

The Programme of the Revolutionary Anarchist Group

Revolutionary Anarchist Group — Birmingham

28/03/2025

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Since the beginning of 2025, the members of RAG have undertaken the development of a revolutionary programme. This document has been reviewed, critiqued and edited by several individuals involved in RAG with all theoretical and tactical points being agreed on unanimously. The programme is ultimately an expansion the aims and principles which underpin, this document will act as our guide for what tasks, activities and organising we seek to undertake during the coming months and years. It is vital to note that this document is by no means static, we in RAG have agreed that this programme is a 'living document' which will be amended where necessary.

Our theory however is unchanging! We are committed class struggle anarchist communists whose activities will hopefully bring us closer to achieving a stateless and classless society.

In Solidarity,

Revolutionary Anarchist Group (RAG)

This document is correct and fully updated as of the 28th of March 2025.

The Revolutionary Anarchist Group (RAG) are a Birmingham (UK) based group of intersectional revolutionary anarchist-communists fighting for an anarchist communist society through a social revolution to overthrow capitalism and the state. We believe that through direct action, workplace struggle, education, and solidarity that the working class can successfully overthrow the twin evils of capitalism and the state, to pave the way towards a libertarian communist society free from the oppression and violence that characterise capitalism.

We are an independent group who affiliate to no national or international organisations; we are however committed to working with other working class organisations within grassroots movements and campaigns. Alongside building towards the revolution we are committed to acting according to the ideas we want our future society to be based on: mutual aid, collective responsibility, and free association.

1. The situation in Birmingham

Since the dawn of the 21st century, the city of Birmingham has faced many challenges from various elements of the state and capitalism. The last few years, however, have been particularly dire for the working class in Birmingham. Fourteen years of Conservative austerity measures and the continually negative effects of free market capitalism on the housing crisis and energy crisis have plunged thousands of working class people, students, and pensioners into poverty and suffering, all while the political and business elites of the city continue to profit and benefit from the conditions we face in our city.

Recently Birmingham City Council issued a section 114 notice effectively declaring itself bankrupt after failing to pay equal pay claims and overspending on an IT system. The government in classic fashion agreed to help the council pay its debts only if the council agreed to massive spending cuts, tax increases, and the selling of public assets. The subsequent increases in council tax, the selling of community centres, and library closures will have dire impacts on the poorest of our city who depend on these spaces for their well-being. Jobs and the cleanliness

of Birmingham will also drop, with many council jobs on the line while waste services will be reduced as part of cuts put forward by the council.

Homelessness and food/energy poverty have skyrocketed over the last few years with many of these developments being worsened by the ongoing conflict on the continent as well as capitalist mismanagement of energy. The council and government, however, have spent a remarkable amount of effort investing millions of pounds into vanity projects which mask the dire state of our city.

The commonwealth games, construction of “Ozzy” the bull, and the expansion of University station are just a few examples of wasteful council spending which have done little to benefit the working class of our city. Gentrification in Birmingham has also expanded in recent years with many historical properties and neighbourhoods being purchased and destroyed to make way for a “technology park” in Birmingham East side, as well as the “City Park Gate development scheme” in the city centre. Both projects have come at the expense of two historical pubs (the Old Railway and the Fox and Grapes). Areas like Moseley, Harborne and Stirchley have been greatly gentrified, with wealthier people swarming to areas of the city with traditionally lower housing prices. The process of gentrification today continues in Digbeth, Ladywood, and many other areas.

That is not to say that the working class has simply been passive throughout this turmoil. The rise in far right and fascist activity in Birmingham has prompted a backlash from the working class who mobilised in their communities to stand up against those who threatened ethnic minorities. Likewise the ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza prompted some of the largest protests, mobilisations, and encampments our city has ever seen, with members of all sectors of society coming out in solidarity with the Palestinian people (and more recently the Kurds).

The large wave of fascist activity was preceded by the UK wide strike wave which hit many public sectors in Birmingham including primary, secondary, further, and higher education at the various schools/universities, alongside the public services and public transport. The strike wave saw previously dormant unions come out on strike frequently to resolve poor pay and conditions, and contracts and pensions forced onto workers by employers. For many days, weeks and months, Centenary Square was filled with trade union activists, organisers, and members rallying against poor conditions.

The events and developments in the last few years have affected many aspects of our city. Both the radical left and the far right have undergone changes in our city with new organisations and groups springing up based on the events which have happened in the UK and across the world. To better understand the current situation of the working class in Birmingham it is necessary to take an informed look at the authoritarian left, the anarchist scene, the labour movement, and capitalism in Birmingham. By doing so we shall be able to establish what actions and developments we must pursue to build towards anarchist communism (libertarian socialism).

1.1. Capitalism and the council in Birmingham

As previously mentioned the council remains in a dire situation financially, with cuts being made to secure a government bailout. Several areas have and will continue to be affected. The UK housing market has always been in a remarkably shit state, and Birmingham is no exception. As

of December 2024 it has been reported that 3/4 of council houses in the city do not meet government standards for decent living, with cases of widespread mould and disrepair being common. The state of private housing in Birmingham remains dire; the ONS has provided statistics indicating private rent per month has increased by 8.7% compared with last year (November 2023), with housing stock remaining either unaffordable for families or simply unavailable due to a lack of affordable developments.

