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THE ACF : WHO WE ARE

The purpose of this pamphlet is to give people interested in the ACF an idea of what we're about. Also, new members often want to know something about the origins of the ACF, what debates and discussions we've had and how we operate. The minimum principles can only give a vague impression of what ideas we have. We have had full discussions on a number of issues that have resulted in more comprehensive statements. And, equally important, the ACF has an **approach** to practice and organisation which is unique and cannot be conveyed easily through a few brief statements. The pamphlet is therefore intended to help people to make up their minds about whether or not the ACF is the sort of organisation they want to be a part of so that they will not join on false pretences. Though we continually re-examine our ideas, practice and organisation there are still core elements that make the ACF what it is and people should be aware of these before they consider joining.

REASONS FOR THE SETTING UP OF THE ACF

The ACF was officially founded in March 1986. At that time it consisted of about 25 people with groups in London, Medway and Canterbury and individuals scattered around the country. The founding of the ACF followed six months of the Anarchist-Communist Discussion Group which had been set up around the magazine 'Virus' and had a long-term aim of forming a national anarchist-communist organisation. The end result, much sooner than expected, was the ACF.

We formed the ACF because we felt there was a vacuum in the anarchist movement. There were a number of individual anarchists organised only on a local basis or not at all, a loose network of people around the paper 'Class War', and the anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the Direct Action Movement. We felt we did not fit in anywhere in the above framework and that we had something distinctive to offer.

We didn't want to join DAM as they are a proclaimed anarcho-syndicalist group who believe that the aim of the anarchist movement should be to set up an anarcho-syndicalist union based around the workplace. We disagreed with this perspective because we believe that 1) the workplace is not the only area of struggle, 2) workers, women, black people and others will most likely develop forms of organisation that do not correspond to the anarcho-syndicalist union, and 3) because DAM was based on a fixed dogma there didn't appear to be much scope for the **development** of ideas and practice.

At that time Class War was not a national organisation but only a loose network of supporters. They didn't seem to have a national strategy for a coherent national organisation. Also, though we supported many of the actions of Class War and welcomed the imagination of their approach, we felt that they only related to limited groups of people and perpetuated an image that gave anarchists a lot of publicity but didn't do much for getting all sorts of ordinary people seriously involved in anarchist politics.

We didn't want to only get involved in isolated local groups because we felt there was a need for a national organisation in order to be more effective. Capitalism is international and we need to aim for at least a national co-ordination if not an international movement.

Because of the inadequacies of the above approaches we formed the Anarchist-Communist Federation which is a national, political, membership organisation based on local groups but federated into one organisation with a decision-making structure and national publications. Though local groups and individuals have considerable autonomy, we also operate as a national organisation with regular national meetings and conferences where we debate and discuss a wide variety of issues, exchange information and co-ordinate activity. We often produce national leaflets, support demos together and try to work together as an organisation around campaigns such as the Poll Tax.

We are a specific **political** organisation in the sense that we try to be involved in a number of areas of struggle - in the locality, workplace, against sexism and racism etc - but still retain our independence as an organisation. Though involved in struggles and learning from them, we would not 'dissolve' into a union or movement but keep our own identity until the goal of anarchist-communism has been reached. This is because we will continue to have something specific to say until then.

We are a **membership** organisation which means that people join who feel committed to the organisation. It's a long-term project that needs people who are prepared to make a contribution. Being part of an anarchist organisation should not be a trendy fashion where people come and go as it takes their fancy. That doesn't mean 24 hour revolutionaries, but people who are serious enough to make some contribution and stick with it even though it may be difficult at times. Also decisions cannot be representative of the organisation if we don't know who is a member. If different people come along and make decisions every time then we can never develop as an organisation in a consistent way.

Though we have much in common with other anarchists, we believe that we have developed a distinct perspective in the three areas of ideas, practice and organisation. The following sections will look at these in more detail.

