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Open letter to the Anarchist Communist Federation

Anarchist Workers Group

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1990

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1990

Since its very beginnings the ACF has time and time again declared its non-sectarian commitment to building “a united revolutionary anarchist movement”. Our principled invitation to political debate has, it seems, put this commitment to the test and found it wanting. We had hoped for something better.

The ACF claims to stand in the same libertarian communist traditions as the Anarchist Workers Group (AWG). We would have thought such a situation would make discussion an urgent necessity. We recognise that there are major ideological and tactical differences between us indeed we outline the most important in our open letter. Since when has complete political agreement been a pre-condition for debate, especially in what passes as today’s anarchist ‘movement’? In the face of a workers movement dominated by reformism and Leninism is such a debate between libertarian communists that problematic? The fact that the ACF shuns such principled debate points to either a serious political weakness or a rejection of a libertarian communist platform that;

“...removes the disastrous effect of several tactics in opposition to one another, it concentrates all the forces of the movement, gives them a common direction leading to a fixed objective.”
(The Platform, P32 WSM Edition).

The Anarchist Workers Group will continue the task we have set ourselves: the building of a libertarian communist workers organisation capable of winning the battle of ideas and making our revolutionary politics a leading influence in the working class. To this end we are always willing to debate with any groups or individuals sharing those aims. Our invitation to the ACF still stands...

Contents

Dear comrades,	5
1; Work within the existing trade unions.	6
2; An approach to anti imperialist struggles, particularly that to get British troops out of Ireland.	6
3; An analysis of oppression, and how to combat it.	7
4; The effective organisation of Anarchist intervention in the struggles of our class.	8
Reply from the Anarchist Communist Federation	8
Briefly, in reply...	9

this would be a fruitful discussion as our positions are so fundamentally different.

Your second proposal suggests observers from our organisations attend each others conferences, with speaking rights. Again we do not think this a worthwhile step

Your third proposal suggests we “conduct regular reviews of each others journals”. This may well happen but we do not see any reason for making it ‘compulsory’.

Finally, your suggestion that we organise joint contingents on marches is a reality anyway as class struggle anarchists generally do come together on marches and we see no reason to stop doing so.

We recognise that your open letter is a “sincere contribution to the task of building a united revolutionary anarchist movement” and is not “meant as some kind of stunt or roundabout sectarian jibe!” but we do not feel there is enough political similarity between our two organisations to enter into any discussions which would be in any way positive. We will continue to follow your progress, as we are sure you will ours.

Yours for Anarchist Communism,
Dek National Secretary,
Anarchist Communist Federation.

Briefly, in reply...

At a time when interest in, and prospects for, serious and coherent anarchist ideas are greater than they have been for many years; at a time when there is a pressing need to build a strong and unified libertarian communist current in the workers’ movement, we find the reply to our open letter (see SfB Number 2) from the Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF) more than a little disappointing.

4; The effective organisation of Anarchist intervention in the struggles of our class.

This point necessarily involves a clear conception of the role, method and organisation of a specific Anarchist organisation, see our article 'Anarchist organisation: the next step' in *Socialism from Below* No2.

Our proposals, therefore, are that:

1. The ACF and AWG arrange for full discussions on the above issues, and any you may wish to add.
2. While these discussions are continuing, observers from each organisation to attend the other's conferences, with speaking rights.
3. We conduct regular reviews of each other's Journals.
4. We organise joint contingents on marches.

We look forward to your reply.
anarchist workers group. spring 1990.

Reply from the Anarchist Communist Federation

[This is from issue 3 of the Anarchist Workers Group magazine, *Socialism from Below*, it was published in Autumn 1990]

Dear comrades,

Following our National Conference on the 5th/6th May 1990, where we discussed your 'Open Letter to the A.C.F.', we are writing in response to your specific proposals.

Your first proposal suggests that our organisations enter into "full discussions" on a number of issues. We do not think that

Dear comrades,

The current situation in the class struggle, whilst in many respects sobering, offers great opportunities for Anarchism. Whilst nearly every major struggle requires politicisation and confrontation with the capitalist state in order to succeed the 'revolutionary' Trotskyist left has proved itself to be bankrupt. The largest Trotskyist grouping, the Workers' Revolutionary Party, has shattered into numerous sects; the Socialist Workers' Party is incapable of responding to even the most basic movement of the working class. But in order not to squander this opportunity, class conscious anarchists must work out an effective programme, which we can take to our class with confidence.

In 1926, the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists saw the need for just such an organisation. Whilst some ACF literature has been ambiguous on this point, it is a tradition (along with the Friends of Durrutti, the French Libertarian Communists, etc) which you appear to place yourselves within. Your 'Message' to the 1989 Anarchist Bookfair states:

"For us in the Anarchist Communist Federation we realise that only a serious and permanent organisational approach to the spreading of anarchism can hope to have an effect... Consequently, revolutionary ideas based on a sound theoretical understanding of the capitalist system and how to destroy it are as vital as ever."

Similarly your Aims and principles conclude with the need to "reject sectarianism and work for a united anarchist movement. ~ This must be the basis upon which we attempt to draw up a common anarchist programme for our times.

However, such a programme can not be based on superficial agreement. This is why we are inviting the ACF to enter into

properly organised discussions with the AWG to see if such a common platform can be agreed.

In our view, these discussions would have to incorporate the following:

1; Work within the existing trade unions.

Whilst the AWG forwards the rank and file tactic (outlined in our pamphlet In Place of Compromise) as a way of fighting alongside non-anarchist workers to take the struggle beyond the bounds of simple trade unionism; the ACF seems to have no consistent strategy within the unions, except to argue that “rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism” (ACF Aims and principles).

2; An approach to anti imperialist struggles, particularly that to get British troops out of Ireland.

Our view is that the blame for political violence lies entirely at the feet of the British state as an occupying power. We therefore fight for troops out now, whilst supporting the fight of Irish anarchists to establish a united revolutionary socialist movement as the only effective anti-imperialist force. When an ACF member writes in ‘ORGANISE’ No 16 that:

“A united capitalist Ireland would be acceptable to all but the most neathandal elements in the British ruling class, if it was to remain in the western imperialist orbit and was able to maintain reasonable political stability.”

We must disagree. This view underestimates the degree to which the six counties have been integrated into the UK. Though this is no longer economically beneficial to the British ruling class, to withdraw from Ireland would mean

dismantling a part of its own state (see ‘Time to Go Further’ Socialism from Below No2). The political implications of this were summed up by John Biggs-Davidson, former tory front bench spokesmen on Ireland:

“What happens in Londonderry is very relevant to what can happen in London, and if we lose in Belfast, we may have to fight in Brixton or Birmingham.”

(quoted in David Reed: Ireland the key to the British Revolution, p.228).

3; An analysis of oppression, and how to combat it.

The ACF’s Aims and principles state that:

“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.”

By contrast, we argue that such oppression is an integral part of capitalism, and therefore ultimately benefits the bosses rather than men or white people as a whole. This is why in response to (for example) womens’ oppression we argue for “free abortion on demand and the socialisation of child care and housework through the free provision of 24 hour nurseries, laundries, dormitories and restaurants” (AWG ‘Where We Stand’, see also “Giving rights to embryos, denying rights to women!” end ‘Sex and Society: pride and prejudice’ articles in Socialism from Below No2). These are the material prerequisites of womens’ liberation.