

"Towards a
History and Critique
of the
Anarchist movement
in recent times"

By K.N., R.A. & C.W.

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Introduction

We apologise for repeating a general analysis of the past ten years in an essay attempting to deal with the future. However, it is not just for oligarchs that "he who controls the present controls the future, by his control of the past". For us this means not the rewriting of history it does in '1984', but its understanding.

The other necessary apology is that much of the narrative is drawn from personal experience. We do not think it much of a presumption to assume that our own political experience is, in a very general way, typical. We fully accept that the criticisms of the movement derived in this essay constitute in every way an auto-critique of our own past theory and practice.

Background

The election of the 1945 Labour Govt. marked the end of an era of working class struggle. For a majority of the working class it represented the final triumph of three generations of struggle and aspiration - at last a social democrat govt. with a huge majority would be able to lay the foundation of a new society.

We are still dealing with the ideological and economic legacies of that 'new society'. The problems of stabilising capitalism and rebuilding European economic life; of shifting markets and a new mode of Imperialism; the break-up of the 3-power alliance into the 2 blocs - the Cold War and the resumed arms race. These problems and the way the Attlee govt. dealt or failed to deal with them are the foundations of the era we are working in.

The first fruits became widely appreciated in the 50's. The Age of Austerity, of reconstruction, gave way to the Age of Affluence, of high mass consumption. The Cold War stabilised, or rather petrified, political life. The rapidly rising consumer demand, carried on the back of the boom in arms production, fostered the illusion that the future would be a steady rise in living standards and that full employment was here forever (these views were widely held among workers. cf Goldthorpe and Lockwood study of carworkers The Affluent Worker.)

It can be characterised as a time when all the old problems which had motivated political life seemed solved or outmoded. Little difficulties might arise but these would be smoothed out in periodic adjustments. There were no great issues, and, when there were those who advanced problems to this status, they were noisome interruptions to the dawning of the coming Utopia. They recieved no echo from any section of society. 'Apathy' was the label coined by the frustrated left to reify what was a genuinely widespread satisfaction with the status quo. Politics had left the realm of conflict, let alone of class conflict. The 'threat' of working class embourgeoisement, the outdatedness of class struggle, were the grounds on which the Gaitskellite revisionists roused the only conflict of the day - in order to 'bring the Party up to date'.

Suez and Hungary were of little immediate impact at the time outside of the small circles of the left. The exodus of the best of its young intellectuals from the CPGB was not to have effect until later.

The Bomb

The movement of intellectuals to the left, out of the CPGB; the need for the Labour Party 'left' to come up with a weapon to fight the revisionist leadership; and the growing ideological estrangement from 'never-having-it-so-good' of youth,

found a meeting point in the movement against the Bomb. During the 50's groups of pacifists, direct actionists, and other 'cranks' had been fighting rather remote and pyhhric guerilla actions in the mud of the Norfolk bases. The needs and organisational skills of the anti-gaitskellites enabled the issue to catch the hearts and imaginations of large numbers of mainly middle class, but also some upper working class, youth.

Depending upon their experience and local political conditions, the liberal (ie. single-issue, emotional, ameliorative, non-theoretical) reaction of those involved was radicalised by experience of debate, organisation, and conflict, to varying degrees, with the status quo and the dominant ideologies. The broadest layers were moved to the extent of providing the basis of active local workers which brought Wilson to power in the Labour Party, and, in 1964 provided the organisation and crusading spirit to take him to Westminster. This was, after all, what the original founders of CND had really been after.

Others, due to the influence of the Committee of 100 (itself a ground for ex-CP militants) had gone beyond this point to 'total' confrontation - a recognition that it was the State they were confronting and not some phantom 'the Bomb'. Their politics were still liberal in that they tended to be still single-issue oriented, strongly utopian, and influenced by nonconformist millenarianism to the extent that they were capable of great sacrifice but little analysis. In short they lacked political acumen. Their political puritanism made them prophets of a better world but unfortunately fitted them for little in this one. The incredible wrangles over the deified body (now recognised largely as a corpse) of abstract 'nonviolence' is perhaps a prime example of their strengths and weaknesses.

It was the interaction between this group and some of the first - who had gone into the LP, the YCL etc, seeing the need for political activity in its broader terms, and who had been progressively disillusioned by the inadequacies of these whilst still being in contact with the Committee - which provided the base for what are, historically, comparatively large ultra-left groups.

