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# Art and anarchy

MANY GREAT PAINTERS have described themselves as anarchists, from Pissarro, the impressionist, to Juan Gris, the cubist, from Augustus John, the last of the great academic draughtsmen (see ANARCHY 10) to Jankel Adler, from Signac to the surrealists. What, if anything, is the relationship between their anarchism and their art? This is the question considered by the articles on Pissarro and the Neo-Impressionists in this issue. Arthur Moyses sets forth his beliefs on art and anarchism, reaching the conclusion that "there is no place for the artist within an anarchist society, only anarchists". If you find the implications of this too alarming, you could perhaps rephrase it in the words that Eric Gill used about a society where "the artist is not a special kind of man: every man is a special kind of artist". One of the things the art students revolted about (see ANARCHY 90) was the supremacy accorded in art education to the "fine arts" with applied arts in a second place. And if you think that Arthur Moyses's castigation of Art with a capital A is exaggerated, here is Richard Boston's description of the fine art department of an art school (*New Society*, 24.6.68): "The studio of a painting department is a comic sight nowadays. It will consist of a very large room in which the painters have built themselves primitive huts from which they rarely emerge. One wall of the hut will probably be a wall of the room; a second will be a piece of hardboard on which the student is painting. The other walls consist of easels and more bits of hardboard. As you walk past, the painter stares out, hostile and defensive. This is the last barricade of the fine arts and he's not going to give up without a struggle. While in the other departments of the art school the talk is all of cross-fertilisation of disciplines, co-operation and learning from one another, the painter is more concerned with the territorial imperative, defending his little corner of the studio against the rest of the world—a last, lonely outpost of civilisation. Inside his hut the painter does his own thing, cultivating his individuality, demonstrating his originality. Surprisingly his individuality almost invariably takes one of three forms—either he does a hard-edge painting, or else a muddy version of Francis Bacon, or else he attaches a few odds and ends to his hardboard with nails and glue. No, he can't draw; but then for what he is doing he doesn't need to."

Art is in a mess, society is too. This issue of ANARCHY looks at the relation between them.



## The Mirror of illusion

ARTHUR MOYSE

THE ARTIST IS THE MOST ALIENATED AND REJECTED OF MEN, seeking by his art a substitute for living. For the man who lives life to the full and finds each and every moment worthy of pure animal enjoyment has, justifiably, little use for the creative arts and an understandable contempt for those who are forced by their own crippled nature to practice the pale trade of the unsought doppelganger. Lonely and afraid, they hymn the joys that others practice, offer to weep for those rejected like themselves, and seek to describe in emotive details the hearsay evidence of other men's lusts. It is the men and the women who sup to the full the strong wines of life who are unaware of the sad-eyed poet at their elbow, and the lovers casually fucking upon the cool grasses of the State parks are indifferent to the rattling sheets of coloured hardboard tied to the park railings. The itinerant labourers, drinking, eating and rutting to and beyond saturation have the purge of violent physical labour to cleanse their soul, their bowels and their psyche, and they are willing to leave the mysticism and the aesthetics to the whey-faced priest whom they acknowledge but do not respect. For they are, and know they are, in the living of this earthly life, the superior of any black-garbed ghoul married to a junk-ridden altar. Every giggling bawdy trollop, every man that can hold his beer, every working man riding his wife after a full dinner, every tearaway brawling in the high street, every leather-coated ton-up boy tearing up the town's main drag, every sweating youth burning up the floor of the crowded dance hall, every woman roaring out her share of the community song in the garish public house, every rural villain chasing an illegal rabbit, every fisherman hauling in a loaded net, finds in these charged hours the repeating quintessence of living that the artist seeks at second hand. And the mother contentedly cooking for her squalling brood does more to add to the sum total of human happiness than all the forgotten artists of the last twenty years who, in misery, have dragged their painted manifestos along the dusty pavements of Bond Street for the approval of a grubby-souled dealer. For the artist, when he willingly and knowingly accepts that rôle, is the tolerated outsider within the group. His rôle is to sit

with the women and to be fed with the women and in return he will paint the boats for the amusement of the fishermen, decorate the walls of the houses of worship on the orders of the political priests, tie coloured tassels upon the helmets of the warriors, and paint designs upon the crude clay pots that the dogs will eat from. That is the rôle of the artist when he seeks to segregate himself from the active life of his community. If he refuses to participate in the search for the daily bread then he must accept that bread as charity, for in the harsh reality of living he contributes nothing. In a complex urban society the artist may delude himself that he is essential to the welfare of the group but when famine and war threaten that group he is of less value than the old for, while the old will sit patiently waiting for death, the artist is the bloody nuisance still demanding to be fed yet incapable of offering any help, sitting on the steps of the abandoned centres of administration with the politician, priest and court-clown, the sick and the dying. The facts of life are hard and brutal so that we choose too often to dismiss them, but we live from day to day by the food that our fellow men pull by their very sweat out of the indifferent earth, and no suburban rhymster, no artist primping along with a pot of coloured paint and a pocket of backscratching reviews, no purveyor of deathless prose, no declaimer of golden oratory, can add one handful of corn to the plate of a hungry child, unless he renounces his artificial and self-created station within the social order and accepts the responsibility for feeding himself. Not in the abstract, not in the third person, but in the particular, and literally accepts the responsibility for his own daily bread. And this the artist will not do, for the rôle of the prostitute is sweet when protected by a benevolent ponce. In a society whose dynamic is to cater to the whims and fashionable fancies of a large minority, the artist and the dealer accept their carrion rôle and are happy and willing to live off the sterile wealth of a worthless but powerful minority.

If you feel that this is the voice of the philistine decrying the arts, then, for the record, I have tramped the Bond Streets with a pile of drawings beneath my arm, I have waited for the nod from a gallery owner who in my heart I have despised and have despised myself for standing there, I have seen my work upon the gallery walls and I have stood and answered the bored questions of a bored reporter as the darling of the drifting hour, and I have despised myself for doing so. But laziness or incompetence have saved me from the rôle of the crawling gallery hack and the press cuttings that I once assiduously collected moulder forgotten and as worthless as the day I gently cut them from the crowded phrases of the daily press. Through *that* experience one learns that the painting is of lesser importance than the man, and that the calvary that one believed was so personal to oneself is the common suffering of so many forced to live at second-hand. Always the lonely child, always the rejected child, always the youth forced back upon himself, seeking to manifest upon the virgin paper the empty corridors of the heart; seeking to mirror the company of the



mind in an attempt to people the loneliness of the hour with pencilled puppets garbed in the gaudy raiments of cheap water colours. Yet even in that sterile misery there is a small salvation denied to so many. For each child that can draw the cloak of imagery across its eyes to bar out the jungle of reality, there are a hundred children who have no gauze of talent to protect their unhealing wounds and for them the daily purgatory must be accepted. They are the strangers within our towns and within our hearts, the child with whom no one wishes to play, the youth forever forced back upon his own unwanted company, and the adult counting off the fading dying years, rejected by the group because they have nothing to offer to pay their way. Neither wealth nor wit nor an able and animal back. To those for whom the printed book and the endless half world that it offers is beyond their simple appetites, there is no key to that door through which they know they can never pass. Challenge your own conscience and your own values, and ask what is the price that you pay for acceptance and what is the price that you charge to the stranger outside. But the child and the youth and the man gifted with a little talent can at least seek the high shelter of his own ivory tower and pour his broken dreams upon the paper, seeking an illusion for life and a substitute for living. And the small reward for the sad and unused years is that the painter who is true to himself will by his very honesty condemn the age that spawned him. Not in the gaudy manifestos that become as meaningless as the ephemeral pamphlets a score of years away, not in overblown and banal platitudes of the hired religious, court, State or political artists posing painted puppets to woo an audience as contemptible or as venal as themselves, but in the acceptance of the painter as a craftsman owing a duty to no one but himself, painting the world that binds him with all its scabs and scars. For the painter's brush can be as deadly as the surgeon's knife and for that it must be as controlled, as practised and as uncommitted. Garb the painted Madonna in the woven cloth of the moment, house the infant Jesus within the framework of your own hearth, paint the bread that you daily break, the platter from your own market place and the cup from which you yourself drank, and a thousand years from now men will judge for good or ill the society that held us in thrall for the cloth and the bread, the platter and the cup, and the background of dumb bricks, will spell out in painted sentences the lives of men and women who paced the forgotten streets. The painter who values truth beyond the fashionable applause of the moment is the unconscious mirror of his times, speaking for the unremembered dead that assemble the pattern of the painter's world. Upon that foundation of truth the painter is answerable to no one but himself and his competence is his only limitation, his imagination his only check. What he paints, or why, concerns no one but himself, and the man who would challenge his right to his subject matter is a fool and the man who would demand an explanation, a pretentious boor.

Fail to be true to the material world around you and you throw your art into an historic void for not only will you be rejected by the future but also by the past as an alien, unnecessary and valueless

irritant. When Stanley Spencer sent his painted Christ striding through his village of Cookham he ranged himself with Masaccio's fifteenth century peasants, weeping through the Christian Eden, and Giotto's fourteenth century bourgeois, acting out the agonies that each generation must of necessity rediscover. Bosch could offer the world of the visionary and Bruegel the savage and bitter world of the medieval peasantry yet these two sixteenth century painters found a common point of departure in the acceptance of their own society as the basic material for the reinterpretation of human experiences.

