

INTRO.

MERSEYSIDE ANARCHIST NEWSLETTER, P.O. BOX 110, LIVERPOOL, L69 8DP.

MERSEYSIDE ANARCHIST is 21 today! In the process of reaching this landmark we've become the biggest selling local anarchist publication in the country and have outlived a great many similar ventures. We are also able to celebrate our coming of age with M.A.'s largest ever print-run.

But before we get too carried away a note of caution must be rung. A small number of people make sure that the newsletter comes out every month, and without them bothering to do the research, write articles and find graphics it just wouldn't happen. You, our loyal readers, can help no end by sending us news, reviews, reports and articles on anything of interest to anarchists. Without support our little newsletter collective can't go on forever. So go on, get writing.

Subscriptions are £2 for ten issues - they're going up soon, so be warned - and cheques should be sent to the P.O. box above, made payable to Mutual Aid Centre.

Deadline for the November issue is MONDAY OCTOBER 22nd. Think ahead. As ever we must point out that the views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of Liverpool Anarchist Group as a whole.

BASIC ANARCHISM.

Anarchism is revolutionary anti-state socialism. In practical terms, anarchists aim for the destruction of the power of the ruling class and of all relationships based on domination and submission. This means taking over our industries and communities and changing them to meet the needs of all, as well as the ecological needs of the environment. Without this takeover we can struggle within capitalism but never replace it.

Anarchism will be created by millions of people, not a dictatorial elite (we are not Marxist-Leninists), and all will have their part to play in shaping it. Power will lie with the organisations thrown up by and for the revolution, not with the political parties who will try to dominate and destroy them.

The new society will not be born through abstract ideas, but will come out of the realities of struggle and the need for working class people to unite. Such struggle doesn't just involve resistance to ruling class power (strikes, mass protests and other forms of direct action), but also construction - the building of new, locally based federal organisations (examples of which go from the original Soviets of the Russian Revolution to the Miner's Support Groups of the 1984/85 strike), plus the forging of solidarity and the willingness to go further.

There is no truce in the class war. The answer to ruling class power is continual and widening struggle - for social revolution and anarchism.

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST GROUP

WE'LL NEVER PAY!



LIVERPOOL - TOP OF THE LEAGUE! and that's not just in football. When official figures for non-payment of the poll tax were released last month the effect in this city was as electrifying as any John Barnes goal - a massive 51% of the population hadn't paid a penny while 50% of the business rate remained unpaid. The figures don't take into account the many thousands who escaped registration altogether. Magnificent!

POLL TAX IN CRISIS

While unofficial sources within the city council were telling the Merseyside Anti-Poll Tax Federation that the real non-payment rate was 80%, the Treasurers office were hastily revising their figures and preparing for crisis. They had originally estimated that 20% of the 1990/91 poll tax bill would be uncollected by next march - now they're talking about at least 30% of the poll tax, 20% of the business rate and £9.6 million of the 1989/90 rates still outstanding by that date. In Liverpool the poll tax is crumbling already, while around the country government statistics are showing an average 25% non-payment rate.

But the battle is far from over, and if councils are to be prevented from gaining the upper hand, non-payers need to stand together against their local authorities. Summonses are being sent out around the country and it's important that people turn up to their court cases. Failure to do so will simply mean that cases will just be railroaded through. Local anti-poll tax groups are using a number of delaying tactics to slow cases down and people should contact them for advice. Of course, non-payers will eventually lose the case and the council will then have a number of options. Councils can be deterred from deducting the tax from wages by threats of strike action, and if they

"IF I'M GOING TO BE POLL TAXED,
I MIGHT AS WELL DRESS LIKE IT."

3D CONFERENCE

'3D' (Don't Pay, Don't Collect, Don't Implement) is a network of anti-poll tax groups and activists who are trying to 'democratise' the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (which is currently dominated by 'Militant') and to increase the effectiveness of the non-payment campaign in general.

The following is a report from last month's 3D national activists meeting held in Leeds.

3D is growing! This was represented by the many groups present at the meeting. There were people from Manchester, Leeds, Eccles, Nottingham, London, Swindon, Leicester, Bristol, Liverpool, Sheffield, Middlesbrough, Edinburgh, Plymouth, York, Oxford and Lancaster. Each group gave a report on local activity and the state of anti-poll tax organisation in their area.

People from London spoke about preparations for the march and festival there on October 20th. As well as the main demo to welcome the people who have marched from Glasgow and Liverpool etc, there will be a feeder march organised jointly by the Trafalgar Sq. Defendants Campaign and the London Federation (see listings). All groups said they planned to attend.

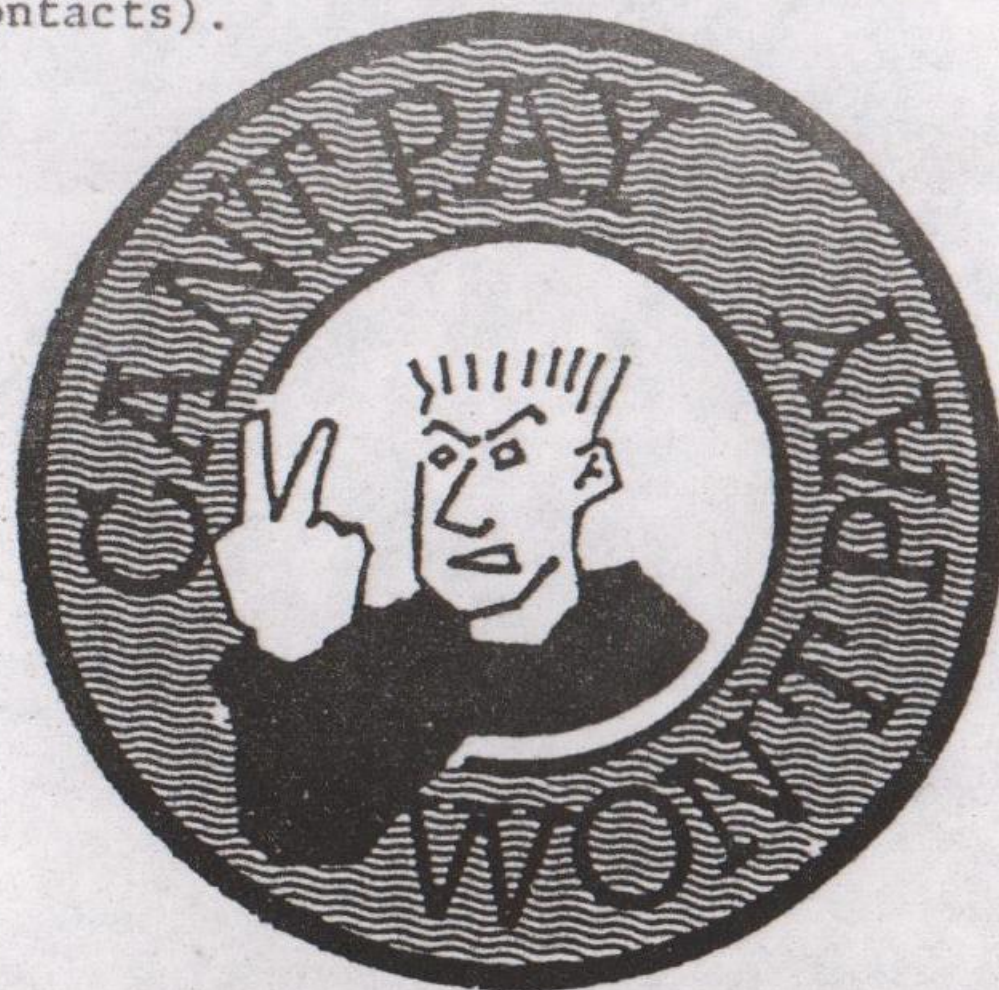
Next was a discussion on 3D's Aims and Principles, which are re-printed here. The treasurers report followed - as always more money is needed to advertise the network and produce the newsletter.

