

# Black Flag

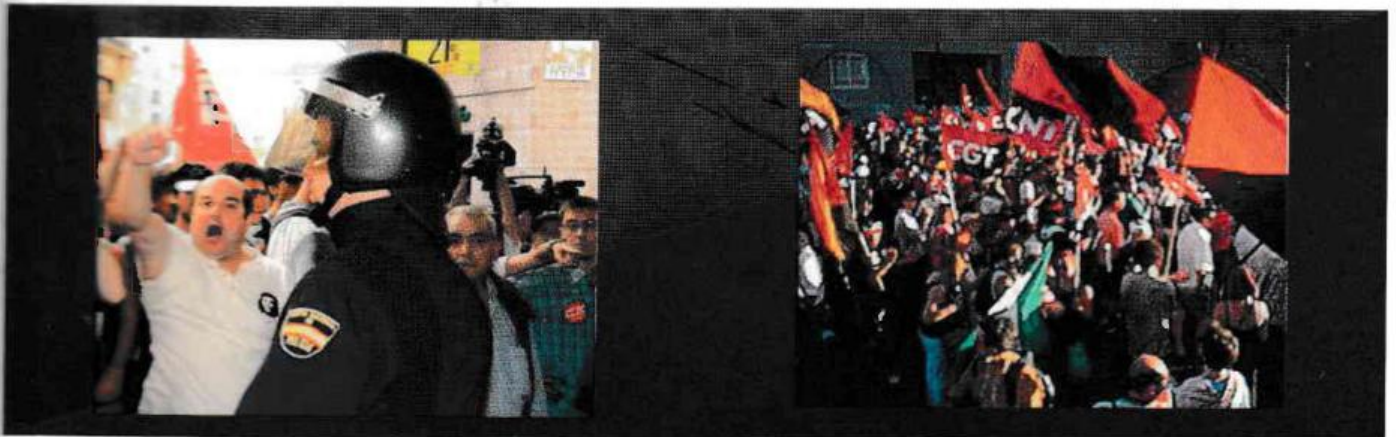
FOR ANARCHIST

RESISTANCE

## Back to



## Basics



*Direct Action, Solidarity, Self-Management*



# Black Flag

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.

**Black Flag,**  
**BM Hurricane**  
**London wc1n 3xx**

**E-mail**  
blackflageds@hushmail.com

**Website**  
flag.blackened.net/blackflag

Subscription – Per Four Issues  
Inland UK & Europe – £8.00  
Rest of World (Surface) – £10.00  
Rest of World (Airmail) – £16.00

**Bulk Orders**  
AK Press, PO Box 12766  
Edinburgh EH8, 0131 555 5165  
AK America, San Francisco  
PO Box 40862, CA 94140-0682  
Black Flag is distributed free  
to prisoners by Haven  
Distribution 27 Old  
Gloucester Street, London  
WC1N 3XX  
**Printing**  
Clydeside Press, 0141  
552 5519  
Giro Account No.  
585524009

## editorial

In his seminal *"Modern Science and Anarchism,"* Kropotkin argued that anarchism as we know it today germinated in the First International. Its "main idea," he continued, was "a direct struggle of Labour against Capital in the economic field – i.e. the emancipation of Labour, not by middle-class legislation, but by the working men themselves."

These are the basics we need to get back to. Direct action is much more than just demonstrating (however vigorously), necessary though that is. It is about working class people fighting back where we are directly oppressed and exploited by capital and the state, in our communities and workplaces. It is about resisting the powerful by building our own power, the power of solidarity, self-organisation and self-management. It means fighting for reforms, both minor and major by our own efforts and own organisations. It means prefiguring the new society while fighting this one.

It is time to get "back to basics," remember where anarchism comes from (social struggle) and apply our ideas where they matter, in the mundane everyday issues that matter to people. Unless we do that, a great opportunity will be missed. Hence our front page.

We at **Black Flag** know that this is not easy. We know how atomised many communities and workplaces are. We know we have argued this before (and will do so again). We also know that many anarchists are doing exactly this. What we need to do now is to start working together in order to aid these tendencies, to concentrate on the basics we all share rather than the minor points which divide us (particularly if these points concern hypothetical future events or developments!). We need to start working out how we can apply the basic ideas and ideals our politics are based on – working class direct action, solidarity and self-management. As Argentina shows, they can change the world!

We have made a few changes in this issue of **Black Flag**. The news section is much smaller, reflecting the fact that we have been less regular in coming out recently. We have limited the news sections to that of interest to anarchists and/or not that well known. Instead, we have concentrated on more in depth articles which will provoke thought and action.

Lastly, there is the usual call for people to get involved. Any anarchist magazine is dependent on members of our movement contributing articles. If you expect others to do this for you, then you are missing the whole point of our politics. *Back to basics* is equally applicable within our movement as it is within the class struggle. Unless you get off your arse and contribute (news reports, articles, book reviews, pictures, etc.) then no anarchist journal can survive for long. If you want **Black Flag** to keep going then it is a case of showing solidarity (i.e. fund raising, selling it) and practising direct action (i.e. helping out).

We hope to produce **Black Flag** more frequently next year. Reflecting this, the deadline for the next issue is February the 14th.

## Contents

### NEWS

- 03 SMI/LPM/internationals  
March on Sandton  
The Street is mightier than  
Le Pen  
General Strike Shuts down  
Spain  
Collective Nouns for  
Anarchists
- 04 Immigrant's Occupation in  
Seville  
Strike Paralyzes Toronto  
Class struggle in China
- 05 No Borders in Strasbourg  
Resistance in Italy
- 06 Machete power beats the  
state  
Argentina: The Struggle  
Continues

### FEATURES

- 07 "You Can't Live on a Web  
Page": Privatisation and  
Gentrification, Reaction  
and Resistance in  
Hackney's 'Regeneration  
State'
- 12 Justice - A bourgeois  
concept?
- 14 Changing the way we  
think of Direct Action

- 19 A Blast from the past...
- 20 Vive l'Anarchie:  
An Interview with  
French  
Anarchists
- 27 The Algerian Insurrection
- 30 Anarcha-Feminism in  
Bolivia

### PRISONERS

- 33 Fight for Life  
Satpal Ram Free at Last!  
Mark Barnsley released  
from Whitemoor prison

### REVIEWS

- 34 Storming Heaven  
Freedom Fighters
- 35 The Spanish Civil War
- 36 Fast Food Nation
- 38 Direct Action  
Workers Against Lenin



*"Conquer or die —  
such is the dilemma  
that faces the  
Ukrainian peasants  
and workers at this  
historic moment. But  
we cannot all die, for  
we are innumerable  
— we are mankind.  
Therefore, we will  
conquer. But we will  
not conquer in order  
to repeat the errors of  
the past years, the  
error of putting our  
fate into the hands of  
new masters; we will  
conquer in order to  
take our destinies into  
our own hands, to  
conduct our lives  
according to our own  
will and our own  
conception of the  
truth." Nestor Makhno*



South Africa:

## SMI/LPM/internationals march on Sandton!

About 20,000 protestors (1) from the Social Movements Indaba, the Landless Peoples Movement and other sub-national and international social justice organisations of the poor marched under blazing skies on the World Summit on Sustainable Development on August 31st.

Thousands of residents of the poor township of Alexandra turned out to cheer on the marchers with revolutionary songs from South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle - now directed against the ANC-Inkatha Freedom Party neoliberal regime. Hot weather, transport problems and an attempt by ANC marshalls to divert 20 buses of SMI/LPM supporters to their own sham "non-governmental" march lead to a lower than expected turnout.

But spirits were high and the mood of international solidarity was fantastic, with protestors from Palestine to Tibet (both fighting occupation), from Bolivia (where last year, anti-privatisation protests beat back multinational Bechtel) to Pakistan, and just about anywhere else you care to mention.

As water poured off fake waterfalls at Sandton City, near the convention centre, thirsty marchers who were not allowed by police to even buy water from nearby shops were forced to drink from a mud-hole in the pavement where a water main had burst.

Despite the attempts of some international media crews to drum up a scare story when they encountered a few anarchists, some of whom were masked up to prevent identification by police, the protest - anarchists included - was entirely peaceful and included children, one in a wheelchair, and pregnant women.

But the message to the ruling elite when we got to Sandton was uncompromising: the SMI told the world's media that if the ANC did not stop riding rough-shod over the poor, they would remove them from power in the same way they removed the apartheid regime.

Global arch-terrorist George Bush junior came in for a solid verbal drubbing as did the Israeli neo-apartheid regime - and all the fat-cats of the WSSD, some of whom pecked at the protestors from behind the "ring of steel" (as the local media likes to call police cordons).

In the end, the boys in blue never got to swing their nightsticks, the army vehicles with their turret-mounted machine-guns were impotent displays of testosterone and the police warhorses merely fertilised the streets of what before we arrived was the most sterile suburb in the country.

The movement surges forward!

Michael (Bikisha Media)  
www.zabalaza.net

(1) Which means we fielded 10 times the numbers that the so-called "non-governmental" ANC-backed march did! The United Social Movement is now a bigger presence on the streets of South Africa than the neoliberal ANC-SACP-Cosatu troika!

### *Collective nouns for anarchists...*

From the latest batch of Nixon tapes, as reported by Paul Slansky in New Yorker. Nixon refers to the anti-war movement as:

**"A wild orgasm of anarchists sweeping across the country like a prairie fire."**

## The street is mightier than Le Pen

Tens of thousands of French people took to the streets when the news spread that fascist candidate Le Pen had made it into the second round of the Presidential elections. The anti-Le Pen opposition quickly gathered force, became bigger, more violent and more organised.

More than 10,000 people vented their rage at the results in Paris demonstrations on Sunday and Monday

night at the Place de la Bastille, Place de la Republique and Place de la Concorde - traditional rallying points since the French Revolution. Each time, police were forced to fire tear-gas grenades to disperse the crowds after a small hard core of militants clashed with them. Some protestors threw Molotov cocktails, while others broke windows and telephone cabins and damaged parked vehicles. Thirteen police officers were slightly injured and 14 youths were arrested.

In the rest of France, similar disturbances erupted without warning. On the Monday, a total of 100,000 people marched through Lyon, Lille, Marseille, Bordeaux and other towns and cities. In Tours, anti-globalisation militant Jose Bove marched at the head of a

12,000-strong crowd. More militant protests were swelling early on Tuesday in the towns of Le Havre, Rouen,

and even in the southern Le Pen stronghold of Toulon.

Most were started by high school and university students, who streamed out of classes to parade past startled police. They soon gathered force as others stepped into line. A climax was reached on May 1, when millions of protestors took to the streets across France. In Paris, a flood of humanity showed how small Le Pen's support actually is. The election results simply confirmed this wave of popular revolt.



### General Strike shuts down Spain

The Spanish general strike over "reforms" of the labour law was great success. Timed to coincide with the EU summit in Seville, the reformist unions claimed 84% backing. The government claimed support was "very slight," a claim belied by the facts!

Mass demonstrations occurred across Spain, during the strike, involving millions of people. Many cities, including Vigo, Seville, Madrid and Barcelona saw over 100,000 marching.

The syndicalist unions took an active part. Not happy with just striking, they also tried to shut down workplaces which were still open. Such pickets were active in the whole country.

Madrid saw all the syndicalist unions working together in calling for a strike, picketing and demonstrating together. They denounced the practice of the reformist unions and argued that the General Strike should be "a starting point and not a cul-de-sac." They argued that workers need to "build another type" of unionism, "based on class demands and struggle, through the participation and decisions of workers through assemblies." This was the "only mechanism to face the aggressions of the European Union and capitalist Globalisation."

Some 15,000 demonstrated as part of the Syndical Coordinating Committee, which unites all the syndicalist unions (the CNT, CGT and Solidaridad Obrera). Slogans included "Syndical Unity? Yes, but to fight!", "Apply the Foreigners' Law to the Monarchy" and "The Solution? Revolution!"

The joint red-and-black demo is encouraging as it is the largest so far in Madrid and shows that the syndicalist organisations in Spain are learning to fight together.



# Immigrants Occupation in Seville

The two hundred and seventy immigrants who were occupying the Universidad Pablo de Olavide in Seville were evicted by riot police on the eighth of August. They had been occupying the University demanding papers for over two months. One hundred and twenty eight of them were taken into custody and are now in a detention centre in Ceuta, segregated from other inmates. The others remain in Spain but are at risk from intensive police checks in the area.

Spanish immigration law was, until recently, comparatively open because of the need for cheap agricultural workers. However now Spain is part of the European-wide

immigration crackdown. The occupation came about after immigrants from the Magreb, who had been employed in the strawberry harvest in Huelva, Andalucia, were replaced by Polish immigrants brought in on temporary work permits. The previous mainly Algerian and Moroccan workers had begun to organise and get higher wages so the employers were trying to substitute workers who were ignorant of local labour conditions and unlikely to attract support from other workers locally.

There have been lots of occupations throughout Spain in the last few years of churches, public squares, government buildings and universities by groups of immigrants demanding regularisation and many have been successful. This latest occupation, initially

involving over four hundred people, mainly Algerians, coincided with the EU summit in Seville in June. In this case the state tried to divide the occupiers by offering papers to a limited number, and attacking as outside agitators the support groups who were raising money for food. (Four hundred people eat a lot.)

The situation in Huelva shows the danger of different groups of immigrants being played off against each other to compete for who can work for the lowest wages. The situation of the Polish workers is an example of a method of exploitation the EU wants to increase. As they only have work permits for a defined short term

contract, they can be employed for a specific job and then must leave or become illegal. This is exactly what the state wants: cheap taxpaying labourers that will not be able to stay and use any public services, who can be called and returned on demand.

Mara



## Strike Paralyzes Toronto

The end of June saw the start of the largest strike by city workers in Canadian history, with a walkout by 23,500 municipal workers paralyzing Toronto. After 10 days, piles of rotting rubbish lined the streets and public services were suspended.

City employees who handle rubbish and other outdoor services were joined nine days later by Toronto's indoor municipal workers. This meant that city-run museums, galleries and day-care centres were closed, building and parking permits were unavailable and restaurants did not undergo health inspections.

The workers said they were striking over job security, not money. They're afraid of losing their livelihoods if the city privatises public services. Toronto guarantees lifetime employment to any full-time, permanent, unionised city worker with at least 10 years on the job. City employees want that guarantee to begin after six years. "City politicians seem determined to go down the road of contracting out and privatisation of dozens of services in this city" said one union's national president.

After 16 days, the strikers returned to their jobs. This was after the Ontario legislature passed back-to-work legislation forcing workers to return to their jobs (using "public health" as the justification). It should be noted that it was the left-wing socialist New Democratic Party which ensured the end of the strike.

The city's Mayor predictably argued that he could not afford the deal workers want. "The real world doesn't get jobs for life," he said. "Where are we going to get the money?" At the same time, Canada held the G8 summit in Kanaskis, Alberta, its biggest internal peace-time military operation ever. While being unable to find money for city employees, money was found for the G8's security costs (estimated to be \$300,000 million and included anti-aircraft tanks plus 4,500 soldiers as well as police from across Canada).

## Class struggle in China

March saw the class war in China heat-up.

Mid-March saw tens of thousands of sacked workers surrounding the main office at China's largest oilfield in protest against cuts in their lay-off benefits. Up to 50,000 protesters gathered every day at the Daqing oil field in north-eastern Heilongjiang province for nearly two weeks. The workers were protesting against cuts in severance pay and heating subsidies promised them when they were sacked three years ago, and an increase in unemployment insurance premiums.

The end of March saw large-scale labour unrest shaking two cities in northern China's industrial zone. Unpaid and laid off workers protested, massing 10,000-strong to face off with military police.

In Liaoyang, an industrial centre in the Liaoning province, columns of military police protected the city government office (on Democracy Road). The crisis erupted when 600 workers blocked the main highway to the provincial capital Shenyang. Reports stated that hundreds of armed police moved in at midnight to clear the highway and dozens of people were injured. Undeterred, more than 1,000 factory workers besieged the city hall, demanding unpaid wages and the release of four detained labour leaders.

In Daqing, an oil town in northern China's Heilongjiang province, up to 50,000 workers demonstrated. There have also been smaller demonstrations in the capital Beijing and in the south-western province of Sichuan.

Such demonstrations, which have been growing in the region since early March, are unusual in China, where the government keeps a tight rein on protests and uses threats and force to discourage any anti-government activism. However, the government has also acknowledged that workers are suffering from widespread closures of inefficient and outdated state firms. Farmers have joined in to protest not being paid by bankrupt factories that were built on their lands.



# No Borders in Strasbourg

The Strasbourg No Border camp during the last week of July was one of a series of protest camps organised on important international borders.

Strasbourg was chosen because of the Schengen Information System computer which is located there, which contains information on all the known immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe. The camp brought together three thousand participants from all over Europe, especially France and Germany. Some people had travelled from Latin America, and there was a big presence of immigrants mainly from North Africa. The purpose of the camp was to bring people together for discussion and action. Every day there were a series of discussions and a demonstration or action in the town.

On Wednesday the demonstration was attacked by the police with gas, charges and rubber bullets. They broke the leg of one protester and arrested thirty people, one of whom was later sent down for eight months. The next day the police declared all demonstrations in Strasbourg illegal, and criminalised any group of more than five people in the street and any one with a flag or banner and any handing out of leaflets. After this announcement an atmosphere of fear and panic took over in the camp for a short while. An imminent



police attack was feared which, given the large numbers of small children and *sans papiers* (undocumented people) in the camp, would have been disastrous. The repression achieved its object to some extent as we had to devote a lot of time and energy on how to demonstrate without endangering the camp and how to leave the camp at the end ensuring everyone's safety. We had up till that point been touring the banlieus (estates) every day with a bus and music making links with the poor communities of Strasbourg. After the criminalisation we were asked not to come as the people feared police repression, so one of the most important aspects of the camp was stopped. However we continued to demonstrate in Strasbourg city centre every day with music, street theatre and banner drops.

Arrests happened continuously and so did

solidarity demos; there were pickets of hundreds of people outside the court and police station. The support we received from the Strasbourgeois on these was very welcome as people cheered us and abused the police as we were arrested or forcibly bussed back to the camp. On the last day there were two demonstrations, one in the centre of Strasbourg and one which tried to go to the Schengen computer. This march made it perhaps two hundred yards down the road before being blocked by lines of riot police, and so detoured into Germany, and went from there to the other demo by train via the jail. The crowd was again attacked by the police with gas but there was not the carnage we had been scared of.

The daily life of the camp - cooking, toilet digging, security - was organised around a series of barrios with communal kitchens and a daily meeting. At times the

functioning of the camp was in danger of taking over from all other activity as the amount of work needed was immense. Political discussions, which had to be translated into five languages, often started at midnight as people arrived late from the demos and then had to eat, by which time most people were drunk. However the experience of collective living and decision making, experimenting with structures and methods, was inspiring. It was very different from an action like Genoa where it felt to many people that all the crucial decisions had been made beforehand and we were passive consumers of an event. Self organised immigrant groups like MIB (Immigrants Movement in the Banlieus) from France or Voice from Germany had been involved in the organising from the start and the human interaction in the camp was a great experience. Learning and shouting chants in different languages on the demos made international solidarity feel like something real instead of a leftie cliché (although the **Black Flag** contingent did walk around Germany for hours shouting 'short people are illegal' due to an unfortunate pronunciation error). If we are searching for a new tactic for international actions, this looks like the way to go.

Mara

## RESISTANCE IN ITALY

March 27th saw the Italian working class once again demonstrating that it will not allow itself to be walked all over by the Berlusconi's vicious attacks on their social conditions. Three million people demonstrated in Rome bringing it to a standstill - and this despite the state's clear message that it is prepared to return to the 'strategy of tension' of earlier years, if these protests continue. The target of this demo was the labour reforms that will make it easier for bosses to fire workers, then re-hire them at lowered wages.

### General Strike in Italy

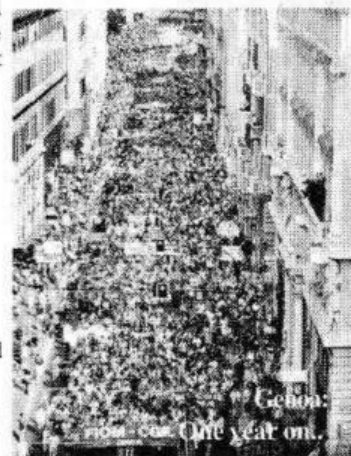
April 16th saw Italy grind to a halt as the first general strike in 20 years took place. More than two million people took to the streets in demonstrations all over Italy as twenty million workers went on strike across the country. The strike was called to protest against proposed new labour laws.

In many cases COBAS - grassroots trade unions - held independent demos, sometimes outnumbering the official ones.

Anarchists and anti-capitalist groups supported these grass root union demonstrations.

Direct actions targeted temporary employment agencies. Several were occupied, while many others had their entrances 'sealed' with glue. The office of an Italian employment agency in Milan was 'raided' and covered with shit (the real thing). In Rome, main roads leading into the city were blocked by small groups.

Genoa's message, "you G8 we 6 billions" starts to become a reality!



The anniversary of the murder of Carlo Giuliani was marked by a 130,000 protest demonstration.



# MACHETE POWER BEATS STATE

Nine months of direct action and community solidarity by peasant farmers have stopped the government plan to build the new Mexico City airport on their land. This is an incredible victory for people power over big business and the state.



For a worthwhile education  
learn the 3 R's:

**Resist, Rebel,  
Revolt!**

The struggle culminated in July with a virtual insurrection in Atenco and 3 other towns. Over 4 days thousands of peasants and supporters blockaded highways and used machetes and molotovs to defy over 10,000 police. The insurgents captured and held 19 government officials and police hostage, in a successful bid to free their own prisoners. The price of victory was high however - police violence killed local man Enrique Espinoza Juarez, who died from injuries sustained on 11<sup>th</sup> July.

On 7<sup>th</sup> August president Fox issued a decree cancelling the previous government decrees expropriating the peasants' land. A week later, machetes aloft, the peasants marched victoriously through Mexico City. Chanting 'Atenco lives, the struggle continues', they demanded that all charges and arrest warrants be dropped

against those facing legal action from the struggle, and declared that they would fight on against the Plan Puebla Panama and in solidarity with all just causes of the people in Mexico.

## COMMUNITY

Ever since October 2001 the peasant farmers and inhabitants of the area around San Salvador Atenco and Texcoco have been resisting the governments

efforts to compulsorily purchase 10,000 acres of their land for the new airport. All attempts by the state to even start preliminary work for the airport have been stopped by community direct action. The machetes of the peasants - carried proudly aloft on all their demos and actions - have become a symbol of resistance. Solidarity has been developed with striking students and workers, Zapatista supporters and many other groups.

The struggle erupted on 11 July 2002. At least 1000 riot police attacked a 100-strong peasants' march. 30 peasants were injured and 19 disappeared, possibly arrested.