Holbein's Ambassadors and decorated Duchess, Botticelli's Venus, Bruggen's red-nosed slack-jawed Lute Player, Bruegel's, with as foul a collection of the spiritual and the secular as one could wish to avoid, slobbering in ritual adoration, Campin's worried bourgeois, van de Cappelle's Dutch fishermen forever sailing through the seventeenth century, Crivelli's patriarchal figures guarding his altar, van Reyerswaele's embalming of his detested relations in the rôles of the money changers and the tax gatherers, Mantegna's madonna, child and saint, Jordaen's man and woman, carry their period in their cloth of the hour but eternity in their faces. Each painter was hired with the carpenter and the mason to work in unison in the creation of the house, the church or the meeting place, yet only the painter could slant his craft to praise or condemn the society that hired him. Not in vapid and ephemeral visual sermonising, but by turning his canvas into a frozen mirror forever reflecting his own society. When the fifteenth century townsmen bowed their heads before the Demidoff Altarpiece of Crivelli they knew that the saints wore robes from their own looms and though a king's mistress modelled for the painter Fouquet's madonna, her garments were woven from the threads spun by the spinners who knelt in adoration before the re-creation in two dimensions of their daily toil. It was left to the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to offer a classic case of a body of painters who rejected their own age for a mythical past and destroyed themselves by so doing. Claiming to be the heirs of the pre-Raphaelite painters they sought their subject matter from the second-hand and emasculated myths of medieval romances, and these middle class painters offered their own *nouveaux riches* an illustration for their political and social dream of a world of rigid class distinctions, a society no longer tied to the oily sweat of industrial commerce, a society wherein woman was a sex toy, the youngest son a liberal-minded gauleiter encased in Tottenham Court Road armour, God a father-employer and Christ the dim-witted but rather pleasant boy-next-door. That class with its Old Testament morality of divine rewards and punishments has gone, leaving only its political credo of an hedonistic materialism based on force and of the art that that society produced, nothing is worth preserving. They dredged the past for a justification of their way of life and left a body of painting of a revolting greenery, meticulous draftsmanship and an infantile subject matter. In rejecting their own world the P.R.B. destroyed themselves, for they failed to realize that all the artist can offer is a reinterpretation of human experiences told and retold against his changing background.



Each generation is thrown new-born into the stream of time to discover anew the ancient agonies and joys, and they must accept or reject them as the hour of the newly-created day demands. So of all the artists only the poet is free.

Not by choice, but by economic rejection. For as long as his work is profitless to the cultural hucksters he will be left to sing his lonely song. But the painter long ago sold the right to be accepted as a free man. He is society's clown, the gallery hack and the favoured skivvy of the Establishment, forever willing and ready to bend his talent to every or any financial fart. The art of the commercial galleries is a class art and those who dictate its terms of reference are those who pay the bill. They are the scum that every troubled society spawns: the adult children of the *nouveaux riches* no longer tied to the counting house, no longer accepting the authority for their source of wealth, no longer accepting the responsibility for their dark mills or their air-conditioned factories, free only to pander to the whim of the moment. For that butterfly existence they will buy the hat of the moment, sing the song of the moment, read the book of the moment, buy the dress of the moment, chant the political slogan of the moment, support the war of the moment and buy the painting of the moment. And the dealers, like sycophantic ponces, will pad around the cultural whore-houses of the lush art galleries of the world's capitals, seeking to hawk the latest sybaritic amusement to these insecure pleasure-seekers. It has always been accepted that the portrait painter performs to the crack of the financial whip, yet they at least have the honesty to acknowledge that for which they are paid. If the gelded hog, industrial or political, wishes to have his portrait painted, he knows what he wants and he gets what he wants. A good academic photo-realist portrait and both parties to this commercial transaction are satisfied. But it is the unfortunate gallery hack swanning from one avant-garde band-wagon to the next who deludes himself that the dirty chains of money does not bind his dim and flickering flame of talent. Yet any dealer would puke into his morning coffee at the suggestion that these people of such minor talent could dictate the terms of their "art".

Name your art movement within the last twenty years and the same dreary and talentless names fall to the floor. When the dealers wanted latter-day surrealism they were influenced by Dali and provided the third-rate substitute. A collage? It was there. Braque or a tenth-rate Picasso? And they sweated out their rubbish under the influence of the master. Abstract painting? And they swilled their pots of cheap colours with the rest. Action painting? And they laid their hardboard upon the floor and trailed paint if not glory.

And when the art writers screamed for hard edge painting they dug out their set-squares and rulers and to their shame literally took their orders for size and subject matter from their agents. Overnight the bottom fell out of the abstract market and last week's work of genius was tossed aside, for Pop Art was now in, and the hacks began to assiduously copy the petrol advertisements and their own comics and the sophisticated buyer turned from Dubuffet's gutter graffiti to a

safe view of the world of the teenage toughie, all muscle, leather jacket and strip-comic reading. And the fashionable world bought, if strictly for giggles, demanding that the painters should be as amusing as their puerile work for the dealer has to sell the personality of the painter with the painting. The American Rauschenberg now holds the stage, yet who dare prophesy how long Rauschenberg's cult of the debased and tattered hoardings will find an audience. But while it lasts our local talent are at this very moment feverously pasting their strips of grubby posters onto their ancient and protesting sheets of hardboard but the dealers' fingers are failing to beckon. For the market for bus-size decaying hoardings is strictly limited and there is only a limited number of public collections that this outsize amusing trivia can be palmed off on, and when it no longer amuses it is literally valueless. For, should the dealer dismiss it as unsuitable for his cult-coterie, it can only be thrown away like a glass of flat beer. One recalls the unfortunate youngster who clowning his way onto the walls of an Edgware Road art gallery by doing everything except paint. He laid his hardboard on the ground, poured paint over it, set fire to it, rode across it on his bicycle and jumped on it, and for his efforts he saw his hardboard hung on the walls of a London gallery. And, when a fresh clique was formed, he brought up the rear and saw his worthless work hanging on the walls of a large established gallery off Trafalgar Square. Here was a work of art, cried the sycophantic critics to the writer who ran the circus, and they dug out their tired clichés to describe this sheet of hardboard painted an all-over black. And when the exhibition ended, his fellow painters took that all-black painting and they drove with it to the painter's home and literally slung it over his garden wall. These were the very people who cried the arts as a Thing and a way of life unique in itself, yet no philistine would have dared to desecrate another man's work no matter how much he despised it. When this group of painters treated a fellow painter's work in that fashion they placed themselves on the level of the German Nazi thugs. Of those mentioned above, the galleries still thrive, the writer still rises higher and higher in the world of art politics and the critics still offer their scented spew for the trade's approval. Only the unfortunate youngster is no longer making the rounds of the galleries. A child without talent, he was used by a group of cynics for their own advancement and then discarded with his own coloured and tatty hardboards. Out of compassion let us forget the child's name though for the record the facts are easily obtained and checkable, but he played his drear game without money and without influence. When the late French painter Klien took a dozen canvases or more and covered each one with nothing but a single overall covering of eggshell blue, the clientele of Gallery One willingly paid fifteen guineas or more for the literal products of a house painter's paint roller, but what they bought was a status symbol. For Klien was an active member of the fashionable Parisian art world and to pay fifteen guineas for an amusing doodle, no matter how worthless in itself, was to buy a third-hand entry into this world, where only money is the judge.



These are our mirrors of illusion, these opaque coloured boards that act as passports to the pseudo-intellectual leadership of those who would seek to define the moral and social path that the mass of people must take. Year by year the demand is made as to what is the rôle of the painter within the anarchist society, when what is meant is what is the rôle of the intellectual élite sick of the thought of grubby hands, within the anarchist society, and the short and brutal answer is that in an anarchist society there is no place for a self-elect intellectual élite sponging as a self-proclaimed right, to the best that that society can offer. Let him take his place in the field, or at the work bench, and we will all join in the leisure games and help to provide the games and the canvas, operate the community printing presses and help to cast the sculpture, but as acts of social kindness just as we will do for the young and the old or the sick within that anarchist society. The desire to create shall be the only test and it shall be the mark of our maturity that we shall not stand in judgement on the ability of the painter or the writer before giving of our aid. For this is surely the essence of an anarchist society that those without physical or intellectual talents shall be as worthy of the common aid that is denied to them now. I see no place within an anarchist society for the public performer nightly standing up before a changing audience to openly clown for his right to eat, for I refuse to accept that there is any difference between Yehudi Menuhin and some pathetic street singer croaking for pennies outside the door of a public house. Each is the victim of a vagrant audience and each man nightly degrades himself for a greater or lesser payment. And if you ask in your St. John's Wood indignation, "What of Great Art?" I will place my faith in the dignity of man not to have to degrade himself for your personal pleasure and a belief that, given a society that can offer leisure and the material means of expression, great works of art will again and again appear and with them the floating audience. I know that if the whole of our culture was put to the torch we would again create works of great beauty and great evil but I will hold that all your philosophies, all your arts, are not worth the death of a single small dog, for if we sacrifice the living to enjoy the luxury of a few contented idle hours then we are the spokesmen for the dead, and we have betrayed those very people whom so many among us demand shall act out their lumpen rôle as the anvil for some quaint version of a swinging philosophical elite now and in the future. While we eat the bread that other men have baked, and wear the clothes that other men have woven and sleep within the houses that other men have built, we are pariahs if we do not take an active and physical part in the growing of that food, the making of the clothes and the building of the houses. For only when we do this can we stand in judgement on the course that a society shall take and how it shall dispose of its surplus leisure. If there is one old woman living in mean and ugly squalor then I would demand that the doors of every church, museum, office or public gallery should be kicked open to give her shelter, and

