

Black Flag

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Issue 233

Mid 2011

chasing change

Lessons from
big rallies and
the debate over
anti-cuts tactics

Picture: Max Reeves

**Also inside
this issue**

**We talk
to Atari
Teenage
Riot**

**Analysis
of the
students'
conflict**

**Red Flag:
History
of a song
for rebels**

**Plus our
economy
rundown,
reviews...**

Editorial

Welcome to Black Flag number 233. As would be expected, this issue reflects the crisis of neo-liberalism as it grinds slowly on.

This year has seen Portugal joining Ireland in proving that austerity makes a crisis worse. Significantly, Portugal and the UK were among just five EU countries (including austerity-wrecked Greece and Ireland) to suffer negative growth in the final quarter of 2010.

Not that our political masters have paid much attention – for them the lesson is not that austerity measures destroy economies but that Portugal did not cut fast and far enough (ignore the awkward fact Portugal adopted similar measures before Chancellor George Osborne announced his Comprehensive Spending Review).

We discuss the many flaws of this ideological blindness.

This issue also focuses on protests against the coalition cuts. As part of our co-operation with other libertarians the Anarchist Federation has written an article on the recent student movement. In addition, we have two articles discussing the impressively large demo on March 26th and what lessons we can learn from it in order to push the struggle forward.

We have two interviews, one with Jon Active on radical distribution and another with anarcho-band Atari Teenage Riot. Our regular Breathing Utopia feature discusses the post in a libertarian society and how it could be self-managed (with classless stamps?). It also has the second part of our articles on what is libertarian history and Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas. With the usual reviews (as well replies to one from the last issue), this is another issue packed with goodies for all discerning libertarians.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Brixton riots, 75 years since the start of the Spanish Revolution, 90 since the Kronstadt revolt (as reflected in this issue's Radical Reprint) and 140 since the Paris Commune. We can only hope that in the future decades 2011 is remembered as the one which saw us start to successfully create the beginnings of a libertarian social movement! Whether that is the case depends on us...



Edge of darkness: Are we staring into the face of decline as neo-liberalism swallows the social gains of the working classes?

Picture: Anya Brennan.

Black Flag JOIN THE COLLECTIVE

Since relaunching over the last three years this magazine has been gaining in recognition and has become one of the best places for serious anarchist writing in Britain today. Now we want to expand. We want you to help us reach out into the wider left and beyond. We're looking for marketers, distributors, designers, writers, commissioning editors and photographers to force our theories into the public domain. Contact us at the email or snail mail address opposite.

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Ethos

Black Flag is for a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation – against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

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Is this only the

In focus:

The student protests have died down, but for how long?

"We're from the slums of London" says a teenage protester, "how are we supposed to pay £9,000 in fees?"

On December 9th, the day the vote on tuition fee rises went through, a mass demonstration outside parliament was kettled by the Met Police. Over the next 24 hours confrontations escalated and mounted charges at students brought back images that had not been seen since the Poll Tax riots.

The events in December were the culmination of student protests that spread across the country, resulting in direct action from students that went even further back, to the 1980s.

After the destruction at Conservative headquarters in November there was a take off in the student movement, but with the New Year the movement stagnated, with protests reduced and occupations few in number.

What needs to be answered is why this has been so and what is needed to escalate the student resistance once again?

During the protests of last year, it was clear that action was being taken by students which was independent from the NUS. This was a result of former president Aaron Porter and the bureaucracy that feeds the union not responding to a rising tide of student activism, choosing an ineffective route of lobbying that has taken the fight against fees nowhere.

Aaron Porter did nothing but condemn the majority of action carried out by students against the government's attacks upon higher education, even mirroring the coalition view of direct action being that of a violent minority.

Students and workers within the Anarchist Federation have been involved in protests, teach-ins and occupations from the outset of the movement, even with the organisation being wrongly accused of masterminding the destruction of Conservative HQ, when it was clearly the legitimate action of thousands.

The ideas and principles of direct action



Class wars: Occupations and clashes with police punctuated the student protests

and self organisation inherent in anarchist groups such as the Anarchist Federation have clearly struck a chord with many students.

The NUS is a union that shows the limits of what working with a capitalist system can achieve, what needs to be taken on board is that it only serves to create individuals who are more concerned with furthering themselves politically, such as Aaron Porter and his well-known connections with the Labour Party. This extends not just to the national body but also down to local university unions which are rife with exactly the same careerists and popularity contestants.

Mikhael Bakunin, 19th Century theorist and a founder figure of collectivist anarchism, was no stranger to the bureaucracy of unions, when he explained how they could be stolen from the membership whose will they are supposed to be an expression of. He

argued that any organisation that mirrored the hierarchal system of capitalism was doomed, as a "governmental aristocracy" would be created destroying the democratic nature of it.

Once militants are promoted to positions of power they forget their revolutionary roots, becoming ambitious self-seekers who have chosen the union more as a career. The fact that high-up SU officials are in a full-time paid job shows their disconnection from those they represent.

The NUS of course creates a mechanism for funneling dissent from disaffected students via representation and increasingly as an out-and-out business attempting to use their monopoly position to liaise with companies and increase campus revenue.

In the student struggle examples can be seen with previous activists who had previously argued for independent action from the NUS being drawn into the internal

beginning?



student movement.

If the struggle is to continue the reliance upon the student unions must be broken. The fight must be taken into the students' hands who should, not be afraid to take direct action and realise that the NUS cannot be won over to radical action due to its undemocratic structure preventing struggle.

This combination of ineffective reliance upon the NUS and supposed radical alternatives has led to a slowdown in the urgency and impact of the student movement.

In order for the movement to progress again radical action needs to be taken that can offer alternatives. From recent months it is clear that these alternative measures are being taken and it is the acceptance of these actions that will determine the long-term success of the student struggle.

Along with independent action, separate from the impotency of undemocratic organisations, there needs to be a radical critique of education under capitalism.

What needs to be remembered is that the university system itself is more geared to creating obedient future workers to prop up the neo-liberal capitalist system.

Students are being asked to pay more in exchange for providing the economy with higher-skilled, more adaptable, less secure and more indebted workforce. A student movement without a radical discourse, not attacking capital itself, will only be begging for crumbs from the table.

The political philosopher Antonio Negri mentions: "We might consider how the concept of general intellect can be used to define not capitalist development but its sabotage, the struggle against this development." With initiatives such as the Really Open University (ROU) which began in Leeds last year, there is an actual opportunity for this to happen.

ROU describes exactly the elitist nature of privatisation, how students have become docile factory workers and universities "are now run as businesses, with students as consumers and lecturers as creators of products. Knowledge has become a commodity that can be bought and sold, its 'value' determined by its ability to generate further private profit."

Students are taking the fight against fees and cuts into their own hands, along a more autonomous route with spontaneous and decentralised methods being applied. A lot has been done to bring action into other areas as well.

Non-student campaigns such as saving libraries, saving forests, defending public services and even action within UK Uncut are examples of such actions.

The relevance this has to the student struggle is that it shows the willingness of students to engage in the wider class struggle off campus.

The Autonomous Students Network is an example of bringing activists together but

on a student level this is based along the principles of connecting students to actions and events that they would have never become aware of before.

This is a step forward in building an alternative to the traditional left and also not only capitalism itself, but against lobbying and ineffective mass protests as well.

These pushes towards building networks to bring local and regional struggles together are typical of anarchist communist tactics of bridging resistance nationally and of creating a culture of resistance that is formed from these experiences.

The problem with such networks is that it is all very well bringing people and campaigns together, but whether action itself is forthcoming is a different story.

Too many networks have disintegrated when offering so much and it is the responsibility of groups to continue the spirit that it was created in.

This needs to be said of the student struggle as well, that there must be a bringing together of student groups who are



Antonio
Negri

The concept of general intellect can be used to define not capitalist development but its sabotage



power struggles of the union itself. Well-known activist Clare Solomon actually prevented the occupation of a ULU building recently in March on the grounds of it being "counterproductive;" this only shows that working within student unions creates a vanguard tendency in militants that are supposed to be the radical choice in the

offering radical action against the attacks on universities and see that there is an alternative in taking the struggle into your own hands.

A network may be useful, but if it does not have the political thought backing it up it stagnates, the actions of the Anarchist Federation and Solidarity Federation on March 26th are a testimony to how joint actions with political vision can work and push a movement forward.

The Really Free School is an occupied space in London that is offering an alternative to the education system that we haven't seen much before in this country. Set up at the height of the student protests last year, education and skills are not bought or sold but shared for the benefit of all.

This autonomous space offers a physical radical alternative in which anything such as radical history, DIY workshops, reading groups, film screenings, soup kitchens,



alternatives to education talks, bike repair and even yoga are offered.

This is a step a forward from the usual squatting scene that we have seen in London, showing a willingness to create something different that is engaging not just with students but the local area is taking shape.

In Greece the opening of similar social spaces, squats and occupations offer exactly the same alternative, but on a bigger and more impressive scale.

In relation to anarchism we can look to individuals such as Francisco Ferrer and Ivan Illich to help us explain and support the free school project.

The Modern School Movement which was prominent in the US in the early 1900s,

the Really Free School but also within the ideals of anarchism as a whole, that education should not be controlled by the state, that we should have the potential to develop as individuals and critical beings, not departmentalised or turned into tools for the capitalist machine.

Of course the problem with projects such as this is that they can easily lose the vision and impetus from when they were originally founded, if this is an isolated phenomenon then it can be easily contained and degenerate under the pressure of the system.

As in Greece, initiatives like this should multiply and begin to dominate, freeing up space and giving an alternative to the capitalist system that could replace it

fees still in their minds and the actual cuts to universities arriving, impacting students in a more personal way.

With courses funding being slashed, lecturers made redundant, scholarships cut and many more cost-cutting initiatives being put into action by universities across the country, the threat has actually hit home. Where fees might not have impacted current students, these cuts actually will be damaging their education.

Students who are members of the Anarchist Federation argue that groups organised by students themselves and along the lines of autonomous organisation can actually be effective in fighting these cuts.

We have seen groups which have been re-emerging since the beginning of the year are actually organising along these lines, that direct action such as occupations are also increasing again with both UCL and Glasgow re-occupying in a very confrontational fashion.

In recent months we have also seen an increase in the black bloc tactic which has been instrumental in the actions during the TUC demo.

This can be seen in part as a seeking within the student movement for more direct action as the methods of lobbying, NUS participation and isolated protests prove ineffective.

What seems evident is that there is a divide between those who believe that more direct action can help them change their situation as evidence has shown and those who still hold illusions in parliamentary democracy.

The more militant end of the movement that has gone full head into anti-cuts action, supporting direct action at the same time, has still to convince the reformist majority that these actions can work. It is the task of anarchists to push forward their perspective within the struggle.

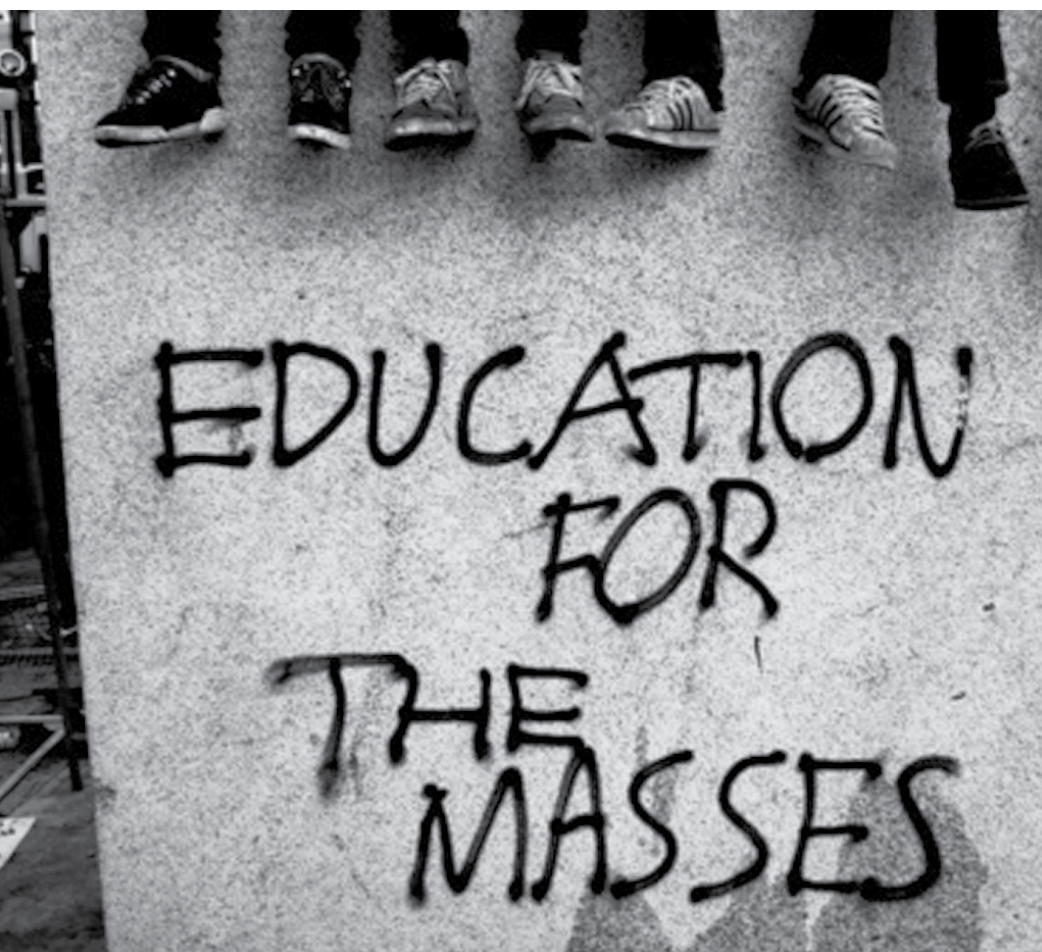
The Anarchist Federation supports the use of direct action in bringing about change, but it does also understand that such action on its own is ineffective and that an alternative needs to be offered: anarchist communism.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that the student movement cannot be isolated on its own; it must combine with the wider struggle of the workers to bring about a threat to the system as it exists now.

We have seen evidence of this as student aims for groups constantly raise solidarity with not only their lecturers but also workers; this has also been added to by students marching with workers on the other protests against the government's cuts, showing that they understand the implications that the attack on the public sector will have on them.

In order for both to succeed and build resistance they need to work together, learning from each others' struggles, showing that there is an alternative to the state and capitalism that is destroying workers' and students' lives.

Yes this is only the beginning and the students might have shown the way, but if their direct action is not taken up into the wider class war then it will only be a beginning, never an ending.



Alternative: Initiatives such as the Really Free School offered a different learning dynamic

which Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre were involved in forming, intended to educate the working-classes from a secular, liberal and class-conscious perspective.

The Really Free School is very much in the tradition of this movement, along the line of an anarchistic free school in which it is a decentralised network where skills, information, and knowledge are shared without hierarchy or the institutional environment of formal schooling.

Ivan Illich understood how the institutionalisation of education leads to the institutionalisation of society, that by deinstitutionalising education could you do the same for society. This is not only very prominent within the ethos of

once the revolution has occurred. There is nothing wrong with us beginning to create a new world within the shell of the old before the revolution and student-influenced initiatives such as the Really Free School show the way, adding a more radical aspect to the student movement.

With the vote for tuition fees going through last year, it is also obvious that the act of parliament itself has had an impact on the level of activity of the students.

What we have seen is a decline where a lot of students have left the campaigns with the idea that all has been lost. Of course as the slogan predicted this is not the end and with the coalition it never is.

Since December 9th, student groups have come back from the winter break with the



Snow business: An icicle-laden stop sign from last winter. The chancellor has been blaming bad weather for his bad statistics.
Picture: Lars Plougmann

Analysis: As our economy slows in line with cuts, Osborne is desperately blaming outside factors – like the weather...

Signs of stress

Surprise! Austerity is kicking in and, as predicted, the economy is continuing its downward trend. If anything, the speed is increasing with growth in 2010 falling from 1.2% in the second quarter, to 0.8% in the third quarter until, finally, negative 0.5% in the last quarter.

"Experts" in the City were both "surprised" and "shocked" by the announcement. The markets had been expecting growth of between 0.3% and 0.7% in the final quarter of 2010. They always seem to be "surprised" and "shocked" when their forecasts prove to be wrong ... don't you wish you had a job in which you are constantly and publicly proved wrong but you keep getting paid vast amounts of money?

The last time the "experts" were "surprised" was back in October, when the economy grew by 0.8% in the third quarter, double the 0.4% expected in the City. At that

stage Osborne was arguing it confirmed his policies: "What you see today, in an uncertain global economic environment, is Britain growing ... that is ... a vote of confidence in the coalition government's economic policies."

This proved his plan to cut the public sector was right: "In the Budget, I set out a plan to restore confidence in our economy by dealing with the deficit ... Today's figures ... put beyond doubt that it was right to begin acting on the deficit now."

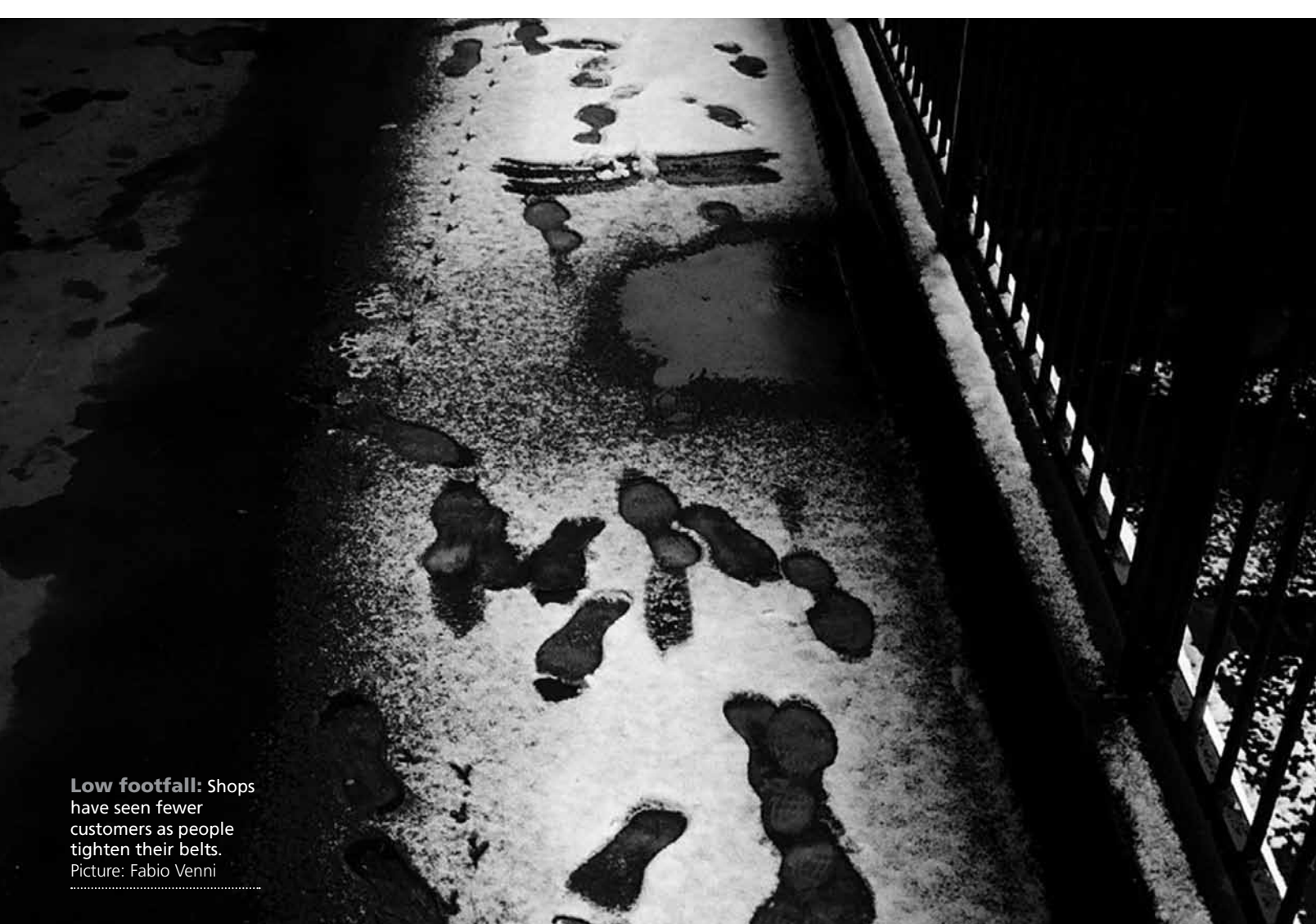
Impressive, given that the second quarter covers April to June, the coalition came to office on May 11th and the budget was on June 22nd 2010. A mere seven days transformed the British economy – unless the budget was so good it had retroactive powers! Sadly he did not explain why his government should take credit for growth in a quarter unaffected by policies he was yet to implement.

