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

Anatoli Grigorievich Zhelezniakov was a young sailor serving on a minelayer based at the naval base of Kronstadt when the rule of the Tsar was overthrown in Russia in February 1917. He was already an anarchist, subscribing to anarchist communist ideas as put forward by people like Kropotkin. He and fifty other sailors went to the aid of the anarchists in Moscow who had occupied the Durnovo villa, which had been owned by the governor of that city. They had converted it into a place for reading and discussion, with the gardens turned into a children’s playground. It became a centre of anarchist agitation and the new Provisional Government tried to close it down. When some of its occupants seized the printing plant of a right wing Moscow newspaper the government ordered the anarchists to be evicted.

Zhelezniakov and the others joined the anarchists barricaded in the villa. After a government attack on the villa, in which an anarchist worker was shot dead, Zhelezniakov was arrested and sentenced to 14 years hard labour.

Escape
A few weeks later, he managed to escape from the “republican prison” as one anarchist paper called it. He restarted his activities and organized a mass demonstration of Kronstadt sailors outside the US embassy in protest against the death sentence imposed on the working class activist Tim Miliroy, freed on prepared evidence and on the threatened extradition to California of the anarchist Alexander Berkman, whom the authorities tried to implicate on the same evidence.

He was elected delegate to the Second Congress of Soviets by the crew of the minelayer on 25 October 1917. That night he and a contingent of sailors took part in the storming of the Winter Palace that led to the collapse of the Provisional Government. He was then at the head of the detachment that guarded the Winter Palace where the newly formed Constituent Assembly was to hold its sessions. As an anarchist, Zhelezniakov was passionately opposed to all forms of capitalism democracy and during the first day of the life of the Constituent Assembly he marched in, pronounced the words “The Guard is tired” and dispersed the Assembly for good.

It was ironic that this move by a libertarian and anti-parliamentarian to bring to the rise to power of the Bolsheviks. Zhelezniakov saw the ending of the Constituent Assembly as a constructive move, coinciding with the development of soviets and factory committees that would take lead to the complete self-organisation of the masses. To defend the Revolution he fought as a commander of a flotilla and then of an armoured train, in the Red Army. He fought against the reactionary White generals Krasnov and Denikin, and against the Don Cossacks of Ataman Kaledin. Then Trotsky began reorganising the Red Army. He fought against the reactionary White generals Krasnov and Denikin, and against the Don Cossacks of Ataman Kaledin. Then Trotsky began reorganising the Red Army.

The egalitarian methods that had prevailed within it up to then, were replaced by the introduction of “insurgents” officers in positions of importance and the ending of the mass meetings and the introduction of a strict hierarchy. Zhelezniakov protested strongly against this, as did many others. For this he was outlawed by the Bolsheviks, like many other anarchists.

Refusal
The leading Bolshevik Sverdlov tried to persuade him to renounce his positions on the Red Army, and offered him an important position. Zhelezniakov refused this offer, leaving for the South and Odessa, where he resumed a military campaign against the Whites. Again, the following year, 1919, the Bolsheviks repeated their offer. This time, because Zhelezniakov perceived the situation as critical, he accepted and became a commander of the armoured train campaign against Donikin, who put a reward of 400,000 rubles on his head. He fought on until he was killed by an artillery shell from Donikin’s forces; dying at the age of just 24.

The Bolsheviks, who gave him a state funeral in Moscow and erected a statue to him in Kronstadt, immediately turned him into a hero. If he had lived, he no doubt would have been imprisoned or shot by the Bolsheviks, as they did to so many anarchists in the Ukraine and to so many Kronstadt sailors in 1921. Indeed, they obscured the fact that he was an anarchist, even inventing the lie that he had joined the Bolshevik Party. But as he said to the anarchist Voltin, not long before his death: “Whatever may happen to me, and whatever they may say of me, know well that I am an anarchist, that I fight at one, and that whatever my fate, I will die an anarchist.”
Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). Organise! is published twice a year in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and initiate debate on ideas not normally covered by agitational papers.

We aim to publish articles that fall within the political scope of our Aims and Principles. Having said that, agreement with our A86 does not mean that there is no more room for debate. The articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective view of the Anarchist Federation. This is, for example, true of the article, Land and Ecology. Others, like the Esperanto and Mental Health articles are obviously intended to provoke discussion and make readers stop and think for a moment. We hope that their publication will produce responses from readers and spur the debate on.

Once again, we have included a number of articles from people outside the AF. These include a major article on Kropotkin, an anarchist from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and an article on the US anarchist scene. We hope that others will take the opportunity to contribute articles that meet the broad editorial objectives of Organise! If you would like to contribute, but are unsure how to do so, then get in touch first.

The next issue of Organise! will be out in October. Articles and letters for inclusion should be sent to us by July 31st.

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

What goes in Organise!: Organise! hopes to open up debate to many areas of life. As we have stated before, under the signatory by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by local AF groups, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has signed the articles and nobody else. If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then, let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not simply drop out of the air.

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

Some comments & observations

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Organise! editors' comment: This article is written by Ronald Young. He is a prisoner in the USA and is the editor of a magazine called Reaction. The article arrived just too late for the last issue of Organise! and was actually written prior to the events of 9/11. Obviously then, the article reflects Ronald's own views and not those of the AF. We do, however, find his views and analyses of interest and wish to share them with our readers. Anyone who wishes to do so can write to him at the address at the end.

Some comments & observations

Organise! editors' comment: The American anarchist movement is once again at a historic crossroads. One hundred years ago it was at its height of popularity only to be crushed by authoritative 'red scare' tactics and war hysteria. Today the anarchist movement is once again gaining in popularity not just in America but across the globe. And once again, history is attempting to repeat itself as elements both within and without seek to destroy anarchism before it has a chance to reestablish itself among the working class of the world.

The forces outside of the anarchist movement that seek to destroy it are fairly obvious for the most part. It is the insidious counter-revolutionary forces residing 'inside' the anarchist movement that has the greatest potential for diverting us from our primary goal of agitating for world social revolution. It is these forces which are the main focus of this commentary.

Primitivists

The primitivists advocate the infantile notion that we can just throw away all technology and return to a 'wild' state of existence. One of their tenets is the silly idea that humanity should abandon the cities and move back to the hinterlands. If we're not mistaken, Pel Pelt and the Khmer Rouge attempted to do this in Cambodia, resulting in two million or more deaths. Besides the possible cost in human lives from such a scheme, can you imagine the environmental devastation resulting from the six billion inhabitants of earth all defecating in the wilderness without the beneficial 'technology' of treatment facilities to process the billions of tons of waste? What do the primitivists intend to do with it, recyle it into organic farming operations? I can think of no better way to transmit untold numbers of deadly pathogens among the population than to use unsterilized human waste as a crop fertilizer. If I'm missing something here, please, somebody enlightens me and I will stand corrected.

It would be a horrid and act of stupidity for humanity to just blindly abandon all forms of technology, transforming ourselves back into the presumably 'feral' creatures we once were. Taken to an extreme, we would have to get rid of every conscience created since the dawn of humanity. It's obvious that much of the primitivist dogma is derived from Luddites and the radical Fundamentalism of groups such as Earth First! and they are attempting to use anarchism as the vehicle to advance their agenda.

I'm the first to agree that anarchism must contain a critique of the inter-relationship we have with the environment and ways to best protect it, ensuring the survivability of the human species as well as the diverse fauna and flora of the planet. But it would be contrary to anarchist principles to adopt an 'earth first' ideology that places 'saving the earth' above saving humanity. The earth isn't a conscious being that cares whether or not it is 'saved'. Only humans have the capacity to care about the future of the environment — best viewed as what might be considered the selfish act of 'saving our own skins'. If humanity wishes to continue inhabiting this planet, we can do so only if the environment remains healthy enough to sustain us. However, the environmental extremists who would disregard human suffering in our own planet do not belong in an anarchist movement whose fundamental goal is the betterment of the human condition. Such extremists must be roundly repudiated.
All inclusive of various liberals, progressives and an army of native American and black nationalist movements.

Anarchist is articulate in his anti-capitalist critique and I agree with many of the points he makes. He also appears to be doing an excellent job in organising numerous chapters of PPWC. But some of Ali's writings are punctuated with references and support for the New African Movement. This movement appears to embrace the ideas of separation and nationalism, two ideas which I believe run counter to the principles embraced by most anarchists. I still maintain that its rhetoric is false and that it is exploitative of nature one group (the ruling class) dominating another (the working class) manifests itself in all aspects of society, including race relations. The ruling class uses the fear of unemployment and deprivation to play off various working class groups against one another. It is this division that keeps the ruling class in power. This is the message we need to be sending to all members of the international working class.

