

# Contacts: anarchists in Newcastle in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Projectile

Projectile is an annual festival of anarchist film, culture and politics. 2008 is its 4<sup>th</sup> year, including a weblink with Noam Chomsky, films, workshops, music etc..

"Projectile hopes to go a little way to liberate anarchism in the UK from its current sub-cultural stale confines and impotent ideologues, and bring it out into the light of the day, as a set of ideas and actions that come tantalisingly close to what is needed if we are to achieve an equitable planet." 23-26<sup>th</sup> May [www.projectile.org.uk](http://www.projectile.org.uk)

## Anarchist Federation

"An organisation of class struggle anarchists which aims to abolish Capitalism and all oppression to create a free and equal society."

"We see today's society as being divided into two main opposing classes: the ruling class which controls all the power and wealth, and the working class which the rulers exploit to maintain this. By racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, as well as war and environmental destruction the rulers weaken and divide us. Only the direct action of working class people can defeat these attacks and ultimately overthrow capitalism."

Anarchist Federation PO Box 1TA, Newcastle NE99 1TA  
[Newcastle@af-north.org](mailto:Newcastle@af-north.org) <http://www.af-north.org/>

## North East Autonomous Class War

"Autonomous Class War thinks while participating in working class struggles against capitalism and its agents, the state and its officers, and fascism. We network within the Left and anarchists to help build class consciousness, working class actions and struggles, and we do confrontational and other forms of publicity."

07931 301901 [trevor\\_charlton@live.co.uk](mailto:trevor_charlton@live.co.uk)

## Industrial Workers of the World

"The IWW is open to all workers. Don't let the "industrial" part fool you. Our members include teachers, cleaners, social workers, retail workers, construction workers, bartenders, and computer programmers. Only bosses are not allowed to join. We are a volunteer-driven union, and this means we, not union bosses or bureaucrats, run the union."

Tyne and Wear Contact: [tyneandwear@iww.org.uk](mailto:tyneandwear@iww.org.uk)



# 12 Direct Action Contacts

## Glimpses of Autonomy

A monthly public forum to discuss campaigns for social and environmental justice, using creative tactics. We discuss, organise, watch films, eat, drink and act together. See [www.starandshadow.org](http://www.starandshadow.org) for meetings.

## North East Campaign Events

A regular list of campaign events taking place in North East England (Northumberland, Tyneside, Wearside, Co Durham, & Tees Valley). To subscribe, go to <https://lists.riseup.net/www/subrequest/northeastcampaignevent> or send an email to [northeastcampaignevent-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:northeastcampaignevent-subscribe@lists.riseup.net)

## Antifa

"We exist to confront fascist ideas, activities and organisations wherever and however they occur. We believe it is important to confront fascism physically as well as ideologically. We do not advocate the electoral process as the means of defeating fascism nor will we work with groups that do. Our structure is anti-authoritarian and non hierarchical."

<http://www.myspace.com/antifanewcastle>

## Radical History Contacts

## Wor Diary

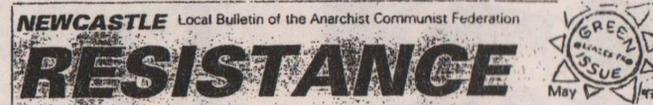
DIY local radical history project, produced a 2008 diary filled with the kind of stuff included here. More to come in 2009: another diary, walking tours, activist videos etc.. [www.wordiary.org.uk](http://www.wordiary.org.uk) [wordiary@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:wordiary@yahoo.co.uk)

## Thomas Spence Trust

Keeping the ideas of Thomas Spence alive with events & publications including 'the Hive of Liberty' available for £5 from: 93 Woodburn Square, Whitley Bay NE26 3JD

## North East Labour History Society

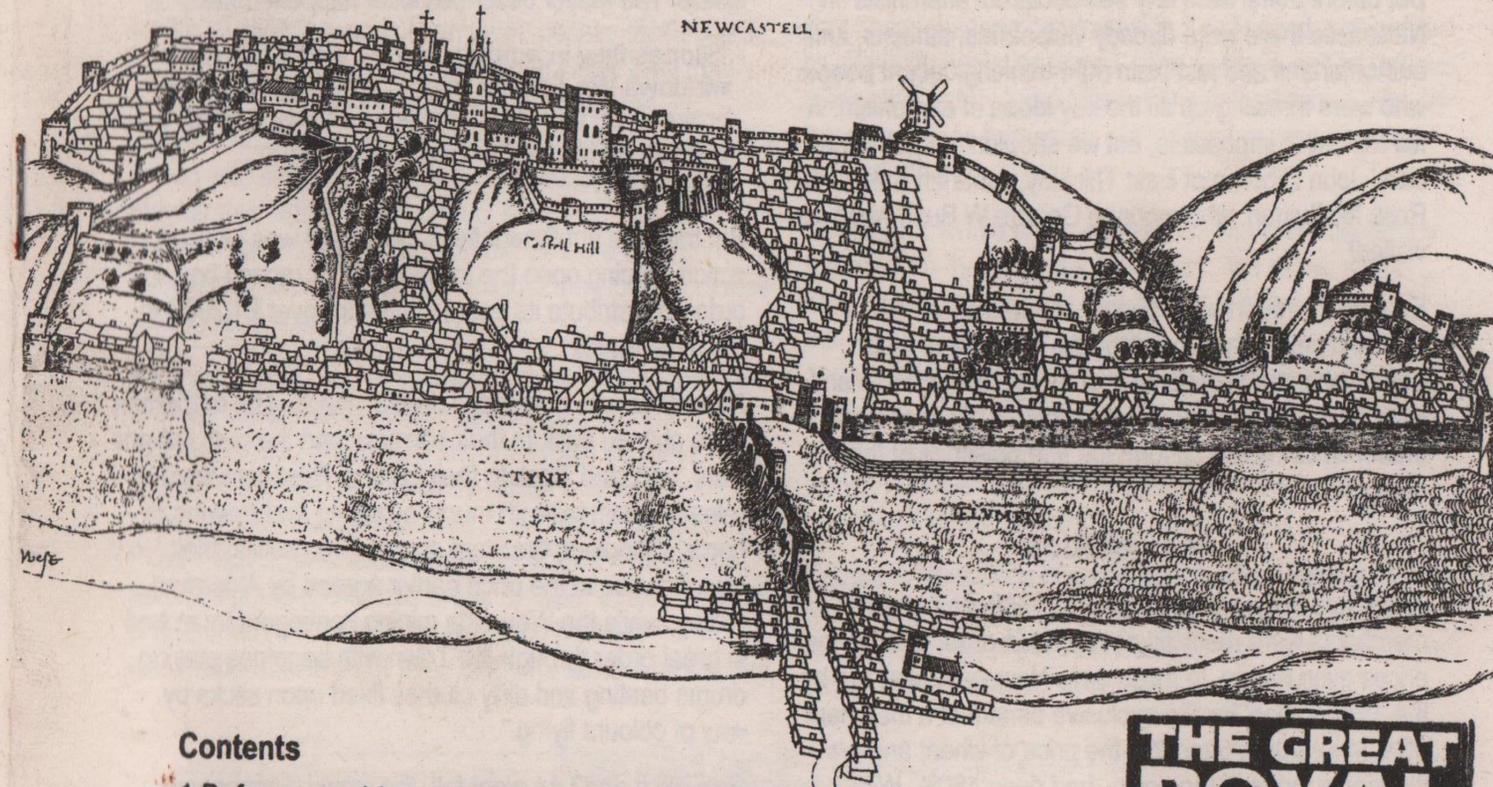
Dedicated to the study of working people's history in the region. Annual journal, public meetings & a monthly discussion group. [www.nelh.net/](http://www.nelh.net/)  
Secretary: John Charlton, 46 West Lane, Forest Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 7BE.



# The Secret Anarchist History

## of Newcastle

This pamphlet is free. I've cobbled it together to combine two things I love: anarchism and Newcastle. It introduces the main themes of what anarchism is about, but it does it by telling tales from the history of Newcastle and the North East. I hope you enjoy it!



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THE GREAT ROYAL DEBATE

do we hang them?

or do we shoot them?

TYNESIDE ANARCHIST GROUP  
PO BOX 1TA, FENHAM, NEWCASTLE, NE99 1TA

by Mike  
[oldalen@gmail.com](mailto:oldalen@gmail.com)

# Before anarchism existed, there was anarchism in Newcastle:

## hunger riots and popular resistance to authority

Anarchism didn't appear as an identified current in Britain until the late nineteenth century, when refugees fleeing oppression in Europe formed clubs in the poor immigrant districts of London. And Anarchism didn't take off as a proper mass movement until industrial workers organised themselves to fight back against the conditions they suffered under.

But before there were any self-declared 'anarchists' in Newcastle there were already visionaries, atheists, anti-authoritarians and just plain right-thinking decent people who were throwing up all the key ideas of anarchism. A full roll-call is impossible, but we shouldn't forget 'Free-born' John Lilburne of East Thickley, Amariah Batty, - & Ross McGuigan, who mooned George W Bush when he visited!

Even more importantly, people at times of crisis had time and time again shown by the strength of their organisation and solidarity how to fight for freedom and justice against tyranny and exploitation. It's these pre-anarchist currents that form the first episodes of this pamphlet.

### Hunger Riots

There had been a poor harvest in 1740, and grain merchants were restricting supplies in order to drive the prices even higher. In those days Newcastle was run by the 'Corporation' for the exclusive benefit of a merchant elite. In less than 6 months the price of wheat and rye – the staple foods of the poor – had risen 160%. While the Mayor of Newcastle & his fellow Aldermen – themselves corn merchants – rejoiced in this golden opportunity to make a killing, the poor were starving.

Discontent reached fever pitch on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, when in desperation the keelmen of Newcastle<sup>1</sup>, aided by pitmen from Wearside, plundered a grain ship. The Corporation of Newcastle sent Aldermen Ridley to parley with the mob, and to pacify them he agreed to price stabilisation – a vain promise as the merchants continued to restrict supplies.

Realising that the promise of affordable grain was a lie, a deputation of keelmen and pitmen made their way to the Guildhall to ask the Corporation of Newcastle to

make good their promise. At Sandhill the deputation and their accompanying crowd found their way blocked by a hastily assembled body of militiamen.

There was a confrontation, the militia shot a boy dead, and in response, the furious crowd charged straight through the militia and surrounded the Guildhall. The Corporation lost their nerve and barricaded themselves inside. The Mayor describes what happened next:

"Stones flew in among us from without thro' the windows like cannon shot ... at length the mob broke in on us. They spared our lives indeed, but obliged us to quit the place, then fell to plundering."

But this was not thoughtless looting – it was justice in action, forcing open the town 'hutch' or money box, in order to distribute its entire contents (over £1,200) to the most needy.

Newcastle was now in the rioters' hands. The militiamen were chased back to their barracks and the civic fathers were 'escorted' back to their homes. Prisoners were released from jail with much 'huzzaing and blowing of horns'. Shopkeepers were coerced into selling their merchandise at the price earlier agreed by Alderman Ridley, while the Wearside mining contingent "marched in great order through the Town with bagpipes playing, drums beating and dirty clothes fixed upon sticks by way of colours flying."

How did it end? As night fell, the crowd disappeared back to bed. Troops of cavalry clattered into town from Morpeth and Alnwick, but they could only find a small number of rioters. Forty were arrested, tried and transported for "feloniously taking money belonging to the Mayor and Burgesses" – money made from blatant profiteering.

**LESSON:** Don't forget that they let the people of Newcastle starve, and they would do the same again. Come the next major crisis, merchants will choose profit over the welfare of the people in Newcastle, just as capitalists do every single day on a global scale. Come the crunch, only our combined strength will save us. So don't lose the connection to your neighbours. Don't let them divide us white from black, scapegoating the weak. We come through crisis only by organising together & asserting ourselves!

