

***Anarchist
Workers
Group***

The logo for the Anarchist Workers Group (AWG) features the letters 'AWG' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are set against a black, downward-pointing triangle. This triangle is superimposed on a larger, light gray triangle with a halftone dot pattern, which also points downwards. The overall effect is a layered, geometric design.

**Founding
Statement**

During 1987 and 1988 a debate emerged within the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement which centred around the setting up of an independent syndicalist union in Britain. At DAM's 1988 National Conference the organisation committed itself through a constitutional change in the Aims and Principles to an attempt to build such a union. In opposition to this strategy there developed a current which has now split from the organisation and in June 1988 agreed on the name 'Anarchist Workers Group'. We had consistently argued against the majority position within DAM that such a strategy was inapplicable to the British situation where high union density has always hindered independent unions from developing. Furthermore we warned against the illusions of those who saw a syndicalist union as a revolutionary vehicle, maintaining that all unions, however militant, necessarily divide workers and must in a revolutionary period be superseded by unitary organs of struggle such as rank-and-file organisations or factory committees which would form the basis of workers' councils as organs of power.

Although the traditional syndicalists now control the Direct Action Movement we are sure that this will prove a hollow victory. DAM now has an identifiable ideology and industrial strategy for the first time since its formation in 1979, but we believe this strategy to be both confused and unworkable. We argued that syndicalist unions developed during periods of capitalist expansion either as splits from the existing trade unions or as pioneering attempts to unionise previously neglected sectors of the labour force such as immigrant or unskilled workers. The unions recruited because they were militant and delivered improvements in workers' living standards but workers who joined did not necessarily adhere to the specific revolutionary ideas of their leaders. This fact is borne out in the inability of the French CGT to oppose the first imperialist World War. The most successful anarcho-syndicalist union, the Spanish CNT, proved itself one of the most militant trade unions in labour history, but failed to destroy the capitalist state and establish working class power in July 1936 when economic power lay in the hands of the Catalan workers who controlled the streets and factories. Anarcho-syndicalists have largely failed to understand that unions, however revolutionary their constitutions, are inadequate organisations for establishing class power. Workers will still be divided according to trade as in Britain, or ideology as on the continent.

The Anarchist Workers Group advocates the strategy of rank-and-file organisation. We understand the need for unity with reformist workers, within the existing unions but with ideological and organisational independence from the reactionary trade union bureaucracy. We advocate a rank-and-file movement firstly as a political counterpoint to the bureaucracy. Such a movement must take on both the bosses' arguments and the New Realist union leaders' concession that British capital must be regenerated. Secondly a rank-and-file movement can and must provide the organisational framework to by-pass the bureaucracy when necessary.

Given the present objective conditions of an employers' offensive and mass unemployment any 'dual unionist' strategy would be suicidal. We instead begin from the need to defend existing trade union organisation and existing trade union rights. The dominance of New Realism in the TUC and union leaderships which has considerably affected the oppositional Broad Lefts points to the necessity of rank-and-file control of workers' struggles and a political challenge to the anti-union laws in order for this defence to succeed. We fully understand that a mass rank-and-file movement can only be built during a period of mass class struggle. Therefore, in the here and now we advocate rank-and-file propaganda groups to argue for what is necessary to win disputes, and promote workers' interests in opposition to the national or corporate interests of the bosses that demand austerity, sacrifice and cuts. A major victory for any section of our class would significantly reverse the demoralisation which has followed the recent catalogue of defeats, and would re-stimulate rank-and-file activity.

Whilst we uphold the traditional syndicalist theory that the power of the working class lies primarily in the workplace, and that class consciousness develops during mass struggle, we reject the 'spontaneism' that fails to see the need for political organisation to convince workers of the validity of our specific ideas. Whilst militant class consciousness can develop spontaneously out of class struggle, this can co-exist with workers' political allegiance to reformist parties. This separation of politics and economics can only be perpetuated by waging the class struggle on the shopfloor alone and neglecting the need to win workers to libertarian communist ideas. The struggle for abortion rights or against immigration controls does not arise spontaneously from the economic class struggle, but these are issues which define workers' political outlook. Equally, the experience of revolutionary situations such as Paris 1968 or Germany 1919

shows us that, even here, revolutionary socialist or even libertarian communist ideas do not automatically win decisive mass support. This points to the need for a specific anarchist workers' organisation to intervene in the class struggle, to constantly uncover the political implications of that struggle, to explain how society works and promote our world view through our literature and meetings to workers. Such an organisation must equip its members with the agitational skills to win the ideological battle, to influence the course of the class struggle in the direction of libertarian communism and to fight for the fullest democracy of all workers' organisations.

At present a variety of views exists within DAM, ranging from those who recognise the need for political organisation, those who are ambivalent or who underestimate or neglect such a need, and those who reject political organisation outright.

The co-existence of contradictory and conflicting political theories and strategies is not only endemic to DAM, but to most 'traditional' anarchist organisations. Those members who founded the AWG found it ludicrous that different DAM members argued different and contradictory positions on almost every major industrial and political issue. This political confusion was furthermore falsely defended in the name of 'federalism' against our arguments for theoretical and tactical unity.