To me, Ali is hinting at the notion that anarchists must embrace nationalism and cross-class movements simply because they may contain an anti-racist or 'liberation' dimension. The anarchist movement must be dedicated to eliminating racism, but it must do so within the context of agitating for revolutionary anarchism. Communism is doctrinal to the overall goal of social revolution to focus on single issues, without placing them within the wider context of a complete anarchist critique of capitalism. It will be equally devastating for anarchists to wander into the fray of nationalist politics.

The ruling class uses the fear of unemployment and deprivation to play off working class groups against each other.

An Otago group's failure to specifically mention racial oppression in its literature.

There are doubt many people of colour who perceive the anarchist movement as generally being a white movement and who may be skeptical as to whether or not anarchist groups will be receptive to addressing the issues of racial and ethnic exploitation in addition to the issue of economic exploitation. There are serious reservations which must be overcome by providing a thorough analysis of capitalism and showing that its exploitative nature of one group (the ruling class) dominating another (the working class) manifests itself in all aspects of society, including race relations. The ruling class uses the fear of unemployment and deprivation to play off various working class groups against one another. It is this division that keeps the ruling class in power. This is the message we need to be sending to all members of the international working class.

To me, Ali is hinting at the notion that anarchists must embrace nationalism and cross-class movements simply because they may contain an anti-racist or 'liberation' dimension. The anarchist movement must be dedicated to eliminating racism, but it must do so within the context of agitating for revolutionary anarchism. Communism is doctrinal to the overall goal of social revolution to focus on single issues, without placing them within the wider context of a complete anarchist critique of capitalism. It will be equally devastating for anarchists to wander into the fray of nationalist politics.

We must support all people's rights to self-determination against exploitative forces, but we must not support nationalist tendencies that fail short of embracing the idea of an international working class and worldwide social revolution. It's precisely because that some social revolutionary movements may appear they accept nationalist tendencies but have as their goal international working class solidarity. To garner support from anarchists, these groups must make it clear that it's their overall objective to link up with other revolutionary movements for the complete global overthrow of the capitalist order. Anarchism is estabishment of a worldwide libertarian-communist society free of artificial borders.

All makes a valid point in his article when he says anarchists must be actively involved in critical issues of colour and the struggle against police brutality and racial profiling. However, when it comes to being involved in any sort of mass demonstrations, anarchists must be careful about who we are aligning ourselves with and what are their motives. Case in point: the movement against racial profiling by the police doesn't necessarily agree with the complete dismantling of the State and its coercive police forces that in reality oppresses us all, though some groups may be more oppressed by the police apparatus than others. The appeal of the left to anarchists in this case is to make police oppression more equitable. It's not the repressive methods of the police, per se, that these groups find appalling so much as the 'selective' use of those methods. The American anarchist movement, in particular, has not been very discerning of these sometimes subtle, yet fundamental, differences in the methods of the police. It is clear, is that anarchists must always operate within the realm of achieving a social revolution, for the betterment of the working class and thus all of humanity, not merely reacting to each provocation from the State in a way that diverts our scarce resources from the business we need to be about — achieving anarchy.

Part of the problem is that various anarchist groups want to seem as socially active and not just sitting around sipping on a cold brew discussing theory. And it's imperative that anarchists who are socially active in the social affairs of our respective communities.

There's nothing wrong with agitating at the grassroots level provided we stay focused on the big picture. We must agitate for anarchism and attack the problems we face using the principles of anarchism as our guide. Anarchists must be careful that we don't find ourselves advocating for 'equality of oppressors', instead of the abolition of oppression. It appears that in many instances anarchists are doing just that, though they may not be fully conscious of the fact because they are still carrying baggage from their pre-revolutionary class struggle days of liberalism. It's time to toss that baggage overboard so we are unimpeded in our journey to achieving the social revolution.

'Anarchist chic'

The anarchist movement is experiencing a rekindled interest among the masses, especially among the younger generations. Anarchism's hope for success lies in its ability to attract young people who are truly interested in attaining working class control over society. We need to be sure that we are dedicated to international working class solidarity and the complete overthrow of capitalism and the State. We need people who have thrown off the shackles of believing that either the reformist or radicalist movement can be reformed and made friendlier to the working class.

I don't advocate that we agitate purely in the abstract without getting involved in concrete direct action. The point I make, which I hope is clear, is that anarchists must always operate within the realm of achieving a social revolution, for the betterment of the working class and thus all of humanity, not merely reacting to each provocation from the State in a way that diverts our scarce resources from the business we need to be about — achieving anarchy.

There's nothing wrong with spontaneity but organisation is also necessary.

destroy corporate property and spray paint signs with the image of our logo on them. (And yes, we're serious about this, but aren't firmly grounded in the principles of anarchism.

Then there are those anarchists who are solely interested in the extreme notion that we must be 'disorganised' and move from one demonstration to the next without any sense of direction. Each affinity group just
It will take a federated, ‘organised’ effort to win the revolution. Currently operating, how can we hope to achieve world revolution and create a system of distribution for the planet’s six billion inhabitants? This doesn’t mean that every act of everyone must always be scrutinised by every other group and local autonomy. Small and nuanced of their communities, and also reduce the possibility of infiltration by counter-revolutionaries.

Anarchists must rise above the idiotic notion that to focus, organise and guide our movement is somehow lowering ourselves to becoming reformists and cross-class movements, but have the world’s attention we must seize that opportunity and not allow a cooling off period where passions are allowed to cool. The momentum is not being carried over from one action to the next. When we have the world’s attention we must seize that opportunity and not allow a lull time where the movement ends up floundering.

While a general strike on a global scale seems fanciful at the present time, it is toward such a culminating future event that all current direct actions should converge. The problem, as things now stand, is that between J18 NO, April-May 2000, etc., there is too much lag time where passions are allowed to cool down.

At the same time, it is on the subject of direct actions and street demonstrations, I’d like to say a couple of things about the upcoming S26 demonstrations in Prague. It has been reported that the policemen are likely to face an army of 11,000 police backed by 5,000 military personnel. This is a prime example of how the oppressors can easily become the oppressed. Apparently Czech President Vaclav Havel has forgotten about the days when he was an outlaw in the Charter 77 Movement, but has remembered remarkably well the tactics of oppression used by the invading Soviet forces during the Prague Spring of 1968. Czech police kicked and beat with truncheons May Day demonstrators and were in Washington DC on April 18 to get first-hand training in American methods of repression.

This is how ‘democracy’ is being enforced by the capitalist powers. The authorities make much of the fact that street demonstrations and rioting are not ‘democratic’ methods for redressing grievances against the State, but fail to also mention that the global financial and corporate institutions which are backed by the police powers of the respective capitalist states are neither popularly elected or supported by the majority of the people. They are nothing but dictatorships ruling the world through the iron fist of brutal repression.

Scientific fact proclaims the existence of an ecology of which we are a part. No system of ethics or morality, except the discredited mythologies of fascism, can justify human existence in the present if humanity fails to exist in the future.

Conclusion

The world is once again awakening to anarchism. A golden opportunity lies before us, which may not happen again for another hundred years, if ever. We can squander the moment or seize it and make this century and this millennium the age of anarchism. We must be willing to be critical of those people who claim anarchy in name only. The winning process must begin to separate the wheat from the chaff — to separate the cultists and the baddies from the revolutionaries who are in this for the long haul of achieving the social revolution.

Anarchists must not allow the reformists and cross-class movements to co-opt the growing antiauthoritarian movement. We must do all that we can to influence the passions of the working class in favour of anarchism.

Anarchists must rise above the idiotic notion that to focus, organise and guide our movement is somehow lowering ourselves to becoming Leninists or authoritarianists. Yes, we must guard against vanguardism in its strictest sense, but also not be afraid to challenge the notion that to act in an organised, unified and concerted effort is somehow selling out our anarchist ideals. It isn’t.

I don’t claim to hold all the answers. There is much I still need to learn but I also hope that I will be able to make some positive contributions as to how to get where we need to go. For the time being I present these comments and observations to you so that they may be critiqued as to whether or not I’m moving in the proper direction or merely suffering from an extremely hot Texas summer.