when, at four or five in the grey winter's morning, elderly men and women shuffle through the dark streets to their prisons of employment, then the vivid and infantile politics of the universities and the art schools become a nauseating farce as meaningless as a brawl of eunuchs in a harem. There are certain simple and fundamental facts that the English anarchists have for too long refused to accept. Middle-class in its recruiting, tearoom philosophical in its actions, and without any faith or belief that there will ever be a radical change in our society in their foreseeable future, they have for too long been content to regard themselves as a romantic literary debating society, despising the great mass of their fellows as unworthy of their message, and they often use this as an escapist clause for not becoming involved in the brute realities of daily decision-making. We are a small island of over fifty million people and if we are not prepared to discuss anarchism in terms that embrace these fifty million people then let us stop fooling ourselves that we have anything to say that is of any relevance to the world at large and, according to our social status, either expend our energies on the local football team, flying saucers, or the endless round of student-teacher politics. We who spend so many pages and so many hours discussing Greek derivations of accepted verbs, solving from a remote distance other people's problems, and refighting ancient polemical battles, would appear to lack both time and inclination to offer a concrete alternative to our present way of living that will win the interest and the emotions of millions of people. By all means let us play games with the police and trample on the wire that some cloddish local council has erected around some weed-flowering plot of grasses, but much as we enjoy these sports do not let us delude ourselves that these activities are peculiar to ourselves as anarchists. For our support on all these occasions will all too often come from men and women who would willingly damn freedom for any who did not happen to share their own particular hate. Let us sit and discuss higher education for lower children and the uses and the abuses of the social services, and the God-fearing Quaker and the Bureaucratic Fabian would, and will, share the chair and the agenda, for what is common to all of them is a knowledge and a proven faith that their committee findings will soften various evils that form pleasant irritants within the social conscience of the uncommitted humanitarians, who love to play these games after office hours. But these are games, little comrade, pleasant games to pass away the drifting hours and if nothing is achieved then those anarchists involved can throw wide their soft white hands and cry that society is evil, and that one day, in some science-fiction future, all will be happiness and sweet light but never in our time, never in our time, and if some social reform is achieved, then who dare claim the victory. Despite the belief, held by most esoteric minorities, that the fifty million people within these islands are but talking cattle, the relevance of any anarchist breakthrough must and can only lie with them. These are the men and women who, in club, café, home, field and factory, daily argue or discuss



the social problems of the hour. These are the men and women for whom every editor of every national newspaper gives pages to, on the social and political problems of the day and, though they may arrive at all the wrong conclusions, the newspaper-owners do not fill this space unless the need is there.

So before we anarchists spend so much time examining our society in abstract, let us pause and examine ourselves and ask ourselves why we appear to offer no acceptable alternative for the people of these islands, for let us always keep one thought paramount in our minds, and that is that whatever the social make-up of these islands it is these fifty million people who will have to operate it and make it workable, and if they are to be but well-tended work animals in a middle-class utopia, then place me among them, for a society that has no use for the labourer in the factory or the peasant in the field can have little use for me. It is indeed our tragedy that we have so much to offer to our society yet we fritter away our cause in stupid and fratricidal gossip, crowd-stealing every riot, and rehashing ancient polemics. All these things are pleasant and amusing, for we all love a riot and gossip is the key to an active mind, while the Dead Sea Scrolls of the anarchist faith are always worth a page of interesting disputation. But our, and I repeat our, salvation lies with the mass of the people of these islands. While every political party in opposition prays that a great evil shall befall the people of these islands we must, like primitive Christians, offer a clearly-defined way to a fuller and happier life irrespective of the material wealth of the people or the class involved. We must offer in reasoned outline a rational way of life that millions of people will be prepared to examine and accept as an alternative to a society that can only offer material efficiency as an end in itself, and the threat of economic degradation to those unfortunates who cannot stand the pace. I, of my innocence, believe that within my lifetime it is possible for a people to lay the foundations of an anarchist society. I know that within a few generations we are going to drift into that moneyless society that so many conservative and anarchist *realists* still regard as a lunatic fringe joke. The choice is not will it happen, but will it be within a paternalistic managerial society, a welfare state in which we draw our rations according to our work status, or an anarchist society where all is free and open and the old dream "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" shall become a living reality? And if you ask, little comrade, "does this mean that all the shops will be left open for people to walk in and take what they like?" the answer is not next Tuesday, but five or ten years from now. For this is your home-work, little comrade, and I would suggest that as we accept the open distribution of books within our public libraries, our drinking water and the moneyless collection of our sewerage, so we must show that our transport will operate with greater social success when we end the archaic use of minted tokens. That coal, cement, wood, bricks, printing paper, steel and all the dull material things of our society can be stockpiled in every community centre, to be freely taken by those who need it. None

will steal it, for there can be no market for it when it is freely available and who will bother (and bother is the operative word) to take these things if he does not have a need for them. This is the home-work that we must do, for as the mundane things of our society are left freely accessible to all, so we can then extend the number and the variety of articles and needs that would be freely available one by one, two by two, and then by battalions, until slowly or swiftly the sugar, the bread, the milk and the meat and all other things of our daily living shall be there to be taken as we need them.

And if you want a car, or a television set or a typewriter, little comrade, do you just pick one up and throw it away the following day out of boredom? Work out the problem, little comrade, next time you change your library book and remember that time is not fourteen days with a penny fine but a relative thing. And if all material goods are freely available, why should men and women bother to work at the drear daily tasks? Because, if we create small and interlocking living groups within the social whole which, brought down to simple terms, means breaking our large towns into small village-size groups, then two things must come into operation. One is the social pressure or the high-minded sneer of public disapproval directed against those who will not work, or who are related to one who will not work, for the community, and secondly, and this surely is the Machiavellian carrot, if you want to live within the community then you will be tolerated, but the community, while it will allow you to partake of its food, its clothing, and its shelter, will not accept the obligation to connect your light, your heating or your drinking water to the community supply. So the parasite may feed off the community but cannot become a part of it, unless he or she is willing, not *must* but *is* willing, to take an active part in aiding the community's physical existence. In other words, the man or woman who refuses to conform can still stay within the opened gates of the community fed, clothed and housed, but not by virtue of private wealth, or entertainment value but of our charity, and only of our charity. And again, little comrade, you ask who will do the dirty work and who will clean out the public shithouse in the Happyville factory, or the public square and the answer to that is that I will and many like me. Not because of any over-endowed social conscience but because the carrot that the community offers people such as myself is greater leisure for cleaning up your shit. If within an anarchist society it is necessary to work four, five, six or seven days a week to fulfil our needs of the moment then the man who is prepared to clean out the public sewers, lay out the lonely dead or unblock the public shithouses need only work one, two or three days a week for a few hours of each day and I feel that there will be a great number of applicants for this work with myself at the head of the queue. Within an anarchist society we can slow down the conveyor belts in the factory, for we can afford the luxury of inefficiency. When the necessary demands of a society are less than the available manpower we can sweeten the sweat. It shall be a society akin to the pre-medieval religious communities, but the task of the anarchists is to show that it



is a workable and worthwhile way of life that can operate within our own complex age and that it is not a form of high-minded social escape for a favoured few, but can be applied to the millions of people who live within these islands. That it is a workable solution to close industrial plants during the harvest season and to transport the men and women to the nearest harvest fields, can be an accepted norm for all of us as it once was for the East London working people when they went to work in the hop fields each year.

The ancient boroughs of our towns and cities shall be reclaimed from the old maps and marked out by boundaries of fresh grasses so that men may once more walk the bounds of their individual communities yet see their neighbours but a score of yards away, and the hidden waters of the old London rivers shall once more run above ground clean and sweet and all within the grid frame of a national transport, light, post and road system. Our hours shall be governed by what we need and what we stockpile, so that for weeks each year we can live off our own fat. That the tea breaks in our factories shall be pleasant interludes in the day's work and not a middle-class sneer, and men and women, irrespective of age or talent, shall have the time and the help to relearn the old crafts and pleasures. That we shall, all and every one of us, take an active part in the production of this island's food, not as a weekend exercise on some railway-siding allotment or some esoteric herb garden, but by our thousands and we shall lighten the dull routines of our production factories by the interchanging of dull jobs within the factory and between factories. We shall balance out what we lose in productivity by what we gain in human happiness.

This is surely what anarchism must mean. But we, at this moment in time, have failed, for unless the most humble and downtrodden turn to our advocated way of life for a new meaning for their own pathetic existence then we have nothing to offer. When small sad grey little groups of men and women can come together in every vile and evil industrial town to give glory to God, when men and women year by year tramp the streets of those same towns propagating their belief in some form of political salvation then we must surely ask ourselves why have we failed to win their faith. For the touchstone of every religious or social evangelicalism must be the faith of its most humble and abject hearers. When the old woman in the slum room and the unnoticed labourer in the backstreet factory, the prisoner serving his time for some unromantic crime, the dowdy girl in some ghastly town, believe that their earthly salvation lies within an anarchist society, then there is no need for us. For I would hold that within an anarchist society it will be such as you and I who will find the times out of joint for we will no longer be able to play God. Meanwhile let us accept that we have failed at this particular moment in history and ask ourselves why and begin by asserting that there is no place for the artist within an anarchist society, only anarchists.

## Camille Pissarro's anarchism

BENEDICT NICOLSON

IN THE COURSE OF A LETTER written a year before his death, Paul Cézanne made this surprising and significant comment: "L'humble et colossal Pissarro se trouve justifié de ses théories anarchistes." No one could wish for more appropriate epithets than humble and colossal to describe the patriarch of Impressionism, who with unstinting generosity had revealed to Gauguin, Guillaumin, Van Gogh, and to Cézanne himself, the rich source of nature as inspiration for painting, who lived and died as a peasant, and who by genius and hard work forces us all to see dignity in the dullest things. But a stranger outside Pissarro's own circle of acquaintances, chancing on this sentence at the moment of its appearance in print, might have been puzzled by a reference to the anarchism of one who was known only to have plodded about the fields for fifty years with an easel; and even at the outbreak of the second world war, the extent of his preoccupation with political questions still remained obscure, in spite of the evidence of his work and of occasional hints thrown out by Tabarant and Venturi, his two most trustworthy biographers. But with the publication in 1943 of a selection from Pissarro's letters to his son, Lucien, a corner of the veil of mystery has at last been lifted. Behind these affectionate paternal scribbles we are permitted a glimpse of Camille Pissarro the political animal in an unpolitical age, and of his attitude towards the successive phases of enlightenment and reaction of the adolescent Third Republic. The only importance that the historian of impressionism attaches to his sometimes erratic judgments on public affairs is the light that these judgments shed on the character of his painting; but, unfortunately, these letters cover only the last twenty years of his life, opening at the very moment of the dissolution of the Impressionist group, when he was already past the age of active participation in revolutionary politics and no longer a very central figure in the artistic world of Paris. How much more illuminating would have been an intimate self-portrait of the artist throughout the heroic years of Impressionism, from 1870 to 1880!

