

# Organise!

*Organise!* is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). *Organise!* is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and initiate debate on ideas not normally covered by agitational papers.

At our recent conference, the Anarchist Federation decided to bring *Organise!* out three times a year. On top of producing the monthly *Resistance*, this will involve a major effort on our behalf. We therefore positively solicit your contributions. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first.

Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our Aims and Principles can leave much open to debate. As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective view of the Anarchist Federation. We hope that their publication will produce responses from readers and spur the debate on.

The next issue of *Organise!* will be out in February 2002. Articles and letters for inclusion should be sent to us by 8 December.

All contributions for the next issue should be sent to: AF, c/o Box 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. It would help if articles could be sent either typed or on disc (PC or MAC format). Alternatively, articles and letters can be emailed to us at: [anarchistfederation@bigfoot.com](mailto:anarchistfederation@bigfoot.com).

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You can also E-mail us at [anarchistfederation@bigfoot.com](mailto:anarchistfederation@bigfoot.com)

**Organise! index:** A list of the articles, reviews and letters from *Organise!* issues No 14-No 43. Send a Press Fund donation payable to AF, to AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX.

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# Can 'anti-capitalism' overthrow capitalism?

## *A critical analysis of the anti-globalisation movement*

The images of thousands of protesters doing battle with the forces of the state on the streets of Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa have enthused and revitalised revolutionary politics. Many 'seasoned' anarchists were as surprised as anyone else to see the black flags proudly on display and to read that this new wave of activists called themselves 'anarchists'. So it is quite understandable that those in the anarchist movement in Britain have thrown themselves in to the 'anti-capitalist'/'anti-globalisation' movement, either travelling to events around Europe or else seeking to organising similar protests here around May Day. There was already a tradition of these imaginative direct action tactics being used by the environmental movement in road protests and Reclaim the Streets.

However, we need to be cautious in our enthusing over such staged events. We have been here before, with similar large-scale and militant protests over the Vietnam War. And capitalism is still here. This article will look at the positive contribution the anti-capitalist events have made. Then it will discuss the limitations and inherent dangers that also exist within the movement.

There are a number of distinctive features of the current anti-capitalist movement that are in the process of transforming revolutionary politics. One is the fact that anarchism is seen as one of the main political forces behind the actions. Whilst anarchism has always had an important presence in countries like France, Italy and Spain, this has not been the case in Britain or North America. We are seeing a new generation of people coming into politics. Instead of joining the Leninist and Trotskyist groups, they are gravitating towards anarchism.

### **The SWP and the 'Anarchist Express'**

The Socialist Workers Party, the largest Trot group in Britain, has realised this and has cleverly disguised the true nature of its front organisation Globalise Resistance. They bring out a bulletin which they call *Resist*, oddly like the AF's *Resistance*. On their website they have links to anarchist groups. They seem to allow the image they have of being anarchist to continue in the press. The train they organised to go to Genoa was called, in the press, the Anarchist Express.

The SWP was forced to jump on the bandwagon of May Day, fitting their activities in with the overall plan of the day which had been organised by anarchists.

In France, Trotskyist groups such as the SWP-controlled Socialisme par en bas (Socialism from Below) and the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) were so worried about the influence of the anarchists that they formed an official alliance with the aim of controlling the committee that was set up to plan for Genoa. All of this shows the leading role that anarchists are playing in setting the agenda for political activity. The press has, of course, helped this process by their obsession with anarchists around the May Day events. Everyone in Britain will have at least heard the word. This fact offers us enormous opportunities.

Another positive aspect of the protests has been





the use of the term 'anti-capitalist'. Protests in the past have been anti-imperialist, anti-war or focused on one aspect of capitalism. Now, there is much more awareness that every issue is tied up with capitalism. In addition, environmental and Third World campaigns have been integrated into the anti-capitalist perspective.

The protests have also highlighted the importance of international resistance to what is a global system. This is the first time that people from many countries have come to organise and act together on such a large scale. This common activity will help lay the foundations for more co-ordinated international action, crucial in the face of co-ordinated international oppression. Organisers have made the most of the internet to set up alternative sources of information. Initiatives like 'indymedia' can help lay the foundations for a permanent, international, alternative information network.

Lastly, the protests have been energetic, militant and challenging to the system. People have not allowed themselves to be channelled into the traditional formulaic demonstrations.

A number of different tactics have been used with creativity and imagination. They have incorporated a

wide variety of tactics including meetings and discussions, non-violent carnival events and direct action against the police, allowing people to participate in the protests in the way that suits their political perspective and personal situation. The end result is that the state, and the more reformist elements of the movement, have been taken completely by surprise.

However, we cannot afford to be complacent and to continue uncritically to organise more of the same. There are several serious problems with these anti-capitalist protests that could be a major hindrance to the overthrow of capitalism, the state and the creation of a non-hierarchical, anarchist communist society.

The inherent dangers in the movement relate to the issue of power. If we are to create a new society, we need to get rid of all forms of power. This includes economic, state, social, cultural and personal power. There is no point in exchanging one form of oppression for another. Anarchists have always recognised that we must be continually on guard against new élites. We also need to think carefully about how we organise. If we organise now in a hierarchical way, this hierarchy will stay with us.

### Body shopping in Seattle

It is apparent to most that the reformist elements of the anti-capitalist movement are not interested in really getting rid of capitalism. For them, the problem is globalisation and the fact that this makes it very difficult for nation-states to control what happens in their countries. It is the reformist groups, non-governmental organisations and a hodge-podge of others who first got the idea to protest directly at WTO and G8 summits.

The Seattle counter summit saw a number of 'celebrities' such as Anita Roddick and Naomi Klein dominate the media. Therefore, we need to consider carefully the implication of focusing our efforts on such a target. There is an unstated assumption that power lies in these summits. It is also assumed that these 'democratically-elected' leaders will respond to the pressure of the protests. It is a continuation of strategies that all reformist organisations use — lobby the government. If you present reasoned and well-thought out arguments, show that you have a lot of support via petitions and letters, then the leaders will see sense and agree to your demands.

This strategy has never worked and will certainly not work in a system

where power most certainly does not lie primarily with those who attend the summits. The only thing it does achieve is give publicity to an alternative élite who will only implement the same sorts of policies if they became part of the state apparatus.

### Out of focus

However, the politics of the more revolutionary and anarchist elements is also unclear. The focus at the summits has been the abolition of debt and the evils of global capitalism. The May Day protest in London also lacked a clear idea on what it meant to be anti-capitalist. Some of the slogans were quite incomprehensible. And why focus on Oxford Street? Are we saying that by disrupting shopping we will bring capitalism to its knees? The problem in both cases is there is a lack of explicit recognition that capitalism is a system of production that exists here in the West as in Indonesia or Nigeria. Targetting finance capital, banking institutions and trade agreements is not getting to the root of the problem, which is the production process itself.

So why do anarchists think it's important to protest at the summits? Do they think that the likes of Blair and Bush will listen to them? Do they think that they will be able to actually get into the summit, attack the leaders and thus abolish capitalism? I would hope that people are not that naive. But then what do we think we are accomplishing?

Class struggle anarchists, like us in the Anarchist Federation, believe that in order to overthrow capitalism and create a new society, you need to organise in the workplace and the community, at the points where capitalism and the state directly impinge on our lives. The world summits are only a symbolic representation of the power of capitalism and the state. The power of capitalism is located in the way it structures and controls every aspect of our lives — what work we do and how we do it, the way our communities are organised, what we consume and do in

## *The world summits are only a symbolic representation of the power of capitalism and the state.*

our leisure time, and even the food we eat and the air we breathe. This is where we must focus our efforts. There is a real danger that these spectacular and exciting events replace our efforts to build up mass working class resistance to direct capitalist exploitation and oppression. They might give people a temporary feeling of strength, but once it's over, we are all back to the everyday struggle of living as best we can under capitalism. Unless we bring this feeling of strength and optimism into the more mundane political activity at work and in the community, then the protests have been completely in vain.

The problem is that ordinary political activity does not give the same buzz and can be extremely tedious. Therefore, people may be tempted to think only of the next 'fix' and start planning for the next big event, completely forgetting about building a mass working class movement. There are certainly enough students and 'activists' to keep things

going for a while without having any relationship to the working class. But this is a dead-end strategy if the goal is dealing a serious blow to capitalism.

Another issue is the way the movement is dependent on the power of the media. Without the media coverage, which gives participants the feeling that they have actually had an impact, there would not have been the increasing interest nor the motivation for such large mobilisations. Organisers may not actually admit this, but the actions could have been much smaller if the media had ignored them. This is a dangerous development. Instead of getting our message across directly to other working class people, we have given up control of information to the capitalist media. The alternative media on the internet is a positive development, but it does not reach many people outside the movement itself. The majority of the working class will get their ideas about what is anarchism from the capitalist press, which is hardly going to win people over to our ideas. In fact, it could be argued that the anti-capitalist movement allows its whole orientation to be defined by what the media thinks is politics. Instead of relating to the daily, normal conflict against capital, it chooses to relate to other media events, such as these summits.

There is another danger with the anti-capitalist protests that has



become much more apparent with the killing of a protester in Genoa. Though people may not think they can actually influence the world leaders at these summits, they do think they can take on the police, the armed wing of the state. In fact, it is the battles with the police that are the main goal of some the more militant protesters. It is obvious why the police are a target. The protesters cannot get at the real enemy because of the police and paramilitary protection. We can't get at capitalism directly, but the police are there. So, attacking the police is a way of attacking capitalism and the state. And there have been some notable successes. When demonstrators get the best of the police through mass action, it is a moment for celebration. However, the focus on the police is also leading the movement into a problematic diversion. Firstly, it is easy enough to forget that the police are only the armed wing of the state and not capitalism itself. Though a revolution will necessarily involve taking on the armed defenders of the

state and capitalism, there is much more to be done in terms of creating a mass movement before we will be seriously ready for this task. In addition, we would hope, as has happened in other revolutionary situations, that the lower ranks of the police and army actually join the revolution. A revolution will be won more through the power of new ideas and consciousness and the creation of new social and political structures than through the actual physical confrontation. If the revolution is purely a military one, we can never win.

Gothenburg and Genoa showed tragically that the police are quite willing to kill to maintain their control of the streets and to protect their masters. When protests get to the point that they even temporarily undermine their power, they will do what they have been trained to do. We cannot expect anything else.

### Where to now?

We therefore need to carefully consider where we go from here. There are several options that different people will be looking at. It is crucial that anarchists choose the option that will help us to grow in influence as part of a strong working class movement. Hopefully we can learn from the mistakes made during the sixties and seventies.

One of the options is that people will think that bigger protests will make the difference. If only more people would come to the events and be prepared to stand their ground to the police, using more effective tactics e.g. protective clothing, then we can get the better of the police. There are two problems with this option. One, we need to get the people to the protests. This means that we need to be part of a much bigger movement within our own country. Such a movement does not just appear but needs to be built. This takes time. If all the time is spent organising the protest itself, then there is not enough time to build up an anti-capitalist movement within the working class. In addition, these protests are necessarily

*If the revolution is purely a military one, we can never win.*

exclusive. Not everyone can afford to travel around Europe. The next G8 meeting is in Canada, which is even more prohibitive. But even if we organise protests in Britain, it is still a type of political activity that is open only to a certain group of people. Knowing that the police will react viciously, many people would be reluctant to come. The kind of person who tends to be the stereotypical protester is a young male, probably a student or ex-student who has adopted a certain alternative style. We cannot build a movement on the image of the lone heroic protester hurling a bottle at the police.

Secondly, even if we do get the people there, past experience has now shown that the police are prepared to go to any lengths to control it. Not only do they have the physical force, they have their informants and agents provocateurs. They will always be able to find out what is going on with the open style of the meetings. Police action will take its toll on the morale of many. Arrest, the threat of arrest, prison sentences, beatings, serious injuries and the death of comrades and friends can seriously demoralise the movement. Instead of organising and reaching out into the working class, we will be bogged down in supporting comrades through what could be very difficult times. This does not mean that we can never win in any confrontation with the police. It only means that we need to rethink our strategy. 'Street fighting' is not something that can be gone into lightly. The Wombles had some success in breaking through police lines at the May Day action (see June *Resistance*). However, whether or not direct confrontation with the police will be effective depends on a whole variety of factors, such as numbers on both sides, where the action is taken

## Resistance!

*Resistance* is our monthly news sheet.

Our widespread distribution of *Resistance* means more and more people are coming into contact with revolutionary anarchist ideas. This is at a time when the Labour Party, the Trotskyist and Stalinist left are spiralling rapidly downwards into decline.

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place, the degree of support from the local community and an analysis of expected police tactics. Taking on the police is not a game. There has to be a purpose behind it and not be done just for the sake of it. The Wombles' success on May Day is open to this criticism. It was obvious for some time that the police were preparing a trap.

Many people knew that, including many of the organisers, and quite correctly stayed clear. The Wombles, on the other hand, seemed to consciously put themselves into the trap so they could break out again! Time would have been better spent helping people to avoid the trap in the first place.

The drawbacks of the previous option may lead some to consider another strategy. This is what happened in the seventies when people got demoralised by their lack of success in challenging the state and capitalism. They saw how the state was ultimately able to control all mass protests. They witnessed the death of protesters whilst the ruling class never suffered. If it is impossible to take on the state by mass street protests then the only solution was to go underground and attack secretly. The Baadher Meinhof group in Germany, the Weathermen in the US and the Red Brigades in Italy were all the result of this way of thinking. No more open meetings that could be infiltrated, no

more battling the police with bottles when the police had guns. They would even up the odds. Though many would not shed a tear for those who were the victims of this strategy, the end result was a disaster for the building of any non-authoritarian, working class movement. The ruling class may have got a bit of a fright, but were never seriously threatened. These groups proved easy enough to infiltrate and soon were all in prison. For example, 300 Weathermen staged one last battle with the police, seething with anger and wanting revenge for all the atrocities. The first day half the group were arrested. The next day the other half went back and they also met defeat. A heroic gesture perhaps, but needlessly futile. They all ended up in prison or went underground from where they eventually disappeared from any political activity. Laws were passed that severely curtailed the activities of all sorts of political groups. If some people decide to turn to this strategy as a result of feeling helpless in the face of the power of the state, there is no reason to believe that the end result would not be the same.