IDEAS

The basis of the organisation, or rather the starting point, is the Aims and Principles. These were debated between November 1985 and March 1986 when the following version was adopted at the founding conference. They were never intended to be tablets of stone and we have since made some changes but neither did we intend for them to be drastically altered as they do represent basic principles. People shouldn't join with the express intention of changing them, but rather with the attitude that we will modify and improve them as we develop our ideas and practice.

THE AIMS AND PRINCIPLES, 1986 - 1988

We believe that:

1. Capitalism and other social systems, in which wealth and power are the property of a ruling class/elite, must be destroyed;
2. Reformist and statist solutions will necessarily fail and therefore revolution is the only possible means of achieving anarchist-communism. How far such a revolution will be peaceful depends upon the degree to which the ruling class clings on to power through violence and state repression;
3. Genuine liberation can only come about through the self-activity of the great mass of the population. We regard parliament, representative democracy and political vanguardism as being obstacles to a self-managed society. Institutions and organisations which attempt to mediate in the fight against domination cannot succeed. Trade unionism, as it is presently constituted, plays an important part in maintaining class exploitation, insofar as it regulates and justifies it through collective bargaining and bureaucratic structures. Nevertheless it is important to work within the trade union movement, in order to build up a rank-and-file workers movement which encourages workers' control of struggle and cuts across sectional boundaries;
4. Workers and other oppressed sections of society will, in times of revolutionary upheaval, create their own democratic institutions, whether they be based on the workplace or the community. To this end we encourage the creation of organs of struggle based on the rank and file, independent of political parties;
5. Pure spontaneity is unlikely to be sufficient to overthrow entrenched class domination. Anarchists must indicate the libertarian alternative to class societies, participate as **anarchists** in struggle and organise on a federative basis to assist in the revolutionary process;

6. Capitalism is international and needs to be fought internationally. We therefore try to maintain contact with as many anarchist-communists as possible in overseas countries as the preliminary stage to the creation of an anarchist international.

7. We do not simply seek the abolition of class differences, for inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, age, sexuality and gender. Personal relationships are now often based on domination and submission. We seek not only an economic revolution but a social and cultural revolution as well, involving a thoroughgoing change in attitudes and organisation of everyday lives to free us in our social and personal interactions.

8. We reject sectarianism and work for a united **revolutionary** anarchist movement.

These principles can be better understood with some background information and further explanation.

Principle One. The expression "other social systems" was used in order to get around the debate of the exact nature of the Soviet Union as there is disagreement about whether the Soviet Union is capitalist or some other social system (not socialist or communist, of course) which is equally oppressive. Also, it allows for the existence of 'patriarchy', a word used to describe the system of male domination which is related to, but still distinct from, capitalism. Whatever the systems are called, the end result is that we believe they should be overthrown.

Principle Two. This principle is stressing that the traditional Labourite and Marxist-Leninist solutions are not the way forward as the former don't lead anywhere new and the latter leads to another form of oppression. The second clause indicates that the revolution will inevitably involve violence but it emphasises that we do not actively seek violence. Violence is necessary because the ruling class is violent, not because we glorify it. We want to see an end to violence but we are not pacifists.

Principle Three. This aims to emphasise that it is people themselves who must organise their struggles directly and not follow leaders or put trust in institutions. This is a fundamental principle of anarchism. That does not mean, however, that we cut ourselves off from organisations such as trade unions or campaigning groups. We work within these groups, constantly arguing for struggles to be controlled directly by those involved. That means within the trade unions we would like to see groups develop that are capable of independent initiative, uncontrolled by the trade union structure.

Principle Four. This is similar to the above point but the exact form these organisations will take is difficult to say. How decisions are made is a very complex area and we use the word 'democratic' with reservations as the question of decision-making needs further discussion.

Principle Five. We stress here that we should not just sit back and wait for the revolution to happen. We are part of a movement for a new society and we must be prepared to argue our ideas as they can influence the direction that society will go in. The greater the influence of anarchist ideas in society, the sooner there will be a revolution and the greater the guarantee that a revolution will not be dominated by a particular elite.

Principle Six. Though difficult to achieve, internationalism is vital because a revolution will have to take place in a number of different countries if it is to be successful.