Even in his youth Pissarro never took an active or violent part in public life. By profession he was a painter, and whatever political opinions he may have held, he never felt much inclination to put them into practice in order to improve the condition of his profession or the lot of mankind. Since the Pink Decade we have come to recognise the need for artists, at moments of urgent social crisis, to drop their pens and brushes to defend life and liberty on the barricades—but in the age

*BENEDICT NICOLSON is editor of The Burlington Magazine. We are grateful to him and to Messrs. Lund Humphries for permission to reproduce this article which originally appeared in The Arts.*



of Flaubert and Cézanne, however much they may have stormed against the philistinism of the bourgeoisie or the apathy of the masses, in the last resort most artists accepted their isolation and went on working, year after year, destitute and unrecognised. At the height of the Commune in Paris, Pissarro was an exile in the suburbs of London; when repressive measures were taken against anarchist riots in 1894, he sought refuge in Belgium; and during the Zola trial he was careful to conceal his Jewish origin and retired to work at his window as though nothing of importance were happening outside. Any demonstration of violence disturbed and frightened him, for all his sympathy with the demonstrators. He remained what some would unkindly call an armchair anarchist, but the words "J'accuse" resound across every page of his correspondence.

Pissarro had always been an anarchist, whether he knew it or not, even during the formative years of Impressionism when painting seemed no more to him than a theory of observation. Of Degas, the reactionary of genius, he said, "Such an anarchist! In art, of course, and without realising it," (13.4.1891) and the pious Jean François Millet he called "another one of those blind men, leaders or followers, who, unconscious of the march of modern ideas, defend the idea without knowing it, despite themselves!" (2.5.1887). Already, by 1883, Pissarro was frequenting Socialist circles and had acquired among his Impressionist friends a reputation for dangerous opinions and disreputable associates. Durand-Ruel attempted, in the previous year, to rally the now scattered group of Impressionists and to persuade Renoir to exhibit with them. "Exposer avec Pissarro, Gauguin, Guillaumin," Renoir replies, "c'est comme si j'exposais avec une sociale quelconque. Un peu plus Pissarro inviterait le Russe Lavrof ou autre révolutionnaire. Le public n'aime pas ce qui sent la politique et je ne veux pas, moi à mon âge"—aged 41!—"être révolutionnaire." There is an engaging perversity about many of Renoir's pronouncements on novelty. Monet was scarcely less violent in his condemnation of Pissarro's association with Gauguin and Guillaumin, although these two were harmless enough—indeed, Pissarro never tired of deploring the mercenary opportunism of Gauguin the stockbroker. It may sound strange that Renoir should invoke, as arbiters of right and wrong, a public that had always scornfully ignored the Impressionists, but he is writing at a time when he, Sisley and Monet felt that they must do nothing to prejudice their chances of recognition. For twenty years they had slaved and starved: now, at last, success seemed within their grasp. Whilst they were busy flirting with the official Salon, Pissarro defiantly threw in his lot with a group of young artists and intellectuals, many of whom became socialists or anarchists.

Pissarro was drawn to the Neo-Impressionists chiefly for their discovery of a new scientific basis for painting, which codified the technical experiments of the Impressionists; but he was also attracted by their sense of responsibility towards society. There can be no doubt that scientific art and Socialism were linked together in their minds as in Pissarro's, and even when Pissarro abandoned the technique of divisionism, these young men remained among his intimate friends. Renoir

was as hostile to Neo-Impressionism as he had been to Gauguin, and thought of founding a "Société des Irrégularistes" to counteract the tendency of the eighties to identify art and science; and in self-defence Pissarro accused his former colleagues of surrendering themselves to commercialism and "romantic Impressionism". Monet's painting he called "a type of romantic fantasy which, despite the talent of the artist, is not in accord with the spirit of our time. . . . You must realise," he tells Lucien, "that eventually we shall have all those who are not haunted by romanticism, who feel simple naïve nature, which does not exclude character and science, like the primitives." (9.1.1887). The scientific study of nature becomes the hall-mark of the new democratic painting of the Neo-Impressionists. Their only great artist, Georges Seurat, never so far as we know concerned himself directly with politics, but in his painting is implicit a new attitude of sympathy towards cheaper and more communal forms of entertainment than the bourgeois "déjeuners sur l'herbe". As for the other prominent members of the group, Paul Signac remained a member of the Communist Party until his death in 1935, and Maximilien Luce, Félix Fénéon, and Lucien Pissarro were implicated in the early nineties in the political movements of the extreme left.

Pissarro's abandonment of divisionism as demanding too rigid a technical discipline was paralleled by his gradual retreat from Socialism in the direction of the philosophical anarchism of Kropotkin and his school. At first he had believed that there was some hope for the Third Republic, but as he came to regard all politicians as self-seekers and all discipline as oppressive, so he lost faith in the liberating authority of the State. Kropotkin's movement, though it proclaimed the solidarity of the workers, was to some extent a reversal of the collectivism of previous anarchists and came to identify itself with the general trend towards absolute personal freedom, characteristic of the late nineteenth century in other spheres of radical thought. Paradoxically enough, the anarchist of 1890 found himself more in sympathy with Flaubert than with Bakunin. We self-righteous bureaucrats find ourselves more than ever bewildered by the Utopia formulated by the anarchists, Elisée Reclus and Jean Grave. They claimed that everything should be held in common, that all materials necessary for living should be divided out according to the needs of each man. Every human being should be at liberty to do and say what he liked within the bounds set by his natural respect for others. Any form of state control, bourgeois or proletarian, was bad because it stifled independent thought and action. Free associations of individuals should be encouraged for the common execution of some task, but political organisations were to be deplored on the grounds that organisation entailed the giving and receiving of orders, hence the exercise of power, and hence corruption, since all power was bound ultimately to corrupt. Similarly, they held that the law was obnoxious and unnecessary, its chief function being to safeguard the privileges of a minority. They agreed with the Marxists that religion was an insidious means of keeping the proletariat in order; and being passionate internationalists they condemned organised armies because



war taught the soldier to bow down to the graven image called patriotism. They looked forward to a time when the state, law, property, God, war, and national barriers would be abolished, when all men would live together in concord and happiness. No political programme has ever been more magnanimous or more unbusinesslike.

Camille Pissarro became a member of the new "Club de l'art social", the object of which was to encourage a popular art, and to establish contact between literary, artistic, socialist, and anarchist groups. Owing to lack of support the club lasted only one year and died at the end of 1890. He also contributed to the Parisian anarchist newspapers, the most reputable of which was *La Révolte*, founded by Elisée Reclus and published by Jean Grave, a close friend of Pissarro who had also been a member of the "Club de l'art social". Taking its cue from Kropotkin, it became the Bible of the intellectuals who were inspired more by its loftiness of thought than by its incitement to revolutionary action. The paper was always on the point of bankruptcy and Pissarro used to help it along financially and twice came to its rescue by paying off its debts. This he could ill afford, even though its publication did coincide with an improvement in his finances. For Grave, Pissarro made two lithographs, *Les porteuses de bois* and *Les sans-gîte*, straightforward in their political symbolism and frankly propagandist. He also made a drawing entitled *Le laboureur* for the jacket of Kropotkin's brochure, *Les temps nouveaux*. The popular organ of the anarchist press was *Le Père Peinard* of Emile Pouget, also published by Grave, with a circulation in 1892 of 6,000 copies in Paris alone. Visual propaganda was as highly valued then as later in the Spanish Civil War, and from 1891 onwards *Le Père Peinard* regularly devoted one of its eight pages in every issue to illustrations by Luce and others.

Jean Grave, a member of the working class and a man of action, was driven to the conclusion that only through violent revolution could the ideals of anarchism be realised. When he was arrested for writing an article purporting to glorify terrorism, Pissarro wrote, "The Republic, of course, defends its capitalists, that is understandable. It is easy to see that a real revolution is about to break out—it threatens on every side. Ideas don't stop!" (26.4.1892). On this occasion Grave spent six months in prison. Later his book, *La société mourante et l'anarchie*, was seized and he was tried for provocation to pillage, murder, and arson. At his trial Reclus spoke in his defence: "Il est arrivé tout seul à acquérir en anthropologie des connaissances très étendues—il est un de ces hommes rares, très rares dont on peut dire qu'il n'a jamais menti." But the plea of wisdom and high-mindedness made no impression on the jury. Grave was sentenced to imprisonment and all available copies of his book were confiscated and destroyed. The bourgeois were determined to put a stop to the riots that were terrorising France during these years, and since they attributed, rightly, the hooliganism of a few brave and impetuous young men to the propaganda of the anarchist press, the intellectuals had also to suffer. The crowning act of folly was the

arrest of Fénéon, accused among other crimes of having imposed "dans quelques feuilles décadentes une sérieuse autorité sur certains jeunes gens aux préoccupations malades et curieux d'étrangeté en matière littéraire." This was an involved way of saying that he was on trial for his stimulating comments on the most advanced ideas of his time. Pissarro wrote to Lucien: "It is alleged that he (Fénéon) is connected with some criminal organisation—what next? Isn't this the limit?" (28.4.1894). The case for the prosecution was so slender, the defence so brilliantly conducted that the jury had no alternative but to acquit all intellectuals, including Fénéon, in this so-called "procès des trente". Pissarro was by this time with Reclus safely over the border into Belgium. "I'm afraid," he writes, "I shall be forced to remain abroad for some time . . . poor Luce was caught; probably someone denounced him and since I do not trust certain persons in Eragny who dislike us, I shall remain abroad." (30.7.1894). However, the movement lacked its Camille Desmoulins and its Danton. After the assassination of President Carnot severe repressive measures were taken, and the revolution that Pissarro had predicted fizzled out that summer. In September, he was able to write from Knocke: "Could I return to France safely? I don't know at all. . . . It seems to me that I, who am absolutely of no importance and participate in no actions of any kind (*sic*), should have nothing to fear, but as you point out, there is always a threat of some sort."