### Elites and hierarchies

However, there is another major problem with both of the two options, which itself comes from the whole nature of these anti-capitalist protests. They lead to the formation of new

élites and new hierarchies and therefore go directly against the goal of an anarchist communist society. With small, armed struggle groups, it is easy to see how they are élitist. There is no attempt to be open and involve people. They feel that they are conducting an armed struggle on behalf of the working class. They are not part of the working class, but apart and above it.

The anti-capitalist movement may be very different, yet they are also prone to the development of hierarchies and new élites. Firstly, if only some people are prepared to take on the police, then with the focus on street protests, it is these people who will be seen as more important, despite attempts to say all activities that take place during these events are important. This is partly the result of the fact that this is what gets all the media attention, so that we ourselves think this is where the most important action is taking place. Meanwhile, all the work that has gone into organising the events, the network of communication that is being built up, the experience gained in self-organisation, the work to publicise what's behind the protests to the local community, is overshadowed by the more 'exciting' action. We can see this with the formation of the Wombles in the build-up to May Day. The press made such a fuss about this 'dangerous' group, that they are seen by many as the group to be with in order to be at the centre of anti-capitalist action. However, there is an important element missing from the Wombles' approach. The strategy was taken from Ya Basta in Italy. Before the actually street fighting group was formed, years of work had gone into building up social centres, such that the Ya Basta could at least claim support amongst sections of working class communities. The Wombles seem to think that they can skip this important stage. In addition, despite the rhetoric, this type of group is by definition élitist. Y Basta itself is a Marxist group, not exactly a model for non-hierarchal organisation. Participation is limited to those who



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feel comfortable with direct contact with the police. If this is the priority, then a whole layer of people are excluded. In this model, political activity exists in street protests, something that can be done as a hobby, a form of 'extreme sport'. Of course physical fighting and confrontation will be a necessary part of any revolutionary struggle. This is unavoidable given the power of the state. However, the point is not to elevate this type of contribution to the movement above the less 'glamorous'. Doing legal support, organising the websites, writing leaflets and just simply talking to people in the course of one's everyday life may not make for such animated conversations in the pub afterwards, but they are just as important, if not more important.

Secondly, though all the anti-capitalist events are organised by 'collectives' and claim to be open and accountable. They are not. They are classic examples of what Jo Freeman called the 'Tyranny of Structurelessness' (pamphlet reprinted by AF — write for a copy). The real decisions are made outside meetings by informal groups made up of the people who may have been around longer or are prepared to put in more time. This problem has always plagued anarchist groups and the only solution is to have a clear structure that might appear bureaucratic and counter to the ethos, but in the end is more accountable and can involve more people than informal affinity groups. This problem is compounded by a certain 'activist' mentality. Organising these protests involves an enormous amount of time and effort. This might be bearable for people

whose social life revolves around the movement and/or who don't have a full-time job or family commitments. So, again, only certain people can have any real input into the 'collective'. However, even the most dedicated activists get burned-out. Some of these people will be permanently lost to the movement.

### Takeover and manipulation

In addition, a lack of structure and clear political perspective can open us up to take-over and manipulation by authoritarian Leninist groups. In France, we have already seen how the Trotskyists tried to dominate the movement. In Britain, the May Day collective had to endure numerous attempts by Trots to manipulate the meetings to suit their own agenda.

Ultimately, the problems of the anti-capitalist movement lie in the fact that it exists in isolation from a working class movement that is embedded in the workplace and the community. Without this grounding, it is far too easy for well-meaning and dedicated activists to create a hierarchical and élitist movement, substituting themselves for the working class. The end result is that, rather than building a mass working class movement, the movement just disappears. Once people get a taste of power and authority, it is not so difficult to make the next step and move on to a career in the Labour Party, local government or even within the bastions of capitalism itself. It has all happened before. Horst Mahler from the Baader Meinhof is now a leading fascist politician, Cohn-Bendit is now in the government, numerous bosses, media personalities and trade union bureaucrats have passed through the ranks of the movement, either Trotskyist or anarchist. And if people don't sell out, they just burn out. If all the people who have passed through the anarchist movement alone were still active, we would be considerably larger than we are now. Resistance to capitalism cannot be a hobby or an alternative lifestyle. It cannot be something you do whilst a student or before settling down to a career. It has

to be part of your whole life and that means part of a movement that challenges capitalism where it exists in our lives and not just in once-off spectacular protests.

The third option, which is the only way forward if we are to build a truly effective and durable anarchist movement in this country, is to change our focus. All the energy and creativity that has gone into the organisation of the 'big events' should be channelled into local organising where direct contact can be made with the wider working class. This has started to happen in Italy with the links made to striking metal workers. In any case, the anarchist movement in Italy has always been much more embedded in the working class. In Quebec, the protests were immensely helped by the support of automobile workers who came to support. In Britain, though our links with the wider working class are minimal, we do have a history of such involvement in the way that RTS worked with the Liverpool dockers. The M11 campaign included both outside activists and the local community. At the same time, we need to keep the national and international perspective that is a key feature of the anti-capitalist movement, meeting with others to share ideas and discuss strategies, rather than just retreating into localism which has always been a problem of the anarchist movement. We need to avoid the temptation to seek revenge on the police for the outrages they have committed against us. We cannot win if that is the main thrust of our activity. However, we will still need to be prepared to confront the police. For, in any struggle we are in which challenges capitalism, the police will be used to stop us. But at least if we are in the process of working in a local area or workplace, we should not be so isolated as when protesting in the centre of cities, cut off in so many ways from the local population. By building up our movement, spreading anarchist ideas throughout the working class, we will become strong in a way that is both more effective and non-hierarchical. Our day will come.

# *The black bloc:* **Fighting back**

*The pieces below are edited individual comments from the interesting Autopsy discussion list at [aut-op-sy@lists.village.virginia.edu](mailto:aut-op-sy@lists.village.virginia.edu). They are deliberately anonymous. Following is a reply from a member of the black bloc and in the shaded boxes running alongside, our own view of the black bloc phenomenon.*

THE BLACK BLOC is not a very precise label. Talk of the multitude avoids political responsibility for actions and tactics that seem to lose political content but which have political consequences. Summit sieges are a less than bright idea, the very opposite of direct action. The 'sieges' remain on a symbolic level whatever the degree of militancy. I hoped Genoa would turn away from abstract protests against world capital and towards direct

action. But that would have meant that the most 'militant' protesters removing themselves from centre stage and listening to other voices. What is evolving is an agenda that unites liberals and 'militants':

"Serve the people!", "Act and decide on behalf of the people", "in the best interest of the people". What the black bloc or summit sieges have to do with an anarchist or social revolutionary perspective, escapes me.

THE BLACK BLOC originated in the German autonomist movement in the 1980s. In Germany, the autonomists often excluded the majority of workers as complicit in imperialist exploitation and oppression; they thought it more radical to build an anti-fascist core of resistance than build mass struggles. I thought that the black bloc was a good tactic despite its shortcomings. On the negative side, wearing a uniform must have had internal repercussions, such

as reinforcing conformity and militaristic tendencies. Externally the threatening appearance of a tight group of masked people helped keep up the divide between autonomists and other workers. In a situation where demos were often banned and attacked by cops and where it was necessary to physically disrupt groups of fascists, a black bloc could add a lot to the defensive and offensive capabilities of a demo.



Skip to Seattle 1999. In hindsight, the window smashing black bloc was an important step in building a mass anti-capitalist movement. Many people who couldn't or didn't want to passively subject themselves to tear gas and

beatings had another form of direct action at their disposal. Although some people were probably scared away from the movement, many more joined it when they saw that inflicting damage to the corporations was possible with collective action. After Genoa the black bloc has come up for a lot of criticism. Although the tactic was useful in Germany to defend demonstrations and in Seattle to broaden tactics and attract many who want to damage big companies, it seems to have been counter-productive in Genoa due to the more advanced level of struggle there.

UNDERSTANDING THAT THE black bloc is not a monolith but a variety of

## **What we think**

The argument about German autonomists deliberately excluding workers and orientating their struggle away from them is interesting because many people in the anti-capitalist and direct action movement share this attitude: workers make and consume the things that trap the 'rest of us', they are 'unaware', unwilling to give up their standard of living to save the planet. All forms of economic activity are a snare, ultimately purposeless and therefore legitimate targets but their workers are not natural allies. The new movement, in these islands at least, does engage with people on the issues (cut-backs, closures, pollution, discrimination and so on) but not as workers, people facing a unique form of exploitation and in a unique position to end it. This is, in the AF's view, a major weakness but not something we can't put right. Our struggles and ideas must follow workers out of the factories into their communities and homes and must move with workers as they leave their homes and enter the factory. The 'thread' of exploitation and domination is actually one, though made up of many strands.

It's interesting also that the perceived tactical advantages of the black bloc, its cohesion, discipline, ability to act both offensively and defensively and its relative mobility does not count for much against its perceived maleness, its exclusivity, lack of tactical subtlety or flexibility and its (negative) effect on both demonstration and the state response to it. At the same time, unless you are a 'peace fairy' or anti-capitalist stilt-walker, there is not a lot else you can do if you don't just want to march up and down, back and forth.

Some view the black bloc as

**What we think** *continued*

selfish, egotistical and because of this. Dangerous, negative. The member of the black bloc writing below claims an individual's right to act alone or together with others in any way she or he feels is necessary. The misunderstanding may arise because some writers view this individualism as egotistical, irrational whereas the black blocker herself views her choice as a profoundly rational one, appropriate to both her needs and the times. She has arrived at this view through an intellectual process and yet the black bloc is seen as possessing a profoundly anti-intellectual 'culture' and 'philosophy'.

The AF rejects the notion that all violent protest, even a 'summit siege', is ritualistic or symbolic. Within every violent moment there is the potential for revolution, dependent on the actual conditions surrounding and informing it. It is true that it is unlikely that violent protest will bring about the collapse of global capitalism, or even a temporary paralysis or loss of confidence, unless it is, like capitalism, global in scope, permanent and highly focused.

This can only occur when protest is a product of actual and direct exploitation and oppression here and now. Only when economic and social conditions where we live drive us to violent protest (and, with us, large sections of the working class) does direct action become revolutionary.

The problem is that most criticism of the black bloc comes from classical 'leftist' groups and perspectives who rightly argue that mass class struggle is the revolution in embryo, but who have no means to provoke or maintain such a struggle, or from groups seeking only the reform or evolution of capitalism towards a benign communality and who feel

affinity groups who can adopt different tactics, I still think we should discuss the nature and politics of 'created confrontation' with the state in a demonstration setting. I am not suggesting we scrap the idea, but that we try to think about when it works and when it doesn't and try to raise the political level of those discussions. When do we decide to engage in direct confrontations with the police? Do we consider issues like the balance of forces, the intent of the demonstration, the presence of children, etc? I have seen people link up and promote fights in the worst possible situations (out-numbered, near the children in a march, etc). I have also seen a lack of respect for the rest of the demonstration. Being in an 'autonomous' group does not mean we renounce respect for and responsibility for others. To act in a way which merely pleases us is no less individualistic and egotistical because there happen to be a group of us. But I have also seen this kind of action light a fire in a demonstration and make it catch a powerful dynamic. What is the political end of direct action? How do we conceive of direct action? Direct action which believes that a small group will 'radicalise' the demonstration by forcing confrontations is politically reactionary because it is a kind of politics of terrorism, guerilla warfare, heroism or Blanquism. It is substitutionist in the extreme. It sets up the authority of a group of 'professional street fighters' who 'teach' us what the state is about in action.

When does direct action become truly mass action, and what do we mean by mass action? On this idea of direct mass action, what questions are raised about sustained organising and discussion, not just activism or militant-ism? I think that the black bloc lends itself to political non-discussion and failure to engage outside of affinity groups. I have seen nothing to convince me that most of this crowd is not interested in politics and ideas but in 'action'.

This addiction to action, which is as bad as perpetual theorising, tends to

involve a refusal to raise political questions, a kind of hardcore anti-intellectualism. So how do we raise the political level? What kind of other political work is necessary? What about political activity at the point of production? How do we help draw political connections between the workplace, the neighborhood, and the demonstrations? One critical issue is the disjunction between working class communities of colour and the very white (in the rich countries) anti-globalisation movement. Is there a point to attacking small shops, cars, etc? Why attack a car and encourage the cops to start on you, when there is by no means any critical mass to offer protection against a large number of police? When is the right time to use violence at this point in the movement? Of course we are right to use violence when attacked by the police. But random acts of violence seem futile. I don't want some white rich kid trashing some working class person's car. I also don't see the value of trashing the neighbourhood diner unless the workers want to do it. I think it is worth pressuring businesses that support local politicians, but I have also seen small businesses provide support for workers on strike, for radical events, etc. In other words, are we attacking the spectacle by spectacular attacks or are we just parading our own 'radical chic'? This goes along with other problems with black bloc tactics. It promotes a kind of patriarchal, macho model of direct confrontation that leaves many people out. I think we should explore the politics of this or that kind of organising and to think through each situation politically. I am for promoting increasing political consciousness and discussion, not cutting it off with mindless activism or militantism, which values a person's activity by their ability to participate in direct confrontations. It is apparent our enemies are trying to (1) cast the movement as a bunch of violent troublemakers in order to destroy our public image and (2) trying to split the movement by blaming the violence on the black bloc. The question is whether

such acts of violence serve our purposes or if they ultimately help our enemies.

MY PARTNER WAS at the underpass in Genoa when the white overalls march was attacked. There was already a riot going on, burnt-out cars in the road and black bloc-ers fighting with the police. Some white overalls were shouting for people to clear the way so that they could engage with the police, but at that moment tear gas was fired and the police attacked with a level of violence which was perhaps more than the white overall tactic could handle. We've got to keep in mind how messy these things always are. She couldn't discern any split in the movement, from where she was it seemed very much that the different tactics blended into one. She's talked about how non-violent it was even in the midst of rioting, non-violent in the sense of co-operation and common purpose between protesters not non-violence towards the police.

Afterwards, when she'd got back, she could make sense of it and see how the black bloc tactic had interfered with the white overalls. But then again all the different tactics are based on the level of violence the police are prepared to use and it seems they were quite prepared to keep upping the ante. These things are messy. Thousands of people speaking different languages, from different traditions, with different levels of experience of these situations. Unless you've got a definite plan of what to do, which doesn't get fucked up by events on the day, people improvise

based on what's going on in their immediate area, without a clear idea of what's going on in the rest of the city.

