

The Anarchist Movement in Europe

A Survey

Anarchist Communist Federation

1998

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Organise! takes a look at the European anarchist movement, with special mention of the recent conference of the International of Anarchist Federations in Lyon, France attended by observers from the ACF. It has to be noted that in some European countries there has been a noticeable resurgence of the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements. Contrary to what our anarcho-primitivist friends might say, this growth is a product of the escalation of class struggle and is more and more based on recognition of that struggle. We take a look at some countries where there is a fairly sizeable movement, and give thumb-nail sketches of the groups represented.

France

In France the principal specific anarchist organisation is the Federation Anarchiste Francophone (French-speaking Anarchist Federation) with sections in both France and French-speaking Belgium. It is a synthesist organisation. That is it attempts to apply the theories of the Russian Voline and the Frenchman Faure who thought that it was possible to unite anarcho-syndicalists, anarchist communists and anarchist individualists in the same organisation. Its politics have noticeably improved in the last decade and it has taken an active part in all the strikes and social movements, taking strong positions against the Front National, militarism, including the Gulf War, the moral order, especially in the mobilisation against the Pope's visit, and in struggles around immigration. It has its own radio station based in Paris, Radio Libertaire, and a weekly paper *Le Monde Libertaire*, distributed in all the newsagents and kiosks. The FA also has a presence in a dozen local free radio stations. What is remarkable is that all attempts by the Communist Party or the Trotskyists to establish radio stations have collapsed and Radio Libertaire has become the foremost free radio station with many listeners and an open attitude to other anarchists and revolutionary libertarians. It has a fine bookshop in Paris, and in most major towns has bookshops or is associated with bookshops. It has around 700 members and is present in all French departements (equivalent of provinces or counties). The individualists within the FA appear to be an insignificant handful, whilst the Paris region appears to be dominated by anarcho-syndicalists, with anarchist communists strong in other parts of the country.

Apart from the FA, the other libertarian organisations are Alternative Libertaire(AL) and Organisation Communiste Libertaire(OCL). Both of these groups are a result of a split in the Organisation Revolutionnaire Anarchiste which had developed inside the FA in the late 60s. The ORA left the FA in 1970 and based itself on the ideas of the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists. The ORA attracted several hundred militants in the glory days of the early 70s. An acrimonious split led to the expulsion of the group which eventually became Alternative Libertaire whilst the majority transformed itself into the OCL. Both groups now appear to have less than a hundred militants. AL has a monthly newspaper and orientates itself to work in the reformist unions, with its militants taking positions in the union structures. Both it and OCL have positions of critical support for national liberation struggles, a position rejected by the FA. AL orients itself towards debate with the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, one of the main Trotskyist groupings, as well as to various green formations and dissident Communists. OCL has a far more critical attitude towards the unions. It produces a monthly glossy magazine often containing interesting analyses. Both groups appear to have lost members in the last decade or at least to have remained static.

Apart from these groups, there is also the Coordination Anarchiste, another synthesist formation, based mainly in northern France, the result of an earlier split in the FA. This group seems on the verge of rejoining the FA. Some anarcho-syndicalists work in the reformist unions. Others are organised in the Confederation National de Travail (CNT) a syndicalist union created in 1946. In recent years the CNT has had a remarkable growth in members. Up to recently the CNT was a member of the International Workers Association (IWA) the anarcho-syndicalist international. It was expelled at a recent congress because of its attitude towards running for election on works committees and for its more open attitude to the Spanish CGT, its contingent forming a united one with that of the CGT at the anti -G7 demo in Lyons in June 1996 (See Black Flag for details of ructions inside the IWA). Two tiny groups both calling themselves the CNT, and basing themselves on 'pure anarcho-syndicalism' (CNT 'Le Mans' and CNT 'Tour d'Auvergne') in practice work together. Some members of FA and OCL are also members of the CNT. Recently AL whose main practice appears to be in the breakaway unions (from the main reformist central union bodies) of the SUD, have taken a less hostile stance towards the CNT.

