

Organise!

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FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

the emerging
movement

AN INTERVIEW WITH ORGANISE!, THE IRISH
ANARCHIST ORGANISATION

resistance in iraq

who's afraid of
nanotechnology



THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT IN ARGENTINA - PART TWO

plus: reviews, letters,
revolutionary portraits and more

the magazine of
the anarchist
federation

editorial - where now?

A number of strikes, with many of them unofficial, have broken out in Britain over the last few months. Postal workers have continued what is now almost a tradition, whilst baggage handlers at the airports have taken militant action. There is seething discontent among the firefighters and this has exploded in a number of actions. Steel erectors at the Wembley Stadium came out on strike, as did couriers. Welcome signs that the working class is not dead and is not quite ready to give up the fight.

However militancy among British workers is considerably lower than in the rest of Europe. The manufacturing industry has been decimated, as has mining. Much of this has accelerated under the Labour government. Both manufacturing and service industries are looking further afield for cheap labour. Even the call centres with their low pay are at risk from being farmed out to somewhere cheaper like India. The rhythm of closures is speeding, with their announcement on the news a regular feature. Despite deals on productivity plants like Jaguar are being closed. And where there are no closures productivity deals are being forced on workers with the connivance of the unions.

Another way the bosses have grabbed back profit is through the increase in the working week. Workers are expected to stay late at work or take home work for the evening or weekend or work through the lunchbreak. The average working week is now 48 hours in Britain- we work longer hours and have fewer holidays than the rest of Western Europe.

Sick pay

But the drive to increase profit isn't just confined to making people work harder. There have been increasing calls from bosses' think tanks to attack sick pay. Tesco has already launched some pilot schemes. Whether workers are genuinely ill - sometimes through the stress of their jobs and overwork- or are taking back time with a "sickie" then the intention is there among increasing numbers of employers to clamp down and to remove sick pay benefits. General practitioners have been recently warned not to write so many sick notes.

Pensions

Another important issue in an increasingly ageing population is pensions. The State is determined sooner or later to make a move on this, just as it has done in other parts of Europe. There, mass mobilisations threaten to halt any schemes to increase the pension age and force people to work beyond 65. The whole issue may prove to be a major mobilising factor. Another way in which the boss class has attempted to retain its profits is with the bringing in of cheap immigrant labour. This is particularly obvious in the service industries and in farm work. One

of the ways to mobilise in the countryside against the reactionary bloc of rural aristocrats, bigfarmers is to consider organising amongst immigrant workers. Similarly in the towns, agitation and propaganda must be aimed at immigrant workers emphasising working class unity.

Yet another way for the employers to maintain their profits is through casualisation, short-term contracts and "precarious" jobs. A lot of thought- and action- now needs to be put into this problem and again agitation and propaganda needs to be aimed at this area.

The political situation

Leninism in all its forms is in severe crisis, as is social democracy including within the Labour Party. Unfortunately, developments on the Continent and in other parts of the world have not been matched at such a fast rate in Britain. In particular, whilst old-style Communist Party politics is rapidly waning, Trotskyism, despite a certain shrinkage, still has a death-like grip in many areas of struggle. Recent events have highlighted how damaging this grip is, and we may now be seeing a

turning point. The stranglehold of the Socialist Workers Party over the last European Social Forum, their collusion not only with Ken Livingstone and his Trotskyist allies of Socialist Action within the Greater London Authority, but with the police has caused revulsion both here and in the rest of Europe. This may well unleash a crisis within that organisation. This crisis was already developing with the SWP's various exploits within their "anti-capitalist" front Globalise Resistance, within the cartel of Leninists and disillusioned Labourites of , the Socialist Alliance, and within Respect cobbled together between George Galloway MP, the Muslim Association of Britain and the SWP.

If the SWP goes into crisis and starts disintegrating this will create new political space. The SWP's increasingly arrogant and authoritarian behaviour, its readiness to ignore and insult its potential allies, and its zeal at forming good working relationships with the Mayor of London and the highly paid officials of Socialist Action, as well as its willingness to collaborate with the police, may cause it to fragment. A large number of disillusioned members will then be outside the SWP. The other Leninist groups smaller in size than the SWP may not necessarily benefit as they themselves have many long-term problems, one of which is their failure to grow and to increase their influence.

The anarchists

Could the anarchists benefit from this possible new space? For many years the SWP has attracted fairly large numbers of people who are discontented with the system. Their Leninism has often come with a pseudo-libertarian turn of phrase and people who might have turned to a confident and organised anarchist movement have joined the SWP. But unfortunately what passes for an anarchist movement is small and is divided into a number of different groups and organisations. There is often mistrust and sometimes outright hostility between these groups. There is an unwillingness to work together. Unlike the various organisational traditions in other parts of Europe, there is often mistrust and opposition to organising beyond the local level. This has been made into a theory by some who advocate the creation of strong local groups before national organisations can be created. The AF has never been opposed to the creation of local groups; in fact our members have often been key figures in the creation of such groups.

Most importantly, there is a distinct lack of class analysis inside what passes for a movement. There is an unwillingness to relate to class struggle. Among certain parts of this "movement" there is an obsession with mobilised around large calendar events , like May Day, G8 meetings and the ESF and much time is devoted towards preparation in the preceding months. In the past, anarchist mobilisations around these events have been useful, but now there is an increasing ritualisation.

There is no substitute for painstaking propaganda and agitation directed towards the concerns of the mass of the population. There has to be a break with the politics of the stunt and the big event. Anarchists have to turn themselves more and more to making themselves relevant. We have suggested in this article that we must organise around problems like casualisation, the attack on sick pay, and pensions. This should be on top of basic anarchist agitation and propaganda aimed, not at the ghettos of the left and of anarchism, but at the mass of the working class.

The Independent Working Class Association has attempted to tackle this problem and seems to have attracted the admiration of some anarchists. Unfortunately their approach is marred by electoralism, among other problems. Some local groups have engaged in work directed towards the mass of the population and their everyday problems, without falling into the trap of electoralism. This approach has to be made general if British anarchism is to stand any chance at all of growing and profiting from the developing situation.



Organise!

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

We aim to produce Organise! twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. 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 viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from readers and spur the debate on. The deadline for the next issue of Organise! will be 15th March 2004. All contributions should be sent to: AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disk (PC or MAC format). Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at organise@afed.org.uk.

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The Anarchist Federation is a member of the International of Anarchist Federations (IAF) - www.ifa-iaf.org

the anarchist movement in Argentina part two

In the last issue of Organise! we had detailed account of the present day anarchist movement in Argentina. Unfortunately some of the text become mangled in layout! So you can read that the Jose Ingenieros Peoples library is supported by the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS) This is not the case. ILS supports the Organizacion Socialista Libertaria (OSL) The section on this group was inadvertently left out of the account.

Going back to the Jose Ingenieros Library, the original article pointed out that the Library was seen by many as a “neutral area” and had good relations with the FLA, the FOR A, and La Protesta and that a few veterans of the movement were involved. Its archives are not large, but it has a good and extensive book collection.

La Protesta

Again, a section on this paper was not included in the last Organise! It was a paper created for the anarchist movement in 1897 and has gone beyond its 8220th issue. It has 8 pages and is distributed widely throughout Buenos Aires. It collaborates regularly with another group Libertad.

Libertad

The French visitor did not meet this group, but it has a bimonthly paper, with a standard 8-page format. It organises joint actions with La Protesta on the 1st May. Each group has no more than a dozen members each. The print run of these papers is around 500, with perhaps 1,000 run for La Protesta,



some of which are sent abroad. Their anarchism appears to be of the ‘classical’ kind.

The Organizacion Socialista Libertaria (OSL)

Again the French comrade did not meet this group. They appear to gather together a handful of militants, and their main activity seems to be to publish En La Calle (in the street), journal of “organised anarchism” a well presented monthly with 8 pages, with a print run of 1,000, of which some are distributed abroad. Its members seem to be active in the unemployed associations of greater Buenos Aires. The appearance and distribution of their journal appears to be largely to financial assistance from the ILS. And now for some updates on anarchist groups not mentioned before.

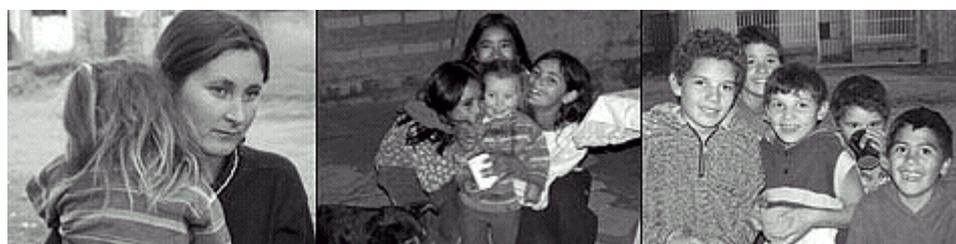
The independents of La Plata

A handful of anarchist militants mostly from the same anarchist family! They have

worked for several years in several poor neighbourhoods. They have started to develop a people’s library in a squatted building on squatted land. They constructed their buildings from recovered materials. After the social explosion of December 2001 they set up a restaurant, a soup kitchen, educational support, a clothes bank, a bread oven and enlarged their buildings before recreating the same sort of thing in a shanty town. They have access to 80 social aid plans. They have a plan to create a metal workshop and to raise rabbits to supply their restaurant. They have met the same problems as all the other unemployed movements- how to involve people, make them self-active, share knowledge, and not fall into reformism. Some of them participate in the Letra Libre Collective, which is planning to publish some works on anarchism. These should be appearing soon.

The Alberto Ghirardo Popular Library of Rosario

This was apparently founded in the 1940s by anarchists in Rosario, a fairly large town several hours bus journey from the capital. Twenty people are involved, among them quite a few young people. Their archives are small, but they have a good stock of pamphlets. They put on video projections and organise debates. Quite a few young people and several people involved in the



assemblies have moved closer to them since December 2001. Their financial situation is tight, they just manage to pay for rent etc with their subscriptions and donations and benefits. The library welcomes the meetings of a little circle of social studies that is not specifically anarchist and those of a recently created anarchist collective "Thought and Action".

The Anarchist Movement of Workers Liberation (MALO) of Bariloche

This group is a sort of political "miracle". The 1st May 2002, anarchists of Cholila, Esquel and Bolson in Patagonia went by bus to Bariloche, several hours journey from Esquel, for a small action in support of political prisoners. At the entrance to the town, the bus was halted by a piquetero blockade, (burning tyres, with people in hoods). They got down to see what was going on and saw a black flag floating above the piqueteros. They approached and made contact with some young people overjoyed to discover other anarchists in the area!! These FORA comrades discovered the existence of MALO created by 30 young people from a shanty town who lived on the recycling of waste. The MALO has existed for 4 years, putting roadblocks up every 1st May and involving themselves in a sort of informal piquetero movement in the shantytown, and operating a form of taxing on the flow of merchandise. With money from this, they buy food wholesale for a people's restaurant to feed the children of the shantytown or to support a mother of one of them killed by a policeman 2 years before. After this murder, they overturned a bus with other inhabitants of the shantytown and went to the town centre to smash shop windows.

They are all young. The oldest is 21-22 years old. It seems that they came across some anarchist propaganda. After having discussed and looked around for more information on the subject, they decided to set up a group, which was joined by some of the young people of the shantytown. Their political level is low and they have a strong tendency towards illegalism. Some of the young have been affected by the squalor of their surroundings, and have problems with alcohol, drugs and some are involved in burgling the houses of the rich and the middle classes. They also pillaged a warehouse belonging to the Church. This pillage undertaken by the majority of the neighbourhood, led to a battle of several hours with the police who were finally forced to retreat. The warehouse is still in the hands of the MALO.

Junkies recruited by local politicians to intimidate the people of the neighbourhood attacked the neighbourhood restaurant in broad daylight. Shots were fired at the canteen where women and children were preparing food. Some young people of the

MALO have since acquired weapons for self-defence.

They took part in the first anarchist congress in Patagonia in January 2004 and hoped to organise the second in their warehouse. A fierce police repression has now fallen on them and a group of riot cops has been stationed at Bariloche where it regularly makes raids on the shantytown. Some members of the MALO have been threatened, beaten and searched, and some have withdrawn from activity because of this.

Other groups exist at Cordoba and Marr Del Plata. They have been active for several years. A little anarchist centre exists at Cordoba. A little anarchist network engaged in sporadic activities exists at Viedma. They have named themselves after Antonio Soto, a FORA militant who animated the great strikes of agricultural workers in Patagonia in 1921. Several individuals are involved sporadically in an Anarchist Black Cross at Buenos Aires (circulation of info on revolutionary political prisoners) Some individuals have begun to produce and

distribute a newsheet in Buenos Aires, El Ilegal. Some groups of anarcho-punks exist who have flyposted and brought out fanzines before disappearing.

The Argentinian anarchist movement is fragmented, communication is difficult because of the vastness of the country, there is an acute lack of funds and of militant experience among the new young people. There is also a certain amount of ideological confusion. There must be no more than 300-350 organised anarchists in the country.

All these groups need support. If visiting, bring papers, stickers and information on the movement in your country, some money, anarchist pamphlets in Spanish, and stuff like envelopes, glue, etc. It's best to learn a little Spanish. A good idea would be to think of twinning with a particular group to support it morally and financially. See the list below.

One final word of caution. A group exists in Buenos Aires called Socialismo Libertario with a vaguely libertarian phraseology. They are Trotskyists!

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This, the final part of the *In the Tradition* series, looks at developments in international libertarian thought and struggle over the last 20 or so years.

in the tradition part five

We finished part Four with a brief look at the Miners Strike of 1984-1985 and the impact this brutal struggle had upon the revolutionary movement. The strike showed the combativity, the fierce intelligence and the practical capability of an historic section of the working class, the mineworkers and their friends and families. It also showed the severe limitations of trade unionism and of the left and the

weakness of the revolutionary libertarian movement.

Demanding the impossible?

The leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers repeatedly called for solidarity action from other union *leaderships*, to, inevitably, no avail. Sections of the Leninist left either called for increases in mass picketing (SWP) or

for the Trades Union Congress to call a General Strike (Militant, WRP). The former 'tactic' was shown to be, on its own, a dead end at Orgreave where the massed miners were battered and dispersed in cossack style by mounted police. The second tactic was merely reflective of the bankruptcy of Trotskyism, most of whose partisans could think no further than calling upon the bureaucrats to show a lead, or to encourage

workers to “come through the experience” of demanding the impossible from that bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, rank and file NUM members, their families, friends and supporters were organising Hit Squads to target scabs and their supporters and to defend their communities. The traditions of Trade Union practice still held most miners back from attempting to reach out to other sectors of the working class directly, not via the bureaucracies of the official union structures. This widening of the struggle would not have guaranteed victory, but its failure to emerge condemned the struggle to defeat.

The anarchist response

The anarchist and libertarian communist movement responded to the strike in fractured way, reflecting the fractured nature of that movement.

Although libertarians added to the numbers on picket lines, at demonstrations and in general support work, there was little co-ordinated activity and a very limited amount of serious analysis. Small collectives such as the London Workers Group (an open group of councillists, anarchists, autonomists etc.) the Wildcat group in Manchester and Careless Talk group in Staffordshire were amongst a minority who attempted to address the issues (such as the need to criticise the NUM and the need for the struggle to be spread by workers themselves) that were being ignored elsewhere.

Class War

One group, which emerged during the Miners Strike, and which was to subsequently have a considerable impact upon the libertarian movement in Britain and beyond, was Class War. The Class War group and its eponymous tabloid-style newspaper had its origin amongst working class anarchists living in South Wales and London. Annoyed and frustrated with what they saw as the clear lack of dynamism and general irrelevance of the anarchist ‘scene’ in Britain at the period, they adopted a populist and highly activist approach. The emergence of this group, which developed a nominally national federal structure in 1986, sent a shock wave through the anarchist ‘scene’, which at that time, with rare exception, was under the influence of pacifism, moralistic exclusivist lifestyle ‘politics’ and/or individualism.

Class War, not surprisingly, emphasised a populist version of class struggle anarchism, promoting working class combativity, focussing on community

rather than workplace struggles. Their practical activity in the first years of their existence, other than the production and distribution of the newspaper, involved headline-grabbing heckling and public harassment of various (highly deserving) left figures. After a period of inventive, but inevitably less than successful ‘stunts’ such as the ‘Bash the Rich’ events, the new federation looked more seriously at their political development.

‘Their irreverent approach shook up a complacent libertarian milieu... their emphasis on an antagonistic class politics being central to libertarian revolution, helped return anarchism to its working class roots.’

This period of intense discussion culminated in the production of a book titled ‘Unfinished Business: the politics of Class War’ (1992) which attempted to outline a new and distinct politics that distanced itself if not from the anarchist tradition, then at least from the present anarchist milieu. Simultaneously the book, somewhat unconvincingly, embraced a libertarian take on Marxism. Although a considerable section of Class War rejected much of the Unfinished Business thesis, the book itself was at least a serious attempt to both renovate libertarian thought and to address the issue of class at the end of the 20th century. In doing so it borrowed heavily from the politics of the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists (see part 2 of In the Tradition) Regardless of the book, the actual Class War Federation, however, continued to be a synthesis of Platformist anarchism, autonomist Marxism, council communism and various other tendencies, all painted in populist colours. This created an ongoing tension in the organisation, which, though it contained a certain dynamic, inevitably led to an inconsistency in political line with regard to fundamentals such as the nature of the trade unions and national liberation struggles.

After a decade of trying to extricate itself from what it described as the “anarchist ghetto” the Class War Federation eventually dissolved itself after a final edition of the paper styled ‘An open letter to the revolutionary movement’ where they stated that “After almost 15 years of sometimes intense and frantic activity,

Class War is still tiny in number and, as far as many in the organisation are concerned, going nowhere”. A small rump of militants continued the organisation, which decided to describe itself as explicitly anarchist communist, though maintaining a populist and increasingly counter-cultural perspective.

But no discussion of international libertarian thought in the last 20 years can ignore the legacy of Class War. Class War, which in part at least was inspired by the

experience of punk in the 1970s, breathed new life into the anarchist body-politic and brought a fresh, fiercely combative vision of revolutionary politics. This vision, which burned brightly for a short time, influenced many young working class militants, new to politics. Their irreverent approach shook up a complacent libertarian milieu. And, if nothing else, their emphasis on an antagonistic and emphatically class politics being central to libertarian revolution, helped return anarchism to its working class roots.

A different direction?

If a group like Class War distinguished itself in its emphasis on class, then other libertarian currents were developing ideas which appeared to be moving in a different direction, that of prioritising the struggle against the environmental destruction of the planet.

Although libertarians such as Peter Kropotkin, Edward Carpenter and William Morris, were amongst the first people anywhere to address issues of environment and human scale economics, much of the productivism and technophilia of capitalist ideology was shared by early socialists, anarchists included.

