

SYNDICALIST BULLETIN



About Ourselves

That shouldn't be what this is about. Everyone who wrote in after the "In Place of S.B." & the supplement to it insist; that this ought to be about industrial & other activity. That indeed was why I only ventured to call the first "In Place of S.B." because it had no industrial report but I am not well placed to write such reports.

I work for a youth/community centre, my bosses are a committee, mostly of punks, about half of whom would call themselves anarchists. Though probably only three of them are conscious of "pre-punk" anarchist history; & those three might well have difficulty in collectively naming four anarchist writers.

That does not qualify me to write industrial reports. Much less to write the whole of a paper concerned with industrial matters. But while I have been promised such reports, none came.

So, as I believe that some communication amongst libertarians - even if not about essentials - is better than none, one more introspective issue. At least it allows reprints of the correspondence that followed in place of S.B.

There were six letters on "In Place" & the supplement, & a couple of references in general letters. Georgina Smith, struck by Hull's lack of access even to a typewriter, sent £50 to start a fund for an Hull Syndicalist typewriter. (I've not heard how much more has been raised.)

Four of the other letters (two each) came from Henry Bell and Martin Bashforth, who, in the 70s were respectively the main activists in the short lived British IWW, & the Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance; & I reprint/paraphrase the relevant sections.

Besides those Adrian Blow shared the criticisms of the lack of industrial reportage, & Martin Guilbert wished us well, but obviously thought that we were part of the nostalgia-cult rather than serious.

Henry Bell prefers the name Syndicalist Comment, thinks that Syndicalist Alliance Newsletter is too much of a mouthful; emphasizes the need to speak in an easily understood language, later praised the SPGB in this respect. Syndicalist Comment he thought preferable as allowing room to comment on non-industrial matters.

His second letter said he'd been apprehensive as to what I meant when I talked of the need to involve many of those anarchist socialists who would not call themselves syndicalist but would nevertheless see industrial-anarchist-type organization as an important ingredient in overall anarchist activity. His fears were allayed by my supplement; so no doubt we were thinking of differing non-syndicalist anarchists.

Martin wrote at much greater length. His first letter said that "In Place of" outlined positions he had held in the 70s but from which he had moved; not entirely by his own volition.

"My present job prevents that, as often as not I am negotiating with unions from the other side of the table, & whatever my views & sympathies, I have to play the game from the employers' point of view. It is one of the ironies of capitalism that the bourgeoisie never does its own dirty work, but uses one section of the working class against another, trying to fragment it even by calling it different names.

"So I'm obliged to play a double game, using my planning expertise to extract the maximum funds possible from the management & then leaving it to the union to marshall its forces to extract whatever else it can." "Such reduction of our lives to absurdity does not endear me to the system, but makes me even more conscious of my alienation."

He went on to argue that some form of a party was nec-

"However, I think this is also very true of syndicalism. It is quite reasonable to think that DAM can be classified as vanguardist precisely because of the low ebb of the struggle. Certainly the same warnings arise in internal SWP debates about the dangers of abstract propagandism, of substitutionism within their proto-Leninist criteria.

"Just as anarchist-socialists are tempted via movementism into reformist compromise so those who have a clear syndicalist position turn in on their own organization & become subject to varieties of bureaucratic deformity. At least it is in such conditions as these that the individuals who favour this kind of self-elevatory politics can flourish & come to dominate groups.

"A significant rise in generalized class consciousness would effectively counteract such tendencies (not without some pain & struggle.)

"I found myself not disagreeing in principle with anything apart from your implicit optimism in even wanting to posit such a grouping at this time. While there has been some lifting of spirits & confidence in the working class, it is as yet fragile, sporadic & thoroughly under the control of the bureaucracy.

"There is very little willingness to attempt anything that the latter cannot contain & protect. The recent debacle on the docks has graphically exposed the vulnerability of the individual worker even in the midst of officially sanctioned, legally constituted collective action.

