

## Revolutionary portraits

# David Edelstadt

"A great poet and one of the finest types of Anarchist that ever lived." Emma Goldman

David Edelstadt was born on 9 May 1866 at Kaluga in Russia. He was deeply affected by the life of his father, enrolled by force in the Tsar's army for 25 years. This type of practice carried out by the Russian army was often used against Jews. Whilst Russian was his mother tongue, Yiddish was his language of communication and propaganda. He used it from his emigration to the United States in 1882.

He participated in the first Jewish anarchist group in New York, The Pioneers of Liberty (*Pionire der Frayhayt*). The framing of the Chicago Haymarket Anarchists had led to its formation. The first dozen workers who set up the group were joined by Edelstadt and other gifted writers and speakers – Saul Yanovsky, Roman Lewis, Hillel Solotaroff, Moshe Katz, JA Maryson. All in their 20s, this group "displayed, apart from unusual literary and oratorical skills, a vigour and dynamic energy that made a powerful impression on the immigrants of the Lower East Side, the predominantly Jewish quarter of New York in which the Pioneers of Liberty were located" (Paul Avrich).

Edelstadt and the others held meetings, sponsored rallies and raised funds to help the Chicago Anarchists. They organised a ball on the Lower East Side which raised \$100 (quite a large sum then), which was sent to the families of the defendants. They began to spread anarchist propaganda among the Jewish immigrants, who were arriving in the States in increasing numbers. They set up a club on

Orchard Street where they organised weekly lectures and discussions. They



brought out literature in Yiddish, including a pamphlet on the Haymarket case.

The intense propaganda led to the establishment of anarchist circles in other towns – Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia and Providence. Edelstadt and others travelled to Philadelphia to deliver talks. The group kept in touch with the Jewish anarchists in London, and Edelstadt was one of those who contributed to the London Yiddish anarchist paper *Arbeter Fraynd* (Workers' Friend).

In 1889, the Pioneers started a weekly *Varhayt* (Truth) He began to write poems in Yiddish and had his

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.

first 'To Truth' published in *Varhayt*. *Varhayt* only lasted five months and Edelstadt then began writing for an interim anarchist weekly, *Der Morgenshtern* (The Morning Star). Two weeks after it ceased publication in 1890, a new weekly anarchist paper, which was to have a far longer life than either *Varhayt* or *Der Morgenshtern*, was to appear.

Edelstadt was to succeed two others as the chief editor of this new paper, *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (Free Worker's Voice). He set up various columns and features, which contributed to its popular success. He produced a series of tribute poems to the judicially murdered Chicago Anarchists. During this brief period of intense creativity, he wrote many poems. These texts were full of a social lyricism, exalting the workers' struggle for dignity and emancipation. A buttonhole maker by trade, "a child of poverty, a dreamer of struggle" (a self-description), his poems were set to music and sung at the picnics and rallies of Jewish workers.

The bad conditions in both the sweatshops and the tenements meant that he contracted TB and was forced to quit his post in October 1891. He moved to Denver for a cure. Although he continued to send poems to the paper, the end was near. He died there on 17 October 1892 at the age of 26 (his brother and sister-in-law also died of this disease). In the next few years, Edelstadt cultural groups sprang up in Chicago, Boston and other cities. An Edelstadt Singing Society was founded in New York. In Argentina many years later, Jewish anarchists named their

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# ORGANISE!

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ISSUE Summer 58

# MAGAZINE OF THE ANARCHIST FEDERATION



# Organise!

*Organise!* is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF) and the Anarchist Federation Ireland. *Organise!* is published 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 produce *Organise!* three times a year. To meet this target we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first.

Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our Aims and Principles can leave much open to debate. As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from readers and spur the debate on.

The next issue of *Organise!* will be out in late Oct 2002.

All contributions for *Organise!* should be sent to: AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disk (PC or MAC format). Alternatively, articles can be emailed directly to the editors at: [anarchist\\_federation@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:anarchist_federation@yahoo.co.uk).

The last issue was incorrectly numbered as 58, it should have been 57. The editors responsible have been roundly criticised, taken out and shot! Hence this issue is numbered summer 58.

Issue 57 contained an article "Revolution on the Net" which provided addresses for a number of pamphlets produced by the group Solidarity. Some of these web addresses no longer work. Manchester AF is in the process of copying as many of these texts as possible onto its web site. Although dated, they make a good read. We hope you enjoy them.

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## Organise! back issues

Back issues of *Organise!* are still available from the London address. They cost 20p each plus SAE.

**Issue 19:** The Poll Tax Rebellion

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**Issue 40:** Work, work, work; Art as a weapon

**Issue 46:** Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin; Syndicalism

**Issue 48:** French unemployed; Haile Selassie; Revolutionary unions?

**Issue 50:** GM Foods; Who owns the land; War in Kosovo; Ireland – the 'peace' process.

**Issue 51:** War in Kosovo; Roots of our movement; Land and freedom; East Timor

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# Argentina: What next?

## Growing resistance

*In the last issue of Organise!, we examined the historical development of Peronist ideology and the forms through which historic class discontent had been recuperated, and made a few suggestions as to the path that the modern movement would have to take to avoid being similarly diverted. In this article we take a closer look at some of the actual events of recent months in light of this, particularly the growth of the popular assemblies and the 'movement of the unemployed'. We will also look at what possibilities exist for class-based revolutionary action, and what dangers this movement may face.*

The months following the tumultuous events of December 2001 have seen a deepening and broadening of the movement that brought down the governments of five prime ministers in three weeks. A few examples have been the growth of the popular assemblies and the continued militancy of the *piqueteros* (picketers) – there have also been factory occupations (Brukman, Zanon) and strikes at the privatised oil refineries (Chubut, Santa Fe etc), whilst the 'pots and pans' protests (*cacerolazo*) have continued unabated. The protests have spread throughout the country with the working classes of Rosario and Cordoba being particularly active and radical, the latter going so far as to burn down the town hall.

It's clear that, irrespective of the media's representation of a united Argentina, pulling together for the good of the country, the social tensions that brought about December's eruption have not disappeared, and that, if anything, they have deepened. People are preparing for the state's new assault, which has to come. Two of the most interesting aspects of this have been the birth and spread of the popular assemblies and the activities of the *piqueteros*, and the possibilities for link-ups between the two.

### Rise of the popular assemblies

The popular assemblies grew directly out of the December protests, and were originally concerned with the Government's restrictions on withdrawals from private bank accounts – which in itself hints at their class composition. They were generally attended by people who were officially employed – whether by the state, the newly-privatised utilities or family businesses – as opposed to the 60% of the population that is employed in the black market or precarious casual labour. They were further distinguished by being drawn largely from the city areas of Buenos Aires rather than the surrounding suburbs and shanty towns (*Villas de La Miseria*) where the *piqueteros* live.

As the crisis developed, more and more of these assemblies sprung up, 20 were formed in the two weeks following the resignation of President De la Rúa, and today there are more than 50, covering almost every area of Buenos Aires. The average attendance is around 3,000 *autoconvocados* (self-convened) which demonstrates the grass roots interest in political activity away from the dead

hand of leftist representation.

Recallable delegates from the popular assemblies are also sent to *interbarrials* (inter-neighbourhood bodies), which operate as a co-ordinating centre. Essential local services, such as water and electricity supplies are now being taken care of by many assemblies, as the Government is not up to the task – a lesson which the assemblies have picked up very quickly, as they continue to take back control over more and more areas of their communities' functioning. A number of neighbourhood initiatives have also been established – community kitchens and cafes, credit unions, barter clubs etc. These are helping to build up a strong feeling of social solidarity, and



Photo from [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)





destroying the idea that only Government is capable of organising society.

The speed of advance of the idea of neighbourhood assemblies is actually drawing strength from their more middle-class composition – these people are the ones who voted for the Governments of the IMF in the belief that it would bring stability, only to find themselves proletarianised.

## Politicians are no longer safe to be seen in public

They are looking to make a clean break with parties, politicians and institutional politics. So much so, in fact, that politicians are no longer safe to be seen in public – they are chased from their favourite restaurants and spat at in middle-class areas by people who would previously have voted for them. This rejection is reflected in the popular assemblies, which have moved on from concern over personal savings to wider questioning of the way society is run as a whole.

## Mobilisation among the working class

The unemployed movement is a much more working-class phenomenon and has been around for a number of years. The movement is made up of those who have been laid off from formerly state-owned companies, and those who operate in the black

economy and who are not guaranteed a wage – it is also noticeably more even in terms of gender representation than the assemblies. Though it draws the majority of its supporters from the areas surrounding Buenos Aires, it is emphatically not a lumpen or rural movement. Many of its members worked in factories, auto-plants or oil refineries for years before the drastic layoffs of the last decades, and have long experience of fighting against capital.

The main activity of the unemployed is called 'picketing' (hence, *piqueteros*) – but it covers a much broader area than is traditionally understood by 'picketing'. The most popular form of picketing is the closing down of main highways or transport networks in order to stop the circulation of commodities. They understand they have no power in the production process, but that capital must complete its circuit if valorisation is to take place, and so they attempt to block the part of that circuit they have access to. (And thereby demonstrate a much firmer grasp of how capital functions than those 'Marxists' who condemn them as powerless lumpens.)

"In August 2001, a nationwide mobilisation of highly-organised unemployed groups, numbering over 100,000 people, shut down over 300 highways in Argentina, paralysing the economy, including the previously invulnerable financial sector." (*The Unemployed Workers Movement in*

*Argentina – Monthly Review, January 2002*)

Clearly, this is a confrontational and militant tactic, and large-scale battles often break out, but it is well suited to the achievement of immediate aims. A further appealing approach used by the *piqueteros* is the refusal of delegation when dealing with capital – if they are blocking a highway for a specific demand, rather than respond to the Government's or businesses' summons to come into Buenos Aires to discuss the matter, they make the responsible party come to them. All discussion is carried on in front of and by the unemployed themselves, which minimises the risk of buying off of leaders and puts the bosses at a distinct disadvantage. Unlike the popular assemblies, the 'unemployed movement' is not a recent invention. It has been in existence since the early to mid '90s, and pioneered the use of assemblies, holding two national conferences in 2001, and regular mass assemblies. It also part of the wider movement and concerns itself with other struggles – members recently blocked transports in and out of oil refineries in Chubut, Neuquen, Chaco and Salta in support of striking workers.

## Asambleas and movimientos

Both movements have important limitations though – most obviously in their relation to the state – and there is a definite tension between the two, which could possibly be a future source of Government-inspired conflict. The contradictory nature of the assemblies is highlighted by their addressing of demands to the state, rather than relying on their own autonomous collective power to take what they want – they are, in fact (for now, at least), based on the acceptance of the state as the ultimate legitimate authority. A participant in the Almagro neighbourhood assembly argues that, "When a married couple decides to separate, that doesn't mean that they won't go on to marry someone else. This is the same thing: we don't want these politicians. We want a change."

But the same assembly can also

publish a declaration stating that: "We have no expectations of the new Government coming out of this crisis, because these people governed the country until a couple of years ago and govern today most of the provinces, implementing the same economic and social policy which the people have repudiated a few days ago. That is why we repudiate both *peronismo* and *radicalismo* and all their accomplices..."

"[...] The state of assembly and mobilisation [is] the only way to guarantee our right as workers, neighbours and Argentinians [...] We call all the neighbourhoods of the Capital to create and take part in all the assemblies and forms of organisation set up by their neighbours and organisations. And we call to create connection commissions (*comisiones de enlace*) with the assemblies already formed or about to be formed." (Declaration of the Popular Assembly of Almagro, Buenos Aires. "The People Say Enough: Let us have Politics through Popular Assemblies"). This contradiction is also demonstrated by the support given for forming 'Workers' Defence' units, under the control of the assemblies, whilst also voting for a constituent assembly, which could only serve to direct anger back into limited and representative forms.

## Liberals and reformists

This reformist tendency within the assemblies is bolstered by the actions of the left, particularly Workers' Power (PO), Workers' Socialist Movement (MST) and the Union of Argentinian Workers (CTA). These groups have attempted to use the assemblies for their own reformist and statist demands. Typically, they will try to get onto executive committees and then push for a motion proposing nationalisation of various industries (sound familiar?), or other measures that divert the struggle into legalistic and therefore easily-recuperable avenues. This has not gone unnoticed by the assembly members, who have acted to remove these parasites – the Workers' Democracy group was

## On the net

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expelled from the national assembly of workers in February, and moves are afoot in other places to minimise the influence of the parties. What is needed though is a clear and unambiguous removal of these reactionary currents, which act as a drag-anchor on the autonomous movement of the working class, from the centre of the struggle – that means taking them off executive committees or from responsible positions.

## The reformist tendency within the assemblies is bolstered by the actions of the left

This liberal/democratic tendency is further encouraged by the adoption of parliamentary terms and conventions, with 'parties' forming and official positions being encouraged. The bourgeoisie has quickly seen the potential in this and has developed courses on 'citizens' power' which teach people the correct and

democratic way to make institutional changes. This has led to the formation of a professional, middle-class strata which holds many of the key positions within the assemblies. Currently, the large numbers involved make it hard for this group to exercise any real control, but the potential remains, especially if numbers attending drop off over the coming months. Further evidence of this possibility is provided by the fact that the work of the executive committees is broadcast on local radio for all of 15 minutes a week! Not exactly going out of their way to involve other people.

## The movements against reform

One dynamic that is militating against this attempted recuperation is the drawing in of the *piqueteros* into the assembly movement. Presently, the *piqueteros* send delegates to the *interbarrias*, without fully participating themselves, as they have their own pre-existing general assemblies in the *barrios*. A tension exists between the two, as the *piqueteros* are suspicious that the popular assemblies are using them as muscle in their plans to apply pressure to the Government, in much the same way that Peron used the might of the organised working class to gain control of the state apparatus. They are also dismissive of some of the rather half-hearted actions the popular assemblies endorse – specifically of the city road blocks that only shut down one main street, whilst allowing sides streets to be used, thereby sabotaging the protest by minimising disturbance





to business. This suspicion is only enhanced by all the above factors.

The 'unemployed movement' also contains its own contradictions. Like that of the popular assemblies, its attitude towards the state presupposes its legitimacy. Despite the militant nature of their tactics, the content is not that radical – state employment schemes, better social security provisions, food allowances, cheaper utility bills, etc. These demands are constantly being expanded, however, and are now complimented by support for the freeing of hundreds of jailed unemployed workers, as well as public investments in water, paved roads, and health facilities.