Undeterred by mere logic and facts, a Treasury spokesman pronounced at the time that while the government was "cautiously optimistic about the path for the economy, the job is not yet done. The priority remains to implement the budget policies which support economic rebalancing and help ensure the sustained growth ... forecast [for] this year and next."

Osborne proclaimed a "steady recovery" was now underway and when the surprising, higher-than-expected third quarter figures came in, much back-slapping was indulged. Yet it represented a fall from the previous quarter. It was only good news in the sense that "the markets" (whom we must appease) got it wrong. Again.

At the time, critics suggested that this





Low footfall: Shops have seen fewer customers as people tighten their belts.
Picture: Fabio Venni

showed that the economy could sink back into recession when the government's spending cuts began to bite.

This was dismissed and in December the Chancellor proclaimed that they had "already begun the reductions in public expenditure, and it has not had the impact on demand, not had the impact on economic growth that the critics said it would ... they're being confounded by the figures."

Cuts were being implemented and all was well with the world. Now Osborne suggests that "deficit deniers or the vested interests who oppose cuts to any item of public spending will probably claim that the Spending Review or the VAT increase are to blame for today's growth data. But there's a big problem with that argument – the data refers to the last quarter of 2010 when neither had yet begun."

When the fourth quarter figures show a much bigger drop however, strangely it tells us nothing about coalition policies. When the second quarter's figures were in Osborne proclaimed this vindicated his economic strategy. With the third quarter's figures, he proclaimed they were down purely to his policies – which he now claims had not been implemented yet!

So despite being in office for over half a year, this slowdown was definitely nothing to do with coalition policies – it was all the fault of the snow – and the previous two quarters had everything to do with them! So rest assured, there was "no question of changing a fiscal plan that has established international credibility on the back of one very cold month."

Sadly he did not explain why one quarter of good growth confirms his agenda but not one quarter of bad growth. So you

should not read too much into one quarter's numbers – unless, apparently, you are a Tory politician and the numbers look good.

Luckily for Osborne there was such heavy show for he could blame the weather (presumably next time he will blame the wrong kind of leaves and then a big dog eating his homework). That meant he could skilfully avoid the awkward fact that, according to the report, the snow simply



Keynes argued, correctly, in the 1930s that cutting wages would not produce a growth in employment, quite the reverse

turned 0% growth into negative 0.5%. While still lower than the 0.3% to 0.7% City "experts" had expected, both show a trend downwards since the coalition took office.

Yet we cannot exclude the impact of the snow. After all, why was it the fault of the snow? Because people could not get out and spend their money. Osborne's policies are based on cuts and raising indirect taxation, so causing real income drops for most people.

Which begs the question – what will happen when people do not have jobs to

go to and do not spend money they do not have? If a few days of snow can have such an impact, what about huge cuts sucking jobs and money out of the economy? We have a government which seems to think that the last thing a business needs during a slump is for people to go out and buy its products.

This drop in growth was predictable and has been predicted. John Maynard Keynes argued, correctly, in the 1930s that cutting wages would not produce a growth in employment, quite the reverse as it reduces consumer demand, shifts the labour supply curve and has little impact on the real wage (see section C.9 of *An Anarchist FAQ* or *Black Flag #228*). Not that unemployment being caused by high wages reflects reality anymore of than any other part of neo-classical economics.

With the advent of neo-liberalism in 1980, real wages stayed flat and the employers reaped all the benefits of rising productivity in the form of rising profits, rising income for managers, rising dividends. Wealth flooded upwards.

Yet a problem remained. If the output per unit of labour input is rising while capacity to purchase (the real wage) is lagging badly behind, how does economic growth sustain itself? Simple – by credit and pushing ever increasing debt onto households, the capitalists found that they could sustain purchasing power and receive a bit extra on the top in the form of interest payments. As an added bonus, it made people less likely to rebel as credit repayments had to be made.

This, however, increased the fragility of credit markets which came home to roost in the credit-crunch. When the bubble burst, revenue collapsed and the bank bailout

increased public debt.

Amazingly, the Tories have managed to turn this narrative of a crisis with its roots in the private sector and inequality into one where the problem is caused by public welfare spending and workers' rights.

Beyond headline attacks on the civil service, the crisis is being used as an excuse to increase job insecurity, by raising the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims from one year to two. This increased ability to fire people will, by the magic of the market, make bosses hire. Which raises the question of just how incompetent are Britain's bosses if they cannot work out in a year whether someone is a "good" (ie, obedient and productive) wage-slave? Rest assured, Vince Cable insisted workers who were genuinely exploited by "unscrupulous employers" would still be able to go to tribunal. Yes, but after two years, meaning that bosses can safely be unscrupulous for 23 months then sack the employee in order to replace them with someone just happy to have a job.

Still, we have "credibility." Shame that the outgoing CBI chief slammed government's lack of strategy for economic growth, warning that it would fail to reduce Britain's budget deficit without measures to boost demand.

Yet that assumes that the Tories wish to reduce the deficit. As the US Republicans have found, the deficit is a useful thing to wave about when demanding austerity measures for the working class. That explains why they are so keen to create them when in power and demand tax cuts for the wealthy which increase it. Here we see "the deficit" rolled out to explain the imposition of every Tory wet dream. What a wonderful coincidence...

The grumbles in the CBI show that while business may have tolerated a deep recession caused by Tory incompetence and economic illiteracy in the 1980s to break the labour movement, it may be less accommodating when it is for the far less pressing ideological passions of a few Thatcherites. Particularly as this crisis was caused by capital winning the class war for the last three decades – as reflected in the exploding inequality we have seen.

And, as in the 1980s, it is hard to tell whether the coalition's stupidity is driven by class interest, incompetence, ideological blindness, economic illiteracy, or a Machiavellian wish to use crisis to pursue market-fundamentalist social engineering. Probably a mishmash of all with the incompetence, ideology and illiteracy helpfully deepening the crisis which can be used as an excuse to impose neo-liberal dreams and ensure the rich get richer.

Still, there is Osborne's "international credibility," that is "the markets" which got us into this mess to begin with and which make such good economic predictions. Yet who will be lining up to invest in an economy in which people don't have money to spend? Just like in Ireland, the old poster-boy for austerity, which saw its credit rating go down in October as the predictable impact of austerity measures took hold and deepened the crisis. It will now have higher interest payments on its outstanding loans. So harsh spending cuts led to huge job losses and lower wages but failed to restore "credibility."

Similarly, after pay cuts aplenty, Irish

consumers have deserted the high street even though there was no snow to blame. Polls show people are reluctant to spend when they are not sure how much money they will have in the future – and why should firms invest in such circumstances? Yet Ireland not so long ago was held up as a positive example for why you should cut hard and fast.

Given the outcome, historical revisionism is to be expected – and revisions are what we are getting. The last budget, which Osborne spun as one for jobs and growth, was notable in that both figures were downgraded.

The June 2010 emergency budget had estimated that the claimant count would be 1.5 million in 2011, 1.4 million in 2012, and 1.3 million in 2013. This was revised upwards in this year's budget by 40,000 in 2011, 130,000 in 2012, and 130,000 in 2013. The (so-called) independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) downgraded its growth forecast from 2.1% for 1.7% 2011 and from 2.6% to 2.5% next year.

Why these growth forecasts should be believed after the surprises of 2010 is left to the imagination but it is significant that to

repay their debt obligations in the face of stagnating income and rising prices.

In short, they are hoping that the American neo-liberal economic model of stagnating wages supplemented by rising debt will overcome the crisis caused by the American neo-liberal economic model of ... stagnating wages supplemented by rising debt.

Insofar as the Tories have a plan this seems to be it – more of the same neo-liberalism which got us into this crisis to begin with – more austerity for the many so that the elite can be persuaded by yet more wealth to exploit us again.

That is the meaning of wage-cuts, to increase the gap between what we produce and what we get paid. "In 2011, real wages are likely to be no higher than they were in 2005," said the head of the Bank of England: "One has to go back to the 1920s to find a time when real wages fell over a period of six years." This squeeze in living standards is "the inevitable price to pay for the financial crisis and subsequent rebalancing of the world and UK economies."

In the short term, the working class is



Storm of criticism: The City has benefited in the short term, but at great cost

achieve any sort of positive news it had to massively increase its predictions on total household debt in 2015, to £303bn. It now expects average household debt to rise from £58,000 to £77,309 rather than the £66,291 expected in its previous figures. This is an average increase of £11,018 or, in percentage terms, from 160% in 2010 to 175% in 2015. Real personal disposable incomes, in contrast, are forecast to increase by 1.3% over the next four years.

When the credit crunch arrived, David Cameron lambasted Gordon Brown for allowing household debt to get so high. Osborne argued that Britain was over-dependent on private debt during the bubble years.

Ignoring the awkward fact that according to their own ideology only households and banks are best able to judge their debt levels and not the nanny-state, it still means that the coalition is denouncing debt in order to destroy the welfare state and undermine unions while pinning its hopes on the assumption that already over-indebted households will get themselves into even deeper debt. While, of course, being able to

expected to pay for a crisis caused by their economic masters.

Inevitable? Far from it – that depends on us. The facts are conclusive – imposing austerity makes the crisis worse. If cutting benefits and wages makes things worse, fighting for increases will make things better by getting money into the hands of those who will spend it. Libertarians need to be at the forefront of anti-cut struggles, arguing for direct action, solidarity and community and workplace self-organisation.

This will combat the contradiction of capitalist crisis being the product of capitalist strength. However, it will expose another contradiction – that capitalism needs workers to obey their bosses and produce more than they get paid but that will be undermined by the strong resistance movement required to solve the current crisis. This struggle, with movement between contradictions, will continue until we get rid of capitalism once and for all.

By Iain McKay



Breathing Utopia: After the revolution...



The Royal Mail is often cited by right wingers as an example of a state institution which can't keep up with private business and as a public service deliberately run into the ground to help sell privatisation by the left.

As it goes through its latest cuts and preparations for a final sell-off, Black Flag talks to postal worker Jock about how the service is and how it could conceivably change.

Jock is one of Royal Mail's fast-declining number of full-time staffers, and has been disillusioned about a service which he believes has been driven into the ground for almost as long as he has been there. He explains: "I've been involved for ten years, and nine out of ten people on the shop floor agree with me that the place would work without management, whose main role is to impose discipline."

"The people at the top often say they have an "open door policy" for new ideas, but I remember when I first started I made a suggestion to my manager and was told 'you're here to work not to think.'"

"Although it's owned by the state, which calls it a public service, it's run as a business and it seems like they want to slim down the whole company for selling off."

That's been the case for a long time now, it was only in the first year or so of working here that I felt I was in a normal

workplace, ever since then it's been layoffs and cuts – something like a third of the staff has gone. To say they run things effectively is laughable, the level of organisation and discussion about the service, with management being left to manage, is very low."

Efficiency savings

Despite the cutbacks, Jock doesn't think that the post would necessarily need a major expansion of workers in a post-revolutionary scenario, pointing out that many of the items sent today would become redundant if the trappings of capitalism were eliminated.

"At the moment most of the things we send are pointless – bills, business-to-business mail, advertising mail shots and the like would all disappear. There will always be things that need moving around though and instead of the commercial stuff we do now we have a very efficient network that could be used not just letters or presents but for materials and big items that today get dealt with by dozens of competing and poorly-resourced company services."

"But we potentially have most of the capacity to do that already – even if we expanded I don't think we'd need much more in the way of staff if the commercial functions went."

"It would generally also be much more

efficient if staff ran it. At the moment we have bosses who give us very specific rules to try and take advantage of us, so people respond by finding loopholes and ways to minimise their workload or up the time they're paid for. If it was us working for ourselves and each other, the main idea would be to get it done on time! There's no buck to pass on to managers and we would be responsible for the work we do."

At work

Looking at his own workplace, Jock believes that managers can often provide an active hinderance to doing the work properly because of the conflict between their "more work for less" approach and an understandable desire in return from staffers to get the most work for the least pay.

"At the moment the main issue for people is Job and Finish and the cuts have been so bad that there's constant delivering and stress."

"Where I work at the moment there's times when because things are so set for managers they will take two people off who are specialists in a role like say, sorting and replace them with people who are completely new – and that ends up screwing things up."

"We respond to that sort of thing by being careful to work our hours and not give

JOB 4: MAIL SERVICE

No more second class: The post would change radically and require far fewer resources. Below, strikes have been common in the service
 Pictures: David Major and Roger Blackwell

Does your mail arrive late, damaged, rushed? Well, there's a better way and it doesn't involve selling the service – workers' control.

more efficient and quick while others, say someone coming up for retirement, might work more slowly and spend more time talking to people.

"Generally this is not a problem, slower people often contribute in different ways, but right now that means they will be pushed by management almost to breakdown.

"They get threatened and disciplined even if they are working as fast as they can because they're not hitting quotas designed for younger colleagues.

"Post-revolution, that would end and be replaced by a better way, from each according to their ability, to each according to their need."

Modernisation

For Jock, modernisation – the calling card which has been left at the scene of every cutback in recent years – is also an issue which, despite the hype about capitalist "efficiency savings," actually favours the workers as long as it is in their hands.

"Modernisation isn't necessarily a bad thing as long as it's for the benefit of people rather than profit. At the moment, we have machines which have replaced human roles, but this doesn't help the quality of the job to improve.

"For example, because we've lost so many people we're often stretched, so when a shift gets behind and is looking to clear the decks on a machine-reader say, loads

of letters which should have been pre-sorted are simply dumped in there and end up going to totally the wrong area, making more trouble down the line as they have to get sorted out again. That's one reason why there's such a mess at Christmas.

"But if the machinery was there as a way to make life easier, rather than to get more work out of less people, we could spend more time getting it right and also doing jobs like bringing out mail to the customers – which can only be a good thing.

"Before this rush to commercialise one of the important functions of the post was its role in the community – posties would keep an eye on old people and things like that because we were around, which benefits a lot more than just the bosses' bottom line. We could actually start doing that again."

Community, or industry run?

Within the anarchist movement, there has always been some debate over the best way to run large enterprises, post-revolution – and the Royal Mail is a particularly notable example because of the sheer size and geographic spread of workers it represents, something Jock believes lends it best to being run by its workers.

"I'm an anarcho-syndicalist, so I think the industry would have to run itself but I don't think there's anything wrong with communities getting together, discussing any issues they have around its work.

"There's things within the post that go hand in hand from local to national (and beyond) which I think would mean meetings with delegates from both industry and communities to discuss how things need to change and adapt over time.

"But in lots of places, as long as the system works well where they live it's not something that a given community would be active about in the same way as its workers have to be.

"At the moment, it's divided up into regions, with regional managers who run big areas and it wouldn't surprise me if the CWU has a similar structure, that kind of regionalised approach within a self-run industry could be a method of getting our networks co-ordinated in a future society.

"Within the mail there's also internal media which was set up by the bosses to batter us and run a pro-management line, but which could be co-opted to help us communicate and run things democratically."

By
 Rob Ray



them excuses to cut more and mess up our routine – but in a self-managed system we'd be able to allocate resources so that it's not such a stretch if a couple of people are off.

"Also like in any job, there's also an issue with differences between people. Some – particularly younger workers – are



Exit left, the

To you and I the “Stage Army” refers to those people in the political parties that scurry round the political scene. You know the ones, identifiable from the initials like RGR (or Revolutionary Group of Recruiters), the APS (Alliance of Paper Sellers), PKR (Preparers of Key Resolutions) and all those other miscellaneous sets of initials.

The Stage Army never actually do anything useful. As the name implies, they merely perform their roles for a brief moment then as the Rubayat says “are gone from sight.”

They are the paper sellers, placard holders, marchers at the weekend to the specified places – and who appear in the photos of the

Tactics

The SA are keen observers of the real world. They await the strike, the outburst, the conflict as capitalism bites into ordinary lives.

Then they come down to sell their papers, recruit the outraged, organise the constitutional march to people’s councillors or their MPs, to fix up a lobby. They demand “Make the TUC leaders fight,” “Force the Labour leaders to follow Conference Decisions,” “Pass this resolution” or “Remember the example of comrade Trotsky.”

They plan to start people on the transmission belt, by their slogans

Other Stage Army members are those with a career to carve. They know there’s no better recommendation than a few years in the Revolutionary Socialist Party, or Party for Socialist Revolution, or whatever, when applying for a full-time position in a union, party or other institution.

Finally we have the conspirators, or those trying to gain advantage for their secret, usually “communist” objectives.

Using Comrade Lenin’s advice in “Left Wing Communism” where the enemies of the Party are destroyed by fair means or foul, these undercover agents plot and plan as the means justifies the ends, scoring unknown victories. Yes, the Stage Army has many dimensions.



Stage fright: The loyal mass at Marxism 2009 and right, an SWP stall
Pictures: Timothy Baldwin and Gene Hunt

journals of the Stage Army, or SA.

I too was in the Stage Army for some decades. Never near the top, or in a speaking role after a surge at the start, more a walk-on role, even a dissenter, but nevertheless part of the institution. I then re-joined the real world, began again to do things and can now reflect at leisure.

The designation was coined, it seems, by a chap called Nevinson in the 1930s. Even in those days the actual reforms made by Labour activists on local councils etc were outweighed by the double-dealing of the official leadership and the outright treachery of the Communists.

The Stage Army practiced their rituals, declaiming forcefully on their promises for when they “got to power,” regardless of their actual performance in practice.

Anarchists such as Bakunin, Rocker and Malatesta, etc, did not get a look in as the glories of the State were strongly pushed. When will the ranks of the Stage Army ever learn a new role in a new enterprise?

and chants, to full membership of the organisation. Or at least buy a paper: “Never miss an issue.”

The Cast

The Stage Army comprises various sorts of people. There are the ideologues who can be relied upon for an appropriate quote from a sacred text. Of course many people are in this category when very young and may foolishly sign their name and address on a form, but it may take some years to finally shake off this “contact” status.

Also there are the genuine reformers who see what’s wrong with our dictated-to society and want to change it. They believe in the power of the parliamentary leaders, the Official Inquiry (or whitewash) the Royal Commission (delaying device) or the power of the free press (millionaires’ propaganda sheets) but they eventually find their destination in the Houses of Parliament, upper or lower.

Chauvinism

All these people – the SWP (or Society of Whimsical Participants), the SP (Spirited Practitioners), AWL (Alliance for Weighty Leaders) and so on, have their separate roles and ranks in the Stage Army.

They are not the same, each group jealously guarding their organisations, journals, ideologies and all that makes up their organisational chauvinism.

Less committed souls can watch amused at the internecine wars between the groups that are so destructive to the participants and eventually destroy their original beliefs. Chauvinism is the politics of the past – a Stage Army specialty – but still they practice it, because their Party is “better than the others.”