Clashes escalated as the community mobilised itself. Hundreds, then thousands, took to the streets and blockaded the roads. The towns of San Salvador Atenco, Acuexcomac, Magdalená Panoaya and Tocuila

were in revolt, with around 3,500 locals on the streets.

300 peasants stormed the sub office of the Attorney General in Texcoco and took 7 employees hostage, including the Assistant Attorney General. Soon the peasants held 19 officials, including at least 3 police. They demanded their own prisoners be set free in exchange for the officials being released.

By the afternoon of 11<sup>th</sup> July 10,000 police, including military police, were surrounding the area as the peasants fortified their defences. 3 police cars were burnt and 3 Coca Cola tractor trailers seized to be used along with police vehicles in the barricades. As night fell the locals were digging trenches around the occupied areas.

Over the next 4 days the revolt continued as resisters blockaded highways in the area, and were joined by supporters from around Mexico. On 14 July the government released the 11 jailed peasants, and the following day the government officials and police were released unharmed. The government conceded that plans for the airport may have to be modified or even cancelled.

## VICTORY

The government defeat was complete when an announcement by President Fox on 1<sup>st</sup> August was confirmed on 7<sup>th</sup> August by the official cancellation of the decrees to expropriate the peasants' land.

The peasants' victory march through Mexico City on 14<sup>th</sup> August showed their determination to continue the fight. We will maintain a constant struggle for the absolute liberty of the peasants facing charges and we demand an end to the legal threats against the members of the Front of Peoples in Defence of the Land, they declared. They demanded compensation for the family of Enrique Espinoza Juarez, murdered by the police.

The peasants see their battle as part of a bigger picture. They declared their opposition to the Plan Puebla Panama, and the drive towards a Free Trade Agreement for all the Americas. The Plan Puebla Panama, backed by the Mexican, US and Central American governments, aims to "develop" the area from Puebla in south central Mexico down to Panama, forcing peasants off the land into sweatshops, plundering natural resources and exploiting the indigenous and other poor local people.

The inspiring message from the courageous peasant people who have defeated the might of the Mexican state is *"Let us be clear that the Front of Peoples in Defence of the Land will act in solidarity with all just causes which defend the dignity of the people of Mexico. There is no doubt that our struggle will be unbreakable in the face of all aggression against our rights."*

## Argentina: The struggle continues

The process of working class self-organisation continues.

Links are being made across the country and across organisations. For example, more than eight hundred delegates attended the *First National Conference of Plants and Factories Occupied and In Struggle* on Saturday, August 24 organised by the **Bloque Piquetero Nacional** (National Picketeers' Bloc) and the **Movimiento Independiente de Jubilados y Desocupados** (Independent Movement of Pensioners and Unemployed). The delegates came from factories, trade unions, shop steward committees and popular assemblies and met in the plant of the Grissinópoli company, occupied by its workers.

The Conference approved a resolution on the expropriation of the machinery, buildings and capital of the companies and their handing over to their workers. Self-management is already being practised in a wide range of workplaces (including supermarkets, mines, clinics, transport, metal works, printshops), all across the country. Some have occupied their workplaces and ran them for more than 10 months. A national march in support of the occupied factories was agreed for September 10, as was the active participation in the roadblocks of the Picketeers. It was also agreed that delegates from the occupied factories attend the

next National Assembly of employed and unemployed workers.

As we argued in the last issue of **Black Flag**, the need to co-ordinate struggles and solidarity was an essential next step. This has started. As one group of workers put it, *"We share the motto: if they attack one, they attack all of us."* Equally as important, the Argentine workers are showing a healthy distrust of hierarchy. Delegates are returning to their factories to discuss in assemblies the proposals for the Second National Meeting. Self-management is replacing government. As predicted, the call for occupying workplaces and placing them under workers' self-management has been raised and put into practice.

Elsewhere, the neighbourhood assemblies have been developing collective solutions to the crisis in housing in the form of *"assemblies okupas."* The assemblies have taken the initiative, reclaiming unused but habitable spaces. By guaranteeing the right to the ceiling, it replaces property rights with use rights, putting it at the service of the community. The occupations are run collectively. When the police ask the squatters who is in charge, the assembly invariably answers *"we are all people in charge."*

The popular assemblies are also collectively resisting attempts at evictions, be it housing or factories.

Slowly but surely, the people of Argentina are creating an alternative to the State and capitalism.



# "You Can't Live On a Web Site"

## Privatisation and Gentrification, Reaction and Resistance, in Hackney's

The London Borough of Hackney in the past few years has been the last word in municipal incompetence, swingeing cuts, privatisation, and eastern European levels of poverty - a standing joke amongst most Londoners. A range of 'regeneration' anti poverty programmes had been underway since the 1990s and the highest number of housing privatisation ballots in the country had been held.

But by 2001, what was new was the booming real estate market not just of trendy Hoxton in the south, but across the whole Borough. May 2001 saw the New Labour Council emerging from a period of coalition rule with the Conservatives - Hackney was after all the home of some of New Labour's leading ideologues<sup>1</sup> and is now the testing ground for New Labour's restructuring of the Inner City.

This piece will argue that the collapse of the local Council and its replacement by a skeletal 'regeneration state' has furthered gentrification and the gradual eviction of the existing multi cultural working class community by:

- further property sales with fewer controls on development leading to a population density which excludes low income families with children
- reduction in support services for working class people, especially women
- low income people [especially younger people in the private rented sector] being driven out of the Borough by the chaos accompanying housing benefit privatisation
- housing privatisation [stock transfer] leaving families [led generally by

### 'Regeneration State'

Gentrification is having the effect of social cleansing of working class communities across large swathes of inner city London, and other major cities. In **Black Flag 220** we covered the effects of gentrification in Berlin, Germany and explored strategies used by German activists to fight back. Below is an edited version of an article documenting the sweeping gentrification of Hackney, an east end London Borough. In the next issue we will explore the strategies used by local activists to deal with the privatisation and take-over of their services and communities.

women] with almost no access to Council housing and a nightmare scenario with which to threaten existing Council tenants

Meanwhile, large developers are increasingly crass in their proposals. The initial pioneer 'arty'

Livingstone] to extract some of the profits from these developments to restructure social structures around the City. But instead of existing working class multicultural communities, a new 'worthy poor' of key workers [mostly white] will receive semi

the defeat of a determined UNISON campaign largely due to lack of a sustained second front ... community campaigners need to reassess strategies.

#### Hackney - a sketch:

Hackney is an inner city London Borough bordering the City. It has a population approaching 300,000 of which over 50% are from ethnic minority communities. Hackney has also the biggest lesbian population in Britain and allegedly the most artists in Europe.

The average income is half that of the London average and 40% of the population live on Income Support. Some 40% of households are Council tenants, about 10% are tenants in the private rented sector, another 10% live in recently privatised ex Council flats. The remaining 40% include some Yuppies but also a significant number of working class owner occupiers.

Without wanting to over-generalise - the south of the Borough [Hoxton, Shoreditch and Haggerston] has both more Council housing than the north, and more of the 'digital yuppies' in renovated lofts along with a few streets of bourgeois housing in De Beauvoir. The south of the Borough was a National Front stronghold in the 70's, with the fascist's national HQ located on Shoreditch High Street in 1979. It's now a successful multicultural community, although older white residents often dominate residents associations and other local groups.

Stoke Newington in the north of the Borough has much of the rest of the gentrified housing, mostly terraced street property.



gentrifiers are now finding themselves under threat from the office development needed for the reinforcement of London as the financial centre of the European Union.

There have been some efforts [e.g. by mayor Ken

subsidised housing providing a safe social mix for the new rich.

The response of the left to this crisis has been disappointing - in fact the populist right around 'Hackney First' are making the most clear gains. With



Clapton and Stamford Hill in the north east have more working class owner occupiers. Homerton and Hackney Wick in the east are similarly poorer. Large estates and small pockets of terraced housing and mixed industrial and warehousing estates are found throughout the Borough.

#### **A Council in financial collapse:**

The UK's first ever 'Section 114' notice of impending bankruptcy was posted in late October 2000. All non statutory spending was cancelled - and all casual staff were immediately dismissed. For example, up to 50% of bin men were sacked. A temporary reprieve was granted with a batch of sales, cuts and privatisations. But the summer of 2001 saw the threat of Central Government take-over once more.

Residents don't enjoy low levels of tax to go with the low level of services. Council tax rates are amongst the highest in the country yet it makes up less than 10% of the Borough's income - most of the rest comes from government subsidies which have been cut by over £100M in the past few years.<sup>2</sup>

As seen below, the cuts due to the Council's financial crisis have been to services for working class people, and the skeletal ['regeneration'] local state is unable to regulate a gentrification building boom. However, even in the late 1990s before the latest round of cuts, the Council was an albatross around the neck for anti privatisation campaigners ... after defeat in 7 stock transfer privatisation votes it's clear that working class tenants would do almost anything to get away from Hackney Council. Defence of the status quo was never a route to popular support.

#### **Privatisation of property and services:**

Section 114 notice was never used in the month of privatisation - that of anti-privatisation - that of disposal. This part of the workforce was

traditionally the most militant - UNISON demonstrations often were led by 'borrowed' garbage trucks. In August 2000 these workers had defeated an attempt to privatise the service<sup>3</sup>. But by December the waste management contract was sold to Service Team. The much reduced and now isolated workforce was willing to give their new employers a chance and didn't join in the industrial action<sup>4</sup>. But in early 2001, Service Team sold their whole company to the American TNC Cleanaway.

Since then the pace of privatisation has if anything quickened, particularly with the defeating of industrial action and the Labour group winning and then keeping a majority. Privatisation is increasingly targeted to

the gentrified north remained a priority for the Labour group despite being £15M over budget at £26.7M<sup>8</sup>

Other services were also under threat - for example two arts centres were under threat of closure - so that in the Borough 'with the most artists in Europe', working class people were not to have access to any arts facilities ... except for the newly opened Ocean [see below].

Compared with the demos of the year before, the level of resistance to these cuts was minimal. A small demo was called by Hackney Fightback. Pensioner activist Mynra Shaw pointed out that:

*"... Hackney Council continues to sell off property to speculators and developers. The presence of*

corruption were even more limited and safeguards of good services for local people were non-existent. ITNET, who won the Housing Benefit administration contract in the late 1990s, understood this well. Their first act after taking over was to cut the workforce by a third.<sup>11</sup> Within months the service, which was never very good, plunged to being disastrous.

The details of ITNET need their own article - but I can identify 3 major different effects:

- enormous pressure was put on the finances of the Council and the Housing Associations in the Borough
- enormous stress was put on every Council and Housing Association tenant on benefit due to their being continuously in rent arrears

---

## **Privatisation is increasingly targeted to facilitate gentrification and cut services for local working class people, especially working women**

---

facilitate gentrification and cut services for local working class people, especially working women.

June 2001 saw a total of 135 different properties listed for sale to raise an estimated £70M including:

a community arts venue, two nurseries, a community boat club, part of a school and maintenance depot, at least two semi derelict open spaces used by their communities as parks and a plot used by a school for kids with special needs.

Most of these sales were in gentrification 'hot spots' like Hoxton and De Beauvoir. Ironically a road garden in an area of the already gentrified Stoke Newington was saved after protesters 'planted a tree as a symbol of their commitment'.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time a further 2 nurseries and a play group were closed.<sup>6</sup> The Borough's 2 remaining swimming pools were put out to private tender whilst the pool in the heart of Haggerston remained closed.<sup>7</sup> Instead, opening a brand new pool in

*more and more of these speculators, interested mainly in developing profits, mean they have an overloud voice in deciding what the 'open market' is in Hackney. The voice of tenants and residents is on the way to being wiped out. This is more serious, as the Fair Rents Officer takes the open market into consideration when he sets the rents for remaining Council and housing association tenants.*<sup>9</sup>

The reality of privatisation was underlined by Nord Anglia, who run the privatised parts of the education department and overcharged the Council £400,000 for their 'services'.<sup>10</sup> However it was on the privatised estates and in the effects of the contracted out Housing Benefit service that the effects were most severe.

Hackney Council had a long, well documented history of corruption. Under regeneration schemes, what controls there were on political and financial

and receiving notices of Seeking Possession from their landlords. [In addition tenant reps and Councillors had their democratic rights curtailed due to ITNET related rent arrears, e.g. a Clapton tenant rep was sacked from the CCHT Board for rent arrears<sup>12</sup> and an independent Councillor lost voting rights due to ITNET related rent and Council tax arrears.<sup>13</sup>]

- in the private rented sector safeguards against evictions did not apply ... and while many tenants already in place hung on, private landlords tended to refuse to take on Housing Benefit dependent tenants.

In April 2001 the contract with ITNET was broken, leaving the Council holding the baby. While the service has somewhat improved, the long term effect on low income people's access to the private market rents sector in Hackney is likely to remain - the already fertile field is left clear for further gentrification.



**Gentrification in Hoxton:**  
*"The chicest place in the inhabited universe" - The New Yorker:*

Around 1990 when the Shoreditch triangle in the south of Hoxton was still largely semi derelict ex clothing industry warehouses, the Dalston City Challenge corridor was drawn to include a large part of this area. The regeneration programme was varied:

- A new cinema for the London Film Makers Co-op [The Lux]<sup>14</sup>
- Redevelopment of Hoxton Square<sup>15</sup>
- Renovation of the Arches under the 'Tube line to be'
- Funding for basic refits of warehouses given to private landlords such as Glasshouse

Consciously or not, this provided the fuel for the gentrification of Hoxton. At first abandoned warehouses were converted into lofts and a couple of existing bars became busier. Ill effects were seen early - with lofts pumping their sewage onto the Pitfield estate and stairwells being used as toilets and places to have sex by people using the bars.<sup>16</sup>

A gentrification whirlpool, aided by central government subsidy, began. By the late 1990s larger scale developments were more common. Some were wholly private and prices for lofts were now topping £400,000. Others were 'market rent schemes' from 'charitable' housing associations - beginning with the award winning Shepherdess Walk

scheme in 1999, where rents were a minimum of £145 a week. In response to local tenants saying that it was "fancy flats for yuppies" a spokesperson said: *"The building will be clad in cedar wood and terracotta and will look very nice."*<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile on Council estates funding for repairs was particularly tight. On estates primed for privatisation no repairs were done at all in the lead up to ballots and estate managers were not replaced. On the other [better] estates tenant representatives were supporting:

*"... people with cockroach infestation or people who have to live and sleep in rooms that are so damp they're covered in fungus and the wall paper is falling off..."*<sup>18</sup>

By 2001 market rents in social housing were reaching £200 a week. While larger

live opposite the Haggerston estate!

'Shared Home Ownership Schemes' were used to sweeten the pill and to ease planning objections. The effect of this development was that tenants who had exercised their 'right to buy' and then let out their ex Council flats could also charge rents of £200 plus a week for a basic 3 bed flat, further boosting the impetus behind right to buy.

Speculators actively leafleted estates with offers to buy out secure tenant's 'right to buy.' They would provide cash [sometimes as

---

*on Council estates funding for repairs was particularly tight. On estates primed for privatisation no repairs were done at all in the lead up to ballots and estate managers were not replaced*

---

Housing Associations such as Peabody led on market renting - other HAs began to get in on the act. But even Peabody couldn't get rid of everything - it had to sell a block to Metropolitan after finding that yuppies weren't willing to pay market rents to

little as £5,000] to a tenant who would buy the flat [with the speculator's money] signing over the rights to let it out to the speculators, and selling it on after the waiting period of 2 years. This meant 2 bedroom flats could be picked up for as little as £20,000 plus the payment to the tenant.

By 2000 the London property market had heated up to such an extent that a new round of tower blocks was being proposed for the inner city. Ken Livingstone, the newly elected mayor, gave his support for these so long as they provided subsidy for social housing schemes and transport in east London<sup>19</sup>. However, rather than affordable rented housing, it was more of the not very



affordable shared home ownership schemes for 'key workers'<sup>20</sup>.

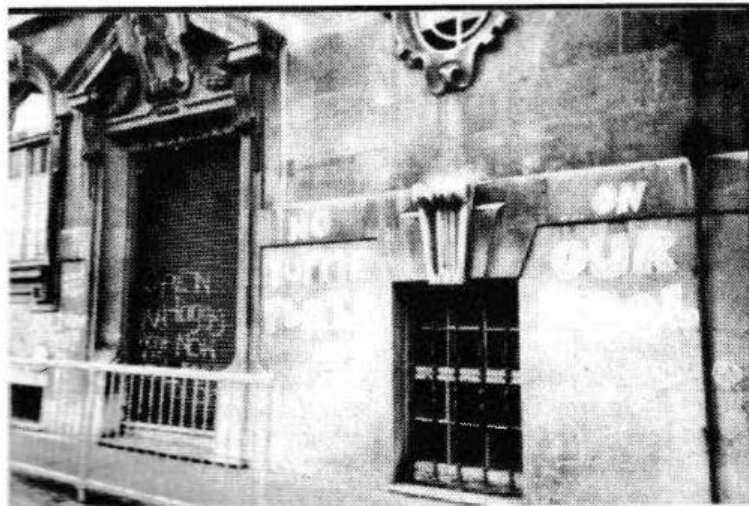
The long term plan is clearly to replace the City's poverty stricken necklace of estates in Finsbury [Islington], Shoreditch and Whitechapel [Tower Hamlets] with a mix of the new rich and the new 'deserving poor' of key workers.

**The estates are just a stone's throw away:**

By 2000, developers were increasingly confident and using all available loopholes to cash in. Even when leases held rents for 3 years, service charges could be jacked up and added to the original rent<sup>21</sup>. Sometimes this meant that tenants wanting to break leases lost not only their 3 months deposit but had to pay extra to get out of the lease. David Nicholson of Glasshouse - who with government cash developed many of the early lofts said:

*"We are not a charity, we are a commercial business ... Market rent in Shoreditch has risen considerably in the last 18 months. We've got tenants who are willing to pay ... and are not going to take up hours of our time complaining about the nitty gritty."*<sup>22</sup>

And it wasn't just businesses evicting tenants





on cheap leases. In August 2000, the charity running Shoreditch Town Hall Trust terminated the leases of 20 small businesses and charities to allow the building to be renovated. As the Daycare Trust commented on their eviction - "we thought we were a part of [the Town Hall Trust's] long term plans. It's obvious we're not."<sup>23</sup>

By 2000, not only were the concerns of Hoxton's majority - working class

Council tenants - irrelevant but the concern voiced in the local media was primarily that

gentrification would "spell the end for the arty atmosphere that began the revival."<sup>24</sup> The Hackney Society voiced concerns that the "huge increases in land and property

values [... were] threatening the future viability of local charities, community groups and small businesses ... small businesses are also being hit hard in particular new businesses in the IT and creative sectors - the very businesses Hackney is keen to attract."<sup>25</sup>

Working class people appeared in this discussion only as an ungrateful or criminal element. The project director at Shoreditch Town Hall spoke of 'resentment' from older residents over £500,000 lofts next to their run down Council flats, while a gallery director from Hoxton Square said:

*"What's becoming more apparent are the crime levels. The estates just off Hoxton Street are just a stones throw away. There's increasing resentment. More and more [very large!] windows are being smashed."*<sup>26</sup>

Reports that homeless families were again being put into bed and breakfast - in part because the Council had sold the estates where they

had been placed previously began to provide a context for this. By February 2001, while the 380 hostel places were full and 450 families were in bed and breakfast, often outside the Borough<sup>27</sup>, at least 15 % of the 7,000 privatised flats<sup>28</sup> were standing empty [following a pre-privatisation policy of running down the estates] and at least another 100 street properties had been sold to subsidise privatisation schemes<sup>29</sup>. The



clear losers in all of this were working class women and their families - they were not welcome in New Labour's Hackney.

#### Who runs Hoxton then?

In March 2001 Shoreditch's new elite attempted to ban Abba's Dancing Queen! Residents of live-work units in Redchurch Street complained about the Village People's YMCA as well as the Conservative Party's Annual Winter Ball which were held in marquees on the Bishopsgate Goodsyards.

*"We cannot sleep because it goes on until one in the morning and in the summer we cannot relax on our rooftop garden without having to listen to Chris de Burgh's 'Lady in Red' or some other dreadful tune."*<sup>30</sup>

'Traditional' East End culture in the area had no chance then - the Brick Lane Music Hall faced closure at the end of 2000 when its rent went up 400% to £100,000 a year. The landlord said: *"unfortunately we are not a charity ..."*<sup>31</sup>

More celebrated, is the case of Spitalfields market - *"a vivid antidote to the blandness that corporate culture brings in its wake"* - next to ABN-AMRO's<sup>32</sup> headquarters and Liverpool Street Station. Half of the market has already been lost to an office development and the rest is under threat despite the protests of market owners. Luminaries such as Terrence Conran are weighing in to protect the creative hub of gentrification

and are willing to trade a bigger development elsewhere to protect it.<sup>33</sup>

While the new residents fight a losing battle against Europe's finance capital or prepare to move to the next chic scene, the interests of the working class

majority are nowhere to be seen.

*"... it's so close to the City, firms won't even know they're in Hackney."*<sup>34</sup>

#### The 'Regeneration' of the Town Hall Square

Broadway Market is a narrow street market between two parks. It makes a geographical link between Hoxton and the Town Hall precinct and is already showing the Hoxton effect. Five years ago it had one pub and a listed pie and eel shop which baked veggie pies on demand. Now there's 2 expensive restaurants, a Japanese noodle bar, 1 yuppie bar, a health food bar and half a dozen boutiques. Not far away, 'regeneration' money was used to do up a derelict church, where a trendy club is now based. Facilities for local people have not similarly expanded - as indicated earlier it is here in the south of the Borough that cuts in provision are tending to be targeted.

Further north, just south of the town hall, is Ellingfort

Road. Here until 1999 were around 30 squatted homes - which have now voluntarily incorporated themselves [keeping just over half the homes] into an existing Housing Association<sup>35</sup>. The rest of this area is now booming with loft live work units.

And on to the Town Hall Square - the site of another regeneration programme. Directly opposite is the new Ocean music venue, opened on the site of the old Hackney Library and Museum. It has already attracted criticism over the price of tickets [up to £27], the wages of the director (£80,000) and its function as an oasis for a "rich young elite."<sup>36</sup> Relations with local people started poorly with complaints of sexual harassment and parking problems. Noise complaints were dismissed as "whinging."<sup>37</sup> The Ocean started with high hopes for participation and access ... it'll be interesting to see how it evolves. I suspect that the social pressures from gentrification and the regeneration of the rest of the square will force it in a less and less accessible direction.

The Town Hall Square, previously frequented by local street drinkers and the odd demo against the Council, became subject of Labour Council plans to spend £1.1 M doing it up. Critics pointed out that 4 different types of limestone wasn't perhaps the aim of Neighbourhood Renewal funding which paid for over half of the scheme. The Hackney tree wardens mounted a vocal campaign against the planned loss of 15 trees and pointed out that meetings were not open to the public and minutes were kept secret.