### 'State Order' is against the Natural Order

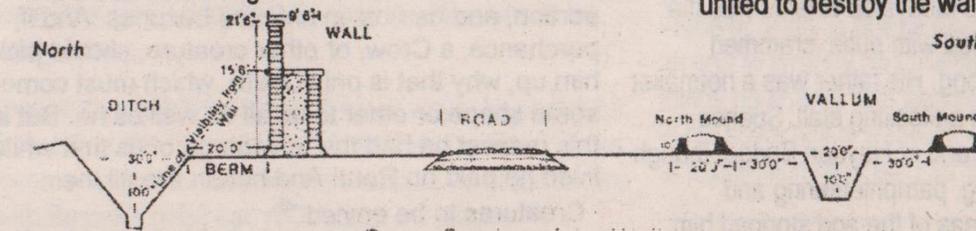
For centuries, the North East was a disputed 'border land' beyond the control of both English and Scottish monarchs. In times of conflict between the two, North Easterners showed their unruly independence. During one battle between English and Scottish armies, the locals participated by first raiding the Scottish supply train and then that of the English too, making off with what they could!

So discipline and obedience to the state did not come naturally – they were imposed through pre-planned acts of violence. For example, in 1761 the authorities were trying to enrol men into a new militia system by calling ballots of eligible men in each town: people rightly feared that if their name was put on the militia lists, then they might be forced into the army. So they resisted. At Gateshead, at Morpeth, at Belford and elsewhere, crowds armed with improvised weapons successfully stopped magistrates' attempts to conduct the ballot. But at Hexham, on March 9<sup>th</sup>, the authorities were determined to force it through and they had brought the North Yorkshire militia in readiness.

A crowd of 5000, led by miners from Allendale, gathered to resist conscription. After a tense stand-off, the authorities read the riot act and the crowd was shot into – with 40 killed – by the Yorkshire militia who became known as the 'Hexham butchers'. A 74-year old man, Peter Pattern, was later hanged for rioting. The folktale relates that when the rope broke he said "Innocent blood is ill to shed". He was re-hanged, and his body dismembered. He'd not even been in Hexham on the day.



Resistance to impressment – forced conscription to the navy – was an even more regular factor in the North East, as the King's pressgangs would roam the Quaysides looking for seamen to kidnap into service. On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1756, for example, 40 seamen successfully resisted an attempt to impress them into the navy at the customs house, S. Shields. One of the lieutenants, being hard pressed, drew his sword and ran one a sailor through the hand, but the wounded man, getting his sword from him, in return cut out his eye and part of his cheek and gave him a stab in the thigh.



In all the riverside communities, solidarity was the only way to protect each other from impressments, and pressgangs were regularly run out of the streets, pelted with filth and physically fought off. In South Shields there was an organised look-out system at times of great danger (such as the Napoleonic wars when sailors were in high demand). Often the women were those fighting in the front row, as they at least could not be grabbed and forced into service.

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 1803 a pressgang was driven out of Sunderland, "attacked by a multitude of Pilots and Women, who threw a quantity of Stones and Brickbats at him, they likewise threatened to hew him down with their spades, which are very dangerous weapons." The next day, the pressgang returned with Sunderland magistrates to attack the resisting crowd. "The seamen all fled, but we were attacked by large Mobs, principally Women, who by throwing things hurt some of the Officers, and rescued several men."

Sometimes whole ships' companies were intercepted by the navy on their way back into port – so crews might land high in Northumberland and walk into the town instead. And if a crew was taken, and a strike did not secure their release, then there was always the possibility of mutiny, or of revenge – on more than one occasion whole ships' companies were denied shore leave to prevent them exercising vengeance on those who had enabled their entrapment.

People in Newcastle also resisted the first attempt to organise a police force. They rose in rebellion against the King 4 Years after the Jacobite uprising had failed. When William the Conqueror installed Bob Comines as

the regional ruler in Durham, the local population stormed the castle and slaughtered him and the new Norman garrison. In retaliation, William the Bastard 'harrowed' the North, burning out villages & decimating the population so that the Norman aristocracy could be imposed and the foundations of a modern state built.

The Romans before him had to build that famous wall – Europe's first border – in order to impose rule on the border-lands and split apart the tribes that used to go to and fro at will. When Roman rule weakened, the 'Barbarian conspiracy' of Picts, Scots & Saxons quickly united to destroy the wall.

"They say border, we say: barbarian conspiracy!"



<sup>1</sup> The keelmen were skilled boatmen who transported coal and other essential supplies on the Tyne, in the days before our strong bridges were built. Their families lived in packed conditions on the slopes around the Quayside, & they were known for their 'atheism & anarchy'.

# Thomas Spence and the (real) Rights of Man <sup>2</sup>

In the 1770s, Newcastle was a thriving town where the ideas of the Enlightenment and their political implications were debated in clubs and radical societies such as the Robin Hood Society, the Constitutional Club, bookshops and a circulating library in the Big Market. When America declared a Republic, the radicals of Newcastle raised toasts in support, and when war was declared on America it was greeted by silence in the streets. The famous engraver Thomas Bewick stood in line with his friend Thomas Spence to sign the petition against war.

## Why we have the Town Moor

At this time Newcastle's Mayor and MP Sir Walter Blackett was trying to enclose the Town Moor and make a profit on leases, mines and turnpikes: a committee of Newcastle's Freemen (those with grazing rights on the moor) met to oppose them. In late 1771, therefore, a mass trespass led by two surgeons went burning down the hedges and letting in the commoners' cattle to trample crops in the enclosures. The fight then went to court, and ultimately the radicals and Freemen won: the selling-off of the Town Moor to private individuals was prevented by the 1774 Newcastle Town Moor Act.

Today, the Freemen are no longer a genuine association of ordinary Newcastle people (they're now an elite clique themselves), but we mustn't forget that the reason why we have such an amazing green space today is cos of mass trespass – militant direct action. During this campaign

Thomas Spence spoke and wrote against the enclosing of land and against those who threatened the customary rights of small freeholders and tenants. It was a major part of his political education - he decided that private property should be abolished and each parish should control its land for the good of all.



"God gave the Earth to you  
And not unto a Few  
But all Mankind."

(History of Robinson  
Crusoe)

## A Local Lad

Thomas Spence lived on the Quayside when it was the living heart of Newcastle, filled with pubs, crammed houses, lively streets and song. His father was a netmaker on the Quay, his mother ran a stocking stall. Spence himself taught on Sandgate and at Haydon Bridge, though his constant activity debating, pamphleteering and engaging with the radical ideas of the age stopped him

ending up as a teacher. Even in his education methods, Spence was innovative: he invented a 'simplified' alphabet and pronunciation guide that Southerners would have discovered to be a North-East accent (for example, Spence gave the same pronunciation to words such as could; cud; puss; put; putt which are all pronounced differently in the South).

Spence "got a number of young men gathered together, and formed into a debating society which was held in the evenings in his classroom in the Broad Garth, Newcastle" and one night they debated Spence's favourite topic, his land Plan. Spence was upset when Bewick did not back him up, and he lost the night's debate. So when the room had emptied he produced two cudgels and challenged Bewick to a fight. 6 foot tall & strong, Bewick easily beat the shorter, rickety, bow-legged Spence - & beat him pretty severely – but neither bore a grudge. Spence was always getting into trouble.

## Spence's Plan

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1775, Spence read to the Newcastle Philosophical Society a paper which he later gave the title 'The Real Rights of Man'. These rights, he said, are liberty, air, the light and heat of the sun, and, most important of all, the right of property in land – by which he meant not the right of a landowner to grab as much land as he could and use it for profit, but a right of common ownership – none of us may be excluded from access to the land. He was not content with this as just an abstract idea, but wanted action: he suggested that inhabitants of each parish should form a corporation to establish common ownership of land, and then rent it back to themselves as individuals at a nominal rent. This rent would be the only tax, and from it the schools, militia, and other useful things would be sustained. There would be no outside authority, no landlords, no aristocracy, no managers. Instead of forming a company to put the Plan into action, however, the Society expelled Spence for selling the speech as a pamphlet on the streets – but he kept on publishing it in new versions.

## A Worm Pays No Rent

"I have often thought how much superior the Condition of Reptiles is to that of human nature, in the present perverted state of things. A Worm pays no Rent: the Earth while he lives is his portion, and he riots in untaxed Luxuries. And if, perchance, a Crow, or other creature, should pick him up, why that is only Death, which must come in some shape or other to us all as well as he. But in this respect he had the advantage of us that while he lived he paid no Rent! And herein are all the Creatures to be envied."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> T. Spence, letter dated 25.9.1800.



French Revolutionary, on the Assembly Rooms.

## Agitator, Fly-poster, Graffiti-ist

The French Revolution led to a scared backlash against any perceived 'radical' ideas in Britain, and a series of Acts suppressed freedom of expression (suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1794, & 2 Acts in 1795 which extended the definition of High Treason to include acts of speech or writing, which allowed the authorities to imprison the likes of Spence without trial). Spence had now moved to London, where instead of being deterred by this persecution, he actually upped his agitation and pamphleteering – he was often arrested, but as one of his verses records, this didn't put him off:

"One night in his bed  
It came into his head  
While locked up in Shrewsbury jail,  
To send Field Preachers  
And peaceable Teachers  
With doctrines that never can fail."

The idea that education based on the rational new ideas of the Enlightenment would be enough, over time, to remove all the old superstitions and injustices of the world (without the need for violent revolution) was most fully argued in 1793 by William Godwin, who is considered the first proper English anarchist. You can read some of Godwin's original publications in the special collections of the Robinson library, and the influence of him, his wife Mary Wollstonecraft (whose 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' makes her our first feminist), son-in-law Shelley and daughter Mary Shelley (author of 'Frankenstein'), have helped transmit an anarchist defense of freedom down through 22 decades. Spence too deserves to be widely known.

Spence spread his message in novel ways- he opened a shop called 'the Hive of Liberty'; and when printed works became subject to laws against sedition, he made tokens (with Bewick's help) carrying radical messages. 'A Freeborn Englishman' (picture: a man with his lips

padlocked together), 'A Man and a Brother' (picture: a slave in chains). His favourite had on one side a cat and the inscription "I among slaves enjoy my freedom", on the reverse a dog with "much gratitude brings servitude".

He wrote verses and songs that were then sung in the pubs of London, stuck up handbills on the streets and avoided prosecution by using chalk to write up his messages on the walls. "The Home Secretary drew the attention of the police to sayings like 'Spence's Plan and Full Bellies' which had appeared on every wall in London"<sup>3</sup>.

After Spence's death, his followers continued to meet as 'The Society of Spencean Philanthropists' and their subversive activities led to charges of High Treason. In 1817 an Act was passed against "seditious meetings and assemblies", which explicitly prohibited "all societies or clubs calling themselves Spencean or Spencean Philanthropists". So debate might lead to enlightenment, but state violence can stop the debate.

## The Rights of Man

Thomas Paine's 'Rights of Man' is one of the best known works of democratic thought, credited with inspiring the principles of the American and French revolutions. But Spence may have been the first writer to actually use that phrase – and in a rather unusual place. An old miner from Allenheads had moved, at the age of 80, with his wife to live in one of the caves at Marsden rocks. Here they paid no rent, but lived in some comfort and were often visited by curious sightseers. Spence was one of these, and "exulting in the idea of a human being who had emancipated himself from the iron fangs of aristocracy", wrote in chalk above the fireplace:

"Ye landlords vile who man's peace mar  
Come levy rents here if you can  
Your stewards and lawyers I defy  
And live with all the rights of Man."

We should also place Spence in front of Paine for his recognition (shared with that other pre-anarchist, Gerard Winstanley) that "formal political liberty was inadequate unless accompanied by economic freedom, by equality." (Christopher Hill).

## Was Spence an Anarchist?

Spence lived for freedom against oppression, he was both a visionary and a practical agitator whose life should be celebrated by all who wish for a better world. His particular vision or 'Plan' is one of peace and common ownership, an end to tyranny and the law of the landlords. All these things he shares with anarchism. He was also *consistent* in his advocacy of freedom – he fought fiercely for freedom of expression (and paid for it with his health, his prospects,

<sup>3</sup> P.M.Ashraf (1984) The Life and Times of Thomas Spence

at least 8 arrests); he criticised Thomas Paine for not going far enough and for neglecting women's freedom (Spence himself argued for equal rights, and also a woman's right to divorce).

Marx includes Spence on his short roll call of early English communists and recognises him as a 'deadly enemy' to private property. But Spence would have hated notions of 'nationalisation' or ownership on a mass, centralised basis<sup>4</sup>. Spence was against 'giantism' and wanted small farms and local, parish-level government instead: he believed this locally-rooted, intimate form of government by residents of an area would eliminate "exisemen, customhouse men, collectors, army", and all the damaging bureaucracy of government.

