

A call for an Anarchist Conference

Fifth of May Group

1997

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Dear Organise!

We, Turkish and Kurdish anarchists who live in Britain, first would like to express very briefly some of the weaknesses such as lack of co-ordination, communication and solidarity that we see in the British anarchist movement which either we are part of or trying to take part in. Then we will put forward our suggestions and opinions, again very briefly.

We think that the British anarchist movement is at the moment in a situation in which it is disorganised and atomised, and it has no aims nation-wide. And except the Anarchist Bookfair which is organised every year and gradually becoming monotonous, we do not see each other, we do not communally inform each other, let alone directing our forces toward mutual aims. We know that there are some friends out there who try to do this. However, we also know that this is not enough. Everything goes on by itself. We are lost in the labyrinths the capitalist system has consciously and purposely created. British anarchists have come near the point at which they exist without sufficient communication and willpower, while they continually oppose the extreme centralism of Marxists. We all know that the elections are coming. Is it not necessary for British anarchists to agree upon a policy in order to act nation-wide against such a nation-wide event? But we do nothing. We seem to be quite comfortable in our little caves.

The lack of communication and solidarity among the anarchists affect most of us, that is, anarchists who come from other parts of the world. Although we try hard to become involved as much as we can in the anarchist movement, we have not been too successful integrating into it. We already experience among our own society, which is under the hegemony of Marxism and liberalism, the inevitable alienation. What a bitter experience this is! "Exile life is as grey as English weather". Anyway... It is not our intention here to moan but to persuade you our comrades.

We invite all groups, organisations, initiatives, etc. in the movement to organise an anarchist conference to discuss thoroughly what has been said in this letter as well as other points which we could not mention here in order to arrive at certain conclusions, most importantly, to create an information centre, and even organise and form an anarchist confederation which would be composed of local as well as national anarchist groups and organisations, and which would be dependent upon such organisations' self-control and absolute autonomy. The call is from ours, to organise this would be your task. Because we know well that considering our own lack of communication we are not suitable for the job. The first three groups, organisations or individuals who would reply to this letter positively will organise the first preparatory committee of the conference. Our task is to get these three groups, organisations or individuals to meet each other. With other groups, organisations or individuals, this committee can later be expanded by the very people who have first started the initiative. We would like you all to discuss this and other things we have mentioned in this letter and send all your replies to the address below.

In solidarity,
5th May Group

Reply

(This reply is printed in issue 46, but is included here to go with the letter)

Dear 5th May Group,

We have discussed your proposal which we have also printed in the latest issue of Organise! and we have decided to support your call for a conference.

However, we did decide that it would be better if the conference was separate from the (London) Anarchist Bookfair, as it is all too easy for just any one to turn up (i.e. someone who is just interested in the books, or in drinking...), without any commitment to the aims of such a conference. This would also go for the day after the Bookfair, as we will be having an ACF meeting then. In any case, you may find the Bookfair date is too soon and there is not time for a long meeting as there are always lots of other meetings happening on that day.

The ACF would not support the idea of organisation of the conference being limited to the first three respondents. It should be open to all interested groups. I am sure you did mean for all groups to participate on an equal basis, so I think it would be best to wait and find out whether you get any other positive replies.

From a political point of view, the sort of initiative you are suggesting has always faced difficulties, as there are anarchists who do not believe in class or who are anti-organisation. You will be aware that the number of anarchists involved in class struggle anarchist or anarchist communist groupings on a national or worldwide scale are relatively small. This is something the ACF itself is trying to address, as we are currently building stronger links with anarchist communists worldwide, some of these thanks to the internet.

Of those who consider themselves class struggle anarchists, some of these are stuck with localist tendencies, though some links between these exist, such as the Northern Anarchist Network (NAN, who are predominately class struggle), which also comprises members of the ACF and other organisations like the Solidarity Federation and Subversion. There is also the Scottish Federation of Anarchists. So there is already some organisation outside of the longer established federations, and this works fairly well in coordinating actions like the anti-JSA, dockers support, anti-election work etc, and there is also a cross-over with single issue groups like Groundswell and the Anti-Election Alliance.

You may not be aware that initiatives like you are proposing have already been tried. Some time ago Class War approached the ACF concerning a possible merger between the organisations, but in spite of several meetings we were unable to overcome the political differences, especially over Class War's ambiguity over nationalism. More recently, there has been the setting up of the Independent Working Class Alliance (IWCA), the proposers of which attempted to attract groups like the ACF, but who are dominated by Red Action and others with marxist and/or nationalist politics, though some members of Class War are involved. There is currently a grouping called Revolutionary Socialist Network, which involves a variety of marxists, and a few anarchists.

The ACF is unlikely to support the idea of a con-federation of groups with widely differing views about anarchism. In Britain we are closest politically with Subversion, who do not wish to be labelled as either anarchist or marxist, one of their main reasons being the impossibility of defining an 'anarchist movement' when there are such a variety of people calling themselves anarchist. We agree in our rejection of syndicalism and total rejection of nationalist tendencies, both issues which are an immediate problem in any call for unity in the 'movement'.

So, although there are some problems with your call for a confederation, in your open letter you mention a point which is perhaps not addressed by the current network structures, that is, how to involve comrades from other countries who are currently in Britain and do not feel they are easily integrated into anarchist organisation here? Maybe THIS question is the one YOU could bring up by organising a brief meeting at the Bookfair for those who have responded to your open letter (and those who may not have seen it) to discuss your proposal further. This would not be too difficult for you to do as all you have to do is book the room, and we could sort out who would be into organising a conference at that meeting.

Maybe doing this would help you convince yourselves of the validity, or otherwise, of calling for the setting up of a confederation which as I have said is fraught with difficulties, and has been thought about many times in the past. In any case, it would show the importance of solidarity of 'British' anarchists with comrades in Turkey and elsewhere, something which would certainly benefit from organisational structures like those advocated by the ACF. This might draw in a few more people than the ones you have managed to contact already.

As I have said already, any Turkish language versions of anarchist literature is welcome on our website, and am happy to help set up a site for your group. I am also intending to place the ACF principles on our site in as many languages as possible and if you are able to translate any of our materials, please let us know.

In summary, the ACF supports the idea of organising a conference, whether or not this leads to the formation of a confederation.

An initial meeting at the Anarchist Bookfair would help get more support for the idea, and would also raise some of the specific problems you are having as Turkish and Kurdish anarchists in Britain.

Anyway, please let us know, either by e-mail or by letter to the London Address when you get any more interest in your proposal from other groups and how you want to take this forward.

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