Complaints about how the regeneration of the Square was going could be assuaged by promises of a new Technology and Learning Centre [a rebuilt library]. But cuts in the Learning and Leisure budget meant that "the Council can barely afford to buy books



for the new library ... and has set aside £150,000, warning that it may cut the Borough's book fund."<sup>38</sup>

Opposite the TLC lies the Hackney Empire and the Samuel Pepys Bar. The Pepys was for years the late opening 'alternative' bar in Hackney. It was shut along with the Empire for refurbishment in May 2001 ... the ensuing street party in the Town Hall square got a bit out of hand - although participants commented that it was more simulacra than reality. What's clear is that they didn't want to go to the Ocean!<sup>39</sup>

### Resistance and Reaction:

Hackney UNISON members fought a determined campaign against Council cuts and attacks on their wages and conditions from 2000 - 2001. This needs a separate analysis but Hackney Council workers showed well into 2001 that they were willing to take unofficial action particularly against victimisation.<sup>40</sup> In addition the current Hackney UNISON officials have been willing to continue a dispute in an attempt to carry it through to victory.

But what was stressed to me by a number of UNISON members however was that their campaign would fail without a 'second front' being opened by militant community struggle. This never came despite a series of local disputes over specific closures - some of which were successful - Burbage School in Hoxton for example.

The attempt to have a united front of community struggles through an organisation called Hackney Fightback fell apart with open splits between the SWP and the Socialist party - leading to separate candidates standing in Council by-elections in June 2001.

Worse still, the Council by-elections showed that the

main beneficiaries of Hackney's crisis far from being the left were the populist right wing formation Hackney First - who achieved 546 votes in 2 wards versus Socialist Alliance's 513 in 3 wards. In 2001, the BNP showed that given a crisis in political life - the riots in Oldham as much as the crisis in Hackney - the



english electorate would be willing to vote for a 'radical' political alternative. In Hackney, with a organised membership of nearing 1,000 the far left working together could not do the same. So much for electoralism...

### And what about the grassroots?

There were a number of other positive local community campaigns over the last two years namely:

- Occupation of two of the threatened nurseries (see Black Flag 220)
- Rent Freeze Campaign
- Organising on privatised estates.

In Shoreditch, community activists working within the New Deal Trust, alongside the Hackney IWCA conducting mass leafletting work, have now turned the tide on stock transfer in the south of Hackney. Looking at this combined approach of confrontation inside and outside the structures of the regeneration state can begin to answer the question of how to build mass support for progressive alternatives to gentrification and privatisation.

NS

In the next issue of **Black Flag** we look at grass root responses to gentrification and privatisation in Hackney and elsewhere. We welcome contributions.

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Such as Michael Barber who has moved from Education honcho to be a top advisor at Number 10.

<sup>2</sup> Unison eaflet for 7th of March Strike 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Hackney Gazette 24/8/00.

<sup>4</sup> Its unclear to what extent the SWP declaring that the waste workers were victorious in the fight against privatisation in October, didn't help in this situation. There could be a certain - thank fuck we've escaped from Hackney Council - factor linked in with experienced social democrat managers to explain the waste workers 'giving Service Team a chance.

<sup>5</sup> Hackney Gazette 14/6/01 and 28/6/01.

<sup>6</sup> Hackney Gazette 21/6/01 and 19/7/01.

<sup>7</sup> Hackney Gazette 5/7/01.

<sup>8</sup> Hackney Gazette 1/3/01.

<sup>9</sup> Hackney Gazette 5/7/01.

<sup>10</sup> Hackney Gazette 21/6/01.

<sup>11</sup> Personal conversation with HB staff.

<sup>12</sup> See report in *Inside Housing* February 2000 and *Housing Today* 24/2/00.

<sup>13</sup> See *Whose Benefit* leaflet from Hackney IWCA.

<sup>14</sup> For criticism of the Lux see letter in *Hackney Gazette* 9/12/99 where Dave Young [from Geffrey Estate not the Haggerston labour Councillor] says "I think the Lux is a perfect example of 'regeneration.' Our money goes into it. It is of no use to us, but only serves to pull more rich young people into the area - the same people who are gradually taking over our pubs, our shops and even our homes."<sup>15</sup> A letter in *Hackney Gazette*

14/9/00 pointed out the reality of the square's use as a open air drinking area for yuppies.

<sup>16</sup> Hackney Independent Spring 2000

<sup>17</sup> Hackney Gazette 1/7/99 and Hackney Independent Spring 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Eugene Francis in *Hackney Independent* Spring 2000.

<sup>19</sup> The Observer 3/6/01.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. teachers and nurses, although behind these paradigms of virtue, technicians and even housing workers are sneaked in.

<sup>21</sup> Hackney Gazette 23/3/00.

<sup>22</sup> Hackney Gazette 23/3/00.

<sup>23</sup> Hackney Gazette 17/8/00.

<sup>24</sup> Hackney Gazette 29/7/00.

<sup>25</sup> Spaces Spring 2001, issue #8.

<sup>26</sup> Hackney Gazette 29/7/00.

<sup>27</sup> Hackney Gazette 15/2/01

<sup>28</sup> The 3 Estates for which I have precise

figures the total was [including squatted homes] over 20%.

<sup>29</sup> Hackney Gazette 10/12/98 and 14/1/99

<sup>30</sup> Hackney Gazette 1/3/01.

<sup>31</sup> Hackney Gazette 16/11/00

<sup>32</sup> The main Dutch bank ... also known for attacks on inner city communities in Amsterdam.

<sup>33</sup> The Observer 15/7/01.

<sup>34</sup> Hackney Independent Summer 1999 quoting developer Peter Moreno [or Moron as the spellchecker suggests] from the *Hackney Gazette*

<sup>35</sup> See *Hackney Gazette* 16/8/01.

<sup>36</sup> Hackney Gazette 29/3/01 - see also letters from staff and the director defending the venue on 12/4/01.

<sup>37</sup> Hackney Gazette 31/5/01.

<sup>38</sup> Hackney Gazette 26/7/01.

<sup>39</sup> Hackney Gazette 24/5/01 and *Evening Standard* 21/5/01.

<sup>40</sup> See *Hackney Gazette* 29/3/01 for Transport Workers, and 5/7/01 for dust men as well as the ongoing actions over Noah Taylor who was sacked by the Council in August 2001.





# Justice – A bourgeois Concept?

*"The communist revolution, by suppressing private property and giving 'to all the same things', will emancipate man [sic] and will bring to life the egalitarian spirit. Then the ideas of justice, which have haunted human heads since the establishment of private property will vanish – the most frightful nightmare which ever tortured sad civilised humanity" (1)*

## Justice – A Dominant Ideal

Justice is one of the dominant ideas of the society in which we live. Everyone has a sense of justice and its opposite, injustice. This sense of right and wrong is obviously closely linked with morality. The idea of justice might be summed up as the passion for vengeance coupled with the sentiment of equality. It is an important ideal against which outcomes are measured.

In law a distinction is made between formal justice and concrete justice. Formal justice concerns the mechanism by which decisions are made (the rules of court) whilst concrete justice is more concerned with the end result – the verdict and sentence. It has been suggested that, beyond the defendant in any given case and a few specialists, most people's concern with justice is concrete. In the main people are concerned with the outcome and above all sentence. Did they get their just deserts? For many people this is the meaning of natural justice (although in law the concept of natural justice is concerned with the fairness of the process).

Defining justice has proved harder. The American jurist John Rawls defined justice as that which prevailed in a just society, and a just society as one to which a group of rational but mutually disinterested people would unanimously choose to belong if such a choice were available. He recognised that any such choice is purely hypothetical, and that in practice all human beings are born into a particular society with no option, but suggested the concept of the rational choice as one that could help our understanding of what justice might require. (2)

Those seeking to reform or overthrow capitalism are also swayed by this dominant idea of justice. Indeed, it may be argued that the left holds the value of justice more highly than most.

Some recent examples are:



- Those killed by the cops (e.g. Justice for Harry Stanley).
- Victims of police brutality (e.g. Genoa Justice Campaign).
- Victims of racist murders (e.g. the campaign by the family and friends of Stephen Lawrence for justice).
- Those imprisoned for crimes that they did not commit (e.g. Justice for Mark Barnsley, a campaign that successfully sought the release of an anarchist revolutionary). (3)
- Groups campaigning for 'social justice' (e.g. **Justice?** the publishers of the direct

action weekly *Schnews* (4); the Dockers/Reclaim the Streets March for Social Justice; the Movement for Justice).

-- And, of course, the slogan 'No justice, no peace' is raised on almost every demonstration. (5)

These examples are given not to single them out, but the opposite, to show how widespread is the acceptance of the ideal.

## Origins of law

The origins of the concept of justice are to be found in the passion for vengeance and in the custom of the blood feud. Whilst some criminologists have argued that the possibility of further vengeance is excluded when the victim is avenged, the reality is that such vengeance was passed from generation to generation, threatening the very existence of clans and tribes. **"Vengeance one hundred years old, still has milk teeth"** in the words of an Afghan proverb. (6)

The custom of vengeance is transformed from a purely biological reflex into a juridical institution by being linked with the form of

## Anarcho-Quiz

1. Which famous anarchist is featured in the Warren Beatty film "Reds"?
2. The Polish Syndicalists (ZSP) who fought in the Warsaw Rising of 1944 stubbornly refused to replace their black and red armbands with nationalist white and red ones. Despite total animosity from the nationalist leadership of the underground army they became the best-armed unit (and probably the best fed) in the Rising. How?
3. On whose life is the action film "Behold a Pale Horse" loosely based?
4. What year did the Spanish CNT join the reconstituted First International, the International Workers Association?
5. How did American imperialism towards Japan help Bakunin?



equivalent exchange, exchange according to use values. This then is the principle of equivalent requital. As we find in the bible: *"life for life, eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe"*. (7) This exchange of equivalents is, notes Pashukanis, the first truly judicial idea predating the concepts of 'justice' and 'law'. (8) In a process arising alongside the direct exchange of commodities arises this direct exchange between offence and retribution. Lefague has termed this Retributive Justice. (9)

Not surprisingly the earliest concepts of justice come from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. In ancient Greek many legal terms shared a common root with words linked to the division of lands. In Latin there is a common root between contractual and legal terminology. The first memorial of law is the 12 tablets of ancient Rome. Law thus arises alongside the development of property and the commodity. We do not need to look to radical writers to find confirmation of this. Blackstone, who in 1765 at the behest of the Lord Chancellor began the first systematic exposition of the common law, states:

*"Simply larceny [theft] then is the 'felonious taking, and carrying away, of the personal goods of another'. This offence certainly commenced then, whenever it was, that the bounds of property, of laws of meum and tuum, were established. How far such an offence can exist in a state of nature, where all things are held in common, is a question which may be resolved with very little difficulty."* (10)

With the creation of property, blood feuds become transformed into blood money. From the stand point of Roman law, for example, there was nothing strange in the fact a tardy debtor paid with parts of his body and that the person guilty of bodily harm paid for it with his property. In accordance with this, criminal procedure assumes the character of a commercial transaction.

### **The Development of Capitalism**

Whilst the concept of justice finds its origin in the development of the commodity form, both the commodity form and justice become fully developed with capitalism. We can therefore draw a direct parallel between the rise of wage labour, measured by labour time, and the emergence of the prison system; between the growth of the working class and the creation and expansion of the police and judiciary;

between the building of factories and the building of prisons. The domination of commodity production finds its mirror in the domination of the legal system. The dualism of the commodity, with the split between exchange and use values, is echoed in the dualism

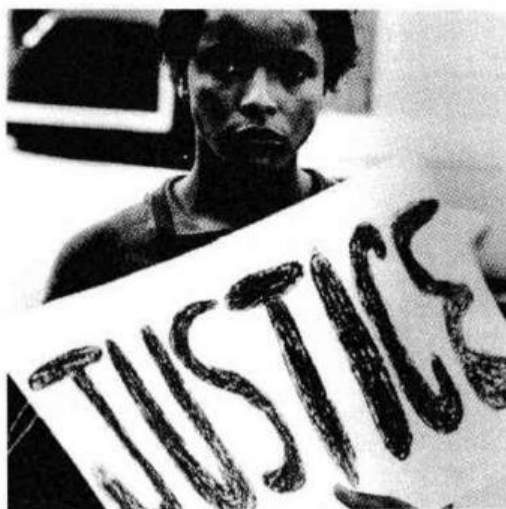
***We cannot replace bourgeois law with proletarian law, any more than we can replace capitalist economics with Marxist economics, or the existing state with a workers' state***

between subjective and objective law, public and private law, distinctions that only make sense from the point of view of bourgeois society.

It is only with the advent of capitalist society that all the necessary conditions are created for the judicial factor to attain distinctness in social relations. One of the necessary conditions is the idea of equality. This, as Marx has demonstrated, arises from the economic condition of bourgeois society, which found its reflection in the ideas of the Enlightenment. (11) Thus Rawls traces the origin of the idea of

suppression, especially of the peasants fleeing intolerable exploitation by lords of the manner ... of impoverished vagabonds, beggars, and so forth". (14) Above all, as Peter Linebaugh has demonstrated in his seminal study of crime and civil society in 18th century London, criminal measures were directed at the newly created class of workers, who were unable to afford to live from the fruits of their labour alone yet were often reluctant to work. (15) In this way wages as the only form of income was imposed.

Barbaric forms of corporal and capital punishment were devised to discipline this new class. *"The major lesson the gallows were supposed to teach was the absolute, apodictic authority of law; it was a code governing the relationship between state and civil society, and in this respect was to be distinguished from murder or massacre."* (16) Adam Smith, grasping the connection between justice and political economy, studied ways of improving the efficiency of such punishments. (17) Criminal justice in the bourgeois state is organised class terror.



### **Law and Ideology**

Law thus reinforces class relations and, ideologically, legitimises them.

However law does more than this. As a special body of rules and procedures, it must apply logical criteria with reference to standards of universality and equity. If the law is evidently partial and manifestly unjust it masks nothing, legitimises nothing and won't contribute to class hegemony. (18) As Marx put it:

*"the establishment of the political state and the dissolution of civil society into independent individuals - whose relations with one another depend on law, just as the relations of men in the system of estates and guilds depended on privilege - is*

justice to Locke, Rousseau and Kant, the theorists of social contract. (12)

*"The notion of the rule of law was central to 17th & 18th century Englishman's understanding of what was both special and laudable about their political system. Authorities ... chose to limit themselves in order to acquire greater effectiveness: they traded unmediated power for legitimacy."* (13)

Whilst many historians, like those quoted above, focus on the English it was in fact largely Scots such as Smith, Ferguson and Blackstone who, in the 1760's, laid the foundations of the disciplines of sociology, anthropology,

continued on page 32



# Changing the way we think of Direct Action

The following essay is a subjective consideration of where the anarchist/direct action movement is and where, I feel, it might go. Nothing here is meant to be seen as a concrete text but rather one person's reflections on the movement. It is essentially broken into two parts. The first is a consideration of class, looking at working-class dual power and the (perceived) failures of current direct action tactics and the second is a 'proposal' for how we could move forward. I don't expect people to necessarily agree with what I've written but I do hope it might provide 'food for thought' for others in the activist community and perhaps trigger some debate about the future.

Despite the post-modernist arguments against an historical 'grand narrative', Foucault's atomisation of 'power' and individualist/subjectivist arguments, which seem to be at the forefront of much of the direct action movement, I would argue that class is our primary site of subjugation and therefore should be the main focus for struggle. Although class has traditionally been a dominant thread running through the anarchist movement it has in recent times been hijacked by direct action fetishists. Apparently activism and revolutionary struggle are now defined through identity politics: 'We 'do' direct action and are therefore revolutionary anarchists'. Anarchism and activism have been reduced to pure spectacle; we have our annual Mayday gala for the masses and we engage with general consciousness only when a brick engages with glass or police engage with demonstrators.

Although class is the key narrative I would argue that we need to re-think class dynamics and to move away from seeing the working class as a universal entity. We have essentially seen the death of the 19th century concept of the middle-class. Rather, globally, we have a ruling class, a working class, and a 'consumer-working' class. The distinction between the working class and the consumer-working class is essentially the distinction between the working class in the south for whom the factory is still the key site of oppression and the 'bought-off' working classes of the first world countries.

Obviously, there are managerial roles, distinct from the working class, that can be defined as 'middle-class'. However, we must acknowledge the contradiction that although this group clearly does

not produce surplus value (Marx's definition of the working class) it is not in control of capital and is clearly an alienated class (whilst also being an alienating class). So how should we define this group; by the reality of their exploitation or as another form of social controllers along with the police and army etc.? At the end of the day, as class antagonisms reach crisis point the middle class, like members of all classes, will be forced to declare allegiance to one or the other side of the class

**activism and revolutionary struggle are now defined through identity politics: 'We 'do' direct action and are therefore revolutionary anarchists'. Anarchism and activism have been reduced to pure spectacle; we have our annual Mayday gala for the masses**

divide; there can be no 'third way' in a revolutionary situation.

I will now return to the 'consumer-working-class'. With the expansion of industrialisation and the increasing need of capital to encourage consumption a new 'ideologically oppressed' class was created; a class that is alienated by the "conditioning that leads [them] to choose [commodities] and the ideology in which they are wrapped" 1. The distinction between the two classes is simply the distinction between their primary modes of alienation. The third world worker is primarily alienated from the mode of production whilst the consumer-worker is primarily alienated from the mode of consumption. This is in no way to suggest that the consumer-worker is not alienated as a worker, but simply to distinguish what I see as the primary forms of alienation. Clearly the first world worker is



alienated at the point of production; meaningless work and the atomisation of the individual from 'community' are of huge importance. However, I am arguing a distinction between primary and secondary modes of alienation; the bombardment of images and the alienation of some unattainable

'perfect' consumer life are at the forefront of people's sense of alienation. As Marx states in the *Grundrisse*:

"what precisely distinguishes capital from the master-servant relation is that the worker confronts [capital] as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the possessor of money,

in the form of money he becomes a simple center of circulation — one of its infinitely many centers, in which his specificity as worker is extinguished." 2

This point is further reinforced by Camatte, who states that: "One of the modalities of the re-absorption of the revolutionary power of the proletariat has been to perfect its character as consumer, thus catching it in the mesh of capital. The proletariat ceases to be the class that negates; after the formation of the working class it dissolves into the social body...." 3 This 'extinguishment' of the worker is much sharper in the west and it was upon this consumerism and 'spectacle' that the Situationists quite rightly focused their attention. Where I disagree with the Situationists is that they focus their analysis on this 'consumer class' at the cost of the global south. Their 'Revolution of



Everyday Life', the liberation of self, would, if achieved in isolation, be bought on the backs of the rest of the global working-class. The reality is that no revolution is going to take hold until the means of production are in the hands of the masses.

The question is how we unite these two components of the working class. We need to realise the conjunction of consumer/worker; understand that they are one and the same. My key argument is that the battle to transform society will have two fronts. Firstly, the struggle of the workers in the global south will be driven primarily by the material necessities of their exploitation. Although I am primarily talking about the factory workers of the south, I do include the struggle for land (such as the Zapatistas, Indian farmers etc.) as I would argue that the Marxist distinction between peasant and working class is now, if not before, a false distinction. The fights for both the factory and the farm are a fight to control the means of production.

For those of us in the west the 'vacuity of everyday life' will be the main battleground. It will be an ideological battle in which we must primarily fight the fragmentation of social relations (family, community etc.) and the paucity of a co-modified life.

For the global north, the focus must be the emancipation of community life, the development of civil dual power structures and the coupling of this with workplace struggles.

We have now touched on the key element of this article, Dual Power. The 'Dual Power Strategy' is based on the idea of not waiting until a post-revolutionary period to develop post-revolutionary social forms. We should aim to create an infrastructure that undermines and eventually leads to the erosion of the dominant power structure.

The key premise is that *"a successful revolution can only be made by actively empowered and prepared people, dynamic in their commitment to radical change (not just supporting it), and acting within a pre-established structure for making a new society in the ruins of the old."* 4 Dual power is

perhaps one of the only ways to counter vanguardism as it is about the development of horizontal structures NOW, and thus empowering people in a pre-revolutionary society to build a revolution. However, beyond being purely a revolutionary strategy it is also a practical alternative in the here and now. As Dominick says, whether the insurrection happens in the next decade or takes three more generations to



occur, we can create revolutionary circumstances now, and we can exercise power to the greatest possible extent. Dual power recognises that waiting until after the insurrection to participate in liberatory political and economic relationships means postponing our liberation; it is as senseless as waiting until after the insurrection to begin reorganising society. We do not require that the state and capitalism collapse

achievable. We seek not to seize power, but to seize opportunity viz a viz the exercise of our power.

*"Finally...while a post-insurrectionary society which has generally surpassed the contradictions indicated by the term 'dual power' is the eventual goal of this strategy, the creation of alternative social infrastructure is a desirable end in itself. Since we have no way of predicting the insurrection.... [w]e should liberate space, for us and future generations, in the shadow of the dominant system, not only from which to build a new society, but within which to live freer and more peaceful lives today."* 5

The question is how do we achieve a dual power structure? I would argue that there are essentially four key areas that we need to focus on to achieve the goal of a dual power structure and ultimately the potential for revolution. Social centres, Community activism, Workplace and Social forums (regional, national, international). I will be looking at all of these in more detail below. Before doing so however, I should expand on why I feel that these goals can't be achieved through the current forms of direct action i.e. those acts done by what has become a professional activist elite.

'Anarchist' groups are essentially cliques, an activist caste with no real connection to a wider community. Although, the desire to act is completely understandable, I have two main concerns with these small 'activist gangs'.

Where small actions once succeeded, especially in the 80's and 90's, this was, unfortunately, through media impact. Direct action was an exciting way of communicating an issue to a wider range of people.

Now we are in a period in which we essentially have a media blackout on protest and dissent, therefore the impact of these smaller actions is greatly limited. So my first problem is simply this, without visibility these go no way towards building a larger movement as they have now become almost invisible.

Secondly, although these actions can and do successfully stop the machine for a limited time, often causing



before we can begin living relatively free lives....

The great task of grassroots dual power is to seek out and create social spaces and fill them with liberatory institutions and relationships. Where there is room for us to act for ourselves, we form institutions conducive not only to catalysing revolution, but also to the present conditions of a fulfilling life, including economic and political self-management to the greatest degree



legitimate economic damage; without mass support they don't bring the machine to a complete halt. Activism has become almost nothing more than a fetish for 'action' and as such will never supersede the capitalist mode of production.

This is not to say that I argue for inaction. In the following I hope to show where I think the tactics developed and built on by this movement can be used to greater effect in a wider social context. Also, I am not arguing that such actions should stop. The fact that they can and often do slow down the machine of capitalism, if only for a short time, validates them. Anything that throws a spanner in the works is a good thing. I am however, arguing for a change of emphasis.