What do they do

No person or organisation can be entirely

Stage Army

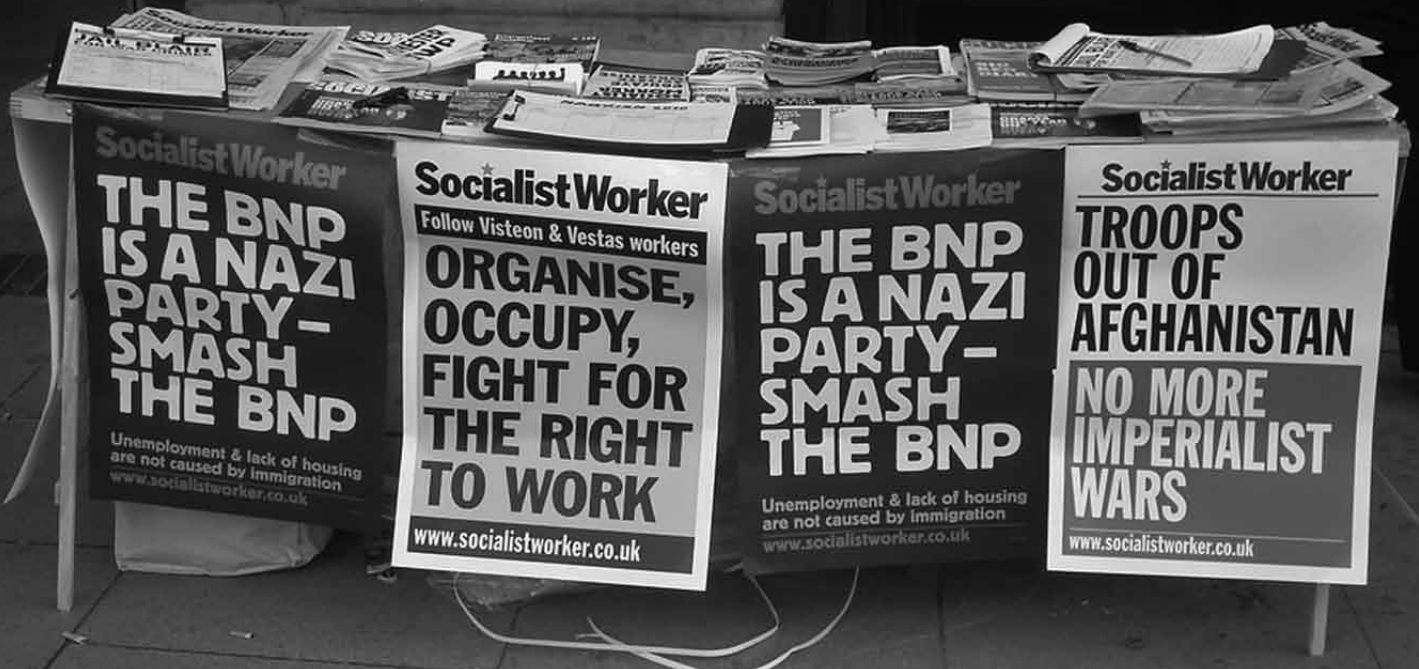
Analysis: Look upon their works ye mighty, and despair! How the ranks of the cobweb left's loyal followers have become a predictable joke

of the past – we can call them myths. Once upon a time when Labour was old, not new, everybody had an Annual Conference and voted decisions on issues.

Well yes, the block votes of the union bosses and the party hierarchy did make that a foregone conclusion but sometimes, by accident or whatever, something got through.

Then the parliamentary members had to implement it. Trouble was that nice Mr Wilson just ignored all that and the rules were changed anyway ...

Still we have to keep up the pressure on our leaders; pass that resolution, attend that lobby. In the name of Lenin, keep the conventions of social democracy safe – there must be a quotation somewhere ...



useless, so the Stage Army must have some virtues. Campaigns do probably benefit from Army activists' participation, though not as much as they say and some may feel they were better off without these interlopers.

Strikers rarely benefit from the intrusion of well-meaning, fairweather visitors - and they generally don't want to buy a political paper. Money may be short enough already. Those outside the Stage Army may remember wistfully the days when supporters asked permission to join a picket line and shared out the proceeds of any sales.

Such advice as is offered will usually benefit the Stage Army's objective of Building the Party but is mostly too general or inappropriate.

But they do take a nice photo! Demonstrations in a parliamentary place can be picturesque especially if taken on a nice Sunday afternoon. The police are no doubt delighted too as in the case of the anti-war marches.

Again those in the real world may prefer

their demos to be a little less planned or predictable. Anti Poll Tax protestors actually broke the law – Stage Army groans – and despite the pessimism of the more conventional, they actually won the day. Of course the bigger anti war movement signally failed, could this be due to its Stage Army leadership and practice?

What about their politics?

The slogans and headlines are kept in a cupboard and are used when it is thought necessary. This saves actually thinking about the situation and aids the process of forcing circumstances into the relevant theory.

Then we can "Make the leaders/TUC/MPs fight" and pass things off to our representatives as we are supposed to. Important features are the lobby and the resolution, again to get our leaders to act – don't want people doing things for themselves, do we?

Then there's keeping alive the traditions

What should we do about them?

Really there is nothing that can be done. Logic, reason, appeals to learn the lessons of the past have achieved little to date and there's no reason to imagine mass conversion in the future.

In the world where the rest of us live, if you want something done, you do it yourself rather than leaving things to the official leadership and the proper channels.

We take direct action and if that doesn't work we try it again and again. We don't build parties but achieve our objective one way or the other. You could say there's no proper structure or organisation and you may be right, but at least we break from the deadening cloak of the Stage Army.

Practical solidarity beats resolutions at meetings, you could say.

By Alan
Woodward



For those of you who attend book fairs around the country Active Distribution will be a familiar sight – it's just about the biggest and brightest stall you're likely to see. Active celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2010 – not bad for “a hobby gone mad”, as described by Jon its founder.

Active is a voluntary not-for-profit anarchist distro inspired today, as always, by the anarcho-punk ethos and tradition. Black Flag caught up with Jon to see what's going on.

First of all, congratulations for 25 years on the road! When you first started did you ever imagine you'd still be at it a quarter of a century later?

Back then we were pretty sure that M.A.D nuclear policies would destroy us all before 25 years was up, and I was pretty sure I wouldn't want to live that long anyway.

Yourself aside, is anyone else still involved from the early days?

Not as such no, as far as I know almost all the early Active co-workers have “left the scene” but there are friends of mine who have always helped us out who are still there when we need them.

Nowadays we are two and we split the “work” between us fairly evenly with Marta doing the mailorder (a sensible idea given the illegibility of my handwriting) and I do everything else.

How did it all start?

I was inspired by the anarcho-punk scene to do something. Crass and Malatesta introduced me to the notion that anarchy was something other than chaos. I was already an anti nuclear activist giving out CND leaflets and selling their badges at school when I was 14, it seemed natural to try to pass on this “enlightenment” that I had sussed.

I still remember the pleasure of reading those first texts and feeling that there were others past and present who felt the same as I did – and had expressed it better than I ever could. If you are as angry as I felt/feel about the “status quo” then it's unhealthy to bottle it all up, innit?

How many bookfairs, festivals and gigs do you do a year?

Loads, it varies, we try to get to “new bookfairs” to support them and go back again if we can. Active has never been bound by the financial constraints of “is it worth it.”

So we will travel to the Zagreb Book fair for instance even though we know we will not be able to cover our expenses, but there we are made very welcome and our presence is much appreciated.

We do less stalls at gigs nowadays as I can't stand the noise at many events and I'm even less tolerant of drunks damaging the stuff we have on our stall.

We like to do events that are free to get into and have a wide variety of people

STAYING



attending, the best example of that was when we did a stall at the Respect festival in the Dome! Our stall was dead in the centre of that weird space and we were surrounded by church groups etc looking at us rather disparagingly.

What are the best and worst moments with Active.

Best: When we get letters from people ordering stuff and thanking us for doing what we do.

Worst: When we get letters from people giving us shit for a parcel that hasn't arrived and treating us as if we were Amazon, when we know that the fucking thing is probably just languishing in a postal sorting office.

I also really enjoyed doing fly pitched stalls at some of the Reclaim the Streets events.

Any anecdotal tales you'd like to share?

You mean like the time I almost knocked one of Albert Meltzer's decorative plates off the wall and was too scared to go back there for months.

Or how I nervously arranged a meal at Pumpkins cafe with Vi Subversa and Eve Libertine and myself without fully realising that they had not talked for about 15 years! Later when I told Eve how nervous I had initially been in the presence of two



I arranged a meal at Pumpkins cafe with Vi Subversa and Eve Libertine and myself without fully realising that they had not talked for about 15 years

high priestesses (!) of anarcho punk she castigated me for being silly – so much for being honest!

Or how I listened to Jean Weir of Elephant Editions tell amazing tales from her life of rock 'n' roll and insurrectional activism including times spent with the

ACTIVE

Rolling Stones, The Angry Brigade, inside Italian jails et al. Then after keeping us all enthralled for two hours I suggested she should write these stories down and she dismissed the idea because she had “nothing interesting to say” about herself!

Or my getting nicked for violent disorder because I was taking photos of aggressive cops and then had drugs planted on me whilst in the van.

I could hardly believe that something so cliché had happened to me and also how funny it was going to be in court when I presented the myriad number of character witnesses how would testify that I detest drug taking and would certainly never knowingly carry cannabis around. I was found not guilty. Are those worthy of repeating?

You’ve obviously grown massively over the years. Will that continue? Do you have any plans or new projects?

Yes Active has grown to the point that I no longer remember all the titles we carry. The Polish section reflects the fact that Marta is Polish and there are many Poles in this country who do not have easy access to radical literature in their native tongue.

Our mugs and stickers are kind of just for fun but they, like CDs and badges, help draw people to the stall and website whereupon we bombard them with radical texts at unbelievable prices they can’t refuse!

We have an internal battle going on about how much more we can do, it involves getting old, a small flat, the desire to have more free time and such niceties versus my insatiable desire to “never give up,” obstinate some would call it!

We have a whole load of pamphlets ready that we’d like to print and we are about to start co-publishing with Freedom Press. At the moment I have just finished the layout for a CD by Kismet HC and am still struggling with the artwork for a three-CD discography of the wonderful anarcho dubsters that were Culture Shock.

Sometimes when I look forward I think “fuck, how depressing” if I’m still doing this in ten years’ time. Mostly though as I see others come and go from the anti-whatever scenes I feel good about the strength of my convictions and sad that so many others give up, breed and start voting for the system that they know deep down is totally flawed.

Oh and don’t forget we distribute Zapatista Coffee too!

Would you like to say a little about Active’s guiding philosophy?

Active’s vision is to supply stuff that we think needs to get out there and doesn’t already have good (or cheap) distribution at the lowest cost possible. We keep prices low to encourage people to buy stuff and to

Interview: Talking to London’s most tenacious distributor about life and anarchism

show that profiting from their sale is not our motive.

We take almost “anything anarchist” which means we deal with the whole spectrum of anarchists. This suits me as I don’t subscribe to knowing all the answers as some anarchos seem to.

I have been involved at the 56A Infoshop in Southwark for the last six or seven years and also the Pogo (vegan) Cafe in Hackney since its inception. I try not to get involved in anything else because to be honest Active takes way more time than I have.

Active is about “educating” people, giving them the chance to learn for themselves from the materials we offer. Hopefully this will produce an army of rabid anarchists sometime soon who will stop at nothing till the global mercantile system has been overthrown, simples!

When you look back, was it all worth it?

Yeah it has, I’ve met some great people and as much as I felt possible at each turn I’ve tried to live and do Active as close as I can to the ideas that it represents, that is important to me because all we really have in this fucked up situation is our beliefs and our integrity.

I had to laugh when I read your website: “Active works out of a very small space and has reached a point where we need to create some space.” I remember visiting you a couple of years ago and you were literally sleeping on a bed of books and boxes! Are you looking for a bigger gaff?

In our dreams! Actually the spacial limitations on Active are a useful way of keeping it manageable by just the two of us in our “free time” when we are not out wage slaving to pay the bills. Having said that we do store bulk items at various undisclosed places and would be royally fucked if we lost those spaces.

Last of all, I have to ask Jon, what do you think about Black Flag today, honest opinion please!

Well obviously it has risen in our estimation greatly since this interview was suggested! I remember when it was a fortnightly paper,

locked in both an international struggle against capitalism and a feud with Freedom Press. It’s a shame that it took so long for that to die out (literally as the people involved died out I guess) and I’m really glad to see the two papers working together nowadays.



Personally I’d like to see an end to there being all the different magazines from each “little” anarchist group coming out every now and then. If all anarchist groups would help finance, publish and distribute one paper regularly it could have a real effect as opposed to the quasi-vanity publishing we have now.

Having said that Black Flag looks and on the whole reads a lot better than it has for some time.

■ Readers may also be interested in a longer interview by Noah Eber-Schmid, which is on activedistributionshop.org.

By Ade Dimmick



Interview: After their long hiatus, Atari Teenage Riot are bringing out a new album

As the anti-capitalist movement reignites across Europe, Atari Teenage Riot are back after a ten year break and have plenty to say about society, politics and economics in the second decade of the 21st century. Tim Forster talks to founder member Alec Empire.

Have you been encouraged by people's responses since ATR regrouped?

Yes, in this case the response of the fans drove ATR forward. First we thought we would play one show in London. And suddenly the timing seemed to be so right for this music and its message.

We didn't see that coming. Next thing we were playing massive shows in Japan again, Taiwan was added, the US tour got extended – it just didn't stop. What is so different now compared to the '90s is that people want us to speak about these issues because the problems are so visible to almost everybody now.

You've a new album out later in the year, how is work going on it?

We don't really look at albums in the same way as we did in the '90s. It is a bigger picture now. We have written 21 new songs, they won't all be released on the CD version of course, because they won't fit that format. So we will put all kinds of music out this year.

CX (the newest band member) brings in some fresh energy and his own views from the US and the politics there and it's an important input. I am the only German left in ATR, so the focus has shifted away from writing songs about Germany's politics.

The new album has its focus on hacker activism, keeping the internet free from government and corporate control, control technologies in the modern age and democracy, human trafficking. We think these are the main issues of our time and there need to be powerful songs written about them.

How do you see things going socially and politically in Europe?

Many people out there are starting to understand that the system will not work out for them. They keep working harder and harder and a small minority of people are taking the profits and not giving anything back. The super rich don't even pay taxes

BACK FOR MORE

in most cases.

I am personally completely against any form of government. People have to learn how to determine their own lives again and not expect the government to sort everything out for them. I see more and more people looking at the idea of true anarchy in a different way than before.

Of course the media is spreading this image of fear, so people don't try to think about those ideas. But if we look at the internet, and especially at the beginning of it, we can interpret it as a proof that anarchy works.

Do you think the internet has helped to dismantle or increase elite control over flows of information and representation?

It did for a while, but we are at a crossroads. The corporations and the governments are trying to control the internet too much. The technology that worked for us will be turned against us. I think that those who are politically very active are already feeling these control mechanism taking effect.

A lot of the "Facebook revolutions" in the Arab countries are the soft power approaches by the US government and not so much the internet on its own like some sort of miracle.

People have to understand that. Our new album deals mainly with that issue. Truth is our best weapon.

And you have to move constantly because those in power – I am talking about the mainstream music industry which has a political agenda, take what we do all the time and feed it back to the mainstream in a compromised way.



Do you think downloading has led to the hyper-commodification of music? Do you think that lack of identification with the artist may be one of the reasons people are happy to download without paying?

Oh that's a very complex discussion ... basically right now there is a war going on for what some call intellectual property. The corporations have started it, so that they can take any idea, anything creative from people like you and me and exploit it financially.

Copyright must be defined from new.

It has to protect the writers, musicians, filmmakers, artists, anybody who is doing creative work and NOT the big publishing companies and the major record labels.

The trouble is that those who support things like the Pirate Party don't have any understanding of how creativity works and flourishes, they don't often understand the way independent artists can survive financially in a capitalist system.

There is a mob mentality right now, almost like fundamentalist Christians they attack any artist who wants to get paid for his/her work. When I talk to my father about this, he has a socialist history and comes from a working class background, he says

it's insane how anybody can try to claim and take somebody else's work and then even accuse him of being a greedy capitalist or something. A young band starting out is not Metallica.

Pirate Bay could have been an interesting approach but of course they had to make millions from corporate advertising on their site and

The majors moan a lot about the situation but in fact they love it that the so-called pirates eradicate all independent competition for them.

So we'll see record stores disappear completely now, the majors cosy up with Apple's iTunes and leave everybody else with pretty much nothing. If you look at how venues are being bought up by a multi-national corporation like Live Nation then you can imagine that the future will look pretty bad for independent and underground music.

The music scene always mirrors the real world. The gap between rich and poor is widening. That is the same in the music scene. When I started there was a strong support for underground and independent music everywhere. When you were into music you just knew the enemy. We need to

musicians.

Music is like language, it is part of evolution, it changes, it moves forward all the time, sometimes backward ... but if there is no innovation, then it dies. This is the real crisis, not kids downloading mp3s from home.

I want musicians to make music. I don't want them to give me their music for free but advertise something else with it. I'd rather pay my small share so the bands I like can keep their integrity.

ATR have always modelled the equality of men and women - do you think things are better for women in music now than in 2000?

Hard to say ... in pop it got worse but it always swings forward and backwards. Those who finance top 40 pop records are usually old men who like to see a blonde girl singing a melodic song or something. This distorts what's really going on, but then again the public and the musicians think they have to go down that route to be popular.

I think we should get rid of the charts system or if we keep it in place then we should print the marketing budget for each song/artist next to the chart position.

The fact is we need more strong girls and women in our society because the ship is going down and we need new and fresh ideas on how to solve those problems. Being a man or woman, that shouldn't matter, we need the best people. Riot Grrl plays a huge part in what ATR is about. Even more on this album than any other we did.

Are you excited to be back as the anti-cuts movement gets going and do you have any hopes/plans?

I was very active with my solo stuff over the past decade, so I never felt like I wasn't around after ATR. But it's true ATR stands for an idea, that's something you can't get across as strongly if you're an individual artist.

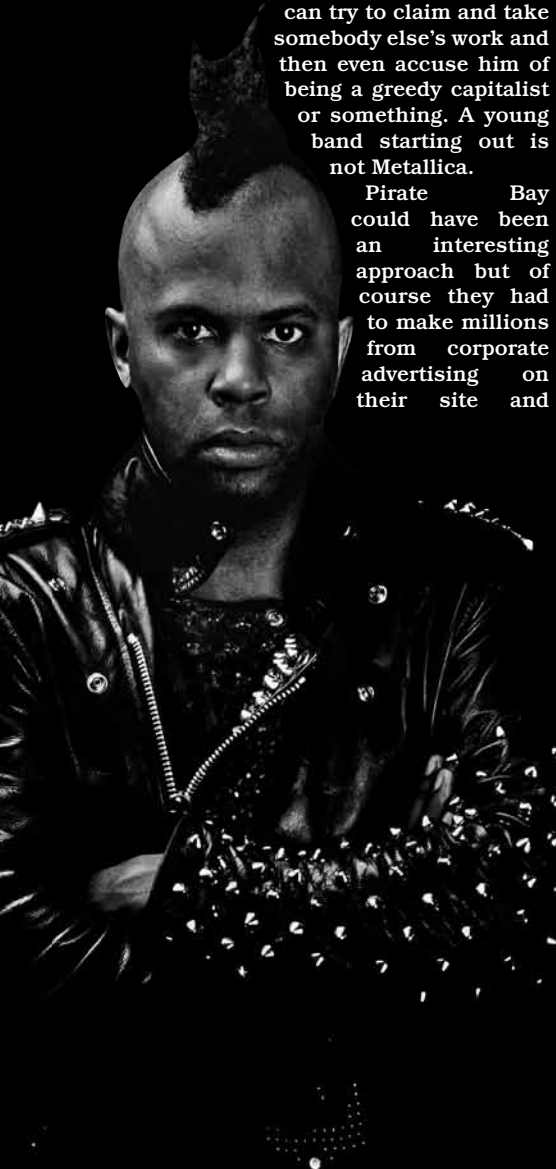
In general I never hope for anything, I do what I think is right and it is down to people out there to decide. If they don't want to see or hear ATR, then we move on.

I love the interaction with the "fans," that's my main motivation.

It might sound weird to some people, but it's true. I met the most interesting people through my music. It connects us. I find that much more exciting than playing a sold-out concert.

When I can talk to political activists before I go on stage in Taiwan, then fly to Croatia and talk to a journalist about politics that is amazing ... I met my favourite musicians via this music and there is a lot more we need to say with it.

By Tim Forster



lost any kind of credibility ... I am pretty hardcore about that. You do not take my music and message and put it next to a Nokia ad and make money from that. If you want to do that, call me and we share the money. But be prepared that I might say no.

Major labels like Sony get finance from other sources, they sell hardware for example, their music labels lose money, always did.

So the reality of what we are seeing now is that indie bands become nothing more than a number in a telephone book, they can upload their music onto Myspace or whatever, make those companies rich, while they might gain a few hundred new fans who then leave weeks after, then they give up and stop.

bring down the major record industry when they finance artists like 50 Cent or Beyonce who perform for dictators like Gaddafi.

If you support the small local store that sells organic food, you might want to think the same way about the music you're listening to. Making music shouldn't be a rich man's thing. Why? Because it will not bring us the best music!

The main thinking mistake that the majors make is that music stays the same and just needs to be presented by different

In focus: What lessons can we learn from the biggest worker rally in modern history?

A protest march is not an end, but a means. It is the issuing of a threat to the ruling class – we are the many and you are the few, your influence dependent on our acquiescence. It is effective only in warning power, “worse is to come.”