This failure to address the alienating and environment destroying nature of unfettered economic ‘progress’ was evident in the brutal industrialisation of the so-called socialist nations. The supporters of the Soviet Union and its satellites sang the praises of the latest super-dam or the newest tractor production figures. But it was reflective of the lack of environmental

awareness generally, that many of those who saw the 'existing socialist' nations for what they were, namely state capitalist dictatorships, failed to recognise the grotesque nature of the productivist ideology they reflected.

Social ecology

A revolutionary anti-capitalist understanding of green politics was slow in developing. 'Ecology' was equated with the 'conservationism' of the past which more often than not, hankered after a pre-industrial golden age and hid a reactionary agenda. It was not until the work of Murray Bookchin, and his book 'Our Synthetic Environment' (1962) that a *social ecology* would begin to emerge based upon a revolutionary humanism. This perspective was most forcefully argued in the 1982 work 'The Ecology of Freedom'.

At the centre of social ecology was the realisation that the productivist nature of capitalism was wrapped up in hierarchical social relations as much as in the need for capital to constantly expand. So this productivism and the desire to dominate the earth are contained also within socialist ideologies, particularly Marxism which also defend hierarchical social relations. Even before the emergence of Primitivism or Deep Ecology, Bookchin realised the danger of an ecological understanding that was based upon a misanthropic, anti-humanist ideology.

"In utopia man no more returns to his ancestral immediacy with nature than anarcho-communism returns to primitive communism. Whether now or in the future, human relationships with nature are mediated by science, technology and knowledge. But whether science, technology and knowledge

will improve nature to its own benefit will depend upon man's ability to improve his social condition. Either revolution will create an ecological society, with new ecotechnologies and ecocommunities, or humanity and the natural world as we know it today will perish." (Post-scarcity

between, on the one hand a Green or Eco-movement increasingly influenced by Primitivism and on the other a Green-Red left which was essentially social democratic. During its short existence it did, however, try to point towards a different direction which emphasised the

'Hopes were artificially high that the possibility of a new working class movement for a self-managed socialism would emerge, somehow, from the wreckage of these societies.'

anarchism, 1970).

Bookchin's vision of a massively decentralised, stateless and classless society which rationally utilises technology in order to both save the planet and to save humanity remains a minority current within mainstream green thought and organisation. On the one hand, reformist green parties and pressure groups remain entirely within the camp of a kinder, gentler capitalism, whilst on the other Primitivist and post-primitivist groups prefer to rage against civilisation itself whilst following an equally reformist trajectory.

There is much to criticise in Bookchin's arguments. His rejection of the working class as motor force of revolutionary transformation, his support for a 'libertarian municipalism' which tends to equate to electoralism etc. But his arguments on the need for a liberatory technology and an anti-hierarchical praxis have certainly influenced the Anarchist Federation and even some of his ostensible critics in the ecological resistance.

Green revolution

In the early 1990s, much of the cross fertilization between libertarian communist and green thought found organisational form in Britain with the journal *Green Revolution: a revolutionary newspaper working for ecological survival, human liberation and direct action*. Though short-lived, Green Revolution attempted an eclectic, but coherent approach, embracing "...an unbroken tradition of struggle". This tradition included the Diggers of the English Civil War, William Morris and the Marxist Rosa Luxemburg. It called for a "Green and libertarian critique of Marxism" and understood that "The war against the planet is a class war". Green Revolution was caught

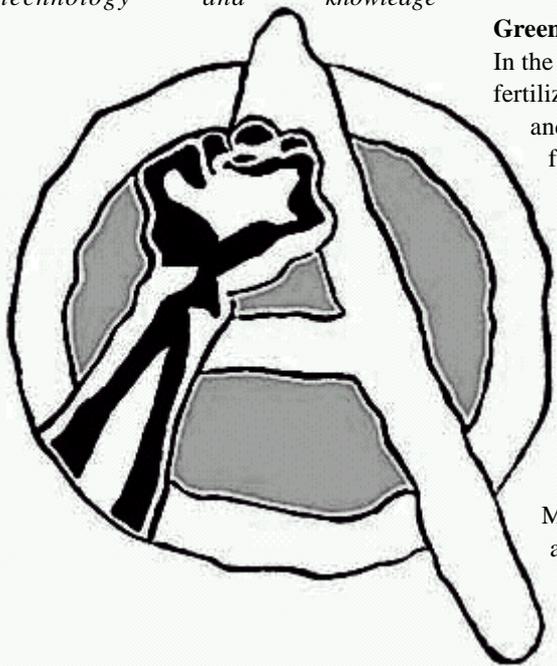
revolutionary potential in *social ecology*.

The collapse of 'communism'

The end of 'existing socialism' with the death of the Soviet Union and the other state capitalist dictatorships was welcomed by libertarian communists, not least those few who lived in those countries. Hopes were artificially high that the possibility of a new working class movement for a self-managed socialism would emerge, somehow, from the wreckage of these societies. But, although a blossoming of libertarian and anti-capitalist groups, newspapers etc. was almost immediate, the reality was that, instability, ethnic conflict and massive attacks upon working class living conditions were the norm across the former 'Socialist' states as private capitalism arrived.

For the Stalinist left across the world the 'collapse of communism' created crisis and deepened schisms. But the Trotskyist left also felt the effects. The Workers States, however degenerated or deformed, were for them still examples of non-capitalist societies. Their collapse left them in an awkward situation.

For those who considered these so-called Workers States as variants of capitalist societies, however, their demise also had a strangely negative impact. Certainly we had no illusion that our God had failed, but the relentless trumpeting of the 'End of Communism' and by extension, of all collective solutions to the problems posed by capitalism, by the bourgeoisie was demoralising. "Look at what happens when you have a revolution. Dictatorship and unfreedom inevitably follows!" harped the ruling class, "Give up now!". As no wave of resistance to the new reign of free market economics seemed to be forthcoming from the working class of the former Soviet Bloc, the early nineties looked bleak.



The return of working class self-organisation

The defeat of the miners strike was an enormous blow to working class confidence. The subsequent unsuccessful struggles in British industry such as those of the print workers at Warrington and Wapping, along with the general run-down of manufacturing, left many feeling despondent. The community based struggle against the Poll Tax in the late 1980s-early 1990s, whilst inspiring, did not signal the beginnings of a new working class combativity. By 1996, the Liverpool Dockers' fight appeared like a struggle from another era. And, despite the efforts of the Dockers to internationalise the struggle and to seek new allies in the direct action oriented movements such as Reclaim the Streets, the dead hand of the Transport and General Workers Union ensured defeat.

Autonomous struggle?

In parts of Europe during the period of 1986 until the mid-nineties, new developments in the class struggle were taking place. As everywhere, working class living conditions were under attack and as everywhere, the Trade Unions were desperately trying to maintain their negotiating positions and to control any autonomous struggle.

In Italy, self-organised co-ordinations of workers began to emerge during 1985, particularly amongst teachers, railway workers and metalworkers. These co-ordinations were outside the existing unions and, where the traditional unions existed, quickly entered into conflict with them. Although different names were used in different industries and regions, the movement became known as the COBAS movement (from Committees of the Base) and used mass assemblies, recallable delegates and militant tactics to conduct their struggles. The political complexion of the movement was diverse and included various elements from the old Workers Autonomy movement of the 1970s, as well as Trotskyists, anarchists and others. Mostly its strength lay in mobilising those workers who were fed-up with the response of the established unions to attacks upon their sectors.

Although the COBAS movement was a positive example of self-organisation, it suffered from sectionalism and the desire of some of its activists to become a new trade union, a little more left and a little less bureaucratic than the traditional ones. In February 1991 the COBAS, alongside the anarcho-syndicalist union, the USI, organised a self-managed general strike

against the Gulf War, which involved 200,000 people. This initiative brought more people out far more than the combined membership of the committees and USI put together.

A year later a formal organisation, the CUB (United rank and file confederation) was established, uniting workers across various sectors. This 'alternative' union is today one of several in Italy, including the UniCobas, which has an explicitly libertarian perspective. These organisations have developed their own bureaucratic practices and operate somewhere between a political group, a trade union and their original role as a tool of liaison and co-ordinated struggle.

France: echoes of 1968?

In France during the early 1990s a similar

the rail workers, were isolated and the struggles petered out.

What such events point to is that even in a period where the ruling class seems to have extinguished the spirit of revolt and any vision of a better world, the basic contradictions of capitalism create resistance. Likewise, the stranglehold of bureaucrats and officials is challenged by the innate creativity of the mass of working people, time and time again.

In the tradition?

The In the Tradition series has attempted to draw the very briefest outline of the ideas, people and events that have influenced the development of the modern libertarian communist movement. Most of the events have allowed us insights into how people attempt to practically solve the problems of

'In February 1991 the COBAS, alongside the anarcho-syndicalist union, USI, organised a self-managed general strike against the Gulf War, which involved 200,000 people.'

development took place as workers in the health service, transport workers, posties, workers in the car industry, the airports and elsewhere began to self-organise. They established independent Liaison Committees which attempted to co-ordinate activity in their sectors. These Committees were constantly having to out manoeuvre the various established trade unions, themselves competing for recognition and advantage. Wildcat strikes involving lorry drivers, nurses and care workers, brought thousands of self-organised workers out. When these struggles died down, some following more success than others, the independent Committees tended not to establish themselves, as in Italy, as permanent structures. Many of those involved in these strikes in 1990-1992 were subsequently involved in the mass strike wave of the Hot Autumn of 1995. Public sector workers responded to proposed attacks upon social security, pensions and the public budget with a series of strikes, mass demonstrations and occupations. With echoes of 1968 (see In The Tradition part 3), at times this took on an almost insurrectional character with pitched battles between coal miners and police, the occupation of public buildings and barricades rising in towns and cities across the country. Eventually, with union help, the most active groups of workers, such as

organisation and struggle. Many have been inspirational and we have learned most from the activity of (extra)ordinary people trying to understand and change their world.

The Anarchist Federation accepts no guru, no theoretical God or master. We think no libertarian group or individual should. But we reject anti-intellectualism and ahistorical approaches, both of which are far too common amongst anarchists. Neither do we favour an eclecticism that simply borrows from here and there without critical appreciation. We hope that readers will seek out for themselves the thinkers, groups and movements that we have talked about. We hope that readers will take the time to contact us, demanding to know why we haven't covered x, y and z! So many important events and theories haven't made it into the parts, perhaps we should have started work on a book several years ago!

But, in a period such as our own, when libertarian revolutionary movements are growing in areas where they had never existed until the last 20 years, then the need for an engagement with *where we have been* is central to any understanding of *where we are going in the future*. We hope that In the Tradition has made a small contribution to making that engagement possible.

who's afraid of nanotechnology?

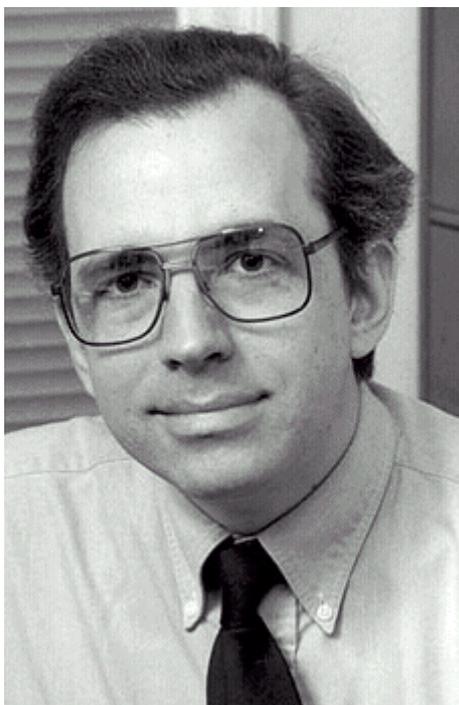
The strength of opposition to GM crops in Britain and elsewhere in the world has shocked the scientific establishment, biotech companies and government bodies to the core.

Now environmental and political concerns are being voiced worldwide about 'nanotechnology', namely the coming together of technologies at increasingly small scales that promises to give humankind unprecedented control over the matter and organisms that make up our world. Development of the ideas and tools to realise nanotech is already being vigorously funded by government and private bodies alike, to the tune of billions of pounds. But it has become clear that some of these same interests are now perceiving a need for 'public engagement' at this relatively early stage of development (at least in terms of consumer products), so much so that in June 2003 Lord Sainsbury commissioned the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering to conduct a study (now completed) of likely developments and implications for ethics, health and society. So what's all the fuss about?

Our world is made of atoms and molecules so what better to manipulate its behaviour at the finest level? But until relatively recently, the story goes, we've only really been able to deal with matter in bulk - mixing and separating chemicals to make new substances has been the mainstay of much of our science since the Iron Age, only supplemented in the last century by our ability to manipulate nuclear matter. Over the last 30 years, however, it's become possible to manufacture ever more complex computer chips and to manipulate the DNA molecules that make up the insides of cells -



An ant carries a 1mm² microchip



Eric Drexler - Engines of Creation

achievements that have fuelled the economies of the developed world in the hands of the powerful and rich electronics and biotech industries.

The GM debate, especially over crops and food, has helped heighten awareness of this power over consumers and producers alike - a 'debate' that has been forced on industries whether by media-amplified consumer unease or by destruction of test sites and seed trials, or by governments responding to those reactions.

Nanotech takes another step towards creation and techniques for manipulation of smaller devices and finer materials, some of which already exist, and this new power raises new safety and ethical concerns. One perhaps obvious safety concern is that very small size particles can interact with living organisms, indeed are being designed to do so for many applications. This might be a good thing - a new way of supplying life-saving drugs for example, or a very bad

thing - if particles or fibres at scales similar to smoke, soot or asbestos lodge in our lungs, or enter and affect cells in detrimental ways. A related issue is that some materials that are not listed as dangerous at larger scales (and so do not currently come under regulatory controls) could become so at smaller scales. One current concern is material used in sunscreen - watch out for 'micro/nano' in cosmetics ads designed to prepare us for more of these. Not only this but the technologies of bioscience, computing and chemistry are converging so that concepts of organisms, machines and environment are getting mixed up. Intelligent chips that inhabit cells or control tissue growth and paint-on arrays of minute lights (or cameras) are just two examples of near-future applications. Insects whose nervous systems are electronically controlled, and self-replicating mini-robots (nanobots) that work in groups to manipulate materials, are being mooted as further-in-the-future capabilities. The latter raises the nightmares of these tiny robots getting out of control in the environment, or the designing of biological or chemical weapons with the very intention of destroying materials or life from the inside. The terms grey-goo and green-goo have been coined to help picture these kinds of scenarios, with some media exposure. [If you've come across this in the press already you might be concerned that Prince Charles came up with the grey-goo problem! Don't worry about siding with the Royals on this, as it actually originated with Eric Drexler of the Foresight Institute, an intellectual originator of the ideas and implications of nanotechnology in his book 'Engines of Creation']. So, why are governments and companies so worried about public opinion these days? Well, not surprisingly much of this comes down to money. Biotechnology has now been shown to be a big earner, and investment in nanotechnology is likewise expected to produce massive profits over the few next decades. Much of the hype and huge funding to promote nanotech is fuelled by the expectation that getting global patents now will ensure that the spoils of the hoped for 'killer applications' of the future will go to the early investors - predominately in the rich developed nations of course - and ensure the continued strength of the biggest economies. Another driver for the so-called

democracies has been created by fostering the need to develop the technology before the bad-guys do - a good way to help secure funding from paranoid governments intent on military domination. But in spite of the scaremongering, the real fear is that popular resistance to GM will translate to nanotech and have an effect on investment, funding and future profits (often called 'stifling innovation'). As well as the potential for consumer refusal and scaring off venture capitalists there is also a worry by companies of 'over-regulation' resulting from politicians responding to public opinion, whether the kind in the EU and elsewhere to limit exposure and import of GM materials, or the anti-abortionist led legislation against embryonic stem-cell research from the US and Costa Rica.

Some scientists are still saying don't worry 'it's all just chemistry' and talk of custom-designing more environmentally friendly materials or even making them to destroy pollutants, but considering a greater awareness of chemical and pharmaceutical disasters in history, just accusing ordinary people of being Luddites is no longer washing. On the other hand, some proponents of nanotech are now attempting to distance themselves from the more futuristic ponderings of enthusiasts like Drexler - frustrated by the fears he has created - and are calling to prioritise funding on less speculative research (at least for now). But what of the other components of nanotechnology? Minute sensors could have a great impact on our freedom. There's already a proliferation of cameras and soon we'll have ID tags on every product. The smaller these become, the more pervasive and hidden these will be. And who might own the 'bionic' insect you were trying to swat? There is virtually no real awareness about these aspects whilst the technology is being rapidly developed.

So, here we go again with a massive campaign against nanotech - or do we? Does this even require special notice by revolutionaries? Well perhaps not if we only stick at the level of safety - we might just be

siding with calls for more state regulation! Even direct action can just end up with a statist solution if governments just respond to public outcry, however empowering it may feel at the time. That's fine if we just want protecting against risks to our safety and that of the environment, but it doesn't get us very far in creating a climate of questioning the vested interests of those who really stand to benefit from the applications of new technologies. Anarchists, who criticise both state and capitalism, have a lot to offer in this respect. Interestingly, Demos, a policy influencing think-tank in the UK, has started to worry that if our democracies don't engage us citizens at the societal and ethical levels (as they didn't do about GM) that we'll never accept any new technologies or controversial policies (whether NHS reform or war with Iraq) again, especially considering that we already mistrust multinational companies. That may be the case, but the fact they are saying this at all is perhaps the best indication that anti-GM protest and direct action has shifted the terrain - it's not just about nut and bolts and what they are being used for, but about who wants to own them, and why.

further information

ETC Group: The Big Down, <http://www.etcgroup.org>
 Greenpeace: Future technologies, today's choices, <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk>
 RS/RAE joint study, <http://www.nanotec.org.uk>
 Institute of Nanotechnology, <http://www.nano.org.uk>
 Foresight Institute, <http://www.foresight.org>
 Center for Responsible Nanotechnology, <http://crnano.org>
 Demos: See-through Science, <http://www.demos.co.uk>

Friends and neighbours

If you like what you read in Organise! you might be interested in these:

SchNEWS - Direct action news sheet. Send stamps to PO Box 2600, Brighton BN2 2DX

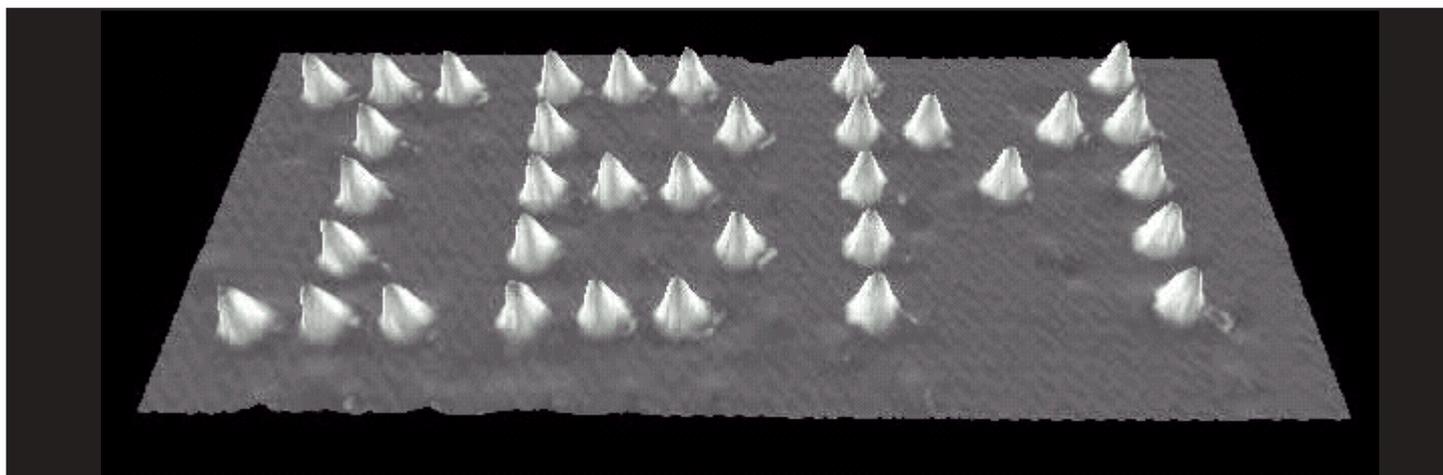
Direct Action - Anarcho-sindicalist magazine produced by the Solidarity Federation. £2.00 issue/£5 subs PO Box 29, SWPDO, M15 5HW

Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly - Under new management! Now more anarchist-communist influenced and worth a read. From Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX. Send a pound for an issue.