After a break there was a discussion on the need to promote 3D locally and regionally, and to circulate addresses of local anti-poll tax groups (which Militant are withholding) to increase communication and effectiveness within the movement.

The final debate centered on the next All Britain Federation conference which is set for late November/early December. Last year's was little more than a Militant rally, but 3D feel that a national federation has a vital role to play in the campaign and is therefore working to ensure that no one faction is in overall control.

Therefore it's important that non-Milo's get elected onto the national committee and that the Federation is re-structured to make it accountable to its members. With this in mind there were discussions on conference resolutions (which have to be received from anti-poll tax groups by October 31st), and slates of candidates which would be acceptable to a broad spectrum of non-Milo's in the Fed. This will all be finalised at the next 3D conference, to be held in London on October 21st. (Contact Tottenham Against the Poll Tax, 081 808 5893 for details).

3D wants people in the anti-poll tax movement who share its aims to get in touch with their nearest regional contact. It also calls on all groups to affiliate now to the All Britain Federation in an effort to break the Militant stranglehold. You can help 3D by getting involved, advertising it within your groups and distributing the excellent 3D newsletter (available from all regional contacts).



3D

on't pay!
on't collect!
on't implement!

Aims and principles

The 3D network has been set up to foster open communication and democracy within the anti-poll tax movement.

It does not set itself up in opposition to the All Britain Federation. Rather, in recognising that an all Britain federation has an important role, 3D hopes to be a positive force towards democratising that organisation and enabling it to represent the needs of the thousands of groups on the ground in a way which we believe it has failed to do to date.

We believe that there is a need to learn from the events of the past year, and as a result outline the following principles as being necessary for the movement to acknowledge.

1. The strength of the anti-poll tax movement is its diversity. This must be encouraged. Attempts by any groups, factions, parties to control the movement should be resisted.
2. The initiatives of the movement should come from the bottom up. The role of the national federation should primarily be: provision of information co-ordination of national events national press work.
3. The movement should be united and concentrate its energy on actively pursuing a range of strategies against the tax. It should not get caught up in minor disputes about emphasis. We believe that non-payment and non-collection are mutually interdependent. Both must be actively pursued. We should also continue to put pressure on councils and call for non-implementation.
4. The movement must defend all those intimidated by the police and assertively expose the violence and brutality of the state whenever it moves to strike against us.
5. The movement should clearly state its bottom line and make clear that it will continue to fight until these bottom line conditions are met.

★ A system based on ability to pay ★ A system which protects jobs and services ★ A system which gives local people/councillors the right to determine their own level of service provision and ★ An immediate amnesty for all non-payers of the poll tax.

Proposed by 3D editorial collective
for discussion on 15/9/90

Affiliate to the All Britain Federation now!

The next conference of the All Britain Federation will be held in late November, or early December, probably in Nottingham. Whilst the date has still to be confirmed the last National Committee agreed that October 31st would be the deadline for resolutions, affiliations and re-affiliations. That doesn't leave all that much time for groups to get their act together.

3D urges all anti-poll tax groups, large or small, to affiliate and send delegates to the All Britain Federation conference. If the Federation continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by one political current after December we only have ourselves to blame. Democratic structures exist within the national Federation — we have to use them.

Existing affiliates will be entitled to two delegates at a cost of £10. New groups will have to affiliate before October 31st for £10 and pay delegation fees. Although it sounds like a lot of money, it's a small price to pay for democracy, and not much compared to the money raised to produce leaflets and keep the movement building.

To affiliate write to ABAPTF, PO Box 764 London E5 9SX.

Support 3D!

3D has, in its short life, made an important contribution to developing the anti-poll tax movement. If the work of building up the 3D network, keeping activists in touch, organising to raise an independent voice within the movement is to continue we need your support.

There are loads of ways that you can ensure that 3D as a newsletter and a network continues:

- ★ subscribe to 3D as an individual — £5 will ensure that you, and other activists receive the next 5 issues.
- ★ subscribe to 3D as a group — £10 for 10 copies of the next 5 issues.
- ★ make a supporting donation.
- ★ organise local and regional 3D fundraising events — then send us the money!
- ★ write articles, send in photos and cartoons, volunteer to take copies to distribute in your area.
- ★ get in touch with your regional contact and organise a regional activists meeting.
- ★ follow the example of Norwich and produce your own local 3D supplement!

Name Organisation

Address

I can subscribe as an individual ☐ subscribe as a group ☐ distribute 3D in my area ☐ organise a local 3D activists meeting ☐
For bulk orders contact the 3D editorial group. Money, articles, local reports, and orders should be sent to: 3D, 116 The Avenue, Tottenham, London N17 6DG or telephone Sham on 081-808 5893