Principle Seven. This is another key principle for the ACF. We do not believe that these oppressive relationships can all be explained in terms of class and therefore will not disappear with capitalism. People in these oppressed groups should be supported if they want to organise independently to combat sexism and racism both now and after the overthrow of capitalism.

Principle Eight. Though we think we have a specific reason for existing, that doesn't mean that we want to remain isolated from other anarchists. We would like to see anarchists who believe in the need for revolutionary change to work together on a number of issues. We specify **revolutionary** because we believe our differences with individualist anarchists who concentrate on their own lifestyle and aren't interested in organising with other people in struggle are so great that we wouldn't get anywhere.

ADDITIONAL MOTIONS ADOPTED.

Since these principles were adopted the ACF has continued to develop its ideas. The discussions have been enriched by the new people who have joined. The main discussions took place at conferences. Specific topics were decided upon to debate and then at the end of the conference, position statements were drawn up and agreed, reflecting the common points. The discussions were much more wide-ranging than the statements can show.

ACF POLICY STATEMENTS

From National Conference, 11th-12th April 1987, London:

THE ROLE OF THE ACF.

We should have no illusions about the importance of the ACF, we can only help those in struggle as best as we are able. We can provide physical assistance, we can publicise and encourage support for struggles, we can help build links between different groups in struggle, we can provide an anarchist analysis of a given situation, but we cannot make decisions for people.

Before anything else we should maintain the importance of those involved in a struggle being the people who decide upon its course of action, whether they be women, black people, workers, unemployed etc. We do however maintain the right to our own opinions and criticisms of struggles.

We should encourage the organisation of struggles independent of control by bureaucrats in the Labour Party, trades unions or Trot groups etc. We should argue against any tendencies to dependence on these people.

We should support struggles for their own intrinsic values, not for what benefit our own organisation may get from any struggle.

We have as much, if not more, to learn from those in struggle as they have from us. It is their experiences and impressions that should form the beginning of our own understanding of their particular struggle.

REFORMISM

Our politics should relate to the here and now or they are dead. We should not be merely propagandising about our political theory and the future revolution but actively participating in and supporting struggles and fighting oppression.

We support the fight for reforms if the method by which the reforms are to be achieved is from **below** via direct action of one form or another. The success of such direct action enhances the self-confidence of those involved and forms the basis for larger future struggles, whilst increasing the solidarity of the oppressed.

We involve ourselves in actions such as marches, strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, subversion etc, as long as we are not marginalising ourselves. We reject notions of propaganda by the deed as an end in themselves.

We do not seek reforms from above via gifts from leftie MPs or negotiations on our behalf by trade union leaders or fighting court cases. The leftie bureaucrats in the unions, poverty lobby or Labour Party wish to enhance their control and leadership via the crumbs they throw us. In turn, their "We'll do it for you" politics leads to passivity and atomisation, playing us into the hands of the bosses. The security of such reforms lies in the hands of the oppressed and the degree to which they will struggle to support them.

LIBERTARIAN ORGANISATION IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Trade unions at the rank and file level form a focus for the beginning of industrial disputes.

Trade unions are bureaucratic, reformist and to a large extent undemocratic.

The leaderships of trade unions are separate and divorced from the experiences of most workers. Trade union leaders do see their role as professional negotiators, their own position depending on their control of the rank and file. There is an inevitable tendency for them to work in league with management, the State, or both. Their separation from the everyday experiences of ordinary workers and their reformist and bureaucratic ideology and practice lead them to regularly sell out workers' struggles and fail to obtain solidarity for struggles.

There is a need for the creation of a libertarian current within the labour movement in order that workers can organise themselves in a non-hierarchical manner across trade union boundaries to improve workers solidarity, support for strike action, democratisation of struggles and to agitate and act against sell-outs. Rank and file organisations could fulfil this role.

Rank and file groups are limited by the inevitable passivity of many workers in capitalism. The bureaucratic reformist trade unions feed off this passivity and encourage it. Rank and file organisations will help to combat this passivity. Fully democratic libertarian trade unions organising the majority of workers within capitalism are a utopian dream.