### **Social Centres**

Social centres are developing throughout the UK at the moment. Social centres such as the Radical Dairy and the embryonic Social Centres Network offer an insight into the potential of using social centres as a physical base for Dual Power Strategies.

**Dual power is perhaps one of the only ways to counter vanguardism as it is about the development of horizontal structures NOW, and thus empowering people in a pre-revolutionary society to build a revolution.**

The social centres are the physical manifestation of a living social network. They are also a return to localism, with an internationalist perspective, as opposed to the internationalist approach that constantly talks up localism, as we seem to have lived through in the last couple of years.

Social centres can act as individual 'community nodes' linked to other nodes regionally, nationally and eventually globally. A strong social network should aim to undermine community reliance and deference to state infrastructure and encourage greater self, and community, reliance. Once people have confidence in their own potential, revolutionary change becomes a real possibility.

How does a social centre try to achieve this? I think it is a two-tiered process. Firstly, it is about the creation of a social base built around general community identity. Providing childcare, free English lessons and yoga do bring people to a social centre, however these should not become primary aims of the centre. Filling a space with a week of handicraft or 'self-help' workshops is not revolutionary.

Social centres must focus on all aspects of life. We must try and engage in everything in a non-hierarchical way,

developing a sense of working class autonomy. A social centre should be built around the uniting factors of the community both positive and negative. By negative I mean the community-wide struggle to get your kids a teacher, to defend asylum seekers, get decent housing etc.

Positive community attributes might be supporting local writers and positive social, cultural forums. The social life of the centres shouldn't be all activism based; it should be both celebratory and confrontational. My main criticism of the Dairy, for example, is that in the first 6-months it focused on DJ workshops, yoga and the like. Although much was done regarding 'Hackney not for sale' it always seemed secondary to the 'café nights'.

Some have argued that simply squatting a space is a political act and yes reclaiming space for people and highlighting the lack of community space is political, but only in a liberal, reformist capacity. For a social centre to be revolutionary it must offer revolutionary potential, not just through an anarchist library but also through anarchist-inspired action.

Some have criticised both Carnivalistas and Emmaz for attempting to purchase a space for social centres, and it can be argued that this is a liberal response to community activism. Purchasing property clearly maintains capitalist social relations and does not supersede rent. However, this should also be weighed against the fact that the vast majority of the community will not be as comfortable entering a squat as their first foray into Social Centres. We are bought up with images of 'squats' as essentially the last refuge of the down and out. There is also the issue of the security of the space and the fact that it should prove much more difficult for the police to oust people from an owned location compared with the vagaries of squatting a space.

Although the ultimate goal is clearly to refute the capitalist system we need to engage with as many people as we possibly can and argue for social change, by isolating ourselves in our own community (i.e. the activist community), which is often what a squatted space does, we are not building a movement, we are building a sect.

Social centres should also be a space for 'education' a possibly contentious issue, which I will address below,

### **Social Centre Network**

We must also try to build a network of social centres. A strong network would allow us to act in a local, national and international capacity and would prevent the social centres from becoming isolated phenomena. A hundred individual social centres are not as strong as a hundred-strong social network so a lot of emphasis needs to be put on forming links with similar social networks.

Again, this shouldn't be about simply linking the social centres created by anarchists or designed with some purist anarchist vision. We should try and encourage grass roots community spaces to become part of this network. The goal is to encourage horizontal organising and the creation of participatory community structures. This won't be achieved by simply creating new spaces and encouraging people to get involved in the centre, it will however (in conjunction with creating new spaces) happen when we engage with already existing spaces. But, what is the role of the social centre network? Firstly as the name implies it should be a network allowing all social centres to engage in planning and put forward new initiatives etc. The sharing of limited resources, solidarity through periods when things aren't looking very good etc.

However, I feel that it should go much further than this. I feel that it needs to become a focal point for Community Social Forums, something grander than Mayday 2002's flawed Festival of Alternatives, which did little more than offer lifestyle tips to activists.

What we need to do is take the lessons learnt from PGA and GSF (and ESF) forums and localise them using the social centres as physical locations for social engagement. Encouraging the diverse community groups to come together to map out a vision for the community. In a sense such networking should almost be a daily occurrence in the social centre however I would also envisage quarterly formal weekends as specified 'Community Social Forums' for planning projects across a region and finding ways to improve and consolidate gains already made.

These local PGA/SF's should become the building blocks for larger national and international forums.

### **Community Activism**

Activist groups have achieved a number of exciting things, from cutting down GM crops, to street parties to shutting down corporate institutions to the good old pie in the face.

However, I believe that there is something missing from many of these events - i.e. a social base to build, strengthen and expand. Over the years



these activist groups have become essentially professionalised activist bodies. These are the people that 'do' activism.

The tactics are often brilliantly executed; however, they often fall down through their lack of community support.

Activists would be much better served, rather than forming more 'action' groups, by joining community groups that already exist and arguing for the use of direct action tactics as opposed to the usual lobbying of government. Activists should be arguing for horizontal structures in all groups. The way to an anarchist society is not by getting everyone to join the local anarchist cell but by encouraging lived anarchism, 'anarchy through the deed'. If a number of anarchists in an area where each working in a different community group highlighting different issues there would be a much wider expansion of anarchist ideas than by waiting for people to join your group.

This is not about leading these groups, co-opting or stampeding ideas through, in fact it is the opposite. The small professional anarchist direct action groups are much more vanguardist in approach than this, which aims to broaden and encourage anarchist ideas.

We need to broaden the movement out, tackle unique issues in unique ways and not selling a party line. We shouldn't offer solutions to these community groups but we can suggest operating methods and practices that may lead to dual power structures.

Of course, one criticism of this is that we would lose the networking of direct action skills that were gained through numerous activist networks. However, as I hope to discuss in the following section a network of educational projects for anarchists would hopefully counter such problems.



The London Underground could for example become a skill-sharing event and a way to see how other activists are working in different groups as well. It could be used as a forum to try and link community struggles.

We must also remember that 'activists' too are a community and therefore, as a group, we need our own spaces for interacting and networking. London Underground, coupled with the social centre network and with the 'educational' element I put forward later, would be a strong challenging move forward for the anarchist movement and anarchism itself.

As Dominick argues:

*"it is not only important to build the foundation of the new society, but also to diminish the strength and capacity of the old system. We must first make space within the dominant system in order to have room in which to build society anew. Therefore, not only must we form alternative institutions, but also counter institutions... to resist and assault the status quo."* 6



*"The vital element of this is that these not be ghettoised activist groups but activist inspired community groups. The social can be a location for the development of both the foundations of a new society and the destruction (or at least educate people on the paucity of capitalist structures) of the old"* 7

### Education

The discussion of 'education' can be broken into two separate sections. Firstly, we need to consider internal 'anarchist' education and secondly,

the broadening out of anarchist and social issues.

Whether we like it or not, we must acknowledge that activists are a professional community with specialised skills. As a community we aspire to have the broadest understanding of the society in which we live and to find ways to change the system under which we live. Leninist groups discuss the 'party' in terms of being the 'memory of the working class'. For groups such as Militant Tendency the party "will be scientifically conscious and permanently organised for the proletarian class struggle, the regular army of the class, which en masse can only approach revolutionary consciousness in sharp periods of crisis, and even then not permanently, not scientifically." 8 This contempt for the capacity of the working class to engage with political ideas is, for Leninists, a justification of top-down 'socialism'. In a sense we as activists are the 'memory' for we specialise in analysing and understanding

oppression. The key distinction is that, far from wishing to maintain a monopoly of information, anarchists aim to push this information out as far as possible.

Firstly, we as a community need to continue to learn. I suggest that we need to spend more time developing analysis. Not only of contemporary political issues but aiming for an historical perspective we also need to learn of old tactics and develop tactics for now. Beyond simply consuming information we should aim to develop the skills to write propaganda



and texts that reflect the political situation in our locale. Reading/Discussion groups should be seen as an important part of developing a social movement.

The skills gained in such group are clearly transferable to our engagement with community groups. This is the second part of the educational aims.

Of course, 'activists' as a clique will never have all the information. Apparent expertise does not in any way override the immediacy of alienation that people feel (rather than read). Unlike the orthodox Marxist approach we must realise that our (activist) community has got a lot to offer the wider community however, all of the numerous 'communities' that make up the wider community have something to offer to the struggle.

What our community can offer is to develop dual power structures - reaching out to the largest number of people in the community in both a practical physical way and in an ideological way. Arguing for practical solutions is a key to developing.

We should aim to develop anarchist forums, similar in concept to Marxist Forums, Marxism and the Globalise Resistance events. At the moment, the Anarchist Bookfair is perhaps our closest equivalent to Marxism; it is one of the largest events on the anarchist calendar. There is also the Earth First gathering and other conferences. What we are lacking however is regionalized, regular events well publicised (fly-posting, leaflets, internet etc.). Not the large spectacles but something much more low-key.

### Work

Although I argued in my introduction that the primary site of struggle for workers in the global north is community based, this is in no way to suggest we should ignore workers struggle. We should aim to build links between work-place struggles and community struggle. To highlight the commonality of issues faced at home and at work and to emphasise the need for horizontal organisational structures in the workplace. Anarcho-syndicalism is the obvious place to start when considering workplace organising.

I won't pursue this to any great extent, if only because the reality of the 'direct action' movement is that it has no strong connection with the workplace in this country and is therefore much better placed to focus on community based issues.

### International Perspective

Another potential problem of the above suggestions is that it could be seen as a step backwards to the single-issue-ism of the 1980's and early 1990's. It was, of course, with the realisation that the single-issue campaigns had a common

enemy in capitalism that the anti-capitalist movement was born. However, through numerous activists deciding to focus on the abstract concept of 'capitalism' as an issue in itself many of the smaller victories of the single-issue campaigns were lost.

Clearly, focusing on single issues and gaining small victories can be seen as reformist, liberal or somehow not enough. It is the anarchist fear of being seen as reformist that often prevents us as a movement making any victories at all. The gains of higher wages, better working conditions, environmental victories, the asylum seeker that is entitled to stay in the country etc. are 'reforms' worth fighting for. If we aren't willing to make the world as good as possible today we will never have the courage as a movement to really transform society. I for one am happy to live with the label of reformist if it means I, and others like me, have a higher standard of living. An abstract 'revolutionary vision' is no less an opiate than religion.

Whilst focusing on local issues, single-issue campaigns etc., we must ensure that we don't lose the larger perspective. We must ensure that the international perspective is kept alive. This can be done in a number of ways. Firstly, I think it is important to start with the concrete things in peoples lives and make the abstract leaps to the nature of capitalism rather than the other way around. Mobilising people to shut down a G8 summit should be based firstly on the lived experiences of people and then on the broader international perspective.

Personally, I feel that the activist community has in recent times focused on these things in the opposite way. We expect people to first come to a large confrontational demonstration and then go back to their communities somehow radicalised. The real answer is to radicalise people in their communities. Then, when they go to a mass action they are already strong, confident and aware and not able to be led.

Another way of keeping an international perspective at the forefront is to possibly try 'partnering' campaigns. For example, it is possible that a campaign against the closure of a hospital in London could be 'partnered' with a campaign to prevent a hospital closure in Ghana. This would have the dual effect of allowing both communities to appreciate that these issues are international that 'the working class have no country' and that the same institutions (IMF, World Bank etc.) that are responsible for the misery of the global South are equally eroding the gains made in the 'rich' North. It also has the practical advantage of allowing groups to learn from the experiences of others to develop more effective strategies.

At all times we need to break down barriers between disparate communities, show people that they are not alone - that their fight is our fight - that together we can make positive inroads against capitalism. 'Partnering' campaigns are also about internationalising mutual aid and finding ways around corporate/governmental programmes to achieve real gains.

### Conclusion

Although many activists are already working in the way I've outlined above, and nothing I've written may be particularly new or innovative, I feel it is important to at least engage in debate about these things, to ensure that we don't get lost in our own backwaters, isolated as a non-movement that only engages with other activists and is alienated from grass roots campaigns and more importantly from our class, which is how I've often felt as an activist.

We need to constantly challenge ourselves and re-evaluate both ourselves as individuals and as a movement. Hopefully this is seen not as a prescriptive text but more of a questioning of direction.

Clayton E



### Footnotes

- 1 Vaneigem, R. 2001, 'The Revolution of Everyday Life'. Rebel Press, London, p. 85
- 2 Marx, K. quoted in Camatte, J. 'Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?'. <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/camwan06.htm>
- 3 Camatte, J. 'Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?'. <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/camwan06.htm>
- 4 Dominick, BA. 'An Introduction to Dual Power Strategy'. HYPERLINK "<http://www.rootmedia.org/~messmedia/dualpower/dpintro.htm>"
- 5 op. cit
- 6 op. cit
- 7 op. cit
- 8 Lever, R., Semp, P. and Matgamna, S. 1966. 'What we are and what we must become: A critique of the politics and perspectives of the Militant Tendency' Section 2. <http://www.workersliberty.org/publications/wwaawmb/seet2.htm>



# A *Blast* from the past...

With American Imperialism running rampant and war with Iraq looking only a matter of time, we have taken the opportunity to reprint these articles by Alexander Berkman from *The Blast*.

Originally published in 1917, these articles indicate why anarchists oppose capitalist wars and how little the rhetoric and activity of the state at war has changed. As such, their message is as relevant and as important as when they were written: No war but the class war!

A leading light in the anarchist movement for decades, Berkman was imprisoned along with Emma Goldman for their anti-war activity.

## To The Youth Of America

By Alexander Berkman

Tyranny must be opposed at the start.

Autocracy, once secured in the saddle, is difficult to dislodge.

If you believe that America is entering the war "to make democracy safe," then be a man and volunteer.

But if you know anything at all, then you should know that the cry of democracy is a lie and a snare for the unthinking. You should know that a republic is not synonymous with democracy, and that America has never been a real democracy, but that it is the vilest plutocracy on the face of the globe.

If you can see, hear, feel, and think, you should know that King Dollar rules the United States, and that the workers are robbed and exploited in this country to the heart's content of the masters.

If you are not deaf, dumb, and blind, then you know that the American bourgeois democracy and capitalistic civilisation are the worst enemies of labour and progress, and that instead of protecting them, you should help to fight to destroy them.

If you know this, you must also know that the workers of America have no enemy in the toilers of other countries. Indeed, the workers of Germany suffer as much from their exploiters and rulers as do the masses of America.

You should know that the interests of Labour are identical in all countries. Their cause is international.

Then why should they slaughter each other?

The workers of Germany have been misled by their rulers into donning the uniform and turning murders.

So have the workers of France, of Italy, and England been misled.

But why should *you*, men of America, allow yourselves to be misled into murder or into being murdered?

If your blood must be shed, let it be in defence of your own interests, in the war of the workers against their despoilers, in the cause of real liberty and independence.

*Which is the braver? The man who falls in line with the great majority or he that faces the wrath of millions for conscience sake?*

*Do not confound us with the pacifists. We believe in fighting.*

*Aye, we have been fighting all our lives — fighting injustice, oppression, and tyranny. Almost single handed at that.*

*We are not pacifists. But we want to know what we are fighting for, and we refuse to fight for the enemies and the exploiters of humanity.*

Alexander Berkman

## WAR DICTIONARY

By Alexander Berkman

**ALLIES** - The fairies of Democracy.

**BARBARIANS** - The other fellows.

**CONGRESS** - The valet of Woodrow the First.

**CENSORSHIP** - The rape of Free Speech.

**CONSCRIPTION** - Free men fighting against their will.

**CIVILIZATION** - In God We Trust.

**DEMOCRACY** - The voice of the Gallery Gods.

**FREE SPEECH** - Say what you please, but keep your mouth shut.

**HUNS** - Loyal patriots from Central Europe.

**HUMANITY** - Treason to government.

**JUSTICE** - Successful target shooting.

**KAISER** - A President's ambition.

**LIBERTY BOND** - A bone from a bonehead.

**LIBERTY LOAN** - The bread line of the Unborn.

**LOYAL CITIZEN** - Deaf, dumb, and blind.

**MILITARISM** - Christianity in action.

**PATRIOTISM** - Hating your neighbour.

**REGISTRATION** - Funeral march of Liberty.

**SEDITION** - The proof of Tyranny.

**SLACKER** - Jesus Christ.

**TRENCHES** - Digging your own grave.

**UN-AMERICAN** - Independent opinion.

**UN-DEMOCRATIC** - Ideals.

**UNIFORM** - Government strait-jacket.

**VICTORY** - Ten million dead.

**WAR** - The propaganda of Democracy.



# Vive l'anarchie

## An interview with French Anarchists

The Presidential elections in France caused a bit of a stir. With the fascist candidate getting into the second round, the media and politicians in Britain went into a flurry. The French took to the streets, with anarchists taking the lead. Black Flag decided to find out more about the election, the protests and French Anarchism.

**BF:** First, perhaps you could say something about yourself and the organisation you are part of?

**F:** I'm François, a member of the **Federation Anarchiste**, which includes some 80 activist groups throughout France and Belgium. We have published the weekly **Le Monde Libertaire** since 1976 (monthly previously) and broadcast the 24 hour radio "**Radio Libertaire**" in Paris since 1981. You could call it an old lady (almost 50 years now), but as with the rest of the anarchist movement, its activists are mostly young, say 20-40 years old.

**N:** My name's Nico. I'm 30 and work as an archaeologist. Since 1999, I've been involved in **Le Cercle Social**, a small nucleus of anarcho-councilist orientated anarchists. I also participate in the **International Discussion Network**, a world-wide "ultraleft" network. Now, I live in Lille, in the north of France, where I work with a group of **Autonomist comrades**, outside any federation. We first met to create the **No wars, No Borders collective**, and recently, the **Collective for a General Strike**. We are presently trying to publish a monthly bulletin named "**Un autre monde**" (Another world). This includes political and social debates, but also practical training (what to do in a demo, how to speak publicly and so on).

**BF:** Obviously, the results of the presidential elections have brought France to the attention of the world. What can you tell us about the election? What did the anarchists do during the campaign?

**F:** Obviously, nobody expected these results, us included. The first thing that comes to mind is the unpleasant sight of Le Pen challenging Chirac. But this has somewhat obscured the fact that only a minority of people (indeed less

than a quarter) voted for one of the two mainstream candidates, and more people refused to vote at all than vote for any of the single candidates. From this viewpoint, it is a pity that Le Pen's "victory" made us forget that this was actually a defeat for prime minister Jospin, a defeat that we anarchists welcomed warmly.



As far as the **Federation Anarchiste** is concerned, we first planned a "classic" campaign against political elections. That meant leaflets, public gatherings, etc... For instance in Rennes we organised the "**Journées Libertaires**" where the whole anarchist movement over there (which means a lot of people) gathered to discuss what anarchists effectively can do in the here and now, and what alternatives they can suggest to parliamentary politics.

Of course, the result was somewhat different than expected between the two elections, and there was no easy answer to the question whether we should change our campaign. In particular, the question of voting for Chirac against Le Pen gave rise to several individual answers in most groups within the Federation. Eventually, as far as I know one group publicly urged people to vote, a few continued with the abstention campaign unchanged, and most claimed voting or not for Chirac was not the most important issue and

that electing Chirac (i.e. for business as usual) would only deepen the crisis and help the Front National to be stronger even next time.

**N:** I must admit that we were all surprised by the election results. Everybody just thought there would be a duel between the Socialist prime minister Jospin and the Gaullist president Chirac. There were debates in the media about the "third man": would it be the sovereignist Jean-Pierre Chevènement or the Trotskyists Arlette Laguiller?

Before the first turn of presidential elections, most anarchists were involved in traditional anti voting campaigns. Anarcho-syndicalists from the **AIT** (International workers

association) were very active, for example. But there was not a great deal of interest in the campaigns, because of the already expected massive levels of abstention. Here in Lille, there was no special campaign against election... yet abstention remained a crucial factor, even at the second stage of the elections.

**BF:** Was the impression given by the UK media of a "far right upsurge" largely an illusion?

**F:** There was no dramatic upsurge, rather a steady increase for more than 15 years now. The number of Le Pen voters did not decrease between the two elections, which shows that Le Pen voters really mean it... On the other hand, we could remark that many of them did not vote for the far-right at the parliamentary elections in June, and probably abstained instead (as did more than 35% of the people!)

**N:** Yes and no. Before the elections, the French media and public opinion considered Le Pen politically buried, a problem of the past. He was not even sure he'd get the 500 signatures from town mayors that he needed in order to stand. So it was a surprise when he attracted such a high number of votes. But he didn't get many more actual votes than in the last presidential, in 1995. His presence at the second turn was partly because of the millions of people who preferred abstention or far left candidates (Laguiller, Besancenot



and Gluckstein, Trotskyists). So we can't speak of a far right upsurge, but a continuous presence of the National Front. We shouldn't forget it's a party with 40 000 members, well integrated into neighbourhoods and associations. The main problem is not the percentage of votes for Le Pen, but the fact that 100 % of voting people at the second turn approved candidates with racist and securitarist ideas, either Le Pen or Chirac.

**BF:** What do you think of the distribution of FN votes? Why, for example, so many votes in the East of France? What are the underlying causes for the vote?

**F:** I have no idea. In the south-east there are a number of former "pieds-noirs", that is, people of European descent expelled from Algeria in 1962 and that may be of some influence, but as I live in Brittany, where the FN is historically weak, I am not best placed to answer. In general, Le Pen is popular among what we call "petits commerçants et artisans" and it is also commonly acknowledged that many unemployed people or vulnerable workers vote for Le Pen (even if many more do not vote at all). Also, there was an incredible campaign of scare stories on the TV in March-April that certainly helped Le Pen.

**N:** There are various interpretations, because the FN electorate is somewhat diverse. But what is interesting is that the areas with high FN voting are those with high unemployment. In the east, large industries were dismantled by the Left government (Socialists and communists) after 1981. This doesn't mean that former workers all vote for FN (most don't vote), but there are big economic problems, social tensions, and former "workers parties" are absent.

The media said that FN electors were all racists; this isn't necessarily so. They also said it was a "protest vote", but this doesn't explain the progression of FN votes since 1984. There are others causes, but the media don't like to discuss them. For example, part of Le Pen's campaign was against the Euro and "Euglobalisation", and this theme attracted some electors. Europe and globalisation – themes used by all candidates – scare a lot of people. It's connected with unemployment (because of delocalisation of factories) and US domination (an important theme in France). So part of the FN vote is a demonstration of sovereignty.

**BF:** There was a record abstention rate of 29%. Does this suggest apathy or rejection/protest? What effect did it have on the election?

**F:** I wouldn't claim that these 29% abstentionists were anarchist ones! However, it's a clear sign of distrust of parliamentary politics: we have seen a

regular alternating between left and right in power for more than 20 years now, and most people realise it doesn't change anything important in their daily lives. It's no more pleasant to be fired under a left-wing government than under a right one.