Room exists for a radicalisation of their activities into questioning capitalism itself. This is helped by the fact that the movement is very careful to retain its autonomy from state or leftist structures. The whole dynamic of their development has been consistently to push their demands to

a higher level. James Petras notes that, "The success of the unemployed movement in Argentina today is due to the fact that it learned from experience to avoid the pitfalls of the past by organising independently within the *barrios*, autonomously from the trade union bureaucracy, electoral parties, and state apparatus." (*The Unemployed Workers' Movement in Argentina* – Monthly Review, January 2002)

### Reform or revolution?

The possible radicalising effect of a large-scale influx of *piqueteros* will be one of the key things that determine how events will pan out in the coming months. The popular assemblies need the militant, direct action of the unemployed movement to push them beyond the current half-way house of appealing to the state, whilst demonstrating in their practical activities that they have no need of it. Whilst the *piqueteros* can learn from the direct democracy practised in the assemblies and the value of territorial organising. The joint action of the two would only help to advance the struggle to a new level.

The limitations and contradictions sketched out above are not set in stone though – the dynamic of working-class self-activity logically leads to challenging these obstacles. As people become conscious of their own strength and power they gain in confidence and push beyond their original intentions, and the movement gains further momentum, leading to a heightened level of struggle. In just a few months, the situation has developed from a localised dispute about personal savings to a generalised uprising, that is the dynamic of this struggle. To follow it through to its conclusion could mean only one thing – revolution.

Another reason to be optimistic is that the methods used to recuperate past class struggles in Argentina (see the last *Organise!*), and which were based on large-scale welfare programmes, co-option of unions into a corporatist framework and the whole 'social-contract'/ Keynesian model are

now definitively gone and will not be making a comeback any time soon. This has led to a more open and unmediated struggle taking place. The ability of the state to 'pacify' key sections of the working class through rising real wages, welfare provisions, progressive taxation etc has disappeared, and has been replaced by attacks upon the very things that had guaranteed the social peace in the past. The state is trapped in a very difficult situation – it recognises the need to impose social spending cuts, but also recognises that if it does implement these cuts, it's likely to lead to even larger assaults on itself.

### A return to offensive struggle may be on the cards

What the recent events have also made clear is that the neo-liberal project itself is coming under increasing pressure, both from the working class and from inside certain sectors of the ruling class (the IMF's refusal to grant new loans during the December crisis). If the post-war social consensus has been destroyed by neo-liberalism, then neo-liberalism is beginning to show signs that it also cannot guarantee stable conditions for capital accumulation – Argentina may be the first step in a cycle of struggle based upon recognising these new conditions, rather than the essentially defensive battles that the last decades have shown. A return to offensive struggle may be on the cards.

However events turn out, the past few months have shown that the working class has not disappeared and remains capable of collectively fighting for its interests against both the state and the left-wing of capitalism. The rapid spread of bottom-up organising, relying on the activity of the working class itself, combined with the refusal to accept representation or mediation can only bolster the anarchist case for people to run their own lives free of any outside imposition of authority.

# A critical look at the pagan movement: What can magic do for anarchism?

## Why has paganism become so popular?

Despite an increase in the number of people interested and affected by anarchist ideas, the actual growth of membership in organisations and activist groups has been relatively small. On the other hand, organisations and movements that could be defined as religious or spiritual have seen an enormous upsurge in the past decades. Though they might seem very different, some examples of such movements are Muslim and Christian fundamentalism and paganism.

This article will focus on the pagan movement. I will try to explain why paganism has become so popular and then discuss to what extent paganism could have a role to play, along with anarchism, in the creation of a new society.

It is difficult to know how many pagans there are in Britain. The Pagan Federation claims 3,000 members and also estimates that there are between 100,000 and 200,000 practising pagans. These estimates are based on attendance at various festivals. The reason it is so difficult to know numbers is that there are a variety of

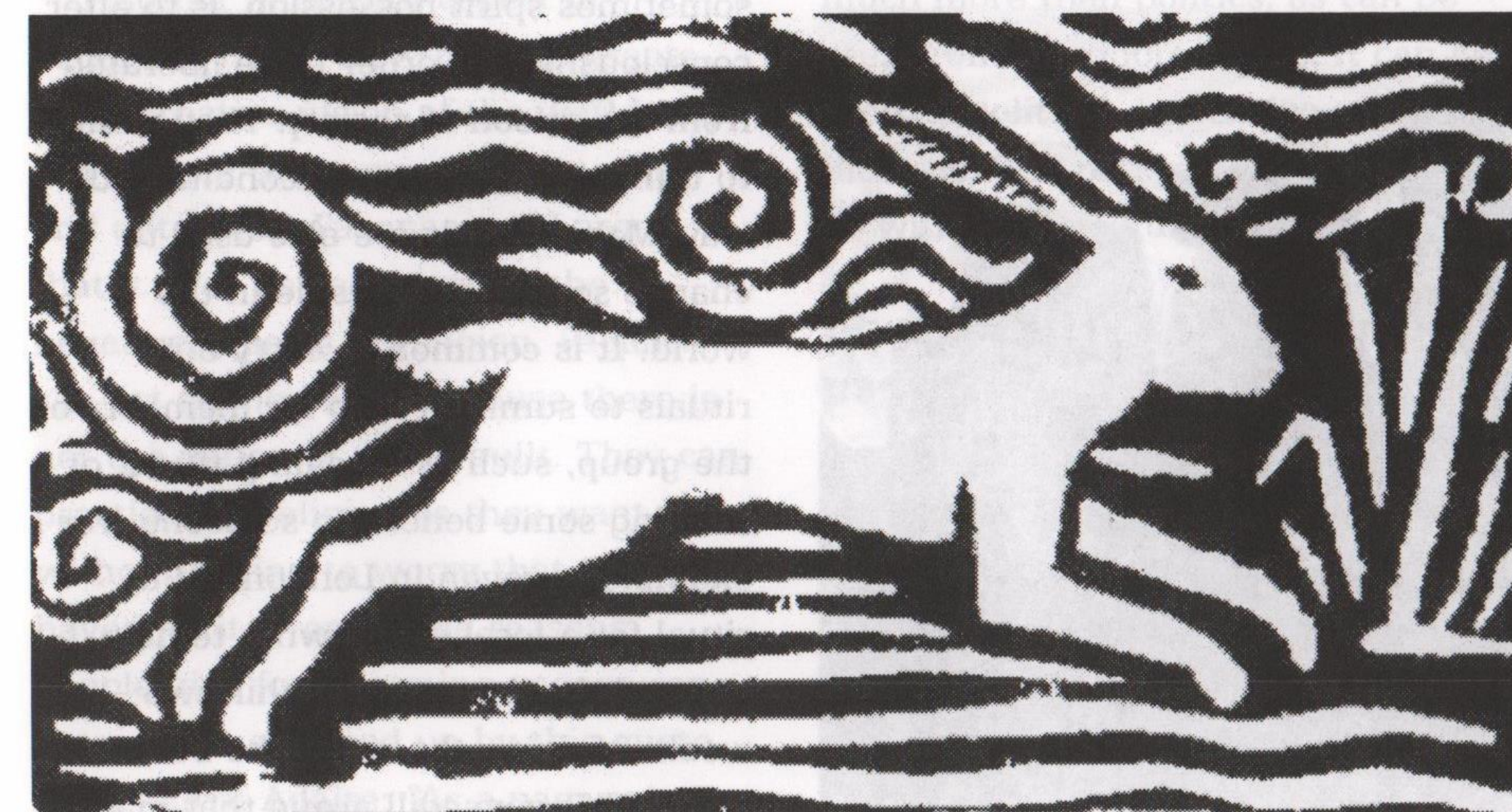
different groups and practices that come under this umbrella term. In addition, many people may see themselves as pagan, but would not join an organisation; they will just hold a set of beliefs and maybe carry out their own individual practices.

### What is paganism?

It is often argued that paganism can trace its origins back to pre-Christian times. It is thought to be the religion practised by people who had an intimate relationship to the land and its seasons. However, it is unclear exactly how linked modern paganism is to the past.

Some of the first groups emerged in the US in the '70s and said they were neo-pagans. One of the first groups, Church of all Worlds, took its name from a religious group in a science fiction book by Robert Heinlein. In Britain, the movement is thought to have its origins in a witchcraft coven founded by Gerald Gardner back in the '50s. He claimed to have found evidence of a coven that could trace its origins back to the witch-hunt days of early modern Europe. Another influence was Robert Graves' book on the White Goddess.

Whatever the actual links to the past, modern paganism is essentially a reconstruction based on what people want to believe. And for most, it doesn't matter whether the new paganism is the same as the old. A good description of paganism comes from Cairril Adaire, the National Co-ordinator of the Pagan Education network in the US: "Paganism is a collection of diverse religions which are nature-centred and rooted in personal experience. While some pagan religions provide training structures,



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the movement as a whole has no hierarchy, no holy book, no one, right, true authority. Pagan religions encourage the individual to develop her own relationship with Divinity, however she views it. And most intriguing to me, you could be an atheist pagan!" Some of the different pagan traditions include wicca (or witchcraft), druidism, shamanism and chaos magic. Most share some common beliefs and practices and see nature as divine in some way.

### Beliefs: The divine is female, too

One of the main beliefs common to pagans is that divinity has both a male and female aspect. In religions such as wicca, the Goddess is usually the main focus of worship. Pagans will also see other gods and goddesses, associated with different aspects of nature or the human condition. Pagans would argue that a belief in these spiritual beings is not the same as in other religions. The divine is not outside and above the world, but exists in everything, including humans. It's difficult to say whether people actually believe that these beings exist or whether they are just symbols that people use.

Starhawk, a well-known American witch, talks of using symbols as a way of visualising things so that we can experience them. If we can name something, we can integrate it into our consciousness. So, for example, someone may go on a shamanic journey and meet their spirit helper.

They ask the spirit helper a question they are trying to answer in their lives. Now, this could be seen as a journey to the other world that really exists, or it may only be seen as a way of accessing parts of the unconscious self. Similarly, a pagan ritual may invoke the Goddess, but only because this is only a symbol of an aspect of themselves that they want to develop.

Pagans also use a wheel or circle as a symbol and place great emphasis on the marking of the seasonal cycle. By celebrating the solstices and equinoxes, pagans believe they are integrating the natural rhythms into their own lives. It creates a bond with nature which is itself divine. Apart from the belief in the God/Goddess and the sacred nature of the seasonal cycles, there are not many actual pagan beliefs that are held in common. Instead, paganism is very adaptable and individuals will create their own particular beliefs. Even the morality is vague and left to the individual; 'If it doesn't harm, do what you will' is the only rule. It is instead the practice of paganism that seems to bind people together.

### Ritual magic

With the popularity of Harry Potter, talk of magic is very much in fashion. But what exactly is it? There's no doubt that pagans have a strong belief in the effectiveness of magic. This can take place on two levels: magic to transform the self and magic to effect

some change in the world. Starhawk stresses the use of magic to transform consciousness. The pagan defines magic as being: "the art of changing consciousness at will". The principle of magic is that consciousness has structure. She actually uses science to support a belief in magic in her book *Dreaming the Dark*.

### 'If it doesn't harm, do what you will'

"Modern physics no longer speaks of separate, discrete atoms of dead matter, but of waves of energy, probabilities, patterns that change as they are observed; it recognises what shamans and witches have always known: that matter and energy are not separate forces, but different forms of the same thing" (p10).

Ritual can therefore be used as a way of changing the structure of consciousness. By using powerful symbols and by going into trance, pagans will try and tap into the movements of energy and change the images in their minds and patterns of behaviour. Power is a key part of magical practices. However, pagans would argue that it is not power-over, but power-within, using the power one has acquired through the ritual and the journey to the 'other world' to channel one's own energies and consciousness in the direction the individual wants to go.

In Chaos magic, the aim of the rituals which involve trance and sometimes spirit possession, is to alter consciousness in order to be liberated from the prison of society. They want to think and act in an unconditioned way. Magic rituals are also used to change something outside in the world. It is common to carry out rituals to summon help for members of the group, such as a healing ritual, or to bring some benefit to someone. For example, a coven in London did a ritual for a local shop owner to help out with business and within two weeks of doing the ritual the business took off! Pagans will argue that magic

can be used for both harm and good and that for them it should only be used for good.

### The appeal of paganism

There are a number of reasons why paganism has become so popular. Marion Adler, in her book *Drawing Dawn the Moon*, discusses a number of reasons. Firstly, the fact that the Goddess is the key figure in the religion has appealed to many women. The Pagan federation was first organised by women. Wicca amounts to about 40% of practising pagans and is especially popular with women. Covens are usually no more than 13 people and will be led by a couple. So, though there is a priest, it is the priestess that seems to have more status. There are also many all-women covens, especially in the US. With the demise of the women's movement and the drop in political activity, paganism has become a haven for many older feminists but also younger women.

The stress on the sacredness of nature has also struck a chord with many in the environmental movement. There has been a cross-over between environmental activists and pagans. It would be interesting to know how many links there actually are between for example Earth First and the Pagan Federation. Pagans were apparently involved in the struggle against the road over Twyford Down. But even though I don't know any more details, it stands to reason that people who believe so strongly in the value of nature would want to get involved in helping to preserve that nature.

Another important aspect of paganism is the way that it presents an alternative vision of the world and the cosmos that represents freedom and autonomy. Pagans would argue that it does not have any of the negative aspects of religion. Pagans can act as they want because there is not the notion of sin or guilt. They can practice the religion as they want, without having to worry that they have 'got it wrong'. The reasons people give for becoming pagans can be perhaps summed up by this quote from Cairril Adaire: "As a pagan – as a

witch – I can be powerful, passionate, intelligent, fun-loving, compassionate, loving and dynamic. My spirituality supports my personality, values and politics. It challenges me to develop continually into a more whole, healthy human being. It also offers a community of like-minded individuals. It answers my questions about the meaning of existence, the importance of justice and the value of change."

### Why not anarchism?

So why don't people become anarchists instead? One of the main reasons people have for becoming pagans is the lack of power people have in their everyday lives. This may be one of the main reasons why people become pagans rather than anarchists. Paganism offers the hope that despite living in a society that aims to control and mould every aspect of your life and thoughts, there is a way to escape. By using magic, you can transform yourself and become something different. In addition, it may even be possible to cause change in a small way in the world at large.