Anyway after being dispersed by the tear gas she ended up back in the Ya Basta bloc, she and her friend the only people in a group of thousands that didn't have body armour, gas masks etc. This meant they had to just

*The most important thing is to keep the movement together and communicating with each other.*

help out where they could, doing up gas masks for people with thick gloves on, etc, but were excluded from the front line by lack of equipment. This does highlight a problem with the white overall tactic, the inability to spontaneously join in except in limited ways. You can spontaneously join in rioting, although if not part of an affinity group you are more likely to get cornered and battered than the more organised contingent. I do think that if the white overall tactic had been shown to work in Genoa it would have been a valuable and creative leap forward for the movement. I can imagine the frustrations when it got fucked up partly by bad tactics by the black bloc, but once again I'd say these things are messy. The most important thing is to keep the movement together and communicating with each other.

### What we think *continued*

'their' project is being threatened by possible backlash and clampdown. What they fail to realise is that their ends are not those of the black bloc, who have a truly revolutionary society in mind, and that their goals are achievable only in the context of the (inevitably violent and complete) destruction of capitalism.

The black bloc does not try to draw non-violent protesters into its ranks nor does it try to make all protests violent. In Seattle, Prague, Goteborg and Genoa, tens of thousands of protesters expressed themselves peacefully and meaningfully and generated exactly the same levels of political pressure and media coverage as if the black bloc had stayed away — that is to say, none at all. The measure of their success is that we protested peacefully about Vietnam, and Chechens are still dying, we marched against the Gulf War, but Nato bombed Serbia, and sat down against car culture and still our cities strangle and babies die. The bloc is not monolithic and consists of individuals claiming an individual's right to act in ways that seems best to them within a collective setting — the very model for an anarchist and free society. Which one of us would dare to say that the levels of violence used by and available to the black bloc is out of proportion to the violence inflicted on the world by capitalism? To win the revolution and create the free society we are going to have to become far more violent and wage war on a far greater scale, the scale of actual war, if we do not ignite the class struggle in workplace, school, factory and street.

The black bloc has added to our repertoire of protest just as RTS and other non-violent direct action have. It has also included many who otherwise would still be inert,

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**What we think** *continued*

angry without knowing why or what at. People who accuse the black bloc of being anti-intellectual or of not having either a political culture or effect are mistaken. Yes, groups that have a culture and philosophy of direct action coupled with both attacks on property and violent self-defence will attract people for whom the adrenalin rush of destruction is critical. But 'leftist', 'political', or 'serious' anarchist groups have their share of negative and (self)-destructive types. And, as the last writer states, many black blockers are highly politically and socially active, the product of years of struggle and repression by the state police. The black bloc tactic is a rational and sensible response to particular situations (where after many defeats our confidence is low, political organisations have decayed, where state and fascist violence is endemic and where there are strong undercurrents of anger and frustration in society). Those who disagree need to understand this: that peaceful protests can only ever bring about temporary reform at the margins. The notion of Gandhian evolution is a fallacy; across the sub-continent whole districts were destroyed, there were numerous rural uprisings and massive military repression, mass arrests, deportations and executions of protestors.

Is violent protest trapped within the Spectacle? Is it a cul-de-sac, leading nowhere except to futile armed struggles or a prison cell? In certain situations, yes. This is more likely to happen when other protestors join in the isolation and containment of violence which is, after all, a symptom of anger and a tactic designed to bring about positive change when all else is failing. When we reject violence, we are doing the bosses' job for them, choking off one potential

**A black bloc viewpoint**

I'm part of a loosely affiliated international group of individuals known as the black bloc. We don't have a party platform, and you don't have to sign anything or go to any meetings to join us. We show up at all kinds of demonstrations, from actions to free Mumia Abu Jamal, to protests against the sanctions in Iraq, and at just about every meeting of international financial and political organisations from the WTO to the G8. Although most anarchists would never wear black bandanas over their faces or break windows at McDonalds, almost all of us are anarchists. Most folks I know who have used black bloc tactics have day jobs working for non-profits. Some are school teachers, labour organisers or students. Some don't have full-time jobs, but instead spend most of their time working for change in their communities. They start urban garden projects and bike libraries; they cook food for Food Not Bombs and other groups. These are thinking and caring folks who, if they did not have radical political and social agendas, would be compared with nuns, monks, and others who live their lives in service. There is a fair amount of diversity in who we are and what we believe. I've known folks in the black bloc who come from as far south as Mexico City and as far north as Montreal. I think that the stereotype is correct that we are mostly young and mostly white, although I wouldn't agree that we are mostly men. The behaviour of black bloc protesters is not associated with women, so reporters often assume we are all guys. People associated with a black bloc may just march with the rest of the group, showing our solidarity with each other and

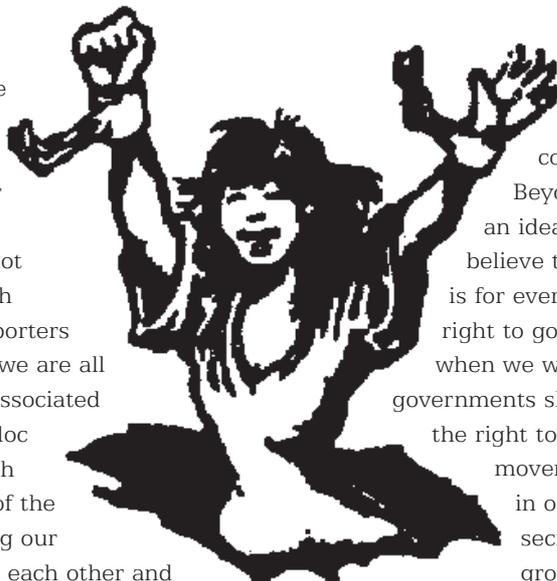
bringing visibility to anarchists, or we may step up the mood of the protest, escalating the atmosphere and encouraging others to ask for more than just reforms to a corrupt system. Spray painting of political messages, destroying property of corporations and creating road blocks out of found materials are all common tactics of a black bloc.

The black bloc is a fairly recent phenomenon, probably first seen in the US in the early '90s and evolving out of protest tactics in Germany in the '80s. The black bloc may be in part a response to the large-scale repression of activist groups by the FBI during the '60s, '70s and '80s. It is impossible at this point to form a radical activist group without the fear of infiltration and disruption by the police, and for some, taking militant direct action in the streets with very little planning and working only with small networks of friends are the only meaningful forms of protest available. Although there is no consensus among us on what we all believe, I think I can safely say that we have a few ideas in common.

The first is the basic anarchist philosophy that we do not need or want governments or laws to decide our actions. Instead, we imagine a society where there is true liberty for all, where work and play are shared by everyone and where those in need are

taken care of by the voluntary and mutual aid of their communities.

Beyond this vision of an ideal society, we believe that public space is for everyone. We have a right to go where we want, when we want and governments should not have the right to control our movements, especially in order to hold secret meetings of groups like the WTO,



which make decisions that affect millions.

We believe that destroying the property of oppressive and exploitative corporations like The Gap is an acceptable and useful protest tactic. We believe that we have the right to defend ourselves when we are in physical danger from tear gas, batons, armoured personnel carriers and other law enforcement technology. We reject the idea that police should be allowed to control our actions at all. Abuse by the police is not only endemic, it is inherent. We live in a society that is racist and homophobic and sexist, and unless that is taken out of our society, it cannot be taken out of the cops who enforce the rules of our society. In an even larger view, we live in a society that has agreed to give some people the right to control what others do. This creates a power imbalance that cannot be remedied even with reforms

## *Militant demonstration and peaceful protest are rarely covered by the media.*

of the police. It is not just that police abuse their power, we believe that the existence of police is an abuse of power. Most of us believe that if cops are in the way of where we want to go or what we want to do, we have a right to confront them directly. Some of us extend this idea to include the acceptability of physically attacking cops. I have to emphasise that this is controversial even within the black bloc, but also explain that many of us believe in armed revolution, and within that context, attacking the cops doesn't seem out of place.

There have been hours of debate in both the mainstream and left-wing press about the black bloc. The mainstream media's current consensus is that the black bloc is bad and extremely dangerous. The progressive media's most common line is that the

black bloc is bad, but at least there aren't many of us. Everyone seems to call black bloc protesters violent. Violence is a tricky concept. I'm not totally clear what actions are violent, and what are not. And when is a violent action considered self defence? I believe that using the word violent to describe breaking the window of a Nike store takes meaning away from the word. Nike makes shoes out of toxic chemicals in poor countries using exploitative labour practices. Then they sell the shoes for vastly inflated prices to poor black kids from the first world. In my view, this takes resources out of poor communities on both sides of the globe, increasing poverty and suffering. I think poverty and suffering could well be described as violent, or at least as creating violence. What violence does breaking a window at Nike Town cause? It makes a loud noise; maybe that is what is considered violent. It creates broken glass, which could hurt people, although most of the time those surrounding the window are only black bloc protesters who are aware of the risks of broken glass. It costs a giant multi-billion dollar corporation money to replace their window. Is that violent? It is true that some underpaid Nike employee will have to clean up a mess, which is unfortunate, but a local glass installer will get a little extra income too. As a protest tactic, the usefulness of property destruction is limited but important. It brings the media to the scene and it sends a message that seemingly impervious corporations are not impervious. People at the protest, and those at home watching on TV, can see that a little brick, in the hands of a motivated individual, can break down a symbolic wall. A broken window at Nike Town is not threatening to people's safety, but I hope it sends a message that I don't just want Nike to improve their actions, I want them to shut down, and I'm not afraid to say it.

The biggest complaint that the left has expressed about the black bloc is that we make the rest of the protesters look bad. It is understandably frustrating for organisers who have

### **What we think** *continued*

source or means to bring about a decisive moment. When we fail to realise that, ultimately, both peaceful and violent protest outside of the class struggle may be powerful and win temporary concessions but are both ultimately recuperable and therefore as limited as each other, we will be unable to broaden and deepen the struggle. Action that arises out of the class struggle, whether a peaceful occupation of a factory or violent assault on a polluting factory, does have meaning because it will have a political and social content and generate revolutionary demands, demands that by their very nature alter the balance of forces between ruler and ruled.

spent months planning a demonstration when a group of scary-looking young people get all of the news coverage by lighting things on fire. Yet what is missing in this critique is an acknowledgement that the corporate media never covers the real content of demonstrations. Militant demonstration and peaceful protest alike are rarely covered by the media at all. Although I too wish that the media would cover all styles of protest, or, more importantly, the underlying issues inspiring the protest, I'm also aware that militant tactics do get media attention. And I think that is a good thing.

I started my activist work during the Gulf War, and learned early that sheer numbers of people at demonstrations are rarely enough to bring the media out. During the war I spent weeks organising demonstrations against the war. In one case, thousands showed up to demonstrate. But, again and again, the newspapers and television ignored us. It was a major contrast the first time I saw someone break a window at a demonstration and suddenly we were all on the six o'clock news. The militant mood of anti-globalisation

protests in the last couple years has undeniably contributed to the level of attention that globalisation is now getting in the media. And although the black bloc is not the only reason for this, I believe that George Bush II felt compelled to address directly the protesters at the G8 summit in Genoa because of the media coverage that our movement is finally getting. A second complaint that I have heard from non-black bloc protesters is that they don't like our masks. I've been yelled at by protester and cop alike to take off my mask. This idea is impossible for most of us. What we are doing is illegal. We believe in militant, direct action protest tactics. We are well aware that police photograph and videotape demonstrations, even when they are not legally allowed to do so. To take off our masks will put us in direct danger of the police. The masks serve another, symbolic purpose as well. Although there are certainly those who wish to advance their own positions or gain popularity within the militant anarchist community, the black bloc maintains an ideal of putting the group before the individual. We rarely give interviews to the press. We act as a group because safety is in numbers and more can be accomplished by a group than by individuals but also because we do not believe in this struggle for the advancement of any one individual. We don't want stars or spokespeople. I think the anonymity of the black bloc is in part a response to the problems that young activists see when we look back at the civil rights, anti-war, feminist and anti-nuclear movements. Dependence on charismatic leaders has not only led to infighting and hierarchy, it has given the FBI and police easy targets who, if killed or arrested, leave their movements without direction. Anarchists resist hierarchy, and hope to create a movement that is difficult for police to infiltrate or destroy.

Some of the critiques of the black bloc by the left come from our own acceptance of the values of our corrupt society. There is outcry when some kids move a dumpster into the street

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and light it on fire. Most people conclude the protesters are doing this to give themselves a thrill, and I can't deny that there is a thrilling rush of adrenaline each time I risk myself in this way. But how many of us forgive ourselves for occasionally buying a T-Shirt from The Gap, even though we know that our dollars are going directly to a corporation that violently exploits their workers? Why is occasional 'shopping therapy' more acceptable than finding joy in an act of militant protest that may be limited in its usefulness? I would argue that even if black bloc protests only served to enrich the lives of those who do them, they are still better for the world than spending money at the multiplex, getting drunk or other culturally sanctioned forms of entertainment or relaxation.

I have my own criticisms of what I'm doing and of the efficacy of my protest tactics. Property destruction, spray painting and looking menacing on TV is clearly not enough to bring on a revolution. The black bloc won't change the world. I dislike the feeling of danger or at least the fear of danger at protests for those who do not want to be in danger — particularly for the kids, pregnant women and older folks I see there. I really hate the annoying use of pseudo-military jargon like 'communiqué' and 'bloc' by my

'comrades'. But mostly I hate hearing myself and my friends trashed by every mainstream organising group and in every left-wing rag. Although this is not true for everyone in the black bloc, I respect the strategies of most other left-wing groups. At demonstrations I attempt to use black bloc actions to protect non-violent protesters or to draw police attention away from them. When this is not possible, I try to just stay out of the way of other protesters. Despite my concerns, I think that black bloc actions are a worthwhile form of protest.

And as I watch the increasingly deadly force with which the police enforce the law at demonstrations around the world (three protesters were shot dead at an anti-WTO demonstration in Papua New Guinea in June, two protesters were shot dead at an anti-globalisation demonstration in Venezuela last year, and Carlo Giuliani, a 23-year-old, was killed by police during the G8 summit in Genoa), I find it increasingly ironic that my actions are labelled as violent and dangerous, while even the left seems to think that the police are "just doing their jobs". I will continue to participate in protest in this way, and anyone who cares to is welcome to join me. Bricks are easy to find and targets are as close as your local McDonalds.