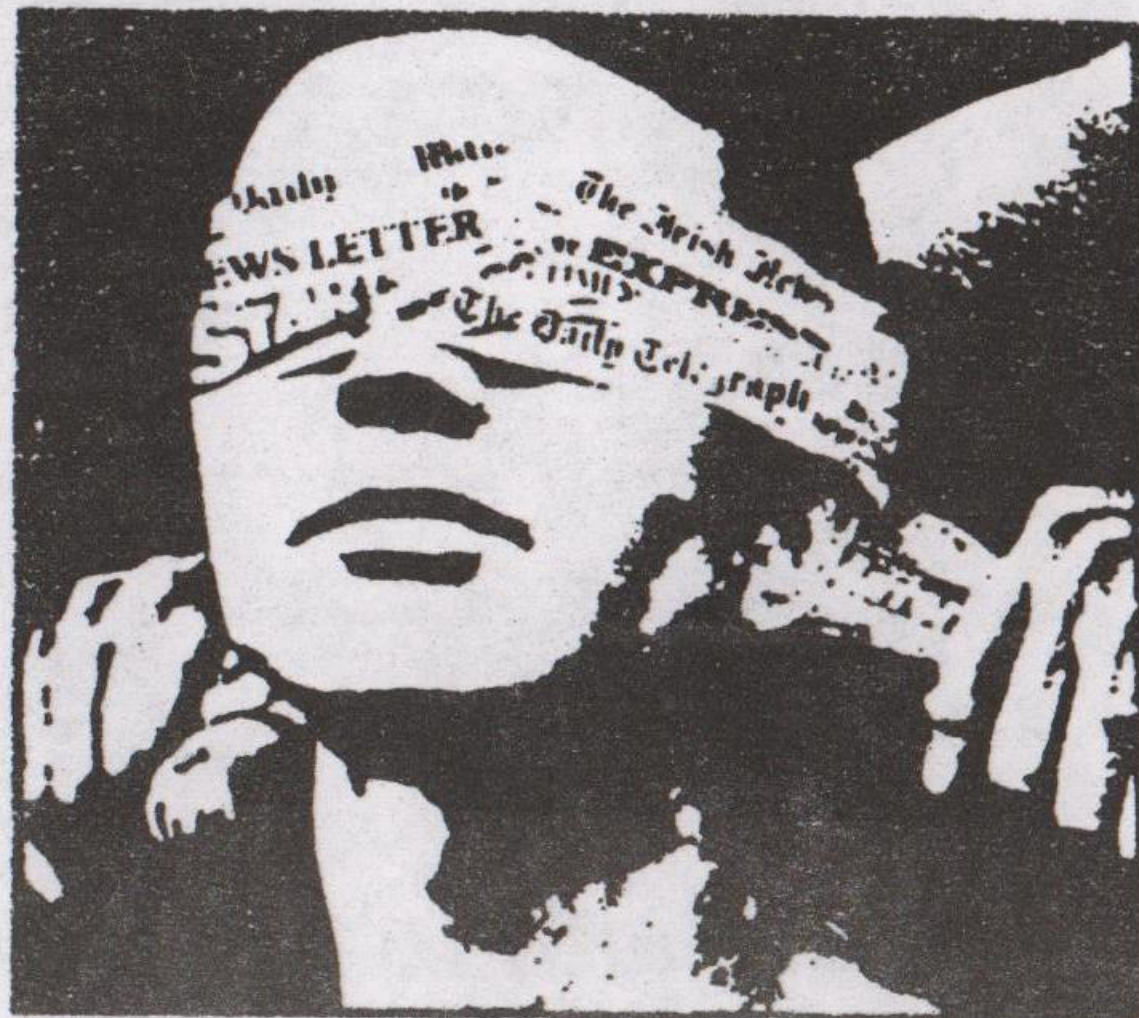
END CENSORSHIP

This month sees the second anniversary of the introduction of the broadcasting ban which further distorted media coverage of events in Northern Ireland. This article examines the thinking behind the ban, looks at its effects and argues that it's in all our interests to end censorship.

In any struggle the state will seek to use the mass media to get its arguments across and to discredit opposition. Whereas dictatorships will do this by direct control of the press, radio and TV, censorship in the western 'democracies' is much more subtle and the illusion of an independent media is created. Of course, because only the very rich own newspapers and because TV and radio managements are nearly all made up from Oxford and Cambridge graduates, our daily diet of news is overwhelmingly biased towards the establishment view.

When the 'old boy network' breaks down and a rogue journalist or producer is threatening to rock the boat, this myth of independence is cast aside and the state will intervene directly (though in as discreet a way as possible) to prevent this happening. In Whitehall there is a standing committee of bureaucrats who can issue a 'D notice' to prevent a newspaper printing anything prejudicial to national security or to 'the public interest', and the Home Office can and do interfere with the production of damaging programmes such as 'Death on the Rock' by using veiled threats to withdraw the broadcasting licence of the TV company involved.

With all this in mind, it came as a surprise to some when, in October 1988, the government announced a ban on the broadcasting of interviews with members or supporters of eleven named organisations involved with the conflict in the north of Ireland. Though the ban didn't prevent such people from appearing, it did outlaw the transmission of their voices whether live or recorded. Given the already high level of distortion with which the media reported news from Ireland and the power the state already had over the press and



TV, why did the government introduce censorship and why did it choose that particular moment? To answer these questions we have to understand a little about British strategy in Ireland as well as looking at events prior to the ban.

It's important to realise that October 1988 wasn't the starting point for censorship on Ireland. Attempts at 'news management' can be traced right back to the spread of adult literacy and the development of a mass media in the 19th century. British governments have always tried to misrepresent opposition to their rule in Ireland and the last 21 years have been no exception. In fact this policy is now so well established that it's been given a name - "Criminalisation".

To hide the fact that its fighting a war in its last colony, the British state does all it can to portray the conflict as a law and order problem. The IRA are branded as 'gangsters' and 'sectarian' and their supporters as "the terrorist community".

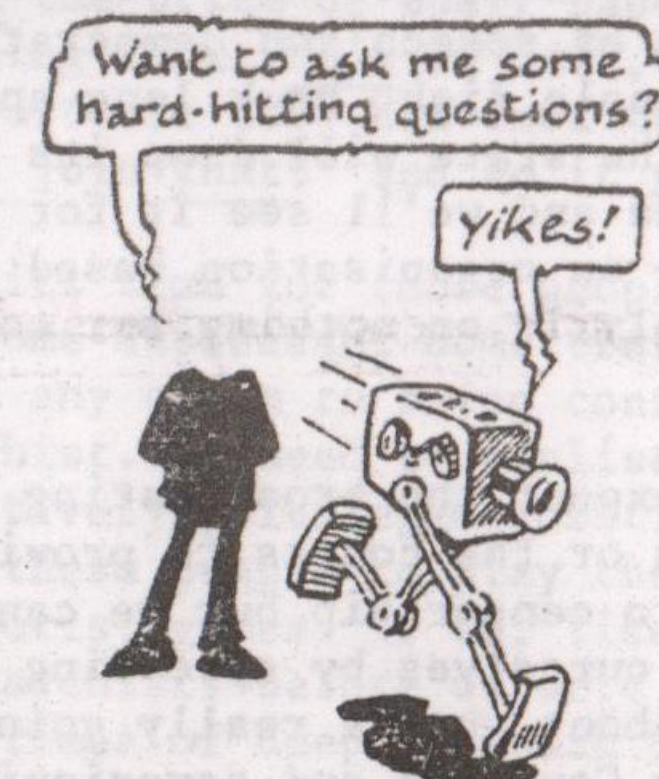
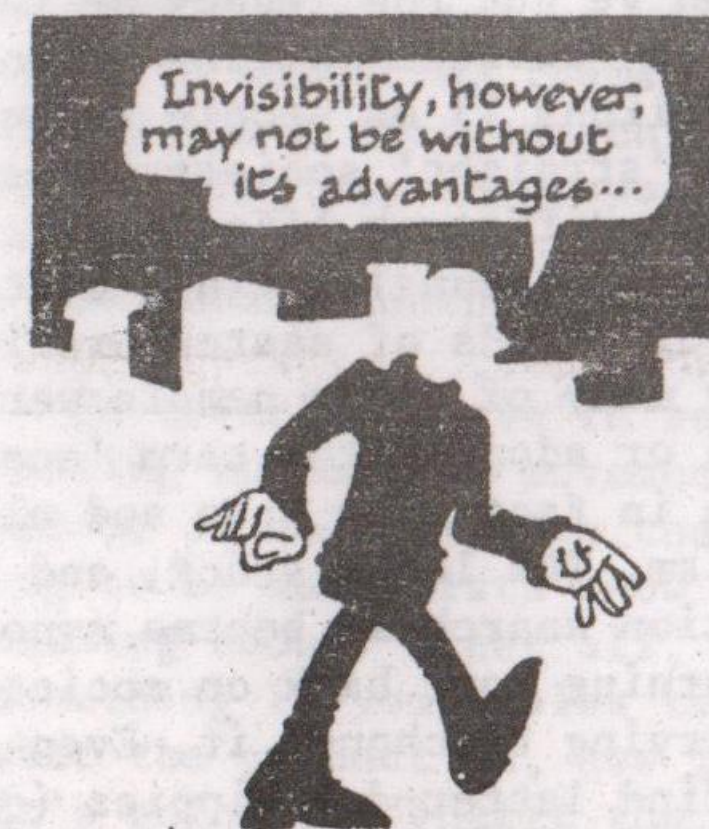
Despite the fact that members of the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, had only been given six minutes of airtime on national TV in the year preceeding October 1988, two things were to force the British to bring in official censorship.

The first was the fact that, until the early 1980's, Sinn Fein had refused to participate in Northern Ireland elections. Successive governments had played upon this fact, using it as proof for their argument that the IRA were criminals and that their armed struggle had no popular support. However, during the 1981 Hunger Strike when IRA prisoner Bobby Sands contested and won a parliamentary by-election in the Mid-Ulster constituency, Sinn Fein realised that both publicity and victory were possible in Six County elections and they dropped their abstentionist policy. Soon the party had 59 local councillors and one MP and were challenging the moderate nationalist SDLP in many seats across the province.