Germany

In pre-Nazi Germany anarchists prided themselves on organisation, for example in the FKAD (Anarchist Communist Federation) and in the FAUD (Free Workers Union). The Nazi persecution, the World War and Stalinist oppression in East Germany meant that few anarchist activists remained in post-war Germany, the rest being dead, exiled or disillusioned. The German movement has been characterised by spontaneism and fear of organisation, the latter partly a backlash against the Nazi past, so that all organisation was seen as intrinsically authoritarian. Autonomism and Maoism have also left their marks on the movement, as well as co-option of libertarian groups by the Green Party. The influence of the Red Army Fraction and their anarchist equivalents are also apparent. Recent organisational ventures have included the setting up of the IAFD (Initiative for an Anarchist Federation in Germany). This group has joined the International of Anarchist Federations. It remains a minority within the anarchist movement and appears to have a synthesist outlook. It does first class work in contact with the re-emerging movement in Eastern Europe, in particular with Russia, Belarus, and Poland. There appears to be no organised anarchist communist grouping.

Anarcho syndicalists are primarily organised in the syndicalist union FAU set up in 1977. This small union seems to have some support among Turkish 'guest' workers and is a member of the IWA.

Austria

The Austrian movement too has been influenced by some of the negative aspects that have effected the Germans. Groups of some interest are the Schwarze Distel (Black Thistle) and the newly formed Anarchist Communist League. Schwarze Distel, based in Vienna, was one of the groups ,including the ACF, which produced a joint statement at the International Conference in Trieste, Italy in 1990, where East and Central European anarchists met with their Western counterparts. This statement spoke out against the market and re-affirmed class struggle. The Anarchist Communist League appears to share many of the positions of the ACF.

Italy

The main anarchist organisation is the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI). This is a synthesist organisation, with an anarchist communist tendency within it. It produces a weekly paper, and appears to number about 200 militants. The FAI orients itself to work in the base unions (the COBAS etc.) and anti-militarist and anti-clerical work. Smaller formations are the FdCA (Federation of Anarchist Communists) and the PAI (Italian Anarchist Party). The FdCA is a result of a fusion over the years of various libertarian communist groups. The PAI has so far failed to yield to this process, and has dwindled to a mere handful based mainly in Modena. The FdCA for its part numbers less than a hundred. It appears to be under the ideological influence of the French AL. Both groups, like the FAI, work in the base unions. Very few libertarian militants in Italy have come to any thoroughgoing critique of the unions. One exception is the group Amore e Rabbia, based in Bologna. Some anarcho syndicalists are organised in the USI (Italian Syndicalist Union). The situation is similar to that in France with one USI (USI 'Rome') being expelled from the IWA, whilst at least another (USI 'Prato-Carnico') remains within it!

Spain

The syndicalists are split between the pure anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT union and the 'pragmatists' of the CGT union. The CGT was recently reinforced by several sections of the CCOO (Workers Commissions-union dominated by the Communists) breaking away to join them and claims 35,000 members. The CNT seems much smaller though we have no clear figures. Another union, Solidaridad Obrera, which appears to be a breakaway from the CNT, seems more based on the practice of workers assemblies, and appears to exist only in Catalonia.

There appear to be at least 3 groups calling themselves the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation). The principal one appears to be the FAI that is affiliated to the International of Anarchist Federations. It has a staunch pro-CNT, pro-IWA line. It takes in both Spanish and Portuguese anarchists, producing a Spanish monthly Tierra y Libertad and a Portuguese magazine. There is also a Libertarian Youth Federation (FIJL) also allied to the CNT and FAI, as well as a libertarian women's organisation (Mujeres Libres). The FIJL produces an irregular paper, Jake. At Saragossa, for example, it has six local groups, with a total of 50 militants. There are also a number of independent anarchist groups, including the Revolutionary Anarchist Collective (Madrid) and the network of groups called Autonomous Struggle.

Holland

VrijeBond- about 60 people. These were originally in the Dutch syndicalist union the OVB. They left the OVB in 1988 after disagreements between pure syndicalists-the OVB leadership- and anarchists. OVB is now considerably less oriented towards syndicalism. A very loose network.