Forward to anarchist communique

Ronald A. Young, 0625541, Huntsville Unit, P.O. Box 32, Huntsville, Texas 77348-9001, USA

Are we the problem?

Of course working class cultures created or maintained by capitalism are part of the problem. As previous articles in Organise! have shown, some members of the working class enjoy wantonly destroying the environment, whether shooters and hunters, trail-bikers or off-road drivers. We consume our environment in the same way and for the same reasons we consume capitalism’s goods. We approach happy to see mountains quarried for stone and the holes turned into landfill, forests planted and felled to feed our craving for newspapers, furniture and packaging. We sometimes side with the rural owning class against our best interests.

Two-thirds of Scottish rural households have an income below the poverty line, yet continue to defer to the local ruling class. We grab up hedges, spray pesticides or use helpful land as fertilizer because someone pays us to do it. Thus we are in a social construct created by capitalism to suit its needs, not ours, is the cause of this false consciousness and revolutionary consciousness the solution.

People at any time, in any place have truly ‘laced’ light on the land’. We have all inflicted ourselves upon the land and the economy is part of as much as our greed, our desires and our technological capacity have allowed. If these impacts were historically relatively small, what could we ask? It is today and tomorrow that matters. We have used as much of the world’s resources since 1950 as the whole of the human race did in its entire existence up to that point. Capitalism’s point of no return has already been reached; it will be or be radically changed. How many of us will die in the process is the question.

A new Holocaust of the ecologies

Capitalism has created the Spectacle to seduce us, it has appropriated all the planet’s resources and built a vast machinery of control, including states, governments, armies, death-squads, laws, judges, policemen, prisons, jails, advertising, schools, socialisation machines and the whole process of production and consumption, in order to protect and extend that grand tacit. And to be precise, by capitalism we mean capitalists, real people running companies and corporations, in huge mansions, wielding vast and shadowy powers. People with great wealth and no ethics, people for whom personal aggrandizement expressed in profit, status or authority is too powerful an opium.

The effect of this is the wholesale destruction of the planet’s biological and social ecologies, the mass holocaust of the poor, in which disasters are certainly the only most visible events in an unrelenting catalogue of wars, starvation, pandemics, crippling disease, ignorance, riots and pogrom. A jungle cleared, a shanty set up, the iron fist of brutal repression. A jungle cleared, a shanty set up, the iron fist of brutal repression. The mass holocaust of the poor, in which disasters are certainly the only most visible events in an unrelenting catalogue of wars, starvation, pandemics, crippling disease, ignorance, riots and pogrom.
people have been cleared from the land, forced to work for pennies, and their forests cut down for timber. The environment was and is an area of working class struggle because it is where we suffer most from environmental degradation and expropriation of land, water and clean air. Boycotts of dam projects, nuclear power stations, forest clearances, heavy industry (for instance in Thailand where a riot by 100,000 people halted a steel-making project), dumping of imported waste, has been social as well as environmental victories for the working class. Early socialists argued strenuously that political and economic struggle was the means to achieve environmental reform. Associations like William Morris and Kropotkin proposed sustainable economies that were also socially just. The land would be a vast granary, water would run clean and food would be free from chemicals and adulteration.

Environmentally-caused diseases like cholera, diphtheria and typhus would be eliminated. These programmes of reform would have to start from the fighting struggle of working class people against bosses and owners, struggles to defend their place within ecologies (such as resistance to clearances or forest destruction). Their struggle brought in the 1970s, spun a new type of consciousness. Whatever its label, whether the means to achieve it. Since ownership creates. We have to stimulate and support movements for radical land reform. Since ownership creates. We have to stimulate and support movements for radical land reform. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land. The HLS campaign is a model we need to spread. We wish to change off the land.
Interview with McDonald’s Workers’ Resistance

McDonald’s Workers’ Resistance (MWR) is a group of politically aware workers who have taken the bold decision to organise a workplace group in their store in Glasgow. The first issue of its plain-take newsletter Micsues appeared recently, and while aimed at McDonald’s employees, is accessible to anyone with experience of the service sector. Looking to spread their message and link up with other groups, they participated in this interview for Organise! There is much that other workers can learn from their example.

Organise!: Initially, how did the MWR group come together? Was it politically motivated or ‘economically’, i.e. through the need to organise for improved working conditions?

MWR: There were specific issues at our store that were pissing people off, for example we were due hundreds of pounds in unpaid bonuses. At the same time a group of us, who over the years had become close friends, got talking and decided to try and take the informal resistance that we’d practised for years a stage further. A number of us were already influenced by radical politics so you could say it was politically motivated. At present our ability to influence our working conditions has improved quite a bit.

Organise!: How successful had your tactics been in improving your working conditions?

MWR: Objectively, not very. We haven’t won higher wages or anything like that, although we did have some initial success with the bonuses. It’s been obvious for some time that to have any real impact we need to reach out to McDonald’s workers in other areas and it was with this in mind that we produced Micsues.

However, we have to be realistic: McDonald’s opens a new restaurant every three minutes, so even if another McDonald’s employee got organised every 10 minutes, the ratio of unorganised, to organised employees, would be increasing. The main way our experience of work has changed has been through changes we’ve enacted ourselves. We challenged the company’s obsession with hierarchies by downing tools to vote on every petty decision; we’ve skived more; stolen more; survived on much less. Each other better and we’ve found a voice with which to hit back against their idiotic propaganda. Finally, several of the group who produced Micsues have subsequently got themselves new jobs, and found their working conditions have improved quite a bit too.

Organise!: How to you see your role in the wider context of the struggle against capitalism?

MWR: A response that frequently follows a denunciation of McDonald’s is an anecdote about an even worse or equally bad job. This is not surprising because, contrary to what you’d think from the attention it receives, there is nothing special about McDonald’s — it’s just especially good at doing what all businesses attempt, that is maximising the profit they can make out of their employees’ labour. MWR is not a cohesive group with a membership or a constitution or anything like that, and not everyone involved in it or in contact would necessarily identify themselves with these aims, but we have never wanted to hide the fact that many of us would like to see the development of a new system of production and distribution. Although MWR’s work is important, the vast majority of McDonald’s workers are...
The most marked experience of serious mental illness, or of those labelled schizophrenic by an essentially oppressive psychiatric profession, is the assumption of a new identity. This essentially takes the place of the sufferer's old identity and, in essence, the 'hysteric' becomes an entirely different person. New, this is not to deny that there are not large difficulties faced by anyone who has suffered a total mental breakdown. The most marked aspect of this is paranoia/confusion, where language itself becomes oppressive and the person begins to hallucinate. But I would argue that the reasons for this experience are entirely rational, and based on the problems of living in an entirely antagonistic society.

Identity

I would like to begin my analysis with a general outline of identity. For me, identity is entirely social. A person learns to co-exist and interact with other people, and develops as a result of this interaction. They are given an identity by their parents, and this develops through interaction with them, other children and adults in their environment. In modern bourgeois democracy, for the early part of their lives, most people are allowed a certain leeway, that in their identity is a result of their association with other people, and not imposed by the antagonistic state/capital machine. This may, however, only apply to the children of middle class families. I would argue this leeway of identity would survive in a non-antagonistic society, where people can be at ease, and important, you will be valued as a member of the human race regardless. I would argue that for most of the same majority, their identities have not been challenged. They are more than just a name. In mental illness, however, it becomes impossible to exist with your previous identity and an escape route is sought, albeit unconsciously. The reason for this desperation is that their social identity is removed, i.e., their social situation has become antagonistic and the person feels an unconscious affinity for this new character, which they may have developed earlier in life. The new person exemplifies all the development of dreams from childhood, when development was on a more unconscious level. This basically ties in with the Freudian return of the repressed. Basically, the suffering person feels an element of redemption, the sufferer believes that he can become this person and therefore return something to the glory of their name because, the sufferer, themselves, is such a good person. While of course, becoming a better person, the suffering person is able to approach other people without fear. Living with or working for a person who thinks they control your identity can use this fact to completely disregard your humanity. If you knew personally the people who oppress you, it becomes worse because the oppression takes on a physical and manifest form.

