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My Relationship to Anarchism:
The Practice and Thoughts of Lin Dodge

by Dan Leahy

My relationship to Anarchism starts with Lin Dodge. Lin was a friend of my main professor at New York University's Graduate School of Public Administration. My professor's name was Herman Berkman.

I attended NYU's Graduate School, located at Washington Square in downtown Manhattan, from 1967 to 1972.

This was a time of great social ferment among university students. People seemed to be taking over buildings, marching and demonstrating every day. Almost all of this protest focused on the movement to stop the war in Viet Nam. I participated in many such activities, but seldom as a leader or organizer.

It was also a time of tremendous personal growth and questioning for me. Not only was I struggling to explain the great poverty I saw in Harlem, the South Bronx and Brooklyn, but I was under an induction order to report for military duty in Vietnam and trying to figure out the right thing to do.

Both Lin and Herman were anarchists. Herman was the grand nephew of Alexander Berkman who was the lover of Emma Goldman and the person who attempted to kill Henry Clay Frick, Andrew Carnegie's man at the steel complex in Homestead, Pennsylvania.

Herman was an economic anarchist, a classic libertarian economist from the Chicago School. I could never really tell whether Herman was a left wing communitarian or right wing supporter of Milton Friedman. Nevertheless, he was my graduate school mentor,

my protector from political persecution, my friend and confidant, but he was not my anarchist educator. That person was Lin Dodge.

Lin supposedly came from an upper class Connecticut "blue blood" family, but I never knew for sure. Nor do I know how he went from there to prison.

Lin was a conscientious objector (C.O.) during World War II and spent time in prison as a result. While in prison, he spent most of that time in solidarity confinement because he would always try and break the color line at the cafeteria and insist on eating with the black prisoners. When he did, the prison authorities would put him in solidarity confinement.

Lin didn't bow to illegitimate authority - he always questioned it, asked for explanations, kept pushing. He also did not accept racism. When he saw it, he wouldn't participate.

Lin did time with some of the future leaders of African Americans, such as Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, and Bayard Rustin, a major strategist for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As a war resister, he also spent time in C.O. camps run by the Society of Friends, the Quakers. I think he had a love/hate relationship with the Quakers. He felt that Quakers were complicit in the war effort since they ran the camps for COs. One time, when Lin got in a heated argument with the Quakers, he wrote on the wall, "Quake the Fuckers." I never confirmed for myself whether Quakers ran those camps.

I met Lin when he was hired by Herman to work on a study of "citizen participation" strategies for public policy making. This was a big topic during the mid-1960s. The language contained in the legislation setting up President Johnson's anti-poverty programs said that there had to be "maximum feasible participation" of the people serviced by the anti-poverty programs.

All the participants in Herman's study went somewhere to put together their report. Lin collected all the "doodles" left over on the scratch pads of the participants and made his collection into the cover of the report. This art work was the most interesting aspect of the report, although very "un-professional."

Lin was also a teacher of mathematics in the public school system. I never knew whether he just did this on his own or whether he was a certificated teacher.

One of the big city-wide fights that erupted in NYC at this time was the issue of community control of schools. There were three experimental models and one of them was PS 109 in Harlem where Lin taught.

The fledgling teachers union led by Al Shanker objected to the notion of community control and struck the schools. The forces that favored community control charged the union with protecting the racist practices of white teachers.

Lin was one of those community members who disagreed with the union and sided with the forces of community control. One of the first activities that I remember Lin telling me about was when he took giant chain pinchers and broke into PS 109 so that the community could continue teaching. Direct action for community control.

I used to see Lin at all the anti-war demonstrations at NYU, especially when the police, the Tactical Police Force (TPF) or federal marshalls with their long riot sticks had us surrounded. He was always dressed in an oversized grey suit and would walk up and down between the two forces, but always facing the cops.

I think he was there to prevent violence.... by either side.

Lin was totally committed to non-violence. He told me once that what we had to figure out was how to keep a person from being beaten by another person without picking up a baton ourselves. I haven't figured out that one yet, but then I do not have the personal courage of Lin Dodge.