This electoral breakthrough prompted the government to think about shifting

the goalposts. Firstly they brought in a law forcing all candidates in Six County elections to sign a declaration saying they didn't condone the use of violence for political ends. (Note the hypocrisy here - the British state, one of the biggest users of violence in world history, forcing Irish people to declare an opposition to political violence before being allowed to stand in its elections. If this qualification was used for House of Commons elections the place would be empty!). When Sinn Fein candidates signed the declaration and began saying in public that they "understood" the need for the IRA's armed struggle rather than "supported" it, further measures including censorship began to be considered.

The factor which eventually forced the governments hand was the intensification of IRA activity through the summer of 1988, which reached a peak with the killing of eight soldiers in a single attack at Ballygawley. Demands for tough action came from both Unionists and Tory backbenchers and this, coupled with the alarm caused by republican successes at the polls tipped the balance in favour of censorship.



The broadcasting ban aims to deter journalists from interviewing members of the republican movement, and for the most part this has worked. In Britain this has made news coverage only slightly poorer, and when presenters have had the courage to go ahead with an interview, the spectacle of republican's voices being over-dubbed by an actor, or their words coming up on the screen as subtitles has served only to make the government look foolish.

In the Six Counties though, the ban is linked to a host of other measures such as the banning of marches and the harassment of republicans, which are designed to marginalise opposition. Over there, the important 'battle for hearts and minds' isn't between unionist and nationalist politicians but between Sinn Fein and the SDLP over the best way to get Britain out. Obviously the British state wants the ineffective, constitutional and non-violent SDLP to win that argument, and denying Sinn Fein access to the media fits in neatly with that aim.

As with many other forms of repression, the state has first used censorship against a minority who will get little sympathy. But we need to realise that this is always a ploy to make such measures acceptable before extending them. The broadcasting ban refers to "supporters of terrorist (sic) organisations" and as such already covers a great many in the anarchist movement who have made their position on Ireland clear. Today censorship falls mainly on those fighting for Irish independence but tomorrow it could easily be extended to cover other groups which don't fit the establishment's view. Who's next - strikers, political activists, poll tax refusers?

The message behind censorship is clear - start throwing spanners in the works and you can forget all that stuff about freedom of speech and democratic rights. If people fight back long and hard enough the state will drop its liberal facade and we'll see it for what it truly is - an organisation based in the final analysis on nothing but coercion.

We can't expect the broadcasting organisations or the courts to provide a challenge to censorship but we can undermine it ourselves by spreading information about what's really going on in the Six Counties and campaigning for a total British withdrawal.

ANARCHIST ORGANISATION

Anarchism in Britain is in a pretty dismal condition. We've got better politics than the left (Eastern Europe proves that) and we're not being crushed by state repression (because we don't pose a threat). So why is anarchism making only slow progress?

The following article places the blame largely with ourselves and calls for a long overdue re-think about how we can best move things forward. We welcome readers responses to this.

LISTEN ANARCHISTS!

Our movement needs a kick up its collective backside! With the Labour Party becoming more right-wing by the day and Marxism being deadlier than the dodo, anarchists should be cashing in. We're failing to do so - but it doesn't have to be this way! We'll begin to make progress when anarchists wise up and get their act together. I'm sick of hearing so-called anarchists constantly slagging off Labour, the left and the unions without they themselves having a clue about how to change things. If anarchism is ever going to amount to more than a rest home for the terminally cynical then we need to get our politics, organisation and direction sorted out - the sooner the better.

LEARNING BASIC ANARCHISM

Before you can have an anarchist movement, you need people who understand what anarchism is (that this fact even needs stating is an indication of how far we've still got to go). Two things have worked against this happening.

Firstly you've got the legacy of the Sixties and its 'counter-culture' when thousands (millions?) of people rejected the values of 'straight' society and experimented with different lifestyles involving drugs, communal living, mysticism and various brands of eastern religion. Unfortunately many of those people were either called or adopted the term 'anarchists', when in fact they knew sod all about anarchism. The label stuck, and for a generation anarchism became synonymous with turning your back on society rather than trying to change it. Even now, you'll find latter-day hippies (or 'lifestylists') who'll insist on calling

themselves anarchists despite the fact that they couldn't tell you the first thing about anarchism, and the fact that their politics are wholly different from all other conscious anarchists!

This stigma, which has linked us in the public mind with everything from paganism to punk, has put countless people off the anarchist movement and has succeeded in obscuring genuine anarchist politics.

The second factor is that many people now turn to anarchism as a gut reaction against the way things are. Having recognised that capitalism has to go, they then rightly see the bankruptcy of the Labour Party and go on to reject the pantomime that passes for the 'revolutionary' left in this country - so far so good. But, after reaching this point, our failure to so far create a viable movement doesn't encourage these people to develop their ideas and many become stuck in a comfortable rut of 'permanent opposition'. But if people can only put forward criticisms (however valid they may be) without having the belief or incentive to push their politics further and to come up with solutions based on educating themselves and others about what anarchism is and what sort of society it proposes, then their anarchism turns to cynicism - and cynics change nothing!

So clearly, if we're serious about wanting to build a movement, it's up to all of us to make sure that people claiming to be anarchists know what they're talking about. After all, you can't sell something if your sales team don't know what the product is, how it works or how it's going to benefit the customer! This means education around anarchist



ideas, the main currents within anarchism (more on these later) and anarchist history. All this is necessary because if we don't know how the ideas came about, or how people tried to put them into practice in the past, then we've no chance of convincing people of the relevance of anarchism today. Education will also enable us to speak with authority when clearing up the misconceptions people have about anarchism.

But education alone is not enough to change the fortunes of the anarchist movement - with it and out of it must come the building and strengthening of anarchist organisations, because.....

INDIVIDUALS CHANGE NOTHING!

One of the myths about anarchism is that it's opposed to organisation, when in fact it calls for, if anything, more and better organisation than other social systems. Alas, this myth seems even to be believed by some anarchists, who are slow to accept the need for organisations. Even when they've been convinced some will still avoid joining one by putting forward puritanical arguments - "have you seen the price of their paper", I'm not joining them, he's in it!", did you see the article they had last month, I couldn't join that!" and so it goes on.

Well, it's time for those people to accept some unpleasant home truths, or renounce any claim to being considered an anarchist. We need to realise that it's our relatively privileged position that enables these people to play their little purist games. If we, like many other anarchists before us were living through times of deep economic depression, mass repression of the working class and under the threat of fascism, there



would be no such nonsense in the anarchist ranks - the need to band together or be crushed would be obvious. And only people who've accepted the capitalist propaganda of 'the class struggle is over' can believe that things like that aren't going to happen again in Britain.

NATIONAL ANARCHIST ORGANISATIONS

So we need to get organised now, before those conditions recur. This means that anarchists have to get their hands dirty and make the decisions (based on what they've learned about anarchism) concerning what 'type' of anarchist they are and therefore which organisation to join. We haven't got time for the perfect group to come along, and it's not necessary to agree 100% with an organisation's policies, as long as you accept the basis and general drift of their ideas. People who refuse to join (or who leave) anarchist organisations over a single issue of policy are making a mistake. The question is not, for example, "Do I agree with D.A.M.'s Irish policy", but should be "Am I an Anarcho-Syndicalist?". And questions like that can only be

answered after reading, research, debate and argument amongst anarchists - all this should be ongoing in a healthy movement anyway.

Many of us now believe that, while dealing with people outside of or new to the movement, it's OK to simply identify your politics as "anarchist" and to explain the basic ideas. But this isn't good enough*who already claim to be convinced. Inside the movement we need to go further than that and learn the meanings of a few 'big words' which sum up the main trends within anarchism and which define the politics of the national organisations. Two such terms are 'Anarcho-Syndicalism' and 'Platformism'.