He wanted the return of the land to a free, self-governing people: this was the key theme of traditional English radicalism, but what Spence added was a class-struggle, pro-common ownership dimension. Down with landlords and down with private property – and as legislation is made by the land-owning class, down with the law as well!

<sup>4</sup> "The elaborate verbiage of Marxism, which places so much emphasis on abstract economic ideas, is a far cry from his practical, sociable invective." A. Bonnett in *The Hive of Liberty* Thomas Spence Trust

In the Lit & Phil library, there is a copy of the 1910 Encyclopaedia Britannica, in which Kropotkin noted Godwin's contribution to wisdom:

"Laws ... are not a product of the wisdom of our ancestors: they are the product of their passions, their timidity, their jealousies & their ambition. The remedy they offer is worse than the evils they pretend to cure. If and only if all laws & courts were abolished, & the decisions in the arising contests were left to reason ... real justice would gradually be evolved."

Spence also shared with anarchists the seldom-heard argument that ordinary people, given the chance, are capable and fit to be trusted with organising their affairs without outside interference. This too was the main argument of Godwin: we all can reason, and therefore none of us need to be ruled over as if we were little, stupid children.

For more: Several old books on Spence can be found in libraries, and there is an active Thomas Spence Trust (see contacts) whose 'The Hive of Liberty' provides a good introduction:

"Oh Lads, you should have seen him gan,  
He was a man the likes you rarely see.  
With a pamphlet in his hand,  
And a poem at his command,  
He haunts the Quayside still,  
And his words sing."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From K. Armstrong 'Folk Songs for Thomas Spence'



**THE CIVIL CITIZEN**

1796

Published by T. Spence Turnstile Holborn

## Democracy is not all it's made out to be: the real history of Grey's Monument

The Monument is the most important landmark in Newcastle. It's where we meet our friends, it's where we turn left and make sure we've not lost our way. It's celebrated in our tourist brochures, in songs by Maximo Park, and, we generally assume, must celebrate a great thing: the granting of democracy in 1832, when Earl Grey (a local lad) steered a Reform Bill through Parliament and gained 'universal male suffrage': a vote for every man.

But the real story of Newcastle and the vote is much darker & more complex, and Earl Grey doesn't cut a decent figure at all. Here I will tell of how the vote was won, of what Earl Grey did, and of why there was a gap of 18 years between the monument going up, and an inscription being placed on it. And I'll use this to look at how anarchists view democracy.

The vote was won by the threat of revolution. On one level this was fine: campaigners were using the threat of revolution to make sure they got the vote. But the actual Reform Act was not what they had hoped for. It was used to gain power for the property-owning middle-class, and deny it to the poor – including those in Newcastle who had fought so hard to gain it. This betrayal ushered in a period of class-conflict between the N. East Whigs, merchant lords & coal-owners, and the vast majority of Newcastle's population – me and you, 200 years ago.

### How the Vote was Won

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1832 the mineowner Buddle recorded nervously how in Newcastle "numerous bodies of persons begin to arrive at an early hour from the country", "the surrounding villages, marching in rank, with military step, to bands of music", "A portion of the men were armed" and "it seems as if we were on the verge of a revolution". 40,000 assembled by 1pm, with banners reading 'Death or Liberty' and the tricolour, symbol of the French revolution. A petition of 19,190 was signed and taken to London that day. It was this show of force which stopped the ultra-Tory government ignoring the movement of reform, and made them allow Earl Grey to return to the Prime Ministership from which they had ejected him.

When pitowner James Losh claimed the Reform Bill "satisfied the whole nation" and was "universally approved", however, there were hisses of "No, no" from the pitmen. John Fife recalled the principle of insurrection if laws are unjust, at which "A forest of hands was uplifted in imitation of the speaker, and in solemn cadence the vast multitude ejaculated that memorable vow – 'In these principles I will live & die!' - followed by the raising of many oak saplings that "remained there for some minutes, amidst profound yet most significant silence." One

speaker, Charles Larkin, called for regicide against the 'uxorious king'

On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1832 the Reform Bill was passed, greeted with celebration dinners around Tyneside. It created Gateshead, Tynemouth & South Shields as constituencies, but denied most of their inhabitants any voice in how things should be run.

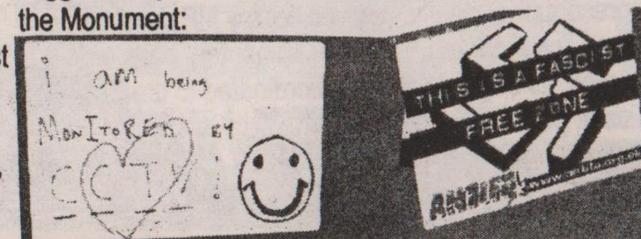
**Earl Grey "The betray'r  
Of every hope of those who placed him there."**

3

The idea of raising a monument to Earl Grey made sense to the Whigs (who later became the Liberal party) as he was their most famous member, they who in Newcastle dominated the local aristocracy, merchant and factory-owning class. But by the time the Monument was completed, the sense of pride and achievement it was intended to declare was thoroughly tarnished in the public mind. Radicals like Robert Lowery now considered Grey to be responsible for the perpetuation of 'Old Corruption', sinecures and nepotism: exactly the corrupt, undemocratic practices that the Reform Bill had, it was promised, been intended to remove. The Monument now represented the gap that lay between the north east's Whig-Liberal governing classes, and the poor communities who worked for them, and who were now drawn instead to the Charter: a democratic charter that would guarantee truly universal male suffrage, annual parliaments & other demands which were completely ignored by the self-satisfied gits in Parliament.

Although an inscription was originally planned to go with the Monument, 18 years passed before the rancour and hostility had subsided enough for them to finally get round to attaching one. In the 1840s the Monument was just "a landmark for benighted strangers who have lost their way in the toon". Campaigners for democracy detested Earl Grey as an 'apostate' – a traitor to democracy.

Even Lord Grey's death in 1845 failed to prompt moves to complete the inscription despite it generally being more acceptable to point up the virtues of dead men. Not till 1854 did verses finally go on the Monument declaring Grey officially noble and fine. But the verses we should remember are those from the time when any glorification of Grey would have triggered popular outrage. They are suggested by the *Northern Liberator* as the inscription for the Monument:



"Rear'd mid a cheated people, who seem born  
To flatter those who hate and those who scorn,  
Who, ever generous, give the selfish aid,  
Who, still confiding, trust – to be betray'd.  
Sprung of the hollow hand and venal hand,  
One lofty, he -, behold this column stand...  
Rais'd into power what was he? – The betray'r  
Of every hope of those who placed him there.

To truth a foe; to Liberty a shame,  
A standing jest upon the Patriots' name.

As seamen, with the tempests taught to sport,  
Outsail a foe by night and gain a port,  
So took he office underneath a storm,  
Pass'd a Reform Bill and denied reform...

A beggar'd nation pitiless he saw  
And when they ask'd for bread he gave them Law...  
Disdaining old oppressions – needing newer –  
He next impov-rishes the very Poor.

Starvation starves- sues ruin for a rate  
And strikes his Docket 'gainst the Workhouse gate.  
Denies the orphans' crust – the widows' mite –  
To keep his titled 'orders' rent-roll right..."

The specifics of what he did have now faded, but the lesson to take remains, that this product of the north east aristocracy was no champion of democracy, of progress, or of the betterment of his fellow man. He and his party used the agitation for the vote to gain power, to dislodge the Tories. And once that was done they turned their backs on those who had fought for reform.

### Anarchism and Democracy

As section 5 will show, the early socialist movement split into Parliamentary and anti-Parliamentary strands. In 2004 these opposing traditions faced each other across the Tyne, as the Labour Party Spring Conference was ringed about by security at the Gateshead Hilton, and the first Projectile Anarchist Film Festival was held at the Side Cinema, on the Newcastle bank of the river. An anti-war march passed between the two.

Anarchists recognise that the vote, and all bits of democracy we have, were fought for and achieved by struggle. But real democracy is not found in Parliament, and 'representative' democracy is a lie: my MP does not and cannot speak for me. Every Parliamentary party will be corrupted, its original values subordinated to the dynamics of power.

25th August 1941 The head of the statue on Grey's Monument is destroyed – by lightning!



### Election Special

Excited by the Election?  
Want some more democracy?

Then why not enter our 'What's Your Favourite Anti-election Slogan' Competition! Put Your Cross next to your favourite traditional saying and exercise your democratic right!

Don't Vote – it only encourages them
Use your Cross Wisely, Crucify a Politician
XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX Your Life-time's Supply of Democracy
If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It
Whoever you vote for, the Government gets in!

The flow of power actually goes the other way than the model pretends: government runs parliament (did MPs even vote on invading Iraq?), and the distance separating us from the country's decision-making body is deliberate – it keeps us voiceless, isolated, denied our say.

So as the slogans from this 2001 election pamphlet show, anarchists say 'don't vote!' But what instead? If you do nothing at all, then you are still not having your say, not being a real, responsible, autonomous individual.

That's why anarchists took up the alternative slogan: "Educate, Agitate, Organise!" Outside parliament, democracy still has a chance if there are people organising together, arguing, creating, deciding collectively. And refusing to let their voices be stolen by 'representatives'



## The Fight for Freedom Knows no Borders

Or: How Peter Kropotkin came to read the Chronicle in a French prison cell

In 1881, Newcastle MP and owner of the *Newcastle Chronicle* Joseph Cowen was decried by the Tories as "a Communist, a Revolutionist, a Republican, and an Atheist."<sup>6</sup> He might not have been quite all those things, but Engels gave a measure of how important this Geordie was when he expressed the hope that a new "proletarian-radical" party might be launched under him (like Engels & Marx's other predictions, it didn't happen).



### The Winlaton Armoury

4

Winlaton was the national centre for the Chartist movement's 'physical force' wing. Believing that argument, or 'moral force', would not be enough to get the rulers of the country to grant democratic reforms to the masses, the metalworkers of Winlaton supplied Chartists around the country with weapons. They hoped that they would never need to use them, but experience had taught them differently. On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819 in Manchester, a crowd of 80,000 peaceful demonstrators had been charged by Tory militia with 15 killed and 500 injured. On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1819 the people of Newcastle held a similar meeting, but this time they were protected by an armed backbone, estimated at 700. No massacre resulted.

### When the *Chronicle* fought for Liberty Across the World

Joe Cowen not only defended the miners' interests as Newcastle's MP, and turned the *Chronicle* into the most radical and freedom-supporting newspaper of the time. He also provided active support for movements of freedom in every country – Irish, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, American, Caribbean. His was a voice that consistently defended everyone's freedom, no matter what language was spoken, and he proudly "talked the Tyneside tongue" in the House of Commons. Cowen supported popular education for miners and miners' wives (founding the Blaydon Mechanics Institute in 1847), supported strikers and co-operative ventures, and when he opened the pages of the *Chronicle* to 'Prince' Kropotkin, got it banned in France where the government wished to imprison this most famous of the anarchist propagandists.