On his own admission Pissarro understood little of the ins and outs of politics, and at heart was more interested in the possible bearing that anarchist theory might have on the art of painting. He made plans for outlining the anarchist conception of the role that artists could play and the manner in which they could combine in an anarchist society—"indicating how artists could work with absolute freedom, once rid of the terrible constraints of Messrs. capitalist collector-speculators, and dealers, etc." (5.5.1891). In the ideal world of the future, the people will learn to love the countryside which with the abolition of property will be the inheritance of all, and hence they will appreciate art based on the study of nature; and the artists who support the revolution will achieve a new freedom by working in the service of the people. In this new world cheaper and humbler objects of art will be needed; and Pissarro begins experimenting in the early nineties in gouache, watercolour, fan-painting, and engravings. "There are hundreds of ideas in your other engravings," he writes, "which belong to you, anarchist and lover of nature, to the Lucien who reserves the great ideal for a better time when men, having achieved another mode of life, will understand the beautiful differently." (8.7.1891). Pissarro describes his own philosophy as absolutely social, anti-authoritarian, and anti-mystical, and envisages the new social art in terms of perception and hard work. He believes that nature makes the deepest impact on those closest to the soil, the peasants, and if the peasant is also endowed with creative gifts, he alone can see and interpret nature in a new way, unclouded by romantic or mystical yearnings. Pissarro ascribes his own profound understanding of nature to his peasant temperament.\*



However, so long as a capitalist society exists, the worker, poverty-stricken, ignorant, and dispossessed, will continue to regard art with derision. The artist is therefore forced, until the day of liberation comes, to depend for his livelihood on bourgeois dealers and collectors who despise him and prefer false art that is glamorous, sumptuous, and fifty years out of date. But this must not persuade the artist to succumb to bourgeois standards of value. We have already seen what Pissarro thought in the eighties of his fellow Impressionists: in the mystical and anti-social art of Gauguin he detects a tendency to pander to bourgeois standards: "Gauguin is not a seer, he is a schemer, who has sensed that the bourgeoisie are moving to the right, recoiling before the great idea of solidarity that sprouts among the people—an instinctive idea, but fertile, the only idea that is permissible! The Symbolists also take this line! What do you think? They must be fought like the pest." (20.4.1891). Gauguin may well have been the Dali of his time, delighting the prosperous by shocking them without seriously menacing their status, but his mercenary attitude towards life blinded Pissarro to his great merits as an artist. It was a source of unending sorrow to Pissarro, always so insistent on the need for modernity, that mysticism should be gaining more and more adherents, whilst his own perceptual treatment of landscape now seemed outmoded. "Perhaps I am out of date," he confesses to Lucien, "or my art may conflict and not be compatible with the general trend which seems to have gone mystical. We may have to wait for another generation,"—we had to wait until the 1930's—"free from all religious, mystical, unclear conceptions, a generation that will again turn in the direction of the most modern ideas, before we shall find the qualities necessary to admire our approach." (13.4.1891). This mysticism is, according to Pissarro, a plot on the part of the bourgeoisie to restore to the people their superstitious beliefs: "Hence the bustling of religious symbolists, religious socialists, idealist art, occultism, Buddhism, etc., etc. Gauguin has sensed the tendency. For some time now I have sensed the approach of this furious foe of the poor, of the workers. May this movement be only the death rattle, the last." (13.5.1891).

However much he may have been persecuted by hostile intellectual movements, Pissarro never abandoned his faith in the ultimate triumph of justice. Nature was for him a moral principle to be defended at the cost even of human loyalties. Only a Jew leading the life of a peasant could be as vulnerable as he, and capable of so much moral fervour and such nobility of character. Each successive counter-revolutionary gesture from Des Esseintes to the Dreyfus case became the target for his moral indignation. All the enthusiasms of Huysmans were anathema to Pissarro. Of the English aesthetic movement—"the art of orange

\*Pissarro was born of *petit bourgeois* parents in the Danish West Indies but escaped from home at the age of 22 "afin de rompre le câble qui m'attachait à la vie bourgeoise". He married a peasant from the neighbourhood of Macon and reared a large family of children. Gauguin, whose origins and milieu somewhat resembled his own, approximated in the eighties to a familiar cosmopolitan type, whilst Pissarro was drawn towards the humbler internationalism of the anarchists.

blossoms which make pale women swoon"—he had learnt enough from Lucien's residence in London, and warns his son to steer clear of Caldecott and Kate Greenaway. He persuades himself that the neo-Catholic movement of the nineties cannot last: "it is too late, people no longer believe in the authority of God, religion, government, etc." (8.10.1896). He interprets the Dreyfus case as an attempt at a clerical and military coup d'état—"a union of the generals with the sprayers of holy water"—and at once associates the political crisis with the prospect for painting: "there will be nothing left but the Symbolists. Can you see art represented by Schuffenecker?"—(10.2.1898).

"I firmly believe," writes Pissarro, "that something of our ideas, born as they are of the anarchist philosophy, passes into our works which are thus antipathetic to the current trend." (13.4.1891). It is true that his association with Grave and Reclus coincides in time with an increased interest in peasant portraiture; but he had planted his roots in the soil, deeper than any other Impressionist, at a much earlier period. A picture by Pissarro is what nature would look like through the eyes of an imaginative peasant. The unrelieved drabness of his subject-matter accounts for the fact that of all the Impressionists he was the last to be appreciated. We are made to follow him into the corner of the kitchen garden, past the cabbage-patch, and over the stile into the dingy cowshed. Here is a field under cultivation, here is the harvest being gathered in; now the time has come to milk the cow, and now water has to be fetched in buckets from a distant well. Unlike the hiker he does not invite us to the top of the hill to admire the panoramic view, nor like the landlord show off with pride his sumptuous park. Normally he does not treat landscape as a detached poetical spectacle but discovers poetry in the use that human beings make of the soil; nor does architecture hold any interest for him except as an expression of the way men live. Renoir's pretty children are trespassers in a field of poppies, but Pissarro's peasants feel as much at home in their landscape as the poplars and the stooks of corn. Smoke issues from the factory chimneys and on the quays cargo boats are being loaded. Neat avenues and semi-detached villas remind him of the imposition of uniformity; he prefers to paint cottages of different shapes and sizes, winding roads, the decaying roofs of old houses and the bustling crowds in market-place and public thoroughfare. In Camille Pissarro the currents of Corot and Courbet unite to produce a vision of the proletarian world, saved from sanctimoniousness by truth and from triviality by style. But though his views on society may assist us to define the character of his work, they provide no clue to its quality. Passionate love of justice is no *laissez-passer* to great art. Signac and Luce, no less politically reputable than Pissarro, seldom rose above honest mediocrity in their painting, whereas the best artists of the nineteenth century, Renoir, Degas, and Cézanne, were anti-Dreyfusards. Nor does sociology help us to answer the question why, during Pissarro's period of greatest revolutionary activity, he should have lost the inspiration and vitality of his earlier years. For a solution to these problems, the historian will find Freud a more persuasive guide than Grave.



# Artists and anarchism

ROBERT and EUGENIA HERBERT

*Justice en sociologie, harmonie en art: même chose.*  
—PAUL SIGNAC.

IT IS ENTIRELY CHARACTERISTIC of the middle of the twentieth century that the film biography of Vincent van Gogh treated his passionate social ideals as a symptom of a peculiar mental condition. This historical view ignores the social realities that help to form an artist's ideas, and explains away social convictions by reducing them to psychological aberrations. Yet van Gogh was by no means the only artist of the later nineteenth century who espoused humanitarian and radical political concepts. A surprisingly large number of artists who matured in France in the 1880s and 1890s were partisans of socialist-anarchist ideas, and it is rather an older artist, like Cézanne, living a hermit's life in the south, who is atypical of the period.

The unpublished correspondence of Jean Grave, France's leading anarchist-communist at the time, is almost entirely with artists, and most especially with those painters at one time or another grouped together as Neo-Impressionists: Camille Pissarro, Paul Signac, Henri-Edmond Cross, Charles Angrand, Théo van Rysselberghe, and Maximilien Luce. These letters provide the focus for an analysis of the Neo-Impressionists' attitudes toward society, all the more rewarding because, together with their friends among the Symbolist poets and critics, this group of artists endorsed one particular political creed. Radical social views were not a new phenomenon in French art. The egalitarian convictions and social consciousness of Daumier, Courbet and Millet had allied painting with progressive political thought earlier in the century. But the Impressionists, with the notable exception of Pissarro, were indifferent to social questions in spite of their struggle for recognition in a hostile society. The tensions of the ebbing century, however, culminating in bloody strikes, terrorist bombings, and merciless police repressions, could not

ROBERT AND EUGENIA HERBERT's article has appeared in several anarchist journals abroad: *Le Mouvement Social*, *Volontà*, and *Tierra y Libertad*. This version is condensed from their paper "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished letters of Pissarro, Signac and others" which appeared in *The Burlington Magazine* for November and December 1960. (Readers who want to pursue the subject further should refer to the original which contains the text of the artists' letters to Jean Grave, a list of their work done for the anarchist press and a wealth of information in footnotes.) We are grateful for the opportunity to reproduce this part of the text.

long be ignored. In this same period, workers' parties became a reality and socialist doctrines for the first time reached a wide public. In such an epoch it is small wonder that a great many painters and writers awoke to social concerns and that the ever-widening gulf isolating the artistic *avant-garde* from the general public reinforced their sympathies with radical political movements.