The 'Anarchist Revival'

The 'revival' has been documented and discussed but never satisfactorily explained. Neither have its consequences been examined. It is too simplistic to say that 'experience' led people to anarchism, unless we attempt to understand what common factor made it likely that the 'anarchist movement' would grow at any faster rate than, say, the SLL - which did have an influence in the early years of the Campaign. The answer is ideological. We have described the Campaigners-of-the-left as radicalised liberals - their distinguishing characteristics a puritanical reaction to consensus politics and a disdain for organisation and theory derived from unhappy experience in the labourite and stalinist groups. The first influx were early CIOO activists who had moved through 'orthodoxy' in the 50's. They had some experience of the Gaitskellite revisionist controversies, of Hungary, and of Suez. On the whole their political experience was far broader and deeper than the second and far larger influx of kids for whom CND had been their first political experience and whom a brief experience of Wilson had driven to the stance of outright rejection (on very moralistic grounds) of orthodox politics.

Reading through FREEDOM in the 50's and early 60's one gets an impression of a much tighter, more determined and theoretically consistent group than one does now. The small number of people, based on London, who had endured the political isolation of the 50's had, of necessity, the clarity and persistence to ensure this survival. Long articles used to be featured on what was shamelessly called

Anarchist Theory - especially remembered are things like a long series on anarcho-syndicalism etc.

The influx of newcomers totally changed the nature of the movement. There was no organisation to which anything had to be sacrificed (indeed that was one of the attractions) , everyone was so new that the few with experience of specifically anarchist activity and ideas were swamped by others who proceeded to apply their own needs as 'anarchism', and these needs were, in the main, expressed as reactions against past experience rather than the logical working out of a political position with its own positive consequences and demands.

Increasingly the demand was for the 'movement' to reflect this new consensus of anti-consensus. The first AFB Conference in Bristol in 1963 had established a secretariat to give some concrete existence to the organisation. This was quickly pulled down in the ensuing years.

We stated at the beginning that this narrative was derived from personal experience as well as general knowledge of events, one case we should like to give in evidence of general trends is that of the way the movement came to a position on Vietnam.

Comrades of the then Harlow group wrote a piece entitled 'Neither Washington nor Hanoi, but Peace AND Freedom'. This article totally lacked any theoretical basis let alone an anarchist one. It was mainly pacifist moralism linked with a strident but unargued rejection of national liberation struggles. It was succinctly criticised at the time by SOLIDARITY ; to paraphrase (since the original is not available at the moment) " it makes no mention that Peace AND Freedom are attainable only by social revolution". It made no analytical attempt to place its attitude in any context from which ideas and action might be derived - it was merely striking a stance.

The AFB had/has no means of discussing issues, so when the article was re-printed as an editorial in FREEDOM and pushed at the next non-representative talking shop, the AFB 'Conference', it became the main anarchist position by default , and indeed the slogan is still used. It was never discussed, adopted or anything at all - it just happened. It was typical in that it could lead to no conclusions about events or have a follow up in sustained activity. What had happened was that we had tail-ended the pacifists whilst others tail-ended the Leninists.

This state of affairs was possible because the movement had never before been in the position of having even the remote possibility of a mass participation. The question of the nature of a mass anarchist movement was/is never raised (save in occasional, uninformed, discussion of the CNT - we are sure that the Principles of the CNT printed in the Anarchist Black Cross Bulletin, revealing a democratic-centralist structure, come as a surprise to most of the movement).

Having never thought of itself as playing an important role in initiating campaigns and activities the movement was/is content to maintain the perspectives of a small group of dedicated but isolated dreamers. This is in accord with the past mode of work of the Campaign and the Committee. What was to some extent, in the 50's, a realistic appraisal is now becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Towards an outline of where we are now

It is now becoming evident that the breakup of 'apathy' is at last extending far beyond the mainly middle class milieu we have been discussing. The economic problems of the 59-64 Tory govt., the dissatisfaction with the 64-70 Labour govt.,

the increasing attacks on living standards necessitated for a 'rationalised' capitalism - coming to a head in the Carr union legislation and Barber's attacks on social provisions (parts of one strategy) - are responsible for a growing wave of working class militancy motivated by the system itself destroying the illusions which had sustained acquiescence for so long.

Laurens Otter has suggested in numerous articles (FREEDOM 9.10.70 and in Organisation and Anarchists printed in York March 70 - it should be pointed out that although we take issue with some of his points we accept the general thesis and also that Laurens and Peter Newell seem to be almost alone among anarchists in at all considering possibilities for the future and our options) that we are indeed faced with the possibilities of large scale direct action movements, initiated by other sections of the left, in which anarchist faction work could have a large even determining influence.