From the Special Conference, 10th-11th October 1987, in London

IMPERIALISM

We will do what we can to show support and solidarity for anti-imperialist struggles. As anarchists we have our own specific analysis of these struggles, but at the end of the day an oppressed people will choose their own method of liberation.

We support anti-imperialism but we oppose the leadership ideology of nationalism. This ideology attempts to subordinate all other struggles (class, race, sexuality etc) to the concept of the nation State.

As anarchists we need to be involved in anti-imperialist work in order for our criticisms of these struggles to be taken seriously and seen as relevant.

Our activities need to be internationalist in practice and reflect a good understanding of the history and effects of imperialism.

Although we support the liberation of a people from 'outside interference' we realise that an isolated 'independent' State will find it impossible to escape international capitalism. A people may be able to escape the direct rule of another power, but the ultimate revolution must be international, abolishing all States.

Within diverse 'national liberation' movements there are likely to be progressive currents (from an anarchist viewpoint) which we should make contact with where possible. Such currents will not necessarily call themselves 'anarchist' or 'communist'.

Information on such currents is often deliberately denied us by the 'official' liberation and solidarity organisations.

RACISM

1. We recognise that contemporary racism has its roots in imperialism and slavery. Racism was the dehumanising ideology used as the justification for slavery, colonisation and exploitation.

2. We believe that the abolition of capitalism will not automatically mean an end to racism and sexism. A change in class relationships and the mode of production will not necessarily remove deep rooted power relationships such as racism and sexism.

3. We define racism as an institutional relationship, whereby white people oppress Black people. The term racism means more than 'simple' prejudice but also implies the power to back up any such prejudice on a mass or institutional basis.

4. There is the need to recognise white racism in order to fight it, not to wallow in guilt, and to use this acknowledgement as a starting point. Equally it is important to go beyond the empty sloganeering of the Left. Yes, links must be forged between Black and white people in struggle, but this doesn't come about by sloganeering, intervening and posing as a new leadership, or sitting back and applauding others' initiatives. It comes about by solidarity, mutual aid, and identifying and working towards common goals. Specific examples of where Black groups have requested support and solidarity were given at conference and are rife. It is important that the ACF recognises the importance of this work and becomes actively involved.

SEXISM

Sexism is the domination of men over women. This oppression pre-dates capitalism and although its exact origins are hard to determine, it is one of the oldest oppressions. All men benefit from sexism and therefore they will not easily give up their power and must be considered an obstacle even though they are not the enemy. Sexism is built into the fabric of society so that both men and women are socialised into adopting sexist attitudes and roles: women towards themselves and men towards women. Sexism cannot be subordinated to the class struggle and will not end with the destruction of capitalism, though the two are interlinked. Capitalism itself is an obstacle to the ending of women's oppression. Though not a conscious conspiracy, capitalism uses women as a reserve labour force and as unpaid labour in the home.

Sexism exists on all levels of society - political, economic, social and personal. Therefore all these areas are arenas of struggle against women's oppression.

We believe that women must organise autonomously to fight their oppression. Men, though they will lose their power, have much to gain in terms of richer lives and therefore should also take up the issues, combating sexism in society as well as in their personal lives.

Practical points:

1. Women in the ACF will organise a women's group as they see fit. What it does and how it does it will be determined by them.
2. We need more articles by and about women in Virus.
3. A women's pamphlet which could possibly develop later into something more regular.

From National Conference, 29th-30th April 1989

DECISION MAKING AND THE INTERDEPENDENT SOCIETY

Organisation of production. Production should be organised and run collectively; this does NOT mean collectives will be run in isolation from each other but that they will operate in an **interdependent** society.

Decisions will be made by everyone involved and affected. The categories of 'worker' and 'consumer' (an artificial division) will be abolished. Decisions will be made at different levels - local, regional, national and world - depending on how widely people are affected.

Sharing and co-operation will be the basis of society. For this there must be mutual recognition of peoples' needs, abilities, desires and interdependence - when people or regions want things they ask and are **given** them.

