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!

Direct Action Contacts

Contacts: anarchists in Newcastle in the 21st Century

Projectile
Projectile is an annual festival of anarchist film, culture and politics. 2008 is its 4th 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 state 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 May 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 17A, Newcastle NE99 1TA
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

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

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

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. wordiary.org.uk wordiary@yahoo.co.uk

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.nelhs.net/ Secretary: John Charlton, 46 West Lane, Forest Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE12 7BE.

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The Great Royal Debate

The Royal Debate - do we hang them? or do we shoot them?

TYNE & WEAR ANARCHIST GROUP

by Mike 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 Liburne of East Thirsk, Amaher Batty, & Ross McGuihan, 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 9th of June, when through the militia and surrounded the Guildhall. The Corporation lost their nerve and barricaded themselves inside. The Mayor describes what happened next:

"Stone 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 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 'huzzying 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 as small a 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 9th, 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 Patter, 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 11th 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, and then ran an others 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 19th 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 them, they likewise threatened to hew them 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 toon 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 entraped 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!"
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 Bigg 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 turnips: 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 due to 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 net-maker on the Quay, his mother ran a stocking mill. Spence himself taught on Sandgate and at Hadrian 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; put 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**

Spence read to the Newcastle Philosophical Society a paper which he later gave the title 'The 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 aristocratic 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.

"I have often thought how much superior the Condition of Reptiles is to that of human nature, in the present perverted state of things be A Worm pays no Rent: the Earth while he lives is his portion, and he roits 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."


**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, and freedom of association). 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 'seditions meetings and assemblies', which explicitly prohibited 'all societies or clubs calling themselves Spencian 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 stewsards 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)

**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 1793, & 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 recognition (shared with that other pre-anarchist, Gerard Winstanley) that "formal political liberty was inadequate unless accompanied by economic freedom, by equality."

- (Christopher Hill)
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 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. Spence was against 'giantism' and wanted small farms and local, parish-level government instead: he believed this locally-rooted, intimate form of government would eliminate 'excesses, custom-house men, crooks, impostors, thieves, and the damaging argument that ordinary people, given the chance, are believed this locally-rooted, intimate form of government at least not arresting them); he criticised Thomas Paine for not going far enough and for neglecting women's freedom (Spence himself argued for equal rights, and a woman's right to divorce).

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. And if 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 can all 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." 4

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 15th 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

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', sycophants 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 races and hostility had subsided enough for them to finally get round to attaching one. In the 1840s the Monument was just "a landmark for bemused strangers who have lost their way in the town". 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:
In 1881, Newcastle MP and owner of the Newcastle Chronicle Joseph Cowen was decried by the Tories as "a Communist, a Revolutionary, a Republican, and an Atheist." 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).

When the Chronicle fought for Liberty Across the World

Joe Cowen not only defended the miners' interests as Newcastle 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.

There were, at first, no mass strikes, but the organising work continued. 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.

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.
Cowen and the Anarchists

Although Cowen was not an 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 and thousands into exile. He was a journalist with Social Democrats whose 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.

In 1882, 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.

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."

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 put their address 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."

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.

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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 against Tsarist oppression and also against coercion in Ireland, noting "that in the English dominions people are also imprisoned without being judged."

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.


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."13

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.

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 30th, those found guilty were fined £6.

Even in the 1960s, Tyneside's 'Committee of 100' 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. 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 Millian 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 people 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.

Notes

8 Most fled Germany when Bismarck'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. 13 Newcaste Weekly Chronicle 8.7.1882.

9 Newcastle Daily Chronicle 3.7.1882.

10 Only in his old age did his politics go shit. 132 The 'Anarchist'. Sheffield, March 1894.

11 'The Anarchist'. Sheffield, March 1894.

12 D. Dougalas (2000) Geordie; was Memo...
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 would 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-parliamentary 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?"19

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 merely lobbying group for reforms.20 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.

Morris & the Miners

On the 10th April 1887 William Morris arrived in Newcastle, and accidentally bumped into the authoritative Manxist H.M.Hyndman. These men had both addressed to 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 upon 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 "at ease (except the East End of London) orderly and good-tempered" but steadfast and militant: when the reporters in the wagon 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 squattting down to let the rest see, the many women including "one (elderly) when any objection was put forward, she 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 for no time and till 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 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 with a thing as a general strike, he thought it was possible that the masters of society would attack them violently—be even 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 but that society was armed with the law. This was the victory they wished them. Nothing better to be desired by men than to have a society who would respect their..."

Then Morris, veering back to the old prescription of the League, told the miners that they must organize 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 hated the Socialists. Society had made the life of a working man..."

5

The next week, back in London, William Morris "could not help contrasting our Cockneys much to their disadvantage with the northerners." Even the anarchists in London praised him off, arguing pointless 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 II).
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."