# *Did somebody mention* **Capitalism?**

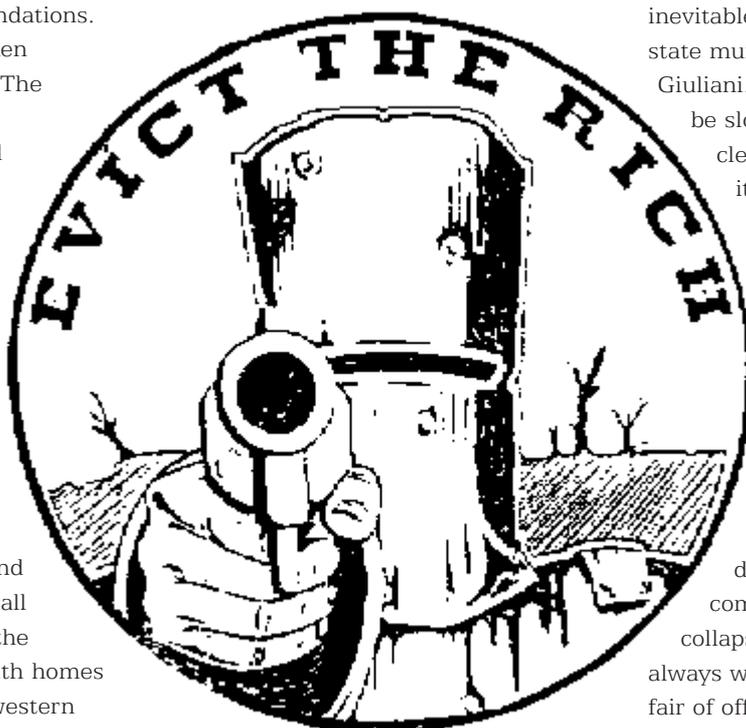
*"Modern industry has established the world market. All the old, established national industries have been destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries whose products are consumed in every corner of the globe. In place of the old wants, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes... All fixed, fast-frozen relations are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air."*

When Marx wrote these words for the Communist League in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, he had no idea that just weeks later riots in Italy would ignite a revolutionary conflagration across Europe that would rock the old order to its foundations. Revolutions have always taken revolutionaries by surprise. The problem with Genoa... and Seattle, Prague, Quebec and Gothenburg (amongst other demonstrations before hand), is that they are not surprising anybody — least of all revolutionaries, who are rightly suspicious of liberal reformism in 'radical drag'. Just a glance at the shopping trolley of demands — fair trade not free trade; union rights; save the rainforest and democratise the IMF — are all ultimately compatible with the status quo, and are ideas with homes in every parliament in the western world.

## **Fads and fetishes**

Unless one fetishises violence (an accusation now habitually thrown at the anarchist activists allegedly in the forefront of the confrontations), it can be difficult to see what the progressive element is. What adds to the confusion is the tag 'globalisation' itself. Has nobody heard of capitalism? Its trendy renaming and re-marketing as some sort of recent discovery inevitably

fuels the suspicion that this 'movement' is just another fad that burns up the surplus intellectual calories of a guilt-ridden yet otherwise pacified (or even complicit) western middle class. Superficially, the



assemblage of individuals resembles the heyday of the anti-nuclear movement and CND (remember the 'campaign for real war'?).

While large numbers are seductive, and exposing the violent face of the 'democratic state' is always a bit of a give away, it could be that all our comrades in the Black Bloc and Ya Basta! (Enough Already!) — amongst others — are doing is adding that very veneer of radicalism that gives the

anti-globalists the appearance of potential they don't deserve. While our suspicions are understandable, they shouldn't blind us to the real possibilities that may lie beneath this superficial presentation. The state has always needed demonstrations as a living manifestation of its prevailing ideology that it is 'democratic', 'free', and pluralist. It is the ideology they use to control us — throw it away and the state is exposed as the brutalising bouncer of the international capitalist club. Throw that away and their bluff is called destroying the paralysing straight jacket of consensus and inviting a violent response.

## **Democracy unmasked**

Yet in Genoa they risked it — deploying an armed and armoured force the size of that occupying Northern Ireland, and with the inevitable consequence of the brutal state murder of 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani. Whatever potential we may be slow in spotting, the state is clearly taking no chances. This in itself speaks volumes.

Something is changing, and it is scaring the crap out of the ruling class. The old post war systems of 'managing' class antagonisms has gone. The capitalist left no longer articulates and derails popular frustrations in the way that it did; the old bogey man of a brutal dictatorship masquerading as a communist alternative has collapsed into the gangsterism it always was. The standard democratic fair of offering us 'Taboo' or 'Mirage' ("...because moods are never the same") becomes ever more exposed as incapable of responding to needs and bringing about change. It was never really designed to do this anyway, but the belief that it was is crucial to maintaining the ideology of consensus.

Audience participation in the pantomime of democracy is coming to an end. The staging continues, but no longer to a packed house. President Select Bush's victory showed how irrelevant the voters' role in the

process is, with manipulated irregularities that would have made Mugabe blush. For the first time ever, the UK saw more people not voting at all, than voting for the governing party. Abstentions of 41% equal the highest figures achieved by the CNT (the mass membership anarchist union) in its great 'election strike' in Spain in 1933. Recent riots on the streets of England's northern towns and cities — inaccurately grouped together as 'race riots' — are just another expression of this subtle process in operation. Many of those involved doubtless didn't see the point in voting just to remain as powerless as they always have been.

### Change is possible

The first step towards change is not the belief that change is needed, but that it is possible. As our French comrades La Banquise tentatively began suggesting in the late '80s, the 'ice cap' (from which they took their name...) is melting — not just in reality, but metaphorically too, and all things are becoming possible. The last 18 months have seen the most significant series of mass actions since 1968. The 11 major anti-globalist demonstrations since (and including) Seattle have witnessed an ever-increasing number of people getting involved, despite increasingly violent repression. Genoa itself, with over 200,000 people, was five times the size of Seattle, while the forthcoming IMF/World Bank summit in Washington in September is already anticipating a quarter of a million people, in what will be the largest militant demonstration there since the Vietnam war.

Perhaps up to half a million people have been involved to date. While a long way from a revolution, they are developing and sharing some distinctive characteristics. Significantly, the sheer diversity of demands is bringing together many different groups and strands of interests: industrial workers; ecologists; unemployed, anti-fascists with some clearly unifying perspectives. Not least

among these is a recognition of a common enemy that is international, endemic and multi-institutional. Though as yet still lacking the central word — capitalism — a common focus of responsibility for war, poverty, inequality and the destruction of the planet.

"A different world is possible.' This was the slogan chanted in 10 languages by 200,000 demonstrators... It is coming from more than 50 countries and three continents. In many ways this growing movement looks less isolated than the 'democratically elected' (sic) leaders from the G8 states." (*La Repubblica*, Italy July 21)

This key slogan at Genoa is unifying, and the experience of community in the face of violent repression and intransigence moves it beyond sectoral 'bread and butter' issues, giving scope for the realisation that 'enlightened self interest' lies in solidarity. Some 15 years ago the capitalist left would have policed this demonstration, Communist Party stewards would have beaten up the 'radicals', but since their relative demise, and with the realities of changing forms of communication, new



forms of organising deepen their growth, experience and confidence.

People clearly believe that change is needed. More importantly, they are beginning to believe it is possible through their efforts. The next step lies in imagining what that change could be. A realisation that will be as much born out of their practical experience as their encountering of and receptiveness to new ideas. Anti-globalisation, however, will ultimately be doomed to a sideshow on the periphery, unless those involved realise that it doesn't need an international summit to find an enemy within

striking distance. The acid test will be a recognition that the demands of the protestors must find resonance with the conflicts and class struggles in the demonstrators' own countries, and an unambiguous recognition that the struggles there are at the centre and not the margins of this resistance.

### *A different world is possible.*

This movement may well turn out to be a fad, it may well yet prove transitory or dissipate in the face of escalating repression, but it will certainly radicalise many in the process. Its enduring lessons for those involved may well not be that capitalism is barbaric, or that democracy is a hollow sham (any more than knowing the TUC is the workers' enemy or the Sun is a fascist rag endured in the minds of the British working class following the end of the miners' strike). What will be learned is the sense of power and community that people share and experience when they step out of the 'normality' of their daily lives under capitalism and unite with a

common purpose. As revolutionaries, we should always view with a critical eye those claiming to challenge capitalism whilst possibly striving to preserve it in a different form — but this is a process, not an event. Our caution should be accompanied by a recognition

that a real constituency for our ideas and actions is growing rapidly. We should never compromise on our revolutionary perspectives, but we should be prepared to engage fully. To paraphrase old comrades, our eyes should not be on the edges of what is collapsing, but at the centre of what is rising. The slogan of the demonstrators in the last day's fighting with Berlusconi's goons was "We are winning — Don't forget!"

Something is not always better than nothing, and a thousand molotovs are not a revolution, but we should always be prepared to be surprised.

# Oldham

## *Trouble in 't mill town*

*In the early summer, the North of England was rocked by the worst race riots in living memory. Initially they left the state and press bemused and desperately seeking explanations. The left joined in blaming either unemployment or the BNP/NF or both. The probable causes are quite complex and deep-rooted in towns like Oldham. Understanding them is important, though this article can do little more than hint at some of the reasons.*

The Oldham riots started on a sweltering Saturday night at the end of an unusually hot week just before the local schools broke up for half term. The immediate cause was probably a mixture of revenge against the police and local white racists.

That week a group of around five or six young white racists, aged around 16 years old, had made repeated visits to a local secondary school from which they had voluntarily excluded themselves. They hurled insults and then bricks at kids playing on the football field. They came back to repeat the fun at the end of the school day.

This went on all week. At first the police tried to simply ignore the problem. When they finally did respond it was to send several vans of riot police who promptly set about attacking the Asian school kids! Two were arrested, the police using considerable force to do so.

Kids told of being racially abused by police whilst all this was going on. This combined with reports from the school over the week of the repeated attacks and abuse contributed to the rise in tension. People in Glodwick, an Asian area of Oldham, were angry. They wanted to know what the police were doing attacking the kids. They wanted to know why the racists involved had been ignored (and indeed continued to be ignored for another two weeks). Tempers were boiling and it would take little to make things explode.

### THE NF/BNP

The National Front had been trying to march in Oldham for weeks before the riot. Banned by the local council and police, they resorted to coming into town and

holding 'rallies'. They threatened local people and tried to be as intimidating as possible. At no point, however, did they number more than a few dozen.

However, the local press whipped up a sense of hysteria about the NF. Popular folklore also played a part. Few realised just how small an organisation they are these days. People remembered the late '70s when they numbered in their thousands. There was a palpable sense of fear in the town amongst all ages and ethnic groups.

The tension was exacerbated when a large contingent of football fans from Stoke-on-Trent descended on the town on 28 April. They proceeded to march to the match against Oldham through the predominantly Bengali part of town. On the way they chanted racist abuse, rattled doors and smashed windows.

After the game the police escorted them back the same way! This time they were met by angry teenagers armed with baseball bats, petrol bombs and, rumour has it, a couple of guns. According to the police, local antifascists and the press, the Stoke fans had been infiltrated by the NF.

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The BNP decided it could capitalise on all this and said they would be putting up candidates in the General Election. They spent their time canvassing on local, white housing estates. It is no coincidence that they were on Holts and Alt the weekend before the trouble at the school. The BNP strategy is to stir up trouble and encourage youngsters to let their frustrations out in violence. When the victims respond, the BNP set about using that response as a reason to fight more. The NF are more straightforward. They simply talk about controlling the streets.

### Riot day

The actual day of the riots was like previous Saturdays. Small groups of Nazis came to town. Some local youths — rumour has it that they were the same ones who had chanted abuse the previous week — started a fight outside a local chip shop. They are said to have attacked a pregnant woman and then tried to get into the house of one of the boys who had been arrested on Thursday. The police apparently did nothing, just looked on and threatened Asian youths who tried to retaliate. Then Glodwick exploded. The rest dominated the national news for days and was repeated throughout the North of England.

The problem is that all of this only scratches the surface. Why should these events lead to carefully planned riots that only finished when the petrol

ran out? It is at this point that we have to look at the longer-term background.

Oldham has long been a poor part of England. It was based on low wage jobs in textiles and engineering. In the late '60s and early '70s there was a shortage of labour in the cotton industry. Local capital responded by recruiting men from the Mirpur region of Pakistan and the Sylhet area of Bangladesh. Mirpur itself was an area going through serious problems; many people had lost their farms and homes when their valley was flooded to create a new massive lake.

In Oldham, people moved into the traditional immigrant areas of Glodwick, Westwood and Coldhurst. These were areas of poor but cheap housing. Denied council housing, the immigrants initially rented and eventually bought their own places. Previous waves of immigrants had moved out of these areas as soon as they could afford to, but with the Asian immigrants this did not happen and ghettos were formed.

This concentration into ghettos happened for many reasons. One was a deliberate council housing policy. Put simply, the council wanted Pakistanis in Pakistani areas, Bengalis in Bengali areas and whites in white areas. In the early '90s this was exposed by the CRE. The result is that Oldham is a ghettoised town. The 1991 census revealed that a person of Pakistani or Bengali origin/descent in Oldham is more isolated than anywhere else in the UK. By this they meant that they were more likely to have a neighbour of the same ethnic origin.

Soon after the immigrants arrived, the jobs disappeared. The cotton mills slowly went broke and were shut down. Unemployment in Glodwick currently runs at over 30%. Many of those employed either work in takeaways or drive taxis. Others work in low-paid sweatshops. A dependency culture has grown up, with far too many reliant totally on JSA and other benefits. The signs of demoralisation are obvious to see.

As the cotton mills went into decline so did the other industry in Oldham. As Asian workers lost their

jobs, so did local whites. The white estate of Holts is one of the poorest 5% in the country. Neighbouring Alt is probably in a worse state. The pattern is similar to that in Glodwick. Low-paid jobs, reliance on benefits and demoralisation.