This presupposes a number of things, among them, that we have the capacity to organise, service and maintain faction work; and equally basic but more important that in somehow tail-ending the Leninists we can at some opportune moment seize the initiative. One should avoid over-simple 'lessons of history' but it seems to us unlikely that, even when the movement, as in the past, is revolutionary, rooted in the working class, and theoretically consistent, it does not pay to compete by giving our opponents an initial advantage. This is not to call for further isolation but to suggest that we need to be more objective in our assessment of our capacities and, at once, more ambitious in the use of them.

WE ARE FACED WITH A MOBILISATION POTENTIALLY AS LARGE AS THE ANTI-BOMB MOV'T. AND FAR MORE FUNDAMENTALLY DANGEROUS TO THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. To be able to operate in this situation we have both to absorb, understand and integrate the hangovers of our 'revival' - to clear the decks for action; and to analyse as rigorously as we can the major factors of the present events and prepare for their consequences. To give an example - what is the relative importance of the Carr legislation and the South African arms deal?

For the first we must take issue with many popular misconceptions of revolutionary ideas and organisation inside the movement.

Anarchist organisation is not 'ad hoc' (Terry Philips FREEDOM Aug 70). To organise for the future is not so grandiose as to 'channel it' (ibid). Neither is organisation the result of some spurious 'natural organic growth' (suggesting a somewhat dubious concept of 'nature' and frequently and dishonestly advanced at Conferences to avoid initiatives.)

Anarchist organisation is based upon a dialectical relationship between anarchist principles and the realities of the situation we are working in. It is therefore decentralised and efficient, open-ended and effective, non-hierarchical and capable of reaching and implementing decisions. Comrades who react to democratic-centralism with an abhorrence of organisation; to Leninist theory with mindlessness, throw away the baby with the bathwater.

To influence the future we must see where it will be derived. The future is created by human actions, (just as is 'nature'), we must be aware which actions we can help, which oppose. We must determine which areas of conflict are basic and which are peripheral.

To ignore reality in favour of a Utopia which is too pure to be concerned with practical applicability is not to refuse to 'channel events' but to be prey to them. To be at the mercy of those who create the events; for remember, nothing 'just happens' - except in the theology of lazy anarchists. To attack any formal organisation of our ideas and our strength is not to rule out the possibility of leaders but to create many of them - each in his own isolated semi-feudal fief. To ignore the necessity and link of theory and practice is to effectively deny any meaningful activity, and we have.

Disjointed local activity; often moving from one 'issue' to another; unable even to create a small scale programme of work over a period, characterise our 'practice'. In the event of a degree of small scale organising eg. squatters (1946 and 1968); the campaign to turn Morrision Fire Station into a Youth Centre (1970) etc; the lack of theory and its consequence is exposed par excellence.

The omission of an attempt to link present short term action with the totality of capitalist society and with the totality of the future alternative society, means that when the short term issue dies, as it will, then so does the consciousness created by this short term action. The pressures of the system are powerful enough to erode understanding created by short term action in ordinary people unless that consciousness includes an understanding of where the limited action fits in with the present totality, and unless that consciousness includes an understanding of where the limited action fits in with the totality of the future society.

Bitter personal disputes based upon spuriously advanced positions; battles for the soul of the revolution/movement/Individual/reified anything, fought in reams of paper attacking and defending positions long since overrun by time. This is our 'theory'. Usually it totally replaces even the pretence of activity. (see AFBIB for evidence on the above 3 paragraphs).

Is it an accident that the only coherent stream of theory - based on ANARCHY - is derived from a consciously reformist element in the movement. (ANARCHY was originated from a group calling themselves 'Revisionist Anarchists').

This situation is not just an 'inevitable organic growth'. Indeed that attitude obscures and prevents any real appraisal. It results from identifiable historical factors. Some of which we have already sketched. The only way to end this is by conscious understanding and effort. Not just by proposing any alternative or reaction but by careful thought and full discussion. Any good proposals will fail unless we rectify the basic problems which at the moment do not allow the kind of thought and widespread discussion which are prerequisite.

When a movement is out of key theoretically, such that its ideas are not a coherent guide to events, it replaces real work and discussion (which would involve admitting mistakes and necessities), with false ones, which can absorb the same attention and energy but also act to effectively obscure the increasing isolation. It is in this light that we can understand the conflicts occurring at the moment, whatever the content of the debates.

