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«SOHO CRACKPOTS» ANARCHISTS

IN THE MEDIA IN THE 1890S



"Thrilling" - Dr. R.S., Germany
 "An underground classic." Bulletin of Anarchist Research

This booklet is for Larry Law

With thanks to Michelle Archer, Martyn Everett and Mark Saunders

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"Soho Crackpots" is a quotation from an essay on The Secret Agent by Albert Guérard, reprinted in The Secret Agent (Casebook Series) p 153

PROPAGANDA BY DEED AND THE NEED FOR A STEREOTYPE

When some sections of the anarchist movement began to use terrorist methods in the 1890s, it was quickly realised that this was the most unpopular course of action they could possibly have taken. This tactic made anarchists the focus of public attention through a vitriolic media campaign, and they very quickly became the target for abuse and hostility. The media generally showed anarchists as being hideously ugly and total madmen with no political morality whatsoever, and they soon developed a stereotyped image of what a typical anarchist looked like.

This campaign by the media was highly sensational, and in style looked back to the way in which Jack the Ripper's murders had been shown by the press, and looked forward to the era of German plots just before the First World War. The stereotype that has largely remained with us of the anarchist in a black cloak and wide hat with a bomb in his hand tended to develop slightly later than the era that I am dealing with. The anarchist that we are considering is more an extension of the socialist layabout-cum-agitator figure, who was dressed in shabby clothes, usually an overcoat, with a decidedly foreign look.

To this image was usually added an element of caricature, a gross exaggeration of one feature, such as short stature or old age. A more frightening idea was also introduced into this campaign: the so-called 'science' of physiognomy was enormously popular in the 1890s, and it claimed that a person's personality was reflected in their looks. Therefore, because anarchism was a distorted political theory, said physiognomists, anarchists must have distorted bodies. The chief exponent of this belief was the Italian scientist Cesare Lombroso, who dedicated an entire book to discussing anarchist traits. Although it is easy to laugh at ideas like these, they were dangerous ideas, for they ultimately formed the basis for fascist extermination programmes.

Although the vast majority of the bombing attacks (these were called by anarchists 'Propaganda by Deed') took place in Paris, the English media reacted as though London was at the centre of the explosions. This is in part due to the Fenian bombing campaign of the 1880s, so dynamite was still in the mind of the public. The media capitalised quite shamelessly on this fear and every possible outlet - novels, newspapers, illustrations - even the developing film industry - showed anarchists, and showed them at their worst.



POPULAR MISCONCEPTION
OF TYPICAL ANARCHIST

The terrorism in Paris between 1892 and 1894 included a bomb being hurled into the Chamber of Deputies, the President of France was stabbed in revenge for not pardoning an anarchist bomber, and a bomb was left at the offices of a company whose workers were on strike, but it was taken away to a police station where it exploded and killed five policemen and a secretary. Not all anarchists, of course, agreed with terrorist methods, let alone thought of using them, and the whole issue roused very strong emotions.

The bombings, of course, were frightening, and the media - certainly in England - did nothing to allay those fears. With hindsight, as one writer has pointed out, the number of attacks was quite small and were always directed against specific targets (1). The English media immediately began to focus on the huge number of immigrants living in London whose politics were often left wing.

Rudolf Rocker points out that émigrés tended to live in a certain neighbourhood, often never learned to speak English, relied on political clubs for their social life, and so never integrated with the English community (2). This, of course, led to resentment, fear, hostility, and ultimately these people largely became the target of the media war against anarchists. But to imply that the anarchist movement in England was wholly foreign is a serious misconception. John Quail and Hermia Oliver have shown that there was a sizeable English anarchist movement which co-existed with the foreign one, and this English section produced at least five journals and had several clubs.

But of course xenophobia and panic are a lot more saleable than the truth, and it is this response by the media - in all its forms - that this booklet is concerned with.

ANARCHISTS IN NOVELS

Because of the sensational elements available, anarchists proved to be a very popular subject matter for novelists: both 'respected' writers such as Joseph Conrad and Zola used anarchists in their novels, as well as many more popular authors. Anarchists themselves wrote about their experiences, for instance Louise Michel's novel Nadine (which has not been translated into English), as well as memoirs. In addition, in the journals of the anarchist movement, especially Freedom and the Commonweal, there were notices for social nights, usually at the Autonomie Club or the Grafton Hall, which often included a play, on one occasion billed as "'Condemned to Death" An Anarchist Drama in One Act', and the anarchist tailor, James Tochatti wrote at least two plays on anarchist life.