Anarchism is a political movement that seeks to bring about a totally new society. This is not an easy task and will not be done for the foreseeable future. Many people who are committed anarchists often despair at the difficulties involved, so it's not surprising that others would want to find something that makes them feel that they are changing something now, even if it is only themselves. In addition, paganism seems to offer much more than politics, as can be seen from the quote above. It can be seen as political, but it also offers a more general perspective on issues to do with the 'meaning of life'.

### Give up anarchism, become a pagan?

Despite being able to see the attractions of paganism, I would argue that paganism is not only limited in its vision, but it could actually conflict with the basic principles and practices of anarchism. The problem with paganism is that the focus is too much

on the individual. There is nothing wrong with wanting to escape social conditioning and to expand one's consciousness, but if this is all that you do, then it will have little, if any impact on the world. In fact, any one could become a pagan, no matter what their position in society and use the magical practices. So it could be equally of use to the manager who wants to become more powerful and confident as it would be to a worker who wants to become more autonomous in relation to management's attempts to control him/her.

### By using magic, you can transform yourself and become something different

If we are going to create a new society, we need to directly challenge and eliminate capitalism and the state. This can only be done by building a powerful movement, based on the working class, which engages in struggles over very concrete issues. Paganism has no intention of doing anything like this. They would not have time in any case, with most of their time taken up with various rituals. There seems no awareness that there are very real material forms of oppression and exploitation. No amount of magic or self-transformation will stop the bombs falling or put food on your table when you have no money.

There is another equally important problem of paganism. Though the stress is supposed to be on power-from-within, I am not convinced that this is always the case. There are many inherent dangers within the belief systems and practices.

Susan Greenwood is an anthropologist with many sympathies to witchcraft and paganism. However, in her research she became very worried about the problem of power relations within covens. Witches journey to the other world in order to tap into the power and knowledge of





other beings. Those who are seen to have more access to this power and knowledge often have more power within the group. Therefore, she found that in some covens, the priestess used her position of being in a superior position in relation to the otherworld to dominate and psychologically abuse the other members of the coven.

She cites one example where the priestess set up a ritual and wouldn't tell the other members what it would entail. Once it was underway and she had 'summoned the Goddess', she asked the priest to go around to all the members of the group with a knife, asking them who would suffer pain for the Goddess. This was a way of testing individuals' willingness to obey her, under the guise of saying it's to obey the Goddess. This might not be typical of the practice of covens, but the basic structure of a coven, dominated by a priestess and priest, does not encourage equality. Also, the use of the 'otherworld' to enhance your personal status and position in this world, seems no different than what happens in other religions. I do not see how the emphasis on magic and power can help us to create a society where we have destroyed power. Even if pagan groupings are less hierarchically-structured, there is still the problem of 'tyranny of structurelessness' where certain individuals dominate because of their personality and experience. This critique of power relations within paganism does not mean that anarchist groups are free from these issues. In some ways, there are similar problems. For example, a knowledge of anarchist theory or super-activism can be the source of individual power within a group. But at least in anarchism there is no outside source of power.

### Common ground?

Paganism may have some serious flaws that make it no substitute for anarchism if the goal is to create a new society. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to be an anarchist and a pagan. As mentioned

above, anarchism is a political movement and though it says that it is important for individuals to change, it does not offer any ideas on how this should be done concretely, except 'through struggle'.

Anarchism may try and create new forms of organisation but there is little consideration of how we should try and change as individuals, though these issues were addressed by anarchists historically. Also, anarchism has nothing to say about the general question of the meaning of life. Many anarchists will say there is no meaning nor anything apart from this world. However, whether they admit it or not, I'm sure there are many who do ponder some of the 'bigger questions' such as the origin of the universe and what it all means. There does seem to be a need amongst many people in general to have some sort of 'spirituality' or way of dealing with the unknown. I don't really see it a problem for the anarchist movement if people do want to involve themselves with such issues. The main point is whether or not their beliefs cause

them to believe in some external authority, whether it be a God or the Goddess. It would not be at all in tune with anarchism if people presented a view on something because they said their spirit helper had told them to! Whatever the ultimate meaning of the cosmos, as far as we are know, there is only us. We have only ourselves to rely on in terms of creating who we are, how we want to live and the meaning of human existence.

In addition, there are some beliefs within paganism that are compatible with anarchism. We agree that the current society is unacceptable and that we should create a society that is non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal and in harmony with the environment. And you never know, maybe a magic ritual might give the movement just that boost that we need!

On the other hand, paganism can lead to mystification of the world and a misunderstanding of what is wrong and why, the maintenance of relations of power and a very time-consuming diversion from building a movement that can truly change the world.

# ACE

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# An attack on one is an attack on all?

## Editors' note:

*This text was distributed at a recent demonstration in London by people who have been meeting under the banner 'No War But The Class War'.*

If there is one issue that is taxing the minds of states worldwide, it is the question of asylum seekers and refugees. The unprecedented levels of movement of people from Africa, Asia and the Middle East into the economically advanced western countries has led to intense debate between those modernising sectors of the ruling class that see the benefits of this development, but who fear the long-term consequences and the traditional small-minded nationalists who wish to see 'their' countries remain pure, but still want to take advantage of the ultra-cheap labour that undocumented workers provide. Millions of words have been written in the capitalist press, and the liberal left has energetically debated the matter at their dinner parties – how to take advantage of people whilst appearing to treat them fairly and in a manner consistent with the mythology of bourgeois democracy.

The various approaches that individual states and blocs have come up with are the practical expression of the compromise that the competing tendencies have settled on. In short, a plan is being put in place to regularise the movements of people in order to provide a reserve of cheap labour power, which is to be put at the service of capital without any of the social costs that 'legitimate' workers expect as a right (health care, pensions, minimum wage etc). The first step of this plan entails gaining control of the actual points of entry (Channel tunnel, etc), or points of departure (refugee camps, etc) then establishing formal procedures for processing the refugees as 'potential workers'. This will be a long, drawn-out process and the contours of it are only just emerging, but the intention to make use of these developments is

clear. 'Fortress Europe' is not an attempt to stop immigration, but to turn it to capitalism's benefit.

This process differs from past immigration control plans in that it is not dealing with a legal movement of people who already have ties with the 'host' country through past colonial relations and who are 'invited' in to work, instead it is facing mass illegal entry from people who've been displaced by wars or disasters caused by capital, and who often have no tie to their final destination.

## Sicily

The recent events in Sicily, where thousands of immigrants have been arriving on boats, highlights this – the majority of them have originated from Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka or the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Similarly, many south east Asians and Africans are trying to get to North Africa to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. These desperate actions often end in tragedy – hundreds of people are swept away every year trying to swim or raft across the Straits of Gibraltar between Morocco and Spain; thousands drown in the Mediterranean when their rotten boats sink (as recently happened just off Italy with over 50 dead); 58 Chinese people were found suffocated to death at Dover, and a smaller number at Dublin docks; 350 Iraqis drowned off the coast of Indonesia, whilst trying to reach Australia in October 2001, and every day individuals are electrocuted or hit by trains whilst trying to cross through the Channel Tunnel from the Red Cross camp at Sangatte in France. The sheer recklessness of these actions speaks volumes about the conditions they are trying to escape.

The reaction of the EU (comparable changes have occurred elsewhere) has





been to implement a whole raft of measures – more restrictive visa provisions, carrier sanctions (fining individual hauliers or companies who 'allow' people to enter in their vehicles), pre-inspection at points of departure, detention of those who do manage to enter in harsh and unwelcoming conditions, return of undocumented people to their point of departure (which carries an added threat as it puts the refugee in the position of possibly being sent back branded as a failed applicant for asylum, and therefore a dissident), dumping of people in border camps.

### Immigration's Big Brother

The key to the EU's plan is the Schengen Information system (SIS), "a technical deportation device" that carries information on nearly 10 million people and which is open to all member states – the overwhelming majority of data entered is on immigrants and those who are suspected of planning to overstay visas etc – this allows the police in any EU state to effectively carry out 'sus' stop and searches on any one they suspect may be on the database, which amounts to practically a Europe-wide pass law, such as operated in apartheid South Africa. This is demonstrated by the fact that: "Out of the 65 million SIS inquiries

made by German authorities, 52% were requested by frontier officials and mobile patrols near the border. The remaining 47.5% of requests were made by police in the inland, therefore related to non-suspect-related stop and search operations that were carried out in inner cities, on country roads and in trains, and that are first and foremost directed against migrants." ([http://noborder.org/item\\_archive.php?id=80](http://noborder.org/item_archive.php?id=80))

### Immigrant labour is always welcomed by the bosses

All these new measures are being introduced despite the fact that 75% of all movement is still between poor, non-western countries – these are designed as controlling measures for those who are eventually allowed to enter the EU to work. The new strategy doesn't entail the permanent settlement of these people, rather it hopes to make use of their labour then return them to their point of departure in order to be taken up again by some other corporation. This is handy because it means the worker will be contributing to the tax coffers of different countries (as well as helping the local capitalisms) but will be entitled to social security in none. (Incidentally, SIS2 is in the pipeline and will contain data on 'politicals', a clear step towards the criminalisation of dissent – see also reporting on 'Europol' in Statewatch. The 'noborders' 2002 camp is to be held in June at the Strasburg home of SIS.)

### A hidden underclass

All this might give the impression that the EU and European capital is seeking to put a stop to illegal immigration, but this is far from the truth. The fact is that (illegal) immigration is a key plank of the attack on the living standards of the working classes, and is a handy weapon in the hands of the bosses in their battle to impose flexibilisation and the acceptance of the loss of previously guaranteed standards and rights (health

provisions, pensions etc) – a certain amount of illegal immigration is part of the plan – it helps to maintain false divisions in the working class, and in the future could possibly be used to foster legal worker/temporary new 'legal' worker/illegal worker job competition, benefiting no one but the bosses.

Immigrant labour, especially undocumented or illegal, is always welcomed by the bosses. The precarious nature of the immigrant's conditions, and the responsibilities they often have to family in their countries of origin, means that they are compelled to accept conditions that a 'legitimate' worker would not. They can be made to work harder, for longer, at lower rates and in worse conditions (with little or no guarantee of finally seeing their wages) than a worker who is protected by minimum wage legislation, or maximum working time rights.

This clearly benefits the capitalist as they have to pay less in production costs, but it also contributes to internal divisions in the working class with immigrants being portrayed as bringing down the level of wages through their 'willingness' to work in such appalling conditions. This is not a new tactic and has been around since the dawn of capitalism, but what is different about this particular use of it is that it is being applied on a (nearly) continent-wide basis, by a supra-national body which effectively demonstrates that this is a policy that they have decided will become permanent over the coming decades. It is a key part of the ongoing attempt by capital to restructure itself.

The profits secured from this precarious labour is being redirected into updating technology and manufacturing stock for the 'legitimate' sector, which in turn is used to try and force greater productivity and output from the legal workers, through new surveillance techniques and new forms of workplace organisation (just-in-time, toyotism) that have been made possible through the exploitation of illegal workers. This absolutely

fundamental connection between the two sections of the working class is easily obscured, yet it is the key to understanding the shared conditions of these two sections of the working class – the fact that they are both exploited by capitalism, and that the recognition of this bond is a step in the direction of overcoming these conditions by overthrowing capitalism itself.

This practical resistance is happening already: the recent attempts to storm Woomera detention centre in Australia, which led to a mass breakout with an unknown number still on the run; the hunger strikes at Dungavel in Scotland; the burning of Yarl's Wood at the cost of £38 million; the continual demonstrations in solidarity with refugees in Italian cities, usually numbering in the tens of thousands; the Curtin (remote northern Western Australia) detainees who have been in a constant state of rebellion for the last few months; and not to forget the practical critique of capital and its borders that the refugees have made by simply ignoring them. The struggle is bound to be a long one, and will take on many different forms, but we surely must try and at least match the levels of militancy and fiercely-determined resistance that those who are currently incarcerated have shown. The supra-national bodies have shown how they're willing to make this struggle a central part of their plans for the foreseeable future – we must accord it the same importance or condemn ourselves to irrelevance.

## AF pamphlets in languages other than English

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

**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation** is also available in Serbo-Croat for 70p including pGp. If anybody you know in Britain speaks Serbo-Croat or if you have contacts in the countries of former Yugoslavia where Serbo-Croat is understood, then why not send them copies?

German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Italian, Esperanto and Spanish translations of our **Aims and Principles** are also available for 20p plus postage. Write to the London address for orders and bulk orders.

## Peace? What peace?

*The recent murder of Catholic postal worker, Daniel McColgan, in north Belfast, led to one of those rare moments in the history of Northern Ireland – a public display of solidarity against the paramilitary intrusion, usually fatal, into the lives of ordinary people here.*

The large-scale protests which brought tens of thousands out onto the streets of Belfast, Derry and Newry are a clear signal to the paramilitaries that enough is enough, and that what the vast majority of people desire now is peace – a peace in which society here can hope to attain the levels of 'normality' that appear to exist in societies elsewhere.

Daniel McColgan was someone in a uniform doing his job, but he was also a Catholic doing his job in Rathcoole, a Protestant stronghold, and for this reason he was gunned down. That most people come into contact with postal workers every day (one of the few strangers we don't mind opening the door to in our atomised society) perhaps helped in marking the difference between his death and the countless numbers of other sectarian murders that have occurred throughout the last 30 years. Perhaps we all thought we knew him. Perhaps his death, which was part of a series of assaults on other members of the working class whose job is to serve the community (ambulance and public transport workers have also come under attack), was enough to push people here beyond their already high

powers of endurance. But the fact that thousands of Catholics and Protestants were irate enough to come together and voice their anger publicly is a positive sign, and gives hope for the future – but it is only the first step.

Everyone wants peace in Northern Ireland, but what kind of peace does everyone want? Politicians in Stormont, on the odd day in the week they bother to meet, want peace too. Their idea of peace, however, is the peace that renders possible the long-term economic and political interests of Britain, and its commander in chief, the US. For them, peace represents the opportunity to open up Northern Ireland to multi-national investment, and the accompanying third-world style exploitation of our workforce. Stormont itself will not lead to the end of the kind of sectarianism that culminated in the death of Daniel McColgan. It has, and will, merely institutionalise the sectarian divide that continues to be the dominant feature across the social landscape of the north.