Earth First! Action Update - Monthly news from Earth First! £5 for 12 issue sub. PO Box 487, Norwich, NR2 3AL

Collective Action Notes - Bulletin produced by CAN. Information on struggles worldwide. Contact PO Box 22962 Baltimore, MD 212, USA.

NEFAC, the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists - Probably the group closest to us politically. Write to either NEFAC (English speaking), Roundhouse Collective, c/o Black Planet radical Books, 1621 Fleet St., Baltimore MD 21231, USA or NEFAC (Francophone), Groupe Anarchists Emile-Henry, C.P. 55051, 138 St-Valliers O., Quebec G1K 1J0, Canada. Alternatively, you can link to them from our website (www.afed.org.uk).



IBM logo spelled out with 35 atoms of xenon

the resistance in Iraq

The United States and its allies have become bogged down in Iraq. The “mission accomplished” boasts of Bush now seem extremely hollow.

The numbers of fatalities incurred by the US military are well over a thousand and they have lost control in some areas. In fact some areas are no-go. The American policy of capturing the Iraqi oilfields and just as importantly, their hopes of controlling the whole of oil-rich Central Asia from their conquest of Iraq and Afghanistan have gone terribly wrong. Saddam was overthrown, but instead of strengthening the US grip on the world, the forces of Islamic fundamentalism have been seriously strengthened. Saddam, previously a useful client of the West, kept both working class revolution AND fundamentalism under control in his secular State. Now Iraq might disintegrate into several different pieces.

The coalition that the US cobbled together in the wake of the September 11th attacks and the start of the “war on terror” are also showing signs of great strain. There are large anti-war movements throughout the world and anti-war sentiment has resulted in the withdrawal of Spain from the occupation. Support for the occupation is increasingly shaky in other countries, with nervous governments worried that they might be voted out on a wave of anti-war sentiment.

The armed resistance against occupation is made up of two main currents- the Baathist party of Saddam, and different Islamic fundamentalist factions. Part of the Baathist forces are made up of Saddam’s elite Republican Guard, which was his main arm of repression inside Iraq and on whose loyalty Saddam and his family could count. (about 25,000 men and women) Another section of the Saddamist resistance is made up of the Fedayeen Saddam. This formation was set up by Saddam’s son Uday, as a counterweight to his brother Qusay, who controlled the Republican Guard. It is trained in urban combat and undercover work.

Saddam’s regime lasted 40 years and in true totalitarian fashion, it planted itself deeply in every aspect of Iraqi society. That is why, despite the capture of Saddam and the death of his sons, it is proving difficult to uproot. A whole social layer, the bureaucracy and the higher ranks of the military are totally identified with Saddam. For them to retain or claw back their privileges, and there were many, they must either return to power through armed struggle or integrate themselves into the new regime set up by the US.

Originally the US planned on deBaathisation of Iraq. A number of workers strikes broke out in summer 2000 calling for wage rises and violently opposing themselves to the corrupt Baathist factory directors. The urgent need to put the Iraqi economy back on a firm footing meant this was soon forgotten and a number of Baathist officials, bureaucrats and military

leaders have been put back in the saddle, headed up by Alawai, dissident Baathist and loyal accomplice of the CIA.

Splinter

The splintering of the Baathists, with some rallying to the new regime and their failure to mount an effective armed resistance, meant the emergence of political Islam as a dominant trend within the resistance.

The Baathists reinforced religious identities with their persecution of the Shiite Moslems and the expulsion of one of the oldest Jewish communities. Ethnic and religious identities were strengthened, whilst dying institutions were reinforced. The Baathists gave a role to tribal leaders, which caused derision in a population that is 70% urban and considers them as archaic. The chaos in Iraq is now in fact unleashing a process of retribalisation. The Americans have entered into this with their exploitation of tribal relations and which sheikhs could be supported.



Combatants

Many of the Moslem combatants fighting in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Somalia and Bosnia are young people from countries who are glad to see them go off to fight. For example Saudi Arabia is happy to finance Islamism internationally in order to fight it internally. The exodus of many young Islamist militants means less of a threat at home. Those Jordanians, Saudis, Palestinians, Syrians who came to support Iraq against the Allies were stranded there and had no alternative but to carry on armed struggle. These fighters have brought the most intransigent forms of Islam with them like Wahhabism and Salafism. The similarity between the communiqués of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria and the Islamic Army in Iraq are not a coincidence. The Islamist internationalists are a minority in Iraq but their fanaticism and their networks and their training represent a force to be reckoned with.

Abu Rashid, Wahhabist militant and ex-member of the Saddam guard, is now one of the “emirs” of Fallujah. The Taliban is represented by the Army of the Companions of the Prophet, who declared jihad on the feminist leader Yannar Mohammed because of her opposition to the sharia. And of course there is the organisation led by the Jordanian Abu Moussab Zarkaoui, the notorious beheader, who has pledged allegiance to Osama bin-Laden. Al-Qaeda is hostile to all the Arab nationalisms and Arab “socialisms” and wants to create a vast Moslem Umma (community) founded on sharia law and the most advanced capitalism. It is a pure product of capitalist globalisation and it is not for nothing that bin-Laden, a Saudi millionaire, heads this movement.

Whilst the Baathists can only rely on vast stockpiles of arms, the Islamists can count on the backing of the financial networks of Islamism. The Saudi monarchy has not the slightest intention of letting Iraq return to a leading role in petrol production. Iran for its part is financing the Shiite section of the resistance.

Some Islamists have done like the Baathists, integrating themselves into the provisional government, like the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution, whose several thousand militia are now in the new regular army in Iraq.

Even Moqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Shiite resistance, is ready to turn his Mahdi Army into a political party and participate in the 2005 elections.

ALL the Islamist groups, despite their differences have the same aims, to establish a regime founded on Islam and sharia law, with strict sexual apartheid. They hate

atheists and secularists, other religious groups, feminists, organised workers, socialists and communists and they devote columns to denouncing them in their papers. The poet Mohammed Abdul Rahim, who recently joined the Worker-Communist Party and openly campaigned against political Islam in the town of Kut, was murdered, probably by troops of the Islamic Council of the Islamic Revolution, which is part of the new provisional government. In Sadr City, the stronghold of al-Sadr, the local population have supported his Mahdi Army. But in Nassiriyah, the workers of the aluminium factory saw off his troops, which had attempted to occupy and turn it into a military base. In Basra, the different Islamist parties have set up an “emirate” where women are no longer seen in the street and where alcohol and nightclubs and even picnics are forbidden. In Mosul, women working in hospitals or universities have been shot and beheaded. One could argue that there must be more to the resistance than the Baathists or the Islamists. If it does exist, it has not made itself known. The Iraqi Communist Party has participated in the new government, giving it a certain legitimacy within the working class, and has played an important role in the reorganisation of industry, controlling a powerful trade union central, the Iraqi Federation of Unions. This has not always been appreciated by ordinary members of unions. This has resulted in a split called the Communist Party (Cadres) who have joined the armed resistance. Whilst it might criticise the religious leaders, it makes common front with the Islamists and Baathists in the name of patriotism!!

Mobsters and mullahs

A section of the Communist Party has lost

some of its members to the Worker-Communist Party whose opposition to both the occupation and Islamism has attracted an increasing number. This party does not participate in the resistance and criticises it for its nationalist and religious character. It organises in the areas where it has strength- principally refugee camps and squatted buildings- armed groups to protect the population from Islamism and gangsterism. One of its leaders has declared that its aim is to arm the masses and their organisations, to kick out the occupation troops, diminish Islamist influence and to develop the power of the masses. However, they remain trapped within Leninist ideology, and it remains to be seen whether such a mindset will effect their practice as regards real autonomy for the working class. Why is the resistance overwhelmingly on the right and extreme right, with sections of the left pulled into its orbit and with admiration from a section of the extreme left?

Many were favourable to autonomy for the Kurds, they were weary from the years of war, embargoes and sanctions. The appalling behaviour of the occupation armies and the rise in unemployment has now turned this weariness into hostility. Some of the poorest sections of the masses have been drawn into the struggle against the occupiers. The Islamists, with their well-funded networks have benefited from this.

The workers movement and the women’s movement in Iraq does not have large resources. They can only count on themselves, and international solidarity, to develop their workers councils and neighbourhood councils. The resistance only offers an ultrareactionary Islamic regime.

WHAT GOES IN

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has written the articles and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!

ORGANISE!

the third revolution?

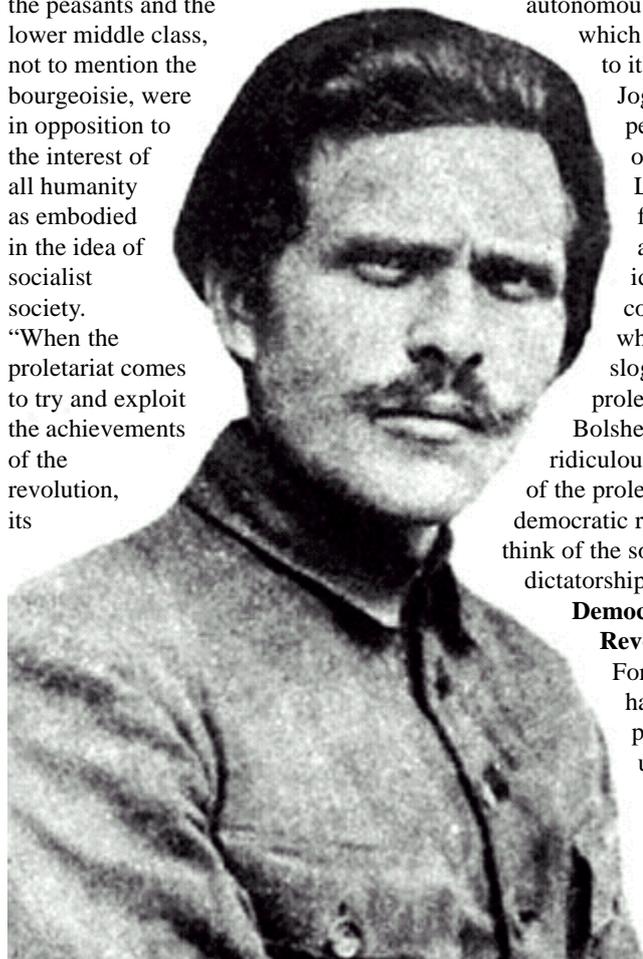
Peasant resistance to the Bolshevik government

“All those who really take the social revolution to heart must deplore that fatal separation that exists between the proletariat of the towns and the countryside. All their efforts must be directed to destroying it, because we must all be conscious of this- that as much as the workers of the land, the peasants, have not given a hand to the workers of the town, for a common revolutionary action, all the revolutionary efforts of the towns will be condemned to inevitable fiascos. The whole revolutionary question is there; it must be resolved, or else perish”. Bakunin, from *The Complete Works*-“On German PanGermanism”.

During the Civil War in Russia, Lenin’s government was faced with a number of predominantly peasant uprisings which threatened to topple the regime. Can the accusation be justified that these were led by kulaks (rich peasants), backed by White reaction, with the support of the poorer peasants, unconscious of their real class interests? Or was it, as some opponents of Bolshevism to its left claimed, the start of the ‘Third Revolution’?

Orthodox Marxism discounted the revolutionary role of the peasantry.

According to the German Marxist Karl Kautsky, the small peasant was doomed. It was tactically useful to mobilise the peasant masses. In his the Agrarian Question, he stated that the short-term objectives of the peasants and the lower middle class, not to mention the bourgeoisie, were in opposition to the interest of all humanity as embodied in the idea of socialist society. “When the proletariat comes to try and exploit the achievements of the revolution, its



allies-the peasantry- will certainly turn against it...the political make-up of the peasantry disbars it from any active or independent role and prevents it from achieving its own class representation...By nature it is bourgeois and shows its reactionary essence clearly in certain fields... That is why the proposition before the congress speaks of the dictatorship of the proletariat alone supported by the peasantry... Peasantry must assist proletariat, not the proletariat the peasantry in the achievement of the latter’s wishes”. Leo Jogiches, “The dictatorship of the proletariat *supported* by the peasantry” at the Sixth Party Congress of the Polish Social Democrats 1908. (and the following discussion at the Congress where it was stated that the “peasantry cannot play the autonomous role alongside the proletariat which the Bolsheviks have ascribed to it”. Rosa Luxemburg shared Jogiches’ mistrust of the peasantry, and could see them only as a reactionary force. Lenin himself, extremely flexible on a tactical level, and extremely rigid on an ideological level, was conscious of what he was doing when his Party advanced the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. After Bolshevik triumph “then it would be ridiculous to speak of the unity of will of the proletariat and of the peasantry, of democratic rule...Then we shall have to think of the socialist, of the proletarian dictatorship”(Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, 1905).

For his part Trotsky had a harsher attitude to the peasantry, and was unconvinced of even a temporary alliance with them: “The proletariat will come into conflict not only with the bourgeois groups which supported the proletariat during the first stage of the

revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasants (1905, written in 1922).

The Bolsheviks defined ‘kulaks’ as rich peasants, able to sell produce on the market as well as produce for their own use, able to employ hired labour and to sell their surplus products. They were seen as representing the real petit bourgeois elements in the countryside, ready to develop agriculture through capitalist advances. In the second stage of the revolution, after the initial bourgeois stage, the kulaks (and a ‘substantial part of the middle peasantry’- Lenin) would go over to the bourgeoisie, whilst the proletariat would rally the poor peasantry to it. But as Ferro points out: “The search for the kulak was partly false, a matter of chasing shadows, for the kulaks had often disappeared, or sunk to muzhik level, since the Revolution of October” (1). What is certain is that on a practical level the Bolsheviks alienated vast masses of the peasantry in the ‘War Communism’ years from 1918 to 1921, in particular with grain requisitioning and the Chekist repression. The Bolsheviks sought to bring class war to the peasantry. In doing so they exaggerated the importance and wealth of the kulaks. Selunskia reports that in fact only 2 per cent could be classified as ‘clearly kulaks’ (2). One official statistic gives the following figures: in 1917, 71% of the peasants cultivated less than 4 hectares, 25% had between 4 and 10 hectares, only 3.7% had more than 10 hectares, these categories changing respectively in 1920 to 85, 15, and 0.5%. Another criterion, the possession of a horse, according to the same statistics, can be used to show relative wealth. 29% had none, 49% had one, 17% had two, and 4.8% had more than 3 (in 1917). By 1920, the figures had changed respectively to 27.6, 63.6, 7.9, and 0.9%. (3)

In fact, the number of kulaks- and here we are referring to Bolshevik norms as to what constituted ‘wealthy’- was diminishing, and the equalisation process was continuing. As for the requisitioning, the leading Bolshevik Kubanin admitted that half the food collected rotted, and many cattle died on railway carriages en route, due to lack of water and food (4).

War communism

In reaction to war communism, a number of insurrections broke out. In the West Ukraine, the Makhnovist movement, inspired and militarily led by the anarchist

peasant Nestor Makhno, was one of the more ideologically developed movements. It must be remembered that the Makhnovists had controlled this part of the Ukraine before the arrival of the Red Army and had successively defeated Austro-German and White troops. The Makhnovists invited a number of anarchists fleeing from the North and Bolshevik persecution or returning from foreign exile, to work through the Nabat (Alarm) Confederation of Anarchists in propaganda, cultural and educational work among the peasantry. The Makhnovists saw the White threat as a greater danger than the Bolsheviks, and concluded a series of alliances with the latter in a united front against the White leaders, Denikin and Wrangel. In fact, there seems to be much evidence that Wrangel would have smashed through the Ukraine and taken Moscow and destroyed the Bolshevik government, if not for the efforts of the Makhnovists. At the end of a joint campaign against the Whites in the Crimea, Makhnovist commanders were invited to Red Army headquarters and summarily shot. Makhno himself fought on for several months, before being forced to retire over the border (5).

The Cheka and the *prodrazverstka* (food requisition squads) never showed themselves in the Makhnovist centre of Hulyai-Polye before 1919, but peasants living in the Ekaterinoslav and Alexandrovsk areas had plenty of experience of them. In other areas of insurrection the initial opposition was more directly a result of the 'War Communism' policies of Bolshevism.

In West Siberia, (and indeed throughout the whole of Siberia - see *Organise!* 62 and the article *A Siberian Makhnovschina?*) The regime was faced with probably their worst threat, and it is possible that it was this, more than the Kronstadt insurrection of the same year, that forced it to change course. **Krasnaya Armiya** (Red Army, published by the Military Academy, and aimed at a small circle of Communist readers) had to admit in its edition of December 1921 that the carrying out of the grain collections in spring 1920 roused the Siberian peasantry against the Communists and that "the movement in the Ishimsk region was proceeding under the same slogans which at one time were put forth by the Kronstadt sailors". Red Army had to admit that ineptitude, economic mismanagement, and 'criminal' seizure of property had been amongst the causes of peasant dissatisfaction. The journal recognised the effect on the morale when they saw at first hand the food requisitioned from them rotting in carloads. 'Provocatory acts' by government representatives in the tax-gathering agencies had frequently brought about risings of entire villages. The journal

also reported on 'a very unique' movement in the Don and Kuban regions, headed by Maslakov, an ex-Commander of the Red Army, with the aim of declaring war on "the saboteurs of the Soviet power, on the 'commissar-minded' Communists". (6) In fact, this was a whole brigade of the Red Army.

