

# **Organise! Onwards**

Anarchist Communist Federation

1996

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**ORGANISE! HAS OCCUPIED a unique position amongst the many anarchist papers which have arisen in Britain by its consistent format and level of analysis.** It has always been intended to sit between the agitational ‘in your face’ rag and the heavier theoretical journal. It is aimed at the reader who doesn’t need to be convinced how bad our life is under capitalism and the state, who is looking for more information and a closer view of the class struggle. This has allowed us to present both current news with in-depth analysis, and longer feature articles on a great range of topics including histories of events and political groups from around the world, and forays into anarchist-communist theory. The ACF does not exist in a vacuum, which is reflected by an emphasis on reviews of books, pamphlets and music, in our interviews with other activist groups, and in the Letters section of *Organise!* which is an important forum for feedback, criticism and clarification. *Organise!* began with issue 14 following directly on from the 13 issues of its forerunner *Virus*.

Internationally, the greatest trend over the last 10 years is one towards a more globalised capitalism and a new world (dis)order. We have seen the ending of the Cold War between the two superpowers of the United States and Soviet Union, and a consolidation of the new European bloc. The manufacturing ‘tiger’ economies of the East have continued to grow, and at the same time we are subjected to the effects of an ongoing economic crisis in the West. All over the world, the working class is paying for these changes by increased exploitation with a worsening of working conditions and security on one hand, and nationalist wars and power-struggles on the other. In Britain, the dismantling of the welfare state has meant increased poverty for many, and privatisation of industries has meant a shift from traditional forms of struggle. At least in Britain, we have seen a change in emphasis from a workplace dominated struggle to a mixed industrial and community based one. This is something that most anarchists have recognised, but one which the left-wing parties have had a lot of trouble getting their heads around, remaining stuck in their Marxist dogma. *Organise!* has attempted to analyse and comment on these changes so that we can modify our efforts to best push forward revolutionary ideas and tactics. In order to carry out this retrospective, we have chosen the anti-Poll Tax struggle, South Africa, Ireland, the Eastern Bloc and the Unions, as issues which have maintained a thread over many issues of *Organise!*

## **An Eruption of Class Anger**

From the beginning the ACF recognised the importance of the anti-Poll Tax struggle, and has probably produced more on this than any other subject, spanning ten issues of *Organise!* and two pamphlets *The Poll Tax and How to Fight It* and *Beating the Poll Tax*. In the early days, at the same time as describing the personal effects of the tax as it was piloted in Scotland, *Organise!* was talking about its effects on the power of local councils, and why Labour councils would be second to none in their enthusiasm for implementing the collection process whilst they and the TUC would focus on it as a ‘Tory’ tax. Furthermore it was seen why the Poll Tax could be beaten purely as a community based struggle, even though attempts could be made to involve council workers. While news of 300,000 non-payers in Strathclyde was being reported, *Organise!* was vigorously encouraging ‘twinning’ initiatives between Scottish and newly formed anti-Poll Tax groups in England, and warning of a re-emergence of Militant’s parasitical behaviour. It seems to have become some sort of myth (that we’re sorry to say even some anarchists believe) that

Militant was there from the start in Scotland, setting up 'community' anti-poll tax groups in a genuine effort to help the working class struggle. It must be remembered that Militant leaders, like Tommy Sheridan, were still inside in the Scottish Labour Party at the time, just waiting to be thrown out and use the Poll Tax as a lever to build support for the party outside of Labour. By the time the anti-Poll Tax struggle really got ahead in England, Militant was already well used to the tactic of setting up bogus community groups, so it might well have seemed that they were there first. It's important to look back and remember that anarchist or at least libertarian influenced groups were the prime movers initiating the community based campaigns.

As non-registration and non-payment continued all over Scotland and England, *Organise!* covered the council house demos and burning of forms, the Trafalgar Square and October poll tax riots and the subsequent defence campaigns, and bailiff busting activities. In the case of the Battle of Trafalgar, rather than just celebrate the fightback, *Organise!* put forward a clear case for class violence, against the idea of the riot as either 'anarchist organised' or 'police provoked', and against any alliance with the left. Many of these ideas have bearings on previous and coming struggles against the Criminal Justice Bill/Act (we put our case against the Fluffies in Issue 36) and the Job Seekers Allowance (see Issue 40), so the period of the anti-Poll Tax struggle must be seen as one of the most important since the Miners' Strike.

## **Not talking 'bout a revolution**

The South African situation has long been a big issue on the left, and is an important one for anarchist-communists. The ACF has always been critical of Anti-Apartheid Movement's support of the African National Congress, poised as the 'government in waiting' — waiting to take political and military control over a new South Africa founded on a multi-racial capitalism. When Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison, *Organise!* was quick to quote his call for discipline, support of private enterprise and disowning of the Freedom Charter. Other articles covered the ANC's suppression of township activism, notably the murder of 14 year old Stompie Seipei. Whilst the ANC were carrying out elitist military campaigns on the borders and into Angola against UNITA, arms were being denied to the 'Young Comrades'. In spite of this, townships became no-go areas for police and military controlled by street committees, something both the white ruling class and the ANC could rightly fear. The politics of nationalism and Stalinist 'stages' theory have nothing to offer the South African working class. Now the reality of this 'democratic' stitch-up is clear. Mandela has negotiated the lifting of sanctions and has appealed for foreign investment, supported by President Clinton with his promise to permit lending from the International Monetary Fund. The white Nationalist Party and ANC leaders then faced the problems of a power struggle with the AWB Boer right-wing and the Inkatha Zulu tribalists, which has resulted in ongoing warfare. *Organise!* also predicted swift action by the ANC against any attempts by the black working class to fight for immediate improvements in living conditions, and this was borne out in the waves of strikes in 1994 which were put down by batons, rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades, the last of these rarely used even by the old apartheid regime. Union leaders such as those of COSATU also showed their willingness to make workers demands more 'realistic', and called for orderly strikes and normal collective bargaining under the complete control of the unions.