At the moment, North Belfast is testament to the lingering hatred that the so-called 'peace process' was meant to stamp out. The recent upsurge in violence there is seen by many as an anachronism, a blip in the normalisation process. This view, however, ignores the reality that north Belfast has been one of the most impoverished and neglected areas of Ireland, north and south, for decades and, as a result, a hotspot for the recruiting agents of republicanism and loyalism. With the UDA (Ulster Defence Association) no longer on ceasefire, and with their political wing, the UDP (Ulster Democratic Party) recently disbanded, the stakes have been raised in this particular enclave of Belfast (117 pipe bomb attacks on

## What goes in Organise!

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

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



Catholic homes in 2001) where violence orchestrated by the UDA etc, is being met by the less organised forces of hardcore republican youth.

## Friends and neighbours

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

**Black Flag.** £1.50 per issue/£6 sub. BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX.

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

**Direct Action,** anarcho-syndicalist magazine produced by the Solidarity Federation. £1.50 per issue/£5 subs. PO Box 29, SWPDO, M15 5HW.

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

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

**Do or Die!** c/o Prior House, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY. £5 for an issue. It only comes out once a year and covers a whole range of environmentally-related issues, including news and discussion on the anti-capitalist movement. We don't agree with everything in it and they sometimes say unpleasant things about us, but it's a must anyway.

**NEFAC,** the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists. Probably the group closest to us politically. Write to either NEFAC (English speaking), Roundhouse Collective, c/o Black Planet Radical Books, 1621 Fleet St, Baltimore MD 21231, USA or NEFAC (Francophone), Groupe Anarchiste Émile-Henry, C.P. 55051, 138 St-Valliers O, Quebec G1K 1JO, Canada. Alternatively, link to them through our website.

Sinn Fein and co have too much to lose by taking the bait, and being drawn out of the peace process which has recently witnessed Gerry Adams, erstwhile 'socialist', being feted by the WEF in New York, rather than attend a Bloody Sunday commemoration rally in Derry. Likewise, other mainstream politicians like the DUP's Nigel Dodds, are too fearful of losing potential votes in a contentious Belfast seat that could swing republican at the next election. The UDA, who carried out McColgan's murder, need drug turf and thus drug money to finance future 'military' operations. They need to continue to fuel the fear of Catholic penetration of Protestant areas in order to maximise more hatred, which they in turn can channel for their own ends.

So what does the future have in store for Northern Ireland? The hawks in the UDA will continue their campaign of intimidation and violence in order to destabilise the 'peace process' which they feel has failed them, and hope that the IRA slips up over demilitarisation – a prospect which is unlikely, given the financial windfall that capitalists can expect with prolonged peace. As small-time entrepreneurs themselves, the UDA is guilty of a marked naivety if they think anything they can do will rock the boat now. That said, perhaps they will be content with the ghettoisation of various interface and poor loyalist areas in which they can conduct their business, and like their counterparts in the IRA, renounce, if they haven't already, their version of the phoney concept of 'national liberation', which is as implausible as the idea of national economic independence given the nature of the world today.

So, the demonstrations against the murder of Daniel McColgan, positive as they were, must be followed by the growth of a culture of resistance which sees the communities here united again, but this time united in the daily struggle of life under capitalism, united in their realisation that they should no longer be manipulated as two rival sets of exploited labour, divided by religion and nationalism, and underpinned by

a bogus cultural identification of what differentiates something or someone British, from something or someone Irish. It is up to anarchists to involve themselves in this process, to build the foundation for class struggle, and destroy the capitalist stranglehold over us.

The Anarchist Federation Ireland set up in Ireland in autumn 2001. Since then AFI has been actively involved in anti-war, pro-choice and anti-Sellafield activism. We also participate in the series of grassroots gatherings, the aim of which are to build up a broad-based libertarian movement in Ireland. We already have contacts with anarchists in Dundalk, Derry, Belfast, Dublin, Sligo, Kildare and Cork and have members both north and south of the border.

To find out more about the Anarchist Federation Ireland, email us at [ireaf@yahoo.ie](mailto:ireaf@yahoo.ie) – Or go to our website at [www.afireland@cjb.net](http://www.afireland@cjb.net)

## Stormy Petrel pamphlets

**Towards a Fresh Revolution by The Friends of Durruti.** Writings from the much-misunderstood group who attempted to defend and extend the Spanish Revolution of 1936. 75p plus postage.

**Malatesta's Anarchism and Violence.** An important document in the history of anarchist theory refutes the common misrepresentation of anarchism as mindless destruction while restating the need for *revolution* to create a free and equal society. 50p plus postage.

**A Brief Flowering of Freedom: The Hungarian Revolution 1956.** An exciting account of one of the first post-war uprisings against the Stalinist monolith. Also includes a history of the Hungarian anarchist movement. 60p plus postage.

All Stormy Petrel pamphlets are available from AF (London), c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX.

# Inside the Yellow House

## A libertarian approach to disaffected youth in Liverpool

Curfew orders on disaffected youth? A new generation of Kray Twins? 'Feral' children roaming the streets? And who but some right-wing hack could coin such a phrase to describe fellow human beings? Listening to the media, anyone could be forgiven for thinking that all hope has been abandoned and working-class youth are the bane of cosy, middle England.

Nothing could be further from the truth and there are things going on in Liverpool that give the lie to the lurid bourgeois accusations of lawless young desperadoes hanging around every street corner just waiting to relieve passers-by of their credit cards, Rolexes, jewellery and mobiles.

It's undoubtedly true that capitalism has the power to create monsters in every community. The remarkable thing is that so few of us take this road despite the enormous, coercive pressures of consumer-driven society breeding a crude selfishness in practically every one of our actions, from the earliest stages of infancy. They won't admit it, but avarice is a condition alien to the huge majority of humankind the world over and especially so in young people. Young people possess a fondness for each

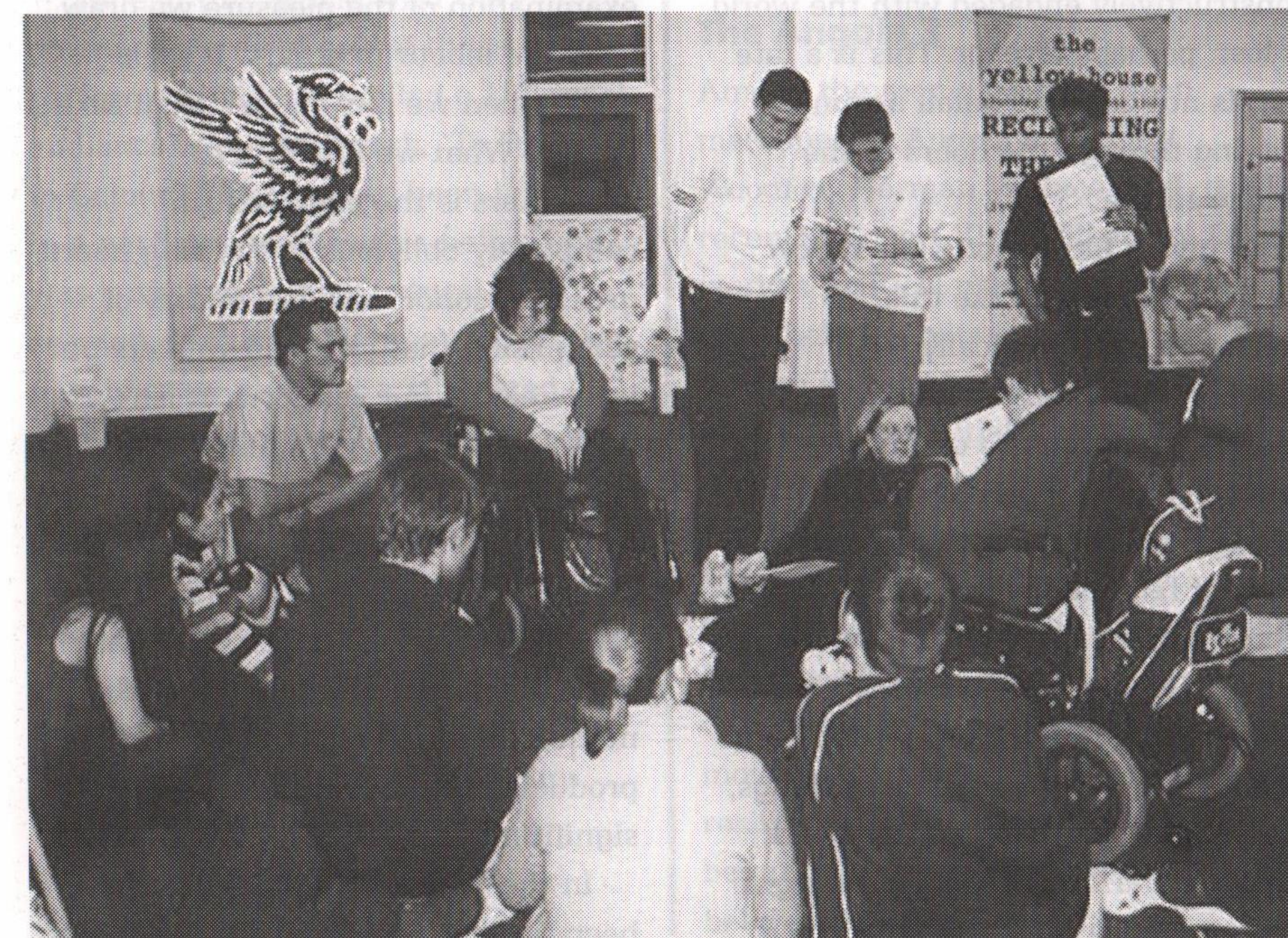
other unparalleled in other groups, they love working hard and having fun together with their peers. Caring, sharing, harmonising and fostering a natural empathy are strongly rooted in the young. The Yellow House theatre group is living proof of that.

### Very personal visions

Yellow House is a unique youth organisation created and set up in the mid-80s by a local man with vision and an undaunted faith in Liverpool's working-class youth – George McKane. Yellow House is named after Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh's house in Arles, where the door was always kept open. For Yellow House, read open house – open specifically to working-class kids.

George feels instinctively that art is not the prerogative or product of the middle and upper-classes but could be more passionately expressed and appreciated by the working class themselves – art that is an expression of their daily experiences of hardship and the emotions that scraping a living from the crumbs from the capitalist's table create. "For me, daily life is the act, the common reality, the domain of falsehood and convention. The purpose of theatre should not be to describe life but to be a space where a life process takes place. Theatre should be where the 'actors and the audience' make mutual contact, leading to the discovery of the fullness of human nature."

The Yellow House is principally a theatre group open to all young people of Liverpool regardless of background, race or financial status. George believes passionately that the talent and the urge to be creative that is part of every human life does not depend on wealth or social connection for development. The theory behind this Theatre of Exposure is quite simple: "We are teaching the young people not to act, but to be themselves in a given situation. We are training – asking –





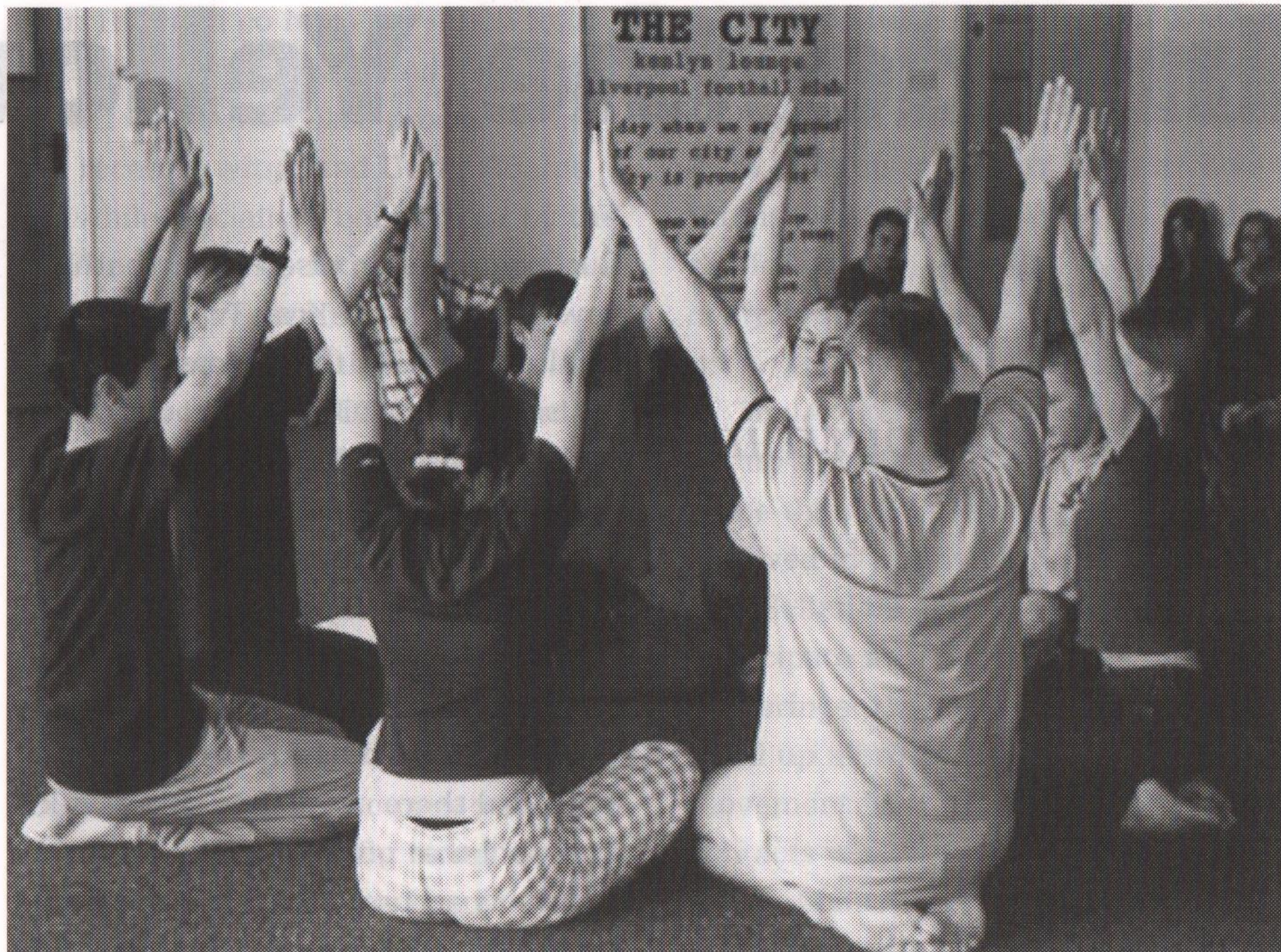
the young people to take off their masks and to be themselves; their real selves. The training is actually getting them to act as their real selves; the real self that is buried beneath the image that they have, or their environment has created for them."