A person only develops when he/she can approach other people without fear. Living with or working for a person who thinks they control your identity automatically puts them in a position to create fear in you. This is the psychological consequence of capitalism, where people turn other people into property. A main tactic can be, in fact, labelling or calling someone mad in the first place, when they are not. This implies that the person is not human, is already an outcast, has created their own suffering, or, has brought about their own punishment by acting in the way they do — an argument analogous to the one where Jews deserve to be exterminated by acting in the way they do — an argument analogous to the one where Jews deserve to be exterminated because they are weak. Of course, this is the main problem with mental hospitals where people are treated as self-made outcasts from an otherwise benevolent society. The existence of the state ties in with this as everyone becomes a piece of property or a subject and therefore expendable. Those who value themselves and their independence are deemed insane.

Hospitalisation

I would now like to turn to more concrete matters by focussing on the effect of psychiatric hospitals on patients. Firstly, the patient is ignored. Nurses, doctors, do not talk to patients. This is because the suffering person is deemed irrational and therefore basically impossible to talk to, no longer a social being. That this ignorance may be the reason for the patient's problems in the first place, and any action may be tiring to talk to totally people about their new identity and how the world can finally be a better place, is concealed or ignored, perhaps consciously, to further weaken the person's psyche. People are denied basic human rights on the most innocuous of pretences. Wanting to leave the hospital, or basically confronting the psychiatric profession with the fact that you are being oppressed unjustly, you are not irrational, and being somebody new doesn't mean that you are, can lead to your being sectioned. This means that for 28 days, soon to be six months, you cannot go outside the ward, have to take medication and have a nurse follow you everywhere. Everyday situations in mental hospitals get described as an exercise in control on the part of the patient. psychiatrists themselves are basically an essential part of you at that time, and as such to cut you off from your physical existence, suppressing your every will to live. Witnessed by the high number of suicides among mental patients after leaving mental hospital and after returning to the person you most hate, yourself, and the same environment as caused your emotional destruction, most likely friends and family. The system does not even treat you as mentally ill. If you were, you could be talked to and reasoned with, but this is not the way of modern psychiatry. Besides, some people get bunged up just for being active, as in the case of Greg Minns in Burnley.

Liberation

Lastly, I would like to emphasise the liberation found in mental illness. Firstly, a mental patient is entirely sociable. They depend on other people for warmth, kindness and solidarity. The usual picture of mental hospitals is completely false, they are usually very quiet and subdued places. The change in the sufferer's identity is also accompanied with a change in the identities of those round about them. The happiness found in escaping from your life needs to be shared, in a way. Also they are left no doubt about their own nature or of their suffering. They are totally alienated the mere fact of having a body with which to associate with other people means you can intuitively follow your own will and power to do good rather than evil, evil no longer has any hold over or attraction for the totally insane. Basically, your experience becomes proof of the power of the individual. But as a social being your wants are basically the same as those around you, love, comfort, peace and happiness. But, to say that these can be achieved in anything other than a stateless communist society would be a blatant lie.

In conclusion, the experience of mental health sufferers is one of unending pain, but that all that is needed to end their suffering is a change in composition and understanding. With the ending of capitalism and the state, not only would suffering not arise, but also people would be free to be forbearing with the mentally dispensensed.
Tribal life and anarchism

The Politics of Peter Kropotkin

Organisers' note: This article is an edited version of a chapter from a book by Brian Morris. A member of the AF, with Brian's permission, did the editing. If you want to find out more about the book, then contact the AF's London Group.

Kropotkin is one of the first thinkers to attack the ideas of philosophers whose work helped to justify capitalism and the state. He was, in particular, strongly opposed to the views of such philosophers as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, all "contract theorists" who tended to view humans in as essentially social, atomistic beings. Hobbes especially considered the human person as a self-directing, competitive owner of private property, whereas Kantian philosophers...
Part three

In the tradition

This is part three of 'In the tradition', a roughly chronological outline of the various political events, movements and ideas which have influenced the development of the Anarchist Federation. We left off last time having looked at currents which emerged during the 1960s, particularly the British-based Solidarity and political events, movements and ideas which modern revolution would be one which confirmation of their argument that a activity of millions of 'ordinary' people and a Anarchist Federation.

Social revolution continues to haunt capitalism

The reality of the events of May—June, "the greatest revolutionary movement in France since the Paris Commune" (International Situationnist, September 1969) is very different. Although the actions of the students provided a detonator, the actual social explosion was manifested in the largest wildcat strike in history, the occupation of workplaces across the country and the proof, if proof were needed, that the spectre of social revolution continues to haunt capitalism.

Superficially, the insurrection of May 1968 appears to have come out of nowhere. In France and in Europe generally, class struggle was at a low ebb; there appeared a massive depoliticisation, particularly amongst young people and prospects for any movement for revolutionary change seemed particularly remote.

However, amongst large sectors of the working class there existed a long-standing bitterness born of long-neglected grievances over wage claims and simmering resentment over conditions of work. Amongst young workers particularly there was a sense that the misery of the previous generation wasn't for them. It was amongst this part of the working class, including the 'bourgeoisie noire', the members of street gangs, that the revolutionary spark ignited and they were usually the first to join the students on the streets, in order to 'have a go' at the police.

In the universities, the high—schools and in many workplaces, there were also various revolutionary groups and individuals who had been agitating for years, some of whom were or had been involved in various libertarian socialist currents outlined in part two of 'In the tradition'. Prior to the May—June events these groups had enjoyed a growth, but one that could not be described as large or rapid. However, revolutionary ideas had a small but growing audience amongst significant sections of students and workers.

The original agitation had its origins in the Nanterre campus of the University of Paris, a new ultra-modern nightmare of glass and steel. In April 1967, some male students set up camp outside the female dormitories in protest against sexual segregation, setting a hall of dissent rolling which culminated in a student boycott of lectures in November.

March 22nd
On March 22nd 1968, a group of students occupied the university administrative building in protest against the arrest of members of the National Vietnam Committee (anti-Vietnam war protesters were taking place across the globe). This was the birth of the March 22nd Movement (M22), an affinity-type group of the amorphous New Left, but which included anarchists and people influenced by Situationist ideas. The M22 'spokesman' Daniel Cohn-Bendit was associated with the Noir et Rouge group of libertarian communists (see 'In the tradition' part 2) and, thanks to the media, his face became the face of the movement. Also amongst the student agitation were the Enragés, by no means all students themselves; but protest. This continued over the weekend as an emergency court jailed six student 'agitators' and the authorities banned the planned Monday demonstration. The march went ahead and was the biggest seen in Paris since the Algerian war.

Between the Monday and the following Friday the momentum increased with ever larger numbers in the streets, taking, planning, organizing. On the Friday the first barricades went up and the situation took a semi-insurrectionary turn following a 30,000 strong march where the University students were joined by large numbers of students and local workers. The police response was brutal in the extreme, but the situation was changing from a 'student' protest isolated in Paris to something that would engulf millions throughout France, thus is a class movement.

On May 13th, realising that a grassroots revolt was gathering momentum, the trade unions, led by the Stalinist CGT, called a one-day protest strike in order to let off a little steam and to maintain some sort of leadership role. The demonstration of at least 200,000 (some estimates a far higher figure) contained workers from every industry and workplace. At the 'official' end of the march the CGT stewards, of which there were at least 10,000, managed to get most of the crowd to disperse; although they were needed to physically intimidate many non-party activists in order maintain control. Thousands still managed to converge on the Champ de Mars at the foot of the Eiffel tower to discuss just where the struggle was going.

On the 13th also, the Sorbonne was vacated by the CRS and subsequently occupied by students and others. In an area where the student movement had been described as 'euphoric' the university buildings were transformed into a vast arena of revolutionary discussion and action, 24 hours a day. The original occupiers were soon joined by delegations from other educational institutes, from the high schools (where the Jeunesse Anarchiste Communiste (Anarchist Communist Youth) organisations played a significant role in forming Action Committees) and from factories and offices. Various committees developed with responsibilities for the occupation, propaganda, liaison committees with the workers and other students. Large groups argued with each other over the historical significance of it all and who would be providing the correct leadership. Funnily enough, none of them were required to do so. Those who really wanted to develop the movement as far as it would go attempted to deepen the break with bourgeois society and to encourage the working class to take things into its own hands (and out of those of the parties and unions).

Occupation of the workplaces
The occupation of factories and other workplaces began on May 14th when the Sial Aviation plant at Nantes was occupied by its workers. The next day the Renault factories at Cléon and Flins were occupied and over the next couple of days the wildcat strike wave was spread all over France. Few major workplaces were not affected, even in small rural towns. Action Committees were set up in numberless factories.
the whole of France was paralysed. Sites, railway stations, schools and black! flags were hoisted over buildings. The Committee issued a call for "the revolutionary elements, situationists and members of the Enragés group formed a Committee for Maintaining the Occupations on May 19th, which continued to call for the continuation of workers controls. This call was echoed by various groups involved in the struggles in different parts of France, whilst increasing numbers of workers joined the strike movement. By the end of the week 10 million were on strike.