As the housing policy kept ethnic groups separate, so did the employment that people had. Working in cotton mills was noisy and unskilled. There was no need for the majority to learn English as long as the charge hands and foremen were bilingual. In any case most couldn't hear what was being said and after working a 12-hour shift there was little energy to go to language classes! So the new communities continued to be isolated and became increasingly self-dependent.

In the '90s the state realised that the local infrastructures were close to collapse. Money was needed to put things right. However, everything had to follow a market-led model. Communities had to bid for Single Regeneration Bid (SRB) funds to provide capital to improve their areas. Only a limited amount of SRB money was available at any one time, so communities had to bid against each other. The first to get the money was the Bengali area of Westwood. In fact, much of it was squandered. Next came Glodwick and then Holts. Surely a recipe for further escalating suspicion and mistrust between people from the different communities! Some central government monies, which came into the borough in the '90s, went to build and maintain community centres. At the same time the council-funded community centres were under threat and a significant few on white estates were closed down. This added fuel to the fire of residents on these estates predisposed to racism who did not understand the money came from two different sources.

The local Labour Party was happy to play up these divisions. For years, Oldham was a rotten borough for Labour. However, in the '90s it looked increasingly likely that the Liberals would take over. The Labour Council tried to prevent the inevitable by



giving money to whichever set of 'community leaders' could get the vote out for them. This kind of 'pork barrel' politics worked for a while, but at a cost of deepening the splits and distrust within the town.

Now isolated in their separate parts of town, the different communities seldom come into contact with each other. Schools are becoming more and more ethnically divided — especially at primary level. Kids only tend to come into contact with each other when they enter secondary school. Then the ethnic differences get mixed up with the gang culture of much of Oldham. Both sides are suspicious of each other. They then try and jostle for position. The one that ends up dominant tries to keep the other in its place. This is a breeding ground for mistrust and hatred. It is said that racism requires power. Power in a place like Oldham depends on where you live. It is possible for someone to be both a perpetrator and a victim of racism in different areas of their daily life at different times of the day.

### **Racist attacks and the press**

Over recent years the number of violent attacks by young men for robbery or just plain sick gratification has escalated in Oldham. Since the publication of the McPherson Report, the police have been obliged to check with the victims whether these attacks were, in the victim's opinion, racially motivated. Many of these muggings have been carried out by young Asian men. Some parts of town have become increasingly dangerous to walk in.

The police response to a mugging by an Asian thug has been to say to the white victim, "It was a racial attack, wasn't it?" When Asian people have been attacked, the police have not asked this question or have often dismissed the victim's complaints. Not surprisingly then, the statistics for Oldham reveal that 60% of racist attacks have been carried out by Asians on whites. In addition, the figures were further skewed by the underreporting of attacks by whites on Asian people due to a mistrust of the police force.

The local press, in the form of the *Oldham Chronicle*, has seized upon this and for the last couple of years has carried repeated stories of racist attacks — on whites, whilst giving little or no coverage to attacks on Asians. They have, at the same time, been the culpable victims of a crude write-in campaign by fascists and racists in Oldham. Almost every night they have published short letters, always under pseudonyms, complaining about social problems and ending with the same, "It's all these Asians' fault".

The press coverage reached a crescendo after an elderly man was viciously attacked by a couple of

## *Isolated in their separate parts of town, the different communities seldom come into contact with each other.*

teenage thugs on the way back from a rugby match. It was widely reported as racist, may well have been so (although his family thought otherwise), and provided a rallying cry for the National Front and BNP, and allowed them to start their campaign which ultimately culminated in the BNP's electoral success.

No doubt all this scare-mongering increased the sales of the local paper. However, pandering to racist prejudices does little to help produce a sense of harmony in the community.

At this point, realising what it had unleashed, the *Chronicle* started supporting anti-racist initiatives! However, by then it was too late and the series of events outlined above had begun. During the riots, someone obviously sussed out what had been going on. The *Chronicle's* offices were one of the first victims of the petrol bombers.

### **A balance sheet**

The riots, when they took place, had a marked racial element to them. Places

perceived as belonging to 'them' were attacked randomly. So Asian takeaways and taxis were attacked. Pubs and white shops were firebombed or had their windows put in. The only obvious winners were the glaziers.

The consequences of these riots are harder to evaluate.

Quite obviously the white racists of the BNP have made enormous ground. They gained around 13% of the vote in Oldham. They are now trying to build on this to create a permanent presence. However, their electoral success does not mean that all those who voted for them are fascist. For many it was a protest against exclusion and alienation, but one that looked at others in even worse situations to blame.

It is notable that it is only now that the BNP are able to make progress. It is the absence of any meaningful class struggle to unify Asian and white workers which has let the cancer of racism take hold in places like Oldham. Back during the struggle against the Poll Tax, for example, non-payment was high in all the areas affected by the riots — Asian and white. Racism existed then, but it was subdued. Years of demoralisation and atomisation, low wages, poor housing and decaying social services combined with increasing segregation have had their impact.

In the Asian communities the effects of recent years are equally profound. The elders come from rural backgrounds in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Their children are city dwellers. The elders seek to hold on to a familiar culture from the past, a culture that in many ways is more repressive than the one that exists today in their homelands. The youngsters don't want to adopt western ways in their entirety, but do want to live in a different way from their parents. The inevitable culture clash has left communities in crisis.

The riots show the crisis in its starkness. The elders and 'community leaders' are appalled at what happened. Many of the youngsters think it was great! However, where it will lead is open to question. For some

younger people it leads to a return to the mosque and radical Islam — itself just as dangerous as the BNP. For others it leads to a kind of limbo state between two cultures, adopting all that is worst from both. Most are simply bewildered and try to carry on as before.

The left is busy trying to take advantage of the situation. The SWP through its front the ANL is busy gathering petitions and trying to organise a carnival — as if this is a simple repetition of what happened in the '70s. Those who follow them should be aware of what happened in the '80s. Failing to recruit sufficient members, worried that the ANL was developing a life of its own, the SWP dropped it like a hot potato.

What happens next is open to anyone's guess. The left will no doubt use it as a way to encourage workers back into the harmless politics of electoralism. They will repeat the mantra of "Vote to keep the Nazis out". This ignores the obvious fact that the riots were not caused by the BNP/NF. Their role was to gather like flies round shit.

The likely beneficiaries of this will be the Labour Party in its new Blairite guise. New Labour will finally get round to reinventing local parties like Oldham, will clear out the corrupt and the incompetent. So, one of the most reactionary Labour groupings in the country, which presided over environmental destruction, cuts in services and education, and probably one of the most arrogant groups of politicians around, will be forced to get their house in order. Currently they are in opposition while the Liberal Democrats run the town hall.

We can expect more New Labour initiatives, with more carefully targeted money, which leaves fewer bureaucrats in central government controlling our lives further. Although the money will no doubt be welcome, the long-term effect can only be a greater sense of alienation and exclusion among workers.

In the absence of class struggle to unify workers, the future for Oldham looks bleak.

# Masked racism:

## *Reflections on the prison industrial complex*

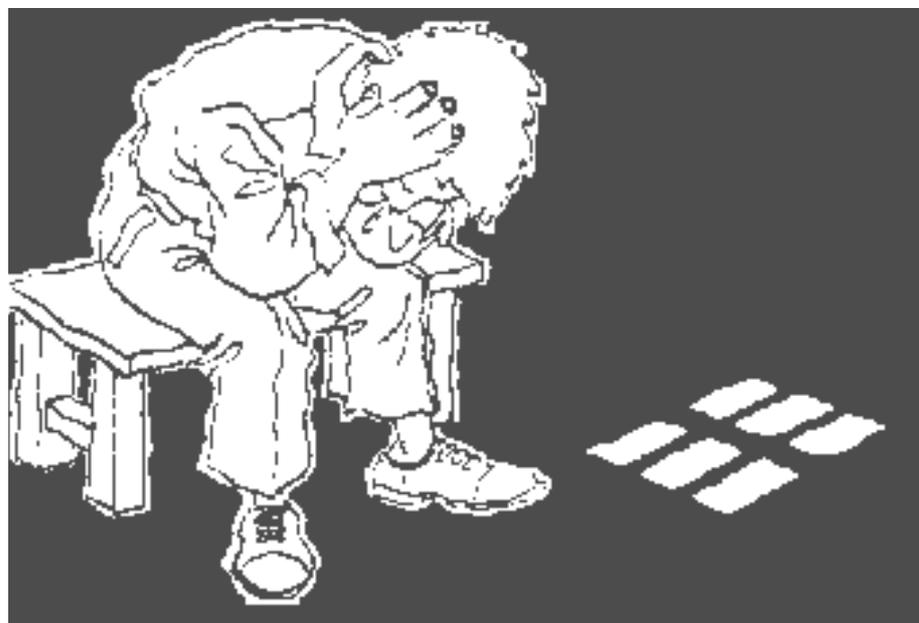
By Angela Y. Davis

*Imprisonment has become the response of first resort to far too many of the social problems that burden people who are ensconced in poverty. These problems are often veiled by being conveniently grouped together under the category 'crime' and by the automatic attribution of criminal behaviour to people of colour.*

Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages. Prisons thus perform a feat of magic. Or rather, the people who continually vote in new prison bonds and tacitly assent to a proliferating network of prisons and jails have been tricked into believing in the magic of imprisonment. But prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings. And the practice of disappearing vast numbers

of people from poor, immigrant and racially-marginalised communities has literally become big business. The seeming effortlessness of magic always conceals an enormous amount of behind-the-scenes work.

When prisons disappear human beings in order to convey the illusion of solving social problems, penal infrastructures must be created to accommodate a rapidly swelling population of caged people. Goods and services must be provided to keep imprisoned populations alive. Sometimes these populations must be



kept busy and at other times — particularly in repressive super-maximum prisons and in INS detention centres — they must be deprived of virtually all meaningful activity. Vast numbers of handcuffed and shackled people are moved across state borders as they are transferred from one state or federal prison to another. All this work, which used to be the primary province of government, is now also performed by private corporations, whose links to government in the field of what is euphemistically called ‘corrections’ resonate dangerously with the military industrial complex. The dividends that accrue from investment in the punishment industry, like those that accrue from investment in weapons production, only amount to social destruction. Taking into account the structural similarities and profitability of business-government linkages in the realms of military production and public punishment, the expanding penal system can now be characterised as a ‘prison industrial complex’.

### **The colour of imprisonment**

Almost two million people are currently locked up in the immense network of US prisons and jails. More than 70 percent of the imprisoned population are people of colour. It is rarely acknowledged that the fastest growing group of prisoners are black women and that Native American prisoners are the largest group per capita. Approximately five million people — including those on probation and parole — are directly under the surveillance of the criminal justice system. Three decades ago, the imprisoned population was approximately one-eighth its current size. While women still constitute a relatively small percentage of people behind bars, today the number in California alone is almost twice what the nationwide women’s prison population was in 1970. According to Elliott Currie, “[t]he prison has become a looming presence in our society to an extent unparalleled in our history — or that of any other industrial democracy. Short of major wars, mass

incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time.” To deliver up bodies destined for profitable punishment, the political economy of prisons relies on racialised assumptions of criminality — such as images of black welfare mothers reproducing criminal children — and on racist practices in arrest, conviction, and sentencing patterns. Coloured bodies constitute the main human raw material in this vast experiment to disappear the major social problems of our time. Once the aura of magic is stripped away from the imprisonment solution, what is revealed is racism, class bias and the parasitic seduction of capitalist profit. The prison industrial system materially and morally impoverishes its inhabitants and devours the social wealth needed to address the very problems that have led to spiralling numbers of prisoners. As prisons take up more and more space on the social landscape, other government programmes that have previously sought to respond to social needs — such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families — are being squeezed out of existence. The deterioration of public education, including prioritising discipline and security over learning in public schools located in poor communities, is directly related to the prison ‘solution’.

### **Profiting from prisoners**

As prisons proliferate in US society, private capital has become enmeshed in the punishment industry. And precisely because of their profit potential, prisons are becoming increasingly important to the US economy. If the notion of punishment as a source of potentially stupendous profits is disturbing by itself, then the strategic dependence on racist structures and ideologies to render mass punishment palatable and profitable is even more troubling. Prison privatisation is the most obvious instance of capital’s current movement toward the prison industry. While government-run prisons are often in gross violation of international human rights standards, private prisons are

even less accountable. In March of this year, the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest US private prison company, claimed 54,944 beds in 68 facilities under contract or development in the US, Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom and Australia. Following the global trend of subjecting more women to public punishment, CCA recently opened a women’s prison outside Melbourne. The company recently identified California as its “new frontier”. Wackenhut Corrections Corporation (WCC), the second largest US prison company, claimed contracts and awards to manage 46 facilities in North America, UK and Australia. It boasts a total of 30,424 beds, as well as contracts for prisoner health care services, transportation and security. Currently, the stocks of both CCA and WCC are doing extremely well. Between 1996 and 1997, CCA’s revenues increased by 58 percent, from \$293 million to \$462 million. Its net profit grew from \$30.9 million to \$53.9 million. WCC raised its revenues from \$138 million in 1996 to \$210 million in 1997. Unlike public correctional facilities, the vast profits of these private facilities rely on the employment of non-union labour.

### **The prison industrial complex**

But private prison companies are only the most visible component of the increasing corporatisation of punishment. Government contracts to build prisons have bolstered the construction industry. The architectural community has identified prison design as a major new niche. Technology developed for the military by companies like Westinghouse are being marketed for use in law enforcement and punishment. Moreover, corporations that appear to be far removed from the business of punishment are intimately involved in the expansion of the prison industrial complex. Prison construction bonds are one of the many sources of profitable investment for leading financiers such as Merrill Lynch. MCI charges prisoners and their families outrageous prices for the precious telephone calls



which are often the only contact prisoners have with the free world. Many corporations whose products we consume on a daily basis have learned that prison labour power can be as profitable as third world labour power exploited by US-based global corporations. Both relegate formerly unionised workers to joblessness and many even wind up in prison. Some of the companies that use prison labour are IBM, Motorola, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Honeywell, Microsoft and Boeing. But it is not only the hi-tech industries that reap the profits of prison labour. Nordstrom department stores sell jeans that are marketed as 'Prison Blues', as well as t-shirts and jackets made in Oregon prisons. The advertising slogan for these clothes is "made on the inside to be worn on the outside". Maryland prisoners inspect glass bottles and jars used by Revlon and Pierre Cardin and schools throughout the world buy graduation caps and gowns made by South Carolina prisoners. "For private business," write Eve Goldberg and Linda Evans (a political prisoner inside the Federal Correctional Institution at Dublin, California) "prison labor is like a pot of gold. No strikes. No union organizing. No health benefits, unemployment insurance, or workers' compensation to pay. No language

barriers, as in foreign countries. New leviathan prisons are being built on thousands of eerie acres of factories inside the walls. Prisoners do data entry for Chevron, make telephone reservations for TWA, raise hogs, shovel manure, make circuit boards, limousines, waterbeds and lingerie for Victoria's Secret — all at a fraction of the cost of 'free labor.'"