Even if you do not believe in anarchist or Marxist theories of class war the evidence for this is scrawled across our recent past, Conservative and Labourite alike ignoring anything which lacks that hard edge of conflict. Without a credible threat behind it, an anti-war march becomes little more than a stroll.

The ruling class, state and capitalist, has always known this to be the undertone of protest that they must watch for, it is the only thing to be feared and acted on. Isolated groups can always be battered into submission, pacifists can be safely ignored, institutions can be financially threatened, but mass militancy takes uncontrollable forms and if left untouched will see their dominance disrupted or worse.

Over recent years however, this simple concept has fallen by the wayside. The tactic of protest as threat has been replaced with that of protest as loudspeaker. Led by wealthy and liberal bureaucrats, the organisations which were originally set up to enforce the will of the working class now serve only to funnel it into “acceptable” channels of debate.

That debate is the same as has been had ever since the cuts were first announced and mass marching – or even one-day strikes – simply make one side louder. This is now the sole idea remaining to the TUC since that very tactic of safe collaboration over uncertain conflict sidelined it at the end of the 20th century. “WE DISAGREE,” goes the cry from the mouths of representatives at the head of the march. “Fair enough, but we’re doing it anyway” comes the mild-mannered reply.

This concept is why there was such fretting when a 1,500-strong black bloc broke away from the March 26th anti-cuts rally, causing some minor property damage. The fear was that the all-important discussion would be disrupted. Yet there has been no evidence that the “discussion” is having any impact at all.

There have been two U-turns from the state, one on woodlands, which was largely a sop to rural Tory elites, and one on the NHS as it became clear there

HUGE but little



would be serious practical problems with implementing change. Both are temporary. On cuts, the only apparent concessions can be explained as traditional bartering, ie. start high and “compromise” for the budget by using the figures you had in mind all along. On banking and tax avoidance we now have an Inquiry, which will take the same course as all state inquiries and come to the conclusion the government is looking for (throw them a bone but don’t rock the boat).

On the sell-off of the postal service, cuts to council funding, privatisation of schools, welfare reform, civil sector attacks, cutting of corporate taxes, maintaining of tax havens, raising of the pensions age – the

main material changes which anti-cuts campaigning is looking to fight, in fact, there has been no change through debate at all. Because for the state and capital this is not a debate, it’s a class struggle. Politicians will talk, but that is not a negotiation, it is an attempt to minimise the number of people prepared to take action against them.

This was the grand failure of March 26th. It was not a demand, but a request, Charles Dickens’ Oliver asking plaintively “more please.” And like Oliver, TUC chief Brendan Barber and his ilk have been shouted down, by an Establishment which paints them as wreckers while ignoring their requests. They made no call for direct action, offered no prospect for a threat to rise to counter

VOICE

changes



Picture: Lizzie Houghton

that of the capitalists. It played to the lie of the right that this is a civilised discourse (despite that discourse's unmoving foundation that cuts are "inevitable") and anything more radical amounts to barbarism. Such an approach undermines efforts to stir up genuine resistance far more effectively than anything the black bloc could manage.

This attitude is reflected in that most famous of trade union tools, the concept of the strike, now being bandied around far too late by union leaders whose demands are still no stronger. Students in the modern era will cross an education workers' picket line saying "I support you 100%," unaware of the contradiction because in most

cases a strike comes from the same sterile species of protest as is embodied on the march. Its first and only effective function, that of causing economic damage until an employer must concede, is forgotten. And so now they are brought out as a "last resort," offering so little genuine threat that where the employer concedes at all it is little more than an undertaking to mount their attack in the nicest way possible.

Britain's collective narrative needs to change. Resistance cannot continue to be contained within the bounds of "civilised" law and order because those defining what it is are the very ones we are fighting. By stamping their feet and calling people who use unofficial direct action "thugs" and

"hijackers" the trade union and left party leaders play into this, tacitly accepting, like Oliver, that we must remain imprisoned inside the institution. That our rulers, in the end, have the right to apportion our daily gruel.

Instead what we must talk about are tactics free from this restriction, which focus on how to make the ruling class take notice, not simply ask. Which aim to bring the old concept of mass rebellion back into common use.

Anarchists and the big day

For each grouping represented within the rally, March 26th was in some ways very successful, in others a disaster.

For those advocating the black bloc tactic, it was the biggest manifestation of power on the streets of London for a decade or more. In terms of showing the potential for large, mobile groups to wreak havoc at the heart of the City it worked. A clearly well-organised manifestation kept ahead of police lines and succeeded in outmanoeuvring them.

Where UK Uncut saw mass arrests despite its non-violence as police took the opportunity to vent their frustrations on a static occupation, the bloc saw almost no casualties and did at least as much economic damage. As a result, it's possible that many more angry people will pluck up the courage to get stuck in through the bloc or similar tactics in future.

However if one of the black bloc's main focuses is to highlight the reality of police and state power in the public mind, on this level it was a failure. The police played it smart in allowing a certain amount of mayhem, creating a post-march narrative which saw the media criticise it for not laying into activists, something which will serve it well if it comes out swinging later on ("well make up your minds, you said you wanted to be protected").

The bloc's structural failings were also allowed to surface as it was funnelled back into the main crowd and overexcited, masked up youngsters (or possibly infiltrators) revelling in anonymity paid too little heed to the maxim of not intimidating bystanders – sound bombs being let off near families offered a "we don't give a shit about the public" message which no amount of delineating between violence and property destruction can get around.

The bloc had within its own lines a mandate for property destruction and repelling cops as part of its tactics. It didn't have one for pulling in the main crowd. As a result, black blocbers angered many on the march and beyond, have been painted as monsters and were even drawn into the media game, with several attempts being made to explain to the Guardian in particular that "we're just normal people." Groups such as UK Uncut came under serious pressure to denounce "anarchists" as the architects of the violence, which risked dividing the movement.

This is a particular problem not just for the movement as a whole but the black bloc itself. The key for any serious exponent of this tactic is numbers. Black blocs are inherently limited as long as participants



only represent themselves – in order for the tactic to gain serious ground it needs to bring the support of the mass with it, to build external support structures, or it will eventually be crushed.

But given the ease with which such an anonymous group can be infiltrated, misdirected and demonised, it is difficult to see how black bloc tactics can achieve such support in the current context. In the final analysis they could even be counterproductive when the police act with restraint, reinforcing the view that anarchism is all about chaos rather than being a coherent societal strategy. Far from rupturing people's ideas of the state as liberal protector, it could reinforce them.

However this is not to say that it definitely has or that everyone will feel such sentiments. One photograph which was widely passed around showed two elderly bystanders laughing at all the commotion. Other comments have pointed out that it was rather less violent than a rowdy night out in some towns can be. While some may be put off, others will not care overly and still others may be encouraged.

And notably, for all that it has been demonised the black bloc has created more space in the mainstream narrative rather than less in crucial ways. Who are they? Why are they so angry? Will more cuts bring



In focus: Does our society look big in this? Sending messages

On March 26th it quickly became obvious that the TUC anti-cuts demo was going to be nearly as big as the 2003 anti-war march. It was an impressive show of numbers – not strength, though, as there was no coherent call for turning words into action. That is why getting our message of direct action (strikes, occupations, etc.) is key.

Anarchists took part in the main march as working class people protesting against cuts in our living standards. We were there as trade unionists and users of council services. There was an impressive radical workers block. However, while it is always good to see a mass of red-and-black flags going past it is less impressive if the bulk of the rest of the march have no idea what these flags represent! We need ensure that we do not accidentally self-ghettoise ourselves and that enough comrades spend time explaining our ideas on marches outside of any libertarian blocks.

After the march, the black bloc provoked a spate of articles by commentators whose obvious ignorance of anarchism did not cause them to pause before expressing it in the printed page. One, in the Evening Standard, proclaimed that anarchists wished to abolish the state and so should have been supporting the (neo-liberal) cuts.

First, anarchism has never been purely anti-state – surely “property is theft”

shows that. Privatising government services is just as anti-anarchist as nationalisation (we favour workers' associations running industry). Second, it is the government which is imposing these cuts onto the general population. It is a strange “anarchist” who would side with the state against its subjects...

And that is the key. Anarchists are against the state because it is an instrument of class rule whose function is to protect the interests of the owning class. These cuts are top-down class war by the ruling elite, ideologically driven to grind the working-class even more into the ground (“fairness” being used to level down the many while enriching the few!).

We are not against the state in the abstract. We are against it for very specific reasons and recognise that “reforms” imposed from the top-down by politicians (aiming to please big business) are of a significantly different character than those imposed from the below, by the people, against the wishes of state and capital. In short, the state can only be abolished by its subjects – along with the class inequalities and hierarchies it defends.

To use an analogy, anarchists are also against wage-labour and aim, in the long term, to abolish it in favour of associated-labour but that does not stop us supporting, in the short-term, struggles to improve our wages and conditions.

At its most basic, anarchists are anti-state AND anti-capitalist — privatising state functions, handing over services to capitalist companies and reducing the state to just defence of private property is an anti-anarchist approach.

Moreover, the struggles against these cuts can create a social movement, a culture of resistance in our communities and workplaces, which will help tame the power of state until such time as we can abolish it. Which is another good reason to support these protests.

Anarchists must take part in this struggle and argue for occupations, strikes and other forms of direct action across the country to stop the cuts. In them we can argue that we need to go beyond defending ourselves against “reforms” (which always make things worse) and present a vision of a world in which we go beyond surviving into one where we start living. And that we can create the embryo of such a society in our struggles against the current unjust one.

This will build a genuine “Big Society” which can tame the state and capital by means of our social and economic power. This is where our libertarian message must be raised – in our streets and in our workplaces. That is the message of March 26th.

By Iain McKay



more of this kind of thing? Brendan Barber is never going to prompt questions on what it feels like to watch his life slide out of view or why he's kicking off. And the ruling class is much more worried about that part of the debate, the bit where people hear others just like them, facing the same problems, saying "you don't have to take this crap." Because it could lead to people organising.

This feeds into how the media and public approached the class struggle anarchist organisations such as the Anarchist Federation (AF) and Solidarity Federation (SolFed) after the event. A well-organised radical workers bloc from Kennington Park saw thousands turn out which was noted, sparking interest and a subsequent rise in applications for both organisations despite a still-patchy planning of roles particularly in outreach.

However in the absence of easy targets to hunt down and harass from the black bloc both these organisations, easily spotted on the march, present but uninvolved in violence at the black bloc itself, were targeted for interview requests and "exposes" as public bodies with easy-to-find contact details.

As such in some ways these were the only direct losers from the day as they became (wrongly) identified as a leadership within the black bloc. Many within this part of the movement have felt extremely uncomfortable with such attention, framed in ways which seriously misrepresent their own strategies and have blamed the bloc for effectively undoing much hard work to destigmatise anarchism.

However this misses two key points:

1) That there will always be an element within anarchist ranks that is more comfortable with kicking off immediately to make an example than with relying on the long hard slog of organising a mass labour movement.

2) That "anarchists" are already considered to be nihilistic thugs by most of the population and are always going to be vilified by the press, be that through attacks on its perceived violence or its notions of the wildcat strike and asymmetrical class warfare.

There's not a lot class struggle anarchists can do about either of these aspects, the realistic path is not public denunciations of blocbers but a combination of debate to try and bring these militants onside (where they aren't already) with long-term organising techniques stressing maximised economic damage, minimised exposure – and a concerted effort to engage with public opinion over the issue. As long as the population continues to regard the economy as "ours" it will be resistant to any ideas which rely on attacking that edifice and the media can play on those fears.

More generally, libertarian organising in communities and workplaces is far more dangerous to the ruling class than a few smashed windows so no-one should be under any illusion, things are going to get much tougher should successes be won.

A notable example of this can be found in the recent past of RMT leader Bob Crow. The Leninist has been branded a union thug, had his phone tapped, his personal life splashed in the newspapers and he has faced constant harassment from press attack dogs. And his approach is far less overtly political than that of either SolFed

or the AF.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the class struggle anarchist response to all this was through an open letter to UK Uncut from Brighton SolFed. In it, they note: "Think about it from the store owners' point of view: a broken window may cost £1,000. A lost Saturday's trade through a peaceful occupation would cost many times more. Perhaps this helps explain the harsh police response to the UK Uncut occupation: it hits them where it hurts, in the pocket.

"Traditionally, workers have used the weapon of the strike to achieve this. But what about workers with no unions, or unions

used to make their point or their specific reason for being on the march.

"We do however condemn the actions of those scum we saw attempting to smash the window of a coffee shop while an elderly couple sat on the other side of it and those idiots who threw paint bombs, sticks and even metal fencing from the back hitting and injuring fellow protesters. Let's get this straight, only wankers throw from the back and endanger the safety of comrades and innocent passers-by."

Between them, the two groups build a partial picture of where the movement goes next – unlike the TUC's repetition of



Pictures: Max Reeves

unwilling to strike? What about students, the unemployed? UK Uncut actions have been very successful at involving such people in economically disruptive action – and this seems to be on the right track in terms of forcing the government to back down on its cuts agenda. More and bigger actions in this vein will be needed to stop the cuts (in France, they call these 'economic blockades')."

Bristol AF meanwhile was quite clear in its approach – solidarity tempered by a call for methods which do not intimidate bystanders:

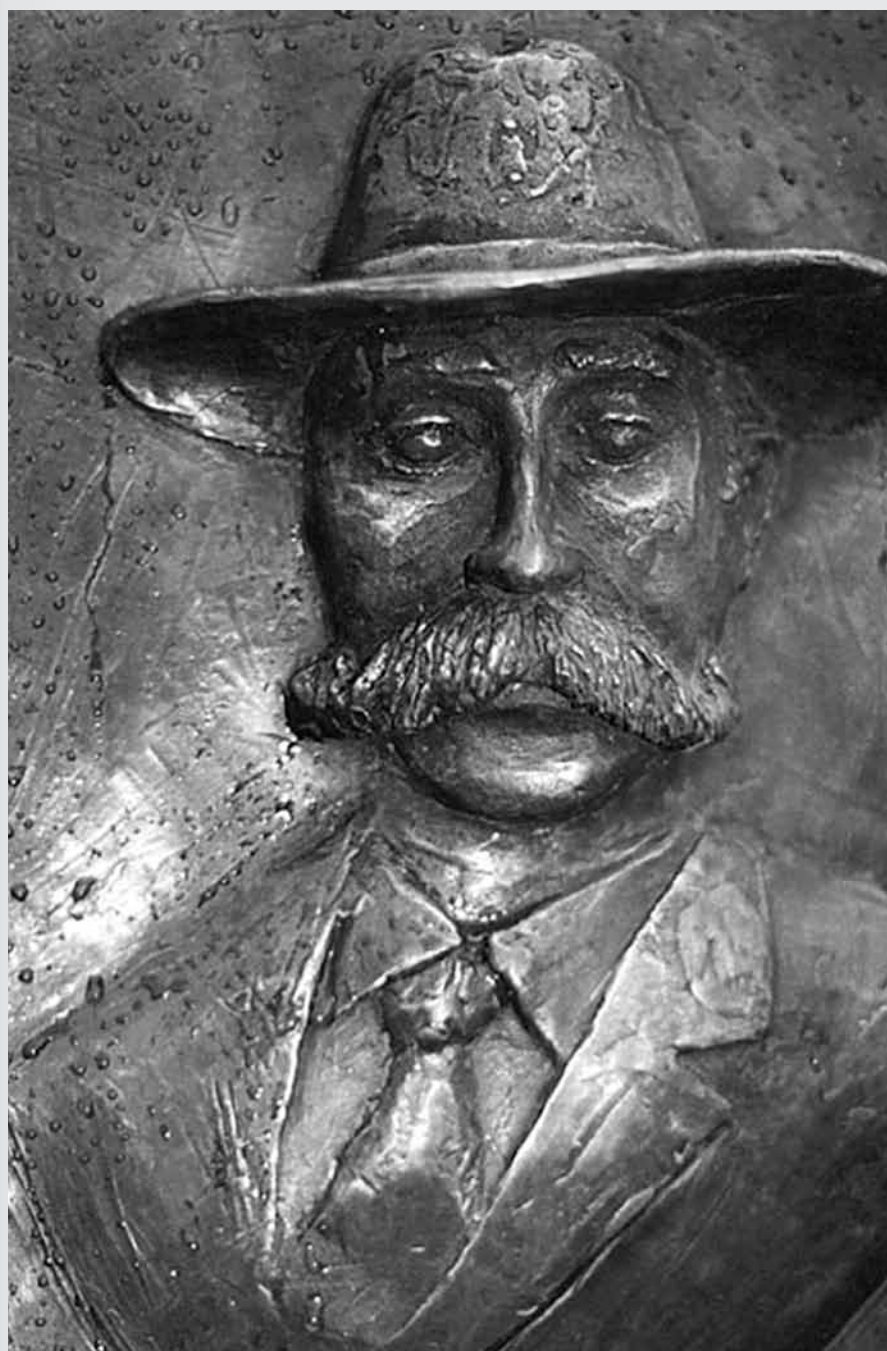
"We would like to state we support all those who took part in any of the marches on the day no matter which tactics they

the same old failures. We need to support a plethora of tactics, economic blockades, raising hell in the workplace, occupations and building up community sympathy and solidarity for such actions.

As the working class reacts and brings its inventiveness to the anti-cuts cause, we can help form the links to bind things together, presenting an alternative to the urge to step in line with authority, be it left or right. But we need to be smart and as the AF notes, make very sure that the only ones feeling pain are the bosses.

By
Rob Ray



Factfile: Jim Connell (1852-1929)**Independent Labour Party activist and writer of the Red Flag**

- Member of the Fenian Movement as a young man and claimed to have been a member of the Irish Brotherhood.
- Blacklisted in Dublin for trying to organise the dock workers
- Moved to London in 1875

and quickly became involved in left wing politics

- Joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1881
- In 1889, wrote The Red Flag
- Joined the newly-formed Independent Labour Party in 1897

That

Exploring The Red Flag, a song which didn't quite change the world...

In issue 231 of Black Flag we looked at the origins of that great revolutionary anthem The Internationale. In this issue we take a look at that other great socialist anthem, the Red Flag.

Before we look at the anthem itself, we should take a brief look at the origins of the red flag and its relevance to the workers' movement.

Before it was adopted as the flag of the workers' and socialist movement the red flag was generally regarded as representing rebellion, mutiny, piracy, bloodletting and defiance.

The origin of the red flag in "radical" terms seems to have had nautical connotations. In the 17th and 18th centuries pirate vessels sailed under both red and black flags, either plain or decorated with personalised insignia, such as variations of the traditionally accepted skull and cross bones theme.

It is said that the black flag announced a warning to other vessels to surrender or prepare for a standard battle, observing accepted rules of engagement.

The red flag announced no quarter, or no mercy! Some pirates, such as John Avery, Richard Hawkins and Christopher Mood routinely sailed under a red flag.

In fact, the term Jolly Roger, which we generally associate with pirates, is said to be derived from the French pirate flag, the Jolie Rouge or Pretty Red.⁽¹⁾

In earlier times a long red streamer known as the baucans signified a fight to the death or no surrender. Naval historians trace reference to this as early as the 13th century. The baucans evolved into the red flag.

British Naval mutinies at Spithead and Nore in 1797 saw sailors hoisting red flags on numerous vessels.

In Sheerness sailors and marines marched up and down the streets, "tremendously armed with cutlasses and pistols, waving red flags," while mutinous vessels flew the red flag.⁽²⁾

Early association with the workers' movement saw red flags raised in the Merthyr Rising of 1831.

It is said that up to 10,000 workers marched under the red flag against the owners of the iron factories.⁽³⁾

The flag was raised again by socialists in the French Revolution of 1848 and saw prominence during the Paris Commune of 1871.

Following the demise of the Commune it was widely adopted by the international workers' socialist and communist movements, in an act of solidarity with the Communards.

In these early days of the embryonic socialist movement the anarchists also carried red flags, seeing themselves as an integral part of this movement.

Anarchist communard Louise Michel

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Red Flag tune

History: Long hijacked by Labour Party hacks in England and France, this is a song of the people

wrote, "Lyon, Marseille, Narbonne, all had their own communes and like ours (in Paris), theirs too were drowned in the blood of revolutionaries. That is why our flags are red."⁽⁴⁾

In 1877 the internationally-renowned anarchist theoretician Peter Kropotkin took part in a protest march in Berne which involved anarchists carrying the red flag in honour of the Paris Commune.⁽⁵⁾

Anarchist historians Nicholas Walter and Heiner Becker noted that "Kropotkin always preferred the red flag."