For the abolition of bosses! But the dead hand of Stalinism and of its bureaucratic apparatus was heavily upon the working class. On the 24th the CGT called a mass demonstration of its members in Paris. The March 22nd Movement and the Action Committees rallied for a demonstration of workers control. This call was echoed by various groups involved in the struggles in different parts of France, whilst increasing numbers of workers joined the strike movement. By the end of the week 10 million were on strike.

The Peugeot works in Sochaux, an attack by the CRS was repulsed by volleys of bolts and other metal objects. In response the police opened fire on the workers, killing two. After a 36-hour battle, Sochaux was finally "normalised". Most car workers voted to return by the 17th, the striking role and TV workers were the last return, holding out until the second week of July. As for the students, the Sorbonne was cleared by the CRS on the 16th, others held out for a few more weeks. Militants insisted "the struggle continued", as indeed it does, but the revolutionary potential in France was petering out. The struggle was to continue, but elsewhere. Solidarity, in the eyes of the CGT, Paris May 1968 concluded that the events pointed to the need for: "the creation of a new kind of revolutionary movement... strong enough to commit the bureaucratic management, alert enough the day to day to recognise the duplicity of the "left" leaderships, deeply enough implanted to explain the the workers the real meaning of the struggles. At the political level, the Communist Party was increasingly integrated into the state structures in return for its complicity in this restructuring. This integration of the Communist Party made it responsible for the emergence of urban armed struggle in the mid-70s.

Restructuring Struggles in Italy also took place around the prisons, which from the early 1970s were increasingly home to revolutionary elements, often culminating in massive demonstrations and prison riots. The period of heightened class struggles heralded in 1968 underwent a transformation as a new employment struggle emerged upon the agenda to defeat the emerging economic crisis, involved a technological restructuring of industry and the end of the 'workers' forresses' of the pre-1968 period. On a political level, the Communist Party was increasingly integrated into the state structures in return for its complicity in this restructuring. This integration of the Communist Party made it responsible for the emergence of urban armed struggle in the mid-70s.

Armed struggle Indeed, in Italy the 1970s were defined by two aspects. Firstly, a level of militancy amongst a large number of workers both employed and unemployed which manifested itself in autonomous struggle both in the factories and on a territorial basis and which arguably reached its high point in the movement of '77. Secondly, the 'armed struggle for communism' carried out by several Leftist groups which, when not actually state sponsored contributed nothing to the actual class struggles which they claimed to somehow lead'. The activities of the latter, which left the working class as spectators to their own 'liberation', tended to overshadow the actual content of the class struggles that took place and any revolutionary potential.

AND IN 'SOCIALIST' POLAND... The strikes and occupations were echoed in the proletarian insurgency in Poland in 1970-71, when workers in the Leninist 'socialist' economy were measured with their very own May '68 (only in December and January)! burning down the ruling Stalinist party headquarters to the tune of the Internationale. By the end of the year the country was effectively master of the situation. As in France, and indeed Italy, the working class rallied "as the whole of the proletariat" and called on the need for a "better" and more effective nature of public opinion. As he wrote: "There is no doubt that primitive society had temporary leaders. The sorceror, the rainmaker — the learned man of that age — sought to profit from what they knew about nature in order to dominate their fellow beings. Similarly, he who could more easily memorise the proverbs and songs in which all traditions was endowed because influential."

Another key point of Kropotkin's critique of bourgeois social theory was his view that society and culture are not the enemies of individual autonomy and expression, but must be seen as "the structure without which no individuals can even begin to exercise their potentialities". Individuals in tribal society were not restrictive or locking any individuality, lived completely determined by social norms and public opinion. Kropotkin always stressed the need to develop a society that was not only respected but also
individual freedom and initiative. Individual autonomy is of paramount importance to Kropotkin and he neither romanticised tribal life, nor considered public opinion an \-\- as some hallowed social form, but rather sought to develop a new form of society “in which the welfare of all would become the groundwork for the development of the personality”. Kropotkin was thus concerned to cherish and uphold the “development of individuality” and the creative power of the individual. Throughout his writings, Kropotkin made a clear distinction between two forms of individualism, the kind of bourgeois individualism associated with Hobbes and Nietzsche, and the “true individualism” that is characteristic of anarchist communistic tradition. The egoism — the “narrow and selfish” individualism — espoused by liberal theorists and by the anarchist followers of Nietzsche, Kropotkin considered “spurious” for it was essentially anti-social and implied the oppression of one’s neighbours, at the elitist affirmation of a “superior type” of humanity. The egoistic, or the narcissistic individual who was content to treat other individuals as a means to his own advancement or as a means of their own empowerment, was not Kropotkin’s idea of an anarchist.

Individualism

In a recent study on the politics of individualism L Susan Brown essentially follows Kropotkin in making a distinction between two forms of individualism, the liberal individualism of liberal political theory, and the existentialist individualism, which she argues, is shared by both anarchist political philosophy and liberalism. Instrumental individualism implies an “abstract” (asocial) individual, as a possessive individual, an individual who uses others to further his own ends and self- interest. Instrumental individualism is thus based on the belief in freedom as a means to achieve individual interests, and conceives the human person as a possessive, competitive individual, the owner of property not only in terms of “self-ownership” — having property in oneself — but also as holding real, private property.

Existent individualism, on the other hand — Kropotkin’s “true” individualism — is “founded on the idea that freedom is an inherently valuable end in itself; self determination and individual autonomy are desirable for themselves, and need no other justification; the wage system, freedom can have two very different meanings — that of instrumental freedom manifested through the market, and that of existential freedom, expressed in the individual’s capacity to be autonomous and self-determining.

In an important critique of liberal feminism — as expressed in the writings of John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan and Janet Radcliffe-Richards — Brown clearly demonstrated that liberal political theory contains an inherent contradiction, in embracing both forms of individualism. For all these scholars, in their liberal commitment to an inherently unequal class system (capitalism) and in advocating state power, completely undermine the existential individualism that they also profess to espouse. Individualist anarchism, Brown suggests, is essentially a radical version of liberalism and not an alternative to it, and that only social anarchism has political coherence in combining existential individualism with free communism.

In contrast, liberalism and Individualist anarchism (or anarcho-capitalism) to the degree that they advocate private property and the free market economy always compromise individual freedom and undermine existential individualism. Brown also emphasises the fact that social anarchism is not only opposed to governmental power (the state) but seeks to dissolve all forms of authority and power. She quotes Rudolf Rocker: “Common to all anarchism is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of free humanity.” She thus concludes that anarchists oppose any form of social organisation that take away or inhibits the self-determination of the individual. However, in contrast to Kropotkin, her emphasis in the study is on individual autonomy rather than on social freedom. Kropotkin was not only critical of the state, and all its manifestations and techniques of power (prisons, schools) but also of primitive property, the wage system, capitalism and all forms of religious authority — not just the state.

Kropotkin never fantasized about a pre-social state of nature, for he recognized that humans were intrinsically social beings — as well as being autonomous individuals. He thus repudiated entirely the philosophy of Kropotkin recognised that humans were essentially social beings.

of the individual as anarchical, possessive, narcissistic and competitive. He considered an individualism — an individual which only serves to subserve and narrow and selfish individualism to be both “misanthropic” and oppressive. But in stressing that humans were inherently social beings, this did not imply that human nature was “fixed” or “static”, or that they had ontological “freedom”. Kropotkin stressed social freedom and a communal individuality, and advocated anarchist communism in that he felt that this form of human society, for the benefit of individual development and freedom, and allowed for the full expression of a person’s faculties, capacities and individuality. It has been fashionable, usually by writers of Fr. D. Chesebro, to criticise Kropotkin for having a romantic view of human nature and therefore making ethics unnecessary. This presents a complete travesty of anarchist thought. It has often been said that Kropotkin, and anarchists more generally, are too innocent, too naive, and have too rosy a picture of human nature. It is said that, like Rousseau, they have a romantic view of human nature, which they see as essentially good, cooperative and peaceful loving. But of course, real humans are not like this; they are cruel and aggressive and selfish, and so anarchy is just a pipe dream. It is an unrealistic vision of a past golden age that never existed. This being so, some form of coercive authority is always necessary. The true individualist and other anarchists — do not follow Rousseau, Kropotkin, as we have seen, repudiated Rousseau’s rationalisation of the ‘muzzle savage’, while Kropotkin was even more scathing in his criticism of the egoistic conception of the individual.