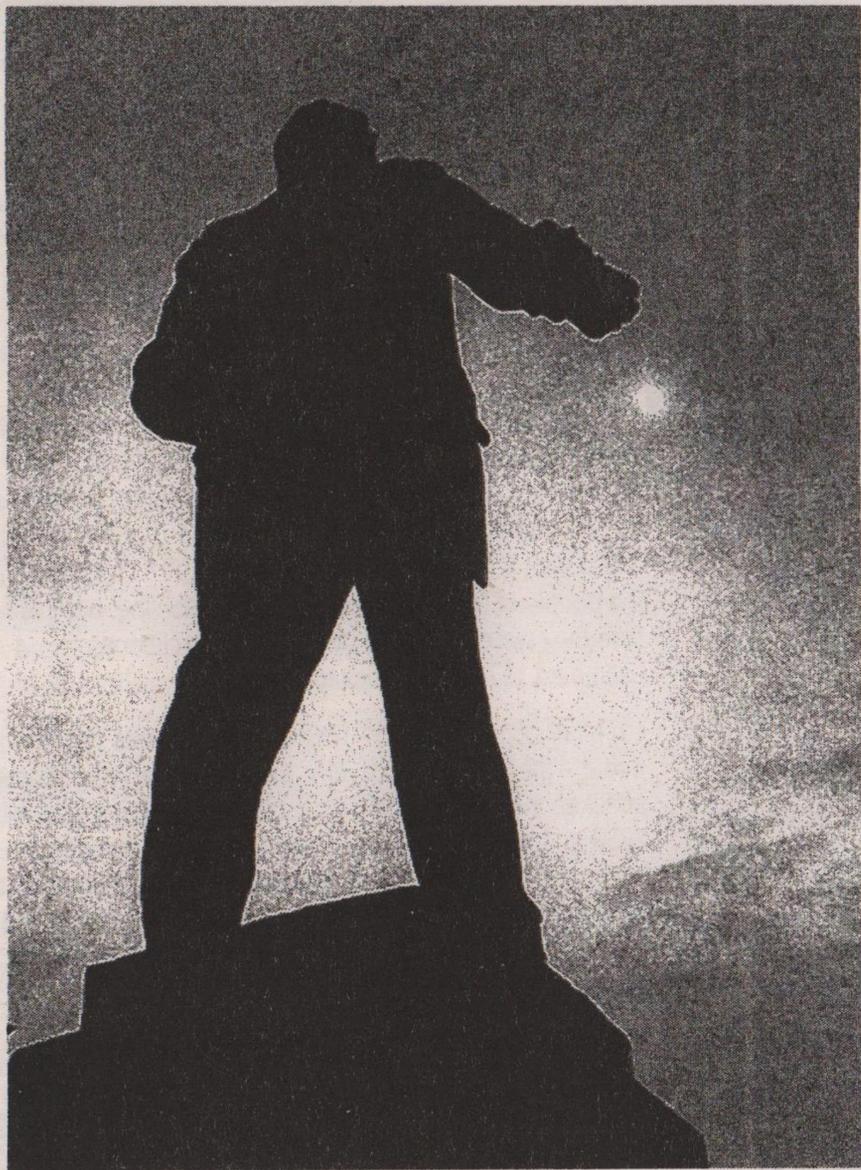
Cowen was central to Tyneside's "solidarity committees" with other national struggles, and raised more than just money to support the cause of freedom elsewhere. In 1860 the *Chronicle* recruited volunteers for a British legion to fight for Italian independence. In 1864 Cowen secretly built a warship, the *Kilinski*, to provide the Poles with a navy with which to fight the Tsar. Cowen was also connected to the Italian revolutionary Felice Orsini, who blew up the Parisian Opera House in 1858 in an attempt on the French Emperor, Louis Napoleon. The link between bombs and liberation is a tense one in the anarchist tradition – see box. To understand Cowen's view - that appeals for justice addressed to European tyrants must be backed "by a party of well-armed soldiers"<sup>7</sup> - we need to look at his upbringing near Winlaton.



Protesters against the Terrorism Bill gathering at Cowen's Monument in 2000 – some dressed as suffragettes and other Geordie freedom-fighters.

<sup>6</sup> Noted at Newcastle upon Tyne Liberal Association Meeting, 24.2.1881

<sup>7</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle* 22.3.1852.



### Cowen and the Anarchists

Although Cowen was not anarchist, he was impressed by anarchists he met in 1881, and he participated in the defence of Johann Most, editor of *Freiheit* (the UK's first anarchist paper, in exile from Germany), when Most was arrested in London for publishing a justification of tyrannicide of the Tsar.<sup>8</sup>

Cowen then invited Kropotkin to write for the *Chronicle* on life under Tsarism – the only English paper to side with

<sup>8</sup> Most fled Germany when Bismark's 1878 Anti-Socialist Laws sent hundreds to prison and thousands into exile. He was a journalist with the Social Democrats whose views were moving closer and closer toward anarchism (though his fetish for secret conspiracies and bomb attacks means he wasn't a great hero for later anarchists). The paper, *Freiheit*, was smuggled in its thousands into Germany via mattresses sewn up in Hull.

Kropotkin instead of the Tsar's men. Cowen wrote

"I like him very much. He seems a good fellow. He wants to be able to put his case before an English audience and I promised to secure him one in Newcastle."

And so Kropotkin addressed the Durham Miners at their Big Meeting in July 1882, speaking out against Tsarist oppression and also against coercion in Ireland, noting "that in the English dominions people are also imprisoned without being judged."<sup>9</sup> This link between freedom/oppression abroad and freedom/oppression at home is one of the most important ideas to keep alive in the present age of anti-terrorist laws, foreign invasions, and the denial of asylum to those fleeing torture.

<sup>9</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 3.7.1882.

Kropotkin went on to speak at the Nelson Street lecture rooms, greeted by a round of applause. In the archives at the Civic Centre, you can look at copies of the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* on microfiche, and read Kropotkin's address:

"It is in Newcastle that a Russian revolutionary writer has, for the first time, found the means of disclosing in an English daily paper, the true state of Russia; and it is, again, in Newcastle that I have found for the first time the honour of addressing a large English audience, to relate, in plain words, the true state of Russia."<sup>13</sup>

Cowen was unable to attend that meeting because he was in the House of Commons voting against the Irish Coercion Bill (indeed he was such a safe pair of hands that Irish MPs had their post addressed to him, to prevent it being read by British secret services), but he wrote:

"you will find no feeling anywhere in England against the Russian people. Why should there be? Our enemy, and yours, is despotism."<sup>14</sup>

This sums up Cowen's political viewpoint: he associated 'the people' (the working class) with a passion for democracy, equality and liberty. Even when the Irish in Newcastle lost the plot, beating up anyone who supported Italian independence against the Pope, Cowen stayed consistent in his support of freedom for all nationalities, and supported both Italian independence and Irish home rule.<sup>15</sup>

In 1883, Cowen was pressing for Kropotkin's release from a French prison "with little hope of success", and Kropotkin "with some surprise received in his cell an English friend, who had come with a message from another Englishman [ie. Cowen] offering to go bail for him." Cowen sent him a copy of the *Chronicle*, too.

<sup>13</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* 8.7.1882.

<sup>14</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* 8.7.1882.

<sup>15</sup> Only in his old age did his politics go shit.

Sources on Cowen et al: N.Todd *The Militant Democracy* & North East Labour History Society Bulletin.



### Anarchists and the Bomb

Perhaps it is finally fading now, but for many years, the commonest image associated with anarchism was that of the caped bomb-thrower. By looking back at the nature of the times when bombs really were used by anarchists – and thought of as a revolutionary tactic – we can see a context of desperation, of genuine starvation and despair, and of a hot thirst for vengeance by those such as Most who had seen their friends and comrades destroyed by state terror.

There was a (brief) period when the anarchist press threw up passionate justifications of violence, and when bombs were seen as a valid and potentially revolutionary tactic. But the most violent advocates were often in the pay of the police, and it was quickly realised that the tactic was having the opposite effect on the cause of freedom than intended. By the time of anarchist bomb explosions in London in 1894 (and one on a tube train in 1897), the anarchist press was more likely to state:

"DYNAMITE IS NOT ANARCHY It is the weapon of men driven to desperation by intolerable suffering and oppression. Our ideal can be realised without it, if the rich will let us. So long as we can express our ideas freely we shall be content with advocating PASSIVE RESISTANCE."<sup>16</sup>

The anarchist tradition has advocated peaceful means ever since, and compelling arguments that "violent means will lead to violent ends" have been used not only to limit the anarchist use of violence to self-defence, but also to condemn the use of violence by the state. Anarchists have been amongst the staunchest opponents of war, aggression and militarism. We believe that the existence of states and power-structures is in itself a cause of violence: remove the state and you remove the biggest cause of violence in the world.

<sup>16</sup> The 'Anarchist', Sheffield, March 1894.

### Guns for Russia, Bombs in Spain

The problem remains, though, that the bad guys have no qualms about using violence against movements which seek to unseat them. For this reason, there have been recurring occasions when rank-and-file people in the North East have seen the need for defensive violence.

One example is the 'Cartridge Case Mystery' reported by the press at the time that Russia was in the grips of civil war, when many were shocked at the western capitalists' backing of Stolypin's 'White' military offensive against the Russian revolutionaries. In April 1907 35,000 gun cartridges were found in Sunderland, and then more were found in Leazes Park road, Newcastle, eventually amounting to 117,250 cartridges. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, those found guilty were fined £6.

Even in the 1960s, Tyneside's 'Committee of 100'<sup>17</sup> rejected a pacifist position, and when Scottish anarchist Stuart Christie was arrested in 1964 during an attempt to kill the fascist dictator Franco, up to a thousand youths marched in Newcastle & smashed the windows of the Spanish Embassy in response.<sup>18</sup> Christie has recently said:

"All I can say is that couldn't know then what we could only know today. Things that appeared possible 30 years ago – and the way to achieve those ends – wouldn't work today. Times change, as do tactics and strategies. The currency of that particular form of gestural protest has been debased since the mid-1970s with the murderous campaigns targeting innocent bystanders run by the IRA and ETA, culminating in the crusade-like slaughters of 11 September. The philosophy and attitude of these guys is exactly the same as Franco's old Foreign Legion commander, General Millan Astray whose constant watchword was 'Viva la muerte!'"

For those of us who see the problems that guns and bombs cause for freedom, the solution has been found in the anarchist conceptualisation of direct action. Anarchists reject passivity, because failing to stop violence and injustice means that greater violence and injustice will result. So we must take action, and this must be direct – not lobbying somebody else to do it for us, not putting our energy into power-structures (like police or military elites) that will, in future, lead to more violence and injustice. Direct action might be sabotaging the war machine, it might be re-cycling tools so that more don't need to be made, it might be organising a neighbourhood meeting to stop bad developments happening on your street. It must be effective without being oppressive. And it is wonderful when it happens.

<sup>17</sup> Direct action wing of the 'Ban the Bomb' peace movement.

<sup>18</sup> D.Douglass (2000) *Geordies wa Mental*

# William Morris's visit to Newcastle

## & the anarchist roots of socialism

We saw with Thomas Spence & William Godwin how some people reached anarchism by exploring the radical conclusions of the liberal political tradition – the rights of man, the principles of democracy and of personal liberty, and the way that reasoned debate will sooner or later work out that all kings, superstitions, inequalities and infrastructures of violence must go.

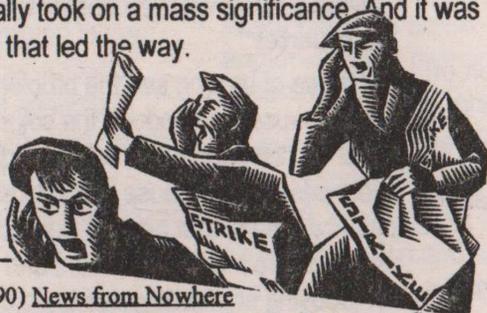
The 2nd source of anarchism lies in the socialist tradition, which first formed organisations in London - and which quickly developed the arguments and problems that have dogged socialist parties ever since. In opposition to those who were trying to turn the socialist organisations into Parliamentary parties to contest elections, participants in these organisations developed anarchist and anti-parliament positions.

Thus William Morris, the most influential and popular of Britain's early socialists, argued alongside the anarchists that

"Was not the Parliament on the one side a kind of watch-committee sitting to see that the interests of the Upper Classes took no hurt; and on the other side a sort of blind to delude the people into supposing that they had some share in the management of their own affairs?"<sup>19</sup>

Britain's anarchist movement arose from these debates - from the need to counter the arguments of those amongst the socialists who wanted to turn the movement into a parliamentary party or mere lobbying group for reforms.<sup>20</sup> But it was only with the great wave of industrial unrest of the 1880s that, for the first time, socialism (and anarchism) really took on a mass significance. And it was the North East that led the way.

5



<sup>19</sup> W. Morris (1890) *News from Nowhere*

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Lane's 'Anti-Statist, Communist Manifesto' was first read to the Socialist League as a 'minority report', and became Britain's first anarchist manifesto. "We revolutionary socialists desire to organise ourselves in such a manner as to render politics useless and the powers that be superfluous ... We aim at the abolition of the State in every form and variety ... We are Atheists in point of philosophy ... Anti-Statists in point of politics... Communists as regards the economic development of human society... We are free communists as opposed to the state communists..."

It is hardly necessary for us to add that we fight against (on the same principle of the abolition of private property), the institution of the family, such as it exists nowadays. Thoroughly convinced partisans of the free union of the sexes, we repel the thought of marriage..."