Links

Indeed Maslakov's uprising in February 1921 in eastern Ukraine quickly linked with the Makhnovists through the detachment of the Makhnovist commander Brova. Other



Bolshevik, General Mikhail Tukhachevski, who put down peasant uprisings

Red Army Commanders revolted, as with the battalion at Mikhailovka led by Vakulin, and then Popov, in the Northern Don Cossack territory. (from December 1920) Vakulin appears to have had a force of 3,200, six times the amount he had started out with, when he moved east into the Ural region. He succeeded in taking prisoner a Red Army force of 800. But on 17th February 1921 he lost a battle in which he died, and the Don Cossack F. Popov, a Social Revolutionary, took over. The Popov group moved back into Samara and then Saratov provinces, picking up strength as it went along. It was estimated by the Red Army that it numbered 6,000 by now. It managed to capture an entire Red Army battalion. It appears to have been eventually crushed, if we believe Bolshevik sources. In Samara a Left-Social Revolutionary officer, Sapozhkov, in the Red Army revolted at the head of 'anarchistic and SR elements' (according to the Soviet historian Trifonov). He was himself the son of a peasant in this province. This uprising began on 14th or 15th July 1920 with a force of 2700. Sapozhkov fell in battle on 6th September after 2 months of fighting. His place was taken by Serov, who was still able to gather 3,000

combatants and who fought on until summer of 1923, the longest time than any rebel band had fought on, apart from Makhno.

In the Tambov region another serious insurrection began in August 1920 under the guidance of Alexander Stepanovitch Antonov. Here again the revolt was sparked off by grain requisition. Antonov himself was an ex-Social Revolutionary, who spoke of defending both workers and peasants against Bolsheviks. Other leading lights in this movement included, Socialist Revolutionaries, Left Socialist Revolutionaries and Anarchists. The Antonovists were able to assemble 21,000 combatants at one time. The Anarchist Yaryzhka commanded a detachment of the Antonovist movement under the black flag of anarchism. Whilst serving in the Army during World War I, he had struck an officer in 1916, was imprisoned, and had converted to anarchism as a result of his experiences. He began operations in autumn 1918, fighting on till killed in action by the Bolsheviks in autumn 1920.

It can be seen that all these risings or oppositional movements to Leninism amongst the peasantry occurred around about the same time, over the period 1920-1921. Indeed, taken with the rising of the sailors at Kronstadt in 1921, they formed in toto a grave threat to Bolshevik rule. The aims of the Kronstadt insurgents seem to have had an echo in the peasant movements. This is hardly surprising considering many Kronstadt sailors had peasant origins. The west Siberia uprising adopted the Kronstadt demands, as noted by *Krasnaya Armiya*. After the Tambov insurrection, the Soviet authorities found the Kronstadt resolutions at an important Antonovist hiding place. Antonov himself was so saddened by the news of the crushing of the Kronstadt uprising that he went on a vodka binge, so it is alleged. It appears that some Kronstadt sailors escaped the crushing of the insurrection and linking up with the Antonovschina. On 11th July Bolshevik cavalry fought an engagement with a small but elite band of Antonovists, Socialist-Revolutionary political workers and sailors. They fought with "striking steadfastness" until the end according to the Chekist Smirnov, when the few survivors shot first their horses and then themselves. One Bolshevik noted in 1921 that "the anarchist-Makhnovists in the Ukraine reprinted the appeal of the Kronstadters, and in general did not hide their sympathy for them" (7)

Accusations

It is clear that the Kronstadters were opposed to Tsarist restoration, and had been instrumental in bringing down the Kerensky regime. The Makhnovists were equally

implacable towards the Whites. No alliance was even considered with them against the Bolsheviks, and indeed the Makhnovists formed anti-White alliances with the Bolsheviks, the last of which was to prove their downfall, as seen above. The movement was deeply influenced by anarchism, and hardly likely to countenance collaboration with one of its mortal foes. As for Maslakov, he had been a trusted Red Commander, and seems to have been fighting for a communism without commissars. Krasnaya Armiya admitted that the insurgents in the Don and Kuban regions 'disapprove of and fight against White Guardist agitation'. As for Antonov, he "undertook no embarrassing action against the Bolsheviks such as cutting communications behind the front lines, but contented himself with combating punitive detachments sent out against the peasants" (8). Antonov had been imprisoned under Tsarism for his activities as a Socialist Revolutionary during and after the 1905 Revolution with a 12 year sentence in Siberia, and his peasant movement was unlikely to have favoured a return to the old days.

Another accusation against the peasant movements was that they were kulak-led, dragging the rest of the peasantry in their wake. An analysis of leading lights within the Makhnovist movement at least disproves it in their case. Trotsky implied that the "liquidation of Makhno does not mean the end of the Makhnovschina, which has its roots in the ignorant peasant masses". But all the leading Makhnovists that we have biographical information on came from the poor peasantry, including Makhno himself, and in a few cases the middle peasantry. As Malet says: "the Bolsheviks have totally misconstrued the nature of the Makhno movement. It was not a movement of kulaks, but of a broad mass of the peasants, especially the poor and middle peasants". (9)

We have little empirical evidence for the composition of the peasant uprisings in the Don and Kuban areas. Radkey has provided some information on the Tambov insurrection through research under difficult conditions, and has found that Antonov was the son of a small-town artisan-hardly a kulak! There is evidence that some leading Antonovists were of kulak origin, (based on Bolshevik archives) yet one Cheka historian had to admit that a "considerable part of the middle peasantry" supported the insurrection (10). There is evidence that Antonov had the support of the poor peasantry and some workers in the province (11).

Reservations

One must reservations over the allegations of the 'kulak character' of these uprisings.

Even if it is admitted that some kulaks took parting the risings, it must be granted, from the little evidence available, that other sections of the peasantry took an active part. What can be made of the allegations that far from being counter-revolutionary, the peasant uprisings were the start of a 'Third Revolution' (leading on from the February and October Revolutions). This term appears to have been developed by Anarchists within the Makhnovist movement, appearing in a declaration of a Makhnovist organ, the Revolutionary Military Soviet, in October 1919. It reappeared during the Kronstadt insurrection. Anatoli Lamanov developed it in the pages of the Kronstadt *Izvestia*, the journal of the insurgents, of which he was an editor. Lamanov was a leader of the Union of Socialist-Revolutionary Maximalists in Kronstadt, and saw Kronstadt as the beginning of a 'Third Revolution' which would overthrow the "dictatorship of the Communist Party with its Cheka and state capitalism" and transfer all power "to freely elected Soviets" and transform the unions into "free associations of workers, peasants and labouring intelligentsia" (12). The Maximalists, a split from the Socialist-Revolutionaries, demanded immediate agrarian and urban social revolution, a Toilers Republic of federated soviets, anti-parliamentarism and distrust of parties. There is little evidence on the links between them and the Makhnovists, though it would be unlikely that this slogan emerged in two places totally independently. "Here in Kronstadt, has been laid the first stone of the Third Revolution, striking the last fetters from the labouring masses and opening a broad new road for socialist creativity", proclaimed the Kronstadters (13).

The term 'Third Revolution' however, seems vague, with no clear idea of how to bring this Revolution about. It had its adherents in Makhnovist circles, and possibly in West Siberia and with Maslakov, but never operated in a unified approach to a development of its implementation. What distinguished the Makhnovist movement from Tambov was the former's specific ideology. The Antonov movement had no ideology, "knew what they were against....but only the haziest of notions as to how to order Russia in the hour of victory" (14). The Antonovists were a local movement with local perspectives. The Makhnovists were wide-ranging, and links were formed with Maslakov. Makhno himself campaigned as far as the Volga, going around the Don area linking up similar bands. A Makhnovist detachment under Parkhomenko was sent off to the Voronezh area in early March 1921 and it might have been attempting to link up with Antonovist detachments under Kolesnikov.

But the vast expanse of the Soviet Union curtailed link-ups between the movements. There seems to have been widespread mutual ignorance of either the existence or the aims of the differing peasant movements.

Where there was an awareness, there seems to have been little effort to combine the movements for a unified onslaught against the Bolshevik government. The Kronstadt insurrection was later deemed as several months premature by some of its leading lights (15). Localism and lack of a more global strategy similarly hamstrung Antonov and the movements in the Don, Kuban and west Siberian regions, as did the very spontaneity of the risings. The Makhnovists may have had a better grasp of the situation, but they failed to unite the opposition, going into alliance once more with the Bolsheviks, despite previous unhappy experiences. Nevertheless, the sum of these risings presented a very grave threat to the regime, forcing it to at least move from War Communism to the New Economic Policy.

Notes.

1. p.138 Ferro
2. *Izmenia* 1917-20, in Atkinson.
3. L Kritsman, *The Heroic Period of the Great Russian Revolution*, 1926 in Skirda.
4. Kubanin 'The anti-Soviet peasant movement during the years of civil war (war communism) 1926, in Skirda.
5. Palij, Malet, Skirda all cite evidence of Makhnovist achievement in saving the Bolshevik capital
6. p.148, Maximoff
7. Lebeds, quoted by Malet.
8. p.82 Radkey
9. p122 Malet
10. Sofinov, in Radkey. p106.
11. p107-110 Radkey
12. See Getzler
13. p243 Avrich
14. p.69 Radkey
15. see Avrich

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Glossary

- Kulak - a better off peasant
 Muzhik - the poorer peasants
 Whites - the reaction to the Russian Revolution, gathered around the Tsarists
 Socialist-Revolutionaries - revolutionary party that saw a key role for the peasants and thought that Russian society could avoid capitalism and go straight to a socialist society
 Left Socialist-Revolutionaries - a more radical split from the SRs.

the emerging movement

A member of the Anarchist Federation talks to a member of Organise!, the Irish anarchist organisation, to find out the state of the movement there and what prompted the merger between two of the national groups.

Perhaps you could explain the basis of the merger of the Anarchist Federation and Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation in Ireland?

The merger of the Anarchist Federation (AF) and Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) in Ireland was based on the common desire for those organisations to look at practical ways forward for anarchism in Ireland. Theoretically and tactically, we came to believe that there was not enough difference in our mutual positions to warrant separate organisations, especially given the current size of those organisations. From working together on previous campaigns - anti-war activity, prisoner support, support for the fire fighters etc. - we already knew that there was a sufficient level of trust, confidence and mutual respect to render practical cooperation possible.

After a series of private meetings, which covered a whole range of different issues, the lack of divergence in our position on 'the national question' was confirmed. The question of workplace organisation was discussed, from time to time at later meetings, but never formally.

Did the merger start with a formal proposal or did it grow organically?

There was never a formal proposal for the AF and ASF to sit down and discuss amalgamation, though members of the AF did respond positively to the proposal made by Jason Brannigan to the movement on the 'irishanarchism' email list in 2003. For those comrades in Britain not aware of this proposal, it called for the establishment of an Irish anarchist federation based on affinity groups that "could be formed around local areas, membership of the same trade union, be employed in the same industry, or around specific issues or collectives such as prisoner support or book distribution".

This was a proposal to all three organisations existing at the time in Ireland, and to other non-aligned activists. Unfortunately, the proposal did not meet with a positive response from the Workers' Solidarity Movement (WSM) at that time;

not that their response was negative, it was simply non-committal. It was just after this, however, that the ASF and AF published their first joint bulletin - Wildcat! - which focussed on class struggle relevant at the time, but also included a 'statement on the north', which we had previously agreed. It was while we were deciding the layout of the second edition of Wildcat! that we first began to realise the direction in which we were heading. It was suggested that we could compliment the statement in the first bulletin by having 'a statement on industrial organisation' in the second, and I think it was during the groundwork accomplished for that, that some of us first began to talk seriously of the possibility of merger.

Anarchist Communists and Anarcho-Syndicalists have historically differed about the way in which we create a free society. What's changed?

First of all, I think you have fallen into a common misconception regarding the use of those terms 'anarcho-communist' and 'anarcho-syndicalist'. It is fairly obvious that 'anarcho-syndicalists' are 'anarcho-communists' too. The latter is simply an umbrella term, indistinguishable from similar terms such as 'anarchist' or 'libertarian communist'.

Secondly, both the AF and ASF, during our negotiation process, were aware that those events that have 'historically' divided and weakened us should not be permitted to do so over and over again.

For example, from the perspective of the AF in Ireland at the time (of which I was a member), we had long ago refused to focus on the CNT's entry into government in 1936 as an example of anarcho-syndicalist tendencies towards reformism, especially when 'historically' the FAI (good 'anarcho-communists' by the way) had also participated. We looked instead at those episodes in history that would furnish us with hope for the future: for example, the relations between the Turin Libertarian Group (essentially council communists) and the USI during the upsurge in the Italian Works Councils in 1920. Questions like: 'what were the differences in the FAUD and

AAUD-E in Germany at the same time' were routinely being asked.

As to the accusations of a-politicism meted out to anarcho-syndicalists the world over, for anarchists, mostly based in the north of Ireland, we understood, as did the ASF, that being apolitical was the one thing neither organisation could be accused of.

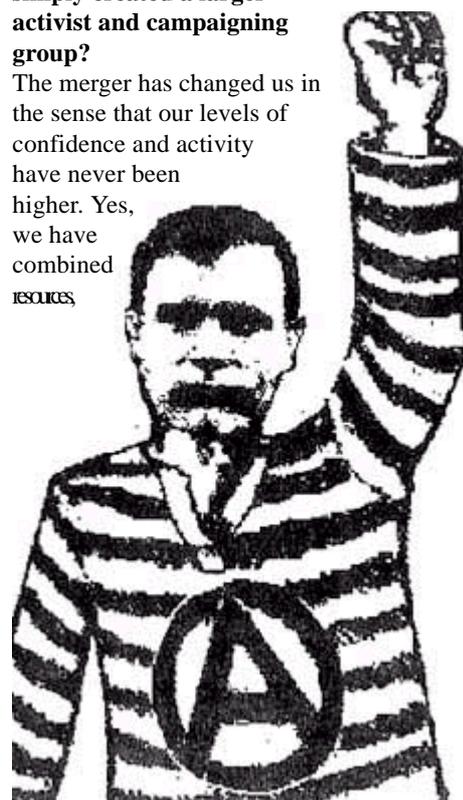
From the ASF perspective, I think there was a definite sense that here was another organisation which wanted to find practical ways of working together in the here and now. When Jason, in his proposal wrote: "I do not believe, personally, that an all island Anarchist organisation/federation, or for that matter anarcho-syndicalist federation/union can be built on the basis of any of those active at present trying to achieve this on their own and in competition with each other" it seemed to echo thoughts that we had already been having in the AF.

I think our aims and principles on trade unions and industrial organisation are a great step forward in the sense that a federation of workplace and community resistance groups, alongside activity in the trade unions (if the militancy of the TU warrants it) has provided us with the opportunity to initiate in cooperation with others a series of industrial networks. The establishment of an Educational Workers Network in Ireland will hopefully be just the first step in that direction.

Has the merger changed anything or simply created a larger activist and campaigning group?

The merger has changed us in the sense that our levels of confidence and activity have never been higher. Yes, we have combined

resources,



a better bulletin, a vastly improved website, and active locals (in Belfast, Armagh and Down and in Dublin/Kildare). But we have an even firmer belief in the validity of our ideas, and the willingness to argue them. At the same time, we are modest enough to realise, that the growth of anarchism in Ireland will be a combined effort of all those willing to participate in class struggle both in the workplace and our communities.

What are the main political priorities of the new group and what are the main challenges facing the working class in Ireland?

The main political priorities really lie in helping develop greater coordination, solidarity and mutual aid, which will culminate in the social, political and economic transformation of our society. In the north of Ireland, our activists have been greatly encouraged by the reaction of ordinary people to our message in the anti-water tax campaign in which we are currently involved. The message simply is 'organise yourselves'!

We do not see the 'working class' as something external to ourselves. Organise! members are working class people and we believe that as members of that class we can reach out to the majority among us and convince them that they have the ability to empower themselves.

What has been the reaction of other anarchist and libertarian groups to the merger? Have relationships altered and if so, how?

We had a Dublin launch, which was well attended by members of the WSM and others. Everyone has been positive about our merger. If relations have altered, they have altered for the better. Having a stronger anarchist organisation in Ireland can only be beneficial to the movement overall.

One of the key reasons for merger appears to have been to increase the profile of anarchism in the workplace. How's that going?

Organise! has members who are shop-

stewards in trade unions but, where the potential exists, it is through our vision of 'open' industrial networks that we believe there is a real possibility that the profile of anarchism in our workplaces will grow in the next few years. But not just the workplace, organisation must link up with community-based struggle as well.

What campaigns are Organise! involved in at the moment?

Our ongoing campaigns are anti-racism, anti-water charges activity and prisoner support. Our members are involved in the Fascists Out Campaign (FOC), which has taken direct action against the rise of the White Nazi Party (WNP). We believe this is the only argument those thugs understand. In the north, the onset of water charges in 2006 has been met by our locals there actively going out and engaging with people in our communities, winning the argument for a massive campaign of non-payment based on direct action. Through our links with Anarchist Prisoner Support (APS), we remain constant in our desire to build up networks of support for all our prisoners. Recently, our members were involved in direct action against the use of Shannon airport by U.S. military aircraft and against the use of so-called 'less lethal weapons' by armed forces throughout the world.

What's your view of the state of libertarian politics in Ireland and the culture of resistance to the state?

I think libertarian politics are in a healthy state at the moment in Ireland. Grassroots networks have appeared in several cities in Ireland as a result of the prevalence of libertarian ideas and disillusionment with Marxist-Leninism. The Grassroots Gatherings of anarchists and libertarians in Ireland is ongoing, and while they are a useful source of networking with others, I believe, personally, that they ought to focus on more class-based issues in the future.

Are any other mergers or co-operations planned? What about the Workers Solidarity Movement?

We have no mergers planned with the WSM. We have just published our response to their position on partition and we would hope this would be seen as a valid attempt to work through some of our differences there. Regarding our positions on trade unions, there is possibly greater opportunity for rapprochement around the strategy of industrial networks.

As far the future we have a pamphlet on 'the national question' due out in early 2005 which will compliment the pamphlet on Belfast anarchism just released. A pamphlet on trade unions will follow later next year.

Anarchist Federation pamphlets in languages other than English

As We See It: Available in Welsh, Serbo-Croat, Greek, German and now, thanks to our Spanish comrades, in Spanish and Portuguese. They are each available for 70p including postage and packaging from our London address.

The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation: Available in Serbo-Croat for 70p including p&p.

If anybody you know who speaks Serbo-Croat in Britain or you have contacts in the countries of former Yugoslavia where Serbo-Croat is understood then why not send them copies?

German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Italian, Esperanto and Spanish translations of our **Aims and Principles** are also available for 20p plus postage.

Write to the London address for orders and bulk orders.