GERMINAL

An early novel which included an anarchist character is Germinal (1885) by Emile Zola; this tells the story of a group of miners who become engaged in a protracted strike which is led by the Socialist, Etienne. As the strike ends, the anarchist Souvarine, saws through the pit supports, which results in a large-scale disaster. Etienne survives, and becomes a union boss in Paris. Souvarine is often overlooked, but he does provide a very important foil for Etienne's behaviour; it is his use of Propaganda by Deed which results in decisive action, not Etienne's strike, and Souvarine retains his political credibility, whereas Etienne slowly becomes more and more bourgeois.

Although Zola tries to show Souvarine as being fairly 'normal' - unlike later authors - he is still capable of fanaticism; he holds Bakunin in almost religious awe, turning his eyes towards the east whenever the 'Master' is mentioned. In his physical appearance he is very unlike other anarchists in novels: he is described as looking "girlish" and has a delicate face and hands. When, however, he begins to talk about Propaganda by Deed - which he frequently does - he becomes much more conventionally terrifying: his eyes have "fierce red glints", and "a mystic flame darted from his pale eyes and his delicate hands gripped the edge of the table so tightly they almost broke it".

Although Germinal was published a lot earlier than most of the other novels I will discuss, Propaganda by Deed had already been recognised as a feature of anarchism; but a more well-known source is the assassination of the tzar in 1881, and Zola uses this incident in the novel. This is one of the less satisfactory elements of Germinal, in that Zola lumps various revolutionary ideas together in Souvarine (e.g. Populism, anarchism, Nihilism) and brands them anarchist.

When Souvarine weakens the supports of the pit shafts, Zola shows how he is a totally dedicated revolutionary; earlier we have heard that Souvarine wants "no family, no wife, no friends, nothing to make my hand falter on the day when I have to take other people's lives or give my own." Yet he almost stops his friend Etienne from going to the pit, knowing it to mean almost certain death - but he changes his mind, and lets Etienne go. He sits and watches impassively as the miners go to work:

And high upon the pit-bank the fair man with
the girlish features smoked cigarette after
cigarette in his impatience, and his pale eyes
never left the pit for a moment.

Zola quite deliberately stresses Souvarine's detachment to show his readers

the extent of his revolutionary fervour, that he is totally without compassion.

When the pit collapses Souvarine leaves the mine, and in this departure Zola again stresses his destructive capacity:

He threw away his last cigarette and walked off into the darkness without so much as a glance behind. ... He was bound for the unknown, over yonder, calmly going to deal violent destruction wherever dynamite could be found to blow up cities and men. Doubtless, on that day when the last expiring bourgeois hear the very stones of the streets exploding under his feet, he will be there.

Although Zola is a lot less hysterical and a lot less sensational than many other writers, he still succeeds in presenting a view of anarchism that is both distorted and generally unsympathetic. While Souvarine may have destroyed the mine partly out of revenge because his wife was hanged for her part in the assassination of the tzar, Zola largely gives a view of anarchism as being wildly destructive - Souvarine glories in talk of blood and destruction - he never seems to realise that terror was only one aspect of the whole movement, and was largely unrepresentative.

CHESTERTON AND THE ANARCHIST SHAM

While Germinal is a very early example of the use of anarchists in novels, a much later, and more representative example is G K Chesterton's novel The Man Who Was Thursday (1908). This novel is a very typical extension of the kind of propaganda that was so much in evidence during the 1890s, and the plot is based around a very simple idea, that the chief group of anarchists in London are all police agents, that none are anarchists at all. The sort of stereotyping that existed continually stressed that anarchists were sham revolutionaries, that they were all lazy and liked talking so anarchism suited them, and Chesterton is merely taking this sort of idea to its logical conclusion, that there are no real anarchists at all.