The student housing market also remains in a poor state. Rapid increases in the price of student halls has made pursuing higher education all the harder: some student halls charge as much as £250 (per week) for rent. The transition out of halls and into private student housing for many results in houses riddled with mould, pests, and maintenance issues. Housing agencies such as Oakmans have benefited massively from students by offering expensive student housing with many of the issues listed above. The winter fuel cuts and ending of price caps on energy have also pushed many people both young and old into fuel poverty, with many people going without turning on heating for many hours during the day.

The severe lack of affordable housing has pushed many into rough sleeping, homelessness, or overcrowded temporary accommodation. According to council data 14,500 people are homeless in Birmingham (this statistic is almost certainly wrong due to it being based only on those who come forward for help – the charity Shelter estimates the figure could be as high as 28,000).

Alongside the unavailability and poor quality of social and private housing, increases in UK food prices have thrown more families, students, and pensioners into poverty. With supermarkets increasing prices for essential foods, many families in Brum are increasingly cutting back on food spending, leading to many, including children, going hungry or using food banks regularly to survive.

Job prospects for those entering the job market in Birmingham are, to say the least, bleak. At the moment ONS statistics indicate 7.2% of people in the city are unemployed/without work. Simultaneously, many companies, businesses, and organisations employ practices which discourage people from seeking work or alternate work: long hours, poor or no benefits, and shit pay are contributing factors which put pressure on working class families alongside the previously mentioned issues with housing, food, and energy.

The pressure this puts on working class people is immense, with working class families struggling to put food on the table for their kids – all while the ruling class business and political elites thrive in the midst of widespread austerity for the majority. Without systemic change to our economic and political system, capitalism will continue hollowing out our communities while the politicians continue to thrive in their position as the ruling class.

The case for a social revolution is strong. Although many are seeking to get mobilised and fight back against the state and capitalism, how are young and working class people doing this? Who is mobilising them, and why might this be problematic?

1.2. The authoritarian left in Birmingham

The authoritarian left has a long history in Birmingham. Several organisations, parties, and groups have been prominent in Birmingham throughout the 20th century. To this day many groups on the left operate in Birmingham, with many aligning with various authoritarian ideologies like Leninism, Marxist-Leninism, and Trotskyism. With more and more young people turn-

ing to socialism and communism as alternatives to both capitalism and electoral social democracy, many young people (as well as older left wing veterans) end up in organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), or one of the various British Communist Parties (CPGB-ML, CBPG, CPGB-PCC, RCG, etc., etc.).

Many of these organisations have existed in Birmingham for many decades now but in recent years certain organisations have witnessed marginal if not gradual growth through various different means. Firstly, the British electoral left under Corbyn, Workers' Party GB, and the Green Party have failed to deliver systemic change in government (both local and national), despite the election of several independent pro-Palestine MPs including one in Birmingham (Perry Barr). The lack of effective change in parliament and the purging of pro-Palestine and socialist elements of the labour party has driven many who are disillusioned towards authoritarian left factions who claim to have the solutions and theory to address capitalist systemic failure (Marxism).

Secondly, several radicalising events and periods of action have occurred which in turn have sparked anger and frustration among elements of the working class, the most notable of which was the October 7th attack which sparked a massive wave of solidarity with Palestine and the Palestinian people. In Birmingham this manifested in several different ways. After October 7th Birmingham witnessed some of the largest protests in the cities history with organisations like PSC, Friends of Al-Aqsa, and Palestine Action growing in membership and support. Alongside protests, several methods of direct action grew in Birmingham, with two student encampments being established while many engaged in direct action (sabotage) against companies complicit in Israeli genocide in Palestine (University of Birmingham, Elbit Systems, and Barclay's bank).

The authoritarian left admittedly played a massive role in these events – within the wave of pro Palestinian solidarity many groups like the SWP and RCP picked up new members who were looking to stay organised or were looking for an ideological/political answer as to why these events were taking place. Many of these parties effectively used social media, banners, and placards to make themselves highly visible within protests. The typical Trotskyite strategies emerged to continue “party building;” these strategies included selling party propaganda, pushing branch meetings, and national events like the SWP's “Marxism.” Arguably the biggest authoritarian left winner in terms of party building was the newly founded RCP who, through their “Are you a communist?” campaign, managed to recruit masses of students who were Marxist-curious and looking to get organised. Despite their origins as a Labour party entryist organisation, the RCP have moved beyond simply pursuing student society meetings, with the organisation engaging in extensive leafleting, stickering, strike solidarity, and city wide branch meetings.

Some may read this and think, “Well, is this an issue? Surely it's good that people are getting organised and politically aware about socialism and communism?” On the one hand it is fantastic that many previously un-organised people are now becoming aware of the issues with our system. Our main issue is “means and ends,” and the categorical failures of Marxist parties to organise effective social change in Britain.

As anarchist communists we categorically reject the Marxist notion of the party and the need to seize state and trade union power. This critique will be explored further on in this programme, but one of the main issues with people joining these parties is how their enthusiasm is channelled. Within groups like the SWP, RCP, and various communist parties there is often an extremely strict structure with the aim of pushing “party building” through activities like street stalls, branch meetings, and attending picket lines to sell literature. New members are often made to do the brunt of the activities on behalf of senior party officials who will justify these mind-numbing

activities by arguing that the party is the most advanced part of working class organisation, because it is they who are organising for the revolution! In branch meetings, parties like the SWP often have meeting lead-offs and topics created and delivered by central committee members, which leaves little chance for input by party members who may have constructive points to offer but which may slightly contradict the party line and positions.