One of the most inspirational things to come out of the protests against the Invasion of Iraq and the anti-war movement in general, was the nationwide series of spontaneous school strikes. Thousands of pupils walked out of school on their own initiative when the invasion kicked off, and their protests were amongst the most militant and confrontational in the country - far more so than the 'official' Stop The War Committees feeble *a-to-b* marches and attempts to defuse any direct action being taken at the various military bases around the country.

schools out!

If the wider anti-war movement had been infused with the same spark of genuine anger, furious indignation and immediate willingness *to act* as the school strikes then we would have been a mighty big step further down the road of building a meaningful anti-war/occupation movement - one that was serious in its aims and methods, and that would actually carry a real social weight, instead of fumbling around making eyes at the useless (and probably mythical) 'labour left' in order to make their own personal Party gains - yet again putting their own useless sects needs ahead of those of the working class.

A *tiny* sample of the school based actions that took place on 20th March 2003 follows: A 1000 holding a demonstration inside school grounds in St Dunstan's School Glastonbury; 100 students at St Boniface School in Plymouth face suspension after a protest on the Hoe and in the city centre; 200 pupils at Helena Romanes School in Essex, staged a protest outside the school gates; Hundreds of pupils walked out from Priory, West Exeter, St Peter's school and others; 500 kids walked out of lessons from Clyst Vale school, Devon and held a protest meeting outside that went on all day; Pupils from Oathall Community College, West Sussex blocked the A272. Students at three other local schools were locked in by staff.; 200 pupils walked out of Caldew school Dalston at morning break, taking police by surprise. More than 500 ie about half the school - walked out of William Howard, Brampton, into town and held a minute's silence. Both were totally self-organised ; students at John Barrow School, Barrow were forced to climb an 8 ft fence to get out of their school after the headmaster locked them in. They occupied the town hall and

handcuffed themselves to the gates; 300 12-15 year olds left 3 schools in Edinburgh and were blocked from reaching the American Consulate by police after attempting to occupy Edinburgh Castle; Students in Plymouth walked out despite staff changing break times and locking doors to attempt to stop students joining protests.; 200 11-to-16 year olds from the Caldew School in Dalston marched into the centre of the village chanting anti-war slogans.

It must be emphasised that there were many, many more protests that day - and not just in the UK, most countries experienced something similar when the invasion began.

Working class resistance

School strikes have long been a part of the

working class protest in Britain, though the recent events were the first large actions since the early 1970s walkout by 800 students in the East End in protest at the sacking of radical teacher, and the various actions based around the Schools Action Unions and more recently in the early 1980s when pupils walked out in a number of Merseyside schools in protest at the YOP (Youth Opportunities [!] Scheme) that Thatcher was then trying to introduce that would allow local companies to use young people as near slave labour - sound familiar to all you New Dealers?

School strikes appeared almost as soon as compulsory Secondary Education was enforced against bitter resistance by many working class people who saw clearly what the state was up to in trying to eradicate working class self-education :



“For the school strike was essentially a defiant gesture of protest by working class children and their parents against the authoritarian, bureaucratic and centralised structure of schooling that increasingly wrenched control of education away from the local community and geared its organisation to the demands of a capitalist state.” (1)

Prior to 1880 and the introduction of state system of compulsory schooling there was a large variety of different forms of working class self-education, specifically geared to the interests and needs of the participants - from miners schools, night schools, chartist schools, reading rooms, workers libraries, lectures, talks and walks - and “all fiercely independent of the attempted influence of the established church, philanthropists and later, of the state, they were to embody the essential belief... ‘that a people’s education is safe only in a people’s own hands’” (2)

This state of affairs was very soon recognised as dangerous to the bosses - the workers could not be allowed to develop a self-identity based around their own conditions and experience and therefore needed an externally imposed ‘education’ that was more useful to capital. This was the thinking behind the various Elementary Acts and other school related legislation that began to appear after 1870.

In short, a situation existed in which the state was attempting to introduce its own form of education based on the concept of teachers being: “moral police” who could 1) condition children against “crime”-curb working class reappropriation in the community; 2) destroy “the mob”, working class organization based on family which was still either a productive unit or at least a viable organizational unit; 3) make habitual regular attendance and good timekeeping so necessary to children’s later employment; and 4) stratify the class by grading and selection” (3) And it was from the communities conflict with and refusal of these aims that many of the school



Burston school strike supporters

strikes sprung from as a closer look will reveal.

But first we need to examine those early strikes.

First struggles

These strikes were sometimes called in solidarity with their parents who were striking over their own conditions, but not always - more often they were autonomous actions, developing out of the needs and conditions of the pupils themselves, self-organised and directed towards goals that they themselves had agreed upon - the most obvious example being the almost continuous protests at the use of corporal punishment.

The first major cycle of school strikes began in 1889 in Hawick in Scotland, when pupils walked out demanding “shorter hours and no stick” - a demand that was to be found in almost all of the strikes up till the Second World War. The fact that these issues were so basic and common to most of the schools up and down the country led

to the surprisingly rapid spread of the strike to other areas - reaching London, South Wales and Bristol - as news of the walk-outs reached new areas pupils spontaneously took up the struggle, recognising their shared interests with other working class children no matter where they lived. In Bethnal Green, for example 500 striking pupils organised a demonstration through the area, and marched carrying the red flags and wearing liberty caps., Thousands of pupils were on strike nationwide at this time.

Following this, there were numerous isolated and short-term wild-cat walk-outs, generally over specific local issues until the next nationwide stoppage in 1911. Again, the key issue was the use of corporal punishment, but as the strike gathered momentum the old (but still relevant) issues concerning school hours and community control of schools rose to the surface again - a clear demonstration that the state had not yet managed to kill off working class traditions of independence and control over their own affairs.

This series of strikes was triggered by an act of brutality on a pupil by a teacher in Llanelli which led to pupils refusing to sit by and let this happen without any collective opposition - a strike was called and the pupils walked out. The next day, a Liverpool school followed suit and even elected a strike committee, followed by schools in Manchester. This led to an ever wider escalation than that of 1889 - within two weeks schools in more than 60 towns and cities were being picketed by pupils demanding longer holidays, and an end to

‘The series of strikes, triggered in Llanelli, led to pupils refusing to sit by and let things happen without any collective opposition. A strike was called and the pupils walked out. The next day, a Liverpool school followed suit and even elected a strike committee. Within two weeks schools in more than 60 towns and cities were being picketed by pupils demanding longer holidays and an end to corporal punishment.’

corporal punishment amongst other things. These lightening quick strikes needed no bureaucrats or ballots to make them happen, they developed spontaneously straight out of the needs of those involved - no leaders to sell them out, or to order them back to school. Amongst the tactics used by the strikers were 'Rolling columns' and 'Flying Pickets' issued with free-passage tickets by their local strike committees, which visited other schools asking their pupils to come out and join the strike, whilst the pickets themselves were usually on duty at schools other than their own to avoid recognition.

Violence often accompanied the strikes - sometimes directed at the police who had been detailed to man the school gates to keep an eye on the pickets or sometimes the teachers who were refusing to back the walk-outs - in Birkenhead the teachers had to ask for police protection. It was reported that in the East End, pickets carried iron bars, belts and stick to stop pupils and teachers entering the schools, schools in Hull, Glasgow, Islington, Bradford, Sheffield, , Leicester and other places were had their windows smashed, and in West Hartlepool after attacking the home of their headmaster, strikers went on to loot a luxury hotel of it's booze, and Dundee was the site of a full scale riot.

A sign of how seriously the strike was being taken is given by one striker in Newport who declared "Comrades, My bleeding country calls me. The time has come. Someone must die for the cause" - or the *Educational News*, which declared "*Schoolboy strikers are simply rebels... Obedience is the first rule of school life... School strikes are therefore not merely acts of disobedience, but a reversal of the primary purpose of schools. They are on a par with a strike in the Army or Navy...*" The strikes were eventually brought to and end by a combination of violence (brutal beatings and canings) and local authority summonses for truancy being served on pupils mothers - but they did clearly demonstrate, both to pupils and the state that school strikes, if linked and mutually supported had a power that could seriously worry authority - indeed the *Educational News* went on to ask whether these walk-outs would have any longer-term repercussions amongst the next generation of workers, considering they had been blooded in open class war at such an early age.

Class Tactics

It is notable that there were major industrial conflicts in both 1889 and 1911, which has

lead some commentators to dismiss the waves of school strikes as mere copy-cats or pale imitations of the actions of the pupils parents.

For instance there was serious conflict in Llanelli in the Rail and Coal industries in 1911 which led to 600 troops being sent in (by Winston Churchill, at that time the Liberal Home Secretary) to militarily occupy the area , which lead to the shooting of two local men, prior to the school strike.

'Violence often accompanied the strikes, sometimes directed at the police who had been detailed to man the school gates to keep an eye on the pickets. It was reported that in the East End pickets carried iron bars, belts and sticks to stop pupils and teachers entering the schools. In West Hartlepool after attacking the home of their headmaster, strikers went on to loot a luxury hotel of it's booze.'

However, Stephen Humphries in *Hooligans or Rebels* has convincingly argued that what this actually demonstrates is the transmission of the tactics of collective class conflict adopted by the parents to the next generation of workers, who quickly picked up the lesson of striking whilst the state was at it weakest and most stretched - as it was in this case. What this signified was not, in fact, a meaningless 'prank' but a serious grounding in class struggle, passed from one generation to the next, and reaching fruition in the General Strike of 1926, which undoubtedly would have saw participation by those original Llanelli strikers. This can be seen in the methods chosen by the school strikers - pickets, mass demonstrations and marches - classic tools of the labour movement utilised in defence of traditional working class concerns.

It would be interesting to ask some of the current crop of strikers how far they were influenced by the sharp increase in industrial disputes in the last few years (Fire-fighters, Transport workers, Heathrow staff etc) especially those of a wildcat nature - if they were influenced by them at all, that is. I'm not suggesting that there will be another General Strike in a decades time, merely that it would be useful to know how aware or tied to the 'normal' form of strike the current examples are given all that has changed in Industrial Relations and the concerted attempts to atomise the working class, and the determined attempt to argue that the 'working class' longer exists anymore over

the last 30 years or so. Have those struggles and their inter-connections with the anti-war movement, and oppositional culture in general being picked up by the school strikers, have those struggles circulated to those areas? (Though it must be rather gleefully pointed out that the leftists failed miserably during the strikes in their attempts to introduce the youthful protestors to the joys of Trotsky!) It might also be useful to ask if, given

contemporary social conditions, are the current record high levels of (recorded) truancy a form of a 'hidden' school strike, in the same manner as sabotage, absenteeism and other covert forms of workplace struggle are 'hidden' strikes? Can this be seen in the same way as the 'Refusal of Work' was seen as a refusal of (or retreat from) the imposition of capitalist social relations in the 1970s and 80s?

Enclosures?

Aside from these nationwide outbreaks of strikes, there have been literally hundreds of other walkouts in hundreds of towns, over a huge range of issues, from the sacking of a favourite teacher, to attempts to move pupils to another school, to Local Authorities trying to remove schools from community control and into their own hands.

In fact, it would be possible to view that history of struggles around these recurrent outbreaks of wildcat school strikes in terms of state (local or national) encroachment upon traditional working class entitlements or traditions - an *enclosure* in the social space of communal education in the same manner as the capitalist enclosures that historically (and currently in many parts of the world) sought to extend capitalist commodity relations to common land or woods in order to destroy the independence and ability to self-provision of the working class, thus forcing them into the cities and wage-labour, but in this case forcing people into the education that capital demands for its continued reproduction - to try and

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Issue 62: Participatory economics; Anarchist movement in Argentina; Camille Pissarro; International or Anarchist Federations.



Anti-war demonstrations in Hereford, 2003, saw many pupils leave school in support

colonise the 'human commons' in fact. An interesting example of resistance to this attempted encroachment and an clear attempt to work outside of the bounds of capital relations (to construct 'a new commons') is the Burston strike of 1914, which was sparked off by the local bosses efforts to remove two socialist teachers from the local school as they were also involved in unionising local agricultural workers, and thereby directly effecting these bosses profits - the pupils struck and funds poured into build another 'strike school' which eventually happened in 1918 - the school was attended by those strikers and later children - the school itself lasted for 20 years in direct conflict with the state school.

There were also significant strikes over similar issues in 1914, Pont Yates, Rathven and Bedford; 1917, in Washington and Usworth; 1919 in Gilfach Goch; 1920 in Northampton; 1922 in Keighly; 1924 in Ebbw Vale; 1926 in Waterfoot; 1928 in Eaton; 1929 in Winsford, Llansamlet and Patcham, 1933 in Newmains; and Audley in 1938. (All in Humphries).

Humphries identified five areas in which school strikes were again and again the working class response to conflict over:

- 1) Corporal Punishment
- 2) Schools hours, holidays and leaving age
- 3) Free provision of education and welfare
- 4) Appointment of teachers
- 5) Location and Organisation of schools

It is plain that, taken together, these were conflicts over *community control* and *autonomy*, over who decides what is taught, where and when, and by whom - that the ruling class sought to portray these rebellions as childish pranks, or outbreaks

of hooliganism or anti-social behaviour is no surprise, as to do otherwise would undermine the whole series of myths that capital has constructed and the lies that it tells itself about the reasons for it deigning to impose education on the working class in the forms that is chose.

These strikes testify to the long running and tenacious struggle of working class communities to resist ceding control of their education and socialisation to the needs of capital, to the consistent refusal to buckle under, a refusal of obedience and conformity to capital's dictates, in favour of acting collectively to impose working class needs on the bosses - to in effect, run their own lives. That students and pupils today are still acting in this tradition (albeit in solidarity with the Iraqi working class rather than classmates) is a testament to the sheer strength of collective action and the refusal to forget this no matter how much the bosses seek to make us.

Sources/Notes:

- (1) *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth*, Stephen Humphries
 - (2) *Class Struggle, Self-help and Popular Welfare*, Chris Jones and Tony Novak in *Class Struggle and Social Welfare*, Eds Michael Lavelette and Gerry Mooney
 - (3) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James
- Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, Geoffrey Pearson
Children's Strikes in 1911, Dave Mason



we don't need to be schooled to learn

“There has always been a proportion of pupils who attend unwillingly, who resent the authority of the school and its arbitrary regulations and who put a low value on the processes of education because their own experience tells them it is an obstacle race in which they are so often the losers that they would be mugs to enter the competition.” (Colin Ward, “The Role of The State” in Education Without Schools 1973.

Our schools are factories for learning

Education is pretty bad. The rat race of getting qualifications and school league tables (which has the schools and teachers cheating as well!) leaves millions of children in dead-end jobs or permanently excluded from society. Schooling is what the state wants. Our early system was shaped by the emerging centralised state and the needs of the iron-masters and mill-owners of the Industrial Revolution. It taught a narrow curriculum of basic skills via the catechism of church and factory: hard work, obedience, deference to authority. FW Taylor, a god to 20th Century industrialists, wrote: *“One of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation is that he be so stupid that he more nearly resembles an ox than any other type”*. Even before state-organised, mandatory and universal schooling got properly going, working class activists and leaders opposed it as dangerous to freedom. In 1793 William Godwin said: *“...the project of a national education ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government... Government will not fail to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions”*. The state must protect and sustain itself, so it demands coercive and hierarchical institutions whose ultimate function is to brainwash people to accept their place in an increasingly organised and socially unequal society. Libertarians know this very well: *The greater the amount of money that is poured into the education systems of the world, the less it benefits the people at the bottom. The universal education system turns out to be yet another way in which the poor subsidise the*

rich” (Colin Ward).

Free schools & social change

These ideas are constantly challenged by people trying to bring about positive change in society. Very often these have been the product of poverty and extreme oppression, when the struggle of working people against their ‘masters’ has been most intense. At other times, social stagnation and a conservative culture have inspired people to create such schools in the name of freedom. Their aim has always been the same: to change society in positive ways by equipping children to challenge all the assumptions and systems of society, its institutions and agencies, as adults. Many of the children who experienced this form of teaching and education went on to become pioneers in modern education, radical activists, trade union leaders and politicians. In countries where the state was extremely oppressive, they often paid for this liberation with exile, long prison-terms, torture and death.

The modern schools movement

One of the most powerful and widely-practiced examples of libertarian education are Modern Schools, which were invented by Spanish anarchist and educator Francisco Ferrer y Guardia. Ferrer wanted to challenge the oppressive nature of the educational system, controlled by the Catholic Church but not through politics or violent agitation. Instead, he chose to defy the state by starting a school in Barcelona based on freedom of choice and expression, learning for learning’s sake and the imperative of finding one’s own truth. He thought the best way to create a just society was to raise a new generation of children

on just, humane and democratic principles. Ferrer believed that education shouldn’t just be a preparation for life but life itself. From anarchist and libertarian thinking, he borrowed key words like “freedom”, “spontaneity”, “creativity”, “individuality” and “self-realization” as the basis for his educational philosophy.

Ferrer set up the *Escuela Moderna* in 1901. Along with primary education, it incorporated adult education and a leftist publishing house. Basic to Ferrer’s philosophy was the intention to develop individuals equipped mentally, morally and physically to build a future libertarian society: *“We [] we want men [sic] who will continue unceasingly to develop; men who are capable of constantly destroying and renewing their surroundings and renewing themselves.... eager for the triumph of new ideas, anxious to crowd many lives into the life they have.”*

The school thrived but the state felt threatened by its existence and the *Escuela Moderna* was shut down in 1906 when Ferrer was implicated in a plot to assassinate King Alfonso XIII. On July 26 1909, workers in Barcelona began protests that escalated into riot, rebellion and a repression so brutal that this time is still known as the “Tragic Week.” Ferrer was arrested, tried as a leader of the protests and finally executed despite an international campaign. All over the world, a movement ensued to start Modern Schools in Ferrer’s memory.

In New York, for instance, the Francisco Ferrer Association was formed by anarchist leaders Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman amongst others. In 1911 a Modern School opened in Greenwich Village with nine students and was soon part of a thriving movement across the US. The Modern School of New York, like it’s Spanish predecessor, featured a publishing house, adult education centre, and served as a community centre for the whole neighbourhood.

Modern Schools sprang up throughout the world (including here in Britain) and the Modern School network remains very large even today. But the limitations of education alone in bringing about radical

change in society have to be understood as well. The Modern School Movement was the product of an era when radical experimenters in art, education and communal living all came together to pursue common goals, the highest of which was to create a better world for all. The overriding belief which sustained them was this: If we could only raise a generation of children who were free of race and class prejudice, of a belief in the necessity of war, and who could think their own minds and solve their own problems, then a new social order would, in fact, be possible.