**N:** Abstention is always difficult to interpret. We should be more precise. Almost 40% of workers don't vote, and 50% of the unemployed. And we should add 25% of workers and almost 50% of unemployed don't even sign on the electoral register, so aren't counted as "abstentionists".

The majority of the working class don't vote. But in some other categories, like middle managers, abstentionism is growing. It's the same thing in workplace elections, for trade-unions: abstention is massive. Now, is this apathy or protest? Both. This is protest, as abstentionists choose not to vote as "they're all the same, they're all thieves". But this doesn't mean these people will automatically join social movements, strikes and so on.

The positive aspect is they are no more influenced by "workers parties" like Socialists or Communists.

**BF:** It is often claimed that anarchist abstentionism aids the right. France seems to confirm this. How do you reply?

**F:** Oh, it is little help, compared to the aid given by "left" governmental politics over the past years...

**N:** It is mostly the Left electorate that don't vote anymore, which profits the Right. That's true. I'm not sure, even being an optimist, that massive abstention has anything to do with anarchist propaganda. People experienced left government and understood it was no help for workers.



**"People experienced left government and understood it was no help for workers. . . . Real socialism can only be found in struggle, not in elections."**



**"it is the duty of grass roots people to organise daily against fascism and capitalism, and that's another deal, much more challenging but much more fruitful than any electoral front."**

The question is now: will there be a new Left? And who will mould it? Radical reformists? Trotskyists? Libertarians? Or will the old Left rise again? This is still unclear. This is always a difficult question, because we must kill the link between us and the "Left", we mustn't fear it's end. Real socialism can only be found in struggle, not in elections. Even for anarchists, this basic reality is sometimes difficult to hear.

**BF:** It's been said that some anarchists have been departing from their usual boycott of bourgeois elections to "stop fascism" by voting for Chirac. Is that true? Have libertarians managed to



**resist the widespread call to vote Chirac?**

F: Some will have certainly voted for Chirac, not exactly to stop fascism – but to prevent the possible immediate dynamic effects of a big vote for Le Pen among his supporters. A public call to vote for Chirac is another story, and I am aware of only one group within the Federation that made such a call. Some other groups, along with Le Monde Libertaire, called for abstention; in Rennes, like in most places, we concentrated on two points: first, explaining that we did not regret having contributed to the fall of Jospin; second, explaining that the only chance to avoid fascism, on the 5th May and in the future, was daily social activism and “reprendre nos vies en main” (to take our lives into our own hands).

N: This is true. To understand it better, we should explain the debates within the French libertarian movement over the last few years. Some people feel uneasy with abstention, as they know it's not the result of anarchist propaganda, and see it doesn't lead to political activism. They became interested in Murray Bookchin's “libertarian communalism” and some said that participation in local elections could be compatible with anarchists ideas. Others, like **Alternative Libertaire (AL)**, had stood candidates for the national assembly in the past. So there is no general agreement on the abstention question. AL officially called for a vote for Chirac to defeat Le Pen. This wasn't much of a surprise, as they generally adopt the same positions as the Trotskyist LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) in most situations. There were also groups of the Anarchist Federation and various individuals, like Babar (Roger Noel, former editor of *Alternative Libertaire*

**BF: What alternative do you present instead of the “vote thief rather than fascist” idea?**

F: That if we stick to this idea, we'll get both: first the thief, and then the fascist. That's again why we found it important to concentrate on the long term (far more important) issues than the (obvious) single issue of the 5th May results.

N: Our first leaflet, on the Monday after the elections, was entitled “Neither thief, nor fascist, general strike!”. We explained, in leaflets, in a small pamphlet, in meetings and general assemblies, that the election results masked the reality of social crisis. That most workers didn't vote for the Left because of the 35 hour law (that introduced flexibility in most workplaces, increasing rather than decreasing working hours), that this social / work crisis, couldn't have a vote solution, but a strike solution. We didn't insist too much on abstention but stressed that the real answer lay in class struggle. On May Day, our leaflet “On May 5, nothing will be solved! General strike!” was generally welcomed by workers on a trade-union demo.

A lot of people said to us: “we'll vote on 5 May, but we'll continue demos against Chirac after”.

**BF: Do you think the absurd, but typical, multitude of left candidates impacted on the election result?**

F: Why absurd? It is no more absurd than the “one left vote only” politics that the Socialist Party and its allies want to promote, without any political content other than beating the FN, at the forthcoming parliamentary elections (and indeed they succeeded in this).

N: There were 16 candidates in the elections, more than the previous one: 3 Trotskyists, 5 governmental Left, 4 liberal Right, 2 conservative Right and

from LCR and LO (Workers Struggle) were united for the European deputies elections, but disagreed on the presidential elections. And PT (Workers Party) never made alliances with other Trotskyists... But we can't say the multiplication of candidates had an impact. This is a political representation crisis that has an impact on the number of candidates.

**BF: One of the obvious calls by the Left here is for “unity” and so some kind of “united front” (particularly in elections). What do you think of this?**

F: That's pure crap. This call for so-called unity is nothing more than a call to back government parties, be they from the left or the right. It is also another attempt to avoid any analysis of the rejection of these parties by the majority of the people.

N: Before the elections, the governmental Left was divided, because they needed to emphasise their difference with the Socialist party to bump up their share of the votes. After the elections, they all united... behind Chirac, whom they had attacked as a thief a few days before. The Right didn't have to bother as the left were doing the work for them – posters proclaiming “socialists with Chirac”, “Green with Chirac”...

**BF: Are the anarchists suggesting an alternative idea to the “united front” idea? If so, what is it?**

F: Of course yes. We call for a social front. Meaning that it is the duty of grass roots people to organise daily against fascism and capitalism, and that's an other deal, much more challenging but much more fruitful than any electoral front. Where people have learnt their strength, and where they realise that it might be used to reclaim social progress for all instead of another leader, then there is no room left for fascism.

N: The only alternative is class struggle. It was somewhat difficult, in a few days, to propose a really coherent alternative, so everybody used “standard” slogans or solutions, like “if

voting really changed anything they'd make it illegal” or, like us and a few others, calls for a general strike. Most of us don't really know how to write a good leaflet or poster – that will be read and understood by most people, without self-reference – or how to speak publicly in an hostile crowd or general assembly. Our weakness lies in our amateurism in propaganda.

**BF: The Left over here is pointing to the large vote for Trotskyist parties. Are the Trotskyists starting to fill the vacuum left by the Communist Party?**

---

**“We explained . . . that the election results masked the reality of social crisis . . . this social / work crisis, couldn't have a vote solution, but a strike solution. We . . . stressed that the real answer lay in class struggle”**

---

in Brussels – which is not the same as the French AL) and an important number of CNT trade-unionists. The OCL (Libertarian Communist Organisation), the AIT and all radical, autonomist and ultraleft groups called for abstention. The pressure against abstention was very strong. In a general assembly, an autonomist comrade was insulted and almost lynched, as he explained what Chirac had done against migrants and “sans-papiers”. We've been insulted and treated like fascists every day.

2 far Right. The Left and Right government or wannabe government parties tend to present candidates at the first round to ascertain their “influence” and prepare negotiations for deputies elections (in June) and ministerial seats. Remember that the Left government was a five-party coalition (Socialists, Communists, Sovereignists, Ecologists and Radicals). The Far Right has been divided for a few years: allowing Le Pen to appear as less extremist than its former ally Megret (MNR). Trotskyists





Anarcho-Syndicalists in France raising a universal message (as featured on the front page of the May Day issue of Socialist Worker!)

***"Be combative in struggles. Study reality in its complexity. Change the world."***

F: In some ways, yes, but the actual picture is somewhat more complicated. The Communist Party began to sink 20 years ago, and many of the people now voting for Trotskyist sects never had the opportunity to vote Communist when it was prominent among the left. Roughly speaking, you can divide the "Trotskyist" votes into two: first, there's the classical radical left vote, deeply rooted in the working class in the usual sense; and second, there is a vote in sympathy with the anti-globalisation struggles as seen in Seattle, Gothenburg, Genoa and other big demos. The first one mainly reflects Lutte Ouvrière's (LO) propaganda, and the second one suits better the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). In both cases, it is very doubtful that the voters had any opinion nor knowledge about Trotskyism...

N: More than 11% of votes were for Trotskyists, mostly for Arlette Laguiller (LO) and Olivier Besancenot (LCR). As "Arlette" called for a blank vote during the second round, a lot of her middle class electors now sympathise with Besancenot, who conducted a good campaign. He was unknown, as a young worker (27 years, a postman, as his posters say) but he surprised everyone by gaining more than 4% of the vote.

The LCR is not a classical Trotskyists organisation. In 1966, they were a castro-guevarist scission of the Communist Party. They were very leftist and militarist after 1968, but became more moderate over the years, and are

critical of Trotsky and Lenin's heritage. Its militants are very active in radical unionism like SUD (essentially in public sector industries like rail or post) and in associated movements. So their political niche is more the former left socialism than communist party. LO is more classically Trotskyist. They were created in the fifties by a small nucleus of workers, with a very Bolshevik conception of organisation and militant roles. From the beginning, their success has been the "workplace bulletins" they distribute in every workplace where they have militants or contacts. Since 1974, Arlette Laguiller (former leader of a bank employees strike) has been their candidate and spokeswoman (but not the leader of the party). She's very popular, being interviewed by all papers and even having a Muppet on a well known TV show. From a very workerist and revolutionary organisation, LO has become an electoralist one. LO is very influential in former "red towns", because former Communist voters turn to Arlette...who calls for new a Communist party.

BF: How do you think the large Trotskyist vote will affect the overall labour movement and revolutionary movement? Will they be pushed back into the ballot box and off the streets?

F: As far as we can see, this large Trotskyist vote does not mean more Trotskyist activism. Few Trotskyist voters were eager to see their candidates effectively elected: they wanted to vote "as left as possible"

(words taken from Lutte Ouvrière propaganda), or more generally to express that they belonged to the left, but rejected the government's politics.

On the other hand, that they expressed it that way (voting) rather than organising for, say a general strike, shows that the labour and revolutionary movement has still a lot of work to convince that there is a way other than electoral politics.

N: It's still unclear. Rather than the streets, the real question is the left's presence in the workplace. It's clear now that there is no far Left in France, as the classic left niche has been filled by LCR and LO. So there's a gap to be filled. But who will fill it? Others Trotskyists are mostly satellized by LCR or LO. So there is room for libertarians and ultraleftists... if we take our chance and make the right decisions.

BF: I saw that during the initial demonstrations against Le Pen, the CNT was given prominent mention. What can you tell us of the role libertarians played in the street protests?

F: Libertarians had a double role there: first, we have far reaching experience of daily struggle against the extreme right, while most protesters were quite new to it. And second, having something else to say than "vote thief Chirac on the 5th may" was quite appealing for many people.

N: At first the street protests were very spontaneous, organised by pupils and students (except in Paris, where they



were in holidays...). When political organisations began to have a visible presence, pupils and students ceased to come... This is true even for anarchists and radical unionists.

**BF: The CNT demonstration was explicitly mentioned in the French reports of the May Day protests against Le Pen. Could you summarise the anarchist input into the May Day demonstrations?**

F: As I don't live in Paris, I can't give direct evidence of the anarchist May Day demonstration there, but it was obviously impressive. I think there was an anarchist block in more than 50 demos on May Day. In Rennes, all the libertarian groups gathered in the town (**Federation Anarchiste, Alternative Libertaire, CNT, SCALP**, and also libertarian squatters), and our block was quite remarkable, and also one of the most dynamic of this very big demo. Of course, here like everywhere else, our message concentrated on what to do and how to organise after Chirac had been re-elected.

N: For the last few years, the media systematically mentions any CNT presence on a demo. On May Day, this was massive, with around 10 000 people with Red and Black banners. Here in Lille, there were two libertarian groupings on May Day: a big one with the CNT and classical anarchists,

and another with our Collective. We wanted to be with the CNT... but we had a problem with the sound car and were late... At the end of the demo, there were a lot of people with us, but it turned into more of a street party rather than a political demo...

**BF: Outside of participating in the street protests, what else are the anarchists doing against Le Pen?**

F: Firstly, there has not been one venue of an extreme-right leader in Rennes, (and almost anywhere in France), not one public FN meeting without anarchists participating in street protests and, more than once, initiating them. These last five years, we have often been alone and, to be frank, too few in number to be anything other than a symbolic presence. But in the past we were able to prevent meetings taking place by blocking the streets etc..

Otherwise, we try to put into practice our idea that daily grassroots activism is the only effective answer to Le Pen's ideas. We do it as well as we can, with our limited means.

N: There was a lot of debate on the Web, mailing lists and Indymedia, around elections, abstention or not, Le Pen social and economic problems,

and so on. During the two weeks of demonstrations, there was very little direct action against fascists. No one wanted to provide the FN with an incident that they could use to win.

**BF: Turning away from the election, can you summarise the current state of the French libertarian movement?**

F: The French libertarian movement has always been difficult to summarise. All I can say is that it is quite lively, and fast evolving.

N: We can list the groups, by order of influence. The big ones: CNT (**National Confederation of Workers**) is the most important organisation, with around 3000 militants. They evolved from anarcho-syndicalism to radical unionism after they were excluded from the IWA. They attract both libertarians interested in class struggle, former members of classic unions like CGT and CFDT, young workers. It's likely they will rapidly evolve outside the

autonomism and council communism, but differs from the ultraleft in its support of national liberation movements.

**No Pasaran** is a former antifascist network turned to anticapitalism and libertarianism.

But we should add to this list a lot of local collectives and small organisations, based on radical, squat or ultraleft backgrounds, with cordial links but without formal networks, like **Maloka** (Dijon), **Ab Irato** (Paris), **Tranquille le Chat** (cool da 'cat, Paris) or **Cercle social** (Lille). Part of the ultraleft is also grouped in an **International Discussion Network**, which we also take part. This is not an organisation, rather a exchange of analysis and theory in various countries.

We can summarise the current state of French anarchism by a few tendencies: a strong attraction for

radical unionism, a difficult search for unity – around an open but moderate social anarchism, and an apparition of radical groups to the left of "official anarchism".

**BF: Do the libertarian**

**groups and federations co-operate together? How much and in what way?**

F: There has been a lot of effort over the past two years to get libertarian groups co-operating together, and I am quite optimistic on that.

At a local level, it is now common for various groups to put their names to common tracts, to appear jointly in protests, to invite each other to their public meetings, and even to organise common actions, like we are doing in Rennes with a "gratis public transport" campaign.

At a federal, or national, level, things have to be done a little bit more formally and the federations are beginning to take into account these local changes, and to behave with respect to each other with the mutual trust we should expect. I'm not saying that everything is wonderful, but the situation is in general evolving in a satisfactory direction.

N: There are conflictual, but existing relations, between the "big ones". The recent "Call for unity of libertarians", launched by the FA, was immediately joined by an important member of **No Pasaran**, and some groups of OCL and

---

**"there was an anarchist block in more than 50 demos on May Day. In Rennes, all the libertarian groups gathered in the town . . . and our block was quite remarkable, and also one of the most dynamic of this very big demo. . . our message concentrated on what to do and how to organise after Chirac had been re-elected."**

---

libertarian field, even if there are anarchists inside.

The **Federation Anarchiste** was for a long time the most important group, and has a weekly paper, a radio station and some workshops and libraries. They are influenced by Synthesism, and local groups frequently have very different positions on various issues (in elections, some voted Chirac, others didn't). A year ago some FA leaders launched a call for Unity of libertarians, with some success in some towns. They call for a "social anarchism" and are somewhat moderate.

The CNT-AIT is the official IWA anarcho-syndicalist group in France. Though smaller than the CNT, they're more strict on principles and stay on revolutionary class struggle ground. Part of its membership is influenced by council communism.

**Alternative Libertaire** is officially of a platformist background, and influenced by Daniel Guérin's synthesis between anarchism and Trotskyism. They're present in trade-unions and social movements.

The **Organisation Communiste Libertaire** has been influenced by



*AL: The CNT now authorises its members to also be members of other political groups, including anarchist ones, but is still very defiant. Most organisations signed the call for an international anarchist network. Everybody is formally for unity, but there are problems over the content of this unity.*

*No unity can be found on the basis of "unity for unity's sake", nor by political discussion without a real movement. The only thing that will destroy old barriers and create a new "anarchist landscape" is a social movement, like the way the 1995 general strike brought about the renewal of the CNT.*

**BF: Is the influence of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism increasing? It appears so as the anarchists continue to crop up in French news reports (at least the ones I see!).**  
**F:** Yes. Over the past ten years, anarchism has gained back some strength. Moreover, as far as I can see, we are more often viewed as promoters of a political project – whether you agree with it or not –

than as poets or bomb throwers. But we should not be satisfied with this alone, this is the very first step of many towards the revolution; and second, we will have to face more attacks as we become a threat. For instance, the local newspaper "Ouest-France" refused to release any of our communiqués during the presidential campaign, or to announce our public meetings or concerts in the same period, including the "Journées Libertaires" I mentioned above. This attitude is somewhat new and probably significant.

*N: It's difficult to say. The old far left in France has become so moderate, and Stalinism / orthodox Communism has become so weak that anarchism seems the only far left alternative. So the daily news can't ignore it. The CNT, which was a small group ten years ago, has become a respectable organisation, having lost some of its references to anarcho-syndicalism along the way.*

**BF: Do you have many links with the wider labour and left-wing groups? If so, what kind?**

**F:** You cannot speak of links. We clearly don't have the same agenda as the

political left, and should never forget it. On the other hand, we may unite with the left for a demonstration, or some specific struggle. This was the case in the past for instance in the defence of illegal immigrants. But it happens more rarely now, as the political left has shown its true colours in power and as the, say, Leninist left is mostly divided between those who try to pull the political left further to the left (typically, the LCR) and those who won't ally themselves with anyone, political left or anarchists (typically Lutte Ouvrière).  
**N:** Our choice is autonomy. Leftists are boring, even anarchist ones. When we call for an action, we don't contact organisations, or if we do, only for very



practical reasons. When our student comrades wrote their call for a World Strike Against War, it was translated into fifteen languages and distributed by people on the five continents. They got support from anarchists of various world-wide groups, ultra-left commies from Russia and outside, trots, esperantists, pacifists, Buddhists, Christians, and so on. But not one line of the text, which was antinationalist and antistatist, was changed. The strike itself wasn't really a success, even if there were some good things in a few French and US towns, but it was a good example: if you have a good proposal at the right time, you can do it. Anarchists generally lack self-confidence, or audacity. That's our main problem. We should have made this call on September 12...

*There are so many interesting people outside of anarchist and leftists circles. I've created a widely open mailing list for discussion, and use various others, and post communiqués to Indymedia. I also participate in the International Discussion Network with people from various countries. But I think that our*

*main effort should be speaking with people outside the activist ghetto...*

*Another weakness is our presence (or lack of) in the labour movement. Most of the Autonomous comrades in Lille are pupils or students, and us - workers and unemployed, are a minority. This has an evident impact on our practice and positions. Having a greater presence in the workplace is an objective.*

*Since the communist orthodoxy has fallen, anarchists have been given a relatively positive outlook in France. Most know singers that were anarchists (Brassens, Ferré...), farmer-leader José Bové refers to anarchism, and even Robert Hue, a communist party leader, says he is libertarian. The only problem is when you begin to explain what revolutionary anarchism is, people feel a little troubled... Oh, you aren't gentle cool pacifist that just dislikes McDonalds and Bill Gates? Oh, you really want a classless, nationless, stateless, moneyless society? Eeuh...*

**BF: Obviously in France you have numerous dual unions (i.e. revolutionary unions like the CNT). Does having dual unions make spreading libertarian ideas and tactics among fellow workers harder or easier? Do CNT activists become isolated from other union**

**members? How do you break down barriers?**

**N:** The first reaction of classical unions when a radical one, like SUD or CNT, appears in a workplace, is to denounce them as "non-representative". But in France everybody can freely choose which union to join, and a union is considered representative if they have a real section with active members. Each time there has been a judgement about representation, radicals have won.

*Does the presence of radical unions enable the spread of libertarian ideas? It would be a somewhat ambitious (or Leninist!) vision. It is workers who search for the right terrain in which to express radical ideas and practice. They find new unions (like SUD) or old and tiny, but radical ones (like CNT) in which to do this. For a long time, CFDT – even if they emerged from Christian background – were a part of this radical, "anarcho-syndicalist" niche. As soon as they left it, there was a need for a new organisation to do this. It's because there's a libertarian practice in workers that CNT or SUD are able*



to be part of the union landscape, not the contrary.

**BF: Do anarchists also work in the larger reformist unions like the CGT? If so, how does that relate to those in revolutionary unions? How successful is such work?**

F: Yes, and I would say that it is still the majority of unionised anarchists. In general, they try to keep comradeship with comrades in revolutionary unions. In fact, the dispute about which union should be chosen is more or less the same as in Anglo-Saxon countries. It may be useful to note that many comrades try to forge links between anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in different unions, be it through the social movement commission within the FA, through informal information bulletins for syndicalists (our comrades in Lyon have edited one for several years), or through more formal groups like the old-timer Ecole Emancipee for educational workers.

N: Yes. In fact, there are anarchists in almost all big unions (CGT, CFDT, FO, FSU), for historical or local reasons. For example, the print correctors CGT union has been an anarchist bastion for a very long time. The former FA leader, Maurice Joyeux, was a known FO figure. And so on. There's now a network for anarchists in trade-unions, to link them beyond centrals. In a workplace, workers don't ask if you're anarchist, communist, socialist or even right-wing, they watch to see if you are a good "unionist", or simpler still, if you defend them well.

**BF: What other areas are anarchists active in?**

F: Squats, education, mutualism, feminism, local organising, fights against nuclear plants or GMO, defence of civil liberties, promotion of public services (water supply, public transports...) in an anarchist perspective... in fact, any worthy social struggle where an anarchist happens to be there.

N: There are anarchists active in almost all the associative and social movements. For example, there's a strong push within the ecological movement against nuclear power stations, to expose those governmental Greens that now discretely support nuclear power. A lot of anarchists also work with the sans-papiers movement, despite the difficulties in fighting against the Stalinists and former Maoists, well embedded in the movement. That's one of our problems in Lille. There are also movements for free public transport and so on.

**BF: The FN seem to be tapping into concern about crime ("law and order"). This is also an issue here. It is also considered a difficult question for anarchists. Have the French anarchists made any practical**

**proposals to counter this problem this side of the revolution?**

F: Indeed, it is a serious question, and it is difficult to give serious answers in a few words. To sum up, every anarchist is aware that there is no solution to this problem this side of the revolution. We know that most crimes, most individual violence just mirrors the daily violence we suffer from the state and the economic (dis)order. On the other hand, we also know that, sadly, when a car burns, it is in all probability a poor person's car, and when someone is assaulted in a train, he or she is seldom a rich capitalist. Hence the best we can do this side of the revolution is to explain that violence against your mates is no solution, nor are calls for stronger repression, since they can only bring more violence in return. Sorry, but this is one issue where the only answer this side of the revolution is to go the other side of the revolution!