### Devouring the social wealth

Although prison labour — which is ultimately compensated at a rate far below the minimum wage — is hugely profitable for the private companies that use it, the penal system as a whole does not produce wealth. It devours the social wealth that could be used to subsidise housing for the homeless, to ameliorate public education for poor and racially marginalised communities, to open free drug rehabilitation programmes for people who wish to kick their habits, to create a national health care system, to expand programmes to combat HIV, to eradicate domestic abuse — and, in the process, to create well-paying jobs for the unemployed.

Since 1984 more than 20 new prisons have opened in California, while only one new campus was added to the California State University system and none to the University of California system. In 1996-97, higher education received only 8.7% of the State's General Fund while corrections received 9.6%. Now that affirmative action has been declared illegal in California, it is obvious that education is increasingly reserved for certain people, while prisons are reserved for others. Five times as many black men are presently in prison as in four-year colleges and universities. This new segregation has dangerous implications for the entire country. By segregating people labelled as criminals, prison simultaneously fortifies and conceals the structural racism of the US economy. Claims of low unemployment rates — even in black communities — make sense only if one assumes that the vast numbers of people in prison have really disappeared and thus have no

legitimate claims to jobs. The numbers of black and Latino men currently incarcerated amount to 2% of the male labour force. According to criminologist David Downes, "[t]reating incarceration as a type of hidden unemployment may raise the jobless rate for men by about one-third, to 8%. The effect on the black labour force is greater still, raising the [black] male unemployment rate from 11% percent to 19%."

### Hidden agenda

Mass incarceration is not a solution to unemployment, nor is it a solution to the vast array of social problems that are hidden away in a rapidly-growing network of prisons and jails. However, the great majority of people have been tricked into believing in the efficacy of imprisonment, even though the historical record clearly demonstrates that prisons do not work. Racism has undermined our ability to create a popular critical discourse to contest the ideological trickery that posits imprisonment as key to public safety. The focus of state policy is rapidly shifting from social welfare to social control. Black, Latino, Native American, and many Asian youth are portrayed as the purveyors of violence, traffickers of drugs, and as envious of commodities that they have no right to possess. Young black and Latina women are represented as sexually promiscuous and as indiscriminately propagating babies and poverty. Criminality and deviance are racialised. Surveillance is thus focused on communities of colour, immigrants, the unemployed, the undereducated, the homeless, and in general on those who have a diminishing claim to social resources. Their claim to social resources continues to diminish in large part because law enforcement and penal measures increasingly devour these resources. The prison industrial complex has thus created a vicious cycle of punishment which only further impoverishes those whose impoverishment is supposedly 'solved' by imprisonment. Therefore, as the emphasis of government policy shifts from social welfare to crime control,

racism sinks more deeply into the economic and ideological structures of US society. Meanwhile, conservative crusaders against affirmative action and bilingual education proclaim the end of racism, while their opponents suggest that racism's remnants can be dispelled through dialogue and conversation. But conversations about 'race relations' will hardly dismantle a prison industrial complex that thrives on and nourishes the racism hidden within the deep structures of our society.

The emergence of a US prison industrial complex within a context of cascading conservatism marks a new historical moment, whose dangers are unprecedented. But so are its opportunities.

Considering the impressive number of grassroots projects that continue to resist the expansion of the punishment industry, it ought to be possible to bring these efforts together to create radical and nationally visible movements that can legitimise anti-capitalist critiques of the prison

industrial complex. It ought to be possible to build movements in defence of prisoners' human rights and movements that persuasively argue that what we need is not new prisons, but new health care, housing, education, drug programmes, jobs and education. To safeguard a democratic future, it is possible and necessary to weave together the many and increasing strands of resistance to the prison industrial complex into a powerful movement for social transformation.

## Supporting prisoners

*With so much brutal repression taking place virtually throughout the western hemisphere (capitalism's natural breeding ground), and our pages already crammed with news of imprisoned activists, the best thing we can do right now is to direct anyone interested in prisoner support (that should be most of us!) to the bi-monthly news bulletins put out by ABC-Dijon, c/o Maloka, BP536, 21014-Cedex, France. Send one IRC for each issue. Email is free at maloka@chez.com. Free to prisoners, it is the most comprehensive English-language revolutionary prisoners' newspaper available. Support our distressed comrades on the inside!*

### Eduardo Garcia Macias

Last November the Spanish media, principally the press, fabricated a whole pack of sensationalist lies and innuendo (similar to May Day reporting over here!) about Iberian Anarchist Eduardo Garcia Macias and several comrades.

Aware that all the accusations were false, a fanciful creation of gutter-press journos, all were acquitted save for Eduardo, who was framed as a result of the media pack-frenzy. He is now serving a harsh prison sentence totally unjustly. The state repression of activists is rife at present across Spain, particularly of those held in FIES isolation units. They need our support. Contact Eduardo's support group for further details: CAN, Paseo Alberto Palacias, 2-28201 Madrid Spain.

### Twenty-year delay on appeal

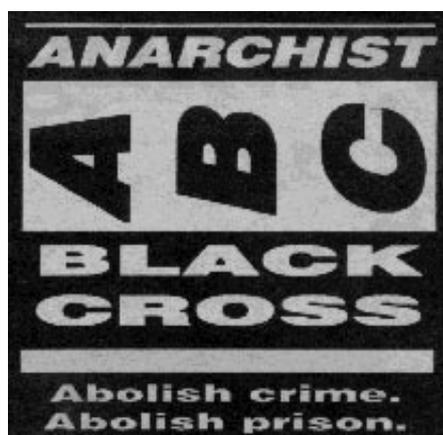
Convicted in 1981 to serve a minimum of 15 years, Ray Gilbert has already been in prison for 20 years without

any sign of parole — he protests his innocence after all — and no sign of access to an appeal hearing. This right was first refused in 1983. Years of campaigning including a hunger strike have followed, but there is still no sign that the authorities are prepared to move on putting right terrible miscarriage of justice.

In 1997 Ray's case was referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission but they did not think there was anything wrong and refused him the chance to refer his case to the Court of Appeal. Since then John Kamara, the man imprisoned alongside Ray, has had his conviction quashed. It seems there was something wrong after all. But, incredibly, Ray continues to be denied a proper appeal hearing. To add to the difficulties, papers essential to his case disappeared while on loan to some of the TV programmes claiming to investigate wrongs and help prisoners. But there is not much someone in prison can do about that: if he tries to assert basic legal rights and

reclaim missing property, he is liable to be called 'vexatious' and end up in solitary confinement, in the supposed name of good order and discipline.

Most recently, a new application is being made on the basis that the interrogation Ray underwent in police custody, which resulted in his original 'confession', should be reckoned violent, oppressive and a breach of human rights. Made without contact with the outside world or access to a solicitor, such a confession might well be considered inadmissible. And if the original grounds for being arrested and charged were improper, then the events of the subsequent trial become irrelevant — for such a trial with its unsafe conviction and lack of proper evidence should never have taken place. The charge, it is maintained, should be overturned and with it the trial, the conviction and sentence. Solicitors, MPs and public figures are beginning to come together to urge the Home Secretary and the legal establishment to put things right in



Ray's case and ensure his grim, protracted imprisonment is brought to an end. Years of solitary confinement have failed to stop him protesting his innocence. The least we can do is support him. YOU CAN: contact your MP and ask her/him to intervene; write direct to the Home Secretary, David Blunkett at Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT; Email the Home Office direct at gen.ho@gtnet.gov.uk; write to Ray Gilbert, H10111, HMP Woodhill, CSC A Unit, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, MK4 4DA.

## Ali Khalid Abdullah — an apology

In *Organise! 55* we published analysis and comment by Ronald Young, a long-time political prisoner in the US and correspondent of note with the AF.

The article, written prior to the S26 events, unfairly maligned Ali Khalid Abdullah and the Political Prisoners of War Coalition (PPWC).

Ronald and Ali have corresponded since the article was written and Ronald now admits his criticisms were due to "a misinterpretation of some of Ali's writings". He now recognises Ali as a "very articulate anarchist" and the PPWC as "a revolutionary organisation that attempts to move away from the rabid sectarianism of many US anarchists... [is] staunchly opposed to capitalism and reformism, and advocate[s] libertarian egalitarianism".

Although we published a disclaimer at the time, we let down the movement by not checking the material more closely. We are grateful for Ali's forbearance and the lucid statements he makes in his and the PPWC's defence, and for Ronald's timely (and contrite!) retraction. We will try to do better next time!

If any of our readers would like to see the correspondence, they should send us an SAE to the London address



and £1 and we will send a photocopy. **Organise! Editorial Collective**

# Anarchism, Marxism & the Future of the Left

**Murray Bookchin**  
**AK Press £13.99**

At last a work containing long overdue insights into the background of the redoubtable Murray Bookchin, introducing for probably the first time to a widespread audience just where the innovator of social ecology as we know it, is coming from. Unveiled is Bookchin's advance from the communism of his youth, surprisingly the Trotskyist variety, through to his advocacy today of anarchism, or more precisely, libertarian municipalism, as he now prefers his politics (rather dissapointingly) to be known. Hopefully somebody, someday, will put together a definitive biography of the good sage but until that time this book will be enough.

The thrust of the book and Bookchin's politics, are drawn out via 'interviews' (although the interviewer does little more than prompt) with Bookchin associates Janet Biehl and Doug Morris, tidily fleshed out with three recent(ish) essays from Bookchin himself. It succeeds admirably, using an accessible style of writing and a personable glimpse of this prolific writer as a radical activist from an early age, countering his reputation as an academic only. Exactly how socially aware Bookchin has always been is evident from his recollections of the revulsion felt by millions when Saccho and Vanzetti were executed, the rise of the CNT in Spain in the 1930s and the lucid way he explains his rapid and permanent disillusion with Soviet communism under Stalin. Bookchin was heavily involved with the 'Stop The Bomb' campaign during 1954, being one of the first left critics to understand both the lethal potential of nuclear weapons and the far-reaching environmental implications. It is therefore fair to say that Bookchin has always been at the forefront of 'green'

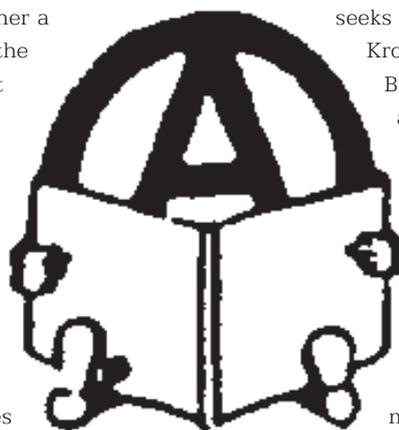
activism and, importantly, placed environmental consciousness at the heart but never ahead of human affairs or social relationships. Arguably then, this is probably the best introduction to a profound body of work in the Bookchin archive. As a thinker about modern times he simply has not been and will not be bettered. From the class struggle perspective Bookchin has succeeded in formulating a vital, forward-looking philosophy in the best traditions of the social anarchist pioneers of the 19th Century as they embarked upon class emancipation. It has been suggested by

his unthinking critics that Bookchin seeks to share a pedestal with

Kropotkin, Malatesta, Bakunin et al but this is an absurd criticism of one of the foremost libertarian thinkers of our times.

We sometimes wonder why Bookchin constantly invents new labels for, as he says himself, "the most preferable-by-far modifications of the libertarian ideal" (i.e

anarchist communism) as it causes a lot of confusion! But Bookchin has always rightly pointed out the hierarchical-power-domination-exploitation element in both emergent and developed capitalism, something too often missed or discounted by too many would-be revolutionaries. Not Bookchin! His entire opposition to oppression is built around these factors and so is crucial to understanding not only those who rule but of how they get away with it. Bourgeois history has always contrived to absolve and justify them and doubtless will continue to do so. So Bookchin is vitally important to undermining what is at the core of the world's misery: power through the hierarchy of class division. Nor does Bookchin let his vitriolic critics off the hook. He refutes, with genuine erudition, the criticisms of people like Bob Black and Dave Watson. The latter is joyfully demolished and his arguments



sink without trace and not undeservedly for the Dave Watsons of the world are very good at pointing out what is wrong but barren of ideas about putting things right. While some people may be entertaining writers they have no proposals about how to lay the foundations of the new society. The circus they propose is as mad as the one we're living through, minus technology. For an academic (so-called), Bookchin understands better than most what will be required to overthrow capitalism's domination: "...those who wish to overturn this vast system will require the

## Dissonances and The Insurrectional Project

Alfredo M. Bonano

BM Elephant, London WC1N 3XX

After reviewing a hefty tome like Bookchin's, you might think a pair of slim pamphlets would be an anti-climax: not so! These short works are refreshing and direct in their approach to active class struggle anarchism.

Written by someone with a wealth of real experience when it comes to facing the wrath of the state, in this case in Italy, Alfredo Bonano is indelibly rooted in the richly authentic working class lineage of past Italian anarchists such as Malatesta and Galleani. Bonano's partner, Jean Weir, herself a victim of that state's repressive judicial and penal system, translates Bonano's message into lucid English and gives a full appraisal of the health of the current anarchist scene.

### The future for class struggle

Bonano speaks with an inspiring honesty about the future for class struggle and is an essential voice rarely equalled in either Europe, the Americas or elsewhere. For social anarchists, anarchist communists and anyone engaged in the class struggle, there are no more concise, self-critical or instructive works about the paths to revolution being written right now. Virtually anything with Bonano's name on it is as revolutionary as it gets. A breath of fresh air amongst all the class-ignorant waffle around today. Check 'em out.

most careful strategic judgement, the most profound theoretical understanding and the most dedicated and persistent revolutionary groups".