The main phenomenon which this creates is a cycle of excitement, joining a party, being made to do the mind-numbing tasks of party building before being spat out as a disillusioned leftist after you realise nothing has come from your efforts. The cycle then repeats with another authoritarian left group trying to recruit you by claiming they are somehow different. A massive issue with certain groups is also the toxic culture of many groups like the SWP and the various communist parties, issues including transphobia, rape apologism, and rampant co-option of independent movements – conflicting with the notions of socialism and communism which these parties seek to champion.

Another potential reason which could explain the growth in membership of these parties is simply their visibility and commitment to attending any protests and events which could benefit recruitment. To illustrate this, simply attend a pro-Palestinian event, a picket line, or a rally in the city, and you will inevitably find a mass of party organisers armed with a newspaper or a clipboard ready for your information. A further problem with the growth of the authoritarian left is simply their lack of action, with the far right building quite a prominent counter-culture the authoritarian left remains obsessed with the idea of party building rather than placing significant emphasis on direct action, community projects, and mutual aid/solidarity (which are the actions which undoubtedly make the most change).

The trade unions in Birmingham are also strongly influenced by the authoritarian left. We do not have exact figures which detail the presence of these groups in union bureaucratic structures but we can certainly say they are there. Whether via branch secretaries, reps, or full time officials, there will be members of unions who affiliate to various groups. We must highlight however that these people are not evil manipulators who seek to ruin your lives; we simply believe the ideas that are pushed by these people within the labour struggle are dangerous and do not provide the full picture of our world.

The rise of the authoritarian left in Birmingham has not gone unnoticed and uncontested with growth in the libertarian left also occurring in parallel. It is also important to note that this document is not meant to dismiss Marxism as an ideology nor slam people who join these organisations. Inevitably as part of political development people go through different phases until they find their preferred method of theory and struggle. We will, however, highlight the questionable and arguably very destructive ideologies and cultures of these groups. Next it is important to detail how the anarchist movement in Birmingham has developed and fluctuated in relation to the various movements and developments in Birmingham.

1.3. The anarchists in Birmingham

The anarchist scene in Birmingham roughly sits in the same position as most other anarchist scenes in places like Manchester, London, Liverpool, Leeds, and Glasgow. Historically the anarchist movement has always been a minority in Britain, going back many many decades into the 20th century. Often being the minority movement among the left, many anarchist organisa-

tions have areas of the country in which they are most prominent. Birmingham is no different; despite the existence of some national-level organisations (Anarchist Communist Group, The Anarchist Federation, and The Solidarity Federation), none of these groups have had a consistent presence within our city (to the point where they can establish a local branch). Similarly to Cambridge and Newcastle, Birmingham's main anarchist presence is within an independent group (us!) alongside a handful of other groups, collectives, and organisations which have anarchist and anti-fascist sympathies.

RAG as an organisation has a fairly short history dating back to 2017, when our organisation was founded. Throughout our existence RAG has been involved in a number of activities with our core members regularly participating in open meetings, reading groups, and demonstrations. When discussing activity, RAG has previously been involved in the Green Anticapitalist Front as well as in struggles surrounding unions and organising. More recently, RAG has been present in the Palestinian protests. In the present day RAG is by no means the only libertarian left group in the city; there are a wide range of radical groups involved in action. Food Not Cops (FNC), for example, are an abolitionist food distro group who distribute free vegan food in central Birmingham, based on mutual aid. Likewise, the Birmingham Radical Unity Hive (BRUH) is a group of anti-fascists who oppose the far right and transphobia in Birmingham. Finally in Redbrick Market you can find Birmingham Anarchist Books (BAB), who operate a small stall selling/giving away anarchist books, stickers, zines, and clothes.

This is not to say there aren't other groups/individuals who do valuable actions as there very much are, but in terms of size the organised anarchist scene in Birmingham, it is clear that we are the minority. When most people who are vaguely politically conscious are looking to get organised most people usually think of Marxism way before they think about Anarchism – unfortunately anarchism still has the historical connotations of chaos, disorder, and violence which naturally limits the attractiveness of anarchism to the general mass. Being the minority, however, does not prevent meaningful action and organisation (as demonstrated by this programme). The reputation of anarchism as an ideology does not entirely explain the lack of growth in the anarchist scene. Simply, the types of strategies which Marxist groups use to grow are not compatible with our beliefs about organisation: party building, for example, is a form of hierarchical organisation in which power is centralised in the hands of a few which therefore reinforces the social relations of authoritarian systems of governance (subservience, obedience, and discipline).

As a result you are less likely to find anarchists pushing newspapers, selling party literature, and occupying stalls at protests, as we do not believe in recruiting people to push our ideology for our own benefit. As anarchists we are friends of the working class who seek to support struggles which advance the working classes interests against capital: if we do not recruit anyone from our participation within struggles then that is fine! Because there is no sole anarchist group in Birmingham, the direction of the anarchist scene is not exactly clear; each group will naturally adopt strategies and beliefs which align with the material conditions in which they operate, and we as RAG are no different.

The relationship between the authoritarian left and the anarchist scene is hard to pin down. Among the anarchist scene there is a general consensus that the ideologies, structures, and beliefs of Leninism, Trotskyism, and other Marxist variants are ideas which do not seek the liberation and empowerment of the working class. It is also clear the Marxists think the same about anarchism from their own ideological perspective. This ideological disagreement however has not stopped tactical cooperation from emerging in times of crisis. The far right riots saw cross-

ideology cooperation between different groups who came out in force to fight the fascists who threaten our communities. It is unlikely we will see any large scale cooperation on certain issues like unions or organising simply due to ideological differences, we cannot discount tactical cooperation however which will naturally occur during time of crisis. RAG specifically has worked with authoritarian communist groups and individuals in the past, and may do so again if the need arises.