One major example of tactical incoherence was the tendency to oppose making demands on the state by those who advocated a form of 'self-management' as an alternative. Although DAM never took any official national positions, some of its members argued for self-managed health centres in response to NHS cuts and self-managed abortion services in response to the Alton Bill. Whilst we too see that the state's repressive powers could play no progressive role in defending the interests of the working class, we also see the need to demand and defend rights and resources such as nursery provision, living wages and decent homes for all. The point of such arguments is to counterpose working class needs to the rationale of the capitalist system which cannot meet these needs. For us welfare provision is a 'social' responsibility and we oppose attempts to offload welfare responsibility from the state onto individual working class families during an economic crisis. In our view, no workers' control of industry or public services can exist under capitalism. However, many syndicalist DAM members see the union they advocate assuming a welfare role which, as they argue, would reduce workers' reliance on the state. Such a position comes dangerously close to abdicating from the struggle against benefit cuts or council cuts budgets which dovetails with the lifestyle of the 'anarchist ghetto'.

Some DAM members who could not address our arguments on a political level chose instead to accuse us of 'Bolshevism' and 'vanguardism'. Whilst we recognise that workers have different levels of consciousness, we do not think, as the Leninists do, that the advanced workers or 'vanguard' can only be embodied in a single political organisation. This mistaken position constitutes a 'theoretical' substitution of the 'vanguard' party for the revolutionary proletariat in the Leninist theory of the party. In practise this leads to the 'actual' substitution of the dictatorship of the party for that of the proletariat. This is why we would defend the fullest democracy and plurality of revolutionary political currents within the workers' councils. The Bolsheviks saw all oppositional currents as counter-revolutionary and consequently subordinated workers' democracy to the development of productive forces at all costs. To avoid a repetition of the Bolshevik counter-revolution, we see that it is necessary for anarchists to organise politically to counter the ideology of Leninism within the working class. In doing so we reject democratic-centralism, which militarises the relationship between the central organs and the rank and file in its political organisation, as in practise undemocratic.

At present the Anarchist Workers Group is an ideological current on the left, but we are clear what tasks confront us. Our aim is no less than to build an anarchist workers' political organisation, rooted in the labour movement, which can intervene in the class struggle so that libertarian communism becomes a reality. We invite all revolutionaries who agree with our arguments to join us in this task.

■ For libertarian communism,

■ The Anarchist Workers Group, June 1988.

a n a r c h i s t

WHERE

AWG

WE

STAND

w o r k e r s • g r o u p

UNDER CAPITALISM the workers produce the wealth of the world but neither own nor control the produce of their labour. Capitalism creates poverty, starvation, unemployment, waste, pollution, war and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Only when the working class seize control of, and plan production, for use not profit, can human needs be satisfied.

THERE IS no parliamentary road to socialism. The company directors, top civil servants, security and army chiefs and lawlords exercise real power and will prevent parliament from legislating for fundamental social change. The power of the ruling class can only be contested effectively at the point of production which is primarily where socialists must organise.

THE STATE is an instrument of class domination and cannot be used in any way to further the interests of the working class. All gains conceded by our rulers can only be defended through the class struggle. The capitalist courts, local councils and industrial arbitration bodies cannot serve as a substitute for direct action by workers. The state cannot be reformed, bypassed or brought under democratic control. It must be destroyed and replaced by the power of workers councils.

THERE CAN be no socialism in one country. Capitalist production is international and, therefore, social revolution must be international in order to succeed. The working class have no country; British workers have no common interests with their bosses. As internationalists we side with all oppressed peoples fighting imperialism whilst promoting the primacy of working class interests in all such struggles.

THE TRADE unions exist to defend workers' interests within the limits of capitalism: they cannot be vehicles for its revolutionary overthrow. The trade union leaders are a bureaucratic caste whose existence depends on the maintenance of their role as professional negotiators. This role fosters a conserv-

ative outlook to act as a brake on militancy. It is necessary, therefore, that workers organise a rank-and-file movement within the existing unions across sectional divisions and independent of bureaucracy. Such a movement would act, firstly, as a political counterpoint to the reformist bureaucracy and, secondly, provide, in times of struggle, the organisational framework to bypass the leaders who always side with the bosses in a revolutionary crisis.

THE LIBERATION of workers must be achieved by the workers themselves. This task cannot be carried out on behalf of the workers by a vanguard party. Any attempt to usurp the role of the mass of the workers must be opposed. There can be no socialism without workers' democracy. Therefore we do not consider the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China or Cuba to be socialist.

CAPITALISM generates systems of oppression which divide the working class. To create a unified workers' movement and a genuine communist society we must fight all forms of oppression in principle.

To this end we oppose the oppression of women. In the family women are burdened with the main responsibility for childcare and domestic labour. We stand for free abortion on demand and the socialisation of childcare and housework through free provision of 24-hour nurseries, laundries, dormitories and restaurants.

We are opposed to all forms of racial discrimination. We are opposed to all immigration controls and support the right to physical self-defence against racist attacks.

We oppose all forms of discrimination against lesbians and gays and stand for the full decriminalisation of homosexuality.

ALTHOUGH WORKERS learn through struggle they do not spontaneously become revolutionary. Therefore we advocate a political organisation of anarchist workers which can win workers to libertarian communist ideas and intervene decisively in the class struggle. We stand for the fullest democracy and independence of all workers' organisations. Therefore we defend the right of all revolutionary currents to participate within workers' councils. We urge all those who agree with our objectives and policies to join us in building such an organisation so that Libertarian Communism can become a reality.

ANARCHIST WORKERS GROUP.

AWG —————
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