Production for sale or exchange will be abolished. Instead we will have **production for need** as determined by the individual and the collective. Abolition of the present situation where the economy is a **separate sphere** to which everything is subordinate.

Anarchist communism will abolish the artificial scarcity of the present world economy. For example the fact of food mountains, fallow fields and crop burning while people are malnourished and starving; empty homes and an abundance of building labour and materials while millions remain homeless.

People's material needs (as defined by them) will be met and the major goal of society will be improving the quality of life NOT the quantity of output. Work should be as playful and creative as possible; this includes making it as easy as possible for people to change 'jobs' frequently rather than doing the same task for years or a lifetime.

Overall decision making will be made through mass assemblies of everyone involved, day-to-day running will be by committees made up of mandated delegates who are instantly revocable (recallable) and rotating. There will be time limits for delegate posts so that people can't exercise power over others through being permanent delegates.

Decision making. We reject the notion of bourgeois democracy, which is a mechanism of an exploitative society. Representation is a barrier to the participation of all people in the running of their own lives.

There should be no separation of economic and political decision making, they are totally interconnected; all economic and political questions are SOCIAL questions. The aim is to work towards the total involvement of everyone in decision making.

People should run and control every aspect of their lives through direct and equal involvement in all decision making. This means mass assemblies of everyone involved and affected, with day-to-day running and regional, country-wide and international co-ordination through committees of **delegates**. People will mandate the delegates as to what they should say and how to vote. Delegates will rotate and be instantly revocable. Delegate bodies have no decision making powers - any decisions they reach must be ratified by mass assemblies.

In coming to decisions in our assemblies there must be a recognition of different views and co-operation and solidarity. In some cases it may be necessary to accept majority decision making.

We realise the difficulties in organising mass assemblies. People may lack the confidence to participate and express their views while others could dominate through charisma, rhetoric, intimidation etc. The whole process of decision making is complex and needs experimentation. We are constantly looking at and reviewing it within the ACF and in the struggles we are involved in.

NEW AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

As a result of two years of discussion and development, we decided to make some alterations to the Aims and Principles to take into account the development of our ideas. These Aims and Principles were finally adopted after the April 1989 National Conference when the final amendments were added. The full text of these Aims and Principles is included below as well as an explanation for the changes.

1. The Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class.

Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in the face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide, and economic and political colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class.

We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to re-define divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist communist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

4. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

5. It is not possible to abolish capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will have to be a time of violence as well as liberation.

6. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled etc). Even syndicalist unions, however, are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism.

The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions, until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

7. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creation of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

8. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe that a strong anarchist organisation

is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called 'socialists' or 'communists' we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggles as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

Explanation of changes

- We have dropped the reference to 'other social systems' to emphasise the global nature of capitalism though we still don't have a formal position on the exact nature of the Soviet Union nor have we abandoned our use of the term 'patriarchy' as a way to describe a system of male domination.

- The statement on violence and the revolution has been changed to make it clearer that while we don't glorify violence, we are in no doubt that it will be necessary to achieve and defend human liberation.

- We have abandoned the term 'self-management' as this could imply a form of self-managed capitalism or 'workers control' where production is still an alienating activity, cut off from other areas of life.

- Reference to the term 'democracy' has also been dropped. We work to achieve the total involvement of everyone in the running of their lives. Representative democracy is a barrier to this. Similarly democracy in 'working class organisation' (eg the use of ballots) can hold back class action. The anarchist communist revolution must destroy the politics of rule by anyone, including any 'majority'.

- We have expanded the section on the role of trade unions following detailed discussions within the organisation. We wanted to emphasise the limitations of trade unions, arguing that they can never be transformed into vehicles for revolutionary change. Setting up alternatives, such as syndicalist unions, is also inherently reformist as the whole role of

unions is to negotiate within capitalism.

- Internationalism is vital for a successful revolution and we have included a statement on national liberation ideology and nationalism to show how these can prevent an international working class revolution.