Yellow House undertakes to nurture this creativity simply because it is there and not because money or position are the key to releasing it. It is something from which the working class in this country has largely been excluded, even in so-called 'free' schools like Summerhill, whose students are invariably taken from the families of wealth or status. Not so at Yellow House.

Just as money is not needed to walk through the Yellow House door, neither is the work of the group structured around anything to do with hierarchy, station in life, precociousness, 'sex-appeal' or any of the other fatuous presumptions the middle and ruling class claim for their kind. What Yellow House aims to offer is a safe and respecting environment not only to work in, but to be seen and to be heard without being judged, to enable each to explore their own self, free from external assumptions being drawn from accent, physique, mannerisms, language, an extrovert nature or whatever. Articulation of what each carries inside is more fundamentally important than following any social pattern derived from class, cliques, in-crowds or élites. Who you really are is what counts, not who you know or what your people do for a living.

### Working-class lives

There is absolutely nothing run-of-the-mill or superficial about Yellow House theatre group. Every action leads to a young, working-class person gaining in self-esteem and self-confidence. No performance is ever scripted, nor is there a reliance on elaborate sets or gaudy costumes. The players are entirely themselves, most often making statements about growing up in inner-city Liverpool through the mediums of poetry and music. Repeatedly the title of each production



speaks of the youngster's aspirations: 'Peace Breaks Out', 'Reclaiming the City', 'Looking for Freedom', 'Between Two Worlds'.

Allowed the opportunity to think about the state of the world on their own terms, it's what youth wants for the future that comes across loud and clear. These kids don't want war, exploitation, restraint, violence. It's adult society that does this to them, destroys all their best convictions, refuses them the right to build the kind of world they desire, directs them down the useless road of consumerist greed, where the essence of being fully human, wholly alive and constructively engaged with the world is lost, perhaps forever. This is a fate that is not going to befall anyone passing through the doors of the Yellow House.

To give a flavour of what Yellow House represents, take this. Responding to a typically conversational remark about the opening performance of a newly-rehearsed production, its founder and inspiration, George McKane, was asked if he thought that the team were "up and ready for the evening's show". George replied that while the performance in front of the audience had its place in the scheme of things, it would not be the most important aspect by far. And he would be right. The most important aspect of the

process, from beginning to end, had been the working alliance, the mutual camaraderie that cemented it all together, the blood, the sweat, the tears that the group had shed in support of one another behind the scenes. The thousand and one things that we, the audience, didn't see and very probably wouldn't even think of.

Like much that goes on in this taken-for-granted society, it was a question that had been asked from the consumer's point of view. It is how capitalism encourages us to think – lazily – without paying too much attention to detail and without anything but the most cursory examination of the pleasure we draw from the labour of others. It's the same when we buy clothes from Nike or Gap. What we focus on as consumers is the end product, completely oblivious to the long hours, gruelling conditions, the misery of compulsion that low-paid workers put into creating our comforts. It isn't done intentionally; it's just that we have become blind to many things. We just don't see it. Consumer capitalism doesn't want us to see it. This is what George has put his finger on: it isn't what the public eventually sees that matters; it is the effort that goes to producing the finished article that has significance.

In the 15 years that George has been facilitating Yellow House, both it

and its reputation have grown and grown. As is the case with any working-class initiative, George has had to fight hard for everything that has been achieved by Yellow House. A not-for-profit, non-commercial venture, Yellow House has had to struggle for funds to stay afloat. People have helped.

George has also found the additional emotional strength he needed to maintain his dream-turned-reality through his partner, Gosia, a native of Poland who has helped spread Yellow House's work across Europe and beyond, to Gdansk, Warsaw, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Köln, Palermo in Sicily, France, Tallin in Estonia, Ghana and other parts of Africa. The entire initiative has been working-class from start to finish. No 'names', no mile-wide grinning celebrities, no corporate sponsors. Nothing but working-class passion and commitment from two very determined working-class people alongside their Liverpool working-class students, who have shared in and built the dream. "A throwaway theatre, a theatre which won't go down in bourgeois history, but which is useful, like a newspaper article, a debate on political action. Theatre to burn when its purpose has been served. We are proud of our past, our history, our origins, we look to them but we are always moving forward."

We end this article with the poignant words of one of those student performers who enthralled a Liverpool audience with their work, 'To Dream in Colour': "I had never been involved in a performance like this before and was surprised at how natural it all seemed. It was really great how young people came together and created something together. I particularly like the fact that we all felt equal and that people who had been involved with Yellow House for a long time valued and listened to everyone's opinion". Yellow House. In Liverpool. Freedom to be who we are.

For more information on Yellow House try [yellowhouse@btinternet.com](http://yellowhouse@btinternet.com) or the website [www.yellowhouse.info](http://www.yellowhouse.info)

# The Angola 3

## A life in blood

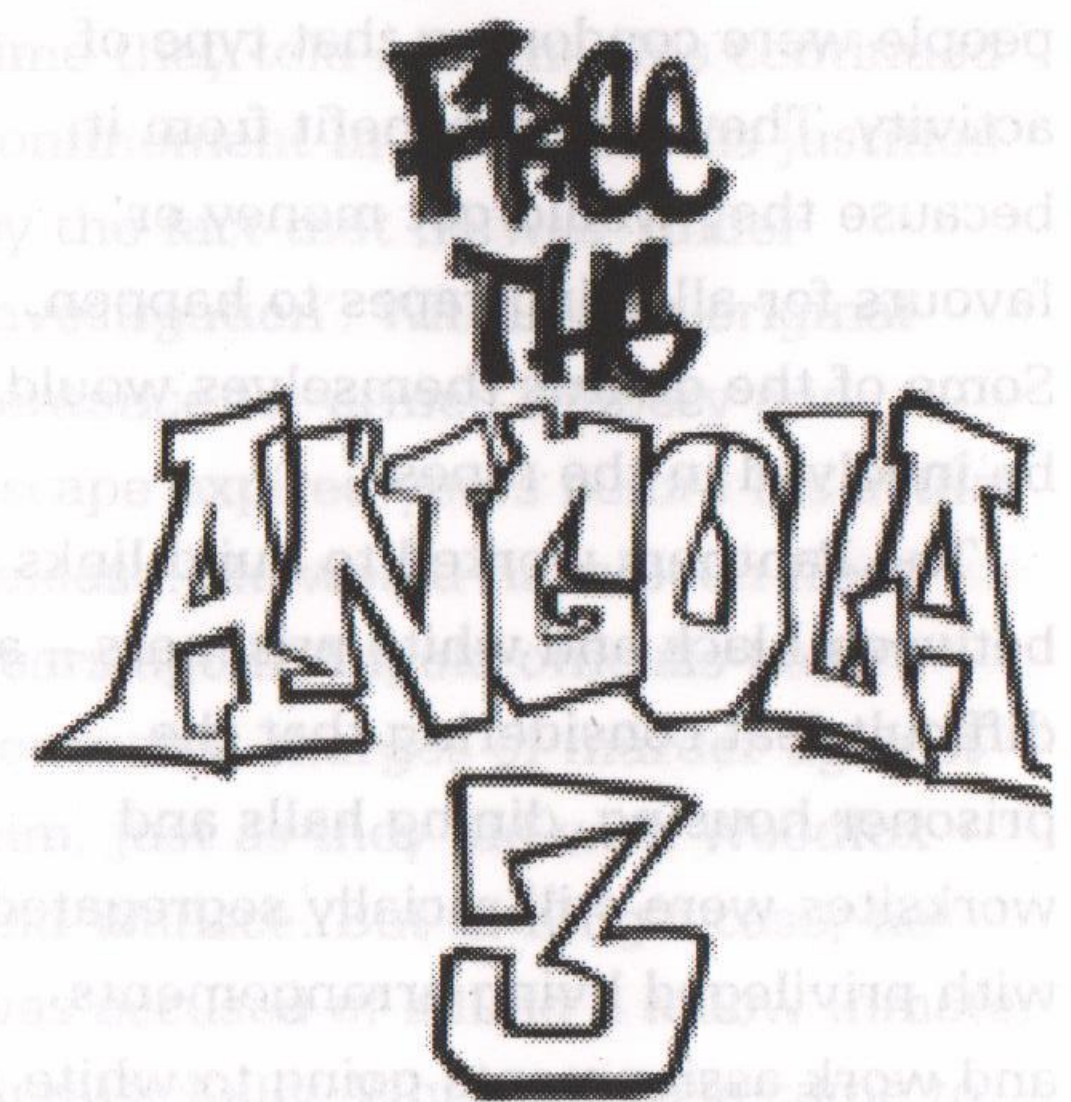
Known as 'The Farm', the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola is the largest prison in the United States. Around three-quarters of its inmates are African-American. According to one documentary, 'The Farm', 85% of the inmates who are sent to Angola will die there.

Angola is an 18,000-acre complex of ante-bellum plantations that the state of Louisiana purchased and converted into a prison around the turn of the century. Angola still operates on the plantation model. Prisoners perform back-breaking labour, harvesting cotton, sugar cane and other crops from dawn to dusk. In the early 1970s, Angola was known as the most brutal prison in the United States, with stabbings an almost daily occurrence. Armed 'inmate guards' patrolled the prison, and they frequently used their state-issued rifles to settle scores with other inmates. Dozens of bodies are rumoured to be buried in the swampland where Angola borders the Mississippi River.

### The Angola 3

Among the men who have been marooned at Angola are Albert Woodfox, Herman Wallace, and, until recently, Robert King Wilkerson. Of the world's political prisoners, few have been held in solitary confinement for as long as they have: nearly 30 years. All three men initially arrived at Angola with sentences for unrelated robberies and a dedication to political activism. Wallace and Woodfox founded a chapter of the Black Panther Party at Angola.

The Black Panther Party was a movement of extreme militant resistance to the American state begun by African-Americans. They believed in armed defence and



resistance, and implemented those beliefs, setting up Black Panther chapters and militias across America. They had a radical programme and gave it substance through educational and welfare programmes for African-Americans, but needless to say were vilified and brutally suppressed by the American State, with many of their leaders killed or jailed, usually on the evidence of police spies.

Woodfox had joined the Party in New York, where he had fled after a daring 1969 escape from the courthouse in New Orleans. After spending time imprisoned under an assumed name in New York, where he helped organise several rebellions in the New York City correctional system, Woodfox, along with his new-found politics, was extradited back to Louisiana. Wallace became a Panther while he was incarcerated at the New Orleans Parrish Prison with the political prisoners known as the 'New Orleans Panther 12'. When they were shipped off to Angola, Woodfox and Wallace took the Black Panther Party with them.

### Inside 'The Farm'

The Angola Panthers not only challenged the prison administration, but they also organised against the inmate social order that hindered



prisoner unity and played into the hands of the guards. The Panthers risked their lives to protect younger and weaker inmates from the rape, prostitution and sex slavery that pervaded prison life. As Woodfox puts it, "It wasn't much help to go to the security, because most of the security people were condoning that type of activity. They would benefit from it, because they would get money or favours for allowing rapes to happen. Some of the guards themselves would be involved in the rapes".

The Panthers worked to build links between black and white prisoners – a difficult feat considering that the prisoner housing, dining halls and worksites were still racially segregated, with privileged living arrangements and work assignments going to white prisoners. The BPP also exposed the widespread corruption of the people who ran Angola, many of whom came from families that had lived on state land and had worked at the prison for several generations. Guards often diverted food, grown by the prisoners for their own consumption, to their families and friends, or sold it in town. The administration of the prison responded to the rise of the Panthers by filling its isolation units with activist prisoners. The associate warden of the prison, Hayden Dees, testified in court proceedings to the need to keep "a certain type of militant or revolutionary inmate, maybe even a Communist type", on permanent lockdown. Their activism made them targets of the all-white prison administration. In 1972, in an effort to stop their organising, prison officials concocted murder charges against Woodfox and Wallace, and placed them on maximum security regimes. Relying on the paid-for testimony of prison snitches, Angola officials won convictions against the two men, who received sentences of life without parole. "I think the fact that they were never able to break my spirit or Herman Wallace's spirit, the fact that they could not shake our political beliefs or convictions, contributed to the reason why we were held in solitary confinement," Woodfox says.

### Story of a frame-up

On 17 April 1972, the killing of Officer Brent Miller took place. Just the day before, a wooden guard shack had been firebombed and the guard inside burned. On the morning of the 17th there was a 'buck', or work stoppage, in the kitchen, where inmate workers were protesting their punishing 16-hour shifts. Inmates were told to return to their dormitories until food could be served. Within a short time, the buck had been resolved, and the inmates were ordered back to the dining hall.



Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace.

The Pine 1 dormitory emptied of all but a few inmates and a guard, Brent Miller. By the end of breakfast, Miller lay dead on the floor of Pine 1, 32 stab wounds in his body. In the days following the murder, prison officials terrorised Angola's black population. Interrogations continued night and day. There were mass beatings. Prisoners with Afro hairstyles – viewed, correctly, by officials as a political statement – had their hair forcibly shorn. For two days and nights prisoners withstood this abuse, and officials learned nothing about the murder. One inmate, Hezekiah Brown, was awakened sometime after midnight and confronted by most of the Angola administration, who told him that they could place him at the scene of Miller's murder. The institutional files of several Angola inmates, including Woodfox and Wallace, were arrayed before him. Terrified that he would be charged with the murder if he did not provide information, Brown picked out the files of Woodfox and Wallace, and

accused them of the murder. More prisoners were coerced or bribed into testifying against Woodfox and Wallace, and in a racially-charged and wholly corrupt trial they were convicted of murder.