### Morris & the Miners

On the 10th April 1887 William Morris arrived in Newcastle, and accidentally bumped into the authoritarian Marxist H.M. Hyndman. These men had both arrived to address the striking miners of Durham & Northumberland, and to press the fortunes of their rival socialist organisations, the Socialist League and the Social Democratic Federation. Morris reports that Hyndman

"I suspect was not over-pleased to see me, as the S.D.F. have been playing a rather mean game there ... after seeming to agree that neither organisation should press itself on the miners [the SDF] has been trying to bag them after all."

You could replace the initials with the SWP and the Socialist Party, the lame dynamic would be the same. But next day, Morris was astounded and inspired when he encountered a genuine mass movement of the workers that was intelligent, passionate and disciplined, and which was fighting for the same kind of world as he, the other socialists and the anarchists desired.

Morris went first to Seghill, where he was entertained at a miner's cottage by "a tall strong man, his face wrecked by an accident which had blown out one eye and damaged the other", "a kindly intelligent man", talking with "that queer Northumbrian smack". Morris was impressed by the miner's analysis of the issues of the strike and by his family's dignity. They went by train to Blyth, where Morris made an impromptu 40 minute speech before a large crowd.

"Then we set off, rather a draggle-tailed lot because we couldn't afford a paid band ... as we plodded on through the dreary (O so dreary) villages, & that terrible waste of endless back-yard, we could see on our left hand a strip of the bright blue sea, for it was a beautiful sunny day."

After about 3 miles they joined another contingent with band and banner, and "soon swelled into a respectable company" of about 2,000 strong. After a six-mile march they reached the meeting-field and found two strong contingents already there, and "groups of men and women ... streaming up the field from all about." Soon many thousands strong, with contingents from all the mining villages around, Morris and his SDF rivals spoke to a crowd that was (unlike the East End of London) "orderly and good-tempered" but steadfast and militant: when the reporters in the waggon beside the speakers took out their notebooks, the miners threatened to "put them out ... unless they promise to put all down!"



The experience made a deep impression on Morris, who recalled the earnest faces of the miners, the people in the front rows sitting or squatting down to let the rest see, the many women including "one (elderly) when any obnoxious person was named never failed to chorus it with 'Put him out!', and beyond the desolate "backyard" to the collieries, "the bright blue sea forming a strange border to the misery of the land." His speech was reported verbatim in the *Chronicle*, and is reprinted here:

From Blyth, Morris and his fellow socialists got the train to Newcastle where they had a "bite and a drop" in the station refreshment-room before continuing on to Ryton Willows, for another meeting where "we had a crowd about us in no time and I spoke, rather too long I fancy, till the stars came out and it grew dusk and the people stood and listened still, & when we were done they gave three cheers for the Socialists, & all was mighty friendly and pleasant: & so back we went to supper and bed, of which I for one was glad enough..."

The next week, back in London, William Morris "couldn't help contrasting our Cockneys much to their disadvantage with the northerners". Even the anarchists in London pissed him off, arguing pointlessly over abstract points and thus wasting their energy – only when anarchism engaged with the practical tasks started by the great workers' movements did it really grow up and become relevant in Britain (see part 7).

They were connected with a great struggle. Into the details of the strike he would not enter. He quite understood that they were at present in such a position that they could scarcely live at all. Their struggle was for a position in which they would be able to live a life which people called tolerable. (Hear, hear). He did not call the life of a working man, as things went, a tolerable life at all. When they had gained all that was possible under the present system, they still would not have the life which human beings ought to have. (Cheers). That was flat. What was their life at the best? They worked hard day in, day out, without any sort of hope whatever. Their work was to work to live, in order that they might live to work. (Hear, hear, and 'Shame'.) That was not the life of men. That was the life of machines. That was the way in which capitalists regarded them. . . Even supposing he did not understand that there was a definite reason in economics, and that the whole system could be changed, he should still stand there in sympathy with the men present. . . If the thing could not be altered at all, he for one would be a rebel against it. (Cheers.)"

The miners had only one choice, Morris said. They must either rebel, or be slaves. When the workers were organized throughout the country, and demanded Socialism with one voice, the masters might give in peacefully:

"He admitted there was another thing they might do. If there was such a thing as a general strike, he thought it was possible that the masters of society would attack them violently—he meant with hot shot, cold steel, and the rest of it. But let them remember that they (the men) were many and the masters were few. It was not that the masters could attack them by themselves. It was only the masters with a certain instrument, and what was that instrument? A part of the working classes themselves."

Then Morris, veering back to the old prescription of the League, told the miners that they must organize not for a partial victory, but a true victory:

"Not a little more wages here and leave to work six days instead of four. He wished they only worked two days and got the same wages or more. Six days a week for the work they had to do was a great deal too much for men of ordinary body and strength. What, he asked, was a life of real happiness? Work for everybody who would work. For him who would not they could not say that Society had rejected him: he had rejected Society. The masters had rejected Society. He wished that the men might have a life of refinement and education and all those things which made what some people called a gentleman, but what he called a man. (Cheers.) That was the victory he wished them. Nothing short of that would be victory. And yet every skirmish on the road and every attack on the position of the masters brought them nearer. They must go on until all the workers of the world were united in goodwill and peace upon earth. (Loud cheers.)"

# Clousden Hill - refugees and cucumbers

"We seek the triumph of our Cause without violence, but through free work and voluntary consent."  
"Every member works according to his or her ability and enjoys equally all the Colony can grant."

# 6

In the 1890s several anarchists started cooperative colonies as an attempt, not so much to spread and lead to revolution, but to experiment with the possibilities available to us in the event of general social reconstruction. The most important of these anarchist communes was at Clousden Hill farm, near Forrest Hall, Newcastle. This is the story I'll tell now.

In April 1895 the 'Horticultural Review' reported Kropotkin's research into intensive agriculture in Jersey, and inspired anarchist communists in Sunderland to try and form a land colony in the North East. Kropotkin was looking at ways to reduce back-breaking labour, and pointed out that much more could be grown in heated greenhouses (this was cutting-edge science!). He suggested that the best location for these would be somewhere near coal mines, as coal to heat the greenhouses could be bought quite cheaply without massive haulage costs. (Kropotkin would have loved our new renewable energy technologies.)

## Frank Kapper advertises in the Chronicle

Frank Kapper was an anarchist-communist, which meant that he wanted a society where private ownership of agriculture and industry would be replaced by small self-governing communes distributing wealth to the people according to their needs.

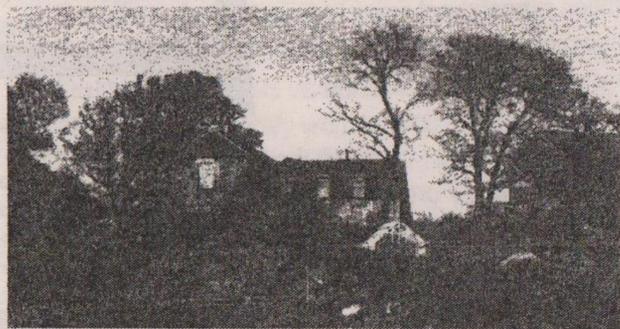
"From each according to his abilities,  
to each according to his needs."

His ideas forced him from his home and eventually turned him up, penniless and looking for work as a tailor, in Newcastle sometime around 1893. Having changed his name to Kapper, he joined with other tailors, and some students and factory workers, to form an Anarchist Club. Here he taught French to 'the English comrades' - but instead of using the usual French classics, he translated books and pamphlets on anarchism!

The Newcastle Anarchist Club held open-air meetings on Sundays with Kapper as the main speaker - early in 1894 he upset the more staid Labour leaders by arguing that unemployed workers should raid food shops to feed their hungry children. At this time, anarchist journals such as *Liberty*, *Freedom* & *Commonweal* were widely read in colliery villages, and there were anarchist meetings in Sunderland, Silksworth, South Shields, Newcastle, Stanley & Gateshead.<sup>21</sup>

The ideas and concerns of anarchist-communists like Kapper were shared by others - many in the trade union and co-operative movements - that were looking for escape routes from the hideous wage-slavery that, at the time, sent most to an early death and only reaped a profit for a few fat industrialists.<sup>22</sup> Many people, therefore, followed the story that began with Frank Kapper's advert in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* for land on which to set up a 'free communist' farm, and which took root when a landowner at Clousden Hill replied.

In October 1895 *Freedom* reported that the Clousden Hill Free Communist and Cooperative Colony at Forrest Hall was intending to "demonstrate the superiority of Free Communist Association as against the Competitive Production of to-day". An example of this was to provide "The mutual assurance of its members against the evils of poverty, sickness, infirmity and old age" (an almost unheard of ideal!) Visitors included Elisee Reclus (famous anarchist veteran of the Paris Commune), Tom Mann and Harry Snell (later to become a junior minister in the 1929 Labour government). *Freedom* called it "one of the most hopeful undertakings that has ever been seen in these islands."



The Commune's building in 1979, before modernisation.

## Visitors from all over the anarchist world

In Autumn 1895 the exiled German anarchist Bernard Kampffmeyer, who had already studied intensive agriculture in Jersey, slipped away from his Scotland yard 'shadow' in London to come and visit Clousden Hill. He later founded the German 'garden cities' movement. Other visitors included a Catholic anarchist (perhaps the only one in the UK at the time) and an 'ultra

<sup>22</sup> A manifesto of the Durham miners, for example, included "the great ideal of living in perfect harmony in co-operative communities, each seeking the good of all and all seeking the good of each; broadly based upon the land." 1896

individualist<sup>25</sup>, Dr. Ladislav Gumplowicz, who stands at the opposite end of the anarchist spectrum from Kropotkin & Kapper's anarchist-communism. William Morris's old group, the Hammersmith Socialist Society, helped raise funds. Followers of Tolstoy came, and annoyed the others by planting "a diminutive orchard in a most unsuitable position, another tried duck-breeding without the slightest knowledge of the subject". Frank Starr records how

"Would-be Communists came tumbling in from all quarters of Europe. Two Danes and a native of Saxony; a German woman and her daughter; a compositor and a professor of literature from Belgium, both fresh from imprisonment for political offences; a Russian, who had suffered in many lands for his revolutionary writings."

Forrest Hall thus became a place not only of pilgrimage but of exile and a respite from persecution for multitudes of political activists. In the summer, up to 250 people arrived at the weekends, all of which made getting the cucumbers, tomatoes and flowers to market that bit more tricky.

When Kropotkin was back in Newcastle in January 1896 (lecturing on land cultivation at the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society), he also visited Clousden Hill, stating "he was much gratified with what he had seen and the manner in which the farm was being worked." He turned down their offer of being the colony's treasurer, however, on the basis that cooperative projects usually failed, unless they were part of a mass, interconnected movement.

## "the house slave, the women"

Kropotkin's advice to the colonists had been published in the *Chronicle* in February 1895:

"do all possible for reducing household work to the lowest minimum ... In most communities this point was awfully neglected. The women and the girls remained in the new society as they were in the old - slaves of the community. Arrangements to reduce as much as possible the incredible amount of work which women uselessly spend in the rearing up of children, as well as in household work, are, in my opinion, as essential to the success of the community as the proper arrangement of the fields, the greenhouses, and the agricultural machinery. Even more. But while every community dreams of having the most perfect agricultural or industrial machinery, it seldom pays attention to the squandering of the forces of the house slave, the women."

<sup>25</sup> Anarchism is not the same as individualism, just as real freedom is not the same as selfish 'license'. Freedom is social, and shared, otherwise it becomes another form of oppression.

The colonists did show attention to gender equality in the original constitution, and in the move to Clousden Hill farm in July 1895 there were "11 members, of whom only 3 were men". But only the names of the men are recorded,<sup>26</sup> and the Colony ended up with a strict division of labour, & many more men than women.

In August 1897 4 greenhouses were built, and used to grow chrysanthemums, orchids, roses, tomatoes and cucumbers - these were bought by visitors to the farm, and sold by children on the streets of Newcastle. The strange anarchists were even gaining acceptance from their neighbours. In many ways, therefore, Clousden Hill succeeded in showing the possibilities available to small collectives of people without the privilege of masses of money, shipping fleets, foreign plantations or the ownership of massive tracts of land (132,000 acres of Northumberland are still 'owned' by the Duke of Northumberland alone). But in 1898 Clousden Hill's original members left, allowing those keen to turn it into a cooperative business to have their way - it was renamed Clousden Hill Co-operative Nurseries Company Ltd, and finally ended in front of Newcastle's bankruptcy court in April 1902.