In 1899 anarchist militant Emma Goldman headed a Labour Day march in Spring Valley, Illinois, "carrying a large red flag."⁽⁶⁾

The newspapers of the day denounced the standard as the Red Flag of Anarchy as the anarchists and other revolutionaries raised it in their struggles and revolts.

In more recent times anarchist writer John Taylor Caldwell ⁽⁷⁾ (1911-2007) maintained links with the red flag, entitling his biography of Guy Aldred after a line in the song, "Come Dungeons Dark."⁽⁸⁾

Aldred, a lifelong anarchist communist and anti-parliamentarian, always associated himself with the red flag.

The writer

The Red Flag was written by Jim Connell.

Connell was born in Kilskyre, County Meath, Ireland.⁽⁹⁾

In 1867 he moved to Dublin with his family.

Here he was particularly impressed with John Landye, a pioneering Irish socialist and a member of the International Workingmen's Association (better known as the First International).

For a while Connell aligned himself with the Fenian Movement and claimed to have been a sworn member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. According to his daughter, Norah Walshe, Fenianism "did not interest him for long."

After moving to London in 1875 he renewed his interest in socialism. In 1881 he joined the Democratic Federation, later to become the Social Democratic Federation and he became a supporter of the newly-formed Independent Labour Party in 1897.

In 1896 the Workmen's Compensation Act was passed.

This Act was the first to allow workers and their families to claim compensation for injuries received, or death, at work, whereas previously they had no recourse.

The Workmen's Legal Friendly Society was subsequently formed to assist with compensation claims against employers. O'Connell worked for them until his death.

Lyrics: The Red Flag

The people's flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts' blood dyed its ev'ry fold.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

Look 'round, the Frenchman loves its blaze,
The sturdy German chants its praise,
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung
Chicago swells the surging throng.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

It waved above our infant might,
When all ahead seemed dark as night;
It witnessed many a deed and vow,
We must not change its colour now.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

It well recalls the triumphs past,
It gives the hope of peace at last;
The banner bright, the symbol plain,
Of human right and human gain.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

It suits today the weak and base,
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place
To cringe before the rich man's frown,
And haul the sacred emblem down.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

With heads uncovered swear we all
To bear it onward till we fall;
Come dungeons dark or gallows grim,
This song shall be our parting hymn.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

The song

Connell wrote the Red Flag in 1889. It is said that he wrote the basic outline on a train journey from Charing Cross to New Cross, on his way home from a Social Democratic Federation meeting at the height of the great London dock strike of that year.

It was first published in the SDF's paper, Justice, (December 21st, 1889), under the heading A Christmas Carol! and soon the song was being sung in socialist halls around the country. Records also reveal that it quickly spread to workers in Australia and South Africa, including Rand miners going to the gallows.

Connell was inspired to write the Red Flag by the political events of the day, in particular, the London dock strike. In 1920, in an interview with The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party, he stated that he had found further inspiration from the Russian Nihilists, the Chicago Martyrs and the spirit of Lucy Parsons.

Connell wrote the words to the tune of The White Cockade, a traditional Irish song. However in 1895 a new edition was published by Adolphe Smythe Headingly, who changed the tune to Tannenbaum, or Maryland as it is known in the USA.

Connell was never happy about this. He wrote in The Call:

"There is only one air that suits The Red Flag and that is the one which I hummed as I wrote it. I mean The White Cockade ... Since then some fool has altered it by introducing minor notes until it is now nearly a jig."

Sadly, The Red Flag is best known for its association with the British Labour Party, sung every year at the close of their conference. That is, until it was scrapped by Tony Blair during the "new Labour" make-over in 1999 – interestingly enough, one of Blair's predecessors, Ramsay MacDonald, unsuccessfully tried to get rid of it in 1925.

Though the two songs were written 18 years apart, The Red Flag is on a par with the Internationale as a powerful statement of working class solidarity, internationalism, class struggle and socialism.

Yet both anthems were hijacked respectively by parliamentary socialist reformism and the authoritarian socialism of state capitalism.

Let us, in the pages of Black Flag at least, reclaim both anthems in the spirit that they were written!

By Ade
Dimmick



This year sees the 90th anniversary of the Kronstadt uprising against the Bolshevik government and the embryonic Soviet state.

For libertarian communists, Kronstadt represents and embodies independent working class organisation; anti-state socialism; a true expression of the soviet or workers council; the spirit of revolution; and arguably one of the most significant revolts against the state capitalist and bourgeois state from a proletarian perspective.

As a tribute we devote this issue's Radical Reprint to the Kronstadt rebels by reproducing the section on Kronstadt from *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* by Daniel Guérin. First published as *L'anarchisme: De la doctrine à l'action*. Editions Gallimard 1965.

In February-March 1921, the Petrograd workers and the sailors of the Kronstadt fortress were driven to revolt, the aspirations which inspired them being very similar to those of the Makhnovist revolutionary peasants.

The material conditions of urban workers had become intolerable through lack of foodstuffs, fuel, and transport, and any expression of discontent was being crushed by a more and more dictatorial and totalitarian regime. At the end of February strikes broke out in Petrograd, Moscow, and several other large industrial centres.

The workers demanded bread and liberty; they marched from one factory to another, closing them down, attracting new contingents of workers into their demonstrations. The authorities replied with gunfire, and the Petrograd workers in turn called a protest meeting attended by 10,000 workers.

Kronstadt was an island naval base forty-eight miles from Petrograd in the Gulf of Finland which was frozen during the winter. It was populated by sailors and several thousand workers employed in the naval arsenals. The Kronstadt sailors had been in the vanguard of the revolutionary events of 1905 and 1917. As Trotsky put it, they had been the "pride and glory of the Russian Revolution."

The civilian inhabitants of Kronstadt had formed a free commune, relatively independent of the authorities. In the

centre of the fortress an enormous public square served as a popular forum holding as many as 30,000 persons.

In 1921 the sailors certainly did not have the same revolutionary makeup and the same personnel as in 1917; they had been drawn from the peasantry far more than their predecessors; but the militant spirit had remained and as a result of their earlier performance they retained the right to take an active part in workers' meetings in Petrograd.

When the workers of the former capital went on strike they sent emissaries who

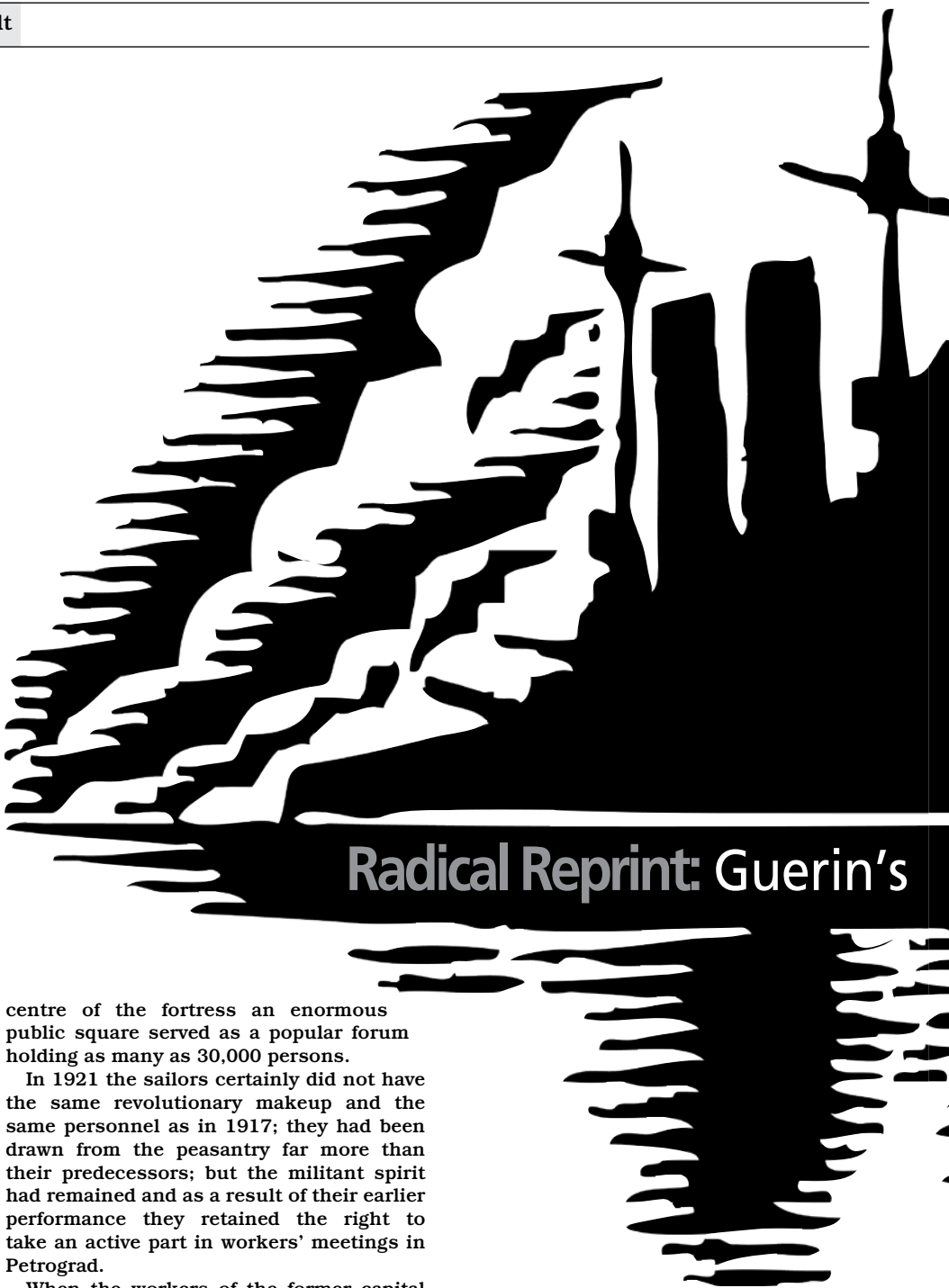
were driven back by the forces of order. During two mass meetings held in the main square they took up as their own the demands of the strikers.

Sixteen thousand sailors, workers, and soldiers attended the second meeting held on March 1, as did the head of state, Kalinin, president of the central executive. In spite of his presence they passed a resolution demanding that the workers, Red soldiers, and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt, and the Petrograd province be called together during the next ten days in a conference independent of the political parties.

They also called for the abolition of "political officers," asked that no political party should have privileges, and that the Communist shock detachments in the army and "Communist guards" in the factories should be disbanded.

It was indeed the monopoly of power of the governing party which they were attacking. The Kronstadt rebels dared to call this monopoly an "usurpation."

Let the angry sailors speak for themselves, as we skim through the pages of the official journal of this new commune, the *Izvestia*



Radical Reprint: Guérin's



History: Fighters at Kronstadt in 1921

An icon of revolution annihilated

work on the Bolsheviks' great shame

the forerunner of Budapest.

Trotsky, the man with the "iron fist," undertook to be personally responsible for the repression. "If you persist, you will be shot down from cover like partridges," he announced to the "mutineers." The sailors were treated as "White Guardists," accomplices of the interventionist Western powers, and of the "Paris Bourse."

They were to be reduced to submission by force of arms. It was in vain that the anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who had found asylum in the fatherland of the workers after being deported from the United States, sent a pathetic letter to Zinoviev, insisting that the use of force would do "incalculable damage to the social revolution" and adjuring the "Bolshevik comrades" to settle the conflict through fraternal negotiation. The Petrograd workers could not come to the aid of Kronstadt because they were already terrorized, and subject to martial law.

An expeditionary force was set up composed of carefully hand-picked troops, for many Red soldiers were unwilling to fire on their class brothers. This force was put under the command of a former Czarist officer, the future Marshall Tukachevsky.

The bombardment of the fortress began on March 7.

Under the heading "Let the world know!" the besieged inhabitants launched a last appeal: "May the blood of the innocent be on the head of the Communists, mad, drunk and enraged with power. Long live the power of the soviets!"

The attacking force moved across the frozen Gulf of Finland on March 18 and quelled the "rebellion" in an orgy of killing.

The anarchists had played no part in this affair. However, the revolutionary committee of Kronstadt had invited two libertarians to join it: Yarchouk (the founder of the Kronstadt soviet of 1917) and Voline; in vain, for they were at the time imprisoned by the Bolsheviks. Ida Mett, historian of the Kronstadt revolt (in *La Commune de Kronstadt*), commented that "the anarchist influence was brought to bear only to the extent to which anarchism itself propagated the idea of workers' democracy."

The anarchists did not play any direct part in events, but they associated themselves with them. Voline later wrote: "Kronstadt was the first entirely independent attempt of the people to free themselves of all control and carry out the social revolution: this attempt was made directly, by the working masses themselves, without 'political shepherds,' without 'leaders,' or 'tutors.'"

Alexander Berkman added: "Kronstadt blew sky high the myth of the proletarian State; it proved that the dictatorship of the Communist Party and the Revolution were really incompatible."

■ For further reading go to anarchism.pageabode.com/afaq/append4.html

By Daniel
Guerin



of Kronstadt. According to them, once it had seized power the Communist Party had only one concern: to keep it by fair means or foul.

It had lost contact with the masses, and proved its inability to get the country out of a state of general collapse. It had become bureaucratic and lost the confidence of the workers.

The soviets, having lost their real power, had been meddled with, taken over, and manipulated, the trade unions were being made instruments of the State. An omnipotent police apparatus weighed on the people, enforcing its laws by gunfire and the use of terror. Economic life had become not the promised socialism, based on free labour, but a harsh state capitalism. The workers were simply wage earners under this national trust, exploited just as before.

The irreverent men of Kronstadt went so far as to express doubt about the infallibility of the supreme leaders of the revolution. They mocked Trotsky, and even Lenin.

Their immediate demands were the restoration of all freedoms and free elections to all the organs of soviet democracy, but beyond this they were looking to a more

distant objective with a clearly anarchist content: a "third revolution."

The rebels did, however, intend to keep within the framework of the Revolution and undertook to watch over the achievements of the social revolution. They proclaimed that they had nothing in common with those who would have wished to "return to the knout of Czarism," and though they did not conceal their intention of depriving the "Communists" of power, this was not to be for the purpose of "returning the workers and peasants to slavery."

Moreover, they did not cut off all possibility of co-operation with the regime, still hoping "to be able to find a common language." Finally, the freedom of expression they were demanding was not to be for just anybody, but only for sincere believers in the Revolution: anarchists and "left socialists" (a formula which would exclude social democrats or Mensheviks).

The audacity of Kronstadt was much more than a Lenin or a Trotsky could endure. The Bolshevik leaders had once and for all identified the Revolution with the Communist Party, and anything which went against this myth must, in their eyes, appear as "counter-revolutionary."

They saw the whole of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in danger. Kronstadt frightened them the more, since they were governing in the name of the proletariat and, suddenly, their authority was being disputed by a movement which they knew to be authentically proletarian.

Lenin, moreover, held the rather simplistic idea that a Czarist restoration was the only alternative to the dictatorship of his own party. The statesmen of the Kremlin in 1921 argued in the same way as those, much later, in the autumn of 1956: Kronstadt was

History turned on

In the second part of her work on how the field of history has evolved, Liz Willis looks at the modern era and the rise of revolutionary theory

For committed Marxists who came into the system, the real and earnest, especially economic types of history were preferred among a growing number of options and specialisations – and it was obligatory to fit political events into the appropriate categories.

Two Trotskyist students going into a history exam: one (not a Trot swot) calls to the other, “Was 1848 a bourgeois revolution?” The other indicates affirmative. Sorted. Or up to a point – they may not pass but at least they can write something, more than likely involving the conclusion that what the revolutionaries needed was correct leadership.

The Communist Manifesto (K Marx and F Engels, 1848) begins with the assertion that “the history of all hitherto-existing society has been the history of class struggle.”

This proposition was more complicated and nuanced than it might at first appear and was elaborated at considerable length in the foundation texts of Marxism into a system purporting not only to explain the past but to understand the present and predict the future.

So Marxist historians and students knew where they were and had a structure to apply as universally as possible: Pre-history, feudalism, rise of the bourgeoisie, industrial capitalism; forward to the proletarian revolution, socialism, and the withering away of the state.

You don’t have to buy into the whole Marxist package to find aspects of this analysis useful, perhaps essential tools of the trade in many historical contexts, but it begs questions that may present themselves to libertarians particularly and suggest alternative or supplementary approaches.

What about authority relations generally: People against the state, dissent from dominant ideology, issues of gender or race?

Some of the subtler and less rigid proponents of Marxism could accommodate such elements, even if it took a while for them to get around to doing so and much ingenuity was devoted to the shoe-horning of examples from multifarious epochs and locations into the overarching framework.

The insistence on that framework was the problem, as analysed by, for one, Paul Cardan (aka. Cornelius Castoriadis). Apart from taking issue with the prediction of successive crises leading inevitably to a final collapse of capitalism, he sought in a text published by Solidarity in 1971 as “History and Revolution: a revolutionary critique of historical materialism” to restore the primacy of human agency, the power of collective action to shape events instead of being stymied in advance by “objective” economic conditions, immutable laws and

pre-determined stages of development.

1960s and after

In the high cold-war era any mention of capitalism, class struggle or even classes, especially in terms like “bourgeoisie” and “proletariat” was often enough to brand someone as an unsound, subversive lefty, acting as a red rag to respectable academics entrenched in university establishments.

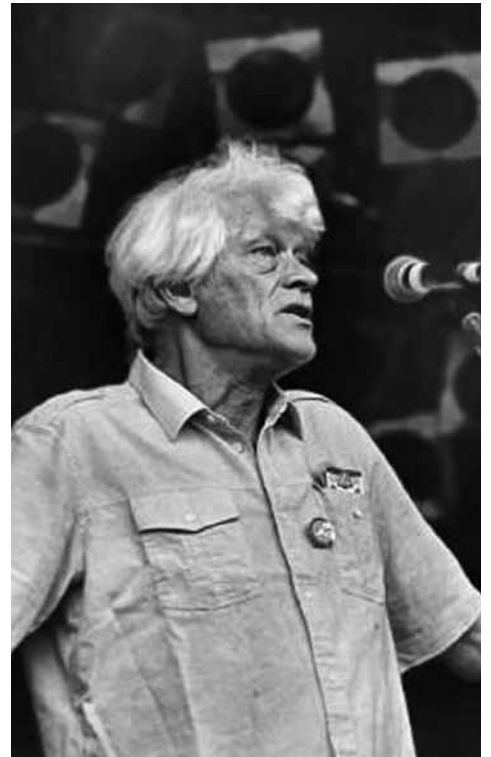
Such suspect concepts were discouraged by the ranks of “bourgeois empiricists” who would examine closely, for example, the opposing sides in the “English” Civil War



two of history students, at least.

Another change was that the “Whig interpretation” of history. Roughly, the view of steady progress and successful reform, and judgments of significance based on whether and to what extent events contributed to this – was challenged on various fronts.

This became prominent not only because academic fashions change but because developments such as the women’s movement and other liberation struggles meant an increasing number of people were realising how much had been written out of history as they were being taught it.



Marking history: Left to right, E H Carr, E P Thompson, Sheila Rowbotham and Cornelius Castoriadis

or the factions in the French Revolution and discover so much disparity within them that it seemed they were not really sides or factions at all – not only refusing to see the wood for the trees but asserting that so many differences existed between individual trees there couldn’t possibly have been any wood.

Meanwhile other things were happening. E H Carr famously argued in *What is History?* (1961) that historians’ pretensions to absolute objectivity, to be simply researching and conveying “the facts,” were illusory, and that there was always an element of bias in selection and presentation.

The solution was not to give up trying to be objective but to recognise the influences working in the other direction. This book, written up from Carr’s Trevelyan Lectures, became the classic introductory text to the subject’s theoretical side for a generation or

For many, of course, the realisation was far from new, but from the 1970s there was a fresh dynamism in the expansion of “alternative” and subversive histories, together with an awareness of formerly neglected episodes such as mutinies, anti-colonial struggles and anti-war activism. Bringing out the relevance of these to contemporary society was an important part of the process.

To take a few prominent examples, Sheila Rowbotham uncovered the hidden history of women, with special reference to resistance and revolution. Raphael Samuel’s *History Workshop* celebrated the labour movement. E P Thompson influentially described *The Making of the English Working Class*. Perhaps rather little of this was of a self-proclaimed libertarian persuasion but the overall tendency was in the direction of wider participation and diversity in theory and practice.

its head by class

Analysis: Looking at the march of the academics taking a bottom-up approach to our past

A great deal of it eventually became integrated or co-opted into academic respectability, with more or less resistance from historians of the old school (sometimes in more sense than one). But that establishment too was changing.