We do maintain the belief and hope that the anarchists in Birmingham will continue to promote and put into practice anarchism for the benefit of the overall working class against capitalism and the state. Our programme in whatever form it takes will hopefully be a valuable addition to the anarchist scene and our ideas.

1.4. The trade unions and labour scene in Birmingham

As in every city, Birmingham has several large trade union branches of TUC unions in various sectors. The Birmingham Trade Union Council (BTUC) goes all the way back to 1866 with unions in Brum playing a massive part in industrial action throughout the 20th and 21st century. More recently during the strike wave of 2022–2023 11 unions went on strike over pay disputes across multiple sectors (education, transport, healthcare, etc.). Despite the increasing pressure from government legislation and employers, unions still mobilised for strike action with several unions winning concessions from employers on pay (which has largely been on the decrease since the late 2000s). The strike wave, despite looking large and powerful from the outside, had several underlying issues: the vast majority of strikes occurred independently from other unions, with very few strikes being coordinated to cause the largest amount of disruption to the natural functioning of society and the economy.

We can largely pin this down to the reformist nature of unions whose primary concern is settling disputes as quickly as possible rather than pushing for the maximum amount of concessions possible (as well as other radical functions of syndicalist unions like radical education). The desire of unions to settle quickly ultimately led to the failure of many strikes in Birmingham, most notably the UCU strike for the “Four Fights.” After a sustained period of strike action, in which energy and morale was high, the strike was subsequently stopped short by secretary general Jo Grady after UCEA offered minimal concessions on pensions (this sole concession despite being only one of four fights won). Strike action was suspended and negotiations ultimately failed to bring any fundamental changes to working conditions.

The role of radical unions throughout the strike wave was also remarkably minimal. Midlands Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have been active in labour solidarity but not necessarily strike action. Sol Fed, however, does not have a presence in Birmingham. The BTUC’s report “On a Knife Edge” has continually highlighted how these TUC unions (despite their problems) have been continually restricted by government legislation in an attempt to prevent strike action from even taking off. Interestingly, out of the 5000 people interviewed about their striking experience during the strike wave, 66% of respondents claimed their union branch had gone on strike at least once during the last five years, with the same 66% of respondents claiming that they had witnessed “Detrimental treatment of strikes during and after industrial action.” Despite this anger at employers in Birmingham, radical action has seemingly not developed especially among the

rank and file of mainstream trade unions who have not capitalised on the energy generated during the previous strike wave.

Moving into 2025, the collapse of council finances has caused some strike action among council workers (eg. binmen) as well as union solidarity with the anti cuts movement in Brum. Most importantly, however, unions and union members in Birmingham have been strongly prominent in Palestinian solidarity with trade union blocs being present at almost every single demonstration.

Whether it be university campus rallies, city wide marches, or local gatherings, you will always be able to find a banner from a trade union as well as some of their members, supporting the end of Israeli genocide in Gaza. Increasingly, more and more branches are affiliating to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in order to push for divestment and the cutting of ties with Israeli business and institutions. It is not clear however how the mainstream trade unions view the increasing amounts of radical direct action being undertaken against Israeli affiliated businesses in Britain.

Although the strike wave and increasing Palestinian solidarity has shown the mainstream unions to be capable of some level of activism and action, the limits of reformism and state compliance are once again being shown. It is unclear whether the British working class will undertake similar efforts in the years to come but it is clear the trade union movement in Birmingham is a mixed bag, with some positive elements clearly being demonstrated.

1.5. Conclusion

The political and economic state of the city of Birmingham is clearly grim; the increasing pressures of British capitalism is manifesting itself once again in cruel cuts to public services, higher rents, and lower wages, all while the political left in Birmingham is failing to offer any meaningful alternative to the misery of electoral politics and capitalist servitude. It is therefore necessary to assess what our role as a revolutionary class struggle group can be in the wider working class in Birmingham.

2. Why do we need a programme?

Essentially all revolutionary groups and organisations which follow ideologies such as Marxism and anarchism have some document or programme which outlines their theoretical perspective which in turn informs their actions and activities. There is no standard structure for a revolutionary programme or document; many different groups take different approaches to outlining their theory and praxis. Some groups may strongly emphasise their group structure; others may in fact address the theoretical side more, in an attempt to justify their own beliefs.

In RAG we believe that creating a programme is necessary in order to outline our theoretical perspective (anarchist communism) and how our anarchist communist stance informs the types of structures we will build and actions which we will undertake (our collective vision of our future society). We believe that action without theory is pointless; it is necessary to have an end goal in mind (which for us is the establishment of a stateless and classless society). By having an end goal we can establish which actions will lead us in the direction of our end goal. This can also be explained as the unity of means and ends (as coined by Zoe Baker). Another aspect of the unity

of means and ends is that the actions we undertake on the path to anarchist communism should assist our members in transforming our social relations and establishing reforms and structures which better reflect the society we want to live in (building the new society in the shell of the old).

Throughout history these actions would include striking, building non-hierarchical social structures, and undertaking direct action to achieve goals (rather than voting or party building). We will not establish a comprehensive list of actions which we will or will not undertake as that would ignore the fact that emerging social movements, groups, and actors are not simply good or bad: reality and society is far more complicated. Our aims and principles establish the shell of this programme; this programme is building on the principles which we believe in! Relating to our aims and principles document, this programme will be useful to expand on terms, definitions, and ideas which we did not have the space to fully elaborate on.