To conclude, this work although not the most intellectually engaging of Bookchin's works is one of the easiest to digest, and therefore thoroughly enlightening about Bookchin's ideas about social ecology, together with an account of a lifelong commitment to libertarian politics. It is my guess Bookchin will one day be regarded as a seminal figure in the fields of class politics and environmentalism. The

contribution he has made to both is immense. If you are at all interested in a lifetime's work by Murray Bookchin or any kind of social anarchist, this is definitely a book worth reading and referring to. Despite its hefty price, lack of an index and typos (the publisher's fault not the writer's) this really is one to cherish and heed. Whether his critics admit it or not, we all owe a debt to this remarkable anarchist mind. The more people who think about what is contained within this work, then the more sensible we will grow in our approach to revolutionary politics.

### OBITUARY

Phoolan Devi, 38, who came to be known as India's 'Bandit Queen', was killed by gunmen in New Delhi on 25 July 2001. Born into a grindingly low-caste peasant family, she survived the poverty of a society that gives more respect to a stray buffalo than a young girl. She survived horrendous rapes and beatings, became an outcast and devoted her life to righting the many wrongs of both herself as a woman and to the people of her community. She was an inspiration to all who heard her name. Phoolan Devi will live forever in the hearts of the downtrodden, brutalised and oppressed the world over. We commemorate Phoolan Devi's brief but courageous life in her own words: Sing of my deeds, Tell of my combats, How I fought the treacherous demons. Forgive my failings and bestow on me peace.

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# Anarchist Song in France and Italy

## Part 1: France

*Like other political groups, anarchists have seen music as an excellent means of agitation and of popular education, and have made it one of their key activities of propaganda in many countries.*

In France, political song had been developed since at least the time of the French Revolution of 1789 when there had been an explosion of song. The particular song form of the *chanson* has been seen as the key vehicle of political ideas. The supporters of the revolutionary Gracchus Babeuf went so far as to flypost the words of *chansons*, and to sing them in the streets and in the cafés.

In the period 1815-30, Pierre-Jean de Béranger was a pioneer of the political, republican *chanson*, with his strong anticlericalism, his call for the union of peoples and peace and against tyranny. However, he was essentially a liberal, and was neither revolutionary nor socialist. His songs were popular in the *goguettes*, a network of song clubs which sprang up in Paris in the 1820s. There, songs about love and drink were sung alongside political and 'patriotic' compositions.

These *goguettes* soon came under the scrutiny of the police, who led a campaign of repression against them, closing some of them down. The restored monarchy engaged in a 'guerilla war' over the freedom of the press... and of the *chansons*. At any moment, the police could ban the execution of a song in a *gouquette*. The *gouquette* of the singer Gille had to move several times in order to avoid such attention, for which he finally received a six-month jail sentence in 1847. Normally, the judiciary avoided this because the jury usually acquitted the accused in such cases.

The *goguettes* were a place for workers and artisans to go after work, which explains the predominance of songs about drink and love. But they played a major role in creating the 'social' *chanson* — the working class and socialist *chansonniers* of the 19th century had their apprenticeship in the *goguettes*.

The utopian socialist Saint-Simon

exhorted artists to fulfil their social role as interpreters of ideas. So music and song occupied a key place in Saint-Simonian ideas. All their meetings were accompanied by song and pieces of music, as were those of the utopian socialist Fourier. Fourier, however, did not establish a strict norm for artists, saying that they should produce what they wished. Some ex-Saint-Simonians among the followers of Fourier organised singing lessons among the workers in 1839.

The song and poetry of these workers represented the first signs of what Henry Poulaille, in the 1930s, called the proletarian writers — writers from among the people, who continued to live among them, and who represented a form of direct expression on the part of proletarians.

### 1848

The 1848 Revolution brought a new flowering of political songs. *Le Républicain lyrique* appeared, a monthly magazine supported by the principal *gouquettiers* favourable to the Republic. The reaction to the June Days and the repression that followed led many towards social reconciliation. Only *chansonniers* like Gille saw the new and revolutionary character of these events, which announced future social conflict.

Eugène Pottier, was the only *gouquettier* of his generation to evolve towards socialism, and to conceptions which he himself at the end of his life qualified as communist and anarchist. Born in Paris in 1816, Pottier came from an artisan family. He was an advanced thinker, moving from the authoritarian communist ideas of Babeuf to libertarian communism by the end of his life. Most *chansonniers* with the exception of Gille and Pottier had not broken with republican and nationalistic concepts of liberty.

Proudhon, the socialist thinker who began to develop some anarchist ideas,

Gaston Couté



tells us that during his time in the prison of Sainte Pélagie in 1849 he had seen the political prisoners sing in a large crowd every evening. "Every evening, I remember with emotion, a half-hour before the cells were locked-up, the detainees gathered in the courtyard and sang the 'prayer'; it was a hymn to freedom attributed to Armand Marrast. A single voice quoted the main verse and the 80 prisoners took up the refrain, which was then repeated by the 500 unfortunate prisoners detained in the other part of the prison. Later these songs were forbidden, which was a really painful aggravation for the prisoners. It was real music, realist, applied, of art *en situation*, like song in church, the fanfares on parade, and no other music pleased me so much."

Joseph Déjacque was a man ahead of his time. He wrote poetry and songs putting forward his advanced anarchist ideas, an anarchism that he had evolved in advance of the birth of the anarchist movement. Fraternalistically criticising Proudhon for his failure to carry his thoughts through to their ultimate conclusion, his ideas were openly anarchist, revolutionary and communist, affirming the individual at the same time. In many ways he was the ancestor of both anarchist communism and of individualist anarchism. He was driven mad by grinding poverty, dying in Paris in 1864.

Under the Empire of Napoleon III, cultural resistance through songs continued. One of the most beautiful of French political songs, and indeed of French song in general, still known by many ordinary French people today, is *Le Temps des Cerises* (Cherry Time). The author, Jean-Baptiste Clément wrote it in 1867, and he wrote many more songs advancing the ideas of socialism, gaining the attention of the police. This period of repression led to the stifling of the *goguettes*. At the same time another decisive factor in their decline was the emergence of the *café-concerts*, which became popular generally. The development of *café-concert*, then of music-hall, ended the activity of the singer on the edge of a

market economy, and opened up song to business and the chance to earn a steady living and indeed have the possibility of becoming rich. In this process, the *chanson* lost its direct and spontaneous character. It was still a means of communication for the masses, but was more aimed at them than being produced by them, becoming more and more the business of specialists.

### The Paris Commune

The bloody repression of the Paris Commune, with tens of thousands shot, imprisoned and deported, led to a new stage in political song. Pottier, forced to go into hiding in Paris, produced his most famous songs, *La Terreur Blanche* (The White Terror) and of course, *The International*. Indeed the International has more than a trace in it of anarchism, with its verse about soldiers turning on their officers and shooting them.

The development of the First International itself led to a flowering of song. Indeed, the first specifically anarchist songs in French, date from the 1870s, produced by refugees in the Swiss Jura, the first, *The Right of the Worker*, written by the Alsatian Charles Keller, member of both the Commune and the International. It was very popular among the workers of the Jura.

The development of a specifically anarchist movement meant that anarchists wanted new songs. They were sick of singing the old songs, identified with the 1789 revolution and with bourgeois republicanism. Among the anarchists who came forward to write songs taken up by the movement were Constant Marie, a veteran of the Commune and a colourful and cordial personality. The police kept him under surveillance right up to his death in 1910. Another was the waiter, François Brunel, who wrote 32 songs between 1889 and 1893. The anarchist papers all printed songs and poetry, especially *Le Père Peinard*, edited by Emile Pouget which was a principal promoter of 'propaganda by *chanson*'. Never again in the history of the French anarchist movement were so many

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songs (and poems) produced than in the 10 years between 1884-1894. And the songs were used at all the anarchist meetings, benefits, and evenings of entertainment organised by the groups. As one police infiltrator noted of an anarchist evening: "Towards 10pm, the conversations ended and it was the turn of the songs which went on till midnight. Each song was invariably saluted by cries of 'Vive l'anarchie!' All the songs were of an ultra-revolutionary character".

Because of the itinerant life of some anarchists, the songs did spread outside their circles, circulating all around the country.

Among the main themes of the anarchist songs were antipatriotism,

antimilitarism, antiparliamentarism, the celebration of resistance and of life. Charles Favier was arrested for singing *Les Antipatriots* at a public meeting in 1897 for 'provocation to murder', but the charges were dropped.

Paul Paillette was one of the main anarchist song-writers of the period. An engraving worker, he produced 10,000 verses among them *Heureux Temps* (Happy Times) which treats lyrically of the future anarchist communist society and which is still popular in anarchist circles today. He was a poet of harmony, of love and nature and often dealt with the anarchist communist society of abundance where need had been eradicated. He became a full-time singer in the Montmartre cabarets, remaining faithful to the movement.

In the period after 1894 other song-writers came forward like Madeleine Vernet. She ran a libertarian orphanage *L'Avenir social* (Social future) and wrote many antimilitarist songs, continuing this work through WW1 and into the '20s. The great poet and song-writer Gaston Couté also emerged during this period. Regarded by some as one of the finest poets in the French language, his songs have become popular again in France. Born 1880 in the Loiret region, he started writing at the age of 18. He moved to Paris, leading a hard, bohemian existence there and singing in the Montmartre cabarets. He was a poet above all, with his love of the countryside mixed with a strong dose of subversion. His song *Le Gâs qui a mal tourné* (The Lad who turned out bad), like many others of his work, attacks the clergy and the local dignitaries, whilst celebrating his own resistance to the whole rotten system.

He began to collaborate with the anarchist papers edited by Faure, where his texts appeared. He then moved from being a fellow-traveller of the movement to a 'committed'



singer, supporting the 'insurrectionals' current around the paper *La Guerre Sociale*. This published 60 of his works, which dealt with the social and political events of the time from 1910. Among his most powerful works is *Les Conscrits* (The Conscrits). He died of TB the following year at the age of 30.

Alongside Couté, another important personality was Charles d'Avray, who came to anarchism after the Dreyfus case. His opinion was that "propaganda by song gives the most sure and effective results". He organised tours



Charles d'Avray

all around the country, first of all, in 1907, with the anarchist Mauricius, who also wrote songs, then on his own. At his 'spectacles-conferences' he interpreted his repertoire and discussed his ideas with the audience. His topics were patriotism, parliament, free love, the future society. He was continually harried by the authorities and banned in Grenoble. He wrote 1,200 pieces and his songs became an integral part of the anarchist song repertoire. His rousing song *Le Triomphe de l'Anarchie* (The Triumph of Anarchy) is still popular to this day. Other singers included the individualist Lanoff.

In 1889 came a spectacular comeback of the *goguettes*, supported by those who wanted to defend 'good *chanson*' of a social-political nature. In 1901, *La Muse Rouge* was created. This was a body uniting most of the socialist and anarchist *chansonniers*, among them Constant Marie and Paillette. It ran *goguettes* and participated in festivals organised by workers' associations and political groups, bringing out a magazine *La Chanson*

*Ouvrière* (The Workers' Song). It supported the old song-writers and encouraged new ones like Eugène Bizeau. An agricultural worker, he then became skilled as a vintner, something he exercised all of his life. Self-taught, he subscribed from the age of 14 to the anarchist paper *Le Père Peinard*. His anarchist songs were highly popular in the *goguettes*. He remained true to his ideas up to the last dying at the age of 106 in 1989!

The World War dealt a great blow to *La Muse Rouge*. Two of its singer-songwriters were conscripted and died in the trenches. After the war, the cultural and political scene was never the same and there was a severe decline in anarchist song. The Communist Party attempted to take over *La Muse Rouge*. It failed, but the subsequent split, and the cold-shouldering by the Communist Party, led to its rapid decline.

### The post-war years

One of France's most famous and most popular singers, Georges Brassens, was a militant of the *Fédération Anarchiste*, writing his first article for their paper *Le Libertaire* in 1946, subsequently helping editing it. Whilst his views were presented forthrightly in his songs, his subversive intentions were achieved by a mocking and satirical approach. His rise to fame led to a preoccupation with his career, though he continued to contribute generously to the cause and gave free performances at fundraising galas for the anarchist movement and appears to have maintained his anarchist views up to his death.

A figure of prowess of the Left Bank intellectuals and bohemians, Boris Vian was a jazz trumpeter, author of 10 novels and writer of 400 songs, many of which he performed himself. His most famous song *Le Déserteur* (the Deserter) strongly expresses his antimilitarism, a theme often touched upon in his work, along with his hatred of organised religion and bureaucracy, key elements in his anarchism.

Jacques Brel, a Belgian who spent much of his life in France, was another celebrated singer and song-writer of

this period who also included a fierce antimilitarism, militant atheism and savage satires on the bourgeoisie in his songs. He was careful, however, not to be drawn on his politics in public. Unlike Léo Ferré, who regularly included references to anarchism in his songs, as did Georges Moustaki, a Greek born in Egypt who has spent most of his life in France. Both have made contributions to the anarchist movement and performed in benefit galas.

Unlike Brassens' more gentle approach, Ferré's songs sometimes contained incitements to insurrection and revolt. He was excluded from broadcasting over ORTF (the French version of the BBC) in the '60s because of his anarchist opinions and his opposition to the Algerian war. One of his songs, *Complainte de la Télé*, lays into French TV as a prostitute touting for trade, and the *télécratie*, government by television. In other songs he fires broadsides at the pap served up on TV, which he sees as a morphine for the masses.

Moustaki celebrates the Spirit of Revolution in his *Sans La Nommer* (Without naming her) and his tribute to May '68, written during the events in *Temps de Vivre* (Time To Live).

Since 1981, the radio station of the Fédération Anarchiste, Radio Libertaire, broadcasting over the greater Paris area, has given space to committed chansonniers to perform over the air-waves. This has led to a revival of the old songs, like those of d'Avray and Couté. Singers like Serge Utgé-Royo and Vanya Adrian Sens, openly committed to anarchism, perform regularly on Radio Libertaire.

Perhaps with the rebirth and growth of the French anarchist movement, anarchist song might revive as part of a living revolutionary culture. The spontaneous creation of anarchist militants is a long way from the music stars, who might mention anarchism, or an aspect of anarchism in their songs, and who, finally, may place their careers above the anarchist movement. Both in their way have contributed towards the development of a common libertarian identity



Georges Brassens

among French anarchists and to the establishment of anarchist ideas as an important part of French popular culture.