The scope of studies could be expanded

and no concept undeconstructed (Quote from a conference: "It doesn't matter whether it happened or not"), while on the other there was the popularity of the sillier type of television history restoring royalty to centre stage and endlessly mentioning the war (but let's not go there just now).

absurdities.

The "celebration" endeavour – of past struggles, movements, groups, lives, ideas – can be pursued in a variety of contexts according to choice, interest and access to resources. The point is not to claim that "our history" was all brilliant. Accentuating the positive is fair enough, but not to the exclusion of the negative, even if the latter often seems to have received more than its fair share of attention already.

If past mistakes and flaws are denied, they can hardly be avoided in future. Nor is all struggle, dissent or revolt equally relevant. Just as looking at *A Century of Women* (Rowbotham, 1999) can force an uncomfortable assortment between the same covers, so the idea of "rebel" can concoct a marvellous hodge-podge.

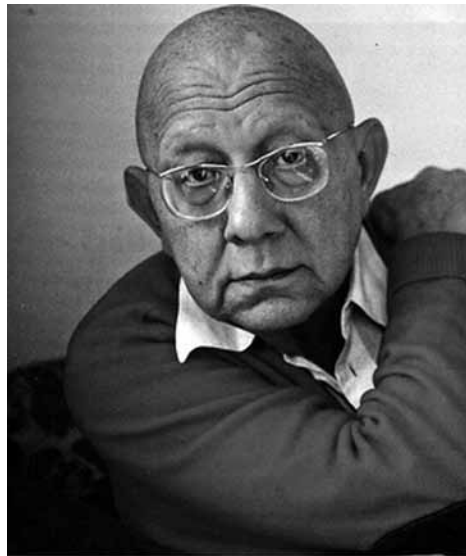
Without attempting to draw up a table of tick-boxes to assess the libertarian credentials of historians and their work, the foregoing bits and pieces may suggest some criteria.

Easier, perhaps, to say what libertarian history is not – productions featuring the glorification of militarism, adulation of heads of state and national heroes, denunciation of popular movements or denial of their existence and so on, not hard to spot.

Libertarians will probably tend to let other pens dwell on the fads and foibles of the ruling class, or on its guilt and misery for that matter. They are not likely either to indulge in the game of making up counterfactual, what-if tales, wishful thinking for reactionaries.

On the positive side, those who are aware of authority relations in all sorts of contexts (in all hitherto-existing society?) and can perceive the plight of history's underdogs will have insights to offer; they will be well-placed to interpret and comment on generally neglected subjects and sources. They may be professionals (or not) but will not be holed up in ivory towers, preferring to make their work accessible and to interact with others, not least those involved in current struggles, and not forgetting the need to document those struggles too.

By Liz Willis



Towards a Conclusion

"Celebrate our history, avoid repeating our mistakes," the slogan of the Radical History Network of North-East London (RaHN), suggests two important elements of a libertarian history project.

A third might be the effort to understand what our history has been up against, in particular the behaviour of those in power, "What's bin did and what's bin hid" by the state to pre-empt or counter any revolutionary threat, or the routine disregard of people's lives and liberties in the alleged "national interest."

This thread is recommended for those with a taste for detective work – the National Archives open new files all the time and Freedom of Information requests can sometimes dig out more. The results can include useful exposés and demonstrate fallacies or distortions in official versions of events. They may sometimes show the effectiveness of protest and persistence of dissent, as well as many bureaucratic

into international comparisons or conversely adopt a regional, local, or even family and personal focus, while approved research topics and papers could range from the inter-disciplinary to ever more specific specialisation. By the early 21st century a group of British historians were considering *What Is History Now?* under the chapter headings: Social, political, religious, cultural, gender, intellectual and imperial.

Then we have on the one hand the increasingly esoteric reaches of post-modernism, leaving no metaphor unpacked

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Kropotkin and

In focus: Part two of Brian Morris's work on the revolutionary socialism of the anarchist prince

Interpreting the state as a territorial institution that monopolises all forms of coercive power, and is invariably identified and sanctified by a national ideology, anarchists have always repudiated the state as an agency of social revolution.

Kropotkin and other anarchists, both in their writings and practices, tended to formulate essentially four political strategies. These are generally described as direct action, these are insurrectionism, anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian politics and community activism.

In the early years of the anarchist movement, Insurrectionism – or what became widely known as “propaganda by the deed” – was part of anarchism. It was never more than a minority activity, although many well-known anarchists were advocates of insurrectionism in their early years. Anarchists such as Errico Malatesta and Alexander Berkman.

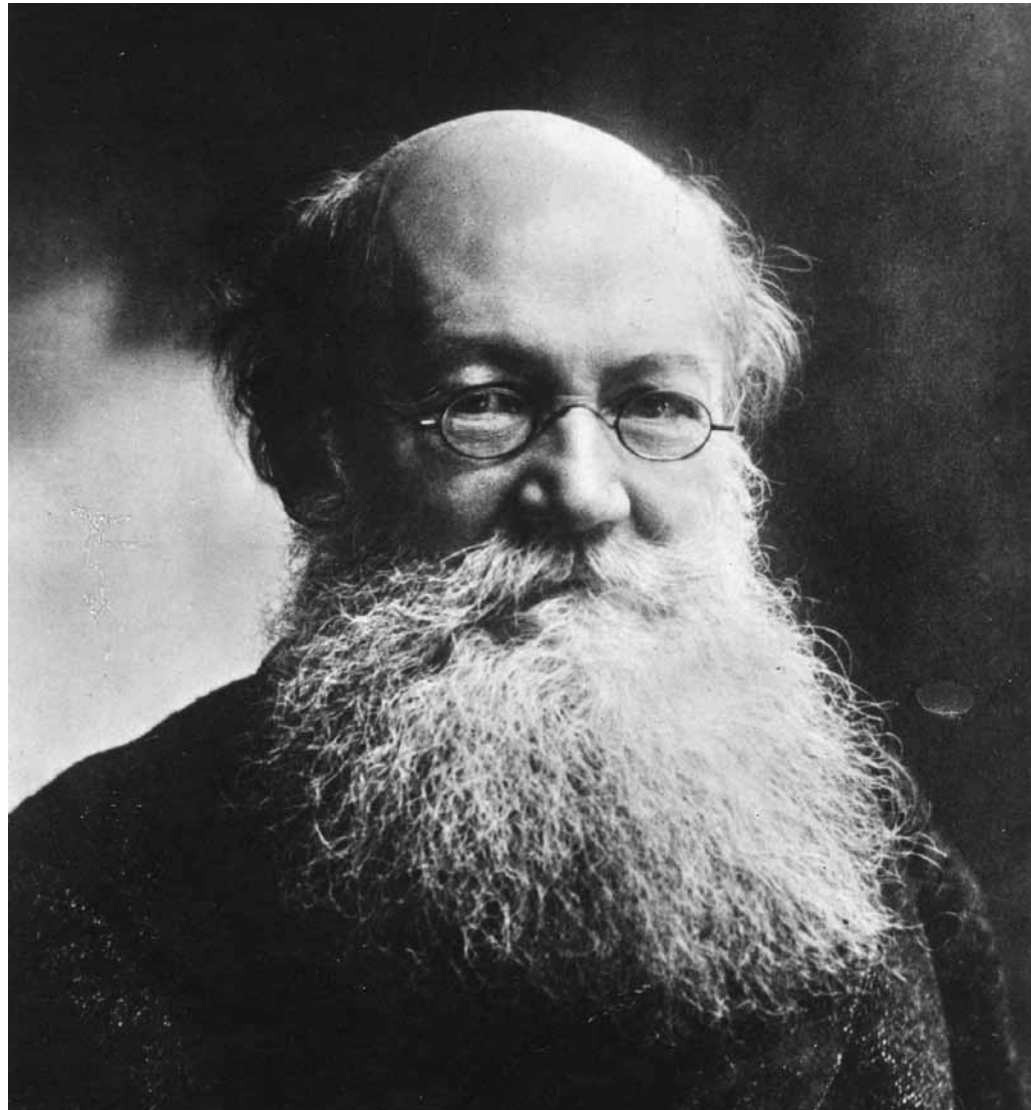
But both they and the movement generally quickly came to repudiate insurrectionism as a political strategy. The reasons for this were simple: it was elitist and alienated the majority of workers; thus it was ineffective, for rather than invoking a socialist revolution, it brought down the wrath of the state and the harsh repression of the whole anarchist movement. Although Kropotkin advocated a “spirit of revolt” he always repudiated individual acts of terrorism as a political strategy. A social revolution could be achieved, he felt, through a popular movement.

Insurrectionism

In recent years insurrectionism has taken on a new lease of life, not in the form of assassinations, but in the form of protests and demonstrations. Seen as involving “direct action” anarchists have been conspicuous in the anti-globalisation demonstrations in Seattle (in 1999) and elsewhere. This has been interpreted as involving a resurgence of anarchism, and, moreover, as involving the emergence of a “new anarchism.”

According to Ruth Kinna this “new anarchism,” has consisted of the following ideological categories: anarcho-primitivism, radical individualism the “poetic terrorism”) of Hakim Bey and John Moore, who follow the rantings of the reactionary philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche; the postmodern anarchism derived from Deleuze, Foucault and Lyotard; and finally “anarcho” capitalists.

As I have critiqued this so-called “New Anarchism” (a milieu only recently rejoined by people interested in class struggle)



elsewhere, I will make only two points.

Firstly, anarchists were in a distinct minority in these demonstrations, even if they were highlighted by the media who equated any violence that erupted with anarchism. For most of the participants were trade unionists, Marxists and reformist liberals – like Naomi Klein – who seek to humanise capitalism and make it more benign. Secondly the notion that anarchism had been in hibernation since the Spanish Civil War, only to emerge with the “new anarchism” is quite misleading.

Anarchists have been involved in many protests and demonstrations since the second world war – against the Vietnam War, against the apartheid system in South Africa, against specific environmental projects, against the proliferation of nuclear

weapons, and the arms trade, and against the poll tax, as well as against global capitalism. Anarchists, as fundamental anti-capitalists, have been very much a part of the recent demonstrations.

Anarcho-syndicalism

Anarcho-syndicalism was the main strategy advocated by the anarchists, and it is quite misleading to draw an absolute distinction between it and anarchist communism. Although many syndicalists were not anarchists – Marxists Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, William “Big Bill” Hayward and Daniel De Leon are examples – and although some anarchists repudiated anarcho-syndicalism, nevertheless anarcho-syndicalism was, and still is, an important anarchist strategy.

the four tactics

Anarcho-syndicalism essentially emerged among the libertarian or federalist section of the First International and besides Kropotkin, many anarchists were fervent advocates of anarcho-syndicalism. They include, for example, Emile Pouget and Fernand Pelloutier. But the key figure in the development of anarcho-syndicalism was Rudolf Rocker and his text "Anarcho-Syndicalism" (1938) has become an anarchist classic.

For Rocker anarcho-syndicalism was a form of libertarian socialism, its aim being the emancipation of the working class. It repudiated the tactic of "propaganda by the deed," opposed the parliamentary road to socialism, which simply entailed reforms within the capitalist system and as with Bakunin and Kropotkin, it disavowed the Marxist conception of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" by means of a revolutionary political party, however this dictatorship was interpreted.

For anarcho-syndicalists the trade unions and workers' associations had a dual function: to defend and improve workers' rights, wages and living conditions in the present day – reforms from below; and to reconstruct social life through direct action, workers' solidarity and self-management, and federalist principles.

It considered that the workers' unions or syndicates, through engaging in class struggle, would become the "embryo" of a future socialist society. Anarcho-syndicalism thus repudiated "political action", by which they meant attempts to form a revolutionary government (as with the Marxists); it did not imply a denial of political or class struggle.

Libertarian politics

But some anarchists have been critical of anarcho-syndicalism with its emphasis on the economy and workers' control, and as an alternative strategy sought to develop explicit political institutions, as a counter-

power to capitalism and the nation-state.

They drew attention to and inspiration from the role of the Sans-Culottes and the Enrages during the French revolution, who through "sections" advocated a system of direct democracy; and also the importance of the Soviets – self-managed popular assemblies – during the Russian revolution.

This political strategy envisaged an initial system of dual power, and the development within capitalism of popular assemblies, through which communities could directly manage their own affairs, via face-to-face democratic assemblies, or meetings, and co-federal organisations.

Community activism

The final anarchist strategy is that of community activism, which may take many different forms. It is what the late Colin Ward described as "Anarchy in Action" (1973), essentially involving ordinary people acting for themselves (as Kropotkin put it), taking control of their own lives and through "direct action" establishing their own associations and groups independent of both the state and capitalism.

It may involve squatting or establishing housing associations, the creation of food co-ops, affinity groups or independent schools, or simply organising campaigns around environmental and community issues. The emphasis is on establishing voluntary associations that both enhance people's autonomy and reduce people's dependence on the state and capitalist corporations.

Kropotkin emphasised the importance of such voluntary associations and mutual aid societies, some fleeting, some enduring, relating to many different domains of social life – artistic, political, intellectual, economic (Baldwin 1970: 132). He was fond of quoting the Lifeboat Association as an example of a spontaneous social organisation that was independent of the state and was motivated by mutual aid

rather than by the exploitation of others.

Indeed, Colin Ward defined anarchism as a social and political philosophy that emphasised the natural and spontaneous tendency of humans to associate together for their mutual benefit. Anarchism is thus the idea "that it is possible and desirable for society to organise itself without government" (1973: 12).

Direct Action within the community is thus something positive; it is not to be equated – as some do – with sabotage and with violent confrontations with the police over the occupancy of a building or a piece of land that has some iconic link to the capitalist system (which in any case, seems to be an ineffective strategy given the powers of the nation-state – as Malatesta learned long ago). Ward often uses the metaphor of the "seed beneath the snow" to suggest the kind of anarchist strategy that would enhance and develop all forms of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation within a community, small-scale initiatives that in some way undermined all forms of authority and the power of capitalism.

Such are the four political strategies, or forms of direct action, that have been articulated by revolutionary anarchists, and Kropotkin is unique in putting an emphasis on all four strategies. All reflect the notion that a social revolution will not be achieved through a revolutionary vanguard party, or through the "parliamentary road" to socialism, but rather collectively through the activities of ordinary working people – by acting for themselves.

In an era of capitalist triumphalism, anarchism, libertarian socialism, provides the only viable alternative to neo-liberalism – for both liberal democracy (welfare capitalism) and Marxism (state capitalism) have been found wanting.

By Brian Morris



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Science with a

Review: With the benefit of hindsight, McKay offers a strong case that Kropotkin triumphed

Mutual Aid: An Introduction and Evaluation
£3
A5 68pp
by Iain McKay
Pub. AK Press (2010)

This extended essay, published in pamphlet form by AK Press, is based on research Iain McKay did for the new Freedom Press edition of the classic anarchist book *Mutual Aid* by Peter Kropotkin. It deals not only with the Russian revolutionary's work but with issues in science writing in general, and encompasses Richard Dawkins, Stephen Jay Gould and Matt Ridley among many others.

Mutual Aid is probably Kropotkin's most famous work. As McKay points out in his essay, although it is often thought of as an anarchist classic, *Mutual Aid* is strictly speaking not about anarchism. It is more a book of popular science aimed at rebutting the misuse of evolutionary theory, in particular Huxley's interpretation of Darwinism, to justify the economic-liberal status quo. But McKay explains: "Its synthesis of zoological, anthropological, historical and sociological data achieved far more and, consequently, its influence is great."

Nonetheless the way the book looks at bottom-up mutual aid tendencies of everyday life, rooted in popular history, is inherently libertarian. McKay discusses the work in the context of Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas, looks at its influences and evaluates how well it has survived scientific advances. He also proceeds to discuss and debunk various myths that have grown up around the book.

Kropotkin was one of the few socialist thinkers who was also a gifted, trained scientist, a naturalist of some renown with a specialised interest in geology. In the 1860s, while in the Russian military, he played a leading role in a number of important geographical survey expeditions in Siberia and north Manchuria. Later he became the secretary of the physical geography section of the Russian Geographical Society. He contributed most of the Russian

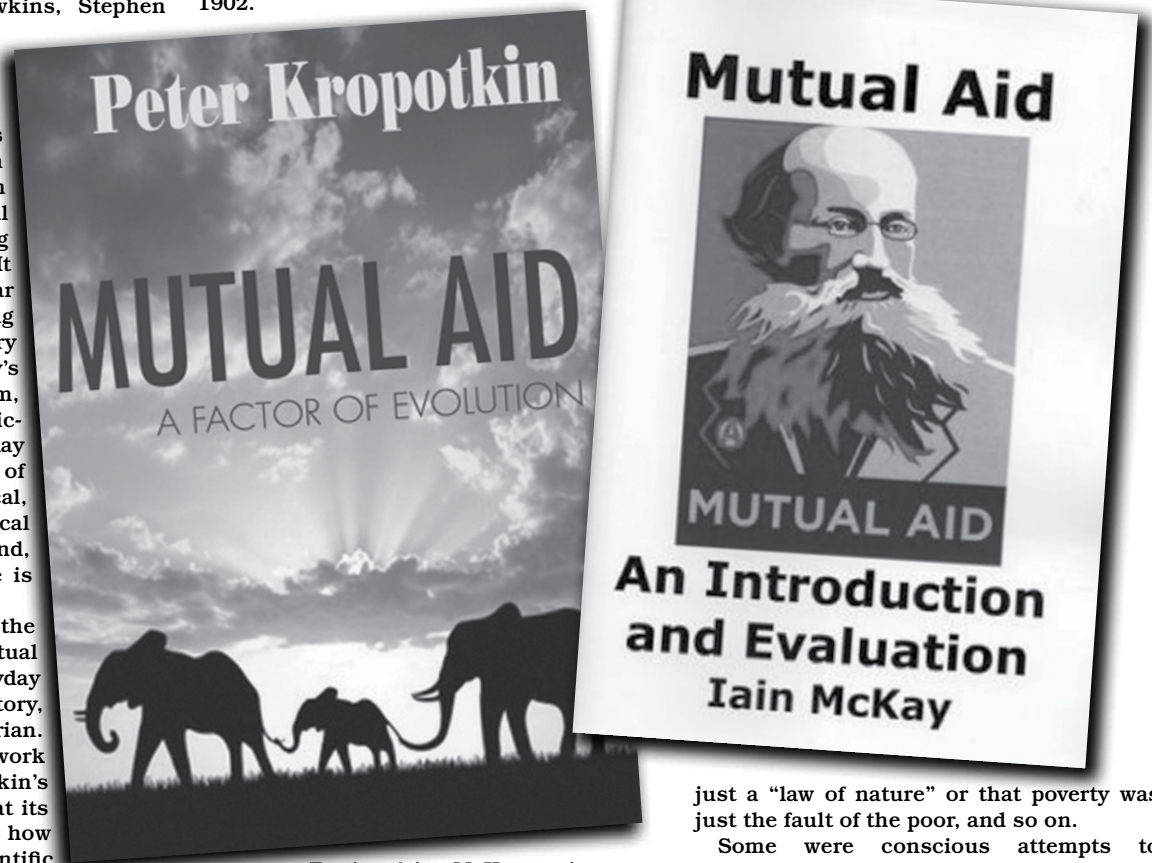
geographical articles to the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for example. His scientific method can be detected in all his work, but, as McKay shows, it is most obvious in *Mutual Aid*.

McKay gives an account of how the articles *Mutual Aid* was based on were written as a specific response to Thomas Henry Huxley's "The Struggle for Existence in Human Society." Huxley's article was written in 1888 and published in the journal *The Nineteenth Century*. Kropotkin's replies appeared in the same journal between 1890 and 1896, and were expanded to form *Mutual Aid* in 1902.

normal state of existence."

Taking a scientific approach, rather than an idealistic or moralistic one, Kropotkin in *Mutual Aid* set out to demonstrate that Huxley's view was in direct contradiction to the facts of both nature and history.

In a section entitled "Science and the Dominant Culture", McKay looks at some of the background to pseudo-scientific "theories" used to justify and defend various interests of the ruling class, whether landlord or industrialist, from Malthus onwards. These theories claimed to prove the status quo was



To be fair, McKay points out that Huxley was not actually in favour of a "social Darwinist" position of unrestrained competition between human individuals that his name has come to be associated with. He actually favoured a significant amount of state intervention to restrain competition.

