Anarchist Communist Federation
ACF — The First Ten Years
1996

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tarian revolutionary movement. The collapse of Stalinism, the changes within social-democracy-including the British variety of Labourism- with the end of welfarism, and the effects of both of these on Trotskyism, have created a space which revolutionary anarchists must fill. That is why we will continue to argue for a specific, unified libertarian communist organisation, for coordination and dialogue between libertarian revolutionaries, for a revolutionary programme. We will continue to argue for these with determination. One of the points we have always made is that an Anarchist movement cannot be built overnight, through bluster, hype or stunts. Steady, consistent work carried out with patience and dogged determination, unglamourous and not readily rewarding as it may seem, is what a movement is built on. And we think that such an approach will eventually pay off.

Our friends, critics and enemies should all take note. We do not intend to go away. We will continue to work towards the greatest idea humanity has ever thought and dreamed of. For us the vision of Anarchist Communism, in which all are free and equal and live in harmony with each other and with nature, is something worth fighting for. It continues to be an inspiration for us, a lighthouse in the darkness of the human night. We will continue to hold aloft proudly the red and black banner of Anarchist Communism.

Stand with us! Join us!

a group where a strong commitment and a lot of determination are required. Many libertarian revolutionaries are as yet unconvinced of the need to create a specific libertarian communist organisation. They remain tied to the ideas of local groups, or at best regional federations loosely linked, being adequate for the very difficult tasks of introducing libertarian revolutionary ideas and practices to the mass of the population. They remain unconvinced of the need for a unified strategy and practice, for ideological and tactical unity and collective action as we in the ACF have insisted upon consistently. Some remain mesmerised by the myths of nationalism and national liberation, some by illusions in the unions. They seem to be unconvinced for the need for a publication, distributed throughout Britain, under the control of its writers and sellers which could be an effective weapon in the fight to develop the anarchist movement. Of course some local groups or regional federations produce some fine publications, and we in the ACF would encourage the proliferation of all sorts of propaganda and discussion publications, whether they might be based on a town, a district, a workplace or industry, or aimed at a particular interest group. But alongside this must be a publication that addresses itself and responds to the needs and problems of the working class as a whole on a Britain-wide basis.

As we noted in Virus 9, in late 1986-early 1987 :"There has been little sharing of experiences among libertarians in various campaigns and struggles. Even on something as basic as a demonstration, libertarians have marched separately and in different parts of the demonstration". This still remains true today, despite several attempts by the ACF over the years to encourage coordinations, and even (still) on basic things like a united contingent on a demo. Libertarians remain within their separate local groups and organisations. There is little dialogue and little attempt for united activity, for forums and debates where these are possible.

And yet not since the pre-World War 1 period and the late 60s has there been such a potential for the growth of the liber-

THE SHIPWRECK OF anarchist communism in the late 70s meant that there was no anarchist communist organisation, not even a skeletal one, that could relate to the riots of 1981 and to the miners strike of 1984–5 as well as to mobilisations like the Stop the City actions of 1984. But in autumn 1984 two comrades, one a veteran of the ORA/AWA/LCG, had returned from France where they had been living and working and where they had been involved in the libertarian communist movement. A decision was made to set up the Libertarian Communist Discussion Group (LCDG) with the aim of creating a specific organisation. Copies of the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, left over from the AWA/LCG days, were distributed to bookshops, with a contact address for the Anarchist-Communist Discussion Group (ACDG). Progress was slow, until contact with the comrade who produced Virus, a duplicated magazine that defined itself as "Anarcho-socialist". This comrade had broken with the politics of the SWP and rapidly moved in an anarchist direction. Apart from its sense of humour, Virus was defined to a certain extent by its critiques of Leninism and of Marxism-not surprising considering the comrade's past experiences. From issue 5 Virus became the mouthpiece of the LCDG, and there were a series of articles on libertarian organisation. Other people were attracted to the group, and it transformed itself into the ACDG, which proclaimed a long-term aim of setting up a national anarchist-communist organisation. This came much sooner than expected, with the growth of the group, and a splinter from the Direct Action Movement, Syndicalist Fight, merging with the group. In March 1986 the Anarchist Communist Federation was officially founded, with an agreed set of aims and principles and constitutional structure that had been developed in the previous six months.

Vacuum

Those anarchists who founded the ACF felt that there was a vacuum in the movement not filled by either the Direct Action Movement (DAM) or Class War. The objections to anarcho-syndicalism which would become more defined in the following years, precluded us joining DAM. Whilst we welcomed the imaginative approach of Class War, we saw that they lacked a strategy for the construction of a coherent national organisation and for the development of theory.

The development of the politics of the ACF is dealt with to a great extent in the accompanying article on Organise! What should be remarked upon is the quantum leap that the ACF made in its critique of the unions. A critique of anarcho-syndicalism was deepened and strengthened. At the same time the ACF broke with the ideas of rank-and-filism which had characterised the ORA/AWA/LCG period, as well as any false notions about national liberation and self-determination. That this was achieved, and achieved on a collective level, seems to have surprised some of our critics. For them, any development of politics must involve vicious infighting and splits, accustomed as they are to Bolshevik ways of functioning. That this was achieved without such a split points to the increasing political maturity of the ACF. The overall theoretical development of the ACF was light years ahead of most articles produced in the previous period. This is vitally important. For Anarchist-communism to survive it must develop both its theory and practice. In this respect the ACF has made important steps forward.

Unlike the previous organisations, the ACF has maintained a certain stability. It has survived the last ten years in times of great political inactivity (Despite high points of struggle like the anti-Poll Tax movement). The number of militants fully committed to the organisation have increased and the ACF has a much more stable base than it had at its foundation.

The ACF has also developed its politics through the collective preparation of a Manifesto and Programme which will be published this year. The ACF has analysed the changes in capitalism and developed a strategy which it believes can be of use in helping re-create a revolutionary movement.

The analyses developed in the pages of Organise! and within the ACF in general have had their effect on what passes for a revolutionary movement in Britain. The organisational moves that Class War instigated (turning itself from a paper group into an organisation) were influenced to a great extent by the strong arguments for the construction of revolutionary libertarian organisations within the pages of Virus Similarly the Aims and Principles of both the Scottish Anarchist Federation and the Tyneside Anarchist Group were influenced to an extent by the politics of the ACF.

Strong contribution

The ACF has made a strong contribution, along with that of other groups and organisations, to the re-establishment of class struggle anarchism in this country. This is part of a long-term process dating back to the 70s, when the struggle began to reclaim the movement from those who opposed any talk of class analysis, (and for that matter of revolution itself) and offered various versions of pacifism, liberalism, individualism, and gradualism. Whilst these elements still exist, those who call themselves class struggle anarchists has increased considerably. This of course cannot just be put down to the theoretical illuminations of one or several groups, but to the stark reality of the ruling class attack in the last 20 years.

So much for some of the positive points of the ACF experience. What of the negative points of the ACF balance-sheet?

The ACF remains a comparatively small organisation. Its desire to create or be the component of a large revolutionary organisation and movement has failed to happen. Many are put off joining