The Liverpool anarchist-communist Sunday school

The Liverpool Anarchist-Communist Sunday School began meeting in November 1908. Its inspiration was a young man, Jimmy Dick, who had become discontented with the world of work, started attending classes at the university and later met Francisco Ferrer. The school opened with 37 pupils and the intention: *“To break down the national prejudices and that patriotic piffle which is inculcated into the children of our present-day schools”* and *“... To point out to them that humility, patience and submission are no longer virtues, if they ever were; and that they must own themselves”*. The school taught primarily through lectures and discussions, often very political! This was because it was seeking deliberately to open children’s minds to politics as a means for them to begin to challenge their situation and prepare for an adult life as activists: *“The State and Church capture the children for they know that the children of today are the citizens of tomorrow....A child will think if we teach it to do so; but leave it to the mercy of the present school method and it will grow up in a spirit of subservience.”* It’s no different today, if you think about it. The school flourished. On Empire Day 1909, students distributed 2000 leaflets attacking imperial celebrations in schools. Later in the year they were involved in the campaign to save Francisco Ferrer from execution, publishing a pamphlet about the tragedy and changing the name of the school to the International Modern School in his honour. In 1910, adult classes were launched and new teachers brought different teaching methods; classes based around free-ranging topics and discussion rather than lectures became very popular. Students were also increasingly involved in deciding what would be discussed and taught. In 1911 there was a massive backlash against the school, prompted by the Siege

of Sidney Street. Newspapers alleged that an international anarchist conspiracy existed, and one of its tentacles were the anarchist Sunday schools. The International Modern School rented its premises from the local Independent Labour Party (which eventually became Labour, then New Labour). Frightened for their electoral prospects by association with anarchists (does this sound familiar?), the School was

optional. The school issued a prospectus, saying: *“The school will be a community school....totally involved with its environment....the vanguard of social change”*. At its opening in 1970, 80 parents and 50 children had committed themselves to the experiment. The school had no rules, attendance was voluntary, there was no uniform, no homework, no punishment, no formal

‘The school had no rules, attendance was voluntary, there was no uniform, no homework, no punishment, no formal lessons, no syllabus and children were not controlled by individual teachers. Relationships between adults and children were open, friendly and free from coercion, unlike modern schools.’

asked to leave. The School moved on and continued the lonely fight for existence, often battling the rigid approaches of the Socialist Sunday Schools who wanted to ‘improve’ the working class by drilling it in its own ‘Socialist Catechisms’ and ‘Commandments’. This approach obviously still exists today, especially in the faith schools Tony Blair and New Labour favour. But as Jimmy Dick said almost 100 years ago: *“The repetition of these moral musings does not tend to develop the mind, but rather to hinder the natural development of the child.”*

Free school experiments

The Anarchist-Communist Sunday School did not pioneer many radical teaching methods during its life, but it illustrated the impoverished nature of the state school system, which continues today. Many people have tried to organise alternatives to the state system, schools that are outside state control or which have a radically different approach to learning. Sticking with the Liverpool theme, two examples where people *did* try to change approaches to learning were the Scotland Road Free School and the Liverpool Free School, which existed in the early 1970s.

The Scotland road free school

The Scotland Road Free School became nationally important and encouraged the formation of other free schools throughout the country. Two local teachers wanted to establish a school run by children, parents and teachers together, without a headmaster, centralised authority or the usual hierarchies. It would be open when it was needed and lessons would be

lessons, no syllabus and children were not controlled by individual teachers. Relationships between adults and children were open, friendly and free from coercion, unlike modern schools. School meetings made decisions about activities and the use of the building. Though lack of resources restricted what the school could do and the children could learn, attendance was pretty constant even though the majority of the students were non-attenders or had been excluded. There were frequent outings, making use of the world outside as a teaching environment. In contrast, one of those ‘much-loved’ local schools, St Anthony’s, was notorious for the severity of its discipline and the brutality of the beatings handed out to the unruly or rebellious. The school’s founders thought the example of the Free School would inspire other people and communities to establish schools, resulting in *“the fragmentation of the state system into smaller, all-age, personalised, democratic, locally-controlled community schools which can best serve the immediate needs of the area....”* Inspired by the example of the state-funded *frijskole* in Denmark, they naively thought the Government would fund the Free School without realising that the Scandinavian system was the result of long-term community pressure for independent schools and not the revolutionary example of a single, short-term experiment. This is how permanent progress occurs, through *social* change, not individual initiative as innovative as it is. Without financial support and in a working class community damaged by unemployment and poverty, the school

closed in 1972 despite continuing to have the support of local people. Another free school, the Liverpool Free School, also existed at this time inside the local university. It started up on Saturday mornings but intended to become a full-time day school. Like the Scotland Road Free School, what was learned and how was decided by the children. It funded itself from a voluntary levy and occasional grants from supportive organisations. Though a small-scale, spontaneous initiative that never grew beyond its limits, it has a profound effect on the 300 children who attended during its existence. This was the first and perhaps only experience of freedom the children would have in their lives: they could co-operate or learn on their own, play, study or do nothing at all, as they decided. Said one student: *“The wouldn’t let all schools be like this would they? It might be really disorganised but I like being able to learn what I want, when I want.”*

It doesn’t have to be this way.

It’s known that children can quickly acquire all the skills and knowledge taught in the first seven years of school in around six months of more intensive teaching. So why are children being forced to learn formally at two? Children are isolated from society and learn nothing about how it functions.

‘We’ve been conditioned to think that education must be expensive, that it is too complex for ordinary people and must be left to experts, and that it is so vital it is best organised by large and powerful institutions, like the local education authority or the state. Like most things we are taught to believe, this is a lie.’

Yet some schools (e.g. the Parkway Educational Program in Philadelphia, US) got rid of their school buildings in favour of 8-10 community-based ‘shopfront’ classes providing a local base and facilities but with most teaching taking place in the community: *“arts students study at the Art Museum, biology students at the zoo; business and vocational courses meet at on-the-job sites such as journalism at a newspaper or mechanics at a garage”*. The Scotland Road Free School didn’t teach labour relations with textbooks. It took its students to the nearby Fisher-Bendix factory when the workers were on strike. Why aren’t all schools like this? The state will only pay for schooling it approves of.

Nowadays these are increasingly faith schools or specialist ‘academies’ where selection rules. Any alternative is viewed with suspicion and hostility. Yet everybody who works pays for state schooling and ought to have a say. We’ve been conditioned to think that education must be expensive (the higher education of the children of the upper and middle classes *is* expensive!); that it is too complex for ordinary people and must be left to experts; and that it is so vital it is best organised by large and powerful institutions, like the local education authority or the state. Like most things we are taught to believe, this is a lie.

There is a great deal of scientific knowledge about how children and adults learn best and actual examples like the ‘Modern’ and ‘Ferrer’ schools that have decades of experience in education and learning to build on. What’s needed are for parents, students, educationalists and local people to come together to campaign to return schooling to local control. Schools and learning centres need to be thoroughly reorganised, with reactionary forces like business - especially corporate business - and the churches excluded. The authority and social standing of autocratic headteachers needs to be challenged and broken and too compliant and often exclusive boards of governors replaced

with democratic forums managing schools. The state can be challenged and forced to meet the needs of ordinary people. The example of the Scandinavian *frijskole* tells us this is possible if we want it badly enough. Do we?

Notes

For up to date information on libertarian education, go to www.libed.org.uk For a different take on libertarian education, try the Anarchist Guide To Raising Kids at www.zpub.com/notes/aan-kids.html A very good description of what libertarian education’s about can be found at www.infoshop.org/faq/secj6.html For a basic introduction to Modern Schools, go to Section 13 at www.infoshop.org/faq/sec15.html For modern examples of alternative education ‘without walls’, go to www.tradequeerthings.com/anarchistfree.html or www.ainfos.ca.03.aug

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review

 **Kropotkin: The politics of community**
 Brian Morris 2004
 Humanity Press, New York

Brian is well known to the pages of *Organise!* and *Freedom*. He is one of those rare academics who want to spread ideas through teaching and writing for a wide-range of publications rather than through obscure academic texts. His writing is always well researched and scholarly whilst remaining accessible to a wide audience. His new book on Kropotkin is the result of many years of

research. Parts of this research have already appeared in previous issues of *Organise!* It is not only an excellent and thorough presentation of Kropotkin's ideas, but also provides the reader with an overview of the anarchist communist or social anarchist current within anarchism as distinct from syndicalism, individualism and 'propaganda by the deed'. The book, though written in a lively and down-to-earth style, is still an academic book and is best appreciated by those with some background in political and social theory. However, anyone can gain something from the straightforward presentation of Kropotkin's ideas. Brian's main aim is to "affirm

the contemporary relevance of Kropotkin and the social anarchist tradition he theorised and defended." In the introduction he attacks the "despair" preached by today's intellectuals who may criticise the current system but offer no alternatives and end up effectively propping up the status quo. In many ways, he is addressing the same problems discussed in the pamphlet by Sarah Young (reviewed also in this issue), but from the perspective of those engaged in public theorising. This might seem irrelevant to the average person, but the despair of these intellectuals is filtered down to the rest of us indirectly through the mass media and has therefore contributed to the general feeling of hopelessness. Though he agrees to an extent with their critique, he lambastes them for their failure to provide any useful theory or ideas for actually understanding and changing the world. Instead, Brian is adamant in his belief that it is Kropotkin and the tradition of social

anarchism that offer "the only viable alternative to democratic liberalism and Marxism, both of which, as we have noted, are politically bankrupt" (p.20). Brian does not give wholehearted support to everything Kropotkin did or wrote. Anarchists, unlike Marxists, do not tend to treat any of our forebearers as infallible. He takes an approach of "critical sympathy", acknowledging the enormous debt we owe Kropotkin and others who developed both the theory and practice of social anarchism, but recognising that like everyone, he is a human being who may make errors of judgement and analysis. This book offers the reader a superb overview of the tradition that the Anarchist Federation comes from and is aiming to develop. It will show people who are fed up with the main political options (see the pamphlet by Sarah Young, reviewed in this issue), that there is an alternative politics for developing a movement of resistance and constructing a new society.



 **A socialist's
guide for the
21st century.**
Jack Grassby.
TUPS Books. £4.95.
149 pages.

A belated review this, because it's been out for a few years. An odd book. The writer says that he adopts a basic Marxist perspective. He gives a brief description of Marxism, and then goes on to discuss postmodernism and existentialism, chaos/complexity theory, socio-biology, before devoting a chapter to the State. This chapter barely mentions anarchist criticisms of the State and blurs the distinction between Leninist and anarchist approaches to it. Political parties are dealt with next, starting with the Labour Party and gradualist/evolutionary socialism, before looking at the 'revolutionary socialist' tradition, where it picks out the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Workers Party as examples of this tradition, in a somewhat odd choice. It then touches on the anarchists. The writer acknowledges that anarchism's "current expression of anti-capitalist direct action gives it a contemporary expression. However, he then goes through the usual categories, irrelevant in this period, that anarchism is divided into by so-called experts outside of the tradition. So we get individualist anarchism (just how many individualists are there in today's international anarchist movement? Not a lot!) as developed by Max Striner (he means Max Stirner); and Tolstoyan anarchism (again, how many Tolstoyans are around these days?), when Tolstoy, whilst exhibiting some anarchist outlooks was careful never to call himself an anarchist. The Industrial Workers of the World, the

revolutionary union set up in the States, is mistakenly referred to as anarcho-syndicalist. Then the writer comments that the greatest prevailing anarchist influence has been in education, in particular higher education where a "generally democratic, non-authoritarian climate prevails". Hmmm. The Anarchist Federation is then mentioned. Georges Fontenis' Manifesto of Libertarian Communism is then described as the foundation document of modern anarchism. Now, Fontenis's document, written in 1953, is very interesting, but is it really the "foundation document" of modern anarchists? The author says that he is reprinting it in full on the following pages, instead of which we get the Aims and Principles of the Anarchist Federation! The author investigates direct action, looking at the anti-capitalist mobilisations that began with Seattle, Reclaim the Streets, and the Claimants Unions. He touches upon the trades unions, and despite criticisms, still sees them as "the best examples of mass democratic action around- or can be". Surely not the same bodies that attempt to control workers when they undertake wildcat actions? The police are seen as the public arm of the State, but then the author goes on to peculiarly say that "as they have sometimes seen more of the injustices perpetrated by society than the rest of us, some are actually sympathetic (but usually covertly) to socialist values. In the double vision of the law the police belong to the people as well as to the state. The Human Rights Act should heighten this dichotomy of responsibility." I would agree that the police need to be subverted, and propaganda aimed at them, but when it comes to the crunch, the overwhelming mass of the police will side with the State and the boss

class. Illusions about human rights enshrined in the law and their positive effects are all too common in this book. I really would like to be more charitable about this book. The writer is not dogmatic, and is genuinely looking for solutions about how to reconnect to the mass of the population. Unfortunately this book is sloppy in its research and its conclusions. Ethical foreign policies are touched upon, where there is precious little evidence that such policies are actually implemented, and somehow organisations and institutions connected to the United Nations are seen to be establishing socialist values! The Rich at Play: Foxhunting, land ownership and the 'Countryside Alliance'. 75 pages. Revolutions Per Minute. £4. This pamphlet shows that the main forces behind those campaigning to keep foxhunting are the major landowners and the aristocracy. It goes on to prove that leading members of the monarchy, Anne, Charles, Phillip and William are actively and enthusiastically involved in hunting, and give just as active and enthusiastic support, undercover or otherwise, to the Countryside Alliance. The section the Land Question touches upon the origins of foxhunting and shows how it is intimately related to the firm establishment of feudalism by the Norman conquerors. William the Conqueror established the principles of land management in Britain. He emphasised hunting "Namely, that facilitating the private pleasure of the privileged few was a legitimate basis for determining the allocation of land in Britain. Secondly that the landowner possessed the right to do whatever he liked ...with his land irrespective of the impact of his land-use decisions on other members of the commu-

nity" p. 6. With this came stringent laws against poaching of game by the mass of the country population. With the industrial revolution came the displacement of many via enclosure of the land and criminalisation of those who objected. The rising new industrial elite looked to pickings in the countryside. Bankers, brewers and lawyers were among those of the new rich who bought up land to enhance their social status. They aped the habits of the rural aristocracy and gentry, putting on lavish hunt breakfasts, generously subscribing to the local foxhounds and stocking their coverts with pheasants. The pamphlet advances the theory that the defenders of foxhunting have created an elaborate mythology around it to restrict the debate to issues, which whilst important, are subsidiary to the main ones. That is, "that the rich are using massive areas of land that were stolen from the ordinary people of Britain to pursue their own personal pleasure." The pamphlet then systematically demolishes these freshly minted myths, like the so-called working class following for foxhunting. It playfully suggests the following programme

1. A right to roam and repossession of the land
2. Stop foxhunting with hounds, either with concerted political action or direct intervention on a local basis, normally with other local hunt saboteurs
3. The right to hunt the rich

The pamphlet argues strongly for the land question to be a main plank in the fight against foxhunting and the Countryside Alliance, as a mobilising factor in drawing together the largest number of people possible. It is noted that the Countryside Alliance is not just a movement against foxhunting, but a conscious



manoeuvre by sections of the ruling class against recent attacks on their privileges like the right to roam and the growth of environmental concerns and the environmental movement. The right are mobilising and are prepared to use direct action to protect their privileges. We have to encourage counter-mobilisation on a mass scale. We need to use the language of class struggle to break any alliance (always an unequal one) that the Countryside Alliance and its supporters are attempting to forge between the wealthy landowners and sections of the rural working class. In that fight, this pamphlet can be a useful weapon. Use it to back up your arguments, take additional copies of this pamphlet and sell it to your friends and workmates. As the pamphlet concludes "combine your activities, invite other organisations from the town and cities to join and get out into the communities and workplaces to build a mass campaign, which will end fox hunting for good and set the people on a course to 'reclaim the land'".

 **Orgasms of History: 3,000 years of spontaneous insurrection.**
Yves Fremin.
AK Press. £12.00. 248 pages.

This book, written by a French veteran of May 1968, attempts to take a look at the riots, uprisings and revolutions that "spring up seemingly from nowhere". It's a wide-ranging work, touching upon the Cynics, Spartacus through to the Bavarian Council Republic and the Spanish Revolution up to 1968 and beyond. And this is what

flaws it. Fremin should have stuck to an account of the real 'orgasms of history'- those events that radically broke with the past, not schools of thought like the Cynics of Ancient Greece. He also has an odd and anachronistic way of using the term 'Stalinism' in relation to events hundreds of years before the birth of Stalin. In his introduction he admits this, seeing it as an "archetype of totalitarianism and authoritarianism". Fremin also has admiration for the peasantry and he is careful to include several examples of peasant uprisings. The book is entertaining and often informative read, but it is too often too eclectic, mixing up thinkers with revolutions. It seems a bit odd to have various social experiments like La Ruche or the Cempuis Orphanage, worthy as they are, shoulder to shoulder with the Makhnovist insurrection in the Ukraine, when the book is entitled *Orgasms of History*. Especially when bohemian/hippy experiments like Christiania or the San Francisco Diggers feature. Nevertheless, Fremin's heart is in the right place and his outlook is always cheerfully and optimistically libertarian with a class struggle approach. Despite its flaws an interesting read.

 **Thinking allowed: A manifesto for successful political change in Britain and the world**
Sarah Young 2004

This is an important and original pamphlet that addresses key questions that are often ignored by many political activists, including anarchists. Political propaganda is usually directed at

exposing the horrors of capitalist exploitation and state oppression with the hidden assumption that this will make people so angry that they will want to do something about it. Sarah questions this strategy. Her starting point is that there are a whole layer of people who are well-aware of the horrific state that the world is in. "A tremendous amount is known about what is wrong with the world." However, despite all this knowledge, people are not doing anything. "We know the world needs to change, but we have no clear vision of how this is going to happen". This pamphlet addresses this crucial question- how can we go from despair to active participation in the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a new society. The pamphlet seems to be directed specifically at young people, but it is relevant to all. She starts from the real life conditions faced by the average young person, writing in such a way that a person can easily identify the feelings expressed. So instead of beginning with the global problems of war, economic exploitation and ecological crisis, she begins with the problems that young people are experiencing in their own lives such as the uncertainty of future employment and housing, the lack of opportunities for living a fulfilling life, and the psychological problems of the pressures to 'succeed' and to conform. The pamphlet then takes an extremely critical and perceptive look at what is on offer for people who do decide that they want to get involved. Though her critique of electoralism, reformism and trade unionism could be more developed and hard-hitting her exposure of the manipulative and effectively counter-revolutionary antics of the revolutionary parties is excellent. She lambasts them for their manipulative and authoritar-

ian politics that have effectively put so many people off political activity altogether. She then goes on to discuss the potential for change. Again, she bases her analysis on the actual lives of people rather than on abstractions. She uses voluntary work, vocational paid work in such areas as health and education and single issue campaigns in the work place and community as examples of spaces where individuals are able to make a difference. By doing this she is not supporting gradualism, working within the system or localism, but is trying to show the kind of activities that people do that can give them "expertise and confidence"; two things that are essential for building a revolutionary movement that is capable of creating a new society. "Our small but creative lives are of great magnitude of importance because they allow the possibility that change can happen and be successful." The pamphlet's main point is questioning the way in which revolutionary politics is something people often separate from their everyday lives. Political activists will go on demonstrations, take direct action and issue propaganda on street corners but then not 'talk politics' to their families, neighbours, workmates or to people 'down the gym or pub'. As Sarah says, politics is a 'hobby' that people do 'in addition' to their normal lives. This is a message that all of us in the anarchist movement should take seriously for three main reasons. We need to recognise that social change does not happen overnight and that the big changes only occur as a result of countless small actions that people have taken in their everyday lives. Physical scientists call this the 'butterfly effect'-where a small change in one particle can affect a particle elsewhere. The same effect is at work in society- small actions can have



big effects without it being obvious how this has happened. In other words, just because an action may seem small and insignificant doesn't mean that it hasn't had an impact. You just can't see obvious evidence of that impact.