It is critical to note however that this programme is not final; this programme is not gospel and will not dictate everything we do. The next logical question is, if the programme is not entirely fixed then how much will our programme change over time? And does everyone have to agree to our programme to participate in our group?

2.1. Programme flexibility and group participation

It is highly unlikely that our core principles will ever change. All of our members are dedicated to the idea that anarchist communism is the best society which we can strive for to replace the state and capitalism; we will not suddenly abandon our views in favour of Marxism, capitalist reformism, or another strand of anarchism.

However when it comes to strategy, procedure, finances, and structures, things will inevitably change and grow. Changes in strategies are common among revolutionary groups as material conditions change. The onset of the social media and the rise of the internet have fundamentally changed the ways in which anarchists have communicated and distributed information. These new methods for communication (websites, email, and social media) in turn necessitated the development of new structures and ways to harness the internet for the pursuit of anarchy. Likewise, in Birmingham it is entirely possible that a rupture may occur which forces our hand into pursuing different types of action or prefigurative politics earlier than we may anticipate.

We expect and welcome change. Standing by old methods of organisation and struggle risks us failing to adapt to new conditions and therefore failing to make effective change. As such, we in RAG are by no means opposed to adopting new strategies which align with our theoretical perspective and will help advance the cause of anarchism in Birmingham. In regards to our theory we obviously reject adopting strategies and structures from other ideologies and material conditions which we know will not benefit us – our conditions are unique and as such require unique structures and strategies. To ensure the smooth running of our group, we strongly favour having a sense of theoretical unity among our members. We are not arguing that everyone should be entirely uniform when it comes to theory as this restricts dialogue. We do, however, seek that those who want to participate in group activities share the principles we have established, while still leaving room for people to debate anarchist organisational and theoretical perspectives (platformism, syndicalism, especificismo, etc.). It is vital for the anarchists in Birmingham to continually debate old ideas and bring forth new perspectives to contribute to the theoretical

depth anarchism has as a political belief, and we are by no means opposed to having dialogue with other groups around the UK for this purpose.

When it comes to new people coming to our meetings, we will not reject anyone for not being anarchists. One of our core activities is education and providing a space for those who are interested in anarchism to learn. We will obviously not just welcome anyone; those who seek to openly disrupt our group are not welcome (fascists, cops, landlords, politicians, etc.). When choosing a venue for meetings, reading groups, or other events, we are committed to choosing a venue which is accessible to everyone regardless of disabilities, health issues, or mental health problems. To provide as much flexibility as possible we will strive to inform anyone coming to our meetings of a potential venue change well in advance.

Having alluded to anarchist communist theory and organisation throughout this document, it is now necessary to delve into detail about our theory, why it matters and how it has developed.

3. The anarchist-communist theory of organisation and strategy

Anarchism is a political ideology which advocates the abolition of all hierarchical and coercive social relations in society to achieve a state of anarchy (a society in which there is no coercive hierarchy, oppressive social relations, or domination). Anarchists believe the main structure which needs to be torn down is the state (the sum total of all permanent political institutions), as the state (along with capitalism) is the highest form of authority and domination. It is important to stress, however, that anarchists are not just opposed to the state and capitalism; anarchists oppose all authority and coercive social relations including (but not limited to) racism, patriarchy, transphobia, and homophobia. Anarchists have long recognised that the state and capitalism has many byproducts and methods through which it can maintain its power – one of the most notable ways has been through sowing racism and arbitrary divisions throughout the working class.

Within an anarchist society, anarchists believe that people are able to mutually cooperate for the benefit of each other, with tasks being undertaken via federations of small communities of people or producers. Anarchism and anarchists advocate the collective making of all decisions, ideally via consensus decision making but also via majority voting if needs be. Within anarchist theory there is no complete vision of what our future society will look like; this is in large part due to the fact that it should be up to people themselves to create structures and forms of organisation which best reflect their local circumstances.

It is also important to make the distinction between anarchism as a means and anarchy as an end. In order to achieve anarchy, we as anarchists believe it is necessary to practice “anarchism” in the present to prefigure the type of society we wish to live in. Practising anarchism under capitalism can take many different forms, the most common being joining a non hierarchical anarchist political or labour group, practising mutual aid, or participating in direct action to achieve reforms and concessions for the working class.

Anarchism as a political ideology has many different strands, organisational theories, and histories around the world. Anarchism first became a coherent set of beliefs during the first international (also known as the International Working Men’s Association) from 1864–1872. During this time, theorists such as Mikhail Bakunin began to crystallise anarchism as a form of anti-state socialism which contrasted with the authoritarian tendencies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who argued that the aim of the International should be to form working class political parties

with the aim of seizing state power. A subsequent split occurred in 1872 over the direction of the international; Marx subsequently had the anarchists expelled, and they proceeded to form a variety of new internationals to further develop anarchism.

Throughout the following decades the theory of anarchism began to be put into practice by various different groups across different states. Within places like Russia and Italy, anarchist communism became the most dominant trend, with many anarchist groups seeking the establishment of communism (a stateless, classless, and moneyless society) after a social revolution. This contrasted with the initial trend of anarchist collectivism, which did not insist upon the abolition of money straight after the revolution. Many see anarchism and communism as closely linked due to the fact that both seek a stateless society as well as the abolition of hierarchical social relations (class and capitalism). Within other states like Germany, Spain, and Britain, the trend of anarchist syndicalism (or industrial syndicalism) became more prominent in large part due to the existence of established trade unions.