Kropotkin and most anarchists, think of humans as having both positive and negative tendencies. If they did think humans all goodness and light, would they mind being ruled? Is it because they have a realistic rather than a romantic view of human nature, that they oppose all forms of authority, whether of egoism, or of the state — they hold that the individual’s determination of the individual. In essence, anarchists oppose all power, which the French describe as “poissance” — “power over” (rather than “power to” do something), and believe, like Lord Acton, that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Social anarchism

In his study of nineteenth century social anarchism, David Morland argues that Kropotkin (along with Proudhon and Bakunin) was not a stand-alone view of the world, but had a realistic attitude towards humans and human nature.

These anarchists recognised that both an inherent sociability and an inherent egoism were rooted in human psychology. But because they acknowledged human “egoism” the classical anarchists like Kropotkin, Morland contends, could not logically and empirically advocate an anarchistic society, a society without a state. Escaping politics and power with coercive government and seemingly unaware that for most of human history people have in fact lived in societies without government. Morland argues that human “egoism” renders a stateless society “impossible”. With “egoism” there inevitably arise conflicts and disputes, and these, for Morland, are the core of civil society, institutions, although for most of human history such conflicts and disputes have been resolved — or not resolved — through social institutions that have the function of the state. To bolster his case Morland highlights the inconsistencies and problematic nature of Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s anarchism — long recognised and critiqued by anarchists — and is continuously engaged in the construction of moral coercion and public opinion with state force. Anarchists, of course, have always recognised that public opinion and social norms (not state laws) be problematically and oppressive.

Morland’s essential argument is followed in the following:

“Both humanity’s egoism and altruism are essential to a society that will ensure this egoism can be restrained... Hence the need for the state. The state’s raison d’etre is grounded in human nature, and so are their political disputes that will emerge from this egoism can have to be restrained...”

Hollis basically argued this three hundred years ago. But the state — centralised, coercive authority — is there not just to keep law and order and to settle disputes stemming from our egoism — but to promote and uphold, and when necessary, defend, systems of social inequality and exploitation i.e. class interests. This has always been the raison d’etre ever since the first state arose only a few thousand years ago. As the old liberal Adam Smith put it, government is for the security of property, and is, in reality, instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, for those “who have property against those who have none. Not savaging politics from economics the classical liberals had a much more historical sense of what the state is all about than those who have no property.”

Human nature

Kropotkin in critiquing the “individualism” of Western metaphysics and political theory, at least attempted to outline an alternative conception of human nature. Kropotkin recognised that humans have certain inherent capacities and powers that are rooted in our human inheritance and that humans, like many other animals, are intrinsically, social beings, constituted through social relationships. Thus, for Kropotkin, we are neither completely socially determined — a “docile body”, or simply an “effect” of discourses, language or power, nor are human free of social constraints. But Kropotkin also stressed the importance of social agency and “personalisms”, a form of existential individualism that emphasised creative self-determination and autonomy — a view of the self that does not entail submission or confession.

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The language of freedom

The voice of internationalism

Anarchists have been at the forefront of the international workers' Esperanto movement practically from day one.

The Anarchist Federation, rightly, has always taken its international work seriously. Our International Secretariat has contact with anarchists and other revolutionaries across the globe. The work they do may simply be a matter of letter writing, exchanging information with comrades about matters in their respective countries. At other times, it has meant concerted solidarity actions on an international level. Furthermore, the AF also participates as a member section of the International Anarchist Federations (IAF).

Point 4 of our Aims and Principles states, "The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated". But such boundaries might not only political or economic constructs, they may also be social or psychological barriers. One major barrier between workers working on the international level, which is often overlooked or even ignored, is language.

Language is always a problem, as anyone will tell you if they've attempted to communicate with overseas comrades, particularly if they have limited knowledge of a foreign language and if the overseas comrade knows little English.

Yet for us as revolutionaries, this need not be an insurmountable problem. With a little bit of application and a degree of international cooperation, the language barrier is something we can overcome without too much difficulty.

Of course, we could all spend loads of time attempting to learn lots of languages (badly). Alternatively, we could spend just a little time learning one very simple and neutral international language (Esperanto) as a means of communicating with comrades in other countries.

Now usually, at the mention of Esperanto, the cynical comments begin... "But hardly anyone speaks it."

Fact: Several million people worldwide speak Esperanto. Actually, even in Britain where Esperanto is relatively weak, Esperantists greatly outnumber anarchists.

"But English is already a kind of international language, isn't it?"

True. But English is the international language of business, the multinationals, power, imperialism, etc. In many parts of the world English has been forced on people, in some cases literally at the point of a gun.

Esperanto on the other hand, is not the property of any class, nation, corporation or government. As far as I know, there is no international Esperanto police force putting the boot into the workers.

Another problem with English is, though it may be a relatively simple language if you want to learn the basics, a non-native speaker will still always be at a disadvantage. In fact English is riddled with countless bizarre and often incomprehensible grammatical forms, completely illogical phrases, strange idioms, as well as weird spellings and pronunciation.

In the end, English for the non-native speaker is yet another barrier to international communication. Much the same problems tend to apply to all other national languages.

With Esperanto, however, everyone is a non-native speaker and therefore everyone is relatively equal — no one has the linguistic advantage. It is also incredibly simple and can be learned in a very short time. In other words, you don't have to be a linguistic eyeglass to benefit from it. Pronunciation is phonetic. The grammar is completely regular. There are no irregularities to painfully memorise with Esperanto. So, once you learn the basics, that's more or less it. It's then simply a matter of putting it into practice and gaining the experience.

We anarchist comrades often talk about creating a "culture of resistance". Well, on the international front, Esperanto can greatly contribute to that goal if we use it for the purpose of international resistance. But it's up to us to build on this. I'm not saying that every class-conscious worker in the world has to learn Esperanto (though that would be a bad thing!). Yet Esperanto, should we choose to use it, is a very useful tool, which can only help the class struggle.

A bit of history

Anyone who's read our excellent pamphlet The Anarchist Movement in Japan will notice that some of the reprinted pages from the old anarcho-communist Japanese newspapers are in Esperanto. In the early part of the 20th century a group of Esperantists were executed by the Japanese state for their anarchist activities.

In fact, anarchists have historically been at the forefront of the international workers' Esperanto movement practically from day one.

The first anarcho-esperantist group was formed in Stockholm in 1905. This was followed by the influential Peace-Freedom group based in Paris in 1906. Meanwhile, in China and Japan, anarchists began publishing the Esperanto journals The Voice of the People and New Century. The influential Chinese anarchist Shin Fu was an Esperantist and the famous anarchist writer Lu Hsien originally wrote his novella Springtime in Autumn in Esperanto (later published in English, by the way). I believe Malatesta also understood the international language.

Moreover, in 1907 the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam adopted a resolution to support the use of Esperanto. Subsequent conferences reaffirmed this aim.

In the early 1930s, the Ukrainian anarchists A. Lvanov and J. Zilberfarb founded the International Language Scientific Anarchist Library (ISAB). The ISAB called for the formation of a world anarcho-esperantist organisation. With the help of the S. Haydon and N. Pateras in Russia, the French anarchist Julio Mogyn and others, the World League of Non-Statist Esperantists (TLES) was eventually formed. TLES had member sections in 15 countries and published the journal Free Worker from Berlin.

Between the two world wars, anarchists in Bulgaria published the journal The Worker, which was later transferred to Stockholm. Meanwhile, repression in Japan forced the Esperanto journal The Anarchist to close down when its editors were jailed. In Spain 1936-1939 the CNT — with its own Esperanto group — was carried on some of the work of the old TLES. In 1949, the anarchist fraction of the World Non-nationalist Association (SAT) began the journal Libereca Ligo (Liberarian Bond), which continues to this day — currently edited in Belgium.