## Postscripts

# Situationists and punks

## Finishing with work

The French Situationists made their own unique contribution to subversive French *chanson*. In 1974 appeared the album *Chansons du Proletariat Révolutionnaire — pour en finir avec le travail* (Songs of the Revolutionary Proletariat — to end work). It was entitled Volume 1 though any further volumes never appeared. Alongside one genuine anarchist *chanson* from the 1890s appeared a number of works professing to be written by a member of the Bonnot Gang, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine and Spanish anarchists. Pseudonyms hid the real perpetrators — Guy Debord, Alice Becker-Ho and Raoul Vaneigem, leading Situationists. Becker-Ho had written one song that was written in 1968 for the Committee for the Maintenance of the Factory Occupations but really the Situationists had employed *détournement* (their tactic of subversively transforming images and sounds) using well-known French tunes and substituting revolutionary lyrics.

## Punks

One of their songs, *La Makhnovschina* (supposed to be the song of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, inspired by the anarchist Nestor Makhno) was given the full-on punk treatment in the '80s. Les Beruriers Noirs had emerged in the music culture that developed in squatted buildings in Paris in the late '70s.

Starting in 1978, they dealt directly with songs about anti-militarism, against prison, and then increasingly against racism and the racist Front National. They also criticised the social order in general in their songs and were explicitly anarchist. Indeed they were far more revolutionary than the British punk bands that had inspired them. Aware of the danger of commercialism, they disbanded in 1989 when they saw this starting.

**To follow: Anarchist Song in Italy**

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## Paul Roussenq *Continued from back page*

Roussenq did a tour of meetings around France denouncing prison and the conditions there. This was organised by the SRI. Many of these meetings were in the Midi, where the anarchists had strong groups and the Communist Party had had a severe decline in members. It appears that the Communists hoped to use Roussenq to recruit among the anarchists.

### Visit to Russia

The SRI financed a trip to the Soviet Union, and asked him to write an account of his impressions. Deprived of his family and of work, Paul had had to rely on the support of the Communist Party. But this was a bridge too far, because the version that appeared in the Communist press was heavily censored. He denounced these manipulations in the anarchist papers. He commented there on the secret police, the lack of liberty, the scarcity and bad quality of food, the police presence at the factory gates. He finished: "In my opinion, no conscious anarchist should rally to the 3rd International. The Bolsheviks have exterminated the Russian anarchists, let us not forget... and whilst not toning down our efforts in the common struggle against fascism and war, let us not be dupes, and conserve our ideal".

Roussenq became involved in the activities of ALARM (Alliance Libre des Anarchistes de la Région du Midi) who had four groups in the area, with a large number of members who brought out many leaflets, pamphlets and posters. He participated in many public meetings. ALARM consisted mostly of workers, many of these agricultural workers. He became the director of the anarchist paper *Terre Libre*, edited at Nîmes by André Prudhommeaux. It analysed the current situation, as well as providing many theoretical texts. He was in the post until the paper was transferred to Paris in 1936.

Paul had to make a living as a peddler of sweets in the markets, profiting from his journeys around the area to sell anarchist books and papers. He left the region in 1935, travelling

all over France, getting several fines for vagrancy. His health was shattered by the time he had spent in Guyana. Then the war came, and he was imprisoned by the Vichy regime in its internment camps. This further aggravated his health. Whilst in internment, he wrote his memoirs which were finally published in 1957.

After the war he assisted in a strike of vineyard workers at Aimargues in 1948, helping the influential group of anarchists there.

## The last train to Glasgow Central will run on time

### Dear *Organise!*

To be successful, libertarian communism has to appeal to both the working and the working middle classes. We cannot expect people to accept a society that does not provide most of the functional elements of industrialisation. What we and many in the new left advocate is an end to capitalist waste, out of which the capitalists make vast profits. Concerning your leading article in *Organise! 55*, the writer is obviously unaware of the ways in which 'green' technology can make use of human sewage and farmyard manure. And to raise the issue of Pol Pot to condemn a rural utopia is an absurdity. Pol Pot anyway did not emerge from a historical vacuum. What about the imperialist puppet Lon Nol and the US saturation bombing of the whole region?

As for sewage, it is contaminated with toxic chemicals, reinforcing the neurotic bourgeois response to excrement. We know it could be turned into valuable compost instead of polluting the sea and rivers. It can be treated and sterilised. The absurd wastage of beer cans and bottles is typical of capitalism. When we were kids there were only bottles that were returnable. Comrades from that era of the '40s and '50s will also remember carhorses, steam trains and electric trams and trolley buses. And not only were beer bottles returnable but all bottles, including those for medicine. And don't forget, as long as there are cars there can be no communism. The car is the vehicle of alienation!

*Yours sincerely,*  
AC, June 2001  
Edinburgh

Twenty-five years of prison, constant hounding and persecution wherever he went in France, the impossibility of getting work because of his record, and the illnesses he had contracted in Guyana, which now caused him extreme pain, led him to take his life by drowning himself in the Adour river. He wrote to Élisée Perrier of the anarchist paper *Le Libertaire* on 3 August 1949; "My dear Elisée, I am at the end. At Bayonne there is a great and beautiful river, and this evening, I will go in search of the great remedy for all suffering: Death".

### *Organise!* reply

We suspect AC has more in common with us than his letter suggests. The AF is very aware of all the green technologies and many of the social sciences we can use to re-model and reshape our society in the direction of freedom. Read our *Manifesto for The Millennium* or *Where There's Muck There's Brass: Ecology & Anarchism*, which says: "We need to develop a technology which extends human capabilities, can be controlled by the community and is friendly to the environment as part of the struggle for a free anarchist-communist society".

The elimination of waste, waste minimisation, recycling and re-use and the use of a vast range of currently suppressed beneficial technologies will be one of the ways we become more free. And this is where we differ from (extreme) forms of primitivism and why, when primitivists speak of the wholesale destruction of vast swathes of industry, technology and infrastructures we compare them to Pol Pot and Year Zero.

The free society will have space for individualists who want to grow their own food, make their own clothes and build their own houses, who want to live alone without sharing with others. But we will fight before, during and after the revolution any individual, group or movement trying to impose this way of life on those like ourselves who believe that a sustainable society matching production and consumption and offering people the chance to experience all life has to offer — an anarchist communist society — is better than a 'pure' world of material poverty, drudgery and isolation.

# *Aims and principles*

**1.** Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

**2.** Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as political level.

**3.** We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women, lesbians and gays, and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

**4.** We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

**5.** As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

**6.** It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

**7.** Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able

to control its membership in order to make deals with , management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

**8.** Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

**9.** As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation.

We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method.

We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

## **WANT TO JOIN THE AF? WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?**

**I agree with the AF's Aims and Principles and I would like to join the organisation.**

**I would like more information about the Anarchist Federation.**

**Please put me on the AF's mailing list.**

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

**Please tick/fill in as appropriate and return to:**

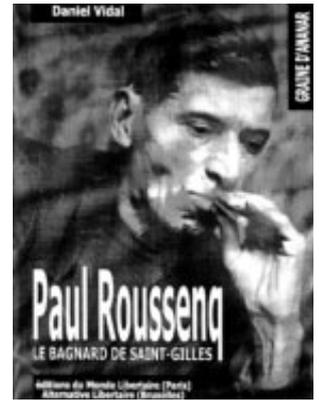
**AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.**

## Revolutionary portraits

# Paul Roussenq

## The jailbird of Saint Gilles

We continue our series Revolutionary Portraits on the lives of those women and men, who have done so much over the last 120 years to build the anarchist movement.



Paul Roussenq was born in the rural Gard department, part of the southern French region of the Midi, in 1885. His mother had a long and painful delivery. His life was to continue as it had started: in suffering. His parents were day labourers working on the land, among the vines, the wheat fields and the meadows.

Paul soon showed his independence, robustness and maturity. He began to read the anarchist papers *Le Libertaire*, *Le Père Peinard* and *Les Temps Nouveaux*. At the age of 14, he had already read the 19 volumes of the Universal Geography of the anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus.

At the age of 16, he had an argument with his father and ran away. His stubbornness had made him fall out with his father over a minor disagreement, which he regretted all his life, as he never again saw his parents alive. He slept in barns, under trees, living from odd jobs and fruit found on the ground or picked. So, on 6 September 1901, he was sentenced for theft at the court of Aix in Provence, getting a six-month suspended sentence. Again in 1903 he was in court at Chambéry, receiving a three-month sentence for vagrancy which he appealed. At the appeal the prosecutor demanded prison for Paul. This was too much for him. Rising from his seat he cried out: "What, going on the road, poor and penniless, is now criminal. But it's precisely the rich who should go on trial, with all their crimes as exploiters!" The court demanded an apology. Paul refused, hurling a lump of hard bread in the prosecutor's face. He was sentenced to five years in jail!

He spent five years in Clairvaux prison and came out with his anarchist convictions reinforced. The police, the judiciary and the army appeared to him as resolute adversaries of free people and he developed a ferocious hatred of uniforms. He was immediately conscripted to serve in Africa. He wrote later: "Barracks life is certainly the most brutalising under the skies... soldiers are just machines that obey".

But the battalions of Africa were worse than the barracks. These military camps were disciplinary institutions reserved for the stubborn, the rebellious and the recalcitrant. The stupidity and cruelty of the officers was celebrated and there had been campaigns of denunciations led against the torture carried out there.

### Devil's Island

Paul had a violent argument with an officer. He was shut up in a cell. He had had a bellyful of prison, and set his bunk on fire. For this he received 20 years hard labour. He was sent to the dreaded penal colonies at Cayenne in French Guyana, the island prison hell made infamous in the book and film *Papillon*.

Many anarchists had been sent there over the years, and indeed there had been a massacre of anarchists there in the 1890s, which the authorities had concealed. Here Paul was nicknamed *L'Inco* (short for the Incurable). On top of his sentence, he received a total of 3,379 days in solitary confinement, and achieved the top record for this. The cells were tiny, with little air and light, with dry bread and water two days out of three. The

humidity of the tropical climate was appalling. Many died of syphilis, malaria, dysentery and TB. Half, yes half, of the 48,000 plus deportees died there between 1852 and 1921. His mother was the first to campaign for his release, then the magazine *Detectives* took up the case, running many articles on the Guyana penal colonies. He came first in a 'competition' of those who should be released. The second was also an anarchist, Vial, who had refused to take part in the butchery of the First World War and had been sentenced for desertion and insubmission. Later, in 1893, Albert Londres the campaigning journalist mentioned Roussenq in his book on the prison islands. Finally his case was taken up by the *Secours Rouge International* (SRI) controlled by the Communist Party, who sent 100 francs a month to his mother "as to all the families of the victims of capitalist oppression".

By 1929, Roussenq had finished his 20 years hard labour. But an article of the law stipulated that a prisoner condemned to more than eight years must stay in Guyana for the rest of his life! The SRI led the campaign against this foul law. Demonstrations for his release were organised, and Roussenq's letters began to be published in the French press. Finally, despite another short detention on trumped up charges, Paul returned to Paris in 1932, with an amnesty. He was welcomed at the station by a large crowd and said, "My impressions are those of one of the damned leaving hell". But in the meantime, both his parents and a sister had died.

*Continued on page 30*

# *Did somebody mention* **Capitalism?**

*"Modern industry has established the world market. All the old, established national industries have been destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries whose products are consumed in every corner of the globe. In place of the old wants, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes... All fixed, fast-frozen relations are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air."*

When Marx wrote these words for the Communist League in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, he had no idea that just weeks later riots in Italy would ignite a revolutionary conflagration across Europe that would rock the old order to its foundations. Revolutions have always taken revolutionaries by surprise. The problem with Genoa... and Seattle, Prague, Quebec and Gothenburg (amongst other demonstrations before hand), is that they are not surprising anybody — least of all revolutionaries, who are rightly suspicious of liberal reformism in 'radical drag'. Just a glance at the shopping trolley of demands — fair trade not free trade; union rights; save the rainforest and democratise the IMF — are all ultimately compatible with the status quo, and are ideas with homes in every parliament in the western world.

## **Fads and fetishes**

Unless one fetishises violence (an accusation now habitually thrown at the anarchist activists allegedly in the forefront of the confrontations), it can be difficult to see what the progressive element is. What adds to the confusion is the tag 'globalisation' itself. Has nobody heard of capitalism? Its trendy renaming and re-marketing as some sort of recent discovery inevitably

fuels the suspicion that this 'movement' is just another fad that burns up the surplus intellectual calories of a guilt-ridden yet otherwise pacified (or even complicit) western middle class. Superficially, the



assemblage of individuals resembles the heyday of the anti-nuclear movement and CND (remember the 'campaign for real war'?).

While large numbers are seductive, and exposing the violent face of the 'democratic state' is always a bit of a give away, it could be that all our comrades in the Black Bloc and Ya Basta! (Enough Already!) — amongst others — are doing is adding that very veneer of radicalism that gives the

anti-globalists the appearance of potential they don't deserve. While our suspicions are understandable, they shouldn't blind us to the real possibilities that may lie beneath this superficial presentation. The state has always needed demonstrations as a living manifestation of its prevailing ideology that it is 'democratic', 'free', and pluralist. It is the ideology they use to control us — throw it away and the state is exposed as the brutalising bouncer of the international capitalist club. Throw that away and their bluff is called destroying the paralysing straight jacket of consensus and inviting a violent response.

## **Democracy unmasked**

Yet in Genoa they risked it — deploying an armed and armoured force the size of that occupying Northern Ireland, and with the inevitable consequence of the brutal state murder of 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani. Whatever potential we may be slow in spotting, the state is clearly taking no chances. This in itself speaks volumes.

Something is changing, and it is scaring the crap out of the ruling class. The old post war systems of 'managing' class antagonisms has gone. The capitalist left no longer articulates and derails popular frustrations in the way that it did; the old bogey man of a brutal dictatorship masquerading as a communist alternative has collapsed into the gangsterism it always was. The standard democratic fair of offering us 'Taboo' or 'Mirage' ("...because moods are never the same") becomes ever more exposed as incapable of responding to needs and bringing about change. It was never really designed to do this anyway, but the belief that it was is crucial to maintaining the ideology of consensus.

Audience participation in the pantomime of democracy is coming to an end. The staging continues, but no longer to a packed house. President Select Bush's victory showed how irrelevant the voters' role in the