So close were the ties between painting and literature in this era, that it is not surprising to find a common pattern in both fields. Symbolism, the dominant movement in French and Belgian letters from about 1885 to 1900, manifested a politically radical side from its beginning, though it was not shared by all of its writers. "The social revolution will take place," wrote one of the important early Symbolist reviews, "all coalitions will only serve to precipitate it." At the height of the Symbolists' *mainmise* on French literature, one of its leading figures said of the bomb-throwing anarchist Ravachol, "a Saint has been born to us", and predicted that in the future property-less society Ravachol would be remembered gratefully as a victim of capitalism. In spite of the esoteric nature of the writing, therefore, many Symbolists were very much concerned with radical social doctrine: "They want to take part in the struggle, a thirst for action dominates the writers". If for some of them sympathy with the far left went no further than an association with their own hatred of middle-class rule and a love of individualism, others endorsed the doctrines of anarchist-communism: Paul Adam, Gustave Kahn, Félix Fénéon, Emile Verhaeren, Bernard Lazare, Pierre Quillard, to mention only the most important. It is no coincidence that the first four named were the friends and chief critical defenders of the Neo-Impressionists. In the world of painting, sympathy with the far left was less widespread but nonetheless very important. It is true that most of the painters and sculptors associated with Gauguin and the Nabis were neo-Catholics and conservative, yet Théophile Steinlen, H. G. Ibels, Adolphe Willette, Félix Vallotton, and all of the Neo-Impressionists were directly associated with the anarchists. Van Gogh and Belgium's major sculptor of the period, Constantin Meunier, were both steeped in quasi-socialist ideas.

The anarchism which awakened such sympathies, far from being nebulous and negative, was a well-articulated, positive doctrine. It combined economic communism with individual anarchism. Collective ownership of the means of production was to be on a communal rather than a national scale, for man works ideally in small groups without the coercion of national laws and institutions. Peter Kropotkin, the intellectual leader of French anarchist-communism, rejected the romantic agrarian idea that the machine was evil, and placed the hopes of mankind on the efficiency of modern technology wedded to decentralised and largely autonomous productive units. The active programme of the anarchist-communists was to hasten the downfall of the present order, but because they did not believe in the efficacy of parliamentary action nor in the creation of a syndicalist elite, they relied upon a combination of propaganda for their ideals and direct support of revolutionary activities. It was to the first of these that the artists were



recruited.

Once it has been established that the artists were friends and collaborators of the leading anarchist-communists, the logical question poses itself: what meaning did this alliance have for the artists, on the one hand, and for Grave and his colleagues on the other? On the anarchist side the question is more readily answered. It is true that Grave, like Kropotkin, had a preference for art with a social message (though his tastes were more subtle than Pouget's), but he was nonetheless happy to accept the art of the Neo-Impressionists, for their honest portrayal of the life of the humble could serve the cause by exposing the injustices and inequalities of the existing social order. At the same time their artistic merits could educate the workers and prepare them for the richer existence promised by an anarchist future.

The problem is more complex in the case of the artists. If they had all indulged in overtly propagandist art the answer would not be difficult to find, but such is not the case. On the contrary, they sat on the horns of a dilemma: their artistic judgement made them prefer subjects which were seldom obviously related to their political sympathies. This dilemma was compounded by another: they insisted upon the independence art must maintain from nature and defended an art for art's sake position, yet they regretted the progressive weakening of their ties with nature. These interlocked problems can be stated succinctly in the form of a proposition: art for art's sake is to propaganda as art independent of nature is to the naturalistic tradition. To explain the equation, it will be necessary first to examine the works the artists gave to the anarchist press, then to see what light such an analysis can shed upon Neo-Impressionism as a whole.

Most of the drawings and lithographs given to Grave were simple views of humble people. Camille Pissarro sent him two lithographs for the 1896-1900 *Temps Nouveaux* series. The first shows a homeless couple and their child wandering along a country road, the second, a group of faggot gatherers. He also drew a ploughman for Grave's reprint in 1898 of a Kropotkin lecture *Les Temps Nouveaux*. The lithographs of van Rysselberghe and Cross in the 1896-1900 series represent homeless figures. Van Rysselberghe's is like Pissarro's, Cross contrasts a vagabond seated in a sombre foreground with peasants at work in a sunlit landscape. Although they are not directly propagandistic, these agrarian subjects were appropriate to anarchist-communist ideals. If Kropotkin pleaded with the artists to "Narrate for us in your vivid style or in your fervent pictures the titanic struggles of the masses against their aggressors; enflame young hearts with the beautiful breath of revolution," he also asked them to "show the people the ugliness of contemporary life" and the "ignominies of the present social order". Simply by portraying workers and social outcasts, the painters were bringing truth before the public; truth about the existing order was by definition criticism of it.

Agrarian subjects were welcomed by the anarchists for another reason: in spite of Kropotkin's efforts to overhaul earlier anarchist theory in a scientific way, through the incorporation of industrial tech-

nology into the ideal society, he and his French followers could not shake a romantic love of the countryside. Their hatred of the manner in which the urban proletariat were oppressed led them to a hatred of industrial life and a glorification of the healthy life of the peasant. The peasant was, moreover, already a "decentralised unit" in society whereas the urban worker had been forced into an economic and institutional pattern the anarchists wished to destroy. The very same orientation is seen in the letters of Pissarro, Cross and Signac. It is essentially romantic because it is born of nostalgia for the old and dislike of the new, inevitably triumphant, urban industrialisation of life. Pissarro's assertion that "our ideas, impregnated with anarchist philosophy, spread through our work", refers to the dying naturalistic and anti-industrial tradition of the nineteenth century to which he clung (in both style and subject matter he remained close to Millet). The stevedores he drew for a special issue of *La Plume* devoted to anarchism could have been seen any time during the nineteenth century, for they are a kind of worker who antedated the industrial revolution.

A good many artistic gifts to Grave and Pouget were nevertheless frankly propagandist. Signac's poster for the *Temps Nouveaux* series shows the anarchist artist slaying the three-headed capitalist monster with his brush, and his *Demolisseur* within the same series is undoubtedly to be interpreted as the worker demolishing the capitalist state. A few years later he showed an allegorical landscape representing the collapse of the present order. The many drawings by Lucien Pissarro and Luce for Grave and Pouget are all quite inflammatory as are those of their allies Steinlen, Valloton, and Ibels. Cross and Andgrand occasionally overcame their timidity and produced militant subjects. Of all the Neo-Impressionists, however, only Luce seemed really at home in this sphere, the others making a clear distinction between their occasional anarchist messages and their independent art. If they were willing to give Grave a propagandistic drawing now and then, they did not consider these *bona fide* works of art. Lucien Pissarro and Signac, in fact, went to some pains to make this clear. Because capitalism has maintained workers and peasants in a state of ignorance, the artist must try to raise their level of artistic knowledge by painting as he sees best, not by diluting his work with easily understood, traditional elements which are reactionary in nature. Besides, Lucien wisely remarked, the individual autonomy sought by the anarchists must apply to artists too, who should not be made subservient to an aesthetic dictated by any collectivity.

Signac on several occasions wrote on even more thorough defence of the artist's autonomy. By remaining true to their sensibilities, honest artists attack traditional artistic conventions beloved of the bourgeoisie, and thus give "a solid blow of the pick to the old social edifice which, worm-eaten, is cracking and falling away". The proof lies in the assumption of the bourgeoisie that radical artists are of necessity radical in their politics. He concludes that subject-matter cannot be the determining factor in painting because it is a literary, not a painterly element. He reminds the anarchists that the official salons are full of paintings of



workers and factories—sops to their middle-class consciences—yet no one pretends that these paintings are revolutionary.

If art could not be propaganda for the Pissarros, Signac, Cross, or Andgrand, it does not mean that their subjects bear no relation to their political beliefs. Sympathetic portrayals of peasants and vagabonds had more than a casual relation to anarchist-communism as we have seen, and are in strong contrast to the medievalizing annunciations or exotic peasantries of the conservative Nabis. There is another category of works given to the anarchist press which expresses their ideals: utopian visions of the future anarchist state. Signac specifically relates his *Temps d'harmonie* to his anarchist faith, and Cross agrees with him that it was better to show people a vision of the anarchist state than present-day misery. To a certain extent the Neo-Impressionist scenes of bucolic happiness can be associated with their utopian dreams. More than once Cross said that he was painting man as he would be in the future anarchist society. Views of peasants at work, gay fishermen on the shore, and idyllic landscapes were a kind of escape from the ugly present. The Neo-Impressionists' letters, especially Pissarro's, are full of references to the happy time in the future when everyone will live in peace and tranquillity like the peasants. By the end of the century, the seascapes and port scenes of Signac and the Provençal shore and the dancing nymphs of Cross are also assimilated into their hopes for a utopian society. It must be admitted, however, that they had a defensive attitude toward their subject-matter and were referring to the utopian future in an attempt to explain to their political consciences what were primarily artistic decisions independent of anarchism. To understand this conflict, we should turn finally to a brief study of the position of Neo-Impressionism in the 1880s.

When Georges Seurat (1859-91), the undisputed leader of the Neo-Impressionists, began his first independent painting and drawing in 1880, he turned to the peasant, whom he portrayed with obvious sympathy. His peasants are always at work, never resting, a tribute to their healthy, if burdened, existence. The influence of Millet and Courbet upon these early works is a link with the socially-conscious mood of the mid-century. Slowly becoming more aware of the urban-industrial revolution, Seurat gradually shifted his attention to the city. A great many of his drawings from the years 1882 to 1886 are of the urban poor, the beggars, vagrants and street vendors who will appear a decade later in the anarchist-communist press. He also drew industrial sites, and painted several views of the factories of Asnières and Courbevoie, the industrial suburb on the north-west fringe of Paris. In the background of *Une Baignade* (Tate Gallery) of 1883-4 are the factories of Asnières, and the boys in the foreground are clearly sons of that working-class area.