- We have made it explicit that ecological issues, allied to a class analysis, are a necessary and integral part of a transformation of society.

CURRENT DISCUSSIONS

We have continued to discuss the relationships of the struggles against sexism and racism to the class struggle, though we have now agreed on a new clause which is in our Aims and Principles.

Addition to Aims and Principles

3. We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women and Black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class women and Black people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

At our Conference in May 1990 we also made progress on our position on Ireland, though the Irish Commission is continuing to work on a policy and a pamphlet.

Discussion on Ireland, ACF National Conference, May 1990

SUMMARY OF POINTS AGREED PLUS STATEMENT AGREED AT CONFERENCE. OFFICIAL POLICY HOWEVER WILL BE DRAWN UP BY IRISH COMMISSION, TO BE DISCUSSED FURTHER.

1. Must be put in context - national liberation is not the answer.
2. Must look at British imperialism in world context.
3. British imperialism is not independent of international imperialism
4. We don't see a united capitalist Ireland as a real advance. Ultimately we want the dissolution of all frontiers and borders.
5. We recognise the partial nature of the struggle against the British State by the Irish working class. As in all partial struggles we support those elements that empower and unite the working class.
6. We take particular inspiration from the day to day fight against the ruling class which is taking place in the working class communities.

We see the working class of Ireland divided, oppressed and exploited by British structures of imperialism, which is all part of a wider Western imperialism. This imperialism has many forms: political, economic, cultural and strategic. We look to and support class struggle in Ireland, north and south, which attempts to oppose these divisions, oppressions and exploitations. As anarchist-communists we see that nationalistic and hierarchical resistance can merely hope to unite a capitalist Ireland. Therefore we should be critical of any group advocating such aspects of the struggle. It is only through a generalised class struggle and internationalist aspects of the struggle both social and armed that a world-wide anarchist-communist society can be envisaged.

We believe that the development of our ideas is an important part of our organisational activity. Ideas are important for understanding what's going on, deciding on an anarchist approach to struggle and thinking about what sort of society we would like to help create. That doesn't mean we think that a set of 'correct' positions will bring about a revolution. Rather it's a question of enriching our practice with ideas and developing our ideas based on our activity and what we learn from other people in struggle. We continually try to keep a balance between theory and practice, aware of the interdependence of the two. We also try to avoid dogma and the idea that there are 'eternal truths'. Though firmly based in a tradition of anarchist-communism, we also try to learn from other traditions and movements such as feminism, anti-racist and Black movements, ecology and the struggles of people in other countries. As we seek a balance between theory and practice we also seek to keep a balance between continuity and change. We want to have core ideas so that we are not all over the place, changing positions like the latest fashion. But we also want to be open to new ideas and to learn from experience, rather than adhering rigidly to a dogma.

PRACTICE

Involvement in the struggle for an anarchist-communist society is of course fundamental. We are not armchair revolutionaries, sitting at the sidelines and telling everyone else how it should be done. We get stuck in for three main reasons.

Firstly the struggle itself is important. We want to win for our own benefit as well as for others. Just because we are political doesn't mean that we are not affected by what's going on in society. Winning a strike, preventing a hospital closure or stopping the poll tax will mean an improvement in people's lives, including our own.

Secondly struggles both for and against things are times when people gain confidence in their abilities to organise themselves. If people have confidence in their ability to effect change then we are all closer to anarchism. As anarchists we are there to help develop that confidence, in ourselves as well as in those around us, so that people will take control of their own lives rather than relying on leaders and institutions.

Thirdly we want people to hear about us as an organisation. We think we've got something to offer and we want people to be involved with us. The Leninist groups with their heavy sell recruitment methods have made us reluctant to 'push' our organisation. But like all other organisations, to be honest, we want to grow. Being involved in struggles or going on demos gives us a chance to show people what we are about in practice and with our ideas in the form of a leaflet, pamphlets or our paper.