Vrije Socialist- more or less a grouping around the long-standing magazine of same name.

Voorden van Rebellen- small grouping around a monthly magazine with politics similar to the ACF.

Switzerland

Organisation Socialiste Libertaire- politics close to those of French AL/Italian FdCA. Though mostly based in French-speaking Switzerland, though in recent years it has expanded its influence into German-speaking Switzerland with groups in Zurich, Bern and Biel. It produces magazine Confrontations and plans to bring out agitational newsheet. It was recently shaken by one of its prominent members taking a job as personal adviser to a cantonal minister, the State Councillor Joseph Zisyadis, who is a Communist!

Sweden

SAC- syndicalist union expelled from IWA for what was seen as compromising relationship to Swedish State. It appears to have entered into alliance with Spanish CGT, as well as the axis around the French AL, Swiss OSL, Italian FdCA, in what has been seen as an attempt to set up a rival international to the IWA. Increasingly the SAC presents itself as politically anarchist and in 1996 experienced the resignation of a number of 'pure' syndicalists.

SUF- Syndicalist Youth Federation. Anarchosyndicalist youth network organised within the SAC.

Folkmakt (People Power) A 'council socialist' group with some similar politics to the ACF, organised nationally.

Eastern Europe

In Poland there exists the Polish Anarchist Federation (FAP) a loose synthesist organisation, uniting many different tendencies. There is a section of the FAP in almost every major and most minor cities. A small grouping known as the Anarcho-Communist Organisational Platform emerged during 1997.

There is also a grouping made up of ex-Communists, ex-Trotskyists who are in contact with the French AL.

In Bulgaria there exists the Bulgarian Anarchist Federation (FAB) mostly made up of ageing veterans from the heroic years of Bulgarian anarchism. There is little interest among the young although the FAB are making strenuous efforts to overcome this. The Federation of Anarchist Youth has been set up to facilitate this. The FAB is a member of the IFA.

There are anarchist groups in Slovenia, Croatia and Yugoslavia (Serbia) who are in contact with each other and who often carry out first class work under very difficult conditions. In particular the ACF has good relations with the Yugoslav group Torpedo.

In Belarus the anarchists are at the forefront of struggle against the military regime, facing physical attacks and arrests. They seem to be developing anarchist communist politics. In Russia a new organisation, the KRAS, Revolutionary Anarcho-syndicalists has broken with the politics of compromise of the KAS anarcho-syndicalists. Both the comrades of Belarus and Russia are in contact with anarchist groupings in the Ukraine. In the Donbas basin, a stronghold of working class anarchism during the Russian revolution prior to Bolshevik repression, interest in anarchist ideas among the working class is phenomenal with demand outstripping supply of literature.

Czech Republic and Slovakia

Anarchists in these countries organise across the frontiers after the splitting up of Czechoslovakia. The Czech Anarchist Federation was founded in 1995. In 1997 it accepted new members from Slovakia and became the Czech and Slovak Anarchist Federation (CSAF). A propaganda tour in Slovakia by Czech comrades followed this event with a revival of the movement there. Thirty Slovak anarchists met in conference and will either set up a Slovak Anarchist Federation or collectively join the CSAF which already had 2 groups in Slovakia. At the fifth conference of the CSAF in October 1997 there was a split between the synthesists/reformists and the class struggle anarchists, who are primarily orientated towards anarcho-syndicalism. The split was carried out in a "moderate and absolutely non-violent way". The Anarcho-syndicalist Faction (ASF) which had organised itself in the CSAF from the start and is a member of the IWA together with other class struggle anarchists have set up the Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA) whilst the synthesists/reformists/greens are keeping the CSAF label. Another grouping Autonomija, which existed alongside the CSAF and was increasingly oriented towards social movements and alternative culture- squatting and punk scene- has completely disappeared, whilst another group Solidarita has recently emerged which seems to combine platformism with anarcho-syndicalism.