At first glance, Seurat would seem to have abandoned his social consciousness in his later paintings of urban entertainments. But we have the word of his friends that the *Chahut* (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) and similar subjects were satires upon the middle-class. Of course, Seurat identified himself to a certain extent with the many

people on the fringes of society whom he portrayed, entertainers as well as the urban humble. Only a few years later the young Picasso showed a similar interest in the destitute and in circus performers. Seurat's early attraction to industrial scenes was shared by Signac, Luce, Andgrand, Dubois-Pillet, and others. It was in fact the painting of *la vie moderne*, the cry of progressive critics since Baudelaire, as well as the artistic merits of the Neo-Impressionists that won the admiration of the political radicals among the critics of the Symbolist period. Running through the praise of Paul Alexis, Georges Lecomte, Octave Mirbeau, Jean Ajalbert, Félix Fénéon, Gustave Kahn, Emile Verhaeren, and Jules Christophe is an open admiration of the new urban themes. All of those named except Alexis had close ties with the anarchist-communists (and Alexis was sympathetic to the cause). The Neo-Impressionists were also frequently defended by the left-wing press even when its writers did not know them personally.

The activity of the Neo-Impressionists in the 1880s testified to the sincerity of their social convictions. But they were equally sincere in the next decade when they had quite evidently forsaken subjects with an overt social message and had developed an art for art's sake position. As the decade of the 1890s progressed, the Neo-Impressionists became more and more aware of the logical conclusions that must be drawn from an art for art's sake position. Charles Andgrand, living the life of a recluse in the country near Rouen, was the major catalyst, prodding Signac and Cross with his profound questions. "He declares," wrote Signac in 1894, "that it's the searching in nature which paralyzes us, that we know enough to draw a dog which won't look like a donkey, and that this suffices. The rest, arrangements of line and colours, ought to be our sole preoccupation." The conflict between a devotion to the abstract qualities of painting, and a lingering faithfulness to the naturalistic tradition, grew more acute. The Neo-Impressionists were never able to desert figurative subject-matter, but because Signac and Cross had an important direct influence on Matisse, Braque, Puy, Valtat, K. X. Roussel, and other fauve painters, their struggle with this crucial problem had important consequences.

And yet, paradoxically, it was precisely in the 1890s, when the artists had adopted this art for art's sake position, that their collaboration with the anarchist movement became most militant, as we have shown earlier. Thus a change in subject-matter meant in no sense a desertion of the cause. Certainly on Grave's side there was a far-sighted concession to the artists. Much as he instinctively preferred somewhat propagandistic subject-matter, he conceded that the artist could not yet hope to be fully understood by the masses. If, however, the artist did not ignore the people but instead took part in raising them to a higher cultural level, he could in the future expect an eager and grateful public, free of the corrupt taste of the bourgeoisie. Over and over again Grave insisted that in the future society the artist would be left in perfect freedom to express his concept of the beautiful, and declared his accord with Oscar Wilde that "art is the supreme manifestation of individualism". It was this willingness to admit an aesthetic



consistent with his libertarian politics and to resist the snare of a more immediately tempting socialist realism that won Grave the lasting sympathy of so many artists.

With the passing of half a century, we can today appreciate the unique position of the Neo-Impressionists and their friends and its relevance to our own era. They lived in a period which saw the formation of new social and labour movements, a period in which the "social question" was forcing older concerns into the background and imposing itself upon the attention of all levels of society. Unlike the radical artists of the mid-century, they did not believe in the idea of a progressive march of humanity toward a fraternal, harmonious society. They inclined instead to the conviction that social progress could not be expected without violence, without a concerted attack on all the institutions of the present and on its social hierarchy. The central issue was no longer monarchism or despotism versus republicanism, and therefore they did not, like Lamartine or Hugo, think primarily in political terms. They worked for social and economic change. Constitutional reforms and political democracy left them sceptical. Their goal was a society resting on an egalitarian base, an ideal that would have frightened most of the radicals of the Romantic period whose motto had been "liberty and fraternity" rather than the dangerous "equality".

The general social ferment of the later century would not, in all likelihood, have sufficed to turn so many artists to the anarchist-communist movement if they had not considered themselves such signal victims of the social order. They saw little possibility of earning a respectable living from their art or of winning an appreciative public. Instead of limiting the blame for these circumstances to the nebulous villainy of bourgeois taste, they turned more concretely on the social organisation of the present and indicted the capitalist system itself. Hence their hopes as artists as well as political individuals were centred on the construction of a new order in which art would meet with the justice that now eluded it. Their dreams of social justice converged with those of the anarchist-communists, the group of radicals which beyond all others emphasized human liberty as the goal of social reform.

Again in contrast to radical artists of earlier years, the Neo-Impressionists found it extremely difficult to relate art to social ideals. To be sure, much of their work given to Grave had a clear social content, but these drawings and paintings were usually of a journalistic sort and not a major part of their life's work. As political thinkers they were impassioned partisans in the social struggle; as artists they were afraid of sacrificing art to didacticism.

It is this conflict between art and political ideals that distinguishes the artists of the late nineteenth century from earlier artists of radical conviction, and makes them so important for the twentieth century. The difficulty in relating modern political beliefs to subject-matter in art is an especially modern phenomenon. With the desertion of naturalism and easily recognised subjects, how can an artist communicate his political beliefs? Signac, Cross, Andgrand and the others are of significance because, on the threshold of abstract art, they wrestled with

the dilemma and came up with the solution that has obtained ever since among most artists: an artist must remain faithful to his artistic sensibilities, for he will help destroy the old social order through his art, not through its subject-matter. The unwillingness of modern despotic governments to grant freedom to their artists is a proof of the significance of the Neo-Impressionists' problem. Freedom of choice in art is incompatible with preordained content.

The Neo-Impressionists also help us understand some of the attitudes of modern artists. Picasso, for example, was very much concerned with social themes in his early work (and looked to Steinlen's drawings of the 1890s that are closely related to the subject of this paper), representing different kinds of people on the fringes of society. His self-identification with these beings is a particularly nineteenth-century attitude. Picasso only becomes a truly twentieth-century artist with his development of Cubism, an art lacking clear social consciousness. This change, foretold by the similar evolution of the Neo-Impressionists a generation earlier, marks the severance of art from overt political expression and becomes typical of the modern period. (This is true as a general statement, although there are notable exceptions. Picasso's *Guernica* proves that the modern idiom can be used to express political and social ideas if the artist wishes.)

Perhaps their strongest ties with the twentieth century are found in the Neo-Impressionists' feeling of isolation, symbolized by their frequent portrayal of lonely wanderers. Their fondness for peasants and rural landscape looked forward to the anti-industrial orientation of many modern artists, whose subjects reflect the individual anarchism and escapism that is both the tragedy and the glory of modern art. The predominant rejection of industrial motifs, which extends to the public in their enthusiasm for Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne, is tragic in so far as it reflects the position of men who feel themselves isolated from the reality of everyday life in an industrial-urban society, but it is also glorious because it represents a consistent and heroic fight against materialism, tawdriness, and facile acceptance of observable reality.

## Remembering Herbert Read

HERBERT READ, who died on June 12th at the age of 74, was a critic of art and society less influential than Ruskin in his day and less exclusively aesthetic in outlook than Roger Fry in his. Read championed the "Modern Movement" in painting, sculpture, architecture, and design in its pioneering days and did a great deal to win acceptance for the succession of those revolutions in the arts—cubism, expressionism, imagism, surrealism, abstraction—which this century has produced.

He was also an anarchist and pacifist who used his position as an established poet and critic in order to gain a hearing for these outlooks in circles beyond those usually reached by minority propagandists. "My anarchist convictions," he wrote last January, "have



now lasted for more than 50 years. I date my conversion to the reading of a pamphlet by Edward Carpenter with the title *Non-Governmental Society*, which took place in 1911 or 1912."

He was one of the group of writers who became active propagandists under the stimulus of the Spanish Revolution of 1936. He contributed to the anarchist journal called *Spain and the World* and its successors and wrote the widely-read books, *Poetry and Anarchism* and *The Philosophy of Anarchism*, which during the last war gained many adherents to the anarchist movement. His acceptance of a knighthood in 1953 ("for services to the arts") estranged him from many anarchists who thought that, of the many compromises we have to make, this was one of the easiest to avoid.

His knighthood also made him appear an Establishment figure in the eyes of the avant-garde in the arts and he probably realised this, writing sadly in 1962, "The State, no doubt, is my scapegoat for a sense of frustration: and a very seductive goat it can be, offering security, responsibility, honours. This is the first mistake one makes: to compromise with authority."

Read thought and wrote a great deal about education. He believed that anarchism had distinctive and revolutionary implications for teachers. Apart from his book *Education for Peace* and his Freedom Press pamphlet *The Education of Free Men*, he set out his educational philosophy in *Education Through Art*, of which he declared, "It is not often realised how deeply anarchist in its orientation a work such as [this] is and was intended to be. It is of course humiliating to have to confess that its success (and it is by far the most influential book I have written) has been in spite of this fact."

#### V.R.:

HERBERT READ was shy and retiring but in informal surroundings could be a warm and humorous person. He had fine eyes which reflected his moods and thoughts as eloquently as his pen expressed his ideas and his creative imagination.

His connections with the anarchist movement and in particular with the Freedom Press group go back to 1937 when Emma Goldman came to London as representative of the Spanish CNT-FAI (the syndicalist and anarchist organisations respectively). This was the beginning of a valuable collaboration that lasted until 1953.