Very briefly, the first aims to replace capitalism and the state with an economy managed by revolutionary workplace and community based unions free of control by political parties. Anarcho-Syndicalism has always been the major tradition within anarchism and is represented here by the Direct Action Movement which is the British section of the revolutionary syndicalist International Workers Association.

Platformism is a set of ideas on organisation, tactics and theory which were developed by a group of anarchists exiled after the Russian revolution and civil war. They believed that the failures of the anarchist movement in that period showed a need for the formation of a 'General Union of Anarchists' which would unite all anarchists around a generally agreed 'platform' of theory, methods of organisation and tactics. Their pamphlet, 'The Organisational Platform of the Libertatian Communists' is essential reading. In Britain, Platformism is represented by the Anarchist Communist Federation and the Anarchist Workers Group.

In addition to the above you have Class War, a network of people around the paper of the same name. Class War has only recently begun to define its politics and contains both anarchists and non-anarchists. Though CW doesn't have as strong a theoretical base as the other three groups, it is still worth anarchists joining if they like the stance taken by the paper, firstly to give weight to the 'anarchist tendency' within the organisation and secondly to develop the potential around its undoubtedly popular paper.

for those

CO-ORDINATION

Unlike other European countries, we have no large anarchist tradition and so no one idea or theory has become accepted or dominant in our movement yet. But if one of the nationals began to make serious headway, and especially if it was developing viable structures and contacts within the labour movement, I think most genuine class struggle anarchists would back it and do all they could to push it further. We wouldn't get bogged down in the same futile sectarianism as the left because, unlike the various parties, anarchist organisations don't see themselves as holders of 'the one true faith'.

Until such a development happens though, anarchists need to be able to co-ordinate their various groups and have a means of communicating ideas and info, and it is here that one of the most positive anarchist initiatives for years comes in.

The Class Struggle Anarchist Network (CSAN) was formed in May 1989 with just such a function in mind. It has since succeeded in bringing together activists from all the nationals plus local anarchist groups without infringing on anyone's independence. Though not in itself a 'national organisation' in the sense of the others, the CSAN aims to promote the ideas of class struggle both inside the anarchist movement and to the wider working class.

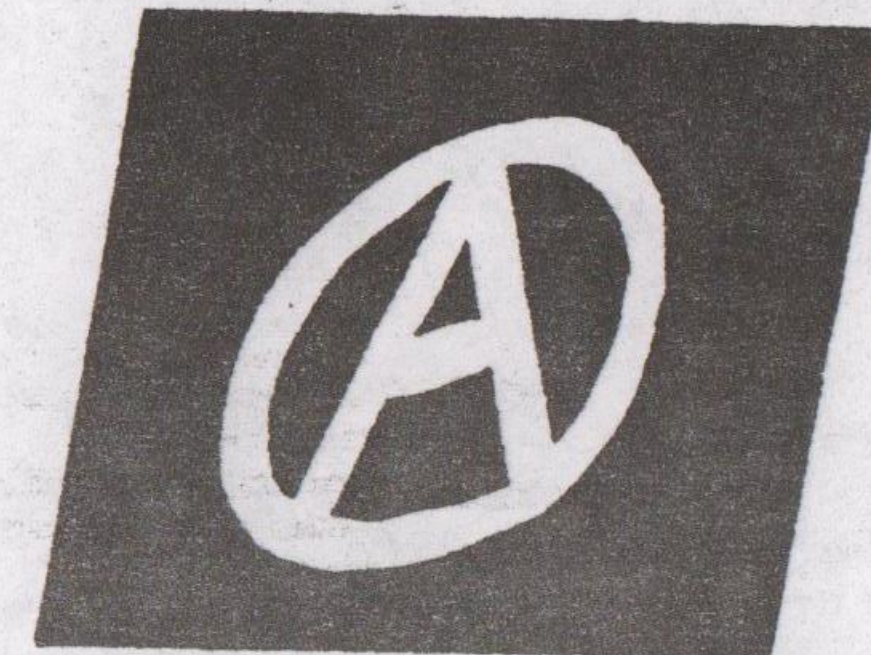
FUTURE DIRECTION

In one sense, this article is designed to make depressing reading. It aims to show what an early stage the anarchist movement in Britain is really at and what basic processes must be gone through before we can expect to get anywhere. But, on the other hand, we mustn't be daunted by what's still to be done. Look at the state of anarchism ten, even five years ago and you'll see the progress that's already been made. With the re-emergence of class politics at least we've seen much of the liberal rubbish being edged out of our movement - a fundamental and necessary development. The point is, of course, that the pace of change is entirely up to us. The more we understand about anarchism, the easier it becomes to put our ideas across, and the more

people we can convince, the stronger our organisations become. From there it follows that anarchists can make greater progress - hastening the demise of the left parties and exposing and eventually providing an alternative to the empty rhetoric of the Labour Party.

A large anarchist movement would be able to build an industrial base and so increase the militancy and effectiveness of workers struggles against the bosses. In the political arena we could begin to set our own agenda rather than just tail-ending issues raised by the left, and anarchists, not being bogged down with involvement in a host of single-issue campaigns would be able to put more time and energy into their own movement, thus expanding it further.

But we can only reach this stage by getting the basics right first. Education leading to organisation. Like everything else about anarchism the responsibility for making this happen lies with each and every one of us.



All the national organisations will explain their politics in detail, give out recommended reading lists and can put you in touch with their nearest branches.

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION, P.O. Box 125, Coventry, CV3 5QT.

ANARCHIST WORKERS GROUP, P.O. Box B20, Huddersfield, HD1 1XS.