Anarcho-syndicalism recognised the flaws that traditional hierarchical unions had which led them to reformism, co-option, and opposition to working class interests. Depending on the state, syndicalists either sought to work within established trade unions to reform them into revolutionary unions, or create parallel radical unions with a distinctly anarchist political agenda (or a broadly anti-capitalist agenda). Several prominent examples of syndicalism emerged during the 20th century. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Confederation of National Labour (CNT) were the two most successful examples of syndicalism in action within their respective labour movements. The IWW since 1905 was able to unionise several branches of US industry under one large union while producing radical literature, engaging in free speech fights, and mobilising previously ununionised groups like European and Asian immigrants. The CNT for its part was responsible for instituting large scale anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-syndicalism in revolutionary Catalonia during the 1936–1939 Spanish civil war. The CNT-FAI administrated Catalonia and saw the implementation of anarchist ideas including workers' control, direct democracy, and workers' militias, all under harsh war time conditions and international pressure.

The late 19th and 20th centuries saw the further development of anarchist political theory. Several new figures emerged within the movement who contributed important texts and ideas within anarchism: Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Tom Brown, Luigi Fabbri, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman are all examples of theorists who participated in anarchist struggles while simultaneously developing new ideas about organisation, strategy, revolution, and the relationship between anarchism and various aspects of society. The onset of revolutions in Russia, Spain, and Germany in the 20th century saw the widespread participation of anarchists. In Russia for example the Ukrainian anarchist black army alongside some anarcho-syndicalists played a massive role in the civil war and struggle against Bolshevik counter-revolution. Meanwhile in Germany the anarcho-syndicalists fought against right wing military militias after the downfall of the German Empire in 1918.

Despite near constant state repression, anarchists around the world continued to participate in social struggles and various organisations. In Britain the Freedom Press collective remains a cornerstone of the anarchist movement, while various collectives, federations, and groups have risen and fallen throughout the last few decades of anarchist history. The role of this part of the programme is merely to provide a concise insight into the history of anarchism. As such there is much we have simplified or missed out within this section. Our main aim is to shed light on the rich and diverse history which anarchism has in both Britain and the world. We in RAG wish to

continue the development and pursuit of anarchist communism while seeking to educate others on the theory and practice of historical and contemporary anarchism.

3.1. Why is revolutionary organisation necessary?

Revolutionary organisation is the means by which revolutionaries achieve revolutionary ends. Effective organisation acts as a “force multiplier,” enabling us to achieve more in concert than we ever could by acting alone. If revolutionary action describes our tactics and revolutionary theory informs our strategy, revolutionary organisation provides the structure within which our tactics and strategy are shaped and developed. This means that the way in which we are organised matters a great deal: if we are not organised in a revolutionary manner, the ideas and praxis that emerges will be of limited revolutionary use.

RAG is organised and structured (as in part 3.3) according to the anarchist principle of “prefiguration.” We are organised non-hierarchically (or “horizontally”) as this is more effective for achieving our desired revolutionary goals, and because we do not believe that any individual should subordinate themselves to the interests of any organisation or movement – such behaviour will never make us into free people. While we are under no illusion that simply prefiguring an anarchist society will ever actually create one, we nevertheless recognise that if we as anarchists do not organise ourselves along anarchic principles, there is never any chance that the whole world will manage to do so. Prefiguration is not a tactic – as though building alternative “anarchist” institutions could ever destroy or supplant the existing capitalist ones – but it is a necessary condition for all of our activity, and it informs the tactics we do employ. We must practise behaving anarchically in an authoritarian world, or else we will never be any good at it! A prefigurative organisational structure therefore serves a double purpose: we train ourselves to become the kind of people capable of making a revolution, and we demonstrate to ourselves and to others that it is possible and desirable to organise anarchically. After all, if RAG can organise this way, and we’re more effective, more united, and happier for doing so, perhaps it could be a better way to structure other activities too. Perhaps your workplace – perhaps the world.

The purpose of RAG’s existence as an organisation is to bring about world anarchist revolution. Given such an ambitious goal, it is essential that our activity is highly focussed. When evaluating the merits of a potential campaign or action, the primary question must always be whether it will contribute towards a genuinely revolutionary end. Anything which fails this test, no matter what other benefits might be associated with it, is unlikely to command our time or resources. Furthermore, we are communist revolutionaries: we will take action which advances the interests of the global working class, and reject action which doesn’t.

These boundaries nevertheless set out a very wide field of potential activity. We are particularly interested in action which has a lasting weakening effect on the power of capital or of the state, when such opportunities arise, and in activity which builds class consciousness and prepares the ground for future revolutionary activity. By “class consciousness” we mean an understanding of society as divided irreconcilably into socioeconomic classes, a sense of the dynamics of the conflict between these classes, and – most importantly – a clear awareness of one’s own class position and interests within this historical conflict. We are painfully aware that current conditions in the UK are far from ripe for revolution, and are not likely to shift in that direction with any rapidity. Therefore our focus at present is on raising class consciousness through

propaganda and education – such as through our regular meetings discussing anarchist texts and current events – and on forging links that strengthen the anarchist movement through our current period of global reaction.