N: This is a recurring question, whenever we have nothing else to discuss... I'm not sure we have better answers than anyone else, except the standard: "in a moneyless society, crime will be rare" and "direct democracy will solve any problem in a democratic way". In fact, we all lack interesting and new "descriptions" of "another world", communism, socialism, anarchy or call-it-how-you-like. This is one of the questions we discuss in International Discussion Network, trying to integrate new aspects of problems like technological revolution, ecological problems, refusal and abolition of work, and so on. But it's interesting to see that most comrades prefer to speak of more classic subjects like globalisation, empire and nationalism, nature of state or class analysis, than positive questions about a future society. We lack a real alternative; in the anarchist press, socialism often feels like a ghost, an undead project, without any link with our present activity. Here, we try to emphasise self-aid in society as a basis for a future world. If violence is a part of us, self-aid is also. Use our violence to abolish society, self-aid to create it. With this perspective, I'm probably somewhere between the new Kropotkinian school of natural science (Franz De Waal, Stephen Jay Gould) and communisation current theoreticians (like Gille Dauvè).

**BF: How do you feel about the future? Do you think that anarchism in France will grow?**

F: It is growing already, and I have every hope that this will continue, if only because it is the last idea that we've never experienced, because the other known revolutionary theory (Marxism) is deeply distrusted, and because the current state of affairs is unbearable. But it is now our duty to

make anarchism attractive and trustworthy, and that's a big deal.

N: Yes, definitely yes. It's "ecological niche" has grown. But what sort of anarchism? Radical-reformism "social anarchism" or autonomous, revolutionary anarchism and anarcho-Marxism? Probably both, at different rates. I feel that the real movement doesn't lie in one or another pole, one or another tendency, but in diversity and multiplicity. We don't know the way to social change, as the only answer to his question is social change itself. There are many currents, that attract different people, sociologically and psychologically. Now, we must make choices, be audacious and self-confident. If we always complain and say "it will not work", we'll lose, we'll be anarchist losers.

**BF: Can you think of any lessons from French anarchism that we in Britain could learn from?**

F: Something that strikes me in the Anglo-Saxon world in general, is that you seem to still pay a lot of attention to formal frontiers between the classical trends within anarchism, that is communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist anarchism. I think anarchism as a whole becomes an interesting issue for the here and now when these frontiers come down, and when we admit that, as individuals or groups, we can find food in all these old places, re-consider them not as dogmas, but as useful tools to put together to help us to understand what we can do today.

In France, this seems to be now the general feeling, and that helps co-operation between groups: not that we all agree on everything (it would be nonsense for anarchists), but we are learning to admit that one side does not always have the right answer.

N: The real problem is that this question can still be posed. Capitalists created an united Europe, and us, anti-national anarchists and communists, we still think of ourselves as "French" or "British" or "Greek" anarchists. History rolls over us... I don't think we can do a "European call for unity of anarchists", it would mean nothing, as there's so many tendencies under the same "anarchism" word. But making links between borders, making an effort to meet friends of the same sensibility outside our local towns and countries is an important thing. The aim is not to sign common declarations between big organisations of each country, it's to create personal, friendly relationship between real people form collectives beyond borders.

**BF: Any final thoughts? Anything you think we have not covered?**

N: Be combative in struggles. Study reality in its complexity. Change the world.



# The Algerian Insurrection

*Black Flag has decided to reprint this article even though it is about events over a year ago now simply because it is an inspiring account of a relatively unknown event.*

Quevedo said of the Spaniards: "they haven't been able to be historians but they deserved to be". This is still true of the 1936 Spanish Revolution: others have written the history. It's too early to write the history of the insurrection that started in Algeria during spring 2001, but it's not too late to defend it; and to fight the deep indifference as we see it in France.

To illustrate the significance of this uprising, we need to look at the actions and declarations of the Algerian insurgents. Their dignity, understanding and courage reveals the abjection in which people of the 'modern world' are living; their apathy, their petty worries and their sordid hopes.

The young rioters fought police and gendarmerie (military police) forces for several weeks shouting: "You can't kill us we are already dead!" Treated as half dead by Algerian society, they knew that they had to destroy it to start living. From the middle of April, mainly in Kabylie, but also in Kenchela, Skikda and parts of the East (at Oum El Bouaghi, Batna, Tébessa, Biskra, El Tarf etc.), they erected barricades, blocked off roads, assaulted gendarmerie and police stations. Rioters attacked a prefecture headquarters (in Tébessa, two ministers were inside the building), burned or vandalised many courthouses (in Ouacifs the 'Justice Court', recently built, was reduced to ashes), some tax offices, post offices and state corporation offices, political parties headquarters (at least thirty two), banks, social security offices etc. This incomplete list only gives a vague idea of the scale of the movement, but what is clear is that the insurgents undertook to clear the land of all "material expressions of the State".

After years of killings by the police and the military, the murder of a student in Beni Douala, on April 18th, provoked the first of the riots. In Amizour, near Bejaïa, the arbitrary arrest of three students on 22nd April provoked a mass insurrection. In Khenchela, on the 10th of June, an officer, showing off, driving a large car, called out insults to a young woman. Attacked by the young people who ran to defend the

woman, he cried out: "But what is going on with you today?" and the answer was "Everything has changed." He got a good hiding and his car was destroyed. An hour later, he returned with thirty soldiers dressed in civilian clothes and armed with automatic rifles. After a pitched battle, the soldiers retreated, but the riot spread throughout the whole town: barricades were erected, the city hall, the tax office, Sonelgaz corporation's headquarter, the prefecture and two chain stores were turned over by people shouting: "this is the way for Chaouis!"

---

The insurgents took up the term "**hogra**", an Algerian term for the arbitrary nature of authority, its privileges, corruption and contempt. Fighting the hogra meant fighting the State itself. What would be left of a state without privileges or corruption, a state that could not use arbitrary force and scorn?

---

When the people cease to tolerate day to day oppression, the extraordinary becomes ordinary. During these weeks and months, nearly everyday a gendarmerie brigade was attacked; and usually several at the same time. Military barracks were besieged; a blockade was imposed on the gendarmes who were forced to launch raids for supplies. Those who continued to have relations with them, even strictly commercial, were boycotted and punished. Some hotels were burned, as well as villas, cafes, restaurants, and stores; targeted because they belonged to dishonest officials or various wheeler-dealer-businessmen. There was a lot of destruction but surprisingly little looting.

So, for example, in Kherrata on May 23rd a stockpile of goods found a gendarmerie ex-officer's house was immediately burned. Everyone expressed their individual or collective grievances; concerning housing, water, industrial nuisance etc. Those known to be guilty of corruption were systematically exposed to public

condemnation. To start dealing with the problems posed by the dilapidated state of the country, it was necessary to first fight those who would prevent the people taking matters into their own hands.

The people targeted mayors and any officials close at hand. Beyond these skirmishes, the project of a complete expropriation from the expropriators was taking shape. On July 7th a declaration of the popular committee from Bejaïa's Wilaya (prefecture) was made to the State: "Your gendarmes, symbols of corruption, have only one use - to kill, repress and traffic. That is why they must leave immediately. Concerning our security, our brave vigilance committees are dealing with

it admirably: they are our pride." It continued, declaring that the citizens' problems would be dealt with "by our neighbourhood and villages' delegates and by trade unionist delegates who are working in an assembly called the popular committee. This is Direct

Democracy!"

The insurrection, or at least in its more advanced form, was limited to Kabylie. Nevertheless, the Kabylie insurgents themselves called it an Algerian Revolution and tried to extend it beyond their local area, refusing the Berberist identity argument in which their enemies wanted to disguise them.

In the aftermath, pointless questions were raised by a governmental "inquiry commission" and journalists, to discover if provocative activities of the gendarmerie could have provoked the riots; as if the existence of the Algerian State and its bloody repression is not a permanent provocation; and as if the population needed special justifications to revolt! The insurgents took up the term "**hogra**", an Algerian term for the arbitrary nature of authority, its privileges, corruption and contempt. Fighting the hogra meant fighting the State itself. What would be left of a state without privileges or corruption, a state that could not use arbitrary force and scorn? In Algeria more than anywhere else, nearly nothing: the only public service that had really worked in



this country, over the past forty years, was torture and political assassination. Whilst conspiring one against the other to appropriate power and oil income, the State gangs never stopped conspiring together against the people. As one of these political decision-makers declared after the repression of October 1988 riots:

*"During thirty years, we were able to tear each other apart, to fight each other. However, we never abandoned an expelled leader, even by simply visiting him. Because we were united by the certainty that our children have to take over from us. We knew that if this law was broken off, it would be the end for us, because the street would not be satisfied with one head but would take all."* (Cited by Jose Garçon in the preface of Djallal Malti's book: **La Nouvelle Guerre d'Algerie**, 1999)

Through countless purges, eliminations, manipulations, negotiations, covered up executions and mass killings, the real and unique continuity of the Algerian State (in continuity with the FLN) has been the police. As early as 1956, the emerging bureaucracy organised itself around the FLN's secret services (the basis for the future 'Securite Militaire'). The assassination of Abbane Ramdane in December 1957 illustrates their definitive victory over those who wanted to use ideology to control the masses and to justify the coming bureaucratic and dictatorial system.

Since then police terrorism has tended to take the place of "revolutionary" rhetoric. Execution became the standard procedure to resolve conflicts, not only against the MNA of Messali Hadj, but also inside the FLN itself. Since 1958, police officers were trained in KGB schools in Moscow. (Former President) Boumedienne had himself been an assistant to Boussouf, the organiser of FLN's interior police. And we know that the generals, who are part of the Mafioso authorities in Algeria, many "deserters from the French Army" (in other words very lately converted to the anti-colonial struggle), went during the sixties to Moscow to gain other skills. With these dual influences of colonialism and Stalinism, their methods of pacification (or eradication), mirrored the worst atrocities of the French colonial army.

For the bureaucrats who cynically glorified the masses with their slogans ("Only one hero, the people"), the Algerian masses have served as human material for their operations and scheming, cannon fodder, sent to be massacred by the French army and then directly massacred. The resolution of the rioters, when they already had dozens of dead in their ranks, gives clear testimony to the hatred accumulated over the years in Algeria

(and particularly in Kabylie) against the State. "No forgiveness, never!" has been a popular slogan. According to Le Monde Diplomatique, "the immediate leaving of gendarmerie brigades" from Kabylie was the only "clear" demand of the rebels. This was a revolutionary demand, whose natural progression would be the "effective control of all state executive functions and of security corps by the democratic elected institutions". The movement's goal was to dismantle the "special armed detachments" which are the main functional and "material expression" of the Algerian State.

To effectively dismantle and then to organise the retaking of power by the people, by the masses "who substitute their own force for the force organised to oppress them" (Marx about the Paris Commune) was the aim. Even if this had only been accomplished in a part of the territory, it could not have been accomplished without a revolution in all other aspects of social life in that area. And this was what the insurgents aimed to do when they besieged the gendarmeries, isolated them and separated them from society in order that society separated from them. This was the example that Kabylie gave to the rest of Algeria.

The existence of such a movement in itself disproves all the political lies omnipresent in Algeria for so many years. In the face of the uprisings, police fictions started to dissolve and people's true loyalties began to become apparent: "we refuse to show solidarity with those who are destroying state property" declared a representative of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front).

In Portugal in 1974, people used to say, "truth is like oil". Today in Kabylie we say: "Truth is like a cork." The insurgents were not interested in abstract debating of the 'truth' with the state (the conclusions of governmental enquiry commissions were denounced in advance, and their dissolution was one of the demands of the El-Kseur platform), but instead imposed the truth with their "live" actions. One of the most beautiful moments, was the women's demonstration in Tizi-Ouzou on 24th May. The women started by refusing to allow the official "Association of Widowed and Daughters of the Martyrs of the Independence War" to join their demonstration, and then expelled Khalida Messaoudi, in her own words "militant companion" of Bouteflika (president-dictator). She had just left the RCD and was attempting to change her political image: "As she was trying to slip into the procession, jeering started. 'Khalida out', shouted some women. 'Khalida Lewinski' screamed others. She had only just been evacuated to Alger." (**Liberation**, 26th-27th May 2001.) Finally, after showing

their contempt for the media's auxiliaries, they also prevented representatives of Kabylie's official council from joining the demonstration.

The rejection of all political parties was a consistent aspect of the insurrection, and one of the most slandered. The offices of the two parties (RCD and FFS) that might have hoped to profit from such a movement were among the first to burn in Tizi-Rached on April 26th. And even during the June 25th demonstration in Tizi Ouzou, commemorating the third anniversary of the execution of the singer Lounes Matoub, we heard among the slogans "a kabyle is a kabyle, its enemies are the gendarmes", "no FFS, no RCD". The most discredited party was the RCD, despite its resignation from the government at the end of April, it was impossible to forget its long time collaboration with the military clan of the 'eradicators'. The FFS, formerly less compromised with the authorities, revealed its true colours by presenting, on the 12th May, to Bouteflika, to the army chief of staff and to the chief of the DRS (former Securite Militaire), a 'memorandum' offering their services to organise a "democratic transition".

The most outstanding aspect of the Algerian insurrection was its self-organisation. The hostility toward political parties and "any proximity with power", the distrust for unaccountable 'representatives', the refusal to be, once more, rank and file for political scheming; all this resulted in the spreading and co-ordination of village and neighbourhood assemblies, rapidly recognised by everybody as the only authentic expression of the movement. As early as the 20th April, the delegates of the forty-three villages of Beni Douala daïra (sub prefecture) came together to call for a general strike. During the following days, village committees co-ordinated throughout the whole wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou. On May 4th, in the city of Tizi-Ouzou itself, posters from a neighbourhood temporary organising committee called for a six day general strike. On May 6th a meeting for the 10th was called in Beni Douala for an assembly of delegates from Tizi-Ozou, Bejaïa and Bouira's wilayas, to co-ordinate actions throughout the whole of Kabylie and to adopt a platform of demands. As one delegate declared: "the parties, nobody believes in them anymore here." (**Liberte**, May 7th)

The meeting in Beni-Douala took place as expected, but only 200 delegates, mainly from the villages of Tizi-Ouzou wilaya attended. It transpired that the press had broadcast a false communiqué announcing the postponement of the meeting (this was just the beginning of a growing campaign of disinformation and

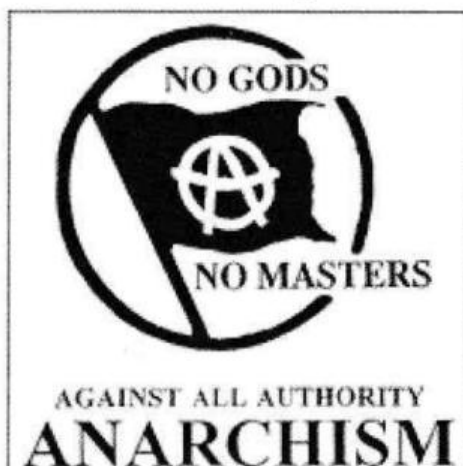


slanders). A mayor who attended to remind the assembly of the need to respect the law of the land, was thrown out "we don't need a mayor here or any state representative" declared the delegates.

A concern to protect the autonomy of the movement and the will to control closely its delegates marked all the decisions; for example, a decision was made to create a committee headquarters in Tizi-Ouzou to publicise the next delegates meeting; but the assembly made forbade the committee the right to speak in the name of the movement. (No declaration to the media etc.)

It is impossible to accurately catalogue the spread of the assembly movement to the whole of Kabylie and on to the rest of Algeria; firstly because the Algerian "independent" press (and the French press) wrote of the need for

The authorities realised that they had to prevent, at any cost, the spread of the insurrection to Algiers, and despite the State's paralysis, found sufficient forces to head off the danger. The



Here, our only political education comes from Egyptian TV soap. After years of brainwashing, G.I.A (Islamic Armed Groups) bulletins looking like science fiction, our brains were like pulp. In a big city, any provocation or dirty trick can happen." (*Liberation*, May 31st 2001)

Jaime Semprun  
Paris

#### Notes:

FFS: Front des Forces Socialistes - Authoritarian Socialist Party  
FIS: Front Islamique du Salut - Islamic Salvation Front - Islamic Populist Party. It was the main opposition to the FLN. They won local and legislative elections in December 1991, the generals rejected the democratic results and organised a coup. FIS leaders and activists were arrested, many tortured, some killed, and the villages and cities who voted for FIS became victims of

## *A concern to protect the autonomy of the movement and the will to control closely its delegates marked all the decisions*

an urgent "democratic" modernisation but hardly mentioned at all the activities and declarations of the assemblies, or, worse they slandered them.

We can nevertheless point out the main developments of self-organisation, that followed the riots as they spread throughout the country. On May 18th in Illoula, a delegates meeting of the Tizi-Ouzou region adopted a platform of demands (among these, the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all gendarmerie brigades) and called for a march on Tizi-Ouzou. On May 21st, this march brought together hundreds of thousands of demonstrators ("the black march" was organised by the co-ordination of village committees and political parties had no visible presence" noted *Le Monde* in its May 23rd edition). Then a succession of delegates meetings led to the formation of an inter-wilayas co-ordination (Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaïa, Bouira, Setif, Boumerdes, Bordj-Bou-Arredidj, Algiers, and the 'Comite collectif des universites d'Alger') and to the adoption, on June 11th at El-Kseur, of a platform of common demands. The march on Algiers, on June 14th, was the peak of this first stage of the movement.

The unofficial aim of the Algiers march was to spread subversion to Algiers itself and to confront the State 'at home'. And, indeed, going to the presidency to bring the platform of El-Kseur (the official goal of the march), with hundred of thousands or millions of demonstrators in the streets, would have enabled the insurgents to speak directly to the State, and to proclaim to the Algerian people that the time had come to end the last forty years of oppression.

authorities used effectively all the repressive tools available to them, splitting up the demonstrators from Kabylie, blocking most of them ten kilometres from downtown Algiers, isolating rioters groups and introducing agent provocateurs, recruited among local gangs, into the crowd. Further, the demoralization and fear among people living in Algiers who suffered the most during the "dirty war" was helpful to the State. The capital's population had only recently begun to rediscover their fighting spirit during the student agitation that started in early May; and since the demonstration called by the FFS on the 31st which had enabled an initial meeting with the insurgents of Kabylie. The comments of some Algerois, reported in the press, expressed quite fairly the situation at that time, after a week of spontaneous demos in Algiers (and also Oran, Setif, Boumerdes) with hundreds or thousands of demonstrators:

"We shout 'pouvoir assassin'. We are beaten. Then we go home and we watch, on French TV, the real riots in Kabylie, just one hour from here. But today we'll know better what is going on, if we join the war or if we stay outside."

"We were afraid to get out of the neighbourhood because of assassinations, policemen, terrorists and all that. Now, I think it's our time, we have to go. But I'm very confused."

"Who in Algeria, doesn't feel injustice and deep discontent? Who doesn't want to end that? However, Algiers is not Kabylie. There it is very tough but they know each other, they are all together, with a culture, strong structures that resisted despite war.

State Terror. Of the villagers who survived, many joined the Islamist terrorist guerrillas to protect themselves from the army and/or to get revenge. FLN: Front de Liberation Nationale - THE Algerian Party for decades. Supposedly democratic and post-colonial, but in fact the corrupt party of the Leninist-nationalist ruling class. The role of the FLN was to control, at any price, the vital resources of the country (mainly oil) for its own interests and for the oil industry. Historically, the FLN manipulated the memory of the fight against French occupation, but is now working for privatisation with capitalist global institutions RCD: Rassemblement Culture et Democratie - Berberist Authoritarian Party - Presented the Insurrection in Kabylie as a "cultural" insurrection. GIA: Islamic Armed Groups - Islamofascists who are using 2 types of armed struggle: regular fighting against the army and terrorism and mass murder of Algerian civilians. One favourite tactic is to murder civilians at false army checkpoints. Many of the GIA are in fact manipulated by the Algerian intelligence services and the army generals-businessmen (who are the real leaders of the country). In addition, some terror acts attributed to the GIA are in fact committed by army commandos dressed as Islamist terrorists. For instance they go into villages who voted for the FIS and kill, torture, rape women, burn babies in front of their parents etc. Of course western intelligence services (specially French Services) are aware of the Algerian state terrorism, but they support it, as a mean of social control and local stability.



# Anarcha-Feminism in Bolivia

Interview with Julieta Paredes of *Mujeres Creando*, an anarcha-feminist group in La Paz, Bolivia.

**How did *Mujeres Creando* (Women Creating) come about? What is its goal?**

JP: *Mujeres Creando* is a "craziness" started by three women (Julieta Paredes, Maria Galindo and Monica Mendoza) in reaction to the arrogant, homophobic and totalitarian Left of Bolivia during the '80s, where heterosexuality was still the model and feminism was seen to be divisive. This was nothing new in a society such as ours, so we had already been developing this kind of criticism.

The other aspect of our criticism of the Left is toward a constructed social practice which was unethical, dishonest and had a double morality. Revolutionary in the streets, revolutionary in their words, revolutionary in their talking; yet, at home, they were the dictators of their own families, with their own loved ones.

We have recently been picking over all our experiences with the Left, as well as learning through taking part, for the first time, in the San Bernard Conference in Argentina, which was an experience for all Latin American feminists.

For *Mujeres Creando*, one way to move toward our goal is to embrace the concept of diversity (the other is creativity). Diversity is fundamental for us, because if you look at how other groups are made up, they're usually of the same kind of people (barrio [neighbourhood], young people, workers, lesbians, etc.). Diversity is a way to criticise these "enclosed cubicles" in society. *Mujeres Creando* is made up of lesbians and heterosexuals, whites and indigenous women, young and old women, divorced and married women, women from the country and from the city, etc. The system tries to keep us in the "enclosed cubicles" and to divide us so that it can control us more effectively.

What's important is that we, through our connections with other women, are starting to look at the diversity in which Latin American feminism developed; that is, there were farmers, students,

soldiers, lesbians, etc. It was beautiful and it captivated us.

Afterwards we realised that it wasn't enough just to be a woman... there were deep political differences. We follow the feminist movement and become feminists, and yet we see something that seems to us like empty space: it's all good and diverse, but what was our position as to (government) power?

The difference between us and those who talk about the overthrow of capitalism is that their proposals for a new society come from the patriarchal left. As feminists in *Mujeres Creando* we want revolution, a real change of the

the murderous politics of the World Bank, IMF, etc.) Here's the difference between us and them: they use power and are within the system, and therefore they always control the (military, economic, social, political) forces against those who oppose what they say.

So, we're not interested in power, women's offices, or ministries. We are interested in the daily building of practice and theory in the streets and in nurturing our creativity.