The scene today

It goes without saying that not all Esperantists are revolutionary anarchists, far from it. The biggest international organisation is the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), which is represented in this country by the Esperantist Association (EAB). Traditionally, it has always aimed to be politically neutral in its orientation. The second biggest organisation is the World Non-nationalist Association (SAT). Since its foundation in 1921, the SAT has traditionally held a class struggle approach, seeing Esperanto as a tool to bring workers of different countries together and to further the workers' cause on the international front. The SAT publishes a monthly journal Sernmalko (Non-nationalist) and has members across the globe. It provides the means for its members to directly communicate with their fellow workers overseas. Its British affiliate is SATEB (i.e. SAT in Britain) who publish La Verda Proleta (The Green Proletarian) — a paper traditionally being the colour of the Esperanto movement.

SAT in Britain is predominantly leftist, although I have to say, very friendly and open. Though the international SAT is a bit of a mixed bag of anarchists and various types of people, it is very active and takes Esperanto seriously.
Report from the Third Congress of the Northeastern Federation of Anarchos-Communists: Quebec City, 10-11 February 2001

by Becky & Nicolas (Sabate Anarchist Collective)

Over 35 people attended the 3rd congress of the Northeastern Federation of Anarchos-Communists (NEFAC) held in Quebec City on February 10th and 11th. Participating delegations hailed from Montreal (Le Tous), Maine (AO) and several as of yet nameless groups, Boston (Barricada and Sabate), Baltimore (Roundhouse), Western Massachusetts, and, of course, Quebec City (Ensemble-Action). Also present was a member of the Lyon region of the Francophone Anarchist Federation (FAF) who extended to the congress the greetings of the FAF and gave a presentation regarding the organisational model of the Lyon region of the FAF.

Several important motions, including the call for an anarchist contingent at the anti-FATA demonstrations in April and for the publication and wide distribution of a four-page agitational bulletin about the FATA and anarchism, were passed during the weekend. Additionally, the conference served as a debut for NEFAC's magazine, The Northeastern Anarchist. The magazine was well received by conference participants and is available throughout the region at movement bookstores and info-shops.

Among the most important accomplishments of the congress were the transfer of the General Secretariat of the English section from Prole Recolt (Marguerant, WV) to Roundhouse, the discussions around Federation structure, the acceptance of several new groups and individuals into the Federation, and the acceptance of several new Federation initiatives. These initiatives include an organisational tour to spread the word about NEFAC and aid people in the creation of new collectives, the writing of a general international and FATA statement similar to the ones written around the Prague and Nice mobilisations, and important organisng for the mobilisation against the FATA conference, including calls for anarchist concepts at the demonstrations in April 20th and 21.

Two upcoming regional meetings will be held to further develop the French-speaking section of NEFAC, focusing on participation in the anti-FATA protests and organisational and political questions in the region. The launching of a sister publication to The Northeastern Anarchist, a French-language anarchist-communist theoretical journal, is also being planned.

As NEFAC approaches its first year of existence, member collectives and individuals are taking the time to reflect on and discuss how to work most effectively within the group. As a regional federation, working within a framework of tactical and theoretical unity and coheren, we aim to struggle collectively, transcending national and linguistic boundaries. By sharing resources — study guides, speakers, discussion lists, publications — we will develop this framework over time. And through the collective production of written materials, we will turn our discussions and ideas into fuel for agitation and organisation. Over the next year, as NEFAC grows, we will turn our efforts outward, to organise and to link struggles in our various communities to the growing anarchist movement.

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http://burn.ucsd.edu/~ac/index.html

Harold Thompson
Editors' note: Harold Thompson has been a contact of ours for a long time now. He recently sent us the following letter. As we have published details of Harold's situation before, we decided to edit it. If you want to learn more about him then contact the Friends of Harold Thompson, whose address is at the end of this letter. They are distributing From the Belly of the Beast, a collection of his writings.

Dear Organiser!

I send greetings of anarchist greets and friendship to all at the Anarchist Federation from the belly of the beast! I am an anarchist who works as a jailhouse lawyer aiding prisoners with their legal matters, appeals, grievances and lawsuits in the Tennessee state prison system where I have been captive for 21 years.

The judicial system in this country leaves indigent prisoners on their own to struggle through the quagmire of the appeal system. I have the benefit of aid of legal counsel. I am free to choose my brothers and sisters in the free world for help with copy, postage, notification and funding so my two people living.

In 1999, I was attacked by two Aryan Brotherhood racist cowards, beaten and robbed of my watch and ring. I had offended ALL bigoted prisoners because I chose to help all prisoners meeting help regardless of race. It turned out a staff member was working hand in glove with the AB's and was supplying them with departmental failed note hole punchers which I sent to help form an organisation through the prison mail room.

The United States Supreme Court has ruled prisoners' aggrieved appeals are not a part of a prisoner's sentence and therefore violate a prisoner's constitutional rights, making such appeal unfruitful.

Aside from my own situation, a recent national event merits brief comment. This nation now has a new president in office, the result of Election Hijack 2000. Considering he is George Herbert Walker Bush's son, Little George, Junior, this nation in all likelihood will be at war in a few years, or less, in some underdeveloped country or Iraq. Bush, Jr., is easy to predict, he will try to achieve his father's unfilled obsession taking Iraq's Saddam out of power by any means necessary. He will propitiate this nation toward fascism at high speed, which will stoke the fire of rebellion in many working class hearts. The widening chasm between the rich elite and working class poor will expand with Bush in office. The country's wealthy minority will enjoy the capitalist system yoke on the shoulders of the working class masses growing progressively heavier with less jobs, decreasing buying power, less pay, more...
Dear Friends,

Here is a letter we have just received from an anarchist in Turkey, about the unbearable conditions anarchists face in Turkish prisons. We have decided not to reveal the name of the correspondent.

5th MAY GROUP

"I have been an anarchist prisoner for five years. They (DGM, Malatya) DGM is a state security court gave me 15 years because I did not deny my anarchist identity and ideas. I had to deal with all sorts of problems. In Malatya prison I was put in the block dominated by Marxist-Leninists prisoners. However, I was not accepted by them. I was told to stay only as an ordinary, non-political not as an anarchist. Only PKK (Editors' note: the Kurdish Workers Party, a nationalist party) accepted me, with one condition: I was not to talk to anyone about anarchism. Although they gave way an little after I insisted, they did not recognize my anarchist identity. They were moderate towards me because in the past I had defended myself in DGM as a Kurdish anarchist. If this was not so, I am sure they would have never let me in their block. I had no choice but to demand my transfer to Burdur prison. There were four other anarchist prisoners in Burdur prison. They were people who converted to anarchism inside the prison walls. Like many other anarchists in prisons, they came from leftist background. At that time I was tortured when I was arrested. Difficulty to breathe, liver aches, ear and eye problems. Most importantly, I had serious trauma. My cell had no air conditioning and my health began to deteriorate even more. I was having problems with breathing and sometimes I fainted. I suggested to my anarchist comrades that we demand to be transferred to a block with air conditioning. They agreed. But the prison authorities rejected us outright. We were told to contact the representatives of the Prisoners' Committee, which was controlled by Marxist-Leninist organisations. I explained to them about this matter. In the meantime, I could not see a doctor about my deteriorating health. I also talked to the representatives of MLKP (Marxist-Leninist Communist Party) and PKK and asked them for help. They got upset. They refused to help us because we were anarchists, not 'revolutionaries'. They did not see us as revolutionaries. They told us not to cause any more problems. Me and my comrades discussed the matter among ourselves. We decided to ask for a transfer to another prison where they were not likely to be transferred. Some friends told me to stay in one of the political blocks until my health got better. First I refused, but then I got worried because I was fading more frequently. I decided to tell the representatives of Prisoners' Committee MLKP to refuse to let me stay in their block against my will. On the other hand, I told my last condition: I had to be an 'ordinary' citizen. I was accepted in solitario and rejected. In the meantime, some of my visitors from outside were sent back by the Prisoners' Committee. The reason was that we were not revolutionaries. (...). We were transferred to different places. I was sent to Konya/Ermenek prison. For about two years I lived there. For a while I stayed with Trotskyists, because they too were rejected and treated like us by Prisoners' Committee. Finally, I realised how difficult it was to live with Marxists. My own political leanings were the reason for this. My health was in danger. Finally, I wrote a complaint. I was sent to Ankara/Namuzen prison and had an operation. However, they couldn't do anything about my severe headaches and our problems.

As you can see, the penalty of the correspondent.

John McArthur. RPM Publications.