We therefore relate to other groups, projects, and causes each according to their particular merits. Where we see genuine revolutionary potential in a particular social movement – that is, we believe it has the power to inflict enduring damage on capital or the state, or is able to act as a crucible in which class consciousness can be forged, or is an opportunity for a sector of the working class to experience winning real improvement to their conditions of life through collective struggle – we will participate in and support this movement. Part of our involvement in these movements as RAG will always be to offer incisive theoretical analysis and critique: to expose the class basis of people’s grievances and their foundation in capitalism, to encourage people to aim higher in their demands, to broaden the scope of the struggle, to warn against dead ends and futile tactics, to foster greater militancy, and ultimately to give people a taste of a better and freer world and to leave them dissatisfied with anything less.

Our ability to support these struggles depends on their specific nature and their geographical location, since we are a Birmingham-based organisation and do not claim to be anything more. We will evaluate our potential support for other movements according to their proximity, their revolutionary potential, and the extent to which our support will have a decisive effect on their success.

3.2. Parties and federations

RAG is not a “party” or a “vanguard.” We do not believe that such organisational forms are useful or effective in carrying out a class struggle that liberates the working class and destroys capitalism. Our organisation does not exist for its own sake, and we do not pursue the “interests of RAG.” Rather, the organisation exists for the purposes outlined previously (in part 3.1 and above); to expand the potential for class struggle in Birmingham; to advance the interests of the global working class as a whole; and to advance our own interests as political subjects oppressed and exploited by class society.

While we draw heavily on the experience of the historical anarchist movement, we do not feel the need to fit ourselves neatly into any particular anarchist tendency, and much less into any particular form of organisation. Therefore we are not, for example, anarcho-syndicalists: while there is much to be learned from the thought and praxis of anarcho-syndicalism, syndicalism is an approach developed for conditions of work and life very different from those we find in Birmingham today. Even as our theory and tactics are strongly influenced by the Organisational Platform of the Dielo Truda Group, neither do we consider ourselves “platformists” – platformism is an organisational strategy from a different time, and the anarchist movement in the UK today faces some different challenges than those which the Platform was written to address. The task for contemporary anarchists is to develop strategies and ideas that deal incisively with the conditions of today, drawing as much or as little as is required on the ideas we inherit from the past.

RAG is not affiliated with any national or international federation. This is not due to a fundamental opposition to these organisations; federations of anarchists have been and continue to be very useful in facilitating anarchist activity and the development of anarchist ideas, and we have worked with and likely will continue to work with national-level anarchist organisations.

Nevertheless in the situation in which we find ourselves today, we appreciate the autonomy and flexibility that independence provides. In particular, there are a handful of areas of the country with an active and vibrant anarchist “scene,” but Birmingham – the UK’s second city – is not one of them. Part of our task as we see it is to foster stronger connections between the disparate handfuls of anarchists that do very much exist in our city, and develop our revolutionary potential together. This local focus is a task well-suited to our level of organisational capacity, and is our priority, but we are willing to co-operate on wider campaigns in concert with other groups should an appropriate opportunity arise.

3.3. How is our group structured and organised along anarchist lines?

RAG is organised non-hierarchically; we have no leader. Decisions are made collectively: by consensus where possible, and by majority vote where consensus cannot be reached. In such situations, the extent to which an individual is expected to abide by a group decision which they opposed is to be decided according to the specifics of the situation, under presumption of good faith. Individuals are not expected to “toe the party line”: within the bounds of RAG’s aims and principles, we value ideological heterogeneity, because it’s only through debate and discussion that we develop and refine our ideas and understanding. Therefore in interactions with other groups and individuals, none of us are expected to abdicate the responsibility to think for ourselves by simply repeating RAG’s position; equally, we do not claim to speak on behalf of the whole organisation except where that responsibility has been specifically appointed. Tasks are delegated by the group, and responsibilities are assigned for as limited a term as the situation allows; no appointment as “chair,” for example, lasts longer than the duration of a single meeting. Where possible, everybody ought to be capable of filling any role, as we are a small organisation whose activity does not rely on very many specialised skills, and it is disadvantageous to rely to heavily on any one individual.

The autonomy to think, speak, and act for ourselves allows us, and by extension RAG, to act and react more quickly and more flexibly. By making decisions collectively we ensure that everyone who is affected by a decision is able to directly affect its outcome, and by choosing not to encode positions of authority into our organisation we limit the influence any one member can exert. Even the most well-informed and well-meaning of us, if expected to act as a director or a president, could not help but exert a stifling influence on the group, its activity, and on the political development of everybody involved. It is, of course, possible to exercise undue influence informally, but at present we are a small enough organisation for us as individuals to check and balance each other. Similarly, we are small enough that despite the claims often made of the inefficiency of non-hierarchical organisation, it is a simple matter to consciously avoid these problems (in addition to putting in place structural aids such as a designated “chair” responsible for keeping meetings short and on topic).

Our “membership” is, at present, “semi-formal.” We have no formal membership requirements or membership dues, yet neither do we operate as a free-for-all where anyone is invited to organising and planning meetings. “Membership,” such as it is, is on a case-by case basis, and we do not actively recruit. While all (with the exception of police officers and the like) are welcome at our public meetings, we are only looking to invite individuals to be a part of RAG who, in

our interactions at these meetings, have demonstrated a clear and principled alignment with our aims and principles based on a robust and deep understanding, and who have expressed a keenness to become more involved with our activity. These are the only criteria: we enthusiastically welcome comrades of all races, genders, and backgrounds; and, within the limits set by our aims and principles, we welcome ideological diversity and the influences of many different schools of thought. We are not, however, looking to grow the organisation for its own sake; we would rather be few in number but with ideological clarity and unity of purpose. If we were to grow significantly larger than at present, this section would have to be revised and a more formal and legible process put in place.