"I am sure there are champagne celebrations in the halls of the ruling class, who had until then been becoming decidedly jittery. They are no doubt also privately reserving a few kind words for their most able ally, Neil Kinnock, who, I am convinced, would cancel the whole Labour Party, & close down all its branches if he felt his image & electoral credibility were under any threat from association with real effective opposition.

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CLASS STRUGGLE ANARCHIST NETWORK

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For some time now, people from various groups across the north have felt that the anarchist movement is lacking in direction and effectiveness. At present there are four national federations (Anarchist Communist Federation, Anarchist Workers Group, Class War and the Direct Action Movement) and most towns and cities have their own anarchist groups. While the work that all these organisations do is valuable, we now believe that for the movement as a whole to progress, communication and co-ordination must be improved.

We are also faced with the problem of being held back by what many term as 'lifestylists' - people who's individualistic ideas and anti-social behaviour have nothing to do with anarchism but who are allowed to tag along with our movement.

For example, many anarchists are bitter that, after putting effort into organising demonstrations (in particular the one in Manchester after Viraj Mendis' deportation and the Glasgow anti-poll tax march), our presence had been devalued by the arrival of numerous punks, drunk or stoned, who weren't involved in the day to day work of either campaign but who joined the anarchist contingent, both confusing our message and denying us credibility.

With these things in mind a meeting was held in Bradford on May 27th to form a network of class struggle anarchists.

WHY CLASS STRUGGLE ? - Although anarchism has always been about class struggle, in recent years the term has been twisted to a point where anyone who was against all forms of organisation and class politics could call themselves an anarchist.

If anarchism is to grow, this 'anything goes' image must be laid to rest by the movement addressing issues relevant to the majority of people and stressing its belief in class struggle.

Obviously we are not the first to see this as the formation of the national federations and local, class based anarchist groups proves. However the number of different groups has led to problems in co-ordinating anarchist activity as well as difficulties with communication. Which brings us neatly to -

WHY A NETWORK ? - While the priority for every anarchist should be the area where they live and work, it is important for news and information to pass between the various groups. There is also a need for the movement to occasionally be able to co-ordinate its activities, for example on 'days of action' or for demonstrations etc.

Due to the differences of opinion between even class struggle anarchists, the

the network will not have hard and fast aims and principles, and will not attempt to formulate 'policies' for the anarchist movement. Because of the need to involve both local anarchist groups as well as branches of the national federations, the only requirement for entry into the network is the belief that class struggle is central to the anarchism of the group or individual concerned.

A network is also useful for anarchists living in places where no group exists. We hope that it will give all those involved a sense of belonging to a movement and help ward off isolation and apathy.

At the moment the network is based mainly in the north, for three main reasons. Firstly this is where the interest is at present, secondly because we already know that we can run a network up here, and thirdly because other anarchist networks have come and gone before, we want to learn to walk before we start to run.

If the network is a success, we can encourage similar ventures in other parts of the country but what we need now is for groups and individuals in the north who agree with what's written here to get in touch so that they can go on the mailing list and to attend the next meeting (details below).

If class struggle anarchists can co-ordinate and communicate while respecting their differences, we will have begun the process of moving anarchism away from the fringe of politics and turning it into a mass movement.

GROUPS PRESENT AT LAST MEETING (MAY 27th, 1989) INCLUDED:

Coventry & Warwickshire ACF, Muddersfield AAG, Liverpool Anarchist Group (including delegates from Liverpool DAM and Class War), Sheffield Class Struggle Group, Sheffield Autonomous Collective, Leeds Anarchists, other individual delegates and Bradford Anarchists.

Next meeting of the Class Struggle Anarchist Network - **SATURDAY AUGUST 11th.**

is at the BROOMSPRING CENTRE, 1pm till 6pm
junction of BROOMSPRING LANE/BRUNSWICK STREET,
BROOMHALL, SHEFFIELD 10.

Creche and accomodation available (preferably requested in advance).

Contact : 60, Brunswick Street, Broomhall, Sheffield 10.

DIRECTIONS : 60 bus from outside Railway Station (15p).

Get off by University on Glossop Road, then 1st left onto Wilkinson Street, then 1st right onto Brunswick Street.