Our generation denounces the unjust relationship between men and women, just as the unjust relationship between

***"we're not interested in power, women's offices, or ministries. We are interested in the daily building of practice and theory in the streets and in nurturing our creativity"***

system; we do not want just to change capitalism, nor just to change attitudes toward women, but also a change in attitude toward young people and the environment. We want to change patriarchy, in a historical and long-lasting transformation created by the feminism we dream of.

In the process of building our organisation - no bosses, no hierarchy - I speak for myself and don't represent anybody... I've said it before and I'll say it again that we're not anarchists by Bakunin or the CNT, but rather by our grandmothers, and that's a beautiful school of anarchism.

***What is it to be a feminist in Latin America?***

JP: To be a feminist in our society means to fight against neoliberalism and its ideology; for us, being a feminist means denouncing racism, machismo/sexism (within the Left and within anarchism as well), homophobia, domestic violence, etc. It means denouncing the sexist, bureaucratised, technocratic women of this generation (those women that have fallen into neoliberalism and are administrators of

the bourgeois and the proletariat has been denounced in the past. These struggles should have led to a revolution, but the system has co-opted the sentiments and concepts behind these struggles, rendering them meaningless. Society is only interested in describing what it is to be a man or woman today, not denouncing the injustice inherent in the relationship between the two. Feminism looks for ways to reclaim this territory, both the descriptive aspect, but more importantly its denouncing character. We try to ensure that fighting the injustice between men and women is at the forefront in our fight to create an anti-patriarchal theory.

***What do you think of the "lack of women" in social movements? Is it a myth or an historical reality?***

JP: It seems to me like people are blindfolded when they ask "where are the women?" We have been around since the beginning of revolutionary movements, always. On the other hand, in today's era, social movements (Sem-Terra, de los Deudores, Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) are all



women-led fights resisting and confronting dictatorships. What we see is a division between public and private life, a blindfold, an invisibility of women in the struggles.

**How do men and women, indoctrinated into a patriarchal society, react to the goals of *Mujeres Creando*?**

JP: Women have sympathy as well as fear. The sexist women are much more stubborn and violent than macho men. The men are careful about having sex with us; they're afraid, it's some kind of complex... but they have a certain kind of respect toward us because we have been fighting for ten or eleven years.

At first, most women have sympathy, and later they're afraid because ours is a demanding and radical programme, but that's the only way to work in a

don't want to accept the challenge of creating their own group.

**What is your vision of social change as relates to the books you [*Mujeres Creando*] write and the videos and graffiti you make?**

JP: You can want a microphone or camera like you'd want a rifle... We have given communication a high place, on the same level as creativity - that is, creativity in communication. So we have preferred to take from our roots and, by leaving them, we begin a creative communication process. In '92 we started to do graffiti. We did it in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and other places.

And so, out of all our work that we do, the graffiti (signed *Mujeres Creando*) is not anonymous - we write what we want, and everybody knows

that MC is in this area, and if someone wants to put us in jail, he or she comes here and does it.

Whenever we've gone out to do graffiti, we have been afraid. But we've thought about our right to do it... Coca-Cola pays and paints,

Repsol pays and paints, so why can't we paint without paying? The problem isn't that the walls are painted, the problem is that it's not paid for. If we must pay for public space, then it's a big contradiction in democracy. What's

public and what's private? Streets are public space, the whole city's courtyard, not a jail hallway, where you go from the jail of your house to the jail of your office job... if it's public, then everybody can use it. But if you pay for public space it becomes private. Public space doesn't exist. Let's start this discussion. What's dirty? What's clean? "You're making my walls dirty!" Oh, so when Coca-Cola contracts a painter, it doesn't make the wall dirty? That's an aesthetic concept. It seems to me that it has made the wall dirty in a disgusting way. And what we have done, our graffiti, that's beautiful.

**What are some of the next projects for *Mujeres Creando*? Is it possible that you will participate in IMC Bolivia?**

J.P.: If we want *Mujeres Creando* to go on, it needs to question itself, and not embody a myth like "a cute group of feminists" because you have to have roots in society. For this, I propose to build a space (*Creando Femenismo Autonomo* [Creating Autonomous Feminism]) for other women and other social groups where we can build feminism in *Mujeres Creando*'s terms... and I think it's important to let people know about these experiences through Indymedia.

My privileged space will be for women; I want to start with them. I want to start from there, to feed others and myself through the Indymedia space. I don't consider this women's space to be apart from others - I think that we can get into deeper discussion if we start with women. But I don't want it to start in Indymedia and finish with the women. It's a social proposal by women and for both women AND men.

from Indymedia



place where everything is superficial and diluted. And the men that sympathise with us follow us as if they're interested in everything, but they want us to be like mothers, feeding them; they're a little lazy because they

## Anarcho-Quiz Answers

1. Emma Goldman

2. They'd got hold of a stock of vodka and traded it with Russians and Germans for arms. The building where they had their HQ was the only one in Warsaw not taken back by German soldiers.

3. The anarchist guerrilla Sabate.

4. 1923. The founding congress of the IWA was in 1922, but repression from the dictatorship prevented the CNT delegates from attending.

5. In February 1857 Bakunin had been exiled to Tomsk in Siberia. In 1853 Admiral Perry had sailed into Edo harbour with his 4 steamships, causing shockwaves in Japanese society that eventually opened it slightly to the west. Bakunin heard of the opening of Japanese ports to Russian ships and that American ships visited Yokohama often twice a week. Escape to the west was impossible, and until then, so had been escape to the east. In 1861 he travelled to Irkutsk and caught a ship to Japan.





# Justice – A bourgeois Concept? (continued)

accomplished by one and the same act." (19)

Law as a form does not exist in the heads of learned judges alone. It has a parallel, real history, which unfolds not as a set of ideas, but as a specific set of relations which people enter into not by conscious choice, but because the relations of production compel them to. The same necessity that transforms a

population continues to grow.

Exchange remains the basis for punishment. The exchange of a particular punishment for a particular quantity of crime. This is the basis of sentencing tariffs, in which each crime is valued and ascribed a certain worth. Thus white collar fraud is valued at say 6 months, theft around 1 year, robbery

world based on the maxim 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs' lays beyond justice. (25)

Tony

This article originated as a workshop given at the Prison Abolition Conference held in London, January 2002.

## Footnotes

1. Quoted in Paul Larfargue, *The Origin of the Idea of Justice* p188
2. J Rawls *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford 1972)
3. Whilst completely understandable, the irony of calling for 'justice' in such a situation is obvious. Justice is served for other prisoners by continuing their sentence since they are 'guilty'.
4. Interestingly the campaign following the death at work on the Shoreham docks of Simon Jones, in which Schnews was instrumental, avoided the trap of justice by focusing on the wider question of the form of society which places so little value on the lives of workers.
5. 'No Justice, No Peace' is not a demand but a lament. It is left to a few malcontents to turn it into the demand: 'No Justice, No Police'.
6. Larfargue p166
7. Exodus, XXI., 23, 25 quoted in *ibid*
8. B. Pashukanis, *Law & Marxism*, p168
9. *Op cit* pp 161-177
10. Blackstone *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 1765, vol IV, p230
11. "The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Betham. .... Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent."
12. Marx *Capital* Vol 1 (Penguin 1976) p280
13. J Rawls *op cit*
14. J Brewer & J Styles *An Ungovernable People* (Hutchinson 1980) p14
15. B. Pashukanis *op cit* p173
16. P Linebaugh *The London Hanged, Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*
17. *Ibid* p 280
18. A Smith *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* cited in *ibid*
19. E P Thompson *Whigs and Hunters* pp259-265
20. K Marx *On the Jewish Question* quoted in Pashukanis *op cit*
21. See Pashukanis *op cit* p 68
22. G Fletcher *Rethinking Criminal Law* (Brown 1978). Contrast the Larceny Act of 1916 with s1 of the Theft Act 1968
23. *Op cit*, Introduction
24. See Wildcat (UK) 17, Spring 1994, p41
25. *Op cit* pp177-189
26. K Marx *Critique of the Gotha Programme*

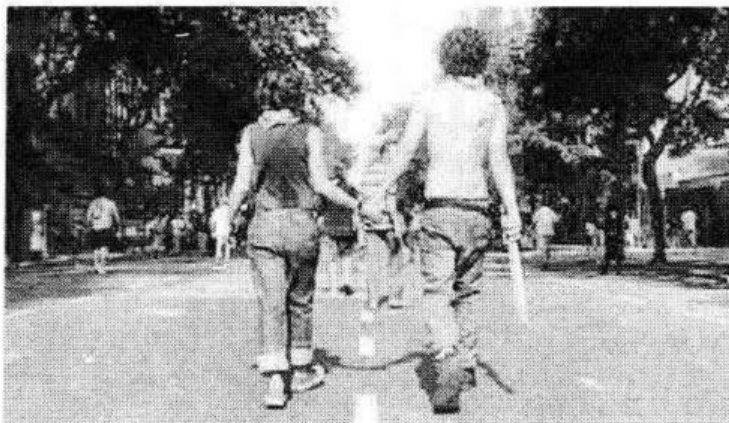
A society based on scarcity and conflict necessitates a system of justice; a world based on the maxim 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs' lays beyond justice

product of nature into a commodity, transforms a human being into a legal subject. Justice therefore is not simply an abstract ideal, but takes on a concrete reality. (20)

The central role of justice in the rule of capital obviously did not cease with the end of the 18th or 19th centuries. Indeed it has become ever more important. In Blackstone's time theft was divided up into grand theft (which included cattle theft, shop lifting, and pick-pocketing) and petty larceny. A distinction was traditionally made between larceny, embezzlement and false pretences, on the basis of the victims degree of involvement in the crime. In the development of modern law these become blurred, into the single concept of theft. Commodities, without distinction on basis of use values, dominate modern life, so the differences between the varieties of theft become irrelevant, even though the punishments remained largely unchanged. Corporal and capital punishment continued into 20th century Britain and remain in use elsewhere. Indeed the use of capital punishment intensified in the 1970's at the end of the long post-war boom. Peter Linebaugh has pointed to the link between capital punishment, the organised death of living labour, and the punishment of capital, the oppression of the living by dead labour. In Britain one in three adult men have a criminal conviction. The prison

about 2 years, GBH roughly 4 years and murder approximately 14 years. We can therefore draw up a table, in which one GBH equals 8 frauds or one murder equals seven robberies etc. In the same way as money is the universal equivalent, the measure used for commodities, so justice means quantifying crimes according to a theoretical unit of measurement. (21) This developed form of law was termed by Lefrague Distributive justice. (24)

However whilst it is correct to speak in terms of class justice, we should not fall into the trap of believing that there can be justice for our class, a proletarian or communist form of justice. We cannot replace bourgeois law with proletarian law, any more than we can replace capitalist economics with Marxist economics, or the existing state with a workers' state. To try and do so would be to fall into vigilantism. Whilst the desire for revenge may be powerful and understandable, we cannot accept the need for punishment (as opposed to say protection). A society based on scarcity and conflict necessitates a system of justice; a





# PRISONERS

## FIGHT FOR LIFE

PRISONERS in Uruguay - including anarchist activists - desperately need international solidarity.

Following a major prison mutiny the authorities are exacting revenge, torturing and beating inmates. 3 prisoners are dead, reportedly killed by guards.

The mutiny broke out on 1 March in Montevideo. Inmates rebelled against brutality and appalling conditions, taking over and largely destroying the inaptly named 'Liberty' jail.

The prisoners held 10 guards hostage, to ensure that the police did not attack and kill them all. The guards were later released unharmed.

Inmates' relatives demonstrated outside the jail, publicising the prisoners' demands concerning overcrowding, maltreatment of prisoners by the guards, a lack of medical services, etc.. While the prison was encircled by army tanks and military helicopters clattered overhead, the prisoners courageously held out.

They negotiated to end the siege: the authorities agreeing that there would be no reprisals against any prisoners and that all would be transferred to other jails.

Some prisoners were transferred. But the hundreds kept in the Libertad prison have been subjected to torture and beatings.

Three prisoners have died. The authorities' claims that they committed suicide or were killed by other prisoners are not believed by inmates' relatives who suspect murder by the guards.

The authorities are searching for scapegoats for the rebellion, thus there is particular concern for 2 young anarchist prisoners, the brothers Gerardo and Miguel Jimenez, currently in Tablada prison.

Family members on the outside have been on hunger strike, as they fear for the brothers' lives. Gerardo and Miguel, of Swedish nationality, have been unjustly imprisoned for the last 3 years, for political reasons. Friends and family of the prisoners in Uruguay stress just how important international solidarity is.

To find out more

*Anarchist Black Cross*, Buenos Aires

<[cruznegra\\_bsas@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:cruznegra_bsas@yahoo.com.ar)>

<http://www.muchachos.cjb.net>

Info taken from April/May and May/June issues of *Obrera Prisionera*, paper of Anarchist Black Cross of Iberian Peninsula: CNA, apdo.5 de Getafe, 28901 Madrid, Spain

## Mark Barnsley Released from Whitemoor Prison

Justice for Mark Barnsley Campaign, are overjoyed to announce that miscarriage of justice prisoner Mark Barnsley was finally released from Whitemoor prison on the morning of Monday 24th June 2002.

Mark walked out of maximum security HMP Whitemoor to loud cheers and applause from waiting supporters. Friends, eager to welcome Mark out of prison had travelled from around the country and included an official delegation from the NUM, complete with their National Union banner.

After spending over 8 years in just about every Maximum security hell-hole the prison system has to offer, Mark is in good spirits and obviously glad to be finally out. Mark and his campaign would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported him during his wrongful imprisonment.

Whilst Mark tries to re-build his life and adjust to living in the outside world again the Justice for Mark Barnsley campaign will continue to help him get the justice which is long overdue. Mark has been released after serving two thirds of his 12 year prison sentence but he has yet to clear his name and have his wrongful conviction overturned. Prior to his release Mark refused to sign his licence on the principle that he is an innocent man and freedom is his right.

Before Mark was even released, the Police in South Yorkshire tried to intimidate local supporters. In a very obvious attempt to make things even harder for Mark, the place where he was intending to live upon his release was visited by the local Police Intelligence Unit (Special Branch). This sadly resulted in Mark losing his new home before he was even out of prison. Thanks to friends and supporters rallying round though, a local alternative was quickly arranged so that Mark's release could go ahead and he at least has a decent place to stay. This action by the Police is obviously of concern to us and we will continue to closely monitor the situation.

If you have Mark on your mailing lists (magazines and other publications) please change his details to those below. Also if you'd like to contact Mark you can now write to him at:

Mark Barnsley

C/O JfMB, PO BOX 381

HUDDERSFIELD, HD1 3XX

[jfmbysyorks@aol.com](mailto:jfmbysyorks@aol.com)

## Satpal Ram free at last

At 7.00pm on Tuesday 18th June 2002, Satpal Ram walked through the prison gate of HMP Blantyre House, for the last time.

Satpal's conviction has not been quashed and though he is now out on licence, Satpal will continue to fight the conviction, that has kept him in prison since 1987.

Threatened with legal action that continued imprisonment of Satpal was unlawful the Treasury Solicitor for the Home Office threw in the towel last Thursday and said they would release Satpal. All that was needed to free Satpal was two signatures. Lord Woolf, the Lord Chief Justice, put his signature to the paper on Friday. A counter signature from a Home Office Minister, usually the prison minister, was then needed to complete the release papers but at this stage the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, made a personal intervention and was more than reluctant to sign Satpal's release. He should have counter signed the release on Friday but didn't, which meant Satpal had to spend another weekend in prison.

On Monday 17th and on the day of his release, numerous phone calls to Blunkett's office brought no joy, it was becoming clear that despite the advice of his own legal experts, Blunkett was stonewalling the release. Satpal's legal team were advised by the Treasury Solicitor that they stood by their original decision to release Satpal. It was clear that Blunkett who was holding up the release against their advice.

Now Satpal's solicitors, felt there was no option but to go back to court. At 6.00pm on Tuesday evening, Satpal's legal team were on their way to the High Court to apply for an order to release Satpal when David Blunkett conceded defeat and counter signed Satpal's release papers.



# Storming Heaven

*Storming Heaven* by Steve Wright is about the theory and the organisations of the Italian Autonomist movement, especially the evolution of *operaismo* (workerism) and the group *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power). The Autonomist movement came out of the specific conditions of Italy in the seventies, where the recent experience of armed resistance to the Nazi occupation and after, plus very harsh living conditions for working class people during Italy's late industrialisation, meant that social struggle was more intense than anywhere else in Europe (apart from maybe Franco's Spain). The different outbreaks of insurgency were more connected than in other countries and

so the squatting movement and the factory occupations for example were mutually supportive in many places. The different revolutionary groups were also more integrated into the workers' movement and less ghettoised and so the theory that they developed is some of the most interesting of those times.

The Italian uprisings of the seventies need to be better known and understood, and this book makes an important contribution, especially as it

draws on a lot of original material which has never been translated. This book isn't an introduction to the events of the seventies and to get the most out of it you would need some background. It would be nice to recommend a good introductory book at this moment but as far as I know there isn't one. A pamphlet to look out for is *Living with an Earthquake* but it isn't easy to get. The book doesn't idealise any of the participants and makes fair criticism of all the groups involved but at the same time it is not a detached or dry academic exercise. It comes from a perspective of understanding the Autonomist movement, with all its mistakes, to learn for the next time.

Mara

## Freedom Fighters:

*Anarchist Intellectuals, Workers and Soldiers in Portugal's History*

Joao Freire  
Black Rose Books

This book is a disappointment. It fails as a portrayal of the history of Portuguese anarchism. Rather, it is a snapshot of that movement during its peak (the 1900s to 1930s) and a somewhat unconvincing "sociological analysis" of it, backed up with copious data. Which is a shame, as a book on Portuguese anarchism is sorely needed.

However, saying that, the book does present an often fascinating picture of an anarchist movement which rooted itself in working class life and struggle. Unlike Spain, social-democracy dominated the early labour movement. The anarchists successfully undermined this and by the 1920s the main union federation was anarcho-syndicalist in nature with around 90,000 members enrolled in it. This movement had a healthy interest in theory as well as action, with unions regularly discussing not only day to day issues but also revolutionary goals such as the socialisation of industry. Needless to say, similar discussions took place in the substantial number of anarchist groups and federations that existed. What strikes the reader is that the Portuguese movement got its strength

by applying its ideas in practice.

The unions and their struggles were organised in libertarian fashion by mass assemblies and bottom-up federations. The anarchist groups, like the unions, federated from below upwards, organically growing wider and wider as time went on. Both the unions and the anarchist groups spent time creating centres, libraries, schools and other forms of mutual aid.

Sadly, the book is badly translated. While most of the text can be understood, sometimes the more turgid "sociological analysis" can be unreadable. Some editing would not have gone amiss, and not only to correct the poor translation. Moreover, it desperately needs an introductory essay to place the main text in context. For example, while numerous insurrections and strikes are mentioned they are not discussed in detail. This means that critical events such as the 1934 insurrection against the fascist regime are mentioned in passing, with no attempt to discuss what happened. For a book claiming to be a history, such an oversight is astounding.

This lack of historic context makes the author's conclusions seem even more superficial than they already are.

As the book ignores the repression of the resistance to fascism, it ends up blaming the decline of anarchist influence on anarchism's inability to "learn from experience." Incredibly, the possibility that the repression after the defeated insurrection of 1934 together with 40 years of fascism may have played a role in this decline is not discussed.

What strikes the reader is that an anarchism that is not rooted in working class life and struggle is doomed to wither and, worse, become theoretically bankrupt. At the peak of its influence, Portuguese anarchism was capable of organising an extensive network of organisations, social projects and class conflicts. By 1987, "anarchists" in Portugal could write that "the 'perfect society' does not exist, fortunately, since it would probably be one of total oppression for the individuals. Therefore we do not believe in any type of 'anarchist society.'" How a once mighty movement had fallen!

This book is for those with the patience to handle the bad translation, who are not seeking a history of Portuguese anarchism but rather want a book which discusses it within its social context. Sadly, anarchism in Portugal still awaits a book to do its struggles justice.

IM



# The Spanish Civil War

Antony Beevor

Originally published in 1982, this work has obviously been re-published to take advantage of the success of Antony Beevor's later work *Stalingrad*. It is a good thing that it was. Beevor has produced an exceedingly good, if short, work on the Spanish Civil War. Unsurprisingly, his account is primarily a military history, but do not let that put you off - he clearly understands the role of the revolution in Spain and how it impacted on the course and nature of the war (and in the conflicts in the Republican side).

Beevor attempts to analyse the Spanish Civil War from three angles: class interest, centralism versus regionalism and authoritarian rule versus libertarian instinct. Unsurprisingly, this means he discusses the anarchist movement (indeed, he places it at the heart of the story). His accounts of anarchism and the social revolution during the war are excellent.

For example, he defines anarchism as a "structure of co-operative communities, associating freely" and which "corresponded to deep-rooted traditions of mutual-aid, and the federalist organisation appealed to anti-centralist feelings." He makes clear that the anarchists were the main part of the labour movement as well as their key role in defeating the fascist uprising. He discusses the collectivisations that occurred in a positive light and notes the disastrous effect on the morale of the anti-fascist side when they were undermined and forcibly disbanded. It is nice to see a historian state the obvious as regards the Aragon collectives: "the very fact that every village was a mixture of collectivists and individualists shows that peasants had not been forced into communal farming at the point of a gun." He even mentions and discusses the *Mujeres Libres* and quotes Malatesta when discussing the anarchist critic of reformism in syndicalism!

From an anarchist perspective, his account of the failings of the Popular Army makes interesting reading. Beevor argues that it was unimaginative in its tactics, with its commanders blindly following instructions even when circumstances on the ground made them inadequate. The army allowed its commanders "little initiative," a dangerous condition when the lines of communication were disrupted by fighting (as was the habit of the

commanders lying to their superiors in and after battles to save face). Used to centralised, top-down structures, the communists re-created these in the Popular Army and the results were the exact opposite of the efficiency and success promised. Ultimately, the Communist and Republican principle of "unified command" and a regular, orthodox (bourgeois) army became a "bureaucratic tourniquet" which was defeated in almost every battle in the war. Indeed, Beevor accounts how its battle plans were usually drawn up simply to gain prestige for the Communist Party.

In this, his account is a useful antidote to those who argue that the militarisation of the militias was a necessary step in winning the war. As history clearly shows, the Popular Army was a disaster. As for the International Brigades, while acknowledging their members courage, he also paints a horrific picture of Communist Party control (which included the shooting of about 500 Brigaders, nearly a tenth of



the total killed in the war) and mentions a few rebellions in their ranks.

While the militias were hardly perfect, it is clear from his account that the Popular Army was not a good replacement. Beevor stresses that much of the problem with the militias, as George Orwell also argued, was due to their lack of experience rather than their libertarian nature. Beevor even argues that electing leaders was "not so much a difficulty as a source of strength" as it "inspired mutual confidence." The question was how to federate the militia columns, not to abolish them. This solution, however, was dependent on whether the revolution would be successful.

