

Why the AWG

Anarchist Workers Group

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Welcome to the first edition of *Socialism From Below*, discussion forum of the Anarchist Workers Group. The AWG was formed in June 1988 following a split within the Direct Action Movement, over the issue of building syndicalist unions in Britain. Although we are a young organisation, we have not only grown in our first year of existence, but we have started to re-establish, for anarchism, a reputation as a serious ideological force to contend with. We have begun the task of creating an effective anarchist grouping, with clear and dynamic ideas, which can put anarchism firmly on the political agenda.

What passes for an anarchist movement today, has become divorced from the working class movement. For years anarchists have been content with living outside of society, rather than trying to change it. Anarchism is therefore seen as a 'counter-cultural' rebellion at society's margins, rather than as a dynamic force within our class. The article 'Anarchism in the Thatcher Years' takes a critical view of anarchism in the last decade, and argues for a complete re-think of anarchist strategy. A new approach demands political discussion, and an abandonment of the ghetto mentality. We hope that *Socialism From Below* can begin that discussion.

A WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

Anarchism first appeared in the wake of the industrial revolution, born out of the first workers struggles. The ideas of Bakunin emerged within the First Socialist International as a school of thought distinct from Utopian Socialism and the Marxian Socialists. The Bakuninists were the only consistent opponents of the state as a agent for affecting social change from above. Anarchists have always understood that the state apparatus, which exists to protect class society, cannot possibly be used as an instrument of workers emancipation. Bakunin warned that the 'ambiguous 'people's state' of Marx could provide cover for the emergence of a new scientific ruling elite.

The experience of the Russian Revolution, where a tyranny calling itself Socialist, grew out of the first workers revolution, proves the validity of the anarchist case. Of course we realise the horrendous conditions following the October revolution with famine and imperialist armies wreaking devastation. However this can never excuse the use of dictatorial methods against the working class itself. Workers democracy and self-management of industry were concepts which the Bolsheviks used and abandoned where they felt it was necessary. The factory committees and Soviets, through which the worker's exercised their power, were systematically usurped by the Party. When the Kronstadt insurgents demanded free elections to the Soviets in 1921, the Red Army was sent in to settle the argument. it was clear that the working class had been robbed of its power by the 'workers state', and a new ruling class accountable only to itself had emerged.

AGAINST THE STATE

Anarchists have an entirely different vision of socialism. We see workers democracy and self management of industry as essential components of our socialism. We therefore see socialism as the product of the self-activity of the mass of workers; a socialism from below, rather than a set of nationalisation decrees imposed 'from above' by parliament, or enforced at gun point by a 'vanguard party'. We, unlike much of the left, understand that working class is capable of achieving its own liberation, and that this fundamentally democratic process necessitates an

entirely different form of social organisation from the existing state machine with its civil service, standing army, judiciary and police. We say workers power must be exercised through councils of elected and recallable delegates, accountable to mass assemblies, and the defence of the revolution must be carried on by democratic work militias, accountable to the councils. The Marxists have shown in practice that their term the 'workers state' does not necessarily entail a commitment to this democratic aspect of class power.

Most Marxists also advocate the use of the existing capitalist state to bring about progressive social change, whether through electing a left Labour Government, or capturing local authorities. This latter strategy of 'municipal socialism' has back fired in recent years as so called socialists have made council workers redundant, slashed essential services and co-operated with Poll Tax implementation. The article on the Poll tax re-affirms that relying on the Labour Party to defend living standards is a dead-end. Anarchists are un-compromising on this issue. workers interests can only be furthered by the mass action of the working class, controlled by the working class itself. We give no political support 'critical' or otherwise, to the Labour Party because it is a bosses' party which has sent troops into break strikes, tightened immigration laws and sent the army into Northern Ireland.

The keynote article 'Myth Illusion and War' rejects the dominant view that that the British troops are playing a 'benevolent peacekeeping' role in Ireland. We oppose the argument that the British army should police withdrawal, by disarming Loyalists, just as we oppose longer sentences for rapists. Even when it appears that the state is playing a progressive role, for example in banning pornography or dealing with child abuse- we recognise that any powers conceded to the state will be used against the working class. The Marxist misinterpretation of the state not only leads them to call for a 'workers' state' but also brings forth demands for greater state interference in our lives for example laws to outlaw racism and ban fascists from marching.