The central character is Gabriel Syme (the seven men in the 'anarchist' group are called after the days of the week, and Syme is Thursday) who is not only anti-anarchist, but almost psychotic about them after seeing a bomb explode (presumably in London - which is sheer lies):

He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

Chesterton gives us a description of what he believes an anarchist looked like in the 1890s by saying that, ironically, Gabriel in his youth fitted the description:

He wore an old-fashioned black chimney-pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old-fashioned cloak, black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early villains in Dickens and Bulwer-Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair were unkempt and leonine ... A long, lean black cigar, bought in Soho for twopence, stood out from between his tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war.

As we shall see in both writings and illustrations, this idea of the anarchist as being wild, scruffy and dressed in old clothes is the standard image from this era.

While Gabriel lacks a grotesque appearance (because he isn't a real anarchist) the other members of the group are all in some way disfigured or odd - Chesterton says they all have "a demoniac detail", as though they are seen in a distorting mirror. The Secretary of the group has a weird, lop-sided smile, "Sunday" is an enormously large man (very like characters in The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes, both by Conrad), and there is a Professor who is so old and decrepit (like Conrad's Karl Yundt) that Chesterton says it looks as though his arm might drop off when he moves it. A Middle Eastern Byronic Marquis and a half-mad Russian peasant are among the other members of the group, and it is interesting to see that Chesterton does leave behind the typical 1890s stereotypes of scruffiness and laziness. He helps to develop, instead, the more common picture of an anarchist - for his revolutionaries wear cloaks and carry swordsticks, and this is surely the basis for the image of the anarchist who wears a cloak and wide hat and carries a bomb in his hand.

Once the anarchists start to be revealed as police spies, the plot of the novel is very straightforward; Gabriel and successive police agents plot against the "anarchists" in the group, until they are chased by the latter through a forest (the anarchists are wearing long capes with black masks over their faces) and are caught by the leader of the group. Chesterton then seems not to know how to end the story, and so Gabriel awakens from a dream: like the anarchists themselves, the action in the novel is just a sham.

These two novels are, of course, only a small proportion of the works of fiction written about anarchists - or people who could be seen to be anarchist; The Princess Casamassima by Henry James, Demos by George Gissing and Under Western Eyes by Joseph Conrad are some of the more famous of the dozens of novels that made use of anarchist-type revolutionaries. Even the phenomenally successful French series of Fantômas novels have been seen as being influenced by the Bonnot

Gang's escapades (3). The inclusion of anarchists guaranteed success - for the public had direct knowledge of Propaganda by Deed (even if only vicariously through newspaper reports), and after the main era of bombings was over the public could be thrilled by lurid stories and think of what a close escape they had had.

The next two novels I will be discussing show more clearly than Zola (who was writing very early on) and Chesterton (who was developing a new stereotype) the typical anarchist of the 1890s - and these novels show both the anti-anarchist and pro-anarchist points of view.

SOHO CRACKPOTS

The most offensive novel ever written about anarchists is The Secret Agent by Joseph Conrad, who, from a position of almost total ignorance of anarchism presents a series of ridiculous caricatures with no political ideas between them, and calls them anarchists. Because this novel has become part of the literary canon it has kept alive the Victorian conceptions of anarchists and anarchism - and has kept the myths alive for a very large audience. As we might expect, Conrad gives his readers a very comforting view of anarchism - the anarchists are all too lazy or frightened to put Propaganda by Deed into practise, the police can sieze them whenever they choose, and when there is an incident of terror it is brought about by an agent-provocateur.

The novel centres around what is known as the Greenwich Bomb Outrage, which took place in real life in February 1894, when a young French tailor, Martial Bourdin, blew himself up by Greenwich Observatory with the bomb he was carrying. There are various theories surrounding this incident, but the most commonly held view is that the bombing was orchestrated by a police spy, H B Samuels, the editor of The Commonweal journal. Conrad used this version of events as the basis for The Secret Agent and so, as Hermia Oliver states, it has become the "received" version of the affair (4).

Because, as I have said, Conrad was writing from a position of near ignorance about anarchism, he had to rely on the popular preconceptions of the time, and repeatedly stresses physical appearance; he also uses physiognomy to quite a large extent, and "ironically" makes one of his anarchists a keen follower of Lombroso's theories.