Beevor gives a fair account of the dilemma facing the CNT after they had put down the coup in Barcelona. The dangers of isolation internally ("Madrid had the gold") and externally (unofficial sanctions by governments

and companies) and the fate of their comrades in other parts of Republican Spain obviously played a key role. However, he quotes Garcia Oliver's comments that the alternative was either an "anarchist dictatorship, or democracy which signifies collaboration" without any analysis. Made in 1937, these comments are both historically and logically defective. On July 20th 1936, the CNT leadership decided to not mention libertarian communism until Franco had been defeated, yet his argument, if valid, was as much applicable to a post-Franco Spain as it was on that day. Ultimately, Garcia Oliver argued that representative democracy is more "democratic" than self-managed communes (hardly a valid position, given the authoritarian and repressive nature of any capitalist democracy and the Spanish Republic itself in the 1930s). His argument simply reflected the CNT-FAI leadership's attempts to justify their collaboration with the state rather than a coherent and accurate argument.

Of course Beevor's work has its weaknesses. His account of the decisive CNT plenum on July 20th, as noted, is one. Similarly, his account of the uprising and suppression at Casas Viejas is wrong, relying as it does on accounts disproved by Jerome R. Mintz in his *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas*. Similarly, his account of the conflict between the radical anarchists and the treintistas is somewhat confused chronologically, but at least he does not paint the usual picture of the FAI seizing control of the CNT by conspiratorial methods. He does suggest that the FAI advocated sudden and fragmented uprisings while, in fact, most of the early uprisings were spontaneous and the later ones co-ordinated by the CNT itself (his account of Casas Viejas fits into this false picture of FAI activities). Ultimately, it would have been nice for the work to be referenced more completely, allowing the reader to investigate for themselves aspects of the Spanish Civil War and Revolution that Beevor discusses in too short a space!

However, be that as it may, Beevor's account is to be recommended. His account of the first days of the revolution, when workers armed themselves when the government refused, is excellent. His summary of the collectivisations is positive. The role of the allied governments and foreign capitalists in stabbing the Republican government in the back is clearly shown. He even discusses the post-war resistance against Franco and the part played by Spaniards in the French resistance.

All in all, an informative and interesting read.

IM



# Fast Food Nation

Eric Schlosser  
Allen Lane  
The Penguin Press

This is an excellent book, crammed full of useful (and disgusting) "McNuggets" of information on the whole process of producing "fast food." From the industrialisation of farming, to the monopolisation of food processing, to the standardisation of food consumption throughout whole sections of North America, Schlosser's book exposes the horrors of modern corporate capitalism. He documents the impact of the rise of fast food on almost all aspects of North America, from farming to health, from working practices to landscape, and beyond.

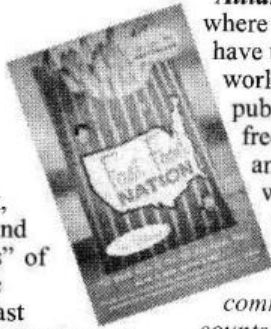
Like the "fast food" economy he dissects, Schlosser's work is far ranging, covering such notable scum bags as Walt Disney (whose father, ironically, was a socialist) and Ray Kroc (the man responsible for making

McDonalds what it is now). Schlosser, to his credit, fills his book with interviews with workers involved in every stage of the "fast food" process, including independent farmers and those opposed to corporations advertising in schools and providing teaching materials. He brings a refreshingly human look at an industry that denies in practice individuality and humanity.

The vision of a "fast food" world is truly horrific. It is a world where even the smell and taste of food is mass produced. Standardised food for a standardised society. As he memorably notes, "Millions of... people at that very moment were standing at the same counter, ordering the same food from the same menu, food that tasted everywhere the same." The true banality of capitalism is exposed in all its multitude of ramifications in Schlosser's book. The Orwellian world of modern corporate capitalism is seen in all its "glory." A world in which the industry group formed to combat

Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulation is called "Alliance for Workplace Safety" and where the processed food's taste has to have the correct "mouthfeel." It is a world where corporations feed at the public trough and then praise the free market, where firms grow huge and exercise monopolistic power while talking about competition, where executives talk about "the very essence of freedom" and yet their corporation's "first commandant is that only production counts... The employee's duty is to follow orders. Period." For all its talk of liberty, the essence of capitalism is wage slavery, and its most odorous aspects are well documented here.

**Fast Food Nation** discusses the corporations' perspective on



**For all its talk of liberty, the essence of capitalism is wage slavery...**

independent farms, opposing any attempt to form co-operatives or associations to improve their bargaining position in the market. As one executive put it, "Our relationship with our growers is a one-on-one contractual relationship" and they "want to see that it remains that way." As with the industrial workforce, the talk of "teamwork" just hides the reality of corporate power - the liberty of doing what you are told, under conditions specified by the powerful. Under such pressure, America's independent farmers are being replaced by industrial farms.

Schlosser places the birth of the "fast food" industry within the 1950s love affair with "progress." Technology would solve all our problems, even the ones it generates itself. The irrationalities here can easily be seen. For example, faced with the serious health problems generated by the industrialisation of meat processing, the meatpacking industry advocated yet more technology to "solve" the problems caused by the existing

technology. Rather than focusing on the primary causes of meat contamination, they proposed irradiating food. Of course the firms involved want to replace the word "irradiation" with the phrase "cold pasteurisation"!

Much of what happens today is justified in terms of "progress." Progress is, we are assured, "neutral." As if! Capitalism is a class society, marked by exploitation, oppression and social hierarchies. As such, change within it will reflect the various class conflicts, social hierarchies, power relationships and so on which exist within it as well as the rationales of the economic system (e.g. the drive for profits). Therefore progress can hardly be neutral. This is particularly true of the economy. The development of the industrial structure of a capitalist economy will be based on the fundamental need to maximise the profits and power of the capitalists. It does not follow that because a society which places profits above people has found a specific way of organising production "efficiently", a socialist society will do the same. Anarchists have long

been aware that capitalist methods are precisely that and that they may not suit a society which replaces

the profit system with human and ecological need as the criteria for decision making. Reading **Fast Food Nation** brings home this anarchist perspective and provides some modern and well researched documentation to support it. We must never forget that capitalism twists progress in its own imagination.

**Fast Food Nation** also brings home how alienated the West is from its food. Food production has become increasingly industrialised and concentrated into fewer and fewer big firms. It also raises some important questions for revolutionaries. Clearly, the Leninist idea that socialism simply involves nationalising big business is a fallacy. If a future society is seen in terms of nationalising McDonalds and appropriating the "efficient" mass production generated within capitalism, not only will it not work, it will not inspire anyone to fight for it.

The logical conclusion of the Leninist vision in terms of food production would be highly centralised and extremely fragile to outside shocks. The



disruption of "normalcy" experienced in most revolutions would quickly mean the disruption of such an industrialised food production and distribution system. This reinforces Kropotkin's arguments in **Conquest of Bread** on the importance of decentralising production during a revolution. Not only would this ensure the feeding of a rebellion, it would also be the first step in creating a method of producing food which was in harmony with nature and encouraged diversity in both production and in the final meal (as the French say, "*Non a McMerde*").

The book has its weaknesses. Like most of the so-called "anti-capitalist" authors how being published by capitalist firms to profit from the current wave of global mass protest, Schlosser nor his proposed solutions are in any way anti-capitalist. While presenting a searing indictment of US capitalism, his vision of the future is simply US capitalism infused with a European social-democratic sensibility. Needless to say, he is not opposed to wage labour. Indeed, he holds up family owned businesses which treat their workers paternalistically as an alternative to corporate capitalism.

There is not even a mention of co-operatives which would, at least, be a step forward. Schlosser's vision of a nice capitalist is identical to that of Tolstoy's kind donkey owner who will do everything for the donkey except get off its back.

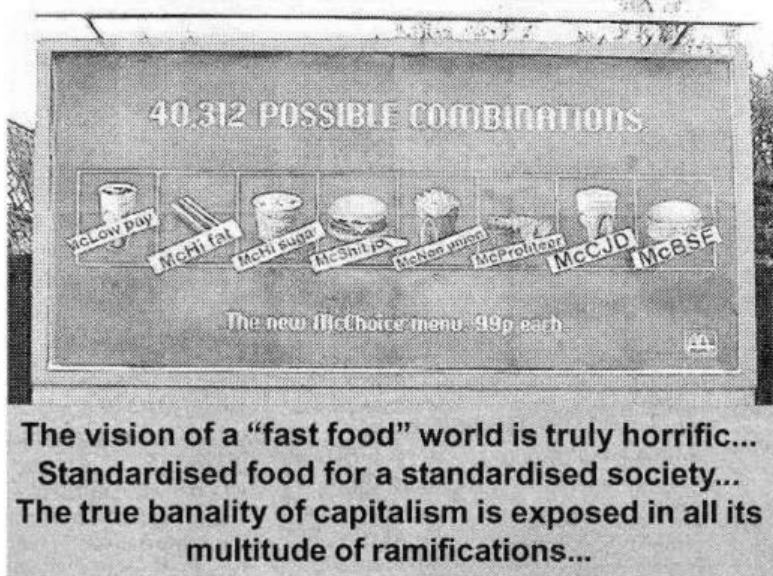
Similarly, his suggested European-style America is totally compatible with capitalism. While correctly acknowledging (in fact basing his suggestions on) the corporate control over the political structure, he raises the spectre of consumer power as the means of achieving his goals. As he puts it, corporations will "*sell free-range, organic, grass-fed hamburgers if you demand it. They will sell whatever sells at a profit.*" Which, of course, is true. It is equally true that we are not forced to buy fast food, which is why companies spend so much in convincing us to buy their products. Even ignoring the influence of advertising, it is unlikely that using the market will make capitalism nicer. Sadly, the market rewards the anti-social

activities that Schlosser chronicles in his book. As he himself notes, "*The low price of a fast food hamburger does not reflect its real cost... The profits of the fast food chains have been made possible by the losses imposed on the rest of society.*" The idea that by using the market we can "reform" capitalism is flawed simply because even "good" companies have to make a profit (i.e. will exploit workers' labour) and so will be tempted to cut costs, inflict them on third parties in the form of pollution, and so on. Ultimately, the price mechanism does not provide enough information for the customer to make an informed decision about the impact of their purchase and, by reducing prices,

directions, namely towards big business. Only when faced with a greater danger (namely a mass popular movement which could go further than the politicians suggest), will capitalists submit to state regulation. And as the 1960s and 70s show, this submission will not last long.

This is not to suggest that individual decisions on what to consume are irrelevant, far from it. Nor are consumer boycotts a waste of time. If organised into mass movements and linked to workplace struggle they can be very effective. This is the main failure in **Fast Food Nation**. It fails to appreciate the importance of working class struggle and organisation (forming unions is mentioned in passing, for example). As

the book makes clear, much of the drive behind the way the fast food industry has developed has been fuelled by fear of labour. Like the food they produce, the "fast food" corporations want workers that are standardised, uniform, easy to define and replace. No training is the goal in this industry and de-skilling the means. Applying Taylorist ideology developed in mass production, the skills of workers are transferred as far as possible into the hands of management and into machinery. In this way anyone can be replaced, making workplace organising and action more difficult. Schlosser presents



actively rewards the behaviour Schlosser condemns.

Rather than see change as resulting from collective struggle, Schlosser sees it in terms of individual decisions within the market place. As such, it does not break from the logic of capitalism and so is doomed to failure. After all, what is now "organic" production was just the normal means of doing it. The pressures of the market, the price mechanism he suggests as the tool for change, ensured the industrialisation of farming he so clearly condemns. Ultimately, we must never forget that the unfeeling corporate capitalism Schlosser exposes so well, sprung from the family owned, small-scale industry he holds up as an alternative. Indeed, one of his examples of paternalist capitalism broke apart in the 1970s under the pressure of class struggle and competitive pressures from less "ethical" capitalists.. This, in itself, shows the weakness of his means of change. Capitalism has a dynamic nature that propels it in certain

extensive evidence of machinery designed to reduce the power of labour, industries moved to crush unions and, of course, the anti-union perspectives of the "fast food" giants. Needless to say, this fear of labour is well-founded as profits are unpaid labour extracted by management's power over workers, whose acts of resistance can bring the whole thing crashing down.

It is here we must look for a real solution to the problems generated by capitalism, not in "green" consumerism. Equally, we must also be aware that the new world we are struggling for must not just aim to take over, without modification, the existing industrial structure. While the expropriation of capital is a necessary step in the social revolution, it is not the end. As **Fast Food Nation** shows, an alienated society has created an alienated means of feeding itself. Such a system will have to be transformed from top to bottom by those who live and work in it into one fit for human beings to live in.

I.M.



## Direct Action, memoirs of an urban guerrilla

Ann Hansen  
Between the Lines / AK Press

This quite a stressful book to read, despite the fact that we know how the story ends. Living 'underground' means a constant stream of crimes - from shoplifting for food, stealing cars for transport as well as the 'actions' themselves - any of which could have meant disaster.

The focus is exclusively on the active period when Direct Action were making things go bang in Canada: part of an electricity megaproject, a cruise missile component factory and (as the Wimmis Fire Brigade) a series of outlets for violent pornography. The people involved definitely didn't want to carry out purely symbolic actions: as Hansen herself has said "the bomb we used at Litton building [where cruise missile components were built] was too big..."



'Damn, Ann Hansen can write!' says one of the reviewers, and it's true; however, as well as a straight first person account you also get a 'reconstruction' of what the 'forces of law and order' were up to - which is just as fascinating.

Part of the quality of this book is its personal nature - the dynamics of the individuals are scrutinised as clearly as the political context of the times. This makes you wonder at times how these events would look through the eyes of the other people involved, but that's inevitable with a book which steers clear of empty phrases - either celebratory or repentant - which it could have been written in. This book gives some 'pitfalls to avoid' kind of hints: getting arrested for shoplifting, not taking notice when you're obviously under surveillance etc. but more than that it raises some interesting tactical questions. A non-symbolic approach to blowing things up marks you out as serious - and also inevitably increases

the scale and urgency of the state response. How can 'the underground' and 'the movement' safely talk to each other? That connection - different methods, similar ends - is something that is vital in current discussion of tactics.

The big question which many will ask (and not only the dyed-in-the-wool non-resisters) is 'was it worth it?' Does defeat equal failure? Few political activities produced immediate and lasting results on their own; guerrilla activities are no exception - they are merely another part of the struggle, and the more closely connected they are to that struggle, the more effective they'll be. In an interview about the book, Hansen has said she would like to see a discussion of "going beyond legal protest" and that she wants to "inspire more militancy, not less". Overall the book gives a good guide to the potential and dangers of underground activity: a worthy companion to Baumann's 'How it all began'.

JT

## Workers Against Lenin:

### *Labour Protest and the Bolshevik Dictatorship*

Jonathan Aves  
Tauris Academic Studies  
I.B. Tauris Publishers

Published in 1996 by an academic publishers, Aves book is essential reading for anyone interested in the outcome of the Russian Revolution. For decades Trotskyists have been arguing that the Russian working class had been decimated during the Civil War period and was incapable of collective decision making and organisation, so necessitating Bolshevik Party dictatorship over them. **Workers Against Lenin** provides extensive evidence to refute those claims.

In his work Aves provides an extremely well researched and readable account of labour protests during the period of 1920 to 1922. Rather than the Trotskyist claim of a 'non existent' working class, workers under Lenin were more than capable of collective action and organisation. Perhaps it is because this struggle was directed against the Bolsheviks that explains this blind spot? In this they simply follow Lenin: "As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin... began to argue that... workers had become 'declassed'."

The most famous expression of collective workers struggle during this period was, of course, the general strike in Petrograd which set off the Kronstadt revolt. Due to Kronstadt, this strike wave is often downplayed or

even ignored but, in fact, general strikes or very widespread unrest took place nation-wide. Faced with this mass wave of protest, the Bolsheviks used a combination of concessions (on the economic demands raised, not the political ones like free soviet elections, freedom of speech and organisation for workers) and repression. They also called it the "yolynka" (which means "go slow") rather than a strike movement to hide its real nature and size.

This was hardly an isolated event. Strike action, Aves notes, "remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920" as well. In Petrograd province, 85,642 people were involved in strikes, which is a high figure indeed as, according to one set of figures, there were only 109,100 workers there at the time! Rather than this being an isolated and atomised working class, what comes through clearly from Aves' work is that the workers, usually drawing on pre-1918 experiences and modes of struggle, could and did take collective action and decisions in the face of state repression.

As the Bolsheviks clamped down on all independent working class activity and organisation, it is hardly surprising that the workers became marginal to the revolution. Moreover, it was during this period that the Bolsheviks raised the dictatorship of the party to both a practical and ideological truism. Given workers opposition to the Bolsheviks, this was the only way they could remain

in power. This implies that a key factor in rise of Stalinism was political - the simple fact that the workers would not vote Bolshevik in free soviet and union elections and so they were not allowed to. As one Soviet historian put it in his account of the "yolynka," "taking the account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists."

This review cannot hope to cover all the important information contained in this book. Aves' discussion on the intensification of war communism and Trotsky's "militarisation of labour" is excellent, placing it in the period of peace at the beginning of 1920 and noting its ideological basis. Also of interest is his account of the "mini-Kronstadt" in the Ukrainian town of Ekaterinoslav in June 1921, where workers raised resolutions very similar to those raised at Kronstadt, including the demand for "free soviets" popularised by the Makhnovists.

Simply put, it's hard to claim that the Russian working class had "ceased to exist in any meaningful sense" in such circumstances. As such, **Workers Against Lenin** helps to undermine the various forms of the Bolshevik myth and, as such, is a key resource for studying the Russian Revolution. Being an academic book, it is expensive and will need to be ordered from a bookshop or a library. However, the wealth of information contained in it, the social context in which it places protest and developments in Bolshevik policies and ideas, make it a must-read for all people who want a revolution to be more than changing who the boss is.

IM



# contacts

## NATIONAL

**Solidarity Federation**  
(Anarcho-Syndicalists)  
PO Box 29, SWPDO  
Manchester M15 5HW  
tele: 0161 231 8177

**Anarchist Federation**  
84b Whitechapel High St  
London E1 7QX

**Class War Federation**  
PO Box 467  
London E8 3QX

**INDUSTRIAL**  
**Education Workers'/**  
**Communications**  
**Workers' Network (SF)**  
PO Box 29, SWPDO  
Manchester M15 5HW

**Public Service**  
**Workers'**  
**Network (SF)**  
PO Box 1681  
London N8 7LE

**Industrial Workers**  
**of the World (Britain)**  
IWW, PO Box 4414,  
Poole, Dorset, BH15 3YL  
[www.iww.org.uk](http://www.iww.org.uk)

## LOCAL GROUPS

As has been obvious  
the last few issues,  
the contacts usually  
listed here been out of  
date for a while. If you  
want your group listed  
in the **Black Flag**  
contacts page, please  
send us your details.



# subscribe!

**Black Flag** has no rich backers and is not linked to any organisation. If you like what we do, please subscribe. See Page 2 for rates/address/trade addresses etc.

Name

I want to take out a subscription  
from the following issue no:

Address

I want to sell **Black Flag**, please  
send the following no. of copies:

I enclose a cheque/postal order/stamps  
to the value of:

Postcode

I want to support **Black Flag**, please  
send a standing order form [tick]:

E-mail

I enclose a donation of:



# The end of confrontation: A step back

The campaign "Against the Europe of the Capital" was a network of activist groups, indymedia, and actions against the European summits in Spain during the Spanish presidency of the EU from January to June 2002. The most important summits were Barcelona, Madrid and Sevilla. However the campaign appears to have been a step back for the anticapitalist movement after Prague and Genoa. Reformism, a lack of direct action, failure to use blockades and a lot of police were some reasons for this retreat.

## Defeat in Spain

Barcelona saw a record 500,000 demonstrators, Madrid and Seville were not bad, with around 150,000 people. But these demonstrations consisted in the main of a short walk, a civic protest, a far cry from anything approaching direct action, blockades or even a tantrum.

It was easy for the mainstream media to portray a picture of responsible citizens asking for a bigger piece of cake, and to hide the real confrontations that happened (in Barcelona). After Barcelona, the official media's satisfaction with the anti-summit protests was evident and when the media are pleased, this should ring

a sub-delegate of the government said that the demonstration was successful. The state got what they wanted from the media - coverage of the official summits, and a few pages set aside for their friends in the social forums - the existence of any dissident movement was ignored.

In the battlefield, fear triumphed. Media manipulation against the black bloc resulted in some demonstrators, mostly the organisers of the social forums, forming a second police force with their own security bodies. In Seville, some demonstrators said that they were scared of the hooded black shadows moving in the demonstrations, but what about the blue gorilla aiming rubber bullets at our heads?

The repression against the dissident activists was brutal, before and during the summits. In Seville, the numbers of secret police, the infiltrations, the hounding of the social centres, the physical and psychological aggression, the provocateurs, and the constant

very hard work for the activists.

## What happened to confrontation?

There was little or no confrontation in the anti summit actions. The anti-black bloc hysteria made it impossible for the rioters in Barcelona be close to the other demonstrations. The black bloc action, so called "Mars Attack: Los ricos tambien lloran", had pretty big support, but they made the tactical error of advertising the action and the police had no problem splitting the bloc up and making arrests. On the another hand, in Madrid and Seville, direct action had very little support, the tiny number

of activists and the big number of police made it impossible to do anything interesting.

The lack of interest in direct action during these events is no mystery. The social forums' leadership consists mostly of reformist organisations, who misrepresent the movement in the mainstream media, and attract the masses because there is little other choice in Spain. Confrontation is not on the agenda of groups that collaborate openly with the system (from the big unions to Oxfam, Attac or the institutional left parties). In fact their traditional vision of political action is a peaceful demonstration, walk around and a photoshoot in front of an institutional building.



On the another hand there aren't any organisations or movements in Spain trying to form new theories or protest strategies as there were during previous anti-summit demonstrations in other countries. The small anticapitalist groups (anarchist and leninist) and the anarcho syndicalist or anticapitalist unions (SOC, CGT or CNT) have their own and old ways of fighting, and most of them are not really interested in the movement.

Finally, there was a lack of interest from groups outside of Spain to help organise blockades etc. It felt as if, after Barcelona, anticapitalist groups lost interest in fighting the summits. In Madrid the dissident block had to split because they weren't strong enough to carry out their action; in Seville the anarchist co-ordination was isolated, marginalised and completely surrounded by the police.

## Conclusion

Maybe the time for big anti-summit demos is over. Capital spoke very clearly in Genoa, they're not going to let us continue. This is probably a good time to look for new ways of fighting, using our experience of the past couple of years.. The anti-summit demos are turning into advertising campaigns for political parties, NGOs and political sects. Its probably not worth fighting the reformists for a strategy that is already finished. It is time to look for new ways and alternatives.

Iban



alarm bells for us. A few months later, in Seville, even

police control made things

*The European summits in Spain. January - June 2002.*