Secondly, politics must not be something people do but something people live. This point is especially important for British anarchists. In countries such as Italy, Spain and France, anarchism is much more of a living tradition. They are more likely to remain active anarchists throughout their lives because it is more incorporated into their everyday lives, which will include work, families and hobbies. In Britain, the movement is dominated by relatively young 'activists' who operate in a kind of anarchist ghetto. They are unlikely to continue this so-called anarchist lifestyle very long and therefore risk dropping politics because their approach to politics will not be able to accommodate being political with work and families.

And thirdly, we have to think carefully about how we build up people's confidence to fight back. The AF has taken this into consideration with our monthly bulletin *Resistance*. Instead of spreading more 'doom and gloom', we try and show examples of people actually resisting capitalism and the State.

However, as an organised, social anarchist I would take issue with two issues. Firstly, there is no explicit discussion of the working class. Though we in the AF have a very broad definition of working class, and recognise that some people shy away from the term because it seems to include only miners and factory workers, it is important that we are clear about the basis of a new revolutionary movement. Sarah's focus on those in certain occupations

that she calls vocations, involves a very narrow sector of the working class. That doesn't mean the point she makes is invalid. But there are many other jobs where important skills are being learned- construction, design, plumbing, farm work to name a few. Revolutionary movements have often included skilled workers who took pride in their craft- such as the Jura watchmakers- the founders of the first anarchist international. Confidence also comes from all manner of work place resistance, often outside the trade union structures, and also helps to build confidence and expertise in organising.

It is also important to consider the class character and political orientation of many single issue campaigns. Though she stresses community fight backs, which will of course involve working class people, many of the current single issue campaigns such as Stop the War, Greenpeace actions and anti-G8 mobilisations are dominated by students, unemployed 'activists' and Trotskyists. The recent European Social Forum as well as the alternative 'Beyond the European Social Forum' in London could be seen as something the pamphlet is arguing for- the linking up of a number of different campaigns. However, both the official and unofficial forums had little relationship to the vast majority of working class Londoners. It was primarily a place for 'activists' or people sponsored by well-heeled organisations to meet up. It is hard to see how such events can contribute to the building of a working class revolutionary movement. Secondly, the final conclusion of the pamphlet argues that there is no worthwhile organisation or political theory that can take us forward. The pamphlet doesn't offer us anything more than a view that people can

only take small actions and begin to link up, somehow hoping that something new will emerge.

In the Anarchist Federation we of course believe that our tradition, based on the principles of anti-capitalist and anti-State working class resistance, is a viable alternative to the bankruptcy of reformism, leftist parties and the lack of relevance to the working class of ESF-style events. The anarchist principles of federalism and rejection of central committees and majority (or in many cases minority) imposed ideas and actions, combine co-ordination of action and sharing of ideas on the local, national and even international level, with individual freedom. The fact that we exist as an organisation means that this pamphlet can be given the publicity it deserves.

Organise! is read around the country as well as abroad. Of course, our practice does not always fit our theory and there is always a need to be open to new ideas that emerge out of new experiences and struggles. But there is no need to wait around for an alternative to reformism and leftism, and remain as isolated individuals and groups. The author of this pamphlet is clearly an anarchist - she should join us! You can order copies from Sarah by e-mailing her at northernsky@hush.com.



**Mikhail Bakunin;
the
philosophical basis of
his anarchism
Paul McLaughlin
Algora Publications,
New York, 2002**

Harassed, abused, jailed, denigrated, ridiculed, misunderstood in his own day, poor old Bakunin has long

been treated by Marxists and liberal scholars alike in the most appalling and derogatory fashion. In the pages of "Freedom", supposedly an anarchist newspaper, many correspondents have now jumped enthusiastically upon this anti-Bakunin bandwagon. Its columns are thus full of petty criticisms and pathetic tirades against Bakunin, who is dismissed as a potential dictator, a Bolshevik no less, and a moral reprobate. Even worse, social anarchists - those dreadful atheists and materialists - are tarred with the same brush; accused of being wicked, nasty "fundamentalists", with their heads full of utopian "fantasies" This is because, unlike the spiritualists who place their faith in god, they are unable, as materialists, to face the openness and uncertainties of human life. These tirades, written from a theological perspective, are of course nothing new: these correspondents simply re-vamp criticisms of Bakunin and materialism that were made long, long ago by philosophical idealists, liberal savants and political reactionaries. Most of these criticisms are either malicious, or misplaced, or both. A decade ago (1993) I wrote a short book on the remarkable life and political philosophy of Michael Bakunin, for in a real sense old Bakunin was one of the first to outline social anarchism as a coherent philosophy. I did not have any particular fondness for Bakunin, yet the idea that anyone expressing an interest in the ideas of Bakunin is thereby advocating a "great man" theory of history (suggested by one correspondent to "Freedom"), seems to me quite facile. Regurgitating the tired mantras and holy writ of such academic gurus as Laclau and Lyotard - who are by no stretch of the imagination



anarchists - this correspondent seems himself to embrace the “great man” theory of history! No. What motivated me to write the book on Bakunin was the arrogant and despicable way in which the old anarchist had been treated by his liberal and Marxist critics, and the dismissive attitude of one “primitivist” who declared, in oracular fashion, that the ideas of Bakunin were “obsolete”. A recent correspondent in “Freedom” likewise boldly acclaim that Bakunin is now merely an “historical curio”, and that we should therefore abandon his social anarchism - especially as it entails atheism and a materialist ontology. Much better to put our faith in god, seek spiritual redemption and thus find happiness in the “afterlife”! It is therefore not unusual to find in the pages of “Freedom” correspondents advocating sociobiology, possessive individualism and free-market capitalism; parliamentary democracy as a political strategy in order that anarchists may have more contemporary “relevance”; and these anti-Bakunin theologians who advocate spiritual redemption through faith in god. These, of course, constitute the “unholy trinity” - capitalism, state power, and religion - that Bakunin and other anarchists critiqued more than a century ago. My book attempted to counter the more malevolent critiques of Bakunin - for Bakunin was not without his foibles, ethnic prejudices and political misjudgements - and to suggest the contemporary relevance of the ideas of this much maligned social anarchist, in the same way as the ideas of Darwin still have salience for evolutionary biologists. In spite of the perverse anti-Bakunin sentiments expressed in the pages of “Freedom” there has in fact been a genuine renewal of interest in

Bakunin in recent years, and this is reflected in Paul McLaughlin’s excellent study of Bakunin’s philosophy, which provides both a defence of Bakunin’s ideas as against Marxist and liberal scholarship, and an interpretation of his philosophy. The book is focussed on the philosophical foundations of Bakunin’s social thought, rather than on his anarchism, but it does offer a spirited (and scholarly) defence of Bakunin’s philosophy, one that combines the logic of negative dialectics with an ontology of evolutionary naturalism. Like Murray Bookchin, the philosophy that Bakunin expressed in embryonic form can perhaps best be described as dialectical naturalism. This philosophy is not a crude form of mechanistic materialism; something that is completely lost on his theological detractors in “Freedom”.

The critics of Bakunin

In my book I tried to defend Bakunin as against both his Marxist and liberal critics. Marx famously described Bakunin as a philosophical “ignoramus”, and Marxists have invariably followed their mentor in describing Bakunin as a petit-bourgeois ideologist like Proudhon, or as a misguided romantic with a bent for destruction and secret societies, and pour scorn on Bakunin for his “elitist despotism”. Hal Draper, for example, saw Bakunin as essentially a revolutionary brigand, whose politics involved little more than pillage, theft and murder, while Lichtheim wrote that all that Bakunin’s anarchism entailed was a “chiliastic vision of an armed uprising that would smash state and society” (Morris 1993:136). Thankfully, McLaughlin continues and develops my defence of Bakunin and offers a strident critique of his Marxist critics,

whom he felt were critical of Bakunin mainly because the anarchist had dared to challenge the philosophical doctrines and statist politics of their hero Marx. McLaughlin notes that the Marxist scholars who dismiss Bakunin as a “voluntarist” (in being ignorant of the political economy) or as an apolitical “bandit”, never actually studied in depth the theoretical writings of Bakunin. McLaughlin focuses his own analysis on two Marxist scholars, George Lichtheim and Francis Wheen. Lichtheim, as noted, had portrayed Bakunin as a mindless revolutionary, a misguided romantic with an insatiable faith in the goodness of humankind, yet one who, nevertheless, was bent on “pan destruction”. This portrait of Bakunin McLaughlin fervently critiques, suggesting rather than being a hopeless romantic bent on destruction, Bakunin had his roots in the Enlightenment tradition, and that his main philosophical interests were in the development of Enlightenment naturalism and “anti-theologism”(4). With regard to Wheen’s biography of Marx, which includes a chapter on Bakunin entitled “The Rogue Elephant”, McLaughlin suggests that this chapter is simply a regurgitation of what Marxists have been writing about Bakunin for many decades, and that the truth value of the chapter approaches zero. The “superfluity of this work, the idiocy of its tone, and the poverty of its content overall” meant, for McLaughlin, that Wheen’s account of Bakunin lacked any scholarly merit (5-6). Liberal scholars have been even more hostile to Bakunin. Eugene Pyziur, whom a “Freedom” correspondent cites with glowing approval, also claimed that Bakunin was the

“apostle of pan destruction” and thereby a precursor of Bolshevism; Bakunin’s early biographer, E.H.Carr thought Bakunin an advocate of “extreme individualism”, as in essence a Hegelian idealist, and as a precursor of Italian fascism; and the well-known liberal scholar Isaiah Berlin, in an essay that is biased, crude and highly prejudiced, in spite of Berlin’s eloquence, declared that Bakunin, for all his love of humanity, was like Robespierre prepared to wade through “seas of blood” to achieve his political aims, and that Bakunin was thus akin to Attila and had a “fascist streak” (Morris 1993:73). Even more biased and crude is Aileen Kelly’s awful study of Bakunin, subtitled “a study in the psychology and politics of Utopianism”. A “lackey” of Berlin’s, Kelly is interested neither in Bakunin as a person, nor in his anarchism - which is dismissed as of “little merit”. In fact her book, as I have described elsewhere, is simply one long diatribe against Bakunin, whom she portrays as fanatical, gullible, vindictive, megalomaniac, an idealist and romantic dilettante who lived in a fantasy world and was completely out of touch with reality. Bakunin she implied was a prototype of the alienated intellectual, an appellation that fits this Oxbridge scholar more easily than it does Bakunin (Morris 1993:3). Throughout his book McLaughlin offers further refreshing, harsh and substantive critiques of the work of these liberal scholars, particularly Berlin and Kelly. Dismissing Berlin as a profoundly unoriginal thinker and an apologist for capitalism, McLaughlin notes that Berlin’s famous distinction between positive and negative freedom is actually filched from Bakunin’s own writings (17). Kelly’s study, though



seemingly impressive and with the trappings of scholarship, McLaughlin argues is seriously flawed. Ignorant of philosophy, never seriously engaging with Bakunin's social anarchism, and ideologically and wilfully biased against Bakunin's socialism, Kelly's study of "utopian psychology" is a work, McLaughlin contends, of a liberal "fanatic" - full of bias, slander, puerile abuse, and intellectual naivety. Kelly's invoking of the "Stalinist nightmare", and insinuating the idea that Bakunin was a Bolshevik in the making - a thesis also falsely propagated by Pyziur and a correspondent in "Freedom" - McLaughlin demonstrates that this notion is both unjust and slanderous, and stems from Kelly's "utter ignorance" of Bakunin's social anarchism, which actually provides a trenchant critique of the "Stalinist" tendencies inherent within Marxism (12). McLaughlin's book consists only of two long chapters or parts: one on Bakunin's negative dialectics, the other on Bakunin's naturalism and his critique of theologism - which for Bakunin meant not only religious ideologies, now promoted in the pages of "Freedom", but also the idealist metaphysics of Kant and Hegel. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Negative Dialectics

As one of the Left-Hegelians, like Stirner and Marx, Bakunin, of course, was steeped in the philosophy of Hegel. According to McLaughlin, and contrary to Carr, Bakunin however did not fully embrace Hegelian metaphysics, for he repudiated both Hegel's idealism and his form of dialectics. For McLaughlin suggests that Bakunin's writings exemplify a revolutionary logic or negative dialectics in which

negation is seen as a creative force - implying as Bakunin put it, a "sense of freedom", and as the one "true expression of justice and love" (Lehning 1973:43). In his well-known article "The Reaction in Germany", published anonymously in 1842 - the article Lehning suggests (1973:11) created a sensation in revolutionary circles in Germany - Bakunin offers a critique of what he calls the "reactionary party". Bakunin himself advocates "democracy" which for the anarchist entailed an opposition to government, and the total transformation of the socio-economic and political order, to herald "an original, new life which has not yet existed in history" (1973:39). The reactionaries for Bakunin belonged to two types: the Consistent reactionaries (or conservatives) who stood for the complete suppression of the negative (the suppression, that is, of those like Bakunin who stood for democracy and the complete negation of the existing conditions), and Compromising reactionaries (or liberals) who attempted some sort of compromise or reconciliation between the positive (existing capitalism and government) and the negative - that is, democracy or the revolutionary critique. Discussing this article at some length, McLaughlin notes that Bakunin, using Hegelian terminology, is essentially concerned with exploring the contradiction between the reactionary principle - the positive thesis of unfreedom - and its antithesis, the negative principle of freedom. But for Bakunin, McLaughlin argues, the dialectical process is not viewed as sublation, or as a positive dialectic (as with Hegel, Marx and Comte), still less as a "synthesis", but rather negation in itself is seen as an affirmative or creative principle - expressed as the principle of freedom or democracy (49).

Contradiction for Bakunin thus represents not a mediation nor an equilibrium but the "preponderance of the negative" (1973:49). In Bakunin's version of the dialectic there is no synthesis, for the negative itself is seen as an "affirmative, creative principle", one that would engender a "new, affirmative and organic reality". Thus the slogans of the French revolution *liberte, egalite* and *fraternite*, were understood by Bakunin as implying the complete negation of the political and social world of the nineteenth century. The article concludes with the famous words "the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too" (1973:58). These words, McLaughlin argues, have been seriously misunderstood, for they did not imply mindless destruction, nor even nihilism, but rather Bakunin's negative logic, which implied the affirmation of freedom and the democratic order (30). Negation for Bakunin is thus an affirmation not a mediation or sublation - an affirmation of creativity and freedom. McLaughlin thus repudiates entirely Kelly's attempt to foist upon Bakunin a triadic conception of history, which implied a "fall" from some mythical golden age of primitive harmony, and the eventual restoration of this harmony in some vision of a utopian society. For Bakunin expressed no nostalgia for some primitive golden age, and any speculations regarding some futuristic society Bakunin regarded as reactionary (55). As Bakunin expressed it in "Statism and Anarchy": "Even the most rational and profound science cannot divine the form social life will take in the future. It can determine only the negative conditions, which follow logically from a rigorous critique of existing society"

(1990: 198).

McLaughlin thus regards Kelly's attempt to portray Bakunin as a utopian thinker as quite "absurd". Even so, correspondents to "Freedom" are still peddling the same messianic thesis.

Bakunin's naturalism

The second part of McLaughlin's book gives a very good outline of Bakunin's evolutionary naturalism as well as of Bakunin's theory of religion, for in an important sense Bakunin's naturalism is very much bound up with his critique of "theologism" - which embraces both religious ideologies and philosophical idealism. In Bakunin's nature philosophy nature, understood as universal causality, and reality are synonymous, Bakunin making a distinction between the natural world (as actualized) and nature as universal causality, that is, the possibilities inherent or imminent in the natural, material world.(105). Materialism and naturalism, for McLaughlin, essentially have the same meaning, and he emphasizes that for Bakunin nature is dynamic, with "movement..of its own"(107). Influenced by Diderot, Feuerbach, Comte and Darwin, Bakunin's dialectical or evolutionary naturalism thus repudiates both theologism (idealism) and mechanistic materialism. It is a philosophy that is characterized by the belief that "life always precedes thought" and that objective or natural Being is always ontologically prior to human subjectivity; and that from an epistemological standpoint dialectical thinking precedes philosophical or theological speculation (33). In contrast metaphysics, or what McLaughlin calls anthropocentrism, articulates the belief that thought and human subjectivity precede



life and the objective natural world. Noting that Kantian metaphysics is radically opposed to naturalistic philosophy in its anthropocentrism, and given the subjectivist reactions of Kierkegaard, Stirner and the neo-Kantians against post-Hegelian philosophy, McLaughlin notes that much contemporary philosophy (whether Nietzschean, phenomenological, structuralist, post-structuralist, pragmatist or post-Marxist), besides being scholastic and obscurantist, is “absolutely antithetical to the naturalist tradition” to which Bakunin belongs. In spite of their radical pretences, much contemporary philosophy, McLaughlin affirms, is both philosophically and politically reactionary (68). Even Marx, McLaughlin argues, given his undue emphasis on social mediation, is essentially closer to Kant than Hegel and thus there is a Kantian strand in his materialism (16).

Given the close association between Bakunin’s naturalism and his atheism McLaughlin devotes a great deal of discussion to Bakunin’s theory of religion, as well as to Feuerbach’s philosophy. Indeed, Feuerbach’s critique of theology and speculative philosophy had an important influence on Bakunin.