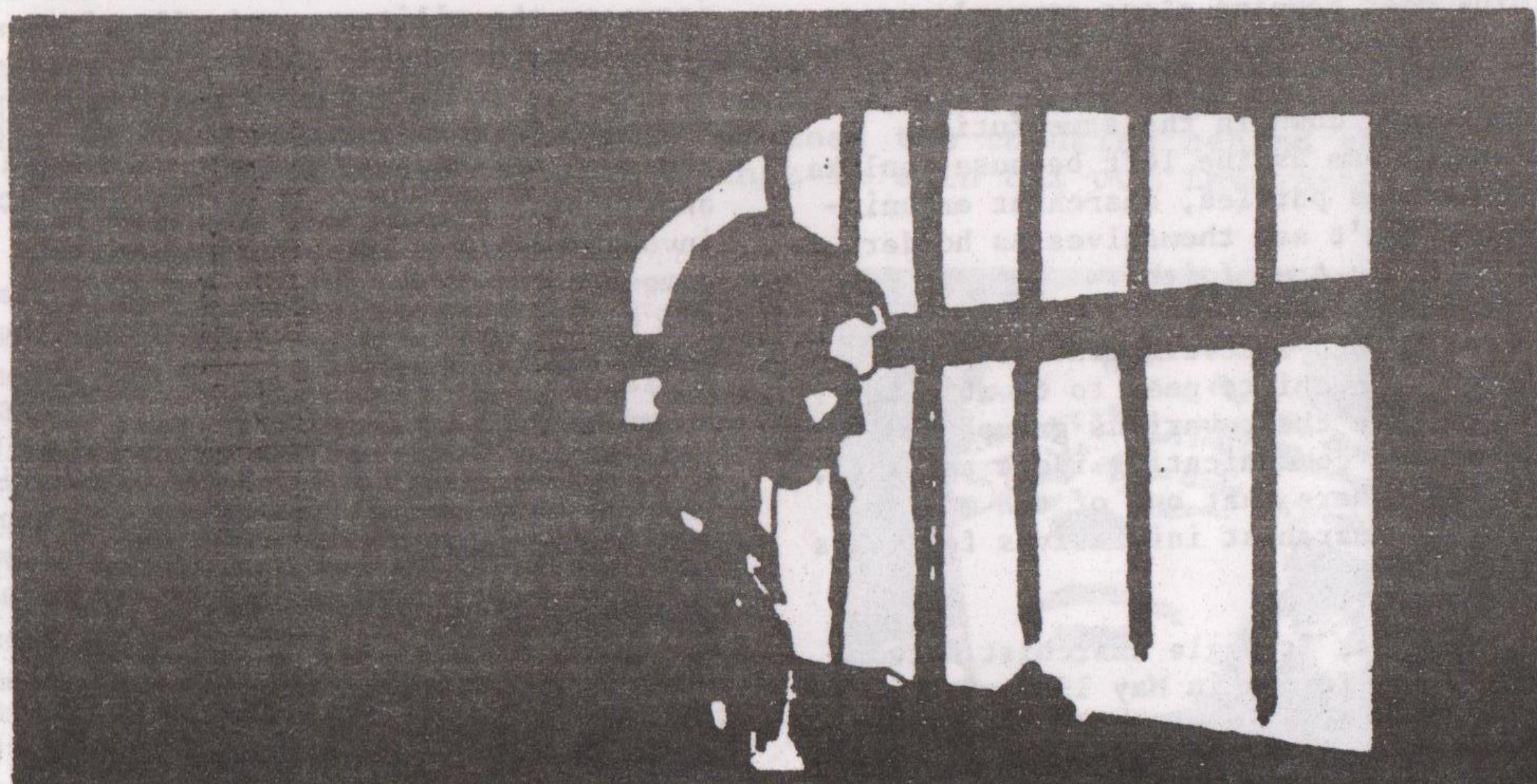
CLASS WAR, P.O. Box 467, London, E8 3QX.

DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT, P.O. Box 29, SWPDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.

&

CLASS STRUGGLE ANARCHIST NETWORK, P.O. Box 446, Sheffield, S1 1NY.

WHY PRISONERS FIGHT BACK



Surprisingly little has been seen in the radical press about the wave of prison riots this summer. This may be because the middle class dominated left feels uncomfortable about extending its 'solidarity' to those who, largely because of poverty and pressure, are imprisoned by the state. Soweto is fine, but Strangeways.... those people are just criminals!

The article below is reprinted from the prison resistance news-sheet 'Inside Info' and looks at the riots in a wider context. It is written by John Bowden, himself a long term prisoner in Long Lartin.

The Strangeways uprising, distinguishable for its intensity and duration, has generated a plethora of interpretations and analyses about what are perceived as the current ills of the British prison system, and placed prisons as an issue close to the top of the political agenda. Unfortunately, none of the discussions about the cause and rationale of the uprising, which acted as a catalyst for generalised unrest throughout the entire prison system, went much beyond the usual superficial and non-contentious issues of overcrowding, staff shortages and, of course, the existence of a ubiquitous minority of 'subversive' prisoners hell-bent on disrupting prison life for purely gratuitous reasons.

The terms of the Strangeways-inspired debate have been set by spokespeople for the prison system itself, and the 'respectable' prison reform pundits have done little more than collude in shifting the focus of public attention away from the grievances raised by the Strangeways prisoners themselves (essentially complaints about physical and psychological brutality) and onto issues more palatable to the establishment. Inevitably, factors like gross overcrowding and a denial of basic facilities contributed to the uprising at Strangeways, but its true origins lay in the behaviour of a prison staff that distinguished Strangeways as one of a group of prisons (Wandsworth,

Leeds, Winson Green and Lincoln sharing the group) renowned for its brutal and inhuman treatment of prisoners.

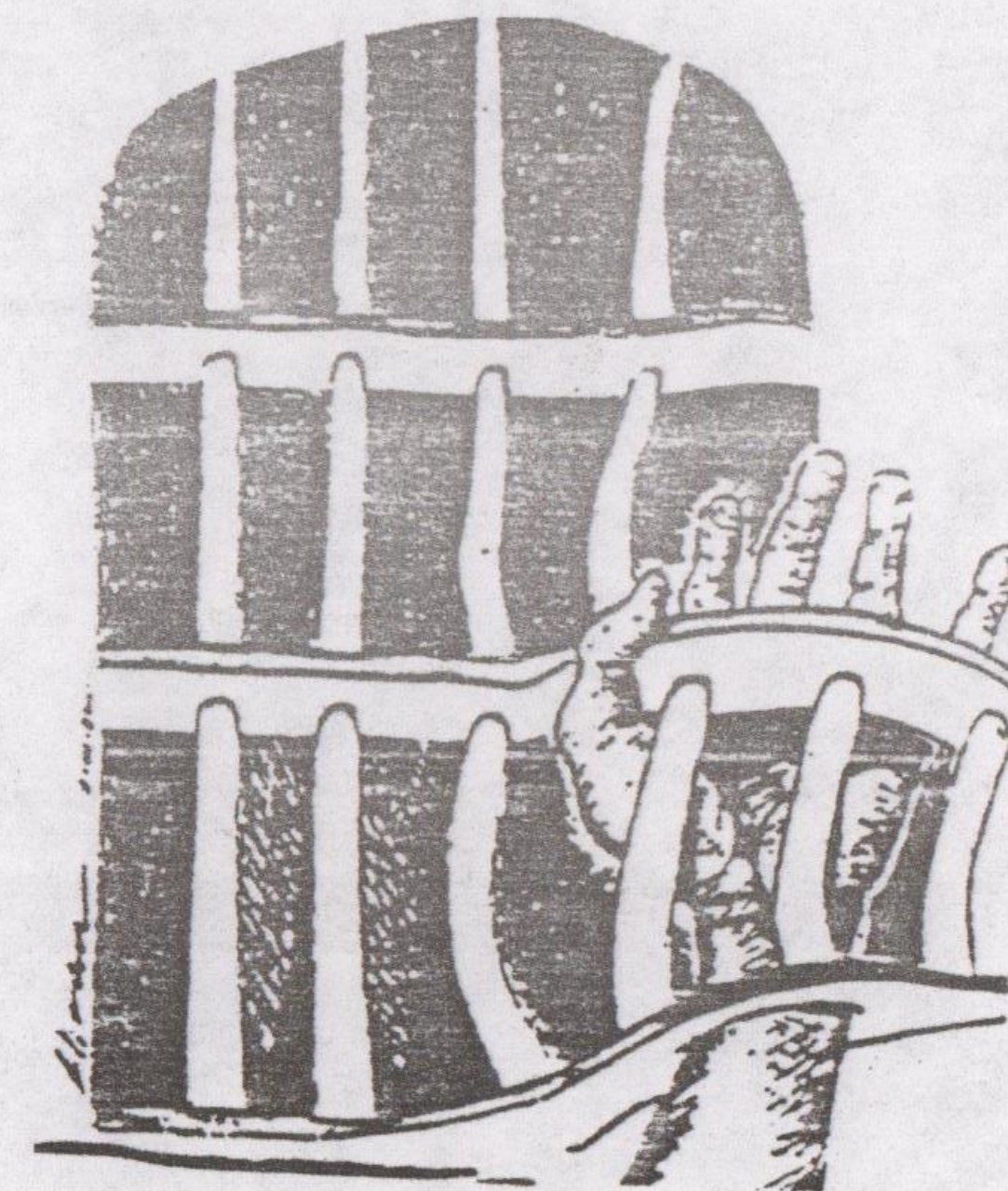
Essentially, the disturbance at Strangeways was an act of resistance on the part of the prisoners to a regime based on a long tradition of officially sanctioned violence and overt intimidation. In view of the complete absence of any grievance procedure for effectively dealing with prisoners complaints and the almost total lack of legal accountability as far as the behaviour and activities of prison staff are concerned, the uprising was both understandable and inevitable. If the state is prepared to sanction the unlawful brutality of prison officers and virtually allow them a free hand to do as they please with prisoners in the interests of ensuring so-called 'good order and discipline' in hell-holes like Strangeways, then prisoners then prisoners have the right to defend themselves and protest in whatever way they consider to be most effective.