## Processed Peace

As the Western media was hailing a new peace in South Africa and the Middle East thanks to a new world order offered by the end of the Cold War, similar attention was being paid to the IRA cease-fire in Ireland. *Organise!* has continually put forward the anarchist-communist position against the nationalist politics of the Republican movement, against the IRA and Sinn Fein or any group calling for a 'united' Ireland, showing that to be anti-imperialist does not mean you have support the weaker state, or a state in waiting. As explained in the ACF's Ireland Commission statement (see Issue 20), "the presence of British troops in Ireland is only one aspect of imperialist domination. As in any fight against imperialism, we support the removal of capitalist troops through united internationalist working class action. The removal of troops on any other basis would only occur if the interests of the British and international ruling class were maintained, and such a move would have nothing to offer the Irish working class. As anarchist communists we see that nationalistic and hierarchical resistance can merely unite a capitalist Ireland". There are plenty of counter-revolutionaries with guns, and Ireland is no exception. Another aim of *Organise!* is to help us know our history in the face of the ignorance pushed by the media, and many of the articles on Ireland have concentrated on explaining traditions such as the Orange marches, the origin of British troops in Ireland, and the politics of both republican and loyalist groups. In the light of recent events, it is all the more important to be arguing the case for revolutionary politics in Ireland, and we support the difficult task of our comrades there.

## All change in Eastern Europe?

The collapse of the Eastern bloc has a particular significance for anarchist-communists. On one hand capitalists all over the world have gleefully acknowledged the failure of 'communism', which gives us a new opportunity to explain the potential for real communism against the state capitalist and command economy nightmares of the old Soviet Union and its satellite states. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War has resulted in many left-wing parties floundering in disarray.

Again, we can usefully look back at history, so *Organise!* has included many articles on the people and events of the Russian Revolution, examining its successes and failures, and debunking of both the Stalinist and Trotskyist agendas. We have also presented analyses of events since Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika, including the attempted coups by the old guard and fascists, the rise of Yeltsin and the break-up of the Soviet Union. It is clear that there are no guarantees that any unrest against the restructuring will result in anything other than reactionary conclusions, as we have seen in the rapid rise of national liberation struggles. As the new unified Europe threatens to leave out the East from its promised prosperity, we are hearing less and less about Eastern Europe in the capitalist media. *Organise!* has countered this by articles on Romania, Hungary, Poland, though we did also print a letter from Czechoslovakia (Issue 27) complaining of our lack of articles on Eastern European anarchists. We are pleased to report a recent contact from anarchists in Lithuania and we hope to build up better links in the future.

## When the marching's over...

The union question has occupied many column inches over past issues, and rightly so. We have reported on unofficial action and union sell-outs over a large number of disputes, covering most recently the dockworkers lockout on Merseyside and wildcat action by postal workers who were subsequently called back to work by the Communication Workers Union. This has been supplemented by numerous features on Rank and Filism, Syndicalism, including an open debate with Dave Douglass of the NUM and the then Direct Action Movement. Finally we have shown that far from being a British phenomena, unions are very much the same the world over and *Organise!* has printed articles on the rise of Solidarity to government in Poland, the COSATU/ANC collaboration in South Africa, and the antics of French unions in the recent wave of actions against welfare cuts and attacks on wages and working conditions by the Chirac/Juppé administration. We should expect similar union activities elsewhere in Europe in the near future, as many states attempt to pave the way for European Monetary Union in 1997. In a more general sense, *Organise!* has encouraged a more general view of the class struggle, which is not based solely in the workplace but is increasingly taking place in the wider community, by the unemployed, by homeworkers and in some aspects of campaigns like the anti-roads movement.

Although *Organise!* has remained in a similar format and style, and is constrained by cost (and number of ACF members!) as to its frequency and thickness, we are open to suggestions from readers on how we can improve it. A questionnaire was sent out to subscribers, the results of which were given in Issue 25, which has helped us make changes in content. The back page Aspects of Anarchism series was started at the end of 1991, covering the fundamental areas of anarchist-communist theory, which is now approaching its 20<sup>th</sup> article. More recent issues of *Organise!* have included features on art and culture, including music and poetry, and special issues have been published on women, prisons and racism. Look forward to more articles about anarchist prisoners, the Job Seekers Allowance and the growth of anarchist-communism internationally. Look out also for the *Organise!* index which is advertised in this issue, listing and categorising the articles, reviews and letters from all previous issues. Finally, thanks to all readers for your support over the years, and everyone who has contributed to the Press Fund.

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