Although religious consciousness may have been important in the development of human culture and in the affirmation of humanity, Bakunin was highly critical of the religion of his day, particularly Christianity, and for two reasons. Firstly, it is hostile to science and entails the abdication of human reason: and secondly, it involves the negation of human liberty (141), particularly in having a symbiotic relationship with political power. The latter is expressed in the oppression and exploitation of the mass of people by various

functionaries - priests, monarchs, gendarmes, capitalists, entrepreneurs and politicians of every shade (148). Thus although Bakunin follows Hegel in viewing religion or the “divine idea” as the product of human consciousness, he also emphasizes the inadequacy of religion as a form of reason, and the need for human consciousness to develop beyond religion in order to realize itself (160)

Reason, the ability of humans to create culture - the faculty by which humans achieve the consciousness of freedom (which is how Bakunin understood the rational faculty) and the “spirit of revolt” are the two essential aspects, for Bakunin, of human nature (127). It is therefore of interest that the pages of “Freedom” nowadays resonate with fervent denunciations of reason and rationality, which is usually, he it noted, misleadingly equated with state management, bureaucratic administration and industrial capitalism - all of which, of course, Bakunin long ago repudiated. But what are we offered in the place of reason, as Bakunin and other Enlightenment thinkers defined it? Recent “Freedom” correspondents, it seems, join the ranks of scores of conservatives, fascists and romantic reactionaries in not only denigrating reason but put in its place faith in god, an emphasis on spiritual redemption and suggest we read Catholic theologians like Matthew Fox and Rosemary Radford Ruether. But Bakunin, it may be noted, was not only critical of theologism and statism, but also of deterministic “scientism”, and was particularly hostile to the rule of scientific savants. As for Bakunin embracing the “myth of progress”, he it also noted that Bakunin nowhere thought of capitalism and the modern nation state as in any

sense inevitable or desirable, let alone “progressive” Making an interesting comparison between the philosophies of Marx and Bakunin, McLaughlin emphasizes that Bakunin was always critical of the economic determinism that was inherent in Marx’s materialist conception of history, and that Bakunin put much more stress than did Marx on the biological aspects of human life. Puzzled on how Marx “can assert that nature is prior to that by which it is essentially mediated” McLaughlin interprets Marx as a Kantian idealist rather than as a “genuine” materialist (170). But of course Marx was affirming, like later anthropologists, that nature is ontologically prior to humans, though our knowledge of the world is always socially mediated.

In my earlier study I suggested that Bakunin’s philosophical writings on nature presented, in embryonic form, an ecological approach to the world, one that is materialist and historical, and stresses the continuity and organic link between humans and nature (1993:84). This ecological world view is implicit in the philosophy of Feuerbach who wrote: “Man is dependent on nature...he should live in harmony with nature...even in his highest intellectual development he should not forget that he is a part and child of nature, but at all times honour nature and hold it sacred, not only as the ground and source of his existence, but also as the ground and source of his mental and physical well-being” (199).

For Feuerbach this did not imply a religious perspective or the deification of nature. Yet although Bakunin follows Feuerbach in his naturalism, and is not, unlike Kant and Marx an anthropocentric thinker, McLaughlin does

suggest that there is an anti-ecological strain in Bakunin’s thought, when, for instance, he writes that humans can and should conquer and master nature (231). But it is also important to recognize that Bakunin was influenced - like Kropotkin - by Darwin’s evolutionary biology, and thus conceived of nature as a kind of evolutionary process, which ought not to be equated with the myth of progress. Thus human sociality and consciousness is seen by Bakunin as a natural development, and he denied any dualism between humans and nature, which was intrinsic to Cartesian mechanistic philosophy (Morris 1993:79) What of course was significant about Darwin’s evolutionary philosophy is that it introduced and emphasized the crucial importance of openness, chance, creativity, and the subjective agency and individuality of all organisms in the evolutionary process. As said, all this is lost on those theological detractors of Bakunin in the pages of “Freedom”. Surprisingly, McLaughlin has little discussion of Darwin or evolutionary theory. What is perplexing and frustrating about McLaughlin’s study is that it contains some fifty pages of footnotes. Valuable for reference purposes, these footnotes include long, substantial and interesting discussions of many topics that could usefully have been incorporated into the main text. Indeed another section or chapter on the political aspects of Bakunin’s philosophy could well have been created from the footnotes, and thus enhanced the study. These topics include the following: Bakunin’s critique of the state and all forms of government, including Marx’s notion of a state “administered” society, which Bakunin, with some



prescience saw as only leading to some form of despotism (80); Bakunin's federalist principle, which implied that the organization of social life from below, although it is significant that McLaughlin denies that Bakunin was an anarcho-syndicalist (232); and, finally, Bakunin's advocacy of true communism, which implied the unity of freedom and equality, which Bakunin continually emphasized, and which was expressed in the well-known phrase: "Liberty without socialism is privilege and injustice, and...socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality"

As McLaughlin denoted, liberal critics like Berlin and Pyziur denigrate Bakunin's socialism, while Marxists repudiate the libertarian aspects of Bakunin's political philosophy: in essence, of course, Bakunin was a libertarian socialist. Bakunin was an heir, as McLaughlin argues, to the Enlightenment tradition, at least in its radical aspects, a tradition, stemming from Spinoza and Diderot, which suggests that through secular reason and empirical knowledge, and through political struggle, humans could create a better world - one in which liberty, equality

and fraternity could be fully manifested. Like his radical contemporaries Marx and Kropotkin, Bakunin was unduly optimistic regarding the coming revolution - but to blame "reason" for the ills of the twentieth century seems to me to be completely facile. Equally, to describe Bakunin as a "modernist" is also rather inept, for Bakunin repudiated many of the key aspects of so-called "modernity" - specifically the modern nation state, industrial capitalism, possessive individualism and liberal ideology more generally. No social anarchist, as far as I am aware, certainly not

McLaughlin, treats Bakunin's writings as "holy writ" or with uncritical adulation, for they have long acknowledged that Bakunin's anarchism is complex and full of contradictions. But avoiding the "intoxicated vilification" (58) indulged in by his Marxist and liberal critics, and by some recent correspondents to "Freedom", social anarchists have approached Bakunin with an attitude of critical sympathy, recognizing that Bakunin, for all his faults and foibles, was the first to articulate, through his disputes with Marx, social anarchism as a political philosophy. Thus rather than viewing Bakunin as a misguided romantic bent on violence, or as having an unbalanced mind, he has been described - by for example Peter Marshall - as a man whose search for wholeness was a "bold and inspiring attempt to reclaim one's humanity in an alienated world" (1992:308). McLaughlin, likewise, emphasizes the contemporary relevance and critical significance of Bakunin - both with regard to his dialectical naturalism as a philosophy, and his social anarchism as a political vision.

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letters

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There I was at my local library (Newport). I decided to have a look on our website to see what was happening. So I tapped in afed.org.uk only to be greeted with a page saying *Access Denied to crime and intolerance!* The anger began to fill me as I kept trying to get to our site only to be greeted with the same Access Denied; to me and to humanity it should have read 'Freedom Denied'

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David, Gwent Anarchists

Shabby response

Dear Organise!

I have to register my discontent with the shabby way you responded to Frankie Dee's criticisms in a recent issue.

Being something of a history buff, I have read Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist and Year One of the Russian Revolution* and Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement*. Both writers vividly convey eyewitness accounts of the turbulence of the Russian Revolution from critical perspectives; Arshinov is explicitly critical of the Bolsheviks and their treatment of anarchists, whilst Serge sings their praises and condemns the anarchists who didn't support Lenin and Co. As such, their works are useful- especially Serge's painful decline from something of an anarchist into a cringing supporter of Bolshevik statecraft. Be that as it may, I have to agree with Frankie in questioning the relevance of their works to the practice of contemporary anarchism, which is not the same as



Have you got a letter for *Organise!*?

Send your letters to:

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suggesting that they be "airbrushed out of anarchist history". And it's dishonest of you to bring up Makhno, since Frankie said nothing about him in his letter.

Your assertion (hinted at in brackets- nicely subtle) that Arshinov, since he was "executed by Stalin" was not "some anarchist-turned Bolshevik" is patently absurd. First the phrase "executed by Stalin in 1937" is clearly a reference to the era of the famous Moscow Show Trials and Purges. Who were the so-called Enemies of the People who were executed by the Soviet Union? Bolsheviks, of course! Second, nobody knows what actually happened to Arshinov upon his return to the Soviet Union. There is a very high probability that he was indeed executed, but there is no evidence I'm aware of to prove that he was "executed by Stalin" personally or through an order. Maybe the editors of *Organise!* know something the rest of us don't? As to the problems with the Anarchist Black Cross Federation, they are not based on- despite your silly dismissal- "fairly arcane matters". The trouble with the ABCF from its inception- and glaringly obvious to anyone who actually bothered to take a look- was their tendency to privilege Marxist-Leninist and Third World nationalist prisoners while virtually ignoring (when not denouncing) anarchist prisoners. For some anarchist prisoners and those who have supported them since before the appearance of the ABCF, the "Anarchist" in the name of their franchise seems a cruel joke. That such absurdities take place through (ab)using the name of an

organisation with a much better history adds insult to injury.

LJ (Berkeley, California)

An *Organise!* editor replies:

For someone who calls themselves something of a history buff, you seem to have a dislike of history. The Serge review debunked Serge's reputation as a "libertarian Bolshevik", one of the myths that are being currently peddled. Should we refuse to review books of interest? Especially when we also used that review to sharply criticise the individualist anarchism that Serge had once supported, and that in different forms still may do damage to modern anarchism? Arshinov's critiques of Bolshevism are still relevant, because unfortunately Bolshevism hasn't gone away. Many old Bolsheviks were eradicated by Stalin (I doubt if he ever shot anyone personally) but there was a wholesale butchering of other opponents of Stalin, including those who had already spent years in prison. Amongst these was the anarchosindicalist veteran Yarchuk., who had also recently returned to the Soviet Union. As far as we are aware, according to historians like Avrich, Arshinov was executed for "attempting to reintroduce anarchism to the Soviet Union". As regards the ABCF, yes, this editor is fully prepared to admit you are right on that question. The AF has been critical of the ABCF on prior occasions. See, for example, *Organise!* 50, where we wrote about them embracing Maoist ideology - <http://flag.blackened.net/af/org/issue50/quiet.html>

revolutionary portraits: Marinus van der Lubbe

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.

Marinus van der Lubbe was born on 13th January 1911 in Leyden, Holland, the son of a travelling salesman, Franciscus Cornelis and of Petronella van Handel, a divorced woman who already had 6 children. His father left home for good shortly after his birth. His mother, a chronic asthmatic moved to Den Bosch to set up a little shop. Marinus, it seems, was briefly put in a home for the education of orphans and poor children. One of his teachers described him at the age of 11 as being a gifted pupil. After the death of his mother in 1921 he lived with his half-sister, at Oegstgeest, near Leyden. Enrolled in a Protestant school, he also was charged with looking after his three younger nieces. He began to work at the age of 14, to take the pressure off of his half-sister. He worked as an apprentice mason and took evening courses. As the result of discussions with his workmates he began to interest himself in revolutionary ideas and joined the youth organisation of the Dutch Communist Party, De Zaaier (The Sower). Of an independent nature and resentful towards authority, as a young autodidact he frequented the public library of Leyden where he read Philosophy and Work of Henry Ford, Marx's Capital and several books about travels through Tibet and China, among other books. In 1924 he had a work accident on a building site. Two of his workmates as a practical joke upturned a bucket over his head. Quicklime at the bottom of the bucket got in his eyes and he had to be treated in hospital. In October 1927, following the fall of rubble on another site, he was injured in the right eye. This second more serious accident, meant that he spent several months in hospital. He was operated on without recovering the full use of his eye. As a result of this, he received a weekly handicap benefit. To supplement this allowance, he worked in one temporary job after the other. He worked in a grocer's, then as a waiter at the station café in Leyden, sailor on a boat between Noordwijk and Sassenheim, before selling potatoes in the street. Of an athletic



constitution, Marinus kept fit through swimming. His friends nicknamed him "Dempsey" after the famous American boxer.

An intransigent activist of the Young Communist League, he was targeted by the police as a result of his interventions at public meetings. His brother in law, who disapproved of his politics, advised him to leave Leyden.

Marinus set up in a furnished room whose rent he shared with Piet van Albada, an oppositionist within the Communist Party, who was close to the Internationalists of the GIC (Groups of Internationalist Communists). This group adhered to ideas of council communism.

Marinus made a short voyage on foot and by hitch-hiking across Belgium and Germany. He went to Calais, where he had the idea of swimming the Channel. In October, In Leyden, he rented a space

which he turned into a meeting room for the Young Communist League, which he called Lenin House. He wrote leaflets and bulletins, intervening in strikes, demonstrations of the unemployed and public meetings. By 1929, his disagreements with the Communist Party led him to resign four times! He criticised the leadership for its timorous and bureaucratic outlook, and began to have doubts about the use of parliament which diverted the energy of militants. Influenced by van Albada and his friends, he drew closer to council communist positions.

Turning point

1931 marked a turning point for him. His enthusiasm for travel widened his outlook. He had a strong desire to visit the Soviet Union which he still regarded as the "country of socialism". He was concerned by the rise of fascism in Germany, and felt that unrelenting struggle against its rise was diverted by electoral tactics that he regarded as superficial. In April, with his friend Henk Holwerda, he planned a journey across Europe to Russia, to be financed by the sale of propaganda postcards en route. The Leyden branch of the Communist Party refused to help him with this, Holwerda backed out and Marinus broke with the Party forever.

He undertook the journey regardless, arriving in Berlin and presenting himself to the Soviet consulate. But the sum asked for his visa was too much for his budget, and he started back to Holland. At Gronau on the border he was arrested for illegal sale of postcards and "communist propaganda". Freed after 10 days in jail, he finally got back to Leyden.

During the summer he returned to Calais, where he worked as a navy. His plan to swim the Channel, for which a Dutch paper had offered a prize of 5,000 florins was thwarted by the very bad weather. In September he went on the road again through Germany. He slept in peasants' houses and in the public refuges for the unemployed. At Budapest he fell in love with a young prostitute and asked her to give up her profession to share her life with him. He was turned down. He got as far as Belgrade, working on the land at each stage and writing a travel log. Returning to Holland, he went to Enschede, where

Continued overleaf

wildcat strikes had broken out in the textile industry. He wrote an account of these strikes for the GIC. With no seasonal work available, he applied for funds from the Bureau of Aid to the Unemployed at Leyden. He applied for assistance to set up a library for workers and unemployed. The Bureau refused to finance such "social projects". In January 1932 after a second attempt to obtain funds was turned down, he broke the windows of the Bureau and was sentenced to three months in prison. To escape this, he travelled to Budapest and in April the Polish police caught him attempting to cross the border to Russia. Returning to Holland he was arrested and imprisoned at the Hague. On his release, he again asked for funds from the Bureau, was rejected, and went on hunger strike. He won his case after 11 days of this. A little later, he published a paper for the unemployed, *Werkloozenkrant*, which advocated self-organisation and direct action and ferociously criticising the union bureaucracies.

He became friends with Eduard Sirach, who had led a revolt on the cruiser *Zeven Provinciën* in 1917 and who was active in a council communist group in Leyden, the LAO.-Workers Left Opposition, which published *Spartacus*. Involving himself in their activities, he was often in the thick of agitation. During the drivers strike at the Hague, he intervened in the mass meetings, criticising the Communist Party and the unions, and advocating workers autonomy. By now, 1933 Marinus had contracted tuberculosis of the eyes and spent several weeks in hospital. This young man of 24 realised that he had a strong risk of losing his eyesight.



Nazi take-over

Following Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Marinus hoped that the millions of German socialists and communists would confront the Nazis and set off a revolution which would spread through the world. He often repeated that something had to be done. A week after leaving hospital, he travelled to Berlin, arriving there on the 17th February. Attending a meeting of the Social-Democrat Party, he was shocked to see a brutal interruption by the police was not resisted. He incited people to react, started discussions in the street, and tried to intervene at meetings. Everywhere he met resignation and indifference. On the 23rd February, he attended a Communist Party meeting, which was again broken up by the police with no resistance. Disheartened by this, and seeing no reaction to fascism among the workers, he decided to act.

On the night of 25th February he tried to burn down an unemployment office and a castle and the Imperial Palace in Berlin. On the 27th he succeeded in burning down the Reichstag, the German parliamentary building, and was apprehended there. This was the flimsy pretext for a closing down of political organisations and papers and the arrest of thousands of socialists, communists and anarchists.

Indeed, the Nazis put him on trial with a leader of the German Communist Party and some Bulgarian Communists, who they accused of working in league with Marinus! He denied any link and stated that he had acted on his own.

He undertook a hunger strike in prison to protest his conditions of detention, and was forcibly fed. He was chained up for 7 months in his cell. Eventually the Bulgarians were acquitted, the Communist leader imprisoned and Marinus sentenced to death. On the 10th January 1934, he was beheaded in the prison of Leipzig

The second death of Van der Lubbe

The Communists set up a committee for aid to the victims of Hitlerism after the Reichstag event. It was directed by Munzenberg, acting for the Komintern, the Communist International controlled by Stalin. It described Marinus as a pseudo-communist and a Nazi agent provocateur. In August 1933, it published the *Brown Book*, edited by Otto Katz, who accused Marinus of being "petty bourgeois" "bragger", a religious maniac, and finally of being a toy boy for the leaders of the SA, the Nazi Brownshirt stormtroopers!! He was described as a "a semi-blind young pederast" and accused of acting with the Nazis in the Reichstag burning. A "counter-trial" in London organised by this committee backed up these findings, with only one person on the jury, Sylvia

Pankhurst the anti-parliamentary communist, strongly objecting. In open court the Bulgarian Communist Dimitrov (after his acquittal a top dog in the Comintern) demanded that his co-defendant be sentenced to death for having "worked against the proletariat".

Council communists and anarchists in Holland and France sprang to his defence (with the exception of the German anarchist veteran Rudolf Rocker, who accepted the *Brown Book* accusations) In France, the anarchist theorist Andre Prudhommeaux set up the Marinus van der Lubbe Committee. On the day of the opening of the trial, the *Red Book*, a refutation of all the slanders of the *Brown Book*, was published in Holland (and reprinted in extracts in France) it defended Van der Lubbe's revolutionary integrity, with many character references from people in different political groups attesting to his honesty and devotion to the working class. But the slander continued.

The Communist playwright Bertold Brecht, in his *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, an allegory on Hitler's rise, has a character called Fish, a caricature of Marinus, whose sole words are "areu, areu, areu". Despite various attempts to clear his name, a bad odour still surrounds the life of Van der Lubbe. At best he is seen as a cretin, or a half-mad idiot. He was as much a victim of the Stalinists as he was of the Nazis. Marinus acted for the best of motives. He thought his deed might be the spark for a general workers uprising against the Nazis. Alas, he was to be very wrong. The Social Democrats and their unions gave up without a fight, as did the Communists. Only in Vienna in June 1933 did the workers attempt to rise up, to be bloodily crushed. But the Nazis would have carried out their wholesale repression, sooner or later, with or without the Reichstag fire. On the day that Marinus saw the Communist meeting being broken up, the Communist Party HQ had been raided, and the offices of their paper closed.

And Munzenberg and Katz? Munzenberg was murdered by the Stalinists, whose bidding he had done, and his body dumped on the Swiss border in 1940. Otto Katz carried on his work for the Soviet secret services, taking part in the hunting down of socialists and anarchists during the Spanish Civil War, before the death machine whose loyal servant he was, turned on him too. He was tried in Prague and hung as a "Zionist agent" in 1952.

"...old formulas and old ideas are in the process of dying, and with them fall into decay the parties and corporative organisations and all of that. The world counts on new forces, which are the heads and the hearts of the workers themselves." From the unemployed paper edited by Van der Lubbe.

aims and principles

1. The 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 a 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 in its overthrow. Trades 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 of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from 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.
10. We oppose organised religion and beliefs.

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.
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