The author of this pamphlet was a member of the JF Fast Food Workers Support Group and is a committed anarchist. He notes: "The workers at JF Fast Food were sacked on October 15th for attempting against low pay and atrocious working conditions. Their activities in the dispute, and the support for them that was generated in the local community and beyond is an example of grassroots working class self-organisation at its best. It showed the vital part that immigrant communities can play in these struggles, effectively cutting across the racism and false divisions that are deliberately and increasingly encouraged and inflamed by politicians, capitalists, the media and the far right.""...

DGM is a state security court which was controlled by the nationalist right. In the meantime, I could not see a doctor because we were anarchists, not 'revolutionaries'. They did not see us as revolutionaries. They told us not to cause any more problems. Me and my comrades discussed the matter among ourselves. We decided to ask for a transfer to another prison where they were not likely to be transferred. Some friends told me to stay in one of the political blocks until my health got better. First I refused, but then I got worried because I was fading more frequently. I decided to tell the representatives of Prisoners' Committee MLKP to refuse to let me stay in their block against my will. On the other hand, I told my last condition: I had to be an 'ordinary' citizen. I was accepted in solitario and rejected. In the meantime, some of my visitors from outside were sent back by the Prisoners' Committee. The reason was that we were not revolutionaries. (...). We were transferred to different places. I was sent to Konya/Ermenek prison. For about two years I lived there. For a while I stayed with Trotskyists, because they too were rejected and treated like us by Prisoners' Committee. Finally, I realised how difficult it was to live with Marxists. My own political leanings were the reason for this. My health was in danger. Finally, I wrote a complaint. I was sent to Ankara/Namuzen prison and had an operation. However, they couldn't do anything about my severe headaches and our problems.

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up Against the Odds

An Account of the JF Food Workers Strike

Tottenham, 1995-96

John McArthur. RPM Publications.

The author of this pamphlet was a member of the JF Food Workers Support Group and is a committed anarchist. He notes: "The workers at JF Fast Food were sacked on October 15th for attempting against low pay and atrocious working conditions. Their activities in the dispute, and the support for them that was generated in the local community and beyond is an example of grassroots working class self-organisation at its best. It showed the vital part that immigrant communities can play in these struggles, effectively cutting across the racism and false divisions that are deliberately and increasingly encouraged and inflamed by politicians, capitalists, the media and the far right."

The run-up to the strike in North London and the appalling conditions, long hours and low wages (70-hour week for £100) faced by many Turkish and Kurdish immigrants is described. As John says: "significantly, the British State has continued to intensify its harassment, detention and forced dispersal of immigrant workers."

Of a total of 75 workers joined the Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU) over summer 1995, the boss, Mustafa Kamil, immediately sacked them. Kamil called in a number of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) who tried to get the pickets called off. They agreed under pressure to call a mass demonstration in North London. And then did nothing to organise it. When it was organised independently by the workers and the GUM workers' group they sent a hostile letter saying that the demo had not been agreed by the TGWU and was unofficial. They contacted the police and told them, this effectively calling on them to act.

When the strike looked like reaching a successful outcome, with JF risking going bust, the union attempted to persuade the workers that going through the Industrial Tribunal was better than economic struggle. They persuaded the workers to return but said nothing about being on the same terms and conditions or in some cases worse ones. The workers rejected this, and the TGWU district officials flatly told them to accept the new conditions. Only 12 returned to work on 18th March 1996. As well as the direct sabotage by the TGWU officials, the "Revolutionary Left" also did their part.

Trots

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in particular cynically used the strike to attempt to recruit to their Party. When this failed they withdrew support. They also arranged collections in workplaces in a way which alienated support there — as Hackney Bus Garage, where the 100% visit resulted in a bitter battle anyone visiting to gain support. They had attempted to swamp Support Group meetings with large numbers of SWP members and called on the workers to "push the TGWU officials to act."

John describes the role of anarchists in the strike, which was enthusiastic and which encouraged self-organisation. As he says: "It was both a strength and a weakness that anarchists were undertaking much of the practical work, but failing to put a strong enough case for breaking with the courts and the TGWU, and for complete independent organisation."

John is a convinced anarchist syndicalist, and he concludes that the way forward is through Revolutionary syndicalism...
Which way the AF?

Dear Anarchist Federation,

"He seemed to have nothing to do with any other concern. He replied to no other crow, but crowed solely by himself, on his own account, in solitary, scorn and independence." We may as well take this letter as an opportunity for complaining.

We regret the AF's recent inability to maintain a class analysis and its consequent subservience under green ideology. Have you forgotten the two major aspects of class struggle theory for anarchists are: (1) that the major part of the working class has to be involved in any revolutionary activity; (2) that the struggle of the working class is sited in the political arena. Have the AF also adopted the greens' reformist programme through which the world can be supposedly improved, improved, improved, i.e., what are the short-term goals of the AF?

The anti-capitalists want to shut down multi-national corporations, if achieved this would constitute a victory for the greens, does the AF understand capitalism in this way? In a similar vein does the AF consider the recent political changes in Serbia (the integration of that body. We do not appreciate the intimidative cultural machismo of those outside. Their personal background means they are practised in being leaders and interpreters, it is a position they are familiar with, they are quite happy that it should fall to them to act and they view it as typical that the working class is not involved, they have no conceptual means of registering working class struggle or the values of ordinary people. Are millions of workers moved to revolt by the example set by the self appointed gladiators of anti-capitalism? The immediate wave of anti-capitalist spectacular actions were calling up those for the AF from the industrial working class then a continued focus on the World Bank and IMF would seem appropriate, if however membership numbers remain critically low then another strategy might be adopted after a thorough critique of the limitations of anti-capitalism.

Extremism

We suspect that the anti-capitalist movement has served its purpose for its leadership and that the temptation of its actions will now begin to pall and its (re)ally small numbers will begin to fall away. It is unfortunate that many anarchists equivocate revolution with acts of political extremism, ordinary people feel a disgust for extremity, particularly gratuitous extremity. This does not mean that they will not participate in a protest, just that they need to feel the force of necessity and sense that there is no other way. In tactical terms we think it is in a great pity that you have chosen to advocate direct action as the primary means of expressing your values as we are certain that in doing so you have chosen to inhabit a ghetto of political activities which very few ordinary people wish to have anything to with.

The principle of class struggle anarchism, as already stated, lies in the mass participation of many, many workers. If many, many workers are committed to the struggle against capitalism then their personal qualitative involvement would not have to be so great, if however large numbers are substituted by small numbers then the requirement on any given individual must increase, at the moment, fifteen thousand people are taking on the role of five billion, the distortion of perspective and analysis brought about by this arbitrary representationalism must be obvious to anybody who opposes authoritarianism, it also militates a completely anti-anarchist form of evaluation where the acts of the few are valued above the acts of the many — do you truly believe that the actions in Prague are more significant than the events in any workplace in any provincial town?

The greens have no qualms about the make-up of their organisation (indeed they are greens because they alone can be uncomfortable at the thought of being red, i.e., being dictated to by workers, being in a theoretical position where their actions are in a certain, divinatory dimension to save the Earth, and by any means necessary, they have no need of delegative structures beyond their own self-referencing because they fight for a political entity that they alone can interpret. It is curious and disappointing to us that the AF new finds more in common with EF than with the letter's emphasis on its narrow definition of activism and direct action than it does with proletarian struggle. Extremist actions do not amount to a revolutionary position, the militancy of anti-capitalism falls long way short of a socially sustainable model as our construction of a world class capitalism is an opposition to capitalism as such but to its current form and that their short term reform goals are their only goals.

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We suspect that the anti-capitalist movement has served its purpose for its leadership and that the temptation of its actions will now begin to pall and its (really quite small) numbers will begin to fall away. It is unfortunate that many anarchists equivocate revolution with acts of political extremism, ordinary people feel a disgust for extremity, particularly gratuitous extremity. This does not mean that they will not participate in a protest, just that they need to feel the force of necessity and sense that there is no other way. In tactical terms we think it is in a great pity that you have chosen to advocate direct action as the primary means of expressing your values as we are certain that in doing so you have chosen to inhabit a ghetto of political activities which very few ordinary people wish to have anything to with....
Aims and principles

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade Unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft workers, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The bosses are our enemy, and while we need to fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The unions is a common point of departure for many workers. Bank and finance initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

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

As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We participate in struggles for anarchist communities, and organise of a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

WANT TO JOIN THE AF? WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?
I agree with the AF's Aims and Principles and I would like to join the organisation.
I would like more information about the Anarchist Federation.
Please put me on the AF's mailing list.
Name:
Address:
Please tick/fill in as appropriate and return to:
AF c/o 8th Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.