In the opening paragraph to *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938) he wrote: "To declare for a doctrine so remote as anarchism at this stage of history will be regarded by some critics as a sign of intellectual bankruptcy; by others as a sort of treason, a desertion of the democratic front at the most acute moment of its crisis; by still others as merely poetic nonsense. For myself it is not only a return to Proudhon, Tolstoy and Kropotkin, who were the predilections of my youth but a mature realization, moreover, of the necessity, or the probity, of an intellectual confining himself to essentials."

He went on to point out that so long as Lenin and Stalin had "promised a definitive 'withering away of the State' I was prepared to stifle my doubts and prolong my faith". But when the years went

by and the liberty of the individual receded at every stage "a break became inevitable". And it was the struggle of 1936-39 that made it "possible to transfer our hopes to Spain where anarchism, so long oppressed and obscured, has at last emerged as a predominant force in constructive socialism".

In that beautiful autobiographical volume *Annals of Innocence and Experience* he makes reference to his Marxist and Anarchist readings in his youth and dates them at not later than the summer of 1914. By 1916, when he was an officer in His Majesty's Army, he read and was influenced by T. E. Hulme's translation of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, and in his autobiography he declares "that few books have impressed me so deeply and so permanently".

After the war of 1914-18 he entered the Civil Service where he remained until 1931. They were years in which he was, he writes, under a much stricter censorship than in the army "and though I never 'dropped' politics, I ceased to write about them". And so when he found himself at liberty to take part in the public discussion of political issues, "many people assumed that I had 'just discovered' Marx, that the turn of political events had forced me from the seclusion of an ivory tower, that I had adopted anarchism as a logical counterpart to my views on art. Actually there was an unfailing continuity in my political interests and political opinions. I would not like to claim that they show an unfailing consistency, but the general principles which I found congenial twenty-five years ago are still the basic principles of such political philosophy as I now accept."

I am not proposing to unravel this personal and intellectual knot here, though I would suggest that no serious appraisal of Herbert Read's political ideas and writings can ignore these significant autobiographical references. I think also that one must take into account that a writer is primarily a writer—concerned with the art of writing, just as a painter is concerned with paint, and a politician with power. Where Herbert Read distinguishes himself from so many writers of our time is in remaining to the end shy but secure; aware of his achievements and failures and never depending on the arc light of the ignorant mass-communicators.

I am sure that Herbert Read would have been the first to recognise that he had not contributed to the elaboration of anarchist ideas that was in his power as a thinker and writer to do. And I would suggest that this stems from an inability to translate his thoughts into language and issues that could capture the imagination of politically conscious workers. Alas, not having been in touch with him personally since 1953, I never put these questions to him. But I think the answers, anyway, will be found in his writings because after all he was essentially a communicator by the written word and not by the odd remark he might make at a party.

My recollections of Herbert are that he not only reluctantly agreed to speak at meetings but that having agreed to he wrote out his speech and delivered it with all the revolutionary fervour he could summon up for the occasion. Which meant that more often than not



some of the public were so disappointed by his delivery that they failed to take into account the important things he had to say!

As well as writing for the anarchist press (his first contribution was in *Spain and the World*, May, 1938, and Freedom Press published most of his political writings), Herbert took part in many of our activities, and not only lent his name but was also most helpful in the work of organising meetings, of getting other well-known people to sign protests, or appeals, or to raise funds. And of course everybody "got" at him to help either with publishing their masterpieces or to get their paintings accepted and so on. It reached a point, when he was still living in Beaconsfield, that he had a card printed which read:

Herbert Read begs to thank you for your letter, but has to inform you that he has retired from all unsolicited correspondence, from lecturing, attending meetings and conferences, joining committees, writing prefaces and introductions, visiting studios and opening exhibitions, reading unsolicited manuscripts and books, offering his opinion on drawings and paintings submitted to him through the post, and generally from all those activities which render his present existence fragmentary and futile.

Poor Herbert; the card saved him from not more than a tiny fraction of this unsolicited correspondence. For it was his essential modesty which made him the victim of all kinds of determined phonies but also the sponsor of so many young people who needed just the kind of help that he could and would give. Henry Moore has written of him that he had never met anyone "more generous with his time, or more self-sacrificing in the way that he would put aside his own concerns to help others".

Our disappointment when he accepted a knighthood in 1953 was openly expressed in the columns of *FREEDOM*, and there is no point in reviving the issue, except by way of explaining why some of us were no longer in touch with Herbert during the last fifteen years of his life.

But the silence of these years never extinguished, at least for me, the friendship and work in common of the preceding fifteen years.

—*FREEDOM*.

## Henry Moore:

I KNEW Herbert Read intimately for forty years. He was one of my closest and very dearest friends. I have never met anyone who was more loyal to the things and the people that he believed in, or more generous with his time, or more self-sacrificing in the way that he would put aside his own concerns to help others.

I remember that just after he had his first operation he read an article in which Shelley was attacked as a poor poet and a bad man. Herbert got off a terrific letter in reply, and when it was published and I congratulated him he said, "Yes, I wrote that with four radium needles in my tongue". In those conditions I should only have been concerned with myself, and here was Herbert provoked into writing by his love for what he believed in.

In a more general way I think that his *Education Through Art* was one of the really influential books. It changed the whole art-situation in this country—and in other countries, too—by insisting

on the part that art should play in education, and particularly in elementary and primary school. In his and my youth, "art" in schools meant half an hour on Friday afternoon. But *Education Through Art* helped to change all that, and I believe that if we have an exceptionally large number of gifted young artists today it is partly thanks to Herbert's having prepared the ground.

He had an almost German thoroughness in everything that he did, and he was aware of what was being written and done in other countries at a time when many people in the English art-world were narrow-minded and provincial. He kept up with his English friends—with T. S. Eliot, for instance, whom he had been seeing every other week since Imagist days—but he also kept up with a wide international circle. He was not at all gushing or effusive—in fact he was uncommonly silent—but when he and I were at some party abroad, as we often were, I would look round the room and find him in a corner with people who had got on to his quiet sociability and recognised him as a really remarkable man.

In the 1930s he was invaluable to us all in the way that he could see both sides of any situation and act as a link between all the different things that were going on. I think that fundamentally he was a romantic, and nearer to poetic or surrealist painting than to abstraction or constructivism, but he never wrote from prejudice of any kind. In politics he was an anarchist, but the gentlest anarchist one will ever know and the best explanation of what the anarchist philosophy really is, as against the popular idea of it. If anyone wanted to prove that an anarchist was not a bomb-throwing destroyer, Herbert was the man to do it.

He was an artist himself, in his poems and in *The Green Child* and the autobiographical fragment called "The Innocent Eye", and he knew what artists were all about. I remember in *Art Now* a quotation he'd taken from Lenin, about how artists were a special sort of person and easily damaged and that the State should leave them alone. The Russians haven't lived up to it, but that was how Herbert thought it should be.

He got through a fantastic amount of work, as a critic and historian, as a publisher, and as a selfless committee-man, but the part of him that will live for ever is his own creative writing. He loved Yorkshire, and the moors, and the beautiful house he bought towards the end of his life, and he was always a Yorkshireman in his speech. He was proud of the connection but, more than that, he just loved it and I couldn't imagine him going abroad and living there for any reason whatsoever. This was one of the things, but only one of them, that made him a wonderful friend and a beautiful human being.

—*Sunday Times*.

## N.W.:

THE ONLY CONTACT I EVER HAD with Herbert Read was three years ago, when I sent him a copy of the questionnaire which my wife and I were distributing to all the people we could trace who had



belonged to the Committee of 100. He was one of the original members, and one of the famous people (the "names") who gave the Committee its great initial appeal. It may be significant that, of all the "names" we contacted, he was the only one who bothered to complete the questionnaire. He returned it in January 1966 with a friendly letter (beginning: "I have submitted to your inquisition . . ."), and I don't think he would have minded my quoting from it after his death.

The main conclusion which emerges from his replies is that he was very much unlike most Committee people, and I suspect that in this he was like most of the other "names". For one thing, he was older (born in 1893), and for another, he had done military service (in the First World War, when he was decorated, which he didn't mention). But more important, he wasn't involved in the active political life which was typical of most Committee people. The only political paper he read, apart from *FREEDOM* and *ANARCHY*, was the *New Statesman*. He had not belonged to any political group or taken part in any political activity before joining the Committee (he didn't mention his former relations with the anarchist movement), and this extended to his support for nuclear disarmament; thus he went on no Aldermaston marches, and took no part in CND or Committee work.

His year-long membership of the Committee of 100 was therefore a break in the pattern of his political life. He said simply that he joined it because "the Committee got in touch with me" and because "I sympathised with its aims". He went on two sit-downs—the first one, at the Ministry of Defence on February 18th, and the biggest one, in Trafalgar Square on September 17th, 1961—but was not arrested. He said he had left the Committee, but gave no reason (it was in fact because he opposed the Wethersfield demonstration on December 9th, 1961). He described himself as an anarchist, a libertarian, and a pacifist, but acknowledged no influences on his ideas, and offered no proposals for future action.

His attitudes to the Committee of 100 are predictable enough. He thought that the best thing it had done was "non-violent mass demonstrations", and that the worst thing was "aggressive trespass of airfields, etc.". He thought that it declined because of "lack of direction and discipline", and the main lesson of its history was the "need for training in the strategy of non-violence", and that its main effect was that it "alienated many people of good will". His attitude to non-violence was one of "complete belief in its efficacy if properly used"; and he thought that we could get rid of weapons of mass destruction only through some form of revolution.

Only the first and last of these attitudes hint at the Herbert Read who was an anarchist for fifty years. The rest express the Herbert Read who seemed so far away from most anarchists—an intellectual who took a brave line all his life but never followed it through to its more uncomfortable conclusions.

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## Anarchy 92

Risinghill and Kilquhanity:  
a tale of two schools

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## Anarchy 93

Radio Freedom

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## Student anarchy?

Write to Libertarian Student  
Federation c/o F.C.J.  
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