We don't prioritise certain areas of activity like the workplace, the community or ecology. We believe that capitalism, the State, sexism and racism affect all areas of life and therefore must be fought on all fronts - at work, in our localities, in the street and in our personal lives. No issue is irrelevant if it involves exploitation or oppression of us or our environment. So we fight around a wide range of issues including strike support, anti-poll tax, housing, health, unemployment and the rights of the unemployed, abortion, anti-nuclear and environmental issues, deportations and international solidarity. Within all these issues we try to put forward a class, feminist and anti-racist perspective as we believe these oppressions exist within all the issues.

We try not to flit from one issue to another. Some individuals and groups are more consistently involved in some issues than others. We aim to give some support to as many struggles as possible, but being a small organisation faced with so many important issues we are often overwhelmed and have to make choices about what we are going to do. These choices are usually made by the local groups and individuals based on the situation in their areas and on their particular interests.

The other aspect of our practice is our propaganda. The word 'propaganda' has negative connotations like indoctrination. What we mean by it is simply telling people what we think about current issues, the system in general and what sort of society we would like to see. We offer our ideas to people as we believe they will make them think about society in a different way, give them ideas of what they could be doing and let them know what anarchism is about.

Our propaganda takes several forms. We do very general things about the injustices of the system, for example the poll tax or private health with ideas of what to do about it. We also do more analytical leaflets and articles about what is happening, how we think we should fight back and alternative ways of organising. We also have a regular publication, **Organise!** (formerly **Virus**), which is aimed at people already vaguely interested in anarchism and looks at anarchist history to give a sense of continuity (we aren't the first anarchists), gives a deeper analysis of current struggles and engages in debates about where we should be going and how. We like to think we are stimulating debate about a number of issues rather than giving definitive answers. People change through a combination of struggle, experience and ideas. They get bombarded with all sorts of rubbish through the media so its important that they hear what anarchists have to say.

ORGANISATION

We believe that how we organise **ourselves** is as important as the ideas we have and our involvement in activity. If we can't organise ourselves along anarchist, anti-racist and anti-sexist lines how can we tell others how to do it?

We spent a lot of time in the first year of the organisation thinking about how to organise ourselves in such a way as to involve everyone in the decision making as well as being an effective, activist organisation. We adopted the following constitution:

Structure: The organisation is based on the principle of federation in which local/workplace/interest groups voluntarily work together in a concerted manner. Each group is autonomous and is responsible for its own internal affairs. A group shall consist of at least three members. Groups and individuals may work with and contact others in the federation, but if such relationships effectively constitute a faction with policies at variance with federation policy, then this should be made clear in public pronouncements. This consideration applies also to minorities in general.

Membership: Membership is normally based around the groups but where no group exists individuals can take up individual membership. Members must pay a minimum membership fee which will be decided by the delegate

meetings and paid to the groups. Groups retain two-thirds of their income from membership fees and pass one-third to the federation.

Delegate Meeting: Groups should send one mandated delegate for every three members to the delegate meeting which meets at least every two months. The delegate meeting is responsible for deciding tactics and the general running of the Federation in line with national conference policies. The delegate meeting is subordinate to the national conference.

National Conference: This is the supreme decision-making body of the Federation and meets twice a year. Emergency national conferences may be held at the behest of a delegate meeting. Policy decisions are made on the basis of a simple majority of the membership. Delegates are represented on the same basis as for the delegate meeting. National conference alone can amend the Constitution.

Voting: A delegate has as many votes as group members. Individuals must either attend the delegate meeting or national conference or register their vote through their nearest local group. Delegate votes to both delegate meetings and national conferences must be ratified by the local groups before decisions can become policy.

Publications: Groups and individuals may publish such articles, pamphlets etc as they see fit under **their** authority. Newspapers, periodicals and other publications produced in the name of the Federation are under the control of the delegate meeting which is empowered to nominate and remove editors, production teams etc.

Bulletin: An internal bulletin will be produced monthly in which all members, groups, committees, officers etc will be urged to contribute.

National Officers: Officers will hold office for not more than one year and not hold national office for another intervening period of two years. All officers are subject to recall by the delegate meeting.