To give a historical example. Trotskyism was able to play a small but important in industrial struggles during WWII, since the Labour and Communist Parties were against any damage to the war effort. The trots gained influence and managed in 1944 to establish the unity of all factions in the Revolutionary Communist Party (which was the peak and contained hundreds of good militants). Unfortunately Trotsky was wrong in predicting the collapse of capitalism after the war, and the trots got increasingly lost to reality - as we are now doing. During the late 40's and 50's their movement has one long history of successive splits and defections. The RCP crashed in 48, Cliffe's escape, Lawrence and Grant defections, Haston's turn to the Labour Party, Healy vs Pablo, Pablo vs Posadas, Mandel vs Pablo.

This is not to suggest that all the arguments then (and the ones we have now) are baseless, but that the reason for such a climate, conducive to such bitter wrangling, is the basic theoretical sterility of the movement. eg. the Black Flag criticisms of the AFB are accepted by many as very good but the positive creations of these comrades, though often heralded, appear to be either aborted or phantom pregnancies.

It is because of this that we hope very much that this essay will not be seen as another sterile joust. We would like the basis for the discussion we want to provoke to be the real situation which comrades will perceive if they peer through the mist of 'revolutionary vs individualist' or 'violence vs nonviolence'.

Reality: Part One

Looking at the reality which forms the first part of our dialectic, we have said that a working class mobilisation is apparent. At the moment it is almost exclusively defensive, it wants to maintain conditions it had thought permanent but which capitalism cannot now sustain. Another obviously important factor is the nature of our competition. We say obviously somewhat cynically for it is rarely taken into account - at the 68 Liverpool Conference one editor of FREEDOM dismissed the problem raised by Digger Walsh - that we had lost many good libertarian militants to IS - as a non-problem. If they were libertarians they were with us, if they were in IS they weren't libertarians! By this process we shall get a long way.

The SLL have at last established what appears to be a viable 6 days a week paper. Many will admit that it is of very good quality. The League has very good industrial contacts and its members work very hard while they last. Its theory however is at once impressionist and mystifyingly esoteric (cf Tony Whelan's pamphlet The Credibility Gap - an IMG publication/note we haven't done anything on them). To be aware of their weaknesses is useless unless we are capable of exploiting them however. The Pilkington's strike is without doubt the most important single strike this year - its ramifications are enormous - in questioning the role of the GMWU alone it raises the questions of trade union democracy, shop floor organisation etc. The SLL is doing very well in winning influence among the Rank and File Committee. With reason for it does have facilities to offer to militants who are feeling (and who are!) isolated and fighting with their backs to the wall.

The IMG/Spartacus League are making slow but definite headway in youth work. Again, they have a reasonably well produced paper, but their key asset is their efficiency in the liaison they maintain between all groups, enabling them to make the most of speakers that are available, and to be up to date with events, particularly in universities. Before laughing at their size (about 200) think of the amount of work we could be doing if we had half the amount of application. (It should go without saying, but of course we should point out that we are not arguing that we should copy their form of organisation, merely stating that their efficiency and sheer hard work is to be looked at and where possible learnt from). They will be able to play an important role as the government proceeds to tighten up on students.

The IS would not have attained their size and influence such that it is if a decent libertarian organisation had existed. It is an unholy mixture of libertarian and Leninist groups. The attempt by Cliffe to compete with IMG by out-trotting Mandel will make this alliance increasingly unstable. BUT do we have any capacity to attract these comrades? In fact, the flow has been the other way. Good comrades (for the most part industrial militants rather than students) have been lost without anyone attempting to understand why.

So, let us now attempt to sum up what the situation demands and then look at how these needs can be applied in the light of anarchist principles.

We must be able to add force and direction to industrial militancy. This entails

being something worth listening to and not just nice blokes in the bar. It means being a movement workers can use in their struggles. There is a world of difference in being liked and being listened to.

The biggest weakness of industrial action is lack of communications. To be successful and defensive strike needs to be able to communicate to the local workers the day to day progress of the struggle - the strike committees (espec. unofficial, rank & file ones) need simple help like duplicators, typewriters, telephones, loudspeaker equipment etc, and sometimes many hands for working them. (Again, we are not advocating muscling in on workers' organisations but pointing out that they are not at all times invariably well supported - anyone with experience of rank & file and tenants work will know that at points outsiders can be of great use).

