Black Flag
Statement by the Black Flag Group to the Liverpool Conference of the Anarchist Federation of Britain, Sept., 1968
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the mere labels they give themselves, although retaining our own identity.

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Comments are invited upon the draft "Aims & Principles of Anarchism".

Issued by the BLACK FLAG GROUP, 735 Fulham Road, London, S.W.6.

The first conference of the "Black Flag" group will be held in Brighton in the autumn. Discussion on the formation of another anarchist newspaper

## Notes

As the text makes clear, it's responding to various disputes in the anarchist press, especially *Freedom* and *Anarchy*. I've not been able to identify everyone, nor track down all statements.

who reject the revolutionary concept may have various views, ranging from a rejection of contemporary values and a mere ignoring of the State hoping it will go away (hippies, diggers) to deliberate provocation of it to use its full repressive powers without, however, preparing for any effective resistance (some at least of the Provo-Situationists).

We do not recognise what we call Liberal Anarchism to be genuine Anarchism, but since it exists, we are obliged to describe ourselves as Revolutionary Anarchists. We do not know to what extent there is general agreement with us in the AFB. Our present intention is to be a membership organisation, within the AFB and local groups. If on the other hand we represent the bulk of the membership of the AFB there is no reason why the organisation cannot take over our programme. Those who have followed controversies in the Libertarian Press, at least, will know what this leaflet is about. Those who have, by reason of their contemporary experience, rejected the name anarchist, thinking they would identify themselves with what we here call Liberal Anarchist, are invited to re-think their position

## International

The situation internationally, has similarities with Britain except that there the tendency to fit into the framework of society comes from an institutionalised syndicalism, or where exile movements have become bureaucratised. This is what the clash at Carrara[8] was about. But it was also a clash between a revolutionary policy and one of "fitting in". We aim to work out a revolutionary programme, as a group having no preconceived programme of working-class organisation but accepting the principle of direct action and working with people on the basis of their beliefs and actions rather than on

[8] Carrara International Anarchist Congress, 31 Aug.-3 Sept. 1968.



Anarchism is a revolutionary method of achieving a free non-violent society, without class divisions or imposed authority. Whether this is a "utopian" achievement or not is irrelevant; the Anarchist, on any normal definition, is a person who, having this aim in mind, proceeds to get rid of authoritarian structures, and advances towards such a society by making people independent of the State and by intensifying the class struggle so that the means of economic exploitation will be weakened and destroyed.

## Confusion

There should be no confusion between anarchism and liberalism however militant the latter might be (e.g. movements towards national liberation). The liberal seeks greeter freedom within the structure of society that he finds himself; he rejects the methods of class struggle which relate to the economic divisions of society. Since there *is* such a confusion, however, we find that there are now TWO contrary conceptions of anarchism.

There are not "as many conceptions as there are anarchists" nor "a thousand fragments" but there are TWO, both of which are probably represented at this Conference. One, which we support and intend to give coherence to as an organisation, is what we are obliged to call *Revolutionary Anarchism* (though anarchism should not need such a qualification) which says that there can be no compromise with the State; that there is a class struggle, and that there is nothing to be gained to [by] adapting to class society. There can only be a revolution, in the streets and in the factories. The other conception we call *Liberal Anarchism* (though it may regard itself as revolutionary, while more usually deriding the word) which seeks to adjust to present day society, without the need for overthrowing the State (regarded as an unlikely contingency). Such adjustment could, of course, be to Capitalism or even in same circum-

stances to State Communism; and there are many different ways in which it could be main [made].

## Peace Movement

In the main, so far as this country is concerned, such social-liberal ideas have come into the Anarchist Movement by way of the Peace Movement which has questioned, or perhaps never understood, certain basic anarchistic conceptions. In saying this, we are not denying that pacifists can be anarchists (though for the sake of coherent action we would exclude them from our own group). So long as their viewpoint does not become a mainstream tendency we can no doubt work with them within the AFB.

We regard the principle of pacifism as irrelevant and on the whole unanarchistic (as would be making a cult of temperance or vegetarianism or taking pot or 'dropping out' – these are all matters for personal decisions, and while often escapes from the main social issues, only become absurd when made into a cult that all are exhorted to follow, and elevated to becoming the main social issue among ourselves and within society as a whole, with matters such as the class struggle relegated or ignored.) Even so, the issue we face in this conference is NOT pacifism as such but the fact that it has opened the door for so many liberal assumptions. For instance, that prisons can be reformed and are incapable of abolition (Vine[1]; Willis); that we should go to the extent of collecting money for policemen injured on demonstrations (Featherstone)[2]; that the police are a necessary

[1] Ian Vine wrote on on crime and the law in *Anarchy* 59 & 'Anarchism as a realist alternative' *Anarchy* 74

[2] See Godfrey Featherstone's letter in *Freedom*, 20 April 1968 and the response in the following issue from Stuart Christie, Adrian Derbyshire, James Duke, Ross Flett, Albert Meltzer and Martin Page



crutch to society (Rooum)[3]; that criminals are the only free people but that we should call on the services of the police if necessary (Schweitzer-Mariconi)[4].

## Liberalism

Once one accepts that "anarchism must be related to contemporary society", capitalism ([Colin] Ward) one may accept participation in management (Topham through to Ostergaard)[5]; or the necessity for psychological and sociological adjustments to living in the rat race (various, *Anarchy*); or that taxation is necessary to help the poorer classes ([Vernon] Richards); or that we need merely be in a condition of permanent protest against abuses within society (Sydney Libertarians); adjusted to non-violent methods (*Peace News*) or to such authoritarian bodies as the Catholic Church ([Ammon] Hennacy) or even make our peace within the Communist State (Jeff Robinson)[6].

Anarchism so diluted may be recognised by the monarchy ([Sir Herbert] Read) or be compatible with voting Labour ([George] Melly); or it can be reduced to a mere imaginary mind process leading to intellectual salvation (various, *Minus One*)[7]. Those

[3] in Donald Rooum's account of the Challenor case 'I've disloged a bit of brick' in *Anarchy* 36

[4] Jean-Pierre Schweitzer's 'Prolegomena to an Anarchist Philosophy: 3 – Politics', *Minus One* no.13 talks about 'the criminal is the (an)archist "par excellence"'

[5] Tony Topham (Institute for Workers Control) was not an anarchist; Geoffey Ostergaard wrote about Workers' Control in *Anarchy* nos.2 and 80.

[6] I've not seen anything by Jeff Robinson saying this. His 'A statement' (including 'Inner freedom is possible in the modern world even in a prison cell') *Freedom* 29 July 1967 wound up Albert Meltzer: 'The division is between those who see Anarchism as a living force, and those who think it an exciting name to use when talking about the need for children's playgrounds.' 'An Understatement' *Freedom* 19 August 1967.

[7] *Minus One* ("Individualist Anarchist Review") see https://www.unionofegoists.com/journals/minus-one-1963/