

Letter from Guy Debord to the Rennes group
of the Anarchist International
16 July 1967¹

*On organization and autonomy*²

The discussion begun on 3 July [1967] between us and the comrades from two groups in the Anarchist International³ seems to us to make visible – aside from our agreement on fundamental points, and fittingly produced by the uncontestable existence of this accord – a divergence on the question of organization, such as it had been expounded by Loïc Le Reste in the name of the Rennes group. One can summarize this divergence thus: whereas we are clearly partisans of the *multiplication of autonomous revolutionary organizations*, Le Reste thinks of their *fusion*. Of course, Le Reste is not a partisan of a unique revolutionary organization that claims “to represent” a class or the revolutionary movement, and we ourselves are not in principle attached to an artificial distinction between groupings that can reciprocally recognize in each other a fundamental identity at the principal theoretical and practical levels.

Thus, the question is not posed around an abstract definition of an absolute model of organization, but depends upon a critical examination of current conditions and upon certain options concerning the perspectives of real action.

The positions of the SI on this question are clear, often expressed and confirmed by all of our conduct. If it is well known that the SI has never “recruited,” but has willingly welcomed several individuals here and there, these two aspects are equally determined by the concrete conditions in which we believe our practical activity is located – as goals and as means, inseparably – and thus aren’t simply dependent upon a comprehension or an approval of certain theoretical positions (as far as these positions are concerned, we naturally desire that all those who can *appropriate them*, in the full sense of the term, make free usage of them). Very schematically, we can say that, at the international level, the SI tries to employ itself in the reappearance of certain general bases for a current-day revolutionary critique. We do not make this *moment* that is the activity of the SI into a *goal*: the workers must organize themselves, their emancipation can only be their own work, etc. Numerical “reinforcement,” considered as a unequivocal advantage, cannot be accepted by us. It can be harmful from an internal point of

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² *Translator*: note that, in their essay “Why Art Can’t Kill the Situationist International,” published in *October* 79 (Winter 1997), T.J. Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith cite this document – though it “is [only] a working document [...] unremarkable in itself, and never published subsequently” – “because its contents contradict the current travesty-history of the SI during this period, and not least that travesty-history’s favorite *political* claim – that the Situationists were simply ‘council communists’ whose only answer to the practical questions of revolutionary politics was to hypostatize past experiments with workers’ councils as a way of solving all problems of organization in advance.”

³ *Translator*: Groupe libertaire de Ménilmontant and Groupe anarchiste de Rennes.

view if it creates a disequilibrium between what we really have to do and the troops who would only be deployed abstractly and thus subordinated – due to the fact of geographical or other kinds of obstacles. Numerical “reinforcement” can be unfortunate from an external point of view, by presenting an example of a will to pseudo-power on the model of the numerous Trotskyist groupuscules with the “calling to be party leaders” (the SI, which is already frequently slandered even though it does not offer any opportunities for this kind or reproach and, precisely because we do not offer any, would be even more frequently slandered if it gave some signs of going in this direction). That is to say, the “massive” rallying to our position of several dozen comrades *on the local level* is not at all what we desire.

Even more clearly, we are in disagreement with Loïc Le Reste when he says that the autonomy of different organizations can introduce a *hierarchy* among them. On the contrary, we think that hierarchy threatens the interior of an organization from the moment that certain people in it can be led to approve and execute what has been decided by that organization, while others have less power than others to influence the result. But we do not understand how an organization that is actually autonomous – and of course rejects all double memberships – can submit to an exterior power. Without doubt, such an idea has already known a “Garnautine”⁴ expression, but one can say that there are few things to be drawn from it: everyone knows or will know that the “Garnautins,” when they do not lie, content themselves with deceiving themselves. Thus, they write in *The Unique and Its Property*:⁵ “When the SI claims to discuss [matters] at the theoretical level with diverse revolutionary organizations . . . it sinks into bureaucratic farce and judges these movements and their programs from the superior and abstract point of view of a discarnate radicalism.” It is only if this type of rapport is really bureaucratic – that is to say, aiming for *subordination* – or if this basic radicalism is actually abstract and discarnate (which still hasn’t been demonstrated and could only be done with difficulty by the Garnautin-M.N.E.F.⁶ incarnation) that one could speak of a *superior role* sought by the SI, in practice, in the first case, and in a weak dream, in the second. But where would the so-called revolutionary organization be, if it were composed of imbeciles who *let themselves be treated in this fashion*? Here the Garnautins have stupidly projected upon the Zengakuren or Acción comunista⁷ *their own attitude* of impotent respect, which we ourselves only discovered retrospectively, at the moment of their exclusion.

As for possible fusions in the future, we believe that they must be made at the most advanced revolutionary moments *of the workers’ movement*.

It is certainly not for us to express the positions that appear to be implicated by the known bases of the A.I.⁸ (we have never given any sort of advice to these comrades concerning their politics – which is another way of reiterating the obvious fact that we never led any sort of “conspiracy” in the A.F.⁹ by sending in or recruiting agents from it). We will limit ourselves to recalling the well-known conclusions that naturally derived from the attitude that these groups

⁴ Arbitrarily chosen name for the Strasbourgeois who were excluded [in January 1967].

⁵ Pamphlet published in May 1967 by the “Garnautins” and directed against Guy Debord.

⁶ *Translator*: Mutuelle nationale des étudiants de France (the National Students’ Mutual of France), a nonprofit mutual insurance company that provided French students with health insurance.

⁷ *Translator*: Japanese and Spanish revolutionary organizations.

⁸ The Anarchist International.

⁹ *Translator*: the Anarchist Federation.

have themselves chosen to adopt by continuing the struggle in the A.F. up until its Congress at Bordeaux. The A.I. is a part of the anarchist movement, certainly not due to chance or airdrops. If the A.I. wants to help renew, in a critical manner, thoughts and activities that come from the old anarchist movement – an *important part* of which will surely find itself justified and realized by the next revolutionary current – then it is legitimate to expect from it a re-examination that we, for example, have taken up with respect to “Marxism” (in our opinion, several days ago, Comrade Le Glou¹⁰ expounded upon this task very well). In the perspective of a short-term liquidation, the orientation towards an autonomous position with respect to the international anarchist movement, the project of publishing a revue and documents, etc., seems both impracticable and useless.

We do not claim to know the secret of the organizational problem of the next era – and, in any case, this problem won’t truly be posed and resolved at the level of small, current-day radical groups. We, and others, have only a few definite givens, for example, those that prohibit the reprise of the old models, without, for all that, falling back into the pseudo-innocence of purely informal liaisons. It is necessary to begin with such givens; and respect for the autonomy of numerous groupings worthy of dialogue, like the steadfastness of this dialogue, is surely one of them.

For the SI,
[Guy] Debord, [Mustapha] Khayati, [René] Viénet

¹⁰ Jacques Le Glou, member of the Libertarian Group of Ménilmontant.