Of the anarchist group, the first member we see is Verloc, the agent provocateur or secret agent of the title; like a fellow member of the circle, Ossipon, Verloc isn't an anarchist at all (Ossipon is a pimp), and so they are merely diversions

on Conrad's part. The first 'real' anarchist we see is Michaelis, who Conrad caricatures in one very simple way:

Michaelis was speaking in an even voice, a voice that wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest. He had come out of a highly hygienic prison round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion, as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar.

This writing is just slapstick, because it makes Michaelis the ultimate incarnation of the fat, foreign anarchist, and this is the only sort of thing Conrad ever says about him. He is given virtually no political thoughts, but lives off a rich woman who provides him with a cottage where he can write his prison memoirs, and who sends him to spas in Germany. He's also the kindest of the revolutionaries, wishing no-one harm and preaching love, and I think Conrad is trying to reflect his generous revolutionary spirit in his layers of fat. But he also seems to see something evil in his obesity: the people who see Michaelis at a party say he's "monstrous", "grotesque" and "quite startling", so Conrad seems to be ambivalent about him.

Whereas Conrad treats Michaelis quite sympathetically, he is most vicious in his treatment of the oldest of the anarchists, whom he based partly on Johann Most. Karl Yundt is described as being

old and bald, with a narrow, snow white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin. An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. When he rose painfully the thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swellings suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab.

Conrad does actually come close to giving Yundt some political beliefs, by making him champion Propaganda by Deed in wanting

"...a band of armed men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world."

However Conrad never lets Yundt make any kind of statement without first referring to his physical decrepitude, so that anything he says is devalued automatically to the level of a joke. Conrad's hypocrisy extends so far as to almost condemn Yundt for not putting into practise Propaganda by Deed - he says "the terrorist" (as he calls him) had never so much as lifted his little finger against the social edifice. Yet if Yundt had executed some sort of bombing, Conrad would have criticised him for being a cold-blooded murderer.

By far the most sensational character in the novel is the Professor: he walks around London with his hand continually on the detonator of a bomb he carries in his pocket - and naturally he is an extreme stereotype. Not only is he incredibly small (Conrad says that when he's standing up he's no bigger than his friend who's sitting down), but he misses London's biggest anarchist news, the Greenwich Park bomb because, he says, "I stayed in bed all the morning" - 'typical' anarchist behaviour and appearance, according to Lombroso's theories.

Added to all this he is, of course, grotesquely ugly:

...a dingy little man in spectacles his flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull. The dome of the forehead seemed to rest on the rim of his spectacles; the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark whisker. The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual.

Although Conrad wrote that he wanted the Professor to have a "note of perfect sincerity", he's just as stereotyped as the other characters, and as well as using the usual features, Conrad also uses the more sensational elements of the stereotyped image.

I think the whole point of Conrad's method is, like Chesterton, to show his belief that anarchism is really a sham movement that is peopled with sham characters - the Professor, after all, never detonates his bomb, and the boy blown up at Greenwich isn't an anarchist at all, but the agent-provocateur's idiot brother-in-law. Conrad once said he thought the real anarchist was the millionaire (a contemporary example being J P Morgan), but this really is an irresponsible political statement, because it is like pretending that a whole political movement doesn't exist - and you can't wish something into non-existence because you don't like it, but it seems to be the limit of Conrad's political knowledge.

One critic has written that the light-hearted tone of The Secret Agent was due to Conrad's relief that anarchism had not triumphed in the 1890s (5), and I think that to some extent it may be true, owing to the lull in Propaganda by Deed between 1897

and 1905. The irony is, however, that anarchism and Propaganda by Deed certainly weren't forgotten about or finished with - for the Tottenham shoot out, the siege of Sidney Street and the Bonnot Gang were all in the very near future after the publication of The Secret Agent, as well as assassinations of, or attempts on heads of state: anarchism could not be cleaned away by a media campaign or a spate of propagandist novels, even though that was their intention.