Later, prison officials themselves testified that the two primary inmate witnesses were known 'snitches' or liars. Prison records show that one of them, Hezekiah Brown, was paid one carton of cigarettes per week in exchange for his testimony. Shortly after he testified, Angola officials began a campaign to win a pardon for Brown, who was serving a life sentence. In 1986, Brown was released by Gov. Edwin Edwards, who is currently being tried on federal corruption charges. For the next two decades, Woodfox and Wallace, from their isolation cells, struggled to continue their activism. Over the years, they have helped hundreds of inmates with their legal cases. Until inmate-to-inmate mail was recently banned, they even helped inmates at a nearby women's prison with their legal work. In November 1998, while Woodfox was away from Angola awaiting trial, Wallace got nearly every inmate on Louisiana's death row to sign a petition in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

### Conviction reversed – twice

In 1992, a Louisiana court agreed that Woodfox's original conviction had been obtained in violation of the United States Constitution. The court granted Woodfox a new trial. Because Woodfox's original sentence, 50 years for armed robbery, was about to expire, the state convened a new grand jury to re-indict him for Brent Miller's murder. Woodfox's trial finally began on 7 December 1998. Because of the notoriety of the case in West Feliciana Parish, where Angola is situated, the court granted Woodfox a change of venue. The proceedings were moved to Amite, near Baton Rouge, where much of Brent Miller's family lives and Miller's body is buried. The area is a hotbed of Ku Klux Klan activity. When the trial opened, the courtroom was packed with Woodfox's

supporters who were elated as the state's evidence seemed to disintegrate. A familiar pattern emerged – 'difficult' prisoners targeted by corrupt guards, fabricated evidence, other prisoners bribed, threatened and coerced into giving evidence. Evidence given at the original trial was clearly inconsistent and contradictory, however, the racist trial judge co-operated with the state in admitting bizarre 'new' evidence and continually ruling against the defence. In order to divert the jury's attention from its compromised witnesses and lack of physical evidence, the prosecution dredged up information about Woodfox's Panther past and used it as evidence that he was guilty of the murder.

In the courtroom, using tactics eerily similar to those enlisted against Mumia Abu-Jamal, Woodfox's political statements were used to convict him (in the jury's mind) of racially-motivated murder. Failing to acknowledge the Panthers' history of establishing children's breakfast programmes, publishing an important community newspaper, or inventing the practice of 'cop-watching', the state was allowed to argue that Woodfox's membership of the organisation constituted evidence that he was a murderer. After closing arguments, the jury deliberated for only about five hours. In spite of the overwhelming lack of physical evidence, the fully-compromised credibility of the state's witnesses, and Woodfox's truthful polygraph examination and convincing testimony, the jury came back with a guilty verdict. After waiting two months, Woodfox was finally sentenced to life without possibility of probation, parole, or suspension of sentence.

### Resistance continues

Woodfox's return to Angola in March 1999 offered him an opportunity for a bitter-sweet reunion with Wallace and Wilkerson, but their time together was short lived. In May 1999, following a peaceful hunger strike in which over 60 inmates protested worsening conditions and curtailed privileges, the

Angola 3 were singled out as leaders and moved out of CCR. They were separated from one another in the horrific confines of Camp J, the prison's extreme punishment unit. In Camp J, inmates are confined to scorching cells for 24 hours on most days. Two or three times a week, they are allowed out of their cells to visit 'the yard', an outdoor cage, unshaded and topped by razor wire. Despite the fact that inmates are placed into this cage alone, they are nevertheless forced to try to exercise with their hands shackled to a chain around their waists. Meals often consist of spoiled meat. Visits with lawyers and family are through a thick metal screen.

In February 2000, after enduring eight months in Camp J, the Angola 3 were returned to the 'non-punitive' solitary confinement of CCR. Woodfox and Wallace are continuing their struggle to prove their innocence. Both have petitions pending before various courts. One alleges that the men are confined in violation of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. They have been locked in small, non-air-conditioned cells for 23 hours a day since 1972. The current civil rights lawsuit was filed in the wake of an uprising at the prison in which an inmate and a guard were killed. The FBI is investigating allegations that Angola guards administered severe beatings to dozens of inmates in the days following the incident, which involved only a handful of prisoners. If Louisiana officials have their way, Woodfox and Wallace will die in their isolation cells at Angola.

### The case of Robert King Wilkerson

Like Herman Wallace, Robert King Wilkerson was recruited into the Black Panther Party in the Orleans Parish Prison. He arrived at Angola in 1972, soon after Officer Miller was killed and his reputation as an activist had preceded him. He was immediately placed in solitary confinement while he was 'investigated', but the prison authorities would not explain why.

Some 19 years later, perhaps by

accident, the classification board told him that he was being investigated for the killing of Brent Miller, even though the murder took place before he got to Angola! For over 28 years, Angola's classification committee reviewed Wilkerson's Closed Cell Restricted placement every three months. Each time they told him that his continued confinement in isolation was justified by the fact that he was 'under investigation'. Wilkerson's original sentence for armed robbery and escape expired years before his actual release. He would have been freed years ago if Angola officials hadn't concocted charges of murder against him, just as they did with Woodfox and Wallace. But in King's case, he was accused of killing a fellow inmate, August Kelly. When his case came to trial, the judge ordered both defendants shackled and their mouths taped shut in front of the jury. Wilkerson was convicted, almost entirely on the basis of two inmates' testimony. In 1974, the Louisiana Supreme Court reversed Wilkerson's conviction, ruling that it had been improper for the trial judge to gag Wilkerson in response to a co-defendant's outbursts. Wilkerson was tried again in 1975. Just as before, Wilkerson was tried in St Francisville, the closest town to Angola, where most of the jury pool is composed of prison employees, their families and friends. This time, one of the state's inmate witnesses refused to testify. Brewer, Wilkerson's former co-defendant, took the stand and testified that he alone had committed the killing, in self-defence. Nevertheless the jury re-convicted Wilkerson. Once again, he received a sentence of life without possibility of parole.

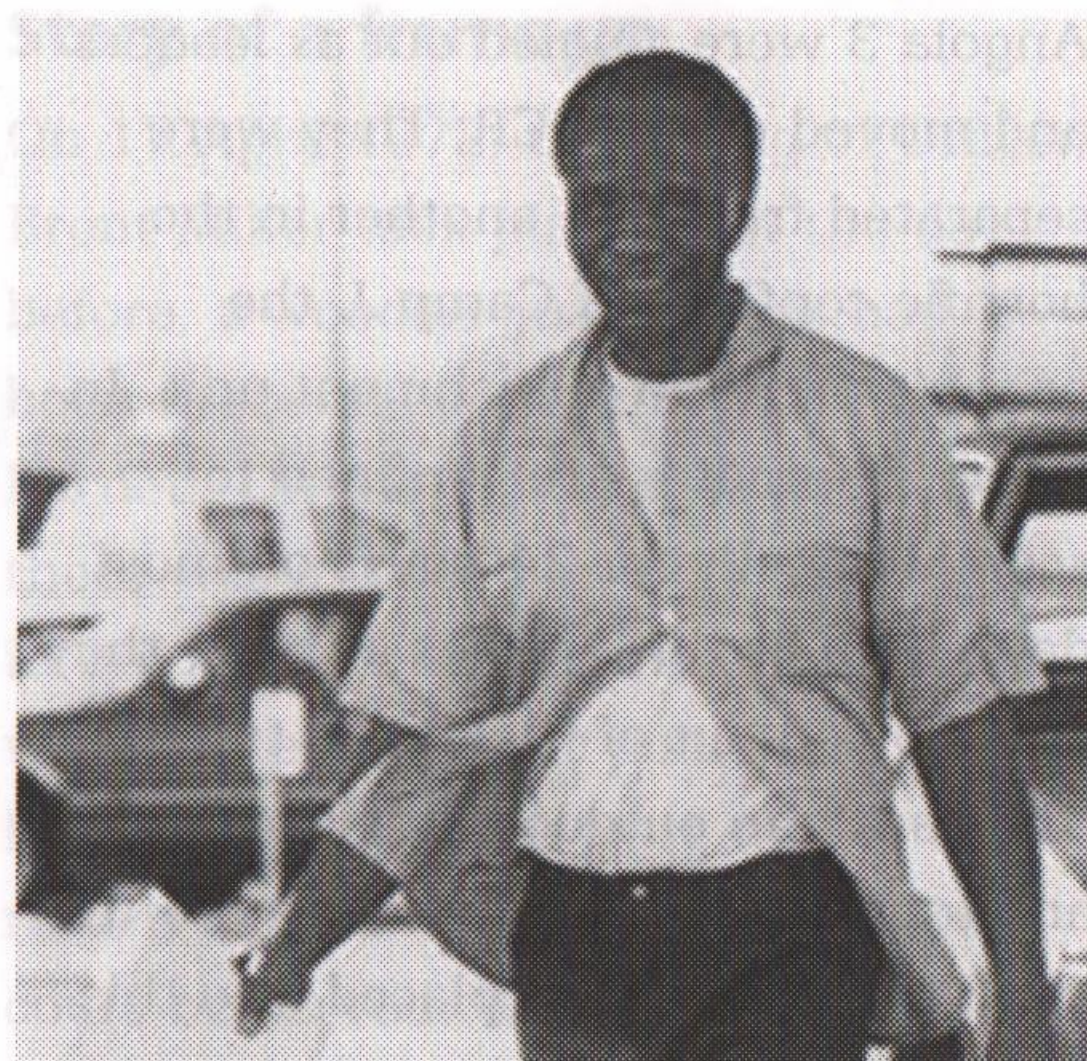
In 1994, the US Court of Appeals granted Wilkerson a new trial because African-Americans and women had unconstitutionally been excluded from the grand jury that indicted him. Only months later, however, the Court decided to rehear the case and reversed its decision, taking away his new trial. In 2000, after years of legal struggles, the Fifth Circuit Court finally ruled in Wilkerson's favour. The



case was remanded back to a lower court and, sensing defeat, the state offered him a plea bargain. If he would plead guilty to accessory after the fact, it would agree to a sentence of time served and Wilkerson would go home. Because he had played no role in the murder of August Kelly, Wilkerson was reluctant to admit guilt to any charge. However, after agonising discussions with family and friends, Wilkerson decided to accept the deal. The state, however, would not let him go quietly. On the appointed day, Wilkerson arrived in court to find out that the state was now insisting that he plead guilty to conspiracy to commit murder. The District Attorney's office, it seems, feared that letting Wilkerson off too easily might subject them to a very expensive lawsuit. In the end, with a large contingent of family and friends watching from the courtroom gallery, Wilkerson decided to go through with the deal. He entered his plea, returned to Angola for processing, and later that afternoon, walked out of Angola's front gate a free man.

#### A prison within a prison

In an interview in July 2001, Wilkerson recounted how he joined the Black Panther Party in New Orleans Parrish Prison and how the state retaliated against him: "When I was initially arrested in February 1970 [for a robbery he didn't commit]... I became aware of the Black Panther Party and it spoke to things that I couldn't address at the time, and it helped me to regain focus on what was taking place in society. I became a rebel at that point. I joined the Black Panther Party... We became an extension of the Black Panther Party. We carried its programme into the Parrish Prison through certain means of communication. We started to deal with conditions in the Parrish Prison. We organised a hunger strike. At one time we got almost the whole prison – I think about 700 prisoners – to go on a hunger strike. The prison conditions were horrible.... It was filthy. The sanitary conditions were intolerable. The food was horrible.... We were treated with so much indignity that we



A free man: Robert King Wilkerson.

decided that we would demand to be treated with some form of respect. So that's why we went on a hunger strike. We were successful. After we went on the hunger strike the prison came along and did some things and they kind of revised some of their actions toward inmates. But it also focused attention on some inmates..."

Recent federal law has greatly restricted repeat appeals like Wilkerson's, creating huge evidentiary barriers that are almost impossible to resolve. A prisoner must show a constitutional violation at his trial that contributed to the conviction and that "it is more likely than not that no reasonable juror could have convicted him in light of the new evidence". Rather than face a new trial against Wilkerson with no evidence, the prosecutors allowed him to plead to charges that allowed him to walk out of jail with time served. "Hell yeah, I'm bitter," Wilkerson said after his release. "I was not only unjustly confined but I was locked away in a prison within a prison. But I am able to rise above the bitterness that comes from being locked away unjustly for 28 years in solitary confinement. I will rise above the bitterness because I have work to do. I have left two of my comrades and other folks behind. I think my goal now is to remain focused. Work for our comrades, with the other people who are working for them. I think that we have set a precedent. I think the same thing that happened for me can happen for them. Like myself, they were unjustly convicted and they are being held in solitary confinement for crimes they

did not commit. The prison officials know they didn't do it. But they have continued those lies for 30 years.... We want to focus on the whole prison industrial complex. There are a lot of guys in Angola who are innocent. All the records, all the facts show that they are innocent. It is incumbent upon me to fight for them as well as my comrades. If I got out, we can also get them out."

Robert King Wilkerson, along with Althea Francois (an ex-Black Panther and prison rights activist) have recently completed a successful tour including Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford and Birmingham, to highlight the case of the Angola 3 and boost the campaign to free Woodfox and Wallace – a campaign the Anarchist Federation is proud to highlight and to have contributed to in some small way.

The story of the Angola 3 is a story of only a few of the many thousands of African-Americans, overwhelmingly working-class people, who are arrested, falsely charged, convicted and confined to a brutal, corrupt and murderous prison regime, often run for profit by huge, private corporations. All parts of the ruling class of America collude in effectively enslaving up to two million Americans. Prison guard unions and administrators collaborate to lobby and bribe state and federal legislators. Party machines that elect the judges who punish the indicted get their pay-offs as political donations and favours, as do the judges themselves, and the legislators, the lawyers, the prison wardens and guards. As 'political' prisoners, Woodfox, Wallace and Wilkerson have paid a savage price for their challenges to state-oppression of mainly working class African-Americans. These working class people are forced, both inside and out of prison, to pay a different kind of price, working in conditions of wage- and semi-slavery to feed the industrial consumerist society they are denied access to and which daily kills and brutalises their communities. To find out more or offer help go to <http://www.prisonactivist.org/angola/> or email [louisiana.injustice@btinternet.com](mailto:louisiana.injustice@btinternet.com)

# Two American anarchist poets

## The anarchist poetry of Kenneth Rexroth and Philip Levine

Perhaps surprisingly, the United States has been the home of a number of poets who have expressed anarchist ideas in their works. But then again, there are strong traditions of immigrant anarchism among Jews, Italians, Spaniards and Russians. There is the radical workers' organisation, the Industrial Workers of the World. There is also the libertarian tradition among intellectuals, dating back to Thoreau. And there is a 'bohemian' tradition, often interconnected with these other movements, which above all had its home in San Francisco and Greenwich Village in New York.