Greece

In Greece there is a large movement, mostly organised around affinity groups and primarily engaged in violent confrontations with the State on the German autonomist model. There is little anarchist organisation in the workplace and little realisation of the need for a strong specific anarchist communist organisation.

Overview of European Anarchism

There are distinct signs that the European movement is growing, in particular in France and the countries of Eastern Europe. The organisations of synthesis are in a majority position whilst those proclaiming some form of specific libertarian communist organisation seem to be at an impasse. There is no homogeneity among these groups. In what could be characterised as the right of European libertarian communism, there appears to be some form of co-ordination-French AL, Swiss OSL and Italian FdCA, with contacts in Poland. These groups seem to have evolved from their original platformism to some form of synthesis between platformism and revolutionary syndicalism. In particular the AL seems compromised by its relations with the extreme left. It seems that AL is making strenuous efforts to set up an alternative international with their fellow-thinkers in Western Europe, contacts in Eastern Europe, and the SAC/ CGT grouping. This would be an alternative to both the IAF and the IWA. The Sixth Conference of the International of Anarchist Federations This took place in Lyons, France in the first weekend of November 1997. It was attended by 3 observers from the ACF. Present were the French FA, Italian and Spanish / Portuguese FAI, Bulgarian FAB, German IAFD, attending as members as well as observers from Guyana, Czechoslovakia, Colombia, Holland, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Finland and South Africa. The sixth section of the IAF, the Libertarian Federation of Argentina were unable to attend as were observers from Turkey who were refused visas. The IAF, in an encouraging turn towards

openness, went out of their way to invite other anarchist organisations who were not members or candidate members, and allowed them to contribute to the conference. The IAF, it should be said, reflecting the politics of its component sections, has a thoroughgoing synthesist outlook. Most of the conference was taken up with confirming membership of new sections of the IAF, reports from the different groups and observers, and analyses of the situation in each country. Of particular interest were the reports of the East Europeans and of the observer from Guyana. The situation in Eastern Europe is very difficult, but also very encouraging with growing interest in revolutionary anarchist ideas. Comrades there are showing great courage and fortitude, particularly in Slovakia where large bands of fascists armed to the teeth are a major threat to the movement. The Guyanese group ASFALT involved in the mass struggles against French colonialism in recent times is rapidly evolving towards an anarchist position and will probably shortly join the IAF. The IAF seems to have a class struggle position and orientates its work towards the building of a working class movement. However, there appear to be disagreements among member organisations as to how this should be done. Sections such as the FAI in Spain, where there is a long tradition of anarcho-syndicalist organisation, still maintain that building anarcho-syndicalist unions is the best strategy. Other organisations are more involved in a wide variety of struggles and are more oriented towards the building of specific anarchist organisations. These differences in strategy were reflected in debates at the conference. The will to grow and influence larger and larger bodies of people, with the preparation of international events, where each section carries out co-ordinated propaganda and events on the same day (watch this space) was one of the more interesting aspects of the conference. The ACF comrades present were able to make a large number of fruitful contacts. We have strong criticisms of the whole nature of synthesist organisations. Nevertheless, we were able to meet on a non-sectarian basis with many comrades. We are prepared to work with all class struggle libertarians, whatever our differences, around practical issues like solidarity work with prisoners and strikers, co-ordinated actions against G8 and European Union attacks on our class etc. We are ready to debate with all libertarians over methods of organisation, analyses, outlooks and approaches. We are strong supporters of internationalism, as both our presence at Trieste, Lyons and the Amsterdam demo, and our correspondence with international contacts have shown.

N.B. When we say "appear" in the above article we are basing ourselves on hearsay evidence. Any comments on, or corrections to the above article, either from comrades in groups mentioned in these articles, or from British comrades who may have information, will be warmly received and printed in Organise! We have attempted to be as objective as possible in terms of reporting on numbers, situation and politics of each group and will gratefully accept any comments. We apologise for leaving out any group/organisation in particular countries where we know there is a movement but have little knowledge -for example the Baltic States, Luxembourg, Denmark, etc.

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