3.4. What strategies and tactics do we use or seek to use to build towards anarchist communism?

The scope for revolutionary activity in the UK is limited by the conditions of the day. Most saliently, the self-organisation of the working class is at a severely low ebb. Many of the most actively-unionised sectors of the workforce are professions such as teachers or doctors, who find themselves in a situation very different from that of the mass of the working class. Other sectors, such as warehouse workers in distribution and logistics, or factory workers find that the unions where they exist are completely ineffective vehicles for building class power – that is, where they aren’t openly hostile to it. The individual situations of most of RAG’s membership do not easily lend themselves to, say, workplace unionisation drives, though we would be keen to support this kind of activity wherever possible.

The focus of our activity at this time, therefore, is on education – both of ourselves and of the wider class. To this end, we host two public meetings each month: one in which we read and discuss an anarchist or communist text, contemporary or historical, and the other in which a speaker delivers a lead-off on a topic from current events, followed by open discussion. These events are publicised online on our website, facebook, and instagram. Going forward, in accordance with our intention to engage with the working class in Birmingham and with other local anarchists, we plan to broaden our reach through posterage, stickering, and through contact with other anarchist (or “anarchosympathetic”) groups in the area.

As part of our emphasis on internal education, where appropriate we will attend training in organising, direct action, union activity, and the like. In addition, we will attend and support demonstrations and protests in the Birmingham area. We will evaluate opportunities for taking more direct action on the merits and risks of each individual case.

3.5. What is our role within the wider class struggle movement in Birmingham?

We see our role in the wider anarchist and class struggle movement in Birmingham as being primarily to encourage and facilitate the development of these movements. We wish to support any cause that strengthens class struggle in Birmingham, and particularly those involving or organised by other anarchists. To that end, we will devote resources and time to these projects, in a spirit of comradely solidarity: we have no ambition to take over or co-opt any activity whatso-

ever. Indeed, one way in which we hope to support promising campaigns or projects is through sound advice built on experience and clear analysis, and we would always warn against the dangers of allowing autonomous activity to become co-opted by the charity sector, “professional activism,” or – especially – political parties. We value the autonomy of our comrades highly, and have no designs to take control of their work, or to see any other organisation “muscle in” on autonomous activity and drive it into the ground. In no way do we view comrades we work with as potential recruitment fodder, or as marks for selling newspapers, and we will always resist the efforts of organisations which do not show the same respect.

The extent of the support we will be able to provide is dependent on the individual nature of a project, campaign, or movement. We will prioritise those where our support is most likely to make a significant positive difference; those where our involvement will foster connection and good relations between anarchists in Birmingham; and those where we are able to effectively provide reliable support. By necessity, our activity is limited to the Birmingham area, though we are happy to sign our name to national or international statements or letters where we find ourselves in agreement, and we are not opposed to becoming part of a “network” of aligned autonomous groups working together on a larger campaign where we feel this fits in with our overall strategy as outlined in this document.

3.6. What will this programme lead to?

In addition to the level of activity described above, we have both immediate and longer-term plans to expand our activity. In the short term, we will expand our outreach into “physical space” with posters and stickers. These stickers are to serve a “propaganda” purpose, featuring phrases and imagery chosen to catch the interest of other anarchists and fellow travellers with whom we’re not yet in contact, and to provoke thought in members of the working class who are unfamiliar with anarchism and communism. Furthermore we want to continue to work with and support the projects of the anarchist groups with whom we are in contact, and to be available to assist with expanding this activity where possible.

We expect conditions for the working class in Birmingham to continue to worsen over the coming decades, so it is of utmost importance that anarchists are ready, with strong organisation and clear analysis, to deal with the upcoming challenges. Robust mutual aid networks, therefore, are an area we will look to support where they exist, and to develop where they don’t yet, over the next few years. To counteract the fragmentation of the contemporary anarchist movement, in the longer term we hope to work together with as many Birmingham anarchists as possible to organise a homegrown Birmingham anarchist book fair. This would bring anarchists together in fruitful dialogue both in the event itself and in the collaboration to make it happen, as well as strengthening Birmingham’s presence in the UK anarchist “scene.” This would also allow those who are “anarcho-curious” to come and see what the various Birmingham anarchist groups offer. Like the book fairs undertaken in other towns and cities, we would be open to hosting talks and workshops from other groups (including those not from Birmingham) to build solidarity among comrades in Birmingham.

At present, articles on anarchist theory and analysis of current events are published intermittently on our website. We intend to increase the rate of publication, in large part by turning every open discussion meeting lead-off into a published article. Eventually our aim is to be able to print

and distribute a free quarterly paper, including pieces from comrades from outside of RAG. We may also consider reprinting historical anarchist texts that we believe to speak pertinently to the political, social, and economic situation in Birmingham today.

3.7. Conclusion

It is evident that increasing pressure will be put on the working class in the coming months and years from the capitalist class, increases in rent, rising food prices, job redundancies and social welfare cuts will plunge many more working class people into poverty. As class struggle anarchist communists, it is our responsibility to offer a clear alternative for a better society free from the oppression and misery we face under the state and capitalism, to be achieved through persistent direct action, mutual aid and solidarity among the working class in Birmingham. Our role is not to lead, but to support and aid the struggles of the working class for better conditions while showing all that the suffering we face is not normal! As such we will continue to strive for revolutionary change, using our theory to guide our action, struggles and practice within the second city.

In solidarity, Revolutionary Anarchist Group (RAG)
Programme approved on the 28/03/2025

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