### Kenneth Rexroth

*Labor power on the market,  
Firepower on the battlefield,  
It is all one merely two  
Aspects of the same monster.*

THE DRAGON AND THE UNICORN

Kenneth Rexroth was born in 1905 in Indiana, into a family that had a long line of freethinkers, feminists, abolitionists, socialists and anarchists. His father used to drink whisky with Eugene Debs, the socialist leader. He had an enlightened upbringing but then had the misfortune of being orphaned at the age of 12.

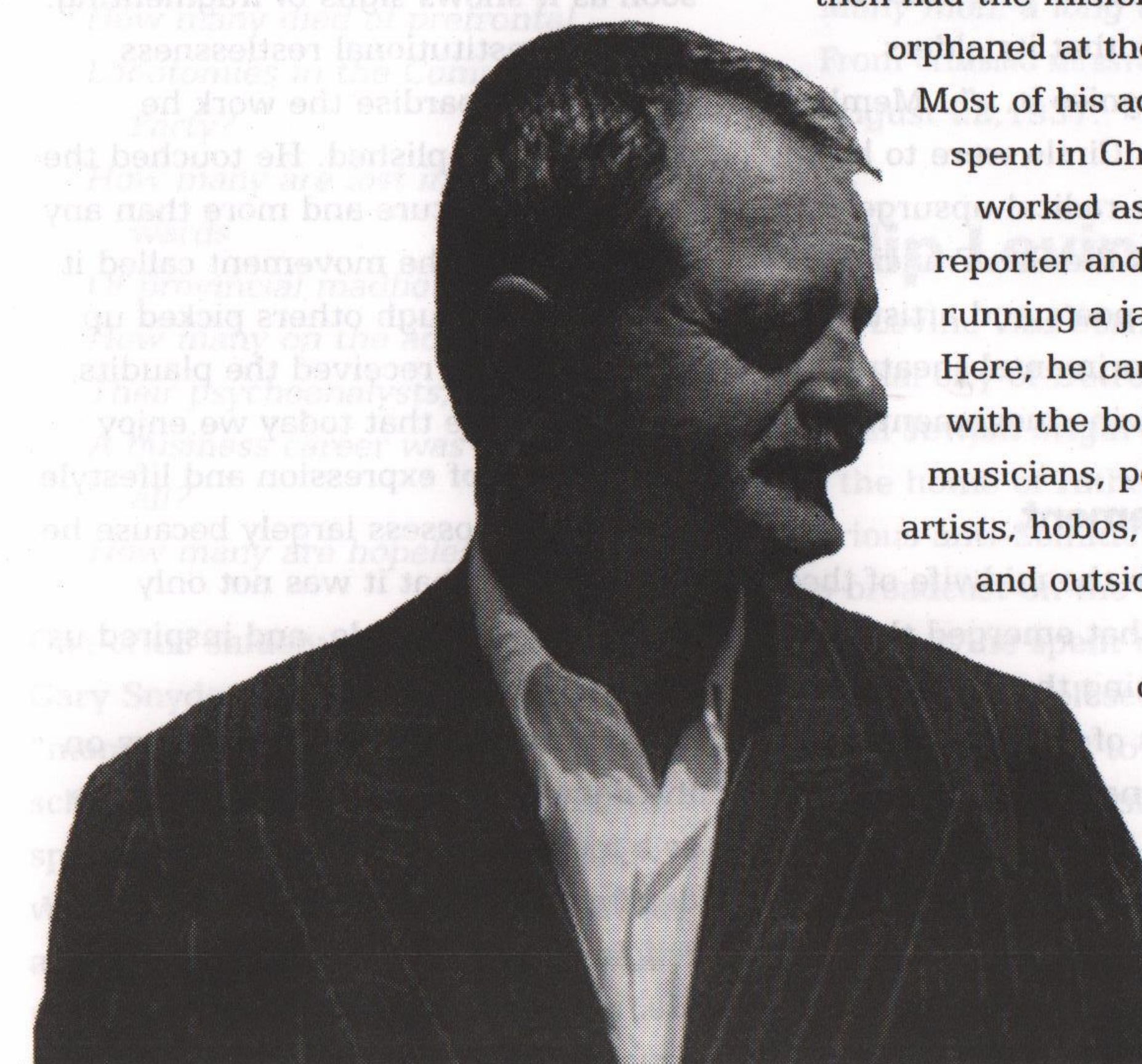
Most of his adolescence was spent in Chicago, where he worked as a newspaper reporter and was involved in running a jazz tea shop. Here, he came in contact with the bohemian world of musicians, poets, writers, artists, hobos, revolutionaries and outsiders.

He was almost completely self-educated, with only five years of formal schooling. He read avidly,

began to write poetry, paint abstract paintings, worked in avant-garde theatre and taught himself several languages. Like the European writer, Malaquais, he took to the road in his late teens. He ranged, he roamed, he rambled. He worked at all sorts of jobs, sometimes as a cowboy cook, sometimes as a wrangler, and in farm and forestry jobs. He worked as a toothbrush maker and as a peddler of pamphlets on diet. He even managed to make it to Paris and back as a stowaway. There he met many important radical artists, including the surrealists. The anarchist, Alexander Berkman, told him whilst he was in France not to become another expatriate and he returned. Becoming an anarchist at an early age, he saw through the Bolshevik myth as soon as 1921, when the Kronstadt sailors uprising was crushed by Lenin and co.

In 1927, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World working for a while on its newspaper. In Chicago, he set up a Dadaist group. He carried on independent activity in the '30s. Settling in San Francisco, he was involved in the newssheet, the *Waterfront Worker*, which exhorted dockers to organise. (In later life he entertained his friends with renditions of IWW and Spanish anarchist songs and sometimes used the IWW address "Dear Fellow Worker" in letters.)

With the collapse of the revolutionary wave, he began to dig in, maintaining and seeking out contact with those who had preserved their radicalism, looking for reassessment and reappraisal. Where possible he spoke out against the established order. We have to remember that in this most grievous period, it was an extraordinary achievement to maintain revolutionary optimism. The perversions of Bolshevism had meant that as Kenneth said, "There was no one left who was not completely centred on the Kremlin, either as a mindless Stalinist





hatchet man or a psychopathic anti-Bolshevik". He was also able to make the acute observation that, "the socialist and trade union movements in the West have functioned in reality – not just as governors to insure that steam is let off when the pressure gets too high, not just as what are now called 'fail safe' devices, though they certainly are that – but as essential parts of the motive organisation of capitalism, more, in other words, like carburettors that insure there will be just the right mixture of fuel and air for each new demand on the engine".

### Conscientious objector

In World War II he refused to take part in the clash of opposing capitalist states and was a conscientious objector, doing alternative service working in a psychiatric ward. During the war he formed the antimilitarist Randolph Bourne Council (named after the libertarian writer who had coined the phrase "War is the Health of the State"). He helped Japanese-Americans who were being interned by the thousands in concentration camps, devising ways by which many were able to avoid internment.

Down in Berkeley from 1944 to 1948, the magazine *Circle*, which united local 'Berkeley Renaissance' writers and exiled European Surrealist poets, expressed anarchist and anti-authoritarian views (Rexroth contributed to it). In their last issue, an ad for a New Writers Group stated that, "We believe in the possibility of a culture which fights for its freedom, which protects the economic interests of its workers in all fields including the arts, and which can create for itself new forms and new voices, against reaction and the threat of war".

After the war, Rexroth was involved

## Discussion board

The Anarchist Federation now has a discussion board at the following address: <http://flag.blackened.net/wwwthreads>  
Log on if you fancy a chat.

in the setting up of the San Francisco Anarchist Circle (later the Libertarian Circle). Anarchists like David Koven, surviving older Italian and Spanish anarchists, and conscientious objectors returning from the Waldorf detention camp, took part. Lively weekly meetings discussed all sorts of subjects from the Spanish revolution, to Kronstadt and Makhno, to the ideas of anarchists like Goldman, Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Kropotkin, the Anarchist Women's Movement, Sex and Anarchy. The sessions at Rexroth's house were enriched by his food (he was a superb cook) and his huge and encyclopaedic knowledge. Rexroth's actions were designed to trigger what he felt was needed for a successful transition to an anarchist society – the development of a new consciousness. The little magazine, *Ark*, which was set up (printed on a small hand press from 1947) was more militant than its forebear to the south, *Circle*. It proclaimed: "Today, at this catastrophic point in time, the validity if not the future of the anarchist position is more than ever established. It has become a polished mirror in which the falsehoods of political modes stand naked."

When all the other social commentators were bluntly asserting that all revolt and dissidence had ended, he was able to say, "The youngest generation is in a state of revolt so absolute that its elders cannot even recognise it...". Members of the Libertarian Circle were to be key players in the radical upsurge that became known as the San Francisco Renaissance – as poets and artists, in free radio, in experimental theatre and in the little magazine movement.

### The Beat movement

Rexroth was to be the midwife of the Beat movement that emerged that succeeded in uniting the dissident poets and writers of both the East and West Coasts. Kenneth hated being called the Father of the Beats – a movement of which he had many criticisms – but he was able to see that he and they were united in their mutual antagonism to the ruling

"convergence of interest – the business community, military imperialism, political reaction, the hysterical, tear and mud drenched guilt of the ex-Stalinist, ex-Trotskyist American intellectuals".

Rexroth was to preside at the birth pains of the San Francisco Renaissance, which led directly on to the emergence of the Beat movement, at the Six Gallery event in San Francisco, where Allen Ginsburg's powerful anti-authoritarian poem 'Howl' was read out to a eager and excited audience of several hundreds in an electric, drunken atmosphere, with Jack Kerouac as cheerleader and rhythm-maker.

William Everson says what I feel about Rexroth better than I could, so let's hear him speak: "He is a powerful spokesman for any cause he espouses. A born journalist, he has a flair for vigorous public speech and the guts to speak out in unequivocal terms. He has fantastic intellectual and moral courage, taking on the establishment and throwing it on the defensive through the sheer force of his invective. His rhetoric is savage, sometimes shockingly so, but it is never ineffectual.... His faults are the excesses of his virtues and he quarrels with his friends as readily as he clobbers his enemies.... He tends to drop the movement he has fostered as soon as it shows signs of fragmenting. But his constitutional restlessness could not jeopardise the work he actually accomplished. He touched the nerve of the future and more than any other voice in the movement called it into being. Though others picked up his mantle and received the plaudits, it remains true that today we enjoy the freedom of expression and lifestyle we actually possess largely because he convinced us that it was not only desirable but possible, and inspired us to make it be".

Rexroth placed too much stress on the development of a radical lifestyle as a fortress against capitalism to the detriment of struggle. His increasingly religious turn, in the last years of his life, is jarring for many atheists and agnostics. Nevertheless, both his prose

and his poems are deeply anarchist and deeply combative. In 'The Phoenix and the Tortoise', he wrote:

*The State is the organization  
Of the evil instincts of mankind.*

In 'For Eli Jacobson', one of his most moving poems, Rexroth remembers a dead friend:

*....We were comrades  
Together, we believed we  
Would see with our own eyes the  
new  
World where man was no longer  
Wolf to man, but men and women  
Were all brothers and lovers  
Together. We will not see it.  
We will not see it, none of us.  
It is farther off than we thought  
[...]  
We will be remembered, all  
Of us, always, by all men,  
In the good days now so far away.  
If the good days never come,  
We will not know. We will not  
care.  
Our lives were the best. We were  
the  
Happiest men alive in our day.*

In one of his angriest poems, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill', Rexroth talks of the toll that the collapse of the revolutionary wave had on so many writers, artists and intellectuals.

*How many stopped writing at  
thirty?  
How many died of prefrontal  
Lobotomies in the Communist  
Party?  
How many are lost in the back  
wards  
Of provincial madhouses?  
How many on the advice of  
Their psychoanalysts, decided  
A business career was best after  
all?  
How many are hopeless alcoholics?*

One critic snidely called Rexroth (and Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen) "members of the bear-shit-on-the-trail school of poetry". Rexroth did indeed spend a lot of time in mountain and wilderness, thought that this time was a splendid antidote to the scourges of urban capitalist life, and wrote beautifully about these experiences.

But often, in the middle of such a poem, we are pulled back to ideas of struggle, just as I myself, walking in the mountains, have turned to thoughts of revolution.

Here Rexroth thinks about the Italian-American anarchist, Bartomeleo Vanzetti, and his comrade, Nicola Sacco, murdered by the State. (He had visited them both in prison.)

*I saw you both marching in an  
army  
You with the red and black flag,  
Sacco with the rattlesnake banner.  
I kicked steps up the last snow  
bank and came  
To the indescribably blue and  
fragrant  
Polemonium and the dead sky and  
the sterile  
Crystalline granite and final  
monolith of the summit.  
These are the things that will last a  
long time, Vanzetti,  
I am glad that once on your day I  
have stood among them.  
Some day mountains will be named  
after you and Sacco.  
They will be here and your name  
with them,  
"When these days are but a dim  
remembering of the time  
When man was wolf to man".  
I think men will be remembering  
you a long time  
Standing on the mountains  
Many men, a long time, comrade.  
From CLIMBING MILESTONE MOUNTAIN  
August 22, 1937.*

## Philip Levine

Philip Levine was born in the industrial city of Detroit to parents of Russian Jewish origin in 1928. Detroit was the home of Father Coughlin, a notorious anti-Semitic Catholic priest who broadcast on the radio every Sunday. Levine spent most of his childhood and adolescence fighting people who wanted to beat him up because he was Jewish. Identifying with anti-fascism, he progressed to a discovery of anarchism, and in particular Spanish anarchism. Spanish anarchism and anarchists are a recurring theme in Levine's poems.

Levine was educated in state schools and at an early age had to take jobs in the factories of Detroit. Many of these were badly-paid, unhealthy and unsafe. The conditions of working life and the way people survive them, and are affected by them is another recurring theme in his poetry. Levine has been called the poet of the proletariat by one critic, and indeed there are few others who deal with factory life and can replicate the experience of it as Levine does.