In the same year, Frank Starr published his amusing, though disillusioned, account of his time at Clousden Hill:

"Angels might have lived the life, flesh and blood could not. Men and women, with all their human failings, are still too distant from the time when the lion shall lie down with the lamb." Animals were too stubbornly individualist to make good anarcho-communists: "The question of live-stock provided obstacles which ... proved almost insuperable. The fowls would not lay, bees refused to swarm, rabbits ran away and the ducks died. One of the newly-purchased cows proved to be blind, another went mad, whilst a third died when calving. With horses matters fared no better. One fine-looking young beast contracted a habit of bolting whenever he was yoked, a second preferred laying down to pulling a load, and another manifested his contempt for things communal by kicking the front out of every cart to which he was harnessed."

Maybe the animals had been listening to Dr. Gumplowicz.

MORE: N. Todd (1986) *Roses & Revolutionists* Other co-operative enterprises in Newcastle have included mining, engineering, printing, housing, music, and consuming. Many are shortlived but others are still around today - and every experience in co-operation gives us an education in how to live in a better way.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Kapper (former glazier), Robert Walker (former farmhand) and E. T. Dipper (former coal miner).

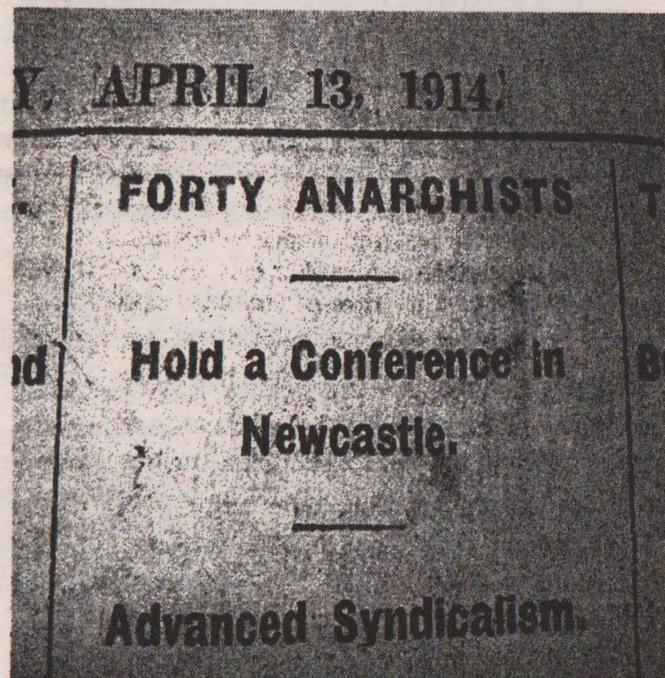
<sup>21</sup> *Freedom* June 1895.

# The 1914 conference

## Syndicalism identical to Anarchism

In 1914, the 1st World War was destined to wipe out the emerging industrial anarchist movement in Britain. But here in Newcastle there was a brief moment in April, before the war, when the new form of anarchism was proudly declared. There was a national anarchist conference in Newcastle, on Leazes Park Rd. Although reporters were denied access, an official delegation told the *Chronicle* that

"Syndicalism should be the practical expression of the philosophy of anarchism, and if syndicalism were absolutely pure, it would be identical with anarchism."



This is the viewpoint of a new form of anarchism, one which was rooting itself not just in debating clubs, or in co-operative experiments, but in the industrial heartlands of the UK – and nowhere more so than the North East. This national conference, featuring many participants from Scotland, was attended by a bus load from Chopwell. *Freedom* reports that "the Chopwell boys came in dozens, each an embryo fighter, from which more will be heard".

Will Lawther was amongst those who spoke – he was one of the mainstays of the village's own Communist Club and the Worker's Freedom Group which he hoped would be "the forerunner of a real rank and file movement"<sup>27</sup>



### What is Syndicalism?

Syndicalism at the time was offering bridges between anarchists and other (anti-parliamentary) socialists. What mattered was to embrace the industrial struggle, support strikers' autonomy and resist Parliamentary and other top-down controls. A 1910 strike showed the character of syndicalist direct action: at Marley Hill Colliery, during a demonstration marching for Gateshead

"about 400 'young-uns' broke away and charged for the colliery ... [holding it] under siege for above an hour before the raiding party returned to the main body of the march." The march was attended by "an army of miners 10,000 strong ... to demonstrate against John Johnson, a DMA official who was standing in the parliamentary election."<sup>28</sup>

Opposition to union officials was celebrated by syndicalists who saw them as agents of control dampening down workers' desire for change and their power through self-organisation. Syndicalists wanted power to be decentralised, held by each small group of workers (a 'syndicate'), and then networked horizontally between workers instead of being exerted from above, by bureaucrats who resembled the other power-brokers they lunched and liaised with.<sup>29</sup>

In 1908 John Turner gave a talk on 'What Anarchism really means' to a crowded meeting in the Socialist Society's hall on Blckett St in 1908, "greeted by vigorous applause". Turner gives a good idea of what anarcho-syndicalists were advocating. He explained that

"We Anarchists have a line to work upon, to teach the people self-reliance, to urge them to take part in non-political movements directly started by themselves for themselves ... We teach the people to place their faith in themselves, we go on the lines of self-help. We teach them to form their own committees of management, to repudiate their masters, to despise the laws of the country – these are the lines which we Anarchists intend to work along. Let them, if they will, commence by claiming the right to elect their own foremen. This very day I have suggested to the men on strike that the trade unions should take over the work rather than the contractors. They might follow this up until they gradually get control of the whole concern, and they would find the capitalists as unnecessary as monarchs have been found to be."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> D. Douglass *Pit Life in County Durham*.

<sup>29</sup> The benefits of decentralisation would be similar to those of Spence's parish system, but this time they were designed for relevance in an industrial age.

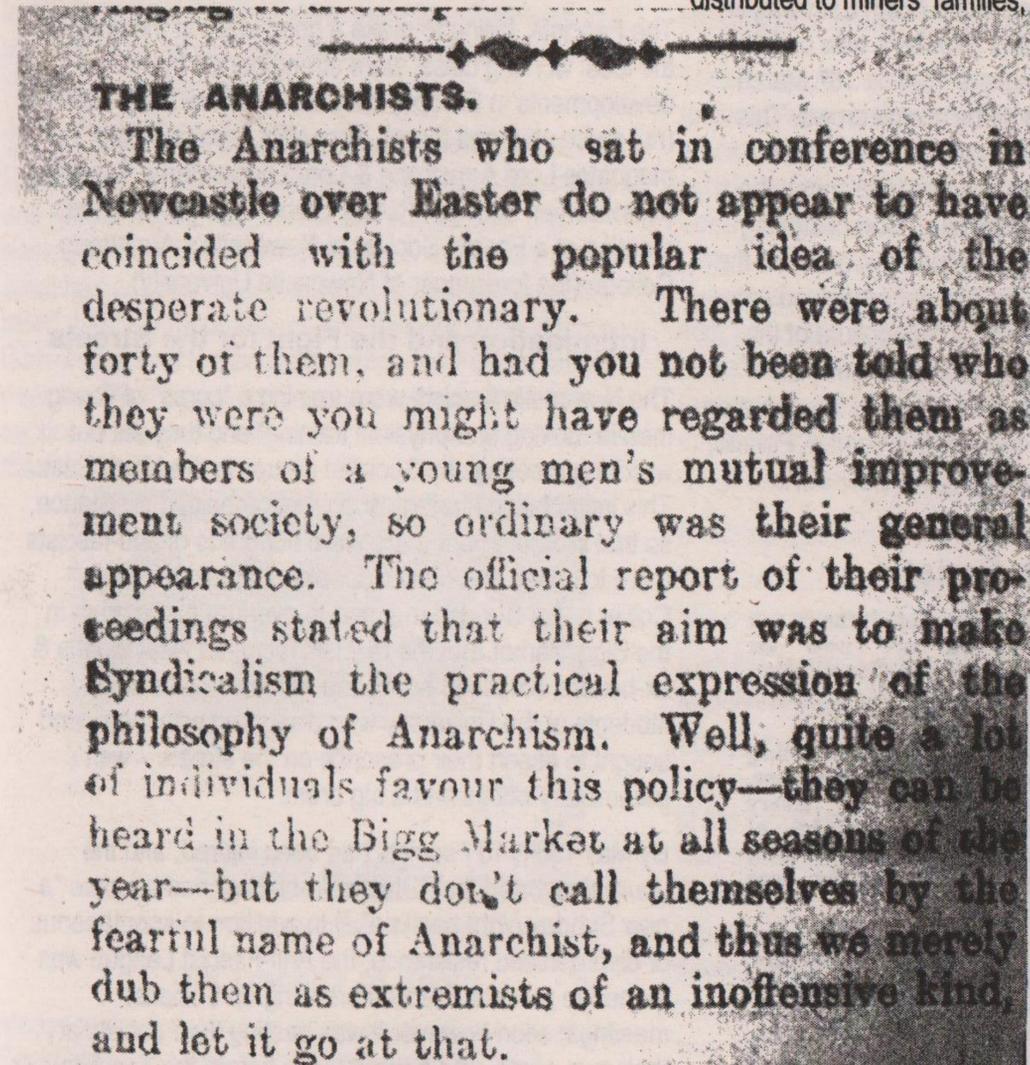
<sup>30</sup> Turner quoted in J. Quail (1989) *The Slow Burning Fuse*

The strength and possibility of the syndicalist method of organisation was demonstrated in areas under anarchist control during the Spanish Civil War. Only a sea of blood could wipe out the power of grassroots workers' self-organisation.

### "a city set upon a hill that cannot be hid"<sup>31</sup>

200 men from Chopwell were killed in the First World War, which put an end to a 7 year growth of anarchism, but the pit village retained its reputation for militant radicalism into the 1921 strike, and the 1926 General strike, after which it gained the nickname 'Little Moscow' – a reputation that 'Red Chopwell' was proud of.

Chopwell was able, 11 months early, to start the strike which, in May 1926, became the General Strike – because they had learnt the lessons from previous struggle, they were organised, and they had elected their own to gain control over the local council. The miners of Chopwell also continued striking when the General Strike was called off. Nowhere was more militant and determined. As Tom Brown puts it,



<sup>31</sup> Councillor Bolton, on release from prison for his part in the 1926? strike – preventing scab food lorries from profiteering during the strike.

in Britain the workers in the mining areas, particularly Durham, have shown they can feed the workers by collecting food and running communal kitchens during a strike of three, four, six months or even longer. The workers can and must ensure their own food supplies in strike and revolution."

In the 1921, 1926, 1970s & 1980s strikes, the mining communities of Chopwell (and elsewhere) showed us how to survive as a community: by organising soup kitchens (with children given priority), growing food on allotments, harvesting wild food, hunting rabbits, and standing together because they had to, win or lose. The power of the North East's mining communities, achieved through community solidarity and determined self-organisation, made it such a threat that the British state felt compelled to use everything it had against them (this was as true in the 1980s as it was in the 1920s).

In April 1921 a squadron of armoured cars was stationed in the Bigg Market, and patrolled the streets of Durham, Rowlands Gill, Chopwell. At Burnhope, too, the day after a baker's van had been held up and confectionary distributed to miners' families, an armoured car patrolled

the village. On 20<sup>th</sup> May 1926, 24 strikers were jailed for distributing the strike paper 'Northern Lights', denounced as terrorists. Nothing much changes.

Good introductions to anarcho-syndicalism are given by Rudolf Rocker and Newcastle's own Tom Brown: <http://libcom.org/library/principles-of-syndicalism-tom-brown>

A local branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (basically a syndicalist union) was launched in 2006 (see contacts). There is also a national anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the Solidarity Federation, contactable at PO Box 29, SW PDO [solfed@solfed.org.uk](mailto:solfed@solfed.org.uk) [www.solfed.org.uk](http://www.solfed.org.uk)

# Our anti-fascist history:

# 8

## fascist aristocrats, kids throwing stones, the Tyne Bridge moment and now

### The First Fascists

The Duke of Northumberland was the first fascist, his rabid paper *The Patriot* announcing the formation of a Fascist party in Britain in 1924. By 1925 Newcastle had a fascist 'Zone Commander', Major Cree, stationed at Barras Bridge. These first fascists had already fallen apart from in-fighting by the time of the General Strike in 1926 (Major Cree urging any remaining fascists to become strike-breakers), but then the 'British Union of Fascists' arrived in 1931 led by wealthy ex-Tory (& ex-Labour) Oswald Mosley. He would go on to marry one of the Duke of Redesdale's daughters – another daughter became Hitler's devoted fan, appearing by his side in European style magazines.