At this level a good local group, that is known and respected, can suffice to be of use in the initial stages. To win it is necessary to get the reasons for the action out to other workers and to people in the street. This role can be played by a good local group with facilities available - but here it calls for established contact with other groups of workers, local branches, trades councils.

To be effective in a long struggle it is necessary to organise sympathy action in other parts of the same combine, industry, town etc. It calls for blacking of goods and raw materials by transport workers and other, totally different trades. This means that all the previous facilities must be magnified in scope and coordinated. (Don't forget that these links also represent, to us as to no one else, the potential embryonic form of a new social order). This requires the capacity to carry out agitational work as well as, and alongside, the merely supporting action - to broaden the experience of those engaged in the fight. In turn this calls for a reasonable theoretical level of our militants, itself achieved only by realising that education and organisation are not just things we preach to others, but things we practice ourselves, all the time.

To be able to spread the ideas of anarchism we need a press that can interpret the events of the day in terms of the present society, such that an increasingly clear picture of its interrelationships can be drawn, and, equally important, in terms of the end we are consciously seeking and continually advancing as the basis for any action we indulge in. (Suggesting a more self-critical approach to our work as well as a greater regard for really sweeping reappraisals as often as possible). The press will have to be in very close contact with the local groups, who must feel close enough to it to regard it as a corollary of their activity to send in reports and thus provide themselves with an additional weapon. More of this in the next section.

This is a very brief description, not of the optimum situation, but of the one necessary if we are to play any role in the major events which are going to happen and which are already happening (the municipal workers, the miners, the coming struggles as regional unemployment soars as a result of Tory policy,) and of all future conflicts. We cannot avoid their consequences in our organisational structure.

Comrades, ask yourselves honestly if we can at the moment fulfill even the minimum local needs, let alone the regional and national ones. We answer, as we feel everyone must, that it is not likely.

Of course the above is concerned with clarifying what we think are the basic problems and events which we are being presented with. It is not to argue that they are the only problems. Because an emphasis must develop in revolutionary

work (which is what we are arguing for) it is a great danger to lose sight of the totality of the alternative society - or if not to lose sight intellectually to do so in practice by omission.

We are thus not dismissing the questions of youth culture, women's liberation, child-centred education, 3rd World poverty, and struggles in the 3rd World in general, but we are suggesting that they are facets of one main struggle, the major point of which must be man'd liberation from his day to day exploitation, the method of which must be a growing class consciousness, and the end of which is workers' self-management of society. Without the continual emphasis on the other points the main factor is not achievable (viz. the sterile posturings of the Institute of Workers' Control) but it is nonetheless the central one.

Freedom means Responsibility

We now have to attempt to outline the kind of movement which is the logical outcome of the previous sections of analysis.

In a federalist structure the national body must reflect the decisions and day to day control of the local groups, since it exists purely to enable them to deal more effectively with common problems and lines of work. The local group is therefore the starting point for our attempts to bring about any change. One of the problems - derived from the present state of communications - is that it is very difficult to get any idea of exactly how groups function at the moment. It is possible though to sketch a few points of a healthy group and to deal generally with those problems that seem to be widespread.

A healthy group must have two parallel emphases, it must be political in that its members must have some idea of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and where they are likely to end up. It must also consciously attempt to put its libertarian ideas into practice in its own structure - indeed the group structure should be seen as an important laboratory for ideas - for the sake of shorthand we can say that it must be non-hierarchical.

It must be emphasised that these two are complementary, emphasis on the politics alone can lead to an unofficial leadership of the activists, those who do the most are more likely to have sparked off in themselves new ideas which lead them to make the initiative and to continue to do so; this can lead to an accepted hierarchy of the experienced - entirely unofficial but nonetheless powerful, it gives rise to social disintegration of the group, which may express itself in very loosely defined but bitter political differences. It is caused because people are aware that somehow the structure is not under their control. As we have outlined it, this arises not from a plot by the activists to gain control - indeed the situation runs them as much as anyone else - but from an emphasis on the work and a lack of concentration on the group itself as a political and social problem to be tackled.

Emphasis on the internal problem of the group's nature can lead to a perfectly harmonious social group/bar crowd/student clique but is basically introverted and consequently incapable of sustained political activity. (Which is not to say that it may not be very effective in short term work, which may galvanise everyone to act together for the moment. The work however may pose problems which lead either to a change in the group or the dropping of the activity.)