Levine began to write poetry while he was going to night school at Wayne State University and working days in the car plants. He has written 16 books of poetry. In the first two *On the Edge* (1963) and *Not This Pig* (1968) Levine deals with those caught up in situations not of their own making. In 'Animals Are Passing From Our Lives' the pig about to be sent to the abattoir intends to keep its dignity, no matter what, as if that were some sort of victory. Wage labour turns everything human into a commodity, the poems illustrate, and they are often harrowing in their depiction of working misery.

This is further expanded upon in Levine's third book *They Feed, They Lion* (not a misprint). Levine picked this phrase up from a black workmate in Detroit and in the title poem – his most fiery – he deals with the seething anger and foul conditions and racism that led to the Detroit riots of 1967.

A subsequent book of poems, *The Names of the Lost*, is dedicated to the Spanish anarchist Durruti, "and the world he said is growing here in my heart this moment". One of the poems 'Gift for a Believer' is for the Anarchist artist Flavio Costantini and deals with the lives of the many fallen anarchists who have been used by Costantini as subject material for his paintings. Another, 'For the Fallen' talks about a visit to the Montjuich cemetery in Barcelona where Durruti, his comrade Ascaso and the libertarian educationalist Ferrer are buried.

Levine returns to this theme in his *7 Years from Somewhere*. The book's cover is illustrated with a photo of the



graves of Durruti and Ferrer, but the greatest poem in it, 'Francisco, I'll Bring You Red Carnations' deals with Francisco Ascaso:

*For two there are floral  
Displays, but Ascaso faces  
Eternity with only a stone.  
Maybe as it should be. He was  
A stone, a stone and a blade,  
The first grinding and sharpening  
The other.  
And below in the city Levine  
describes  
Industrial filth and  
the burning mists of gasoline  
Levine ends with the hope  
We have it here  
Growing in our hearts, as  
Your comrade said, and when  
We give it up with our last  
Breaths someone will gasp it home  
to their lives.*

#### Further reading

Read *The Relevance of Rexroth*, a pamphlet written by the Situationist, Ken Knabb, for a passionate appreciation of what Rexroth was about. Published by the Bureau of Public Secrets PO Box 1044, Berkeley, California 94701.

And 'In Search of a New World: The Anarchist Dream in the Poetry of Philip Levine', by Robert Hedin in *American Poetry* (1986).

## Review

**Bash the Fash (1). Anti-fascist recollections 1984-93. K Bullstreet. Kate Sharpley Library. 31pp. No price shown.**

This pamphlet consists mainly of personal reminiscences by an anarchist involved in physical resistance to fascist groups (NF, BNP) in this country. As such, it is absorbing and often amusing. What it lacks in analysis, it makes up for in eyewitness accounts. The '80s and '90s saw the fascists beaten off the streets. Whilst they are now changing their tactics to 'community issues' as a result, it should be remembered that any street mobilisation by them needs to be countered physically and with maximum determination.

## Letters

### In defence of Father Christmas

*As we head into summer, let nobody accuse anarchists of not being topical...*

There is a certain irony when people denounce lies and the unreal, and conclude their argument by painting a picture of the free society. That irony ran throughout the article, 'Did You Give Santa the Sack?', (*Organise!* no.57). Similarly, such articles are used as evidence that the anarchist movement, like other dour leftist puritanical movements, is out of touch with the day-to-day important things and too much in touch with the navel-gazing intellectualoids of the political class. Which is not to say that the article didn't make good points...

Whilst most people would agree wholeheartedly with the criticism of the role Fr Christmas plays in our beloved consumerist society, they may balk at laying the whole thing on him. Similarly, they may not share the view that Fr Christmas is a weapon, which the adults wield against 'their' young. They may disapprove of provocation-loaded words such as 'lie' and 'liar'. They may interpret the article as an example of how well-meaning adults impose their politics on 'their' children.

Above all, we need to remember that we are shaped by the society in which we live. In this society, Fr Christmas does exist for children and it would be a very misguided parent who sat on their child's bed on 25 December to explain to their weeping children that, "Santa is just a tool that other parents use to persuade, bribe, intimidate, or coerce children into obedience and conformity". It's another thing altogether actually to

make Santa into the moral guardian that he's supposed to be. In other words, Fr Christmas can make his usual deliveries to your house without you having to tell your kids that he only visits good children. In fact, why not go the whole hog and suggest that he only visits children who make their teachers' lives hell?

As for whether or not we 'lie' to our children when we talk about Fr Christmas, I think it's important to remember that our children live in a very different reality. They are not simply young adults who haven't learnt to think correctly and logically. Children are children and they think in a way that is correct and logical for children. In their mind, Fr Christmas obviously exists. They see him on the

television; they can talk to him in department stores etc; he visits their school; he sings the praises of Coca Cola; he flogs everything from the Big Issue to crates of Bells Whiskey. If that isn't proof positive of his existence, then what is? The last thing that a child needs is a Dour Adult banning Santa.

When a child asks whether or not Santa is real, a far more constructive approach might be to ask what the child thinks. Rather than tell our children what is real and what isn't, we can let them decide for themselves.

Santa Claus is not the problem here. The writer of the article was astute enough to see the real problem, which, as ever, is the society that we live in and the way it takes a relatively innocuous thing, manipulates it to its own ends and renders it grubby and unattractive. It doesn't matter whether or not we tell our children about Santa. The problem is that the system uses Santa to force us to buy more, to get deeper into debt and to drip feed the ideas of consumerism into the bloodstream of our young.

Santa is decried as an 'eternal myth' in the article. Parents are 'liars'. But before we begin to throw mud, we should be far more self-critical. After all, we are proponents of a myth too. We talk about the anarchist vision. We see ourselves as revolutionaries. We get together to talk about how to bring down

the state. But is what we say what we do? All too often we are paying taxes, financing the armed forces which will ultimately be used against us; buying into the property market; driving around in our pollution-creating machines; avoiding looking at the labels to see if this cheap T-shirt is ethically sound; not asking questions about where our purchases come from; buying drugs to keep us sedated; compromising eternally in order to live our lives, and a million and one etceteras. We can draw up blueprints of the free society, but what are we really doing to get us there? The myth of the free society is far more dangerous than the myth of Fr Christmas. It tempts us to devote hours of critical thought into dreaming up how things will be. All of our efforts are expounded on explaining how decisions will be reached in the free society; how children will live in a free society; even how bedtime stories will be told in the free society!

The article asked, "Is there anything to be said in Santa's defence and, by analogy, in the willingness of humans to lie to their children and others (and to create, disseminate and defend entirely non-real phenomena) in order to alter their behaviour or perception of themselves on a mass scale?". The conclusion was, "Nothing". But Fr Christmas doesn't belong to us. He doesn't need us to defend him and we certainly have no right to deconstruct him. He belongs to children. He may be manipulated by us (either to sell, sell, sell or to attack the capitalist beast), but the final decision as to whether or not he exists must rest with children.

We, on the other hand, need to look seriously at our own world. We need to think about how we, as anarchists, are contributing to the health of the system by lying, creating, disseminating and defending our myths and our dreams. It's our adult world which causes the problem; what are we doing about it?

**Diarmuid**

#### Reply from an AF member (in a personal capacity):

Diarmuid's letter makes a number of valid points and criticisms, which deserve exploring, however he has missed the main point.

The article was not an attempt at

political correctness run mad, but to use a topical character to explore the cultural importance of the consumerist spectacle that Diarmuid himself admits Santa can represent.

Poor old Santa was being used as an example of a class of things that bedevil our society, the props and walls of consumerism that relative wealth allow us to hide behind. It was not the intent of the article to pour scorn on storytelling, myth-making or the emotions that the unreal have the power to stir. The free society needs passion, excitement and wonder and its members will be the better for experiencing all the emotions life has to offer. But we will not shield anyone from its realities either, for to do so would be to deny ourselves true freedom, the freedom to make choices.

### How much easier just to go along...

The concept of Father Christmas was also being used to examine the ritualised and alienated nature of our lives and the willingness of people, including ourselves, to accept certain 'rules of the game', although as revolutionaries we ought not to. How often do we challenge the pedagogic teacher, the proselytising evangelical, the politician, and the pundit? How much easier to just go along with it all.

The difficulty I have with the Diarmuid's critique is where it asserts that, because capitalism has created a lie (the myth of Santa's reality) and perpetuated it successfully, that reality must be accepted and perpetuated by us. A more telling failure was to forget that means and ends are one. Lies cannot beget truth. The human impulse to share has been distorted by capitalism into a series of ritualistic and ceremonial transactions. Of course, it is possible to argue these are the traditions that (in part) make up our culture, but they are so tainted that in the creation of the free society they will need to be abandoned, rejected and the impulse to share that is at the heart of our humanity given expression every day of our lives. Nor can we really, surely, pick and choose which part of capitalism's spectacle we accept and endorse and which we reject. We can only reclaim parts of reality by deconstructing it and shaping it to our



own desires and needs but not otherwise.

Diarmuid was right to say that the imagination of children is different to our own and the capacity to imagine an important part of our ability to build realities around us. This is what humans do. But in doing so he attacked the need to create new realities (or rather to uncover them) in favour of the child's freedom to believe whatever society wants it to believe. And, in doing that, he has denied the possibility of revolution. For this is what revolutionaries do – challenge the artificial realities of capitalism – its lies and the lies we perpetuate and disseminate – and the way they are created, maintained and manipulated. What is the myth of McDonald's and what the reality? What human experience does Nike offer and what reality lies underneath? Are human beings 'naturally' warlike, competitive, acquisitive? And who says so?

The role of the revolutionary is to uncover and rediscover truth. It is in challenging the false reality and so-called 'truths' of capitalism that we pose our greatest challenge to it; all else is resistance, not revolution. In Ursula K LeGuin's novel of an anarchist utopia, *The Dispossessed*, its central character, Shevek, realises that the free society has become bureaucratic, moralistic, decayed. If it is to survive it must rediscover its revolutionary potential. When asked what he will do, he replies, "I'm going to go and unbuild walls". The walls Shevek went to unbuild were traditions, habits, rituals; customary ways of doing things, the rules that had crept into society and undermined freedom. He went to challenge the lies society was telling the people and the people were telling themselves. If we are truly to be free, we too must unbuild walls. And tell the truth.



# Aspects of Anarchism

New from the AF. This pamphlet covers many of the basic ideas of anarchist communism, from the meaning of anarchism, through violence, the environment to democracy and how to change society.

A straightforward introduction to our politics and great value at just £1, including postage and packing.

## Civilisation

**Dear *Organise!***

Your 'What's wrong with civilisation?' article is an interesting and welcome introduction to the topic of 'primitivism' and the major problems with this bankrupt ideology. Having studied primitivism in some detail over a number of years, I think the most important question you can ask is, are the primitivists serious in their wish to go back to the palaeolithic? This opens up the whole contradiction at the centre of their ideological belief system. On the one hand, they extol the life-ways of the Kalahari bushmen, or they say they want to go 'Back to Croatan', but on the other hand, they are wedded to their mobile phones, computers and websites. John Zerzan, for example, supposedly criticises symbols, art and language, but then declares, "For me, words are a better weapon to bring down the system than a gun would be". We see from this that when push comes to shove, he does not believe his own critique of language.

Similarly (as no doubt posted on some primitivist website somewhere), the *Unabomber Manifesto*, section 200 declares: "If the revolutionaries permit themselves to have any other goal than the destruction of technology, they will be tempted to use technology as a tool for reaching that other goal. If they give in to that temptation they will fall right back into the technological trap, because modern technology is a unified, tightly-organised system."

Primitivism is fundamentally false and hypocritical, a posture, the ultimate end point of postmodern irony. It has done,

and is doing great harm to the radical cause. Primitivism is not a position which can be held to with any integrity. I would urge activists everywhere to have nothing to do with it.

If people want to know more about the detail, and arguments about this, please consult my *Primitivism: An Illusion with No Future*, price \$3 from MPG, PO Box 10384, Eugene, OR 97440, USA.

**Steve Booth**  
Editor, Green Anarchist magazine  
9 Ash Avenue, Galgate, Lancaster LA2 0NP

**Is *Organise!* slipping?**

**Dear *Organise!***

Your magazine has always been respected for its analytical and critical approach, cutting through the bullshit peddled by leftists about the myths of national liberation and trade unionism. I appreciated the first article on anti-capitalism in the last issue. But in other parts of the same issue, the good old critical approach of *Organise!* seems to be lacking. I realise articles unless signed represent individual views of the writers, rather than the Anarchist Federation as a whole, but was Phoolan Devi as wonderful as made out? She fought for the lower castes and especially was seen as a symbol of resistance of lower-caste women, but her life involves a number of murky

incidents and she ended up as an MP, surely something no anti-parliamentarian can admire.

But on to Murray Bookchin. Whilst I would tend to defend him in general against people like the primitivist John Zerzan and Bob 'Copper's Nark' Black, I am not sure he is as pure as the driven snow. He attempts to distance himself from his followers, who see libertarian municipalism as an excuse for running in municipal elections, but this always comes over as ambiguous. What really is his attitude to 'libertarian' candidates standing for council elections, and how far does his analysis go of municipal councils which *Organise!* has rightly pointed out is the State in its local form and extension?

Finally, on Alfredo Bonnano. Whilst appreciating his early writings on unions and national liberation, I tend to feel that his later stuff is composed of a lot of individualist posturing, and has really little to do with class struggle. In fact, I get the impression he has given up on the capacity of the masses/working class to bring about revolutionary change, though I am willing to change my mind as I have not yet read his most recent writings. Oh, and what goes for Bonnano, isn't that true of Bookchin – that he has very little faith in the power of mass revolutionary change?

**Sebastian Melmoth**  
East London

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**David Edelstadt** *Continued from back page*

cultural circle in Buenos Aires after him.

One of the first songs concerning the exploitation of women workers was based on an Edelstadt poem 'Arbeiter Froyen' (Women Workers). This song appeared in the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* in 1891 and was popular in America and indeed in Europe. Litvak, a leader of the Bund (the social-democratic Jewish organisation in the Russian Empire) wrote that it was one of the most popular songs in Tsarist Russia. During the tanners' strike at Krinek near Grodno in 1897, the strikers sang this song and 'In Kampf' (In Struggle). This song on women was one of the most popular among those sung at Minsk in 1896-1897 and was sung again in New York between 1982-1987:

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# 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 goal we 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 do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.
5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.
6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.
7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with

management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

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

9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation.

We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method.

We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise 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 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.  
Anarchist Federation (Ireland), PO Box 505 Belfast, BT12 6BQ.