The system itself in its treatment of prisoners has dictated the terms of conflict, and struggle in prison can therefore hardly be surprised when prisoners adopt a strategy of direct action as a means of both highlighting their predicament and defending their basic human rights. In that sense the uprising at Strangeways was primarily a response to the far greater institutionalised violence of the prison system and very much an authentic front line of resistance against an instrument of state repression that over the last ten years in particular has been wielded with enthusiasm against the social consensus and the victims of Thatcherite Britain. The Strangeways prisoners are therefore to be applauded for their courage and audacity in fighting back against a system that attempts to dehumanise and brutalise them, and deserve the recognition of all those outside prison committed to the wider struggles against injustice and oppression.

The current economic and social crisis pervading British capitalist society is finding its most explosive points amongst the most marginalised and dispossessed (it's probably no coincidence that Strangeways ignited during the same weekend that the huge anti-poll tax demo in London became transformed into a pitched battle with police). The constituency of poor and oppressed people with no representation in capitalism's political

institutions or protections in bourgeois law, the savagely disadvantaged who compose the underside of a class-ridden society in terminal decay. Conditions at Strangeways prison before the uprising were a microcosm of life for the poor in Thatcherite Britain, and the rebellion prefigures the sort of struggles about to assume form in society generally within the next decade; recent 'disturbances' in the prison system indicate that prisoners will be close to the forefront in these struggles.

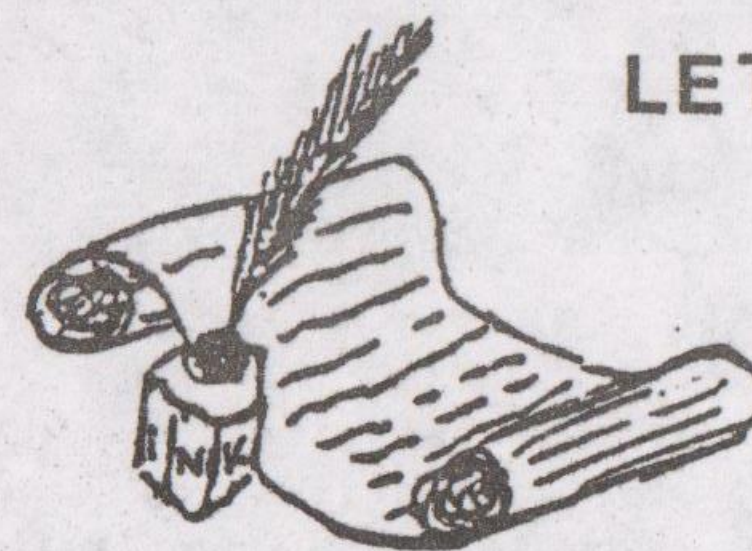
Predictably, in its wake the uprising at Strangeways has produced promises from the government of increased repression in prison and 'tougher' legal sanctions against those prisoners who dare to resist - it represents a message that prisoners are well-used to; submit or you will be crushed. The most enduring image of the Strangeways uprising will surely be the unbroken defiance of the last group of prisoners to descend from the prison's rooftop - it symbolised well the unbroken spirit of resistance that exists amongst the poor in prison, and it will survive no matter what techniques or methods of repression are employed against it.



John Bowden is a prisoner in Long Lartin who has played an active role in the struggle for prisoners rights. He welcomes correspondence -

John Bowden, B41173, HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs, WR11 5TZ.

LETTERS



their own biased interpretation. But Woodcock writes from the point of view of a has-been - an ex-anarchist (in the '40's) turned "respectable" academic. Anyone who can call General Primo de Rivera (Spanish dictator from 1923-30 and persecutor of the anarchist working class movement) a "likeable man" (p357) clearly shows where his loyalties lie now.

Also, while a mine of information, some, at least, of his facts are wrong. For instance, in the section on Spain there's the claim that insurrections launched in January 1933 were a "protest" at the deportation of anarchists to Spanish Guinea (p362). In fact those anarchists had returned by then - some, like Durruti, organising the insurrection (see "Durruti, the People Armed" by Abel Paz). Or there's the claim that, at the CNT Congress of May 1936, the CNT "kept aloof from the Socialists, who talked of the revolutionary alliance" between the socialist party unions and the CNT (p364). In fact the opposite was the case. Or there's the claim (p354) that there's "no doubt" that anarchists were "largely responsible" for death squads being used against them by the ruling class (for some doubts, and a much better account of these events, see Jose Peirats' 'Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution').

Again, in the section on Italy, there's the anti-anarchist lie that some bombs planted in Milan in March 1921 "provided the Fascists with a justification for their campaign against the Left and an excuse for counter-violence" (p334). In reality, fascist terror against working class organisations began from the start. In April 1919 for instance, - less than one month after the first fascist squads formed, and well before the mass factory occupations of 1920 - the fascists had attacked and burned the Milan headquarters of the socialist paper 'Avanti!'. And in January 1921 they burned the Trades Councils of Bologna and Modena, not to mention all the fascist attacks in between.

The above should be enough to make anyone stop and think.

Woodcock's 'Anarchism' may be a "classic" for those who want to bury anarchism. For everyone else it needs to be taken with a large dose of salt. Read it if you must - but don't be fooled.

An Anarchist Reader.

More Letters on next page . . .

AT THE ANARCHIST BOOKFAIR

SAT 20th OCTOBER 1990
CONWAY HALL 10am-8pm
RED LION SQUARE
LONDON WC1
HOLBORN

*anarchist books
pamphlets
posters·badges
t-shirts
meetings·videos
c r e c h e
vegetarian food*



18 LETTERS ON IRAQ

Dear Merseyside Anarchist,

On September 2nd, Hackney Solidarity Group called a meeting in London to discuss a revolutionary response to the Gulf crisis. As well as the HSG, people from Class War, Anarchist Communist Federation, Direct Action Movement, Wildcat and various individual class struggle anarchists and anti-state communists attended. The Anarchist Workers Group also turned up and argued that we should take sides and support Iraq. This view was unanimously rejected and it was decided instead to set up a group on the basis of "No War but Class War".

The front cover of 'Merseyside Anarchist' no.20 - "Class War not Gulf War" - suggested a similar position, but the article inside contradicted this. Despite arguing against supporting Saddam Hussein, it stated that "it's in all our interests for the West to lose". Since one side can't lose without the other winning, wanting the West to lose has to mean hoping for an Iraqi military victory.

When a country wins an inter-capitalist war it is always at the expense of the working class. This is because to win, the victorious side has to be best at - 1) destroying or at least seriously defeating enemy military forces, i.e. killing working class soldiers. 2) destroying enemy communications and industry, usually through bombing. This always involves massive working class casualties, as it is mainly working class people who work in, or live near to, such targets. 3) crushing working class resistance to the war effort at home.

Supporting a defeat for the West isn't like wanting Cameroon to beat England in the World Cup. The West will only lose in the unlikely event of it being less successful at massacring proles than Iraq is.

