

Striving for a global anarchist movement in thought and action

The IAF Secretariat

2006

The International of Anarchist Federations fights for:

The abolition of all forms of authority whether economic, political, social, religious, cultural or sexual.

The construction of a free society, without classes, states or borders, founded on anarchist federalism and mutual aid.

—from the Statement of Principles of the International Anarchist Federation founded in 1968 in Carrara, Italy.

The above statement of principles sets out clearly what the IAF hopes to achieve—an ambitious programme, but the only one that can achieve the goals of freedom, peace and justice that humans have struggled for, in different ways, since the beginning of our existence as a species. Though not calling themselves anarchists, people with anarchist aims and practices have always existed in every part of the world. However, it is only in the 19th century that organised, theoretically-explicit anarchism emerged with the founding of the first International Federation of Anarchists in St. Imier in 1871. It was founded by both workers (many from the watchmakers in St. Imier itself) and international anarchist activists such as Kropotkin who had had enough of the authoritarian nature of the Marxist international. It is significant that even though anarchists formed a relatively small movement in each country, they immediately sought to organise on an international level. The IAF considers itself the heirs of this tradition.

Early anarchism had an international aspect for many reasons. With repression in different countries at different times, anarchists often found themselves forced into exile. Though obviously not something they wanted, it did have the effect of bringing anarchists from different countries more in contact with each other. Internationalism was also the only way to deal with the continual nationalist conflicts in Europe, culminating in the two world wars. Though a test for many anarchists, an internationalism that supported no State was a vision that they had to cling to. Anarchism also spread outside Europe as a result of the waves of immigration in the late 19th and early 20th century. In the 'New World' workers of every nationality had to band together in order to organise against horrific working and living conditions. The capitalists relied

on the fact that there would be language and cultural barriers between different national groups as a way of ensuring that they wouldn't organise against their treatment. An international approach was therefore crucial to the success of any workers' organisation. The Spanish Revolution also required international support, both during the struggle itself and afterwards when many anarchists were killed, imprisoned or exiled.

Today, the need for international solidarity and co-operation amongst anarchists is as vital as ever. Every aspect of our lives is woven into a global system of economic, political and cultural domination. This can lead to a feeling of helplessness as our anger cannot be vented directly against those making decisions affecting our lives. The people of Afghanistan and Iraq are thrown into turmoil as a result of the interference of both the US military intervention and Saudi Arabian-imported Islam. GM crops are imposed on reluctant farmers from Brazil to Poland. Islands in the Pacific are on the verge of disappearance because of the greed for energy elsewhere. People's jobs and security depend on fickle international money markets. And even remote tribal people are losing their very way of life as a result of world demand for the resources on their land. But we are not helpless. We need to make international anarchism our weapon.

The most obvious form internationalism takes is international solidarity, protests at global summits and conferences that bring together anarchists from many different countries. The IAF has always been dedicated to helping comrades from countries who are less well-off financially, such as raising money for the Argentineans or supporting Russian and Eastern European comrades in their efforts to attend international meetings. Support can also be much more concrete like when the Italians helped to organise the first meeting of anarchists of both east and west. The IAF, through its member federations has also been involved in helping to organise international protests in Evian, Brussels, Genoa, Paris, Scotland and Prague. Comrades also have travelled to support the anarchist May Day in Poland and the meet with comrades in Russia. An international perspective, however, does not mean that we spend all of our time supporting other people's struggles or flying off to global meetings and protests. Firstly, there is a limit to how much financial support comrades from the richer countries can give. The country as a whole may be well-off, but anarchist comrades are usually not. It is a struggle to find money to produce newspapers and magazines as well as finance campaigns. Also, travelling to other countries for political purposes can be as great a burden on an unemployed British comrade as it can be on someone from Eastern Europe or Latin America. In addition, power may appear to lie in the hands of those who attend the 'global summits', but in fact, this is really only the public face of power. Organising antisummit protests is also only the public face of anarchism—all dependent on how the bourgeois media want to portray us. That doesn't mean that these protests aren't important; they provide anarchists with the opportunity of feeling something of our collective power on an international level. The power of the ruling class lies elsewhere—manifested in every aspect of our lives. We feel it when we keep our mouth shut rather than talking back to our boss, in the advertisements that bombard us to consume, when we can't get access to clean water because it is someone's private property and when we are forced to conform to an exam system because it is the only way we can 'get ahead'. It is the daily resistance to this power that will lead to the building of a movement that can take on the ultimate objective of overthrowing capitalism and the State. And this resistance necessarily takes place on a local level. So what is the role for anarchist internationalism?

The IAF provides a means for comrades from around the world to communicate. We are confronting the same enemy everywhere and learning about the struggles of others can give us

ideas for our own struggles. Within Europe, the vast experience of comrades from Italy, Spain and France can help those who have a much shorter history of anarchist struggle such as those in Eastern Europe. However, the comrades in Eastern Europe, not weighed down by tradition are able to offer new perspectives and ideas for struggle. Good communication can also be revolutionary if it inspires. Just to know that people elsewhere are fighting back is important to those who may be experiencing a downturn in struggle. This knowledge can help people just keep going or it could motivate people to launch a major fight back themselves. The most important thing is to hear of successes. Spreading these stories of successful resistance is a major role of international anarchist propaganda. The struggles of the Argentinean working class were welcomed enthusiastically by people in Europe. Hearing about workers just ignoring bosses, banks and politicians and just doing things themselves confirmed the faith anarchists have always had in the power of workers to self-organise.

It is also important to have an international forum where more theoretical discussions can take place. Learning about what is happening in a variety of countries can help us to develop our analysis of the situation facing us. We need to have a thorough understanding of the political, economic and social realities so that we can organise more effectively and anticipate the strategies of our enemy. The experience of Venezuelans with Chavez, Brazil with Lula, Britain with Blair all help to reinforce the anarchist antagonism to reformism, a doctrine that seems to think that a government can bring about social change. The Italian experience of 'insurreccionalism', where a few self-proclaimed saviours of the working class have contributed to repression of the anarchist movement, should be useful for those who are tempted to undertake such individualist action.

Internationalism remains vital as a weapon against the rise in ethnic and national conflict just as it was during WWI and WWII. Comrades in the former Yugoslavia, though organised as separate national federations, are beginning to come together on a wider basis, showing that anarchists are above the tragic divisions of the rest of the working class that have caused so much pain and suffering. By providing a framework where anarchists from different countries and ethnic groups can come together, IAF can facilitate the building of an undivided workers' movement.

The IAF recently had its Congress where it reconfirmed its commitment to international solidarity and developed a number of initiatives to facilitate better communication and co-ordination. This Congress also welcomed the presence of so many comrades from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as delegates from Latin America. We hope to greatly increase our links with these areas. We can all benefit from learning from the wealth of experience of those comrades, who have had to struggle in such difficult circumstances, and would like to increase our ability to offer support and solidarity.

For International Solidarity,
The IAF Secretariat.

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