If in doubt write to the contact or go into Smith's and look at an A to Z.

I circulated what follows to the Hull group & one or two others as my proposal for an agreed reply to the ECAN statement. I have not received any reply. So discount the editorial "we."

We publish the launching statement of the CSAN, we welcome their apparent adherence to the basic syndicalist tenet that anarchism is essentially about class struggle, & we could not agree more that the work of anarchists on demos is frequently made more difficult by the presence of many people who do not understand the first thing about anarchism, but like the label & insist that it's theirs.

While some of us remember, with horror, the beliefs of the Sydney Libertarians who equated anti-social with anti-state, & so even considered rape a revolutionary action, & many of us know punks & others who are not even socialist, & certainly not libertarian socialist, but who profess to be anarchists because they think it means anti-conformist; syndicalists do not immediately assume a conflict between life-style & class struggle anarchism.

Indeed one major criterion of traditional anarchist judgements of the theories of other socialists, has been the life-style of those who profess those beliefs. We would, in fact, apply this to many who call themselves life-style anarchists, & note that their life-style is not in fact one of mutual aid, nor in any sense, enlightened egoism.

Syndicalists believe that class struggle is basic & unavoidable in class society. (+) It is not only carried out by those who are aware of their class or the need for classes to struggle. It is the condition of the working class that consciously or unconsciously, it is forced to struggle in order to survive.

While syndicalists believe that such struggle is more efficient if the working class is aware of

ends this. But these principles need to be stated, because in our experience, whether in support groups for workers, in the peace movement, or other single issue campaigns; it has been groups of anarchists who most loudly profess to believe in class struggle who turn out, in vanguardist fashion, & - motivated more by a dislike of reformist fellow demonstrators, than of the capitalist/racist/... enemy opposed, - act in a foolish & purely disruptive manner.

That there is a need in all such campaigns to expose the reformism of the leadership, & the desire of politicians to subordinate direct action struggles to their own ends goes without saying. But it is invariably essential that anarchists find the best way to persuade rank & file activists of the need to go further. Experience over the last decade makes us wary of some of the groups involved in CSAN.

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I don't like syndicalist theory, stemming from a "scientific-socialist" tradition, avoided value judgements about class war; the half-baked plaudits of temporary middle class Trots & others owe more to childhoods reading "boys' thrillers" than revolutionary theory. While we would not endorse the thesis that "social revolution is the cure not the duct of class war"; it is an adage that contains a half-true truth, albeit some more error.
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I am producing - and will distribute a dozen copies to each S.B. contact - a broadsheet pamphlet. I think and hope it will be of use to all libertarian revolutionaries, in activating their contacts. Whether comrades decide to sell it or distribute it free is up to them, but if it sells keep the money for local use.

L.O.

Just received from Adrian Blunt an alternative critique of CSAN, unfortunately too late to have it in this issue.

Martin continued

I think there is a long way to go yet before there is any kind of audience for revolutionary ideas, even on militant picket lines. Let alone the basis for anything but the most basic embryonic LIUF however I wish you well"

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L.O. reply - purely personal -

I agree about the fragility of present day class militancy, & the lack of a market for revolutionary ideas. It being the job of revolutionary groups to preach revolution, I am anxious to bring about the sort of joint work between revolutionaries which would maximise the effectiveness of our actions.

I don't know quite what Martin means by an LIUF. Syndicalist Bulletin has always been unanimous in stressing that we are opposed to any attempt to build a British CNT or IWW or other such IUist federation at this stage. That would merely divorce the most militant workers from the masses. Moreover we believe that such a federation should only be formed when an industrially significant minority of the working class demands it. We have no hard & fast ideas as to what would constitute such a significant militant minority.

Martin may mean a federation of industrial unionist minded libertarians; (I doubt if the spontaneist tradition would accept that description;) I would prefer to put it a loose alliance of libertarian groups who see industrial involvement as an essential part of their work. That alliance uniting differing traditions, (which is why I would like to leave the word alliance to the larger grouping and call the syndicalists Syndicalist Faction.)

That said my proposals are designed with our weakness very much in mind.