To deal with both these problems together demands a great deal of individual responsibility between the members, expressed in a regular shifting of jobs and functions within the group. Also it is important that these functions be clearly defined, not in the method of work but in its scope, so that it is easy to see the totality of the work that is being done and the nature of the group's workings can be clear. - looseness of this definition helps the rise of the meritocratic elite of activists and the consequent splits and alienations.

The continual change of people fulfilling these functions must not only be regular but it must be understood exactly why this practice is adopted and what the qualities being sought are. For an individual to continue in one function for an undefined length of time, is to create a situation in which that individual may develop the tendency to believe himself the only person capable of the function.

If the functions are revised periodically the person who takes over may well be less efficient through inexperience, but can only develop efficiency when presented with the responsibility to do so. This system means allowing the method of accomplishing the job to be interpreted by the individual in his own terms. So long as he is efficient in regard to the job it does not matter that it is performed differently - in fact self-confidence and responsibility are more likely to be achieved if this degree of latitude is given, so that the individual does not become alienated by serving a rigidly prescribed ritual (prescribed by statute or by tradition).

The definition of efficiency will be the degree to which he carries out what other members of the group/ regional group/ national body determine as being the function involved. Thus if after a trial period the individual is agreed to be inefficient, the job can be passed on without the personal implications of either a totally formal or totally informal situation.

The problem with attempting to segment the life of the movement into any division eg local/regional/national is that each 'layer' reacts upon the others. This division is necessary to attempt some kind of outline, but we do not apologise if in the discussion of one we leap into another - we hope it means that it is at the level being discussed that implications affecting the other levels become apparent.

The next section we come to are regional/interest groups. Regions should consist not just of groups in proximity to each other, but also in areas with common problems eg. a common industrial background, a common problem such as being a 'depressed' area (and we suggest that there is a real possibility of the problems of these areas being exacerbated in the near future, which will demand joint discussion and exchange of experience between, for instance, Cornwall Durham, Northumberland, Scotland). School and university comrades come into this category.

Similarly, interest groups - communards, youth culturalists, industrial militants teachers, and so on. What should unite these varied and to some extent changing, and certainly overlapping, groups are the real links of regular discussions (see section on the organisation of conferences) and of newsletters. Each of these groups must be concerned to feed back its deliberations into the movement as a whole. Conferences should make a point of inviting fraternal delegates from groups and areas not immediately concerned. The publications and correspondence should be circulated throughout the movement.

What we need at the moment is not a paper organisation to replace a paper non-organisation, but precisely the thing anarchists push at others - a growing, intertwining network -. We do need a kind of structure precisely to allow this diffuseness and to get the most out of it for everyone. In a word 'doing your own thing' needs coordination with those who are doing it too, and then the ability to tell others doing something else what you have learnt.

We are not therefore advocating a utopian blueprint, but putting forward a necessary attitude to our movement, from which the needed organisational forms are derived. Ideas and enthusiasm are not born out of thin air, there are forms of organisation which can play an important role in their genesis. We need to determine what we want to be in order to achieve it.

The problems of national organisation need to be broken down. They can be discussed separately but for us they must hang together. Firstly, there is the question of conferences. The inadequacies of our present annual conferences are so widely recognised we shall not dwell on them. For any conference to be effective/fruitful/worth travelling for it must not only be representative of the people it purports to serve (in this case the 'AFB'), it must also have the means by which everyone can learn what is to be discussed, by which everyone will know what has been discussed, and then, a means by which collective decisions can be effected.

Conference material and discussion documents must always be circulated well in advance of the date. (It must not be called at short notice, have its agenda made up on the spot, or, having an agenda, not make the arguments around it available as much as possible for everyone to discuss beforehand - not just the people who turn up). If this is not done, Conference will continue to be unthought-out in its discussions, unrepresentative in its composition, and impotent in its results.

The next and parallel point with full discussion throughout the movement beforehand is that conference decisions should be a reflection of the state of opinion throughout the movement after all the available points have been discussed. This means mandating delegates and voting where necessary.

The simplest system for this is that the votes of a group be determined by the number of members, with a maximum and a minimum limit ie. 0-5 members 1 vote; over 20 members 5 votes maximum. This can take account of majority and minority positions within groups by allowing the splitting of their votes. This system still allows anyone who wishes to take part in the conference and discussion, whilst guaranteeing that the conference, the discussions and the decisions will be the property of the movement as a whole, rather than that of whoever gets along to the gathering. It also means that we can then accurately determine the state of opinion inside the movement - something we have absolutely no means of doing at the moment.