Huxley's basic argument was that human society and "civilisation" needed to be maintained artificially against our natural instincts. For Huxley, until the restraints of civilised society and the liberal state were contrived and imposed over us then; "the Hobbesian war of each against all was the

just a "law of nature" or that poverty was just the fault of the poor, and so on.

Some were conscious attempts to counter the influence of radical social reformers like William Godwin and combat ideas of liberty and equality encouraged by the American and French revolutions. 19th century capitalists like John D Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie borrowed Darwinist notions of "natural selection" to construct arguments that great inequalities and concentrations of wealth were just the working out of a law of nature and a law of god.

In opposition to such pseudo-science, which imposes the values of the dominant culture and system while claiming to be objective, McKay quotes scientist Stephen

political point

Jay Gould: "Scientists can struggle to identify the cultural assumptions of their trade and ask how answers might be formulated under different assertions. Scientists can propose creative theories that force startled colleagues to confront unquestioned procedures."

McKay goes on to argue: "Kropotkin's work must be seen in this light, as an attempt to refute, with hard evidence, the cultural assumptions at the heart of the Darwinism of his day. In its most extreme form, this became Social Darwinism which (like much of Sociobiology today) proceeds by first projecting the dominant ideas of current society onto nature (often unconsciously as both 'normal' and 'natural' questions)" (p12).

A particular strength of McKay's pamphlet is its significant coverage of how Kropotkin, long before he became a political anarchist militant in exile in the West, was already part of an established school of scientific evolutionary theory in Russia, the Russian naturalist school, that had developed its own radically different take on Darwin's discoveries.

Applying Darwin's methods and developing his ideas, the Russian naturalists showed that it was the sociable species that prosper, develop and reproduce successfully. This led them to conclusions quite different from those of Western liberal Darwinism which placed a heavy emphasis on individual competition. "Solidarity and joint labour - this is what supports species in the struggle to maintain their existence ..." Kropotkin wrote in an article about Darwin in the anarchist weekly *Le Revolté* in 1882.

In the section "Modern Science and Mutual Aid," McKay looks at how the ideas in *Mutual Aid* have fared in the light of more recent and contemporary scientific thinking. He concludes that Kropotkin's ideas have not only stood the test of time, but are now "standard positions in evolutionary theory, biology and anthropology."

In regards to evolutionary theory, Stephen Jay Gould concludes that "Kropotkin's basic argument is correct. Struggle does occur in many modes, and some lead to co-operation among members of a species as the best pathway to advantage for individuals" (Kropotkin Was No Crackpot. p338).

Leading primatologist Frans de Waal and Jessica C Flack argued that Kropotkin was part of a wider tradition "in which the view has been that animals assist each other precisely because by doing so they achieve long term collective benefits of greater value than the short benefits derived from straightforward competition." And as de Waal argues, the "fairness principle" in humans has evolved and is "part of our background as co-operative primates."

Even an Establishment science celebrity like Richard Dawkins, author of *The Selfish Gene*, and *The God Delusion*, briefly acknowledges Kropotkin in his *Unweaving the Rainbow*, in a chapter "The Selfish Co-

operator."

Dawkins still stereotypes Kropotkin, Margaret Mead and others who stress co-operation in nature as "gullible," while nonetheless also questioning Huxley. But in his work Dawkins has developed arguments why co-operation serves an evolutionary purpose, and stresses that the "selfish gene" does not exclude, and in fact can encourage "mutuality co-operation."

As McKay puts it; "regardless of the assertions of Hobbs and Huxley, there was never a point at which we decided to become social. We are descended from highly social ancestors and ... our ancestors lived in groups. This was not an option but an essential survival strategy and from this mutual aid ethics arose." (p23).

Perhaps part of the paradox of mutual aid in human interactions is that co-operation and competition are not always opposites but often overlap. What is referred to as "friendly competition," for example, involves both mutually beneficially competition and highly complex co-operation at the same time.

McKay's pamphlet helps to correct some common myths and misunderstandings about *Mutual Aid*. For a start, even a simple consulting of the book's subtitle, *A Factor of Evolution*, shows the book is not claiming mutual aid to be THE only factor in evolution. Kropotkin was not denying the existence of competition in nature or the historic role of struggle.

Nor does *Mutual Aid* show Kropotkin to be in denial of the nasty side of human behaviour. Indeed, as McKay argues, Kropotkin "became an anarchist, ... precisely because he saw the horrors and evils of class society." Kropotkin's research "traced the evolution of mutual aid through human history, showing when (and how) it was overwhelmed by mutual struggle (another key factor of evolution), and showed how it provided the foundation for continual efforts at co-operative self-emancipation ..." (p30).

Early on in *Mutual Aid* Kropotkin noted that "when mutual aid institutions ... began ... to lose their primitive character, to be invaded by parasitic growths, and thus to become hindrances to progress, the revolt of individuals against these institutions took always two different aspects. Part of those who rose up strove to purify the old institutions, or to work out a higher form of commonwealth." Others "endeavoured to break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers." In this conflict "lies the real tragedy of history."

Kropotkin also understood the difference between hierarchical organisations with imposed co-operation between bosses and workers compared to genuinely free, equal mutual aid and solidarity in resistance to them. In the context of his times he pointed to workers' unions, strikes, and co-operatives as examples of mutual aid,

as a means for the working classes to start fighting back within a hostile social environment.

So as well as countering hostile attacks on Kropotkin from neoliberals like Matt Ridley and Steve Jones, McKay also deals with some misunderstandings from libertarian socialists and Marxists like Maurice Brinton and Paul Mattick, who mistakenly stereotyped Kropotkin's argument as ignoring the need for class struggle.

McKay concludes that *Mutual Aid* is still important today because many of the justifications for capitalism on the political right, and for state control on the left, retain traces of the old Social Darwinian rationale he was opposing in the 19th century.

Given the current capitalist and statist reality, Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, according to McKay, is still an important antidote to the dominant culture, and it emphasises that "we need not live like this and that



Picture: woodleywonderworks

there is nothing in 'nature' which precludes transcending capitalism."

Kropotkin has often been misunderstood in the West, even by many Western anarchists. Iain McKay's excellent, readable, and very thorough pamphlet helps put Kropotkin and *Mutual Aid* into proper context. If you are tempted to get your hands on the new Freedom Press edition of *Mutual Aid*, then first grab yourself a copy of this extended introduction and evaluation.

■ Available from AK Press, PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE. www.akuk.com

By Paul
Petard



Review: We use it as a dung market

What's wrong with using parliament: The cases for and against the revolutionary use of Parliament.

£1

22pp.

by the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Introduction by Stair.

The title of this review is taken from William Morris's marvellous *News From Nowhere*, where the fictitious post-revolutionary citizens found an appropriate use for the Houses of Parliament.

The Socialist Party argues that it is possible for the great majority of people in all countries to vote for, and achieve, a majority the world over that will proceed to initiate international "socialism."

Exactly how the great majority will vote for socialism unless the ruling class internationally and conveniently provides a universal general election on the same day is not explained. Nor is it shown how "socialism" will be defined. The present procedure will apparently be maintained.

It dismisses those critics who say that where any assembly anywhere in the world has even mildly challenged the power of the international capitalist class it has been destroyed by force, by quoting the case of Allende in Chile in 1973.

A short paragraph concludes that Allende was not a socialist according to SPGB definitions and that the military took over took three years to organise and execute their plans. That's it then!

Those who are not convinced by this powerful argument might even go so far as to list many other examples of socialist parliaments being squashed by the real rulers – capitalists – and their allies (the military, fascists or whoever).

■ Germany 1933 where the Communists and Social Democratic (Labour) parties had a potential majority; Hitler put paid to that.

■ Spain 1936, where an elected Republican government was ousted by a fascist mutiny organised by General

service to the actors for freedom.

Along with council communists and anarchists, they did classify soviet Russia as state capitalist very early on. And they exposed the Leninist/Stalinist hysteria about the final capitalist crisis and collapse in the 1930s.

However that was all in the past and the present decline of the party and its World Socialist companion parties shows no sign of a successful campaign to persuade people to resort to the ballot box.

They keep on engaging in "diversions" like striking and occupying workplaces, and setting up councils and suchlike ...

One mystery remains about the "Small Party of Good Boys." What do they do with their vast financial income that neither keeps the UK banking system going nor invests in capitalist type institutes?

One thing is certain, it does not go to people fighting for socialism outside the parameters of the Holy Script or Principles.

The funding of the SPGB is not covered by either of the following texts, the unofficial and the semi-official versions.

Two books give some idea of the SPGB historically.

The *Monument* is largely a personal account, lots of narrative and anecdotes of workers doing things [Barltrop].

A general but abstract volume *The Socialist Party of Great Britain* [Perrin] examines policy but excludes actions by the members as such.

An account of perhaps the last member to contribute to workers' organisation, bus driver Frank Snelling, is in *Radical Aristocrats*. [Fuller] Snelling was London chair of the rank and file body opposing autocratic trade union leader Ernest Bevin around 1936. Some SPGB members were quite constructive.

This booklet has been reviewed twice – in the SP's journal *Socialist Standard* in September, sympathically, and in the breakaway Libertarian Communist journal no 11, much more critically.

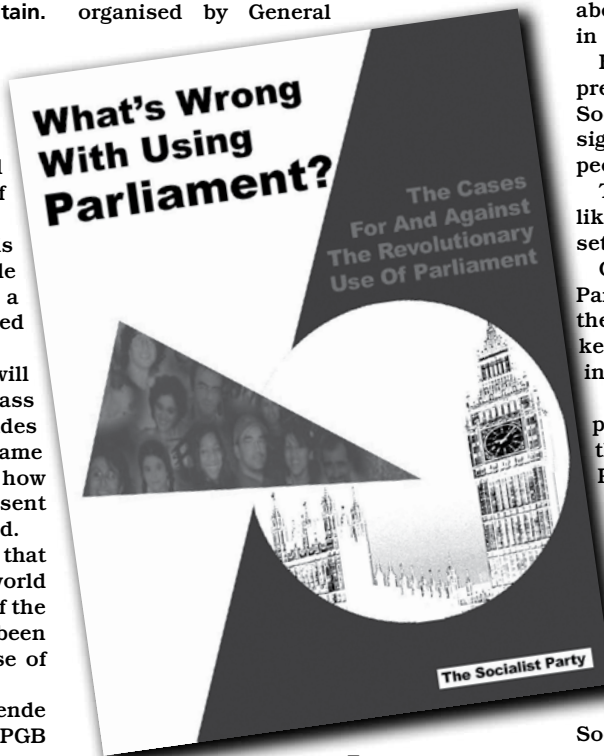
You may not need to consult these.

The SPGB has a well-situated shop and centre in Clapham with an excellent library.

They are always willing to talk about things, but beyond that? *Socialist Standard* has a residual value for its book reviews.

In the mind of this reviewer, the SPGB is located slap bang in the middle of the Marxist vanguard groups whose characteristics it shares – authoritarian structure, party chauvinism and so on. What else can be said about this eccentric body?

■ SPGB, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, UK



Franco ...

and so on. Of course the SPGB would argue that neither groups here, or the many workers revolts like Hungary 1956, had signed their Declaration of Principles, 1904, thus justifying SPGB neutrality in all these cases.

But seriously for a moment, the SPGB as a party has in the past provided some

Reading

- Robert Barltrop: *The Monument* – the story of the Socialist Party of Great Britain [1975, 200pp] a party member and fellow traveller writes up his views;
- Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan, eds: *William Morris & News from Nowhere* – a vision for our time [1990, 213 pp], a book about an excellent book;
- Ken Fuller: *Radical Aristocrats* – London bus workers from the 1880s to the 1980s [1985, 256pp] a communist writer and ex-trade union full-time official;
- David A. Perrin: *The Socialist Party of Great Britain* – politics, economics and Britain's oldest socialist party; [2000, 215 pp] academic analysis of policy primarily;
- Badayev A Y: *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* [1987, 248pp], but read the Introduction by Tony Cliff
- Herman Gorter, *Open Letter*
- Eric Heffer, *Class struggle in parliament*
- Robert Barltrop: *The Monument* – the story of the Socialist Party of Great Britain [1975, 200pp]



By Alan Woodward



Review: What's missing is as interesting as what's in

The Rise of the Green Left: Inside the Worldwide Ecosocialist Movement
ISBN: 978-0-745330-36-5
£12.99
192pp
by Derek Wall
Pub: Pluto (2010)

This little book by Derek Wall is essentially a primer and manifesto of a kind of eco-socialism advocated by the Green Party. Wall seems to have replaced Jonathon Porritt as the principal intellectual guru of the Greens, although it is unclear whether he is still an active member of the party.

In many ways this is an excellent text, lucidly written, well researched, engaging and informative. Wall's heart is clearly in the right place as he describes and supports social movements and the struggles of indigenous peoples right across the globe.

His book is supportive of any movement, organisation or political party that is conducive to radical or "positive social change," embracing both struggles for social justice and ecological integrity.

It consists essentially of four topics: the politics of climate change, a manifesto and advocacy of Marxist eco-socialism, an outline and history of green anti-capitalist thought and a brief discussion of eco-socialism in Latin America.

The basic premise of the book is that eco-socialism can be found amongst "green parties, socialist movements, socialist groups and indigenous networks," that it has its origins in the politics of Karl Marx (2); and that it is necessary to gain "state-level power" in order to transform capitalism, thus achieving the transition to an eco-socialist society (143).

It is however not really a manifesto for eco-socialism; but rather a plea for it and like anarcho-capitalism is essentially a contradiction in terms.

Like many Marxists, Wall tends to conflate socialism with Marxism. He thus envisages some kind of dichotomy between socialism and anarchism. Yet apart from a brief mention of Edward Carpenter and Murray Bookchin, anarchism, that is libertarian socialism, is hardly mentioned in the entire text.

Bookchin, of course, is dismissed as a "sectarian" for his alleged "rejection" of socialism (85). But Bookchin was no more "sectarian" than the anarcho-primitivists, or those who fervently advocate the parliamentary politics of the Green Party - he just happened to be

rather abrasive and strident towards those he disagreed with. Wall disagrees with those who reject electoral politics, or belong to what he describes as the "purist left" (which includes the anarchists) he merely does so in a more benign fashion.

To suggest that Bookchin rejected socialism is quite untrue. He rejected Marxist authoritarian socialism. For most of his life Bookchin was an anarchist, that is a libertarian socialist. This he affirmed in one of his last essays on "communalism." Even so, in his last years, he was reluctant to call himself an anarchist, mainly because in the United States anarchism had become identified with primitivism, Stimerite individualism, and the obscurantist mysticism of Hakim Bey.

Nevertheless, Bookchin was a socialist, but a libertarian socialist or anarchist. Joel Kovel seems to be one Wall's key mentors and Bookchin was naturally critical of Kovel's embrace of the kind of statist politics derived from Marx - hence their split - and as Wall recognises, Bookchin was advocating an ecological critique of capitalism long before Kovel and the Marxists. In fact Kovel's book "The Enemy of Nature" simply appropriates Bookchin's essential thesis, with little acknowledgement.

Wall seems blissfully ignorant of the fact that there is a form of eco-socialism that is quite independent of Marxism. It was advocated long ago by such anarchists or libertarian socialists as Elise, Reclus, Peter Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer - all of whom were real ecological thinkers, unlike most Marxists who are now falling over themselves to affirm their green credentials! None of these libertarian socialists gets even a mention in Wall's text, although he does devote some discussion to eco-fascists like Rolf Gardiner and Rudolf Bahro.

As Wall is rather enamoured with contemporary political "leaders" like Evo Morales, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez it's hardly surprising that Wall fails to mention, let alone discuss, more contemporary anarchists such as Colin Ward, Peter Marshall and Graham Purchase, all of whom have sought to combine a libertarian socialist politics with an ecological sensibility.

An anarchist initiatives, ranging from

indigenous struggles over land rights to community-based organisations challenging environmental degradation, are to be acknowledged and supported. Electoral politics is a cul-de-sac, leading only to social democracy, or worse, a Marxist tyranny, as Bakunin predicted.

Derek Wall ends the book with the rallying call of William Morris: "Educate, agitate, organise." But it is well to remember that

Morris was a romantic and critical of industrialism.



When politically active he advocated an "anti-parliamentarian" form of socialism and thus, as Peter Marshall suggests, has more affinities with anarchism than he ever did with the Marxist politics of Engels and Hyndman, which were fundamentally authoritarian.

History seems to be repeating itself. Twenty-five years ago I reviewed Jonathon Porritt's early manifesto of the Ecology Party, "Seeing Green" (1984).

It was then dubbed as a "quaint organisation" by Porritt, who went on to write a book in support of a benign form of capitalism, and to become an advisor on environmental issues to Tony Blair and New Labour.

Let's hope Derek Wall (and Caroline Lucas) don't follow Porritt's political trajectory!

By Brian Morris



Hob's Choice

Welcome to the latest edition of Hob's Choice, Black Flag's pamphlet mini-review feature. None of the usual suspects make an appearance in this edition. We have a new and eclectic mix of radical pamphleteers offering a diverse fair of subversive literature. Thanks go out to the Bristol Radical History Group, Disophia, Class War Classix and AK Press for submitting a fine selection of publications. Additionally, special thanks go out to Hob's guest pamphlet reviewer Paul Petard, who takes a look at Dysophia and what the green anarchists are up to.

The Dysophia Series

Dysophia 0: Green Anarchism, tools for everyday life. October 2009. Dysophia 1: Anarchy & Polyamory. April 2010.

Dysophia 2: Population and Migration: An anarchist analysis of privilege in a time of climate chaos. October 2010.

A5 format. 16, 54 & 88pp.

dysophia.wordpress.com. Or c/o CRC, 16 Sholebroke Avenue, Leeds, LS7 3HB, UK.

The Dysophia imprint describes its purpose as publishing pamphlets and zines exploring issues and concepts around green anarchist thought, in a way that makes the issues accessible and provides space for a variety of viewpoints.

The pamphlets are generally well-written and reasonably well thought out. There is a genuine attempt here to encourage debate between different positions and tendencies rather than lay down one dogmatic line: "It is okay to challenge each other, it is okay to disagree. Knowledge does not have to be unified ..." (Dysophia 0)

Issues 1 and 2 present articles from different writers and sources and contributions are invited for future issues.

Issue 0 is a shorter, more basic introduction to core green anarchist principles, following the approach of Irving Horowitz, arguing that actual specific historical strands of anarchism were also expressions of more fundamental principles such as "mutual aid and solidarity" and "freedom & equality."

Dysophia believe the basic principles of all anarchism can be summed up in two statements:

1. That all shall be free and equal
2. That we shall extend mutual aid and solidarity where we can.

"Of course, we have to define what freedom, equality, mutual aid and solidarity actually mean." They then attempt a series of interdependent definitions of these principles.

As well as the problems in this approach of reducing things to basic ethical "fundamental" principles, and becoming a bit a-historical, I also have particular problems with aspects of green ideology. Dysophia argue for an earth-centred approach, shifting away



Green message: Utopia, by Delphine

from anthropocentric (human-centred) viewpoints.

But humans are inherently anthropocentric, it's kind of part of what makes them human in the first place. Dysophia are not unaware of this problem as they say: "Nor can we abdicate responsibility for it (the system) by simply blaming society as a whole. This is particularly hypocritical as we are actually seeking to change the society itself." (Dysophia 0, pg 14).

There is also the problem of romanticising and idealising "nature" as one harmonious and stable "holistic" thing, or unified system (before those bad humans came along).

In reality "nature" is not strictly one coherent ecosystem with one coherent set of laws, and there has always been an element of chaos and instability in nature.

Basic green starting points, such as "All resources are ultimately planet based" and "The earth sustains all life" (pgs 14 and 15) sound obvious and self-evident, but can be questioned. Even starting from a clumsy physiocratic viewpoint, a significant amount of the energy we use actually comes from the sun and not the earth, for example. The earth is just one component of the solar system, which is a small part of the galaxy, which is just a part of a bigger physical

universe, which is the material framework in which our life exists.

But what actually sustains our life is our own human labour. Our struggles around different forms of labour, whether in the formal 'workplace' or outside is a major key to changing ourselves, the wider society and our relation to the world.

Reading Dysophia 1: Anarchy & Polyamory, what sort of puzzles me about polyamory is just where do people get all the time and energy to have all these supposedly liberated polyamorous relationships?

And isn't there a danger polyamory, as a political principle, will become a new elitist orthodoxy? There are plenty of people who have enough trouble trying to find the time and energy just to try and keep together one relationship. And then there are many people who in practice don't even get one relationship.