POLITICAL ANARCHISM

To many people anarchism is the opposite of effective political organisation. Anarchists have always understood, however, that workers do not spontaneously become anarchists, but they must be won to our ideas. During the 1920's a group of Russian exiles drew similar vital lessons from their experience of the failed Russian revolution; They sketched out a short but clear outline of the necessity of anarchist political organisation, to prevent a repeat of their tragedy in future revolutions. The Organisational Plat- form of the Libertarian Communist detailed a practical strategy that is relevant in Britain today where anarchism finds itself disorganised and unable to wield much influence. The 'Platform' is discussed briefly in our book reviews, and we will be returning to this text in later issues of Socialism From Below.

The events in Spain during the 1930's prove that anarchism can become a reality. the fact that millions of workers joined an anarchist labour union- the CNT, is proof that you do not need a Bolshevik Party to precipitate a revolutionary situation. However because the working class in Spain did not complete the revolution by destroying the old state apparatus and establishing workers power, it allowed the ruling class to re-organise and erode the gains of dual power (the militia's and the collectives.) Some anarchists in Spain did realise the necessity of establishing class power, the most significant of these being the Friends of Durruti, an anarchist grouping within the CNT, who opposed CNT collaboration with the Popular front. The Friends of Durruti

understood that anarchism needed a sound theoretical base and a programme of action. We in the AWG understand that anarchists must be able to think as well as act, argue as well as fight.

Our political ideas will be elaborated and explained more fully in this, and future, issues of *Socialism From Below*. Our immediate aim is to make libertarian communism clearly understandable; ultimately, we want our ideas to take centre stage in the class struggle.

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

The failure of the labour movement to successfully stave off the employers offensive in the 1980's has created a political climate that encourages defeat. The highly political nature of the attacks on our class has considerably raised the stakes involved. Every industrial dispute faces the full weight of state legislation media propaganda and the economic threat of unemployment.

Reformism has proved itself incapable of rising to meet challenge, because it equates workers interests with the prosperity of British capitalism. This is the root of 'New Realism'. We, unlike our labour leaders are not prepared to wait until British capitalism revives before we start to fight. Nor unlike some of the left, do we believe that the workers are not yet ready for political independence. We are not going to vote Labour and wait until Kinnock starts to break up strikes. Nor do we think that the working class is dead. We believe it is not only necessary but possible for our class to fight today and win. One of the key failures of the labour movement has been to break from the shackles the anti-trade union laws, which hamper every economic struggle today. We say that whatever the prevailing economic and political climate, the working class must mount a political challenge to Thatcher's anti-union legislation. It is the task of anarchist to argue for and assist the politicisation of all struggles and build a movement which is ideologically and organisationally independent from the quango minded bureaucrats who head the trade union machines. The article 'Servants no More' argues the case for a rank and file movement in one particular sector: the civil service. For anarchists, rank and file control of struggle is vital to pave the way for a social system where the working class is in control.

Part and parcel of the ruling class onslaught in the 1980's, has been a blatantly anti-working class ideological offensive. The role of women as second class citizens and 'nurturers' has been reinforced. The promotion of the family as a 'natural' social unit, and the stigmatisation of homosexual couples as 'pretended family' relationships, have ideologically underpinned the dumping of welfare provision (through hospital closures, and benefit cuts etc.) onto the backs of working class families and primarily onto women. The Tories champion the family because it reproduces the labour force without pay, and atomises the working class. The 'Return to Victorian Values', has involved a crude series of moral panics about Aids, football hooligans, lager louts, muggers, illegal immigrants and acid-house parties which all serve to tighten the governments' political control, and legitimise increasing state intervention in all spheres of social activity. We plan to discuss these issues further in *Socialism From Below* as we realise their centrality to the battle against capitalism.

We intend to let no argument go unchallenged, and no question to go un-answered. We intend to win the 'battle of ideas' through our active involvement in all the vital struggles of our class, as we work to re-build an influential anarchist movement. As we have said, our aim is to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas in a victorious workers revolution. Only in this way can we ensure the creation of a new world, where the wealth we produce is put to the service of humanity,

and decision making power becomes the property of all. This is what libertarians mean when we talk of 'communism'. We want Socialism From Below to become essential reading in the struggle for it's realisation.

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