions, and attitudes that comprise the contemporary anarchist movement as it has taken shape in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

When MNS members laid the organization down in 1988, they left in place institutions that later generations of radicals have drawn on. After the organization dissolved, a number of its most committed participants established strategy, direct action, and skills training programs and collectives, such as Training for Change in Philadelphia, Future Now in the Twin Cities, and New Society Trainers

in Seattle. New Society Publishers outlived MNS, and continues to publish important titles on feminism, ecology, and social movements, while a summer camp that MNS members founded still provides a safe space for children with queer parents on a sliding-scale fee structure.⁹⁹ The area of West Philadelphia that was home to the MNS Life Center became a hub of 1990s' anarchist political activity, and has in recent years become home to a vibrant radical queer community. These developments owe a debt to the infrastructure—collective houses owned by a land trust, a member-operated food co-op, and a community center—left in place by MNS.¹⁰⁰ The low cost of living and sense of political community nourished by these institutions have provided a basis for a number of important interventions, including international organizing to free political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, an innovative ACT-UP chapter that worked to shift attention to the AIDS crisis in the global South, crucial work for media democracy and low-powered FM radio, organizing resistance to the Republican National Convention in 2000, and the promotion of radical Jewish anti-Zionist culture, such as the production in 2004 of the play *An Olive on the Seder Plate*.

Significant as these contributions have been, the ideas that MNS brought to radical politics have made a broader impact than the institutions it left in its wake. Though it is hard to evaluate the exact extent of MNS's influence without fuller accounts of the period's other key organizational initiatives, it is clear that MNS was a major innovator and force in promoting, among other tools and approaches: multi-issue political analysis, consensus process, collective

living and political community in urban areas, modeling political commitments in everyday relationships and life choices, network structure, internal antioppression work, identity-based caucuses, cost sharing and sliding-scale prices, direct action, and the use of spokescouncils.

The influence of MNS's approach to activism in recent times was perhaps most evident in the manner in which organizing for the actions against the World Trade Organization took place in Seattle in 1999. This is unsurprising, as former MNS members, including Raasch-Gilman, along with organizers heavily influenced by MNS, such as Starhawk and David Solnit, played central roles in developing the actions and trainings for participants. In Seattle, the nonviolent direct action tradition that MNS promoted intertwined and sometimes conflicted with other tactics and tendencies of the antiauthoritarian Left—for example, ecodefense monkey wrenching and Autonomien-style black blocs—that had developed parallel to the MNS project, giving a sense of how complex and variegated the movement has become since 1968.

But if the success of Seattle demonstrates the clear debts and respect owed to MNS members and their milieu by contemporary antiauthoritarians, the challenges that quickly emerged in the North America global justice movement following Seattle make it equally clear that radicals have not learned to avoid the pitfalls of the MNS experience, much less develop workable solutions to the problems that eventually sunk the MNS ship. How could an antiauthoritarian movement create theory and strategy on a national (or even international) basis? What role did and

should explicit and implicit leadership play in the movement? How to deal with the relative racial and class homogeneity of the participants? And how to work productively with other radical and progressive sectors? These issues were all under debate before the 9/11 attacks sideswiped the movement and changed the conversation. The fact that these questions will reoccur, and continue to weigh down the efforts of new movements and generations of radicals until they are more adequately addressed, has been made apparent by the experience of the reformed SDS. In an assessment of that organization's first two years, Joshua Kahn Russell and Brian Kelly list an array of frustrating inclinations and practices that SDS has had to confront:

When there were too many male voices representing SDS in the media, the response was to attack those speaking rather than to create systems of support for others to publish and be represented. . . .

People proposed [organizational] structures that were rarely designed to meet concrete needs. The debate was often framed by concepts like "decentralization" versus "centralization"—an abstract theoretical simplification. . . .

Informal networks based on experience and personal relationships emerged . . . whispers and groaning about informal leadership permeated the convention floor.¹⁰¹

It is striking and disappointing, but perhaps not surprising, to note the extent to which these conversations

follow those occurring within MNS in 1976.

Some recent anarchist theory likewise optimistically promotes a version of MNS strategy with little consideration of the substantial problems that MNS encountered when it tried to enact such a strategy. For example, in *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, Richard Day presents a wide-ranging and insightful history of anarchist and related political thought from the early nineteenth century to the contemporary period.¹⁰² Yet Day concludes this itinerary by explicitly rejecting strategic organizing campaigns that seek to directly confront inequalities of power and wealth, in favor of focusing overwhelmingly on building prefigurative institutions. For Day, "nothing is more important today than building, linking and defending autonomous communities," so that in the gaps and margins of the neoliberal order, "spaces are available for experimentation" with forms like autonomous zones and intentional communities.¹⁰³

In 1933, the young anarchists who comprised the Vanguard Group criticized the tendency of movement veterans to live in anarchist "colonies," or intentional communities, and claim such activity as revolutionary. A defender of such colonies asked in a letter to the group's journal, "Isn't a living experiment superior to any logical proof, and doesn't the value of colony building lie exactly in the fact that it tries to solve social questions by experiments and not by arguments only?" The Vanguard Group pointedly responded:

There is too much superstitious awe about the word experiment. An experiment . . . cannot be

indefinitely pursued without taking stock of all the previous failures and without introducing a certain variant in each and every attempt. The history of such attempts, for nearly a century, to solve the social problem via colony building has clearly shown the futility of such a method. To keep repeating the same attempts without an intelligent appraisal of all the numerous failures in the past is not to uphold the right to experiment, but to insist upon one's right to escape from the hard facts of social struggle into the world of wishful belief.¹⁰⁴

MNS knew in theory, from the outset, that alternative community building was an insufficient means of creating revolutionary change, even if, to the regret of many participants, the group ended up emphasizing community and lifestyle in practice. The members' subsequent experience confirmed the insufficiencies of an overreliance on prefigurative projects. For Day and others to ignore the lessons that MNS and similar efforts offer is to neglect the true meaning of "experiment" noted by the Vanguard Group.

A key tenet that MNS lived by in its earlier years stated, "Most of what we need to know about making a nonviolent revolution, we have yet to learn." The disappointing setbacks that our movements—whether committed to nonviolence or not—have faced in recent years seem to indicate the continuing validity of such a proposition. Still, it seems clear that a good deal of what we have to learn can be gained from studying the specific successes and shortcomings of sympathetic movements not just in

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also in the recent past—and then modifying our practice accordingly. MNS was an essentially anarchist organization that for seventeen years claimed hundreds of members in more than a dozen cities and contributed to most of the significant struggles of its day. Furthermore, it was perhaps the only such organization, in its time and since, to forward a comprehensive vision and strategy for making antiauthoritarian revolutionary change in the late twentieth-century United States. As such, it deserves to be not only remembered out of respect but also studied assiduously by contemporary antiauthoritarians, so that we might take stock and introduce new variants into each and every one of *our* new efforts. As MNS illustrates, when we don't learn from our mistakes, we haven't fully learned from our great successes.