Of course not supporting Iraq doesn't mean supporting the US and its allies. But the removal of Western forces from the Gulf has to be through internationalist working class action, not through the action of the Iraqi state's armed forces. Nor is it pacifist to refuse to take sides - revolutionaries call for class war, with the working class of all countries turning its weapons against our rulers, in a social revolution.

Instead of arguing that the working class has no country, the author of

"Yankee go home" seems to think that some countries have no working class: "you can't apply strict class definitions to all arab countries - some of them haven't even finished their industrial revolutions yet". This is a eurocentric approach, i.e. it class relations worldwide solely in terms of the european experience of industrialisation. You don't have to be an industrial worker to be working class. In all arab countries and everywhere else there is a clear division between a wealthy ruling class on the one hand and the dispossessed on the other, made up of factory workers and the unemployed, landless ex-peasants, prisoners etc.

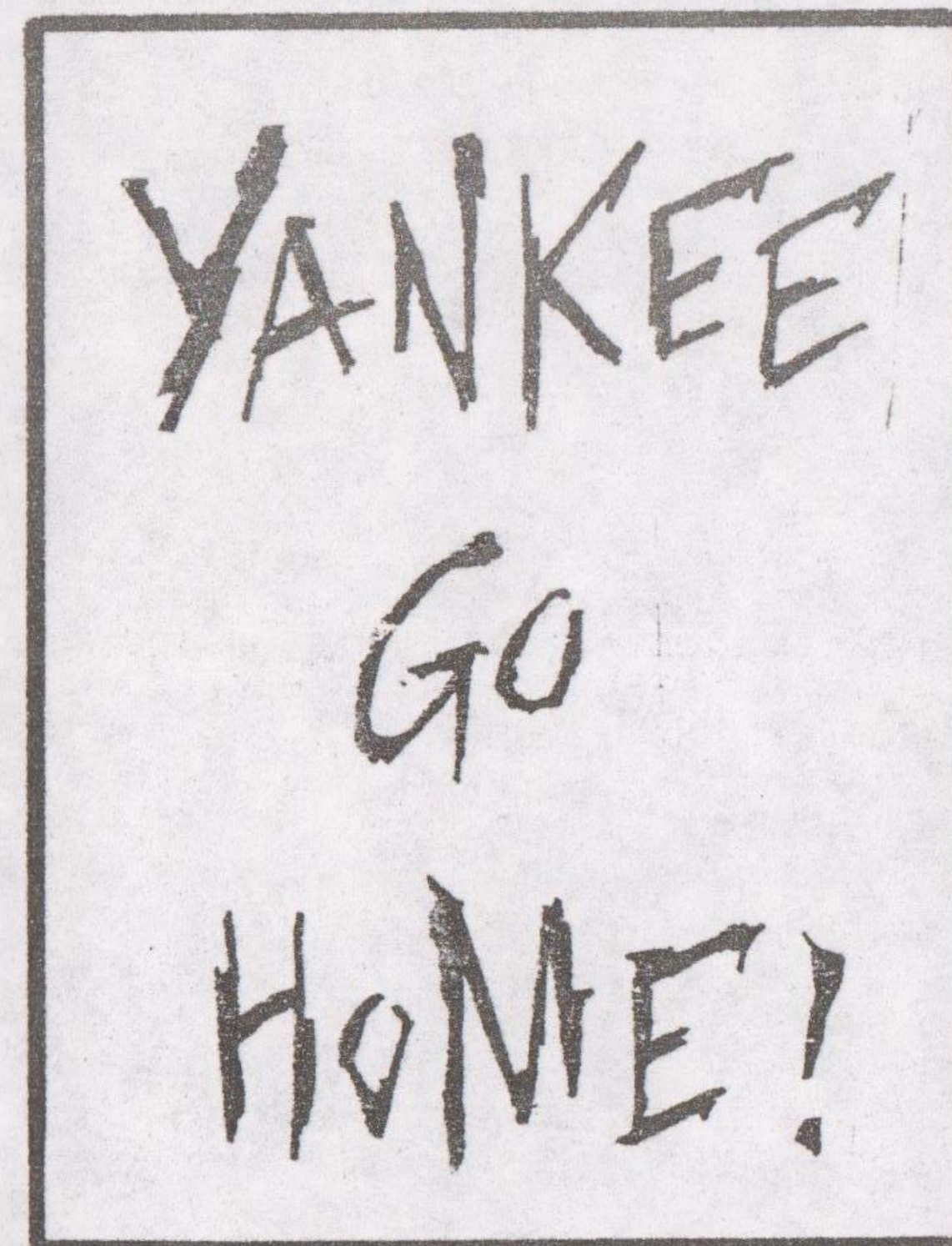
In any case the industrial working class in the region has a long history of struggle of which the author seems ignorant. For instance in 1946/47 there were major strikes by railway, port and oilfield workers in Iraq, resulting in the massacre of strikers. Only a month before the Iraqi invasion, oil workers went on strike in Kuwait for a 6.4% pay rise.

Talk of a working class perspective on the Gulf crisis is also dismissed on the basis that the arab working class is divided, some supporting 'their' governments, some supporting foreign powers. This is like saying that we can't talk of a working class revolution in Britain because some vote Tory and some Labour. What counts isn't what particular groups of working class people think at any one time, but what the interests of the class as a whole are - interests that are broadly the same right across the world. This is not "snappy sloganeering" but a basic principle.

"No War but Class War" has produced leaflets, a banner for demo's ('No War but Class War - Neither Washington nor Baghdad') and picketed BP headquarters to demonstrate the link between oil profits and war. It would be good if people formed similar groups around the country. Perhaps all those interestes could get together at the anarchist bookfair, including hopefully, those of you in Liverpool with similar views to "No War but Class War".

Neil (South London)

NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR are at BM 8884, LONDON WC1N 3XX.



Dear Merseyside Anarchist,

I'd agree with most of your article on the Gulf crisis - if there's a war its important that the U.S. is defeated. With the USSR out of the world power game, the threat of a superpower confrontation that's hung over any direct U.S. military intervention since World War 2 is now largely past history. Vietnam is a fading memory and, where funding of death squads and military butchers isn't enough, U.S. politicians are increasingly willing to use the big

stick to enforce U.S. economic and political control. If the U.S. succeeds here, it'll be the green light to step in anywhere.

I'd disagree though, with your slugging off of an "Arab working class solution". Just talking of an "Arab" solution means support for the Arab ruling classes - whether feudal, religious or military dictators. Saying "you can't apply strict class definitions to all Arab countries" due to lack of industrialisation, or that arab workers are divided over the issue, or that the Palestinians etc don't have any say in the matter anyway, is irrelevant. An arab working class solution means that any solution should benefit and strengthen the position of the arab working class and peasants - the oppressed in any real sense of the word, as opposed to their local or western-based oppressors. That means a defeat for Western Imperialism, and the weakening - preferably the overthrow - of Hussein. At the very least it means that Iraqi and other workers shouldn't be slaughtered for ruling class gain, and that any solution should increase the chances of independent arab worker and peasant organisation and action

Anti-imperialism does not mean supporting any tin-pot dictator who happens to shake his or her fist at America. The best support we can give to workers in the Middle East, and elsewhere, is to heat up the class war against our own ruling class.

For the class war,

John.

REMEMBRANCE DAY



On November 11th, fascist groups will be attempting to march again. The National Front in London and the British National Party in York.

These marches are always opposed and anti-fascists will be out in force again this year to drive the nazis and racists of our streets.

Final details have yet to be announced, but for up to date news about both events contact -

Anti-Fascist Action, P.O. Box 110, Liverpool, L69 8DP.