The first Fascist street meeting in the North East was in Sunderland, where 2 blackshirts (Mosley's new uniform) appeared outside the Boilermakers' Hall on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1933, and were soon chased off by a local crowd. This theme would repeat and repeat – at the Race Week speakers' corner on 18<sup>th</sup> June (now the Hoppings), the crowd noticed that the Fascist speaker "bore a striking resemblance to Herr Hitler" and therefore overturned the lorry he was standing on.<sup>32</sup> This was not organised anti-fascism, but a natural expression of "the culture of the Tyne and Wear which grated against the bigotry of Fascism."<sup>33</sup> Immigrants had been welcomed into the area for many generations – from Ireland, the Yemen, Poland, Africa – and the military posturing of the blackshirts pissed people off.

### The Fascist Society

Our Society, though but in its infancy, is definitely flourishing and we are now an approved College organisation; our Constitution having been passed by the S.R.C. at their January meeting.

Our aims are to study up that interesting movement in political thought, namely Fascism, and especially as it may affect Britain. Every undergrad. ought to have some knowledge of the various political thought, and we hope that, by our meetings, some clearer insight into Fascism may be obtained.

Our last meeting, at which Mr. Alexander Raven Thomson spoke, was a great success, and those present are to be congratulated for the interest evinced. Possibly, our next meeting will be held at the beginning of next term. We expect to have a speaker equally as good as those whom we have had. All College students are welcome to our meetings.

T. E. CLUCH BATTY, Hon. Sec.

### The Fascist Society

Owing to the proximity of the exams., it was decided not to hold any open meetings this term, but we hope to entertain several prominent Fascist speakers next year.

An interesting invitation to be their guests for a fortnight has been extended to the Society by the Nazi students of the University of Marburg; it may be possible for some of our members to accept this invitation.

I expect the Society to carry on even more strongly next year, and to keep up a lively interest in Fascism, at the same time upholding in the College true spirit of loyalty and patriotism.

T. E. CLUCH BATTY, Hon. Sec.

The Fascists, failing to make a good entry at the level of the local working class, were strengthened by developments in Europe, the backing of the *Daily Mail* (not much changed there), Tory MPs, local industry magnates Lord Armstrong & Lord Londonderry, & lesser businessmen active in Rotary Clubs, together with the creation of a Fascist Society at Newcastle's Armstrong College (the forerunner of Newcastle University).

### Intimidation and the Fight for the Streets

The Newcastle fascists were training a "corps" of young men in "boxing and physical training" and they set out wrecking meetings by Socialist groups in the North East. This intimidation strategy soon met organised resistance, so that in September there were hundreds of anti-fascists there to chase the Fascist speaker Captain Vincent Collier out of Sunderland, and to overturn his rostrum in the Big Market. But the fascists recruited local toughs & ex-boxers, smashed bookshop windows, assaulted students at the University who disagreed with them, and sought to assert their presence on the streets – with paramilitary outfits and a big drum.

By May 1934, 40 Fascists had been injured, and the *Journal* reported that "Blackshirt-baiting" had become "a new Sunday night pastime".<sup>34</sup> In addition to spontaneous or disorganised resistance, the Anti-Fascist League was formed to prevent Fascists breaking up Socialist meetings: soon however it was beating the Fascists at their own game, and it wasn't long before the Fascists were being literally driven off the streets.

<sup>34</sup> *Journal* 14.5.1934.

There is not the space here to detail all the many occasions when Fascist marches or rallies were broken up by anti-fascists, but their headquarters were smashed up in Newcastle & Gateshead, each of Mosley's public visits derailed, & they were again & again prevented from spreading their brand of race-hatred and anti-workerism – despite their *Daily Mail* aristocrat / industrialist backing.



Local boys at a 1937 anti-fascist rally in Gateshead

### Highlights

In North Shields 24 blackshirts were hounded back to their office by "about 200 children" mercilessly mocking Fascist marching habits.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1934, the Fascists were due to hold a rally in Gateshead, though they were reeling from a concerted anti-fascist counter-attack the day before, that had besieged them in their Clayton St HQ with every window smashed and the "floor covered in blood and groaning men". Literally thousands of anti-fascists greeted them in Gateshead, and the police guarding the Fascist retreat over the Tyne bridge were almost overwhelmed when "a section of the crowd attempted to rush the party" & throw them in the river.



7 returned volunteers for Spain, at Central Station

### The Tragedy of Spain

Many local anti-fascists became involved in support for Spain, when the Fascist general Franco began a murderous civil war to overturn the democratic (and partly anarchist) government. 24 volunteers from the North East died fighting the Fascists, including Cliff Lawther of the famously radical Chopwell family. In 1937, 40,000 children arrived in the UK from the Basque country, as

refugees from the fascists. Many were accommodated in Brampton and Percy Park (Northumberland). In 1938 the treasurer of the local Basque children's home told the *Shields Evening News*

"The miners never let us down and at that time every Northumberland or Durham miners lodge which was approached had responded magnificently, and their families also, despite the poverty which many of them had to endure themselves."

Anti-fascist action is as crucial now as it ever was. Neonazis appeared just as the old Nazis started to die off. The National Front tried and failed to control the streets in the 1970s & '80s: again, militant anti-fascism was necessary to drive them out, disrupt paper-sellers, prevent racist murders. In 1993, 10,000 took part in an anti-fascist carnival in Newcastle, and when the National Front or BNP seek to hold a rally on Tyneside, it is always outnumbered by anti-fascists in opposition. They can occasionally be seen selling fascist papers to the Countryside Alliance, trying to recruit Goths, or putting up stickers aiming hate at minorities (take them down).

These days, the papers are as bad as the BNP in trying to stir up fears and hatred of immigrants or religious or ethnic minorities (or gay people or Scottish people or gypsies or single mothers – but never rich profiteers). Today's racism and fascism is as divisive and alien to our needs as it always has been. But we can remember Tyneside's proud history of anti-fascism and use it to sustain us: the opposite of anarchism is fascism, and therefore every anarchist will fight against: organised fascism, racism, bigotry of all kinds, and aristocratic or capitalist divide-and-rule tactics.

### More Info

Historical Source: N.Todd (1995) *In Excited Times*

Local anti-fascists today include **antifa** (see contacts) <http://www.myspace.com/antifanewcastle>

Also the (council-supported & non-confrontational) **Tyne and Wear Against Fascism** <http://www.twafa.org.uk/>

**TCAR**, Tyneside Community Action for Refugees, tries to support asylum seekers on Tyneside – the latest victims of the racist British state - and give them a public voice with public demonstrations etc.. (but be aware of the Stalinist sect using the group for recruitment purposes).

<http://www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk/wiki/index.php?title=TCAR>

For an anarchist **No Borders** perspective - & activists – see [www.noborders.org.uk](http://www.noborders.org.uk)

Also look out for '**Films Without Borders**' at the Star & Shadow Cinema, & '**Dawn Raid Watch**' monitoring local deportations.

**National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns** – [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk) – 0161 7406504

<sup>32</sup> *North Mail* 19 June 1933.

<sup>33</sup> N.Todd (1995) *In Excited Times*

# Anarcha-feminism - streetfighting Geordie women and the battle for personal liberation

"As anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power, it is inherently feminist. An anarchist who supports male domination contradicts the implicit critique of power which is the fundamental principle upon which all of anarchism is built. Sexist anarchists do exist but only by virtue of contradicting their own anarchism." (Susan L. Brown)

I have not been able to find a definite historical anarcha-feminist with Newcastle links. The closest I came was during the 1911 international seamen's strike, which centred on the North East, when the anarcho-syndicalist Madame Sorgue ('la citoyenne Sorgue') addressed meetings at South Shields market place, declaring French support for UK seamen. There's also a mysterious 'Red Rose' who led an anarchist group in Sunderland around 1907. But I'll give a whistle-stop tour of some of the personalities and fighters who gained us what freedoms we have today.

## Fishwives, Suffragettes & Feminists

There is Dolly Peel, the only actual once-living woman (except Queen Victoria) to be honoured by a statue in the North East (but spot how many abstract idealisations there are with their tits out). She was a smuggler, a fishwife and an anti-pressganger who would hide sailors under her skirts, composed songs as she worked the Quayside, and who joined a ship's crew herself when her husband was impressed – she worked as the ship's surgeon.

There's the anti-fascist MP for Jarrow, 'Red' Ellen Wilkinson, & Connie Lewcock who burnt down Esh Winning train station in the cause of women's suffrage<sup>35</sup>. There's Emily Wilding Davison from Morpeth who pioneered direct action against all the odds, finally dying under the hooves of the king's horse, and there's Nurse Pitman and Kathleen Brown of Elswick, force-fed in prison after refusing to accept the status quo, that denied women a public voice.



Pioneer feminists include Emma Martin and Mrs Chapplesmith, who delivered lessons in Newcastle on "the causes of misery in married life" – though when Mrs Chapplesmith attempted an open-air meeting in S.Shields, she was stoned and "nearly suffered the fate of Stephen the Martyr". Emma Martin also faced opposition from Christians who spread rumours that she had 7 husbands (she spoke against 'False' religions as well as on marriage). In Newcastle Miss Martin had to move to a larger room to accommodate the crowds, though in Sunderland her lectures were disrupted by a baptist preacher starting a fracas that led to broken bones.

## Impertinent and Riotous

9 Looking through the earliest trials we find "An impertinent servant, Alice Softley" at Alnwick in 1680, and in Hexham in 1712, the magistrates hear that several women, among them the vicar's wife, Mrs.Capstaffe, Mary Scott, Elizabeth Atkinson, Dorothy Mitford & Bridgett Maugham

"and other persons unknown to the informer came in a violent manner into [some bloke's] house and cried out hold him and we'll bind him ... and seized him by the hairs of his head and then bound him and they put his hands in his Briches pockets and took his thimboff and others he had, and ... to their own and his shame .. bound as he was ... carried him to the back door and threw him into the Middling Pool and there left him and went their way laughing."

To be honest, I've read the original report in the Northumberland Records Office and I'm still not entirely sure *why* they did this. But women kept up their riotous, unruly behaviour throughout our history & often very deliberately in the cause of freedom – such as the anti- 'means test' riot in Durham in 1933, led by Mrs.Chaytor, a "conspicuous figure in her red cloth hat".

In 1843 a housewives' strike in the mining villages vowed "to have no more provisions except at a scale of prices set by them." They even stopped the local policeman buying his meat – and proved just as effective during other strikes & struggles - from miners strikes, anti-slavery & anti-war, to Chartism & public health.

<sup>35</sup> She considered burning down Durham Cathedral, too, and the Chopwell miners agreed to supply the explosives.

In the 1790s, Spence was suggesting that

"Female Citizens have the same right of suffrage in their respective parishes as the Men: because they have equal property in the country, and ... as deeply interested in every public transaction"<sup>36</sup>

But it wasn't till the First World War that women finally got the vote – after a struggle that saw windows smashed (Newcastle Liberal Club), golf courses sabotaged (Gosforth), train stations burnt down and bombs planted (Dog Leap Stairs). When the Home Secretary came to Newcastle in 1909, women were there throwing stones at his car and chopping through barricades to get at him.

Kropotkin, in the work that inspired Clousden Hill, asked

"Why has women's work never been taken into account? ... Because those who wish to emancipate mankind have not included women in their dream of emancipation, and consider it beneath their superior masculine dignity to think of 'those kitchen arrangements' which they have layed on the shoulders of that drudge – woman... let us fully understand that a revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words Liberty, Equality, Solidarity would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half."<sup>37</sup>

## THE DAILY JOURNAL, SATURDAY

### MILITANT SUFFRAGISTS

#### Attack on Newcastle Liberal Club.

#### A FUSILLADE OF STONES.

#### Exciting Midnight Scene: Four Women Arrested.

In anticipation of the visit of Mr Lloyd-George, a number of women suffragists carried out a successful raid on the Newcastle Liberal Club, in Pilgrim Street, shortly after midnight. Right under the eyes of the unsuspecting constable on guard, and before that officer could intervene, a skirmishing party of four women smashed in the two library windows of that establishment.