Expulsion: All organisations have the right to protect themselves from unconstitutional disruption and sabotage.

AMENDMENTS

- Membership is open to those people who (A) agree with the Aims and Principles, AND (B) intend to involve themselves with some part of the organisation's political activity, AND (C) will read the Internal Bulletin and all national journals, pamphlets and leaflets, and endeavour to attend the national conference, AND (D) will communicate with the national organisation on a regular basis (eg by word of mouth, letter, report, attending national conference).

- Discussion and amendments to the Aims and Principles and Constitution can only take place at every alternate National Conference (ie once per year).
- Officers can hold position for more than one year if no other candidate comes forward. Other positions such as International Secretary are considered special interest positions and are not elected but are open to as many people as are interested, subject to the control of delegate meetings and national conferences.
- The organisation reserves the right to exclude or expel people through the national conference.
- Current ACF membership fees are one pound per week (waged) and fifty pence per week (unwaged). Those who cannot pay should notify the National Treasurer.

The purpose of the constitution was to set up a framework that would ensure that **all** the membership had the power to control what was going on in the organisation. The delegate meetings are crucial but we wanted people who might have difficulty in getting to meetings but are equally committed to the organisation to have a say in the decisions made. We hoped to avoid the situation where those who are the most active make all the decisions. Those who are very active locally or who have family commitments should also be able to participate in decision making. This is very difficult to achieve and we are still in a position where the delegate meetings and conferences make decisions and little is heard from isolated members and those who do not attend delegate meetings or conferences.

Another feature of our approach to organisation is the way we organise our conferences. We are aware of the problems that arise from the usual conference format where everyone is in a large group and people speak to predetermined motions and then vote for or against. The discussion is usually dominated by a few people as most people feel intimidated about speaking in front of a large group. Also discussions often tend to be polarised between two 'positions' where people deliberately look for differences in order to prove how sussed out they are. To overcome these problems we have organised our conferences in the following way. Firstly delegate meetings select particular topics for discussion at conference many months in advance. Then people write articles in the internal bulletin (IB) and/or have discussions in their local groups about the topics. At the conference itself, certain key areas of the topic are pinpointed for in-depth discussion. We then break into smaller groups with each group discussing all the points that have been highlighted. This way **everyone** will have made some contribution to the debate. The groups report back to the full group and we note down all the common points and the points of disagreement. The points of agreement can then be formulated into a statement and the points of disagreement can be highlighted for further debate.

This method of organising conferences symbolises the philosophy of the organisation towards debate. We want to move forward **together** as an organisation. If a group 'wins' a position with a strong minority disagreeing it is no victory. We have enough in common that we believe it is worth sorting out any differences through further discussion.

Also it is the **application** of the ideas that is most important. People may appear to have different views but act the same in practice. We try to distinguish between fundamental differences and disagreements that are part of a healthy organisation and do not affect the day-to-day functioning of the ACF. So far we have not come up against any fundamental disagreements and are continually discussing other areas where we want to develop our ideas and come to some agreement no matter how long it takes.

Another aspect of the organisation is the way we conduct our discussions. In an anarchist society we will have to make decisions about all sorts of things with all sorts of people, so we should begin to practise now how we're going to go about making those decisions. The principles we **try** to follow are mutual respect and tolerance, giving people the chance to speak and listening carefully to what they have to say before passing judgement. We attempt to organise discussions so that there is an atmosphere where even the most reticent feel confident about speaking out. Of course this is all easier said than done, but it is the aim. We also continually evaluate our national decision making process in order to find ways of overcoming the inevitable problem of unequal levels of participation.

CONCLUSION

In all these areas - ideas, practice and organisation - we have a distinctive ACF approach which makes us believe that we have a role to play in the anarchist movement as well as in the broader movement, tackling both immediate problems and working for a revolutionary transformation of society. Though our part may be small and we don't always live up to the image we have of ourselves, we hope that with time our influence and the impact of anarchist-communism will grow, reflected in a militant, self-confident movement with people who have had enough of the present system and are ready to take control of their own lives and work together with others to help create a new society.