A good quote on page 39 reads: "... you can't always have what you want, there aren't enough lovers to go around, no-one does polyamory perfectly, very few even do it well, and people are going to get hurt.

"Secondary partners probably worse than most. This isn't a dismissal of the concept, but it's something people need to face up to more ... and it's political - we're talking

The printed word and the 'art' of radical pamphleteering must be kept alive. It is a revolutionary tradition that cannot be allowed to die.



about inequality and privilege."

In as far as Dysohia 2: Population and Migration goes, maybe I'm misreading it, but some of the stuff seems to have the tone that most people in the "developed" urban world are inherently "privileged" because of excessive resource use the cities impose elsewhere.

This sounds a bit like saying that most people in prison are "privileged" because they are maintained by ordinary taxpayers etc. The majority of the population in urban centres, even in the west, are exploited prisoners in an economic gulag.

Bristol Radical Pamphleteer Series

BRP#5 John Locke: The Philosopher of Primitive Accumulation by George Caffentzis. 2008.

BRP#6 The Life and Times of Warren James: Free Miner From The Forest of Dean by Ian Wright. 2008.

BRP#14 Anarchism in Bristol and the West Country to 1950 by Steve Hunt. 2010.

A5 format. 13, 15 & 36pp.

Price £1.50 each. www.brh.org.uk

The Bristol Radical Pamphleteer is the imprint of the Bristol Radical History Group. The series to date has published around 16 titles on the radical history of Bristol and the surrounding area. Their titles are incredibly diverse, ranging from Anglo-Saxon democracy to the slave trade and radical beer and illicit tobacco cultivation to black American servicemen during WW2! All fascinating stuff. As a taster to what's on offer the publisher sent us a couple of samples.

BRP#5: John Locke is described by the American author as a Bristol "home boy" and in this paper he explains why he believes Locke was the philosopher of primitive accumulation. In an academic style Caffentzis looks at the work of Locke surrounding the origin of property in land and money, largely based upon his own academic work Locke. Clipped Coins, Abused Words and Civil Government.

Locke is described as the main intellectual founder of liberalism, but also of neo-liberalism, the "ruling idea" of the ruling class today. My problem with this pamphlet is that there is an assumption that the reader already has a clear understanding of what the theories of primitive accumulation are. The author does briefly refer to Marx's thoughts on the matter, again assuming that everyone has read Capital (and understood it!).

BRP#6: For centuries the inhabitants of the Forest of Dean delved a living from the forest; mining coal and iron ore, utilizing timber and allowing their animals to graze freely in the forest.

The burgeoning state became fearful of the rebellious and fiercely independent miners. Businessmen attempted to tap into the profitability factor of the forest and the Crown attempted to enclose the forest and curtail the miners' rights, enjoyed since

Magna Carta.

In 1831 poverty and starvation culminated in social unrest and rioting. A leading spokesman for the miners was Warren James. Miners and their families destroyed around 60 miles of fencing and the homes of the local gentry were attacked. The authorities called in the militia who failed to quell the unrest.

Subsequently the military intervened, who proved to be more than a match for the Foresters. James and a number of others were arrested. James and another were sentenced to death, later commuted to deportation and nine went to prison. This is a recommended read – the exciting thing about local radical history is that it is relevant to everyone, whether it's in the Forest of Dean, the Peak District or the inner city, it reflects working class struggle against the ruling classes, wherever authoritarianism raises its ugly head.

BRP#14: A standard but interesting work plotting the history of anarchism and libertarian socialist ideas in Bristol from the early 1800's (However, the author acknowledges the "proto-anarchist" argument was published in 1756 by Edmund Burke - who later became an MP!) stopping short in 1950.

That is as stated in the title, yet the latest historical reference I could find was 1945 when Freedom Bookshop returned to London having spent a year in the city. The author acknowledges that post-World War 2 anarchism in the area "would be a project for another day." Watch this space.

Class War Classix

Anti Fascist Compilation. Various. Summer 2010.

The Workers' Committee: An outline of its Principles and Structure. JT Murphy. Summer 2010.

Putting Socialism into Practice by Clifford Allen. Summer 2009.

A5 format. 38, 38 & 20pp. Price £1 each.

dr_trevorbark@fastmail.net

mayday-magazine.vpweb.co.uk

The leading light behind this imprint is Trevor Bark, who also edits and publishes Mayday magazine as well as running the Working Class Book Fair.

Trevor is attempting with his various initiatives to "use libertarian and New Left organisational and political history as a guide to help forge a new anarcho-marxist synthesis in the 21st century, tentatively called Red Anarchism." Personally, I am tentatively supportive of such initiatives in the interests of solidarity, class struggle and internationalism, but am not so keen on the label – why not stick to the tried and tested Libertarian Marxist/Socialist tag?

The anti-fascist pamphlet comprises of three articles, entitled: Popular Front Anti Fascism; Autonomous Anti Fascism and British Fascism Past and Present. It is published as a contribution to the ongoing

anti fascist debate.

Trevor declares that the way forward is anti fascist autonomy – defined as finding space between the traditional labour/TU movement and what he describes as the ultra-left; "a horizontal popular front of anti-fascism founded upon the progressive sensibilities ordinary working people already have."

Whilst respecting Trevor's conviction, commitment and admirable sentiments, on this point I have to disagree. The fight against fascism is the fight against capitalism, born out of independent working class organisation, solidarity, class struggle and internationalism. Popular frontism inevitably leads activists down blind alleys, leaving them open to manipulation and exploitation. Let us beg to differ.

The second pamphlet is a facsimile reprint of Putting Socialism into Practice, which was the 1924 Presidential address to the Independent Labour Party conference.

I question the usefulness of this pamphlet as a contribution to, in Trevor's own words, a 21st century anarcho-Marxist synthesis, let alone a class struggle revolutionary movement. The ILP was a pacifist, parliamentary socialist propaganda group – another bourgeois party.

The third pamphlet is on The Workers' Committee, first published in 1917 and was the main theoretical document of the shop stewards movement of the day.

This is a useful document in as far as it talks about various types of workers' committees; ranging from workshop, to local to national committees. It advocates recallable delegates and was widely critical of the ineffectiveness of the traditional trade unions, their leadership and the bureaucratic nature of the unions themselves.

Trevor Bark believes that in essence, such organisations formed the embryonic stage of fully-fledged workers' councils.

I agree that there is potential in researching and discussing further such organisations from a revolutionary perspective, that is, if the vision of the organisation is in itself revolutionary. That "stewards" are indeed truly recallable shop floor delegates, and that the organisations are indeed working against the bureaucratic and bourgeois apologist nature of the trade union movement. Aye to independent working class organisations and aye to the movement for workers' councils!

■ Publishers are invited to submit newly published or recent pamphlets for a min-review. Each review will include publishing details, content summary and occasional comment. Comprehensive book reviews will continue to be published elsewhere in Blag Flag.

By Ade Dimmick
and Paul Petard



Douglass reloaded

Dave Douglass

Firstly my thanks to Alan Woodward for doing me the honour of reading my trilogy, most of everything else I have penned over the years, and for reviewing in such a comprehensive way my work. Thanks too to Black Flag for their excellent presentation and publication of Alan's piece.

There are no sour grapes in this response, only one or two corrections.

Alan is confused by the trilogy's chronology and what seems like repetition between the first book *Geordies Wa Mental* and the second, *The Wheel's Still In Spin*. This is due to Alan reading an earlier edition of *Geordies* which is not part of the *Christiebooks* trilogy.

In the first publication I hadn't known if the rest of the story would ever come out and compressed the period to include events from the second book. When the chance came for the whole trilogy to be published I replaced the chronology to its proper cycle.

The first publication was inadvertently pulped and only a couple of hundred of them ever made it through the net, so Alan's copy is quite rare.

I left the Young Communist League in Newcastle by 1964 not 1969 and soon after my departure to anarchism the whole branch was closed down for dalliance with Trotskyism and anarchism.

The book tells of my seduction by Trotskyist-Posadism* by 1969-70 but I wouldn't, as Alan does, call this or anything else I was associated with at that time, like *The Mineworker* a "Communist Party front organisation."

Review Responses: Dave Douglass, Ade Dimmick and Nick Heath add to Alan Woodward's review in issue 232 of Stardust and Coaldust, Douglass's autobiographical trilogy

The Communist Party of Great Britain hated me with a vengeance at this time and stood candidates against me in every election I was in right up until 1992, trying to displace me from the position of Branch Delegate at Hatfield Main colliery and block my further period on the NUM Yorkshire Area Executive Committee.

Likewise at the very end of the piece there is a suggestion I was a member or supporter of The International Socialists (the predecessor of the Socialist Workers Party). I dunno where this came from but I never got with the IS or the SWP, let alone been a member of either.

I also think Alan misunderstands my confession to having composited events and people at key periods of illegal activity.

The events in the book are all real, but I am not going to put a precise date with the actual people who undertook them. So I have fitted into one timeframe a fusion of actual events, and merged some of the characters who asked me not to link them to what occurred.

This means that historians can be sure these things happened, while some of the players around at the time are mentioned, without actually giving cops the name, rank and serial number of the action and its activists.

My nickname, then and now in the Doncaster coalfield, Danny The Red, was drawn from the public exposure of Daniel Cohn Bendit, prominent at the time for his role as a student leader in France '68 - and I seemed to fit the same persona.

Wise pitmen would often use Bendit's French nickname "Danny La Rouge," but this was sometimes mistaken for the famous drag act Danny La Rue, which didn't help my attempts at steely-eyed Bolshevism. I'm still known as Danny in the coalfields though folk have long forgotten how I got that name.

I'm a bit mystified by Alan's comment that I do not refer to "the tumultuous events" of 1968 unless he means specifically Cohn Bendit's account. The *Wheel's Still In Spin* has a whole chapter about that year on the streets and industry of Britain, Europe and across the world.

Specifically on Paris, a subheading

Days In the Life Of ... (pg 31/32) takes a snapshot of the unfolding revolutionary period. I gave a chronology of the French general strike, so have not as Alan says excluded it.

The support then for national liberation struggles perhaps seems strange to modern libertarian, anti-state eyes, but to us then and to me even yet, it made absolute principled sense.

Imperialism was plundering the third world, robbing its wealth and assassinating by the million those who fought to break free and develop their own social systems.

We might not like the final shape of that social system and would support all efforts to bring around an egalitarian society as part of a world struggle for communism. But in the meantime we stood with the resistance fighters who challenged imperialism and in particular its world representative, US imperialism.

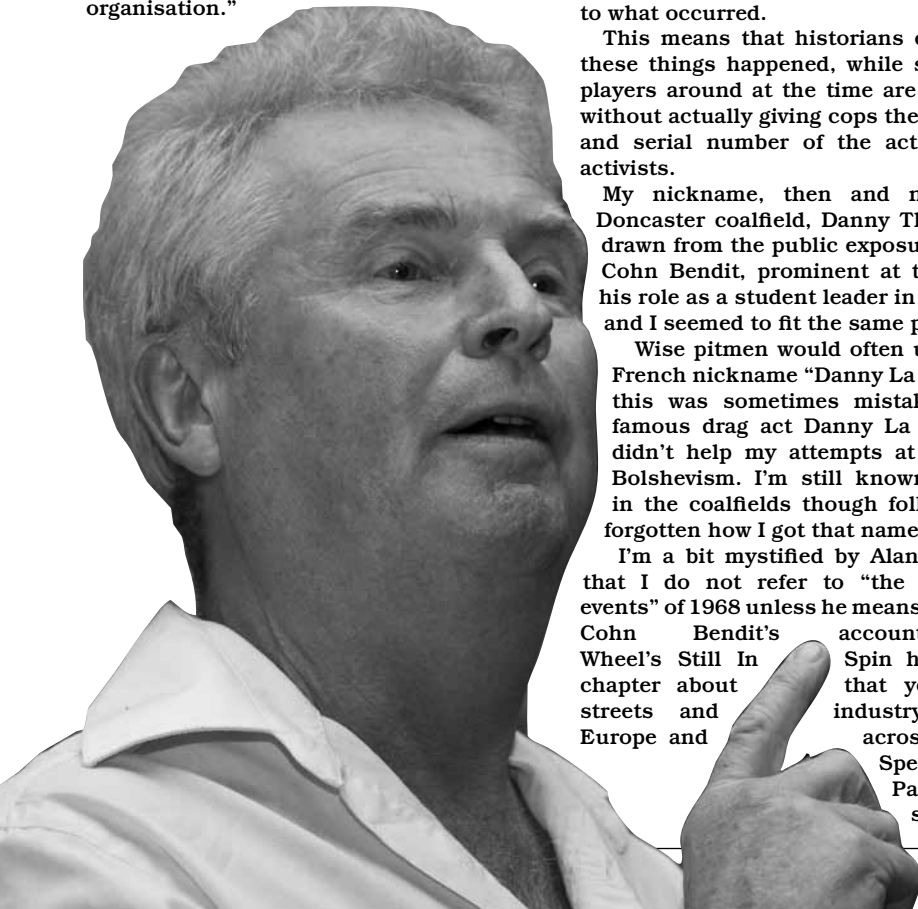
Like the class struggle and the arguments about "the unions" here, you can't opt out of the fight which is actually on, or simply out of your imagination invent combat organisations as pure as you would rather exist rather than those which do.

Actually within those national liberation struggles the class struggle continued, and this was true of the last period of Irish resistance too.

I spend a whole chapter in *Ghost Dancers* trying to trace the degeneration of the Provisional movement from a revolutionary republican socialist organisation in which genuine communists could fight for their vision of secularism and workers' control, to the Establishment party we see today. So I hope I do have a clue as to "what" happened.

"Why" is a different quality of question, that is posed at traitors of all sorts through all periods of history and all organisations, from unions, to parties, movements and revolutions which consciously sell short their roots and principles.

We know that if we don't take steps, whatever team and platform we work on and with, to stop it happening, it will happen again. Why always and apparently inevitably? No I don't know the answer to that, but because we know it is inherent in all organisational structures we are forewarned and must build in counterbalances and safeguards from the beginning.





Interesting times: Police lining up against miners in the 1984 strike and (below) Dave Douglass on the picket line. Bottom left, Douglass today

Remember the instruction of revolutionary James Connolly to the Irish Citizen's Army as they took to the streets in rebellion in 1916: "Should we achieve an independent Ireland, hang onto your guns, for there are those who will stop before our aim is reached, and rob us of the conclusion to the revolution." Wise words in all struggles of the class I have found.

On the subject of martial training, I started myself as a student of karate in 1974 and am now a third Dan in the Shukoki variant, as well as a green belt in Aikido which I have taken up instead of contact Karate.

It started purely as a means of trying to fight myself out of the effects of a nervous breakdown, the result of hard underground toil and ceaseless revolutionary endeavor. I still believe the workers' movement must take self defence and preparation for revolution seriously, it must be at least embryonically trained and prepared for all forms of armed and unarmed combat.

We had founded the Embryonic Military Caucus around 1975 and although we trained numerous key workers from across the British Isles we never once succeeded in winning any of the left groups to this strategy.

It's the one field of revolutionary strategy in which the "vanguard" becomes the rearguard, and believes the workers "will just know what to do."

As it turned out our greatest accolade was to come from Ian McGregor, Thatcher's commander-in-chief of the anti-NUM coalfield strategy. Commenting on that period he tells us "we had numerous reports of our young miners being trained in insurgency practices, but didn't realise



how effective they would be until the fight was on."

I think I can now say from this distance in time that had the state moved, as it was ready to, toward the use of plastic bullets, tear gas and outright deployment of armed forces against the coalfield areas, they would have been met with something

somewhat stronger than bricks and insults – and with units ready to take the conflict to another level.

So whilst it might look fanciful from where we stand now, you can be assured we were much more than paintballing on the moors or surviving in the snow.

On the question of the Socialist Labour Party, Alan is right. Having already dedicated a section of All Power To The Imagination previously to this subject, and already massively overcommitted in word length I didn't mention it again in Ghost Dancers.

The obscenely bureaucratic tricks and maneuvers used in the SLP were rapidly deployed to aid Arthur Scargill's obsession with holding onto power within the NUM.

I'm afraid despite the tiny size of the NUM today, less than 2,000 members, the long-suffering membership is still fighting Arthur's internal guerilla war and external legal war through the courts and tribunals in a kind of spiteful spoiling tirade aimed at stopping the union from functioning without him in command, even to the point of taking us onto the rocks.

Finally on Alan's fact file there is another relevant book, *Strike Not The End Of The Story* - Reflections on national miners' strikes.

Published by the National Coal Mining Museum For England, the museum and underground visit are well worth a trip and the bookshop is the only place where this potted history of 150 years of miners' struggles can be bought.

Ade Dimmick

In his article cum review (BF 232), The

* Posadism is one of the oddest sects in Trotskyism, most famous for believing that aliens will come down from space and bring the human race to socialism.



Definitive Dave Douglass, Alan Woodward makes reference to the Communist Workers Organisation "whoever they were." He later notes that the CWO, amongst others "are gone."

I would like to take the opportunity to remind Alan, and enlighten any readers who may have been misled by Alan's oversight.

The Communist Workers Organisation is a left-communist organisation which was founded in 1975 following a merger

A number of comrades involved in this microcosmic communist milieu also saw an embryonic developmental phase in the influential group Solidarity which was founded in 1960; surviving until 1992. In its time Solidarity helped spawn such groups as Wildcat (Manchester), Here & Now (Glasgow) and Subversion.

In fact today, almost every comrade who meets the SAGA Holiday age criteria admits a fraternal affinity to Solidarity. Indeed, the

In 2009 the IBRP became known as the Internationalist Communist Tendency. As well as the UK the ICT has sections in the USA, Canada, Germany and France.

The CWO publishes a quarterly journal called *Revolutionary Perspectives*, an agitational bulletin called *Aurora* and numerous pamphlets.

Nick Heath

In his review of Dave Douglass's three-volume autobiography Alan Woodward describes Daniel Cohn Bendit as a "German council-communist."

Whilst Cohn-Bendit was of German Jewish descent (his parents had fled to France in 1933) he was actually born in Montauban in France in 1945 and spent the first 13 years of his life there, returning in 1966.

Stateless at birth, he chose German citizenship at the age of 14 in order to avoid conscription in France. Perhaps a better description of him would be "Franco-German."

Whilst he was undoubtedly influenced by council communism, he had been a member of the Federation Anarchiste and then of the Nanterre Anarchist Group, of which he was a member during the events of 1968. He was also associated with the excellent anarchist communist journal *Noir et Rouge* at the same time.

Alan's characterisation of the controversy over the unions between Dave Douglass and others seems a bit wide of the mark. Firstly, to characterise all these critics of Dave's views on the unions as libertarian is wrong. The Communist Workers Organisation is a left communist group, very much in the Bordigist vein.

To describe these critics as leading "a crude, ill-advised and fundamentally incorrect" assault on Dave's ideas on the unions is merely Alan's opinion and bears little relation to what was actually said at the time.

In the same review Gorter and Pannekoek are praised for their views about the trade unions, whilst somehow those described as "disciples" putting forward the same views in the debate are described as confused.

The Anarchist Federation has not collectively moderated its views on the unions as anyone reading its literature can see. Certainly there was far too much of a personalised attack on Dave Douglass in some of the polemic that one member of the AF had with him. This is regrettable and is now seen as such by that comrade.

But to conflate all of the critics into one monolithic bloc and not recognise the important differences between these different critics is a mistake.

However, the fundamental assertion that workers had to develop their own action and organisation independent of the unions was and is still an essentially correct position.

Finally the assertion in the review that International Socialism was at one time libertarian bears no relation to reality. Certainly it had at its inception a far looser structure than its descendant the Socialist Workers Party and toyed with Luxemburgism for a short period.

Nevertheless it was always essentially Leninist (and never libertarian) in its outlook and orientation, as was borne out by its subsequent history.



Trained to fight: Strikers attack a scab van (top) and Douglass during the struggle

of Workers Voice and *Revolutionary Perspectives*.

Around the same time discussions took place with *Revolution Internationale* (France) and *World Revolution* – the latter two going on to form the International Communist Current.

writer himself continues to work to this day with former Solidarity members and has done since the '60's.

In 1983 the CWO joined with the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy) to form the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.



Flags and the little black mask: Scenes from inside the black bloc

In pictures: March 26th





Legal schmeagle:

Police in the Moscow region detain activists protesting against the illegal chopping down of a forest to clear the way for a new road. There have been serious clashes for several years over the project, which aims to drive a highway through the Khimki green belt.

Pictures: Daniel Bellinson