<sup>36</sup> T. Spence "Constitution of Sponsonia".

<sup>37</sup> P. Kropotkin (1906) The Conquest of Bread

Or as Dave Douglass reports from the upstairs room of the Bridge, in 1967:

"COMRADES, SISTERS, FELLOW WORKERS – but certainly not chicks, nor tarts.' (Cheers.) 'Lasses, aye, we'll accept ... but this is what we're about. Ney mer what will we put up with. Ney mer what we shall have given but what we shall dictate for wasells!'

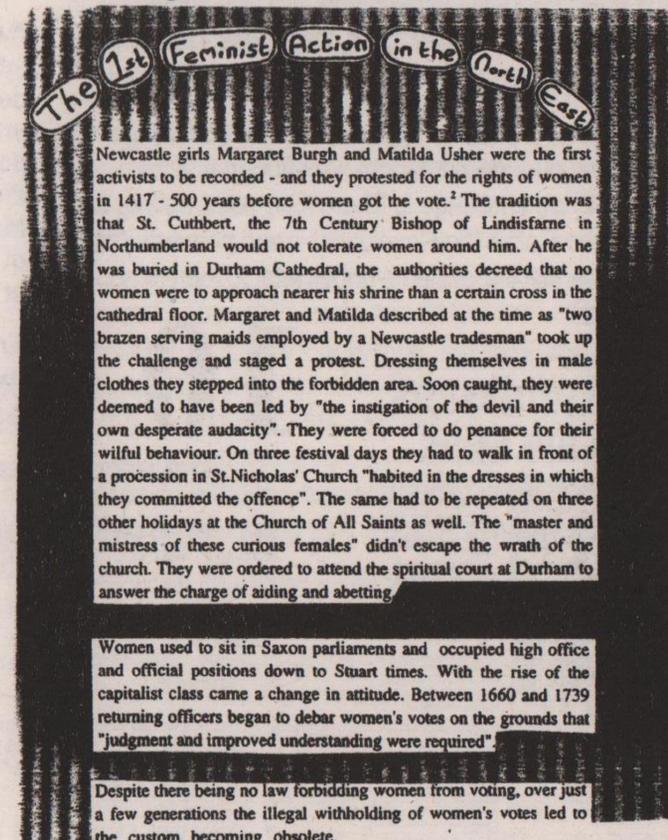
'Ya reet, lass!' – the storm of approval from the lasses from the pits.

'We will start from this proposition: wa bodies are wa an! The body belongs ti us! Or ti wasells mer particular! ... We do not hate men. Men are not the enemy – but some men are the enemy. Whites are not the enemy of the blacks – but some whites are the enemy of the blacks: the race-caller, the man who shouts 'nigger'. Aye, ney mer ti be whistled at! Ney mer ti be called after. Ya body is yer an. Dinit gaan wi' a man why calls 'Hey!' at a lass. We will not be sexual niggers, and we won't be slaves to sexual rednecks!'

The massive cheering upstairs and stamping of feet<sup>38</sup>

**MORE:** David Neville 'To Make their Mark' is the best historical work on Newcastle's women's movement, but you'll find most of Newcastle's radical women by looking into each different struggle.

Amongst groups around at the moment, "The HERA Collective is dedicated to the promotion, articulation and archival of women's art, practice and politicised works." [hera@thebricoleurspress.org.uk](mailto:hera@thebricoleurspress.org.uk)



Women used to sit in Saxon parliaments and occupied high office and official positions down to Stuart times. With the rise of the capitalist class came a change in attitude. Between 1660 and 1739 returning officers began to debar women's votes on the grounds that "judgment and improved understanding were required".

Despite there being no law forbidding women from voting, over just a few generations the illegal withholding of women's votes led to the custom becoming obsolete.

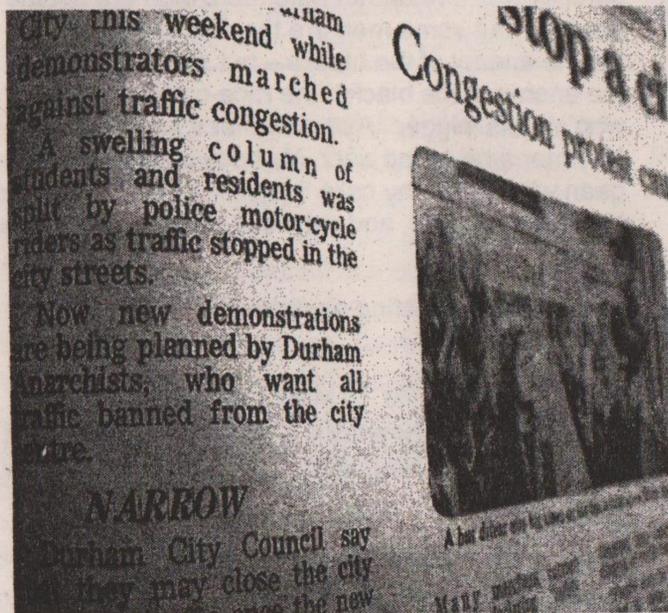
<sup>38</sup> D.Douglass (2000) Geordies wa mental

# Eco-anarchism:

the world needs anarchists now more than ever!

"The colour of radicalism today is no longer red; it is green." (Murray Bookchin)

Whether or not you share Bookchin's view that industrial struggle is no longer the place to find the deepest kind of freedom, it is true that anarchist arguments are heard no longer just in industrial struggles but also, as in Durham in the 1970s, environmental causes:



On 22nd November 1970 Durham anarchists marched against traffic congestion, declaring all traffic should be banned. On 23rd December 1974, traffic was indeed banned from Durham city centre – the anarchists won!

For anarchists, it doesn't matter how small the change is, if it increases our social freedom we support it, if it decreases it, we challenge it. There's no point waiting for utopia to arrive 'after the Revolution' – and now with the planet's essential life-systems under attack, there's no time to wait!

## Bypass protesters take to the trees



The anti-roads protest in Jesmond Dene (where the Cradlewell Bypass is now) was the UK's first tree-sitting campaign, and diffused direct action tactics across the country. Such protests were not just knee-jerk reactions or single-issue affairs but rather, as at the Cradlewell, radical collective actions that re-used anarchist ideas to challenge notions of progress and the status quo, duty and law, profit and property. As the mock-affadavit of the protesters puts it: **see below**

Newcastle has also seen 'Reclaim the Streets', carnival-like occupations of streets (Mosley St in 1999, St. Thomas Crescent in 1997 & 2000), to assert the possibilities of people coming together against the status quo of traffic

There are ongoing environmental direct actions, boycotts, sabotage, free festivals. 2008 sees the 14th annual Newcastle Community Green Festival – which started as a positive action against the proposed destruction of Leazes Park – one of many battles won. Another crucial victory was won by the Druridge Bay Association, launched in Ashington in 1979 to fight government plans for a nuclear power station on the beach. People power **does** change the world!

Helen Benyon gives one explanation of why people involved in radical environmental networks like Earth First! Are drawn to anarchism:

"Most environmentalists are anarchists primarily by intuition and by practice, rather than by conscious decision or education... Activists that have come to anarchist ways of thinking, as well as working, have done so through a dwindling personal faith in the environmental protection, the toothlessness of the mainstream reformist agencies and an awareness of the problem being greater than any one of these or of one road destroying one hill or one woodland.

Environmental destruction, alongside the exploitation of people and animals' environment, is a cardinal feature of capitalism" (Helen Benyon)

# 10

AFFADAVIT (ALLEGEDLY) OF THE FLOWERPOT TRIBE

We, THE FLOWERPOT TRIBE, of Jesmond Dene, Newcastle upon Tyne, Mother Earth, MAKE OATH ON THE GODDESS AND THE DRAGONSPIRIT AND SAY as follows:

1. We are not employed by anyone to protest against road-building and the destruction of this planet, but we're protesting anyway.
2. We are not constructing a new highway known as the "Cradlewell Bypass" on land adjacent to Benton Bank; even if we 'owned' the land we wouldn't construct a road through it because it's a stupid idea.
3. Another stupid and entirely incorrect idea is that anyone can own or possess or have authority over land, people, animals, trees, the sea etc. We'd just like to point this out.

# Direct Action then and now

- how to act like an anarchist

Anarchism is an idea, a movement, an analysis and a point of view that is constantly revived – each place and each decade imprints it with its own stamp. In the 1960s, a new counter-cultural form of anarchism took hold in Newcastle, with the Tyneside Anarchist Federation formed out of the 'Ban the Bomb' movement. At the Town Moor Hoppings, the anarchists tried to storm and seize the speaker's platform from Tory MP Dame Irene Ward.

There was Free Verse poetry and Jazz, all night parties and the opening of a centre in Grosvenor Place. One participant, Dave Douglass, claims that never before "had a political movement been more in tune with a generation", although the student group ended up getting kicked out by the others when they tried, at the Adelaide pub, to form a unitary federation. The founders of the university group graduated, and TAF's members married, gained families, moved out of the area or even – yek! – joined one of the Trotskyist sects that were gaining ground at the time. But new groupings were to come!

In 1976, another student anarchist group formed, this time with a keen interest in local issues – and particularly the town's chronic housing problem. They got active in the local community and within 6 months had about 50 members of the Newcastle Anarchist Group. They opened a squat in the middle of town – a disused Edwardian office block on Mosley St. Donations of food and blankets enabled them to house "as many as 50 homeless [people] at a time."

Squatting demonstrates a classic example of direct action: a solution (using empty property) is found to a problem (no home), and in doing so challenges the status quo of empty buildings being left to accumulate value for landlords. It also teaches new skills, brings decision-making down to our level, and usually creates some weird & wonderful moments!



Newcastle's history of squatting continues into the present day, both with low-key domestic squats (people needing somewhere to live, quietly living without paying rent), and also with public squats with a message.

# 11

In 2001 the abandoned Children's Warehouse building on Pilgrim St was occupied by anarchist squatters as a challenge to the redevelopment of the city, calling for affordable community spaces instead of the empty glitz of corporate developments. The next year, women broke into the old Manors social club just before it was due to be turned into Newcastle's first lapdancing bar. They used it instead for women's workshops and non-exploitative social entertaining. In March 2008, young people in Heaton with time on their hands but no money, occupied an old garage on Chillingham road to create the temporary, but beautiful and free, Pigeon parlour 'art squat'. Anyone can do it, & more people should.

1983 saw the Tyneside Revolutionary Syndicalists using the Days of Hope bookshop on Westgate Rd to focus on workplace issues: they produced a monthly paper, *The Syndicalist*. And then came the last big miners' strike in 1984-5. This great confrontation saw massive community solidarity, self-organisation and novel uses of direct action (not least the 'hit squads' that targeted strike-breakers). The most obvious anarchist presence at the time was Class War, who were selling 12,000 copies of their papers, their pull-no-punches approach to class struggle making total sense at the time – and generating a lot of laughs! The Anarchist Communist Federation (now the Anarchist Federation) also formed. Today, local anarchist organisations continue each of these three styles of class-struggle anarchism – see contacts.

As the previous section demonstrates, new entries in Newcastle's anarchist history have been made by environmentalists. Punks, too, created an anarchist scene in the late 1980s with punk picnics, animal rights & a DIY anti-corporate ethos. In the 1990s, the Tyneside Anarchist Group fought fascists, sabotaged hunts, occupied Tory MPs' roofs and added their efforts to movements against the poll tax and jobseekers' allowance (new forms of control and disempowerment). At the end of the 1990s, overlapping networks of direct action allowed anarchists to cooperate when they wished (solidarity with the Magnet strikers, actions to support the Zapatistas uprooting GM crops) in a more informal way.

Now in the new millennium there's a diversity of anarchist styles and groupings kicking about Newcastle, with the Projectile film festival the biggest public space. Next year maybe you'll be the one starting something totally new, making direct action work to increase the spaces of freedom in the city, resist encroachments of authority, form new bonds with your neighbours and create possibility on the streets. I'm not gonna tell you how to do it, but I'll be doing it in my own way too!