To turn aside here, we must point out that we are not after a position of majority domination. Written into all discussion and decision at group, regional, and national level, must be the right of minorities to organise and carry out action, on any issue, at any time, in any field they may wish to - this is the practical middle point between majority hegemony and minority veto of the rights of the majority.

This active encouragement of what might be termed factionalism, or less emotively, sectionalism is necessary to allow the full development of all streams of thought and their fruitful interaction. The current system of agreeing to differ without either side then being able to do its own thing is merely to stifle discussion, action, and understanding.

Having reached its decisions the conference must then ensure that all its conclusions and the differing interpretations/emphases offered, are available throughout the movement. Full minutes must be sent to everyone. To us this implies the movement creating a far more efficient tool for communication than exists at present. A secretariat.

Without this practical realisation of our determination to control and understand our own movement, and lacking the machinery through which the course of our work can be checked as it is applied in the localities, then we shall continue to be lost. The consciousness and coherence we all want to generate at our conferences must be integrated into the movement at all times, not just once a year. The

secretariat should be elected at each conference, and should be under recall by the initiative of any group calling a conference or circulating a position of no confidence in the present members or structure.

The particular means are obviously for discussion by the movement as a whole eg whether one group or more should be the number necessary to call a checkup conference on the secretariat, whether it is desirable to have some continuity ie replacing as a rule only 2/3 of the members etc. But we should make it clear that the procedure for such a conference of recall should be the same as that we wish to introduce for all conferences - that is, plenty of warning, and plenty of prior discussion. The secretariat should be responsible for the internal communication of the movement. In some cases this may be a duplicating of certain features of all the particular concerns of regional/interest groups - this is not a useless repetition but should be an integration of information and a useful means of feedback from the particular groups.

Alongside the organisational structure are other problems which are national in scale. The primary one being propaganda. The corollary of trying to let reality into the movement is that then we can face out and act upon that reality. The means by which we do this includes all our publications. The publications need therefore to reflect the movement, the only way this is possible is for the movement to control its press in the same way as it must control its own organisation.

Just as the more effective organisation of the interest groups will enable economies of scale in making use of available speakers and specialist knowledge, the more effective communication and cooperation of the movement as a whole will enable us to produce, maintain and develop a national paper which will be a real weapon. It might be possible to edit this upon the lines on which AFBIB is supposed to work. The election of an editor/board, controlled by similar means to those governing the secretariat, would probably be the most likely to succeed at the moment (if only because of the financial difficulties of regular delegate meetings).

It is certain that unless the paper in a real way is under the control of the movement, it will fail. One of the lessons of the perennial and recurrent crisis of FREEDOM is not that the movement is not grown up enough to have a paper, but that it is too mature, even in its chaotic state, to put up with NOT controlling its paper.

Another national matter is derived from the continual emphasis we have been placing on practical and theoretical problems. This can be called - for reason of shorthand rather than grandiosity - the problem of our internal, mutual, and self-education. We feel that this need too should be accounted for rather than piously repeated. We advocate a planned scheme of discussions - not to exclude local and regional initiatives but to strengthen them if they do exist - derived from the national conference. Something in the nature of conference agreeing to hold schools/gatherings as well as those we hope would result from the co-ordination of the interest groups eg, national liberation, communes, the class nature of the bolshevik/stalin derived states, child-centred education etc. Organisation of these should be discussed at conference and either allocated as further tasks to the secretariat, or better given to specific groups/people to ensure that papers were prepared, the necessary pre-publicity and discussion arranged and so on.

The result of our proposals taken together would be continuous flux of ideas organisations, activities. ALL of which could add to the sum total of knowledge, of fulfillment and of progress. It is the only means of ensuring a healthy growth.

We therefore come to the last and most contentious point. The one thing which we feel underlies all the others. This is the question of finance. For such a flux to be maintained, will involve considerable expense, production of a paper; well-prepared conferences; discussions; vastly improved scope of internal communications - in the sense of both continuity and volume as well as regularity; it is necessary to not only have a regular source of funds but also to have some idea of future income by means of which expansion can be planned. To us this implies a membership organisation. Before comrades die of apoplexy, let us clarify this.

We need BASICLY a membership organisation, but not exclusively one. By this we mean that we would not attempt to exclude from groups, discussions and conference those who felt that 'joining' was against their philosophy, we would not restrict the discussion on the use of our facilities to members but we would restrict the decision in such a way. In all of this essay's recommendations we have attempted to reconcile the maximum diversity with the maximum effectiveness, we feel this reaches its logical conclusion in the question of membership.