During the height of the anti-war movement in 1970 there was a nation wide student strike. Students at NYU took over two large university buildings, Courant Hall and

Kimball Hall. Courant Hall was the mathematics institute and housed an expensive federal computer on the second floor. Kimball Hall housed the university's printing presses. I was in Courant Hall.

Lin showed up at Courant Hall. The SDS leadership didn't trust him, nor agree with him. He argued in public session that we should make use of the computer, not blow it up. His argument lost, mainly I think because none of us had any idea about how to make use of such a thing as a computer! The vote was to hold the computer hostage for the release of the Panther 21 and the end of the War by Wednesday, two days later.

When that didn't happen, people tried to blow up the computer as we were leaving the building. That didn't work either.

In contrast, Kimball Hall was controlled by "anarchists" like Lin and they kept control for over two weeks, becoming a major printing press for the national student strike.

Lin was also active in the foundation of AlternateU on 6th Avenue at 14th street in Manhattan. I went there a couple of times with him. The school curriculum was on a poster with a quote from Mao Tse-teung. It said, "If you want knowledge you must take part in changing reality - if you want to know the taste of a pear - you must change the pear by eating it yourself." I never forgot that quote.

The curriculum had courses on Anarcho-Communism, communes, street theater, sex roles, ecology action, self-defense, living free, organic food, gay liberation, child oppression, and many more. I never took a course, but I had Lin Dodge and I still have the poster.

Lin was always talking one on one to me. I can't remember where. It seemed like it happened when we were walking somewhere.

He asked me whether I thought people were ready for revolution - complete change - do you think people are ready for total change?! Dammed if I knew. I just wanted the war to end. I could hardly deal with Lin Dodge. He was total change to me, so self assured in his questioning. He must have spent a lot of time talking all this out somewhere -- maybe it was in prison.

Lin was always challenging me, without confronting me. He wanted to know why it was that there weren't fat people in leadership positions in the anti-war movement. How come only "beautiful people" were leaders? I didn't know. I could never tell why the leaders were leaders.

Do you think we can really have a revolution unless everyone is bi-sexual, he asked me. Isn't male dominance a central problem? Jesus, Lin, I'm just barely into my first heterosexual relationship.

On one of these walks, Lin said we should go to a performance of the Living Theater in Brooklyn. We took the subway out to Brooklyn and Lin talked to me about the Living Theater and its practice of breaking down the "wall" between actors and audience. That idea, like most of what Lin talked about, frightened me. When we got to the theater, I was very relieved that we could only get seats in the balcony. I thought to myself, "they will never get up here." They didn't and I remained secure behind that "wall."

When I left NYU, I got a job working for the Quakers as a community organizer. \$300 per month and they would pay my phone bill. After four years of waiting for me to get a "real job" my wife had had enough. I thought it was a great deal. Getting paid to organize.

One day when I went to the 14th street loft in Manhattan where the Quakers had their office, there was Lin. He had convinced the Quakers to give him space for the Come Unity Press, a twenty-four hour, 365 offset printing press, available to those who would use it.

I wanted to print booklets and flyers I was using in my community organizing work in Brooklyn. Lin said great; there it is. He taught me how to make plates, put them on the press, ink the press and run it. Once. After that, it was up to me. If there wasn't paper, ink, plates, whoever wanted to use it had to go get those things. Anarchist practice.

The Come Unity press lasted for at least two years. In 1973, I left NYC for a "real" job my mother could mention to my relatives. I don't know what happened to the press or to Lin.

The last time I saw Lin I had fallen asleep at the print shop after a long night of printing. He woke me up by pinching my exposed nipple and there he was, nude except for a pair of bright maroon panties. He was "out." It never dawned on me until that moment that he and Herman were not just friends, but lovers.

Lin's practice was my first introduction to Anarchism. A commitment to community that is self-educated and trained in human relations that are non-violent, non-racist and bi-sexual with a capacity for challenging illegitimate authority and producing self-assured individuals ready for total change. For Lin, there were no walls.