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 communities distributing wealth to all 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.21

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.22 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 idea)!

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."

In Autumn 1895 the exiled German anarchist Bernard Kampffmeyer, who had already studied intensive agriculture in Jersey, slipped away from his Scottish 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-individualist23, 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 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 composer 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 repulse for 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 it 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 remaining 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."

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,24 and the Colony ended up with a strict division of labour, & many more men than women.

In August 1897 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, ships, fleets, famous philosophers 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 individualistic 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 cooperative enterprises in Newcastle have included mining, engineering, printing, housing, music, and consuming. Many are short-lived but others are still around today - and even experience in co-operation gives us an education in how to live in a better way.

21 Freedom June 1895.

22 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 seeking the good of each, broadly based upon the land." 1896

23 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.

24 Frank Kapper (former glazier), Robert Walker (former farman), and E.T. DISPATCH (former coal miner).
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."

Philosopher of the new form of anarchism was John Turner, an anarchist and writer who was standing in the parliamentary election.

Opposition to union officials was celebrated by syndicalists who saw them as agents of control dampering 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 loathed and railed at.

In 1908 John Turner gave a talk on 'What Anarchism really means' to a crowded meeting in the Socialist Society's hall on Blackett St in 1908, "greeted by vigorous applause". Turner gives a good idea of what anarchist 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."

The strength and power of the syndicalists 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" 21

200 men from Chopwell were killed in the First World War, which put an end to 7 year growth of anarchism, but the pit village retained its reputation for militancy 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 learned 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.

The Anarchists

The Anarchists who sat in conference in Newcastle over Easter do not appear to have coincided with the popular idea of the desperate revolutionary. There were about forty of them, and had you not been told who they were you might have regarded them as members of a young men's mutual improvement society, so ordinary was their general appearance. The official report of their proceedings stated that their aim was to make Syndicalism the practical expression of the philosophy of Anarchism. Well, quite a lot of individuals favour this policy - they can be heard in the Bigg Market all seasons of the year - but they don't call themselves by the fearful name of Anarchist, and thus we must dub them as extremists of an inoffensive kind, and let it go at that.

The benefit of decentralisation would be similar to those of Spence's parish system, but this time they were designed for relevance in an industrial age. Therefore, workers can and must ensure their own food supplies in strike and revolution. In the 21st century, 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, 1928, 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 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 20th May 1926, 24 strikers were jailed for distributing the strike paper 'Northern Lights', denounced as terrorists. Nothing much changes.

Good introductions to anarchist syndicalism are given by Rudolf Rocker and Newcastle's own Tom Brown: http://lboro.ac.uk/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, SW7 1DD.

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.
The Duke of Northumberland was the first fascist, his '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 (and 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 16th 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* June (now the Hoppings), the crowd noticed that the Fascists speaker 'bore a striking resemblance to Herr Hitler' and therefore overturned the lorry he was standing on. This was not organised anti-fascism, but a natural expression of 'the culture of the Tyne and Wear which grated against the bigoted Fascism. 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 Fasists marching in Newcastle and Gateshead 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 Bigg 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-bailing' had become 'a new Sunday night pastime'. 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.

Highlights

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

On 14th 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.

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 undergraduate, ought to have some knowledge of the various political thoughts, and we hope that, by our meetings, some clearer insight into Fascism may be obtained.

Our last meeting, at which Mr. Alexander Karen Thomson spoke, was a great success, and those present are to be congratulated for the interest exhibited. Possibly, our next meeting will be held at the beginning of next term.

We expect to hold a meeting under the auspices of the Newcastle Asiatic Society, and so good as those whom we have had. All College students are welcome to our meetings.

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. Neo-nazis 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 Gots, 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 proflitees). 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 capitalist divide-and-rule tactics.
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."

But it wasn't until 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 (Leas Dykes). When the Prime 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 them superior masculine dignity to think of those kitchen arrangements which they have layed on the shoulders of that drudge - woman... 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 human subject to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half."

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.

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"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.

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."

But it wasn't until 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 (Leas Dykes). When the Prime 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 them superior masculine dignity to think of those kitchen arrangements which they have layed on the shoulders of that drudge - woman... 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 human subject to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half."

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**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 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:

The anti-roads protest in Jesmond Dene (where the Cradwell 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 Cradwell, 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)

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**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 imprts 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 Tony MP Dame Irene Ward. There was Free Verse poetry and Jazz, all night parties and the opening of a centre in Gosvenor 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 - yekhi! - joined one of the Trotskyist sects that were gaining ground around 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.

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**Bypass protesters take to the trees**

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!

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**Affirmative (Allergic) of the Flowerpot Tribe**

We, the Flowerpot Tribe, of Jesmond Dene, Newcastle upon Tyne, Mother Earth, make oaths 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 "Cradwell 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.