Membership is the means of co-ordinating and directing our mutual efforts - it is not a means of dictating them, since alongside the particular proposals we have advanced, has been the continual need to organise discussion about them, before, during, and after, their implementation. Our organisational proposals are not final but should similarly be open to continual change.

HOWEVER the circle is joined by the fact that we cannot organise such discussion, historical, theoretical and practical without the basic organisational means to do so. To do the necessary research into anarchist and socialist forms of organisation and then to disseminate it involves exactly the kind of structure we have sketched, which leads us into financing and maintaining the means of doing so....

In Conclusion

A) Analysis of the present anarchist movement leads to criticism of the lack of coherent, integrated, theory and practice. This general statement has been illustrated in this pamphlet by an emphasis of the impotence of the movement in the industrial situation at the moment.

This emphasis should not be taken as an excuse to brand the authors (and supporters, if any) as ONLY concerned with the work process.

Our political and social 'theory' leads us to view the control of capital from industry by a state and/or capitalist class as the basis of capitalism, and to discern that without workers self-management over the production process, no social change can be anything but a reform of the capitalist system. Limited by the present processes of power, only isolated and limited change can be achieved. Only when workers control of all production is understood as the base FOR CHANGING THIS SOCIETY, will social changes integrate into the formation of the total liberated society.

The fight for workers control - (power in the hands of all workers, in control of the work process, conditions, and decisions as to what it is necessary to produce etc etc - so that work becomes not a necessary degrading evil, but a creative part of the lives of the people involved) - CANNOT be detached from the fight for the integration of the individual's life - the decompartmentalisation of work from life; of education from the development of feeling and understanding; of the role of women as human beings other than mothers/wives/sex objects/underpersons etc. (The definition of workers control is the central part of our thesis; the ideology of authoritarian left-wing groups, which does not cause an integration of work with other aspects of social and personal life is NOT what we are attempting to create.)

That the anarchists of the AFB are separated into isolated interest groups with no communication and integration to achieve a total consciousness of this

and the future society, is a measure of the inefficiency of the movement in its attempt to develop a social revolution. Unless we 'put our own house in order' at least to a degree which enables further evolution of ideas, we should not delude ourselves that a society can be created in our visions.

B) The present lack of organisation is seen as the cause of the present ills. An organisation is necessary to cause communication and integrate the present isolated individuals and interest groups (teachers, industrial activists, artists, communards, sociologists, scientists etc). The liberated individual does not seek to compartmentalise himself, he seeks to communicate and develop a total consciousness of himself and of society.

Hence this attempt to analyse needs, and, create a form of organisation which is efficient in achieving the social revolution we desire. Such an organisation will only be efficient in so far as it reflects that society, and in so far as it causes the internalisation of that society in its participants (that is, comrades themselves developing their own liberation.)

C) Suggestions for the organisation of the present anarchist movement are based on the conclusion that communication and discussion are our most crying needs at present. We hope that our suggestions will be utilised for ongoing analysis - learning the lessons of local action throughout the movement, teach-ins on past organisational forms of past allied movements - CNT, Wobblies, Commune etc. analysis of present research in education; science; with an attempt to merge these into the ideas of the future society, or to evaluate at least where they fit in with our ideas.

So, let us not pretend that WITHOUT ORGANISATION OF CONSCIOUSLY CREATED FORM, ONGOING ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY-WITH-PRACTICE WILL TAKE PLACE.

D) The general proposals in this document must therefore be seen as a first step towards the cohesion of many disparate elements into a consciously organised movement. The concrete organisational proposals, if implemented, should themselves be the subject of debate, testing analysis - and change, when better forms are discerned.

Ro Atkins, Keith Nathan & Colin Williams
York. November 19th 1970.

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this pamphlet was first produced as a discussion paper for a Conference of Northern Anarchists and Lancaster Nov. 1970. It was adopted as one of the documents for circulation with a resolution on the reorganisation on the AFB which was to be moved at the Liverpool AFB conference in December. The result of the AFB conference was the acceptance and carrying out of that resolution which called for a 'reorganisation conference of the AFB' - decided to be held in Leeds April 1970.

This edition (the 3rd.) has been produced as one of the documents for that conference. Its authors have resisted the temptation to update it and refer anyone interested to later pamphlets for a more developed argument. Especially Laurens Otter's 'Theory and Praxis in anarchist organisation' (5p), also published by ORA.

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