THE ROMANCE OF ANARCHY

A Girl Among the Anarchists is the product of Helen and Olivia Rossetti's involvement with the anarchist movement in the 1890s, and since it is written by ex-anarchists I feel it is an especially important novel to look at. The Rossetti sisters ran the Torch journal from 1891 to 1895 from 127 Ossulston Street (later the offices of Freedom), and played a very active part in the anarchist movement in London, and for that reason their fictionalised account is valuable. Although Hermia Oliver criticises the novel because it mixes fact and fiction and because she says in places it relies on "anarchist hearsay" (6), I feel it does, nevertheless, convey much of the atmosphere of the era.

The novel, published under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith in 1903, was written after the sisters had severed their connexions with the London anarchist movement. Olivia went to Italy in 1896 to marry Antonio Agresti, and Helen had to go abroad because of ill health in the same year (7); while Olivia seems not to have renounced anarchism, Helen appears to have done so, and was still hostile to some members of the movement as late as 1968 (8). John Quail attributes much of their departure from Ossulston Street to the bad behaviour of some of their colleagues (9). We should also remember that when they left the Torch, Olivia was 20 and Helen just 17, so (and I don't mean this nastily) it could just have been that youthful enthusiasm, when faced with too many difficulties, ran out.

It's possible to look at this novel in two ways, firstly to take it seriously, as I'm sure many contemporary readers did, so that it shows a very sensational view of anarchists, or secondly as a rather sardonic comment on how society generally viewed the anarchist movement. The story is basically that Isabel (Helen/Olivia) becomes involved with the anarchist movement, starts a journal, has lots of exciting adventures such as escaping in disguise from the police, then eventually becomes disillusioned with the movement and leaves. The novel claims to be factual and dispassionate, but this is "disproved" (or made fun of) in her description of the first anarchist Isabel meets:

I must confess all my preconceptions fell to the ground. I had imagined him dark and audacious, and I saw before me a tall, well-built man, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, fair of skin, with a blonde beard and moustache,

lank long hair, a finely cut, firm set mouth, and blue dreamy eyes ... He was clad in a thick, heavy, old fashioned blue overcoat with a velvet collar, which he refused to remove, baggy nondescript trousers and uncouth looking boots.

Although this description starts off in a very 'normal' way, by the end we are pretty certain we are looking at the typical bomb-hurling anarchist. By poking fun in this way, the Rossettis can show how ridiculous the media reaction is, and at the same time captivate more gullible readers.

Likewise her account of her first visit to an anarchist meeting in the office of a journal (which is luridly called The Bomb) is both sensational and sardonic:

... it took me some seconds to accustom my eyes to the fetid atmosphere of this den, which was laden with the smoke of diverse specimens of the worst and cheapest tobacco in the metropolis. But various objects, human and inanimate, became gradually more distinct, and I found myself in a long, ill-lighted wooden shed, where type and dust and unwashed human beings had left their mark and where soap and sanitation were unknown. But what most riveted my attention was an indistinct inanimate something enveloped in a red flag, rolled up in a heap on the fouziest and most forbidding old sofa it had ever been my lot to behold. Other stray objects which I noted about this apartment were an ostentatious looking old revolver and some chemical bottles which however contained no substance more dangerous than Epsom Salts.

She uses the same sort of technique when she describes Simpkins, the "something" she has seen wrapped up in the flag, who later becomes the printer for her journal, and is the laziest person she has ever met:

This man, if man I may call him, was bony and ill-built, and appeared to consist largely of hands and feet. His arms were abnormally long and his chest narrow and hollow, and altogether he seemed to hang together by a mere fluke. His ill-assorted limbs were surmounted by a sallow, yellowish face, large repulsive lips, and a shape-

less nose, and to him belonged the long, black greasy hair which I had already noted amid the folds of the long red banner. Large gristly ears emerged from his uncombed mop of hair...

His over-riding feature of laziness is one which Isabel concentrates on; she sees many examples of it in English anarchists, but she always shows European anarchists to be both hardworking and handsome.

However you look at the novel, it is highly entertaining and very informative in that we can see Victorian anarchism in a social setting rather than from a theoretical point of view. As well as providing sensation, the novel shows very clearly how exciting the era must have been, especially for a young girl - Helen, as I have said, was only 17 in 1896. Her writing captures many of the romantic elements of the anarchist movement of the 1890s: clubland, secrecy, foreignness, living outside of accepted society and being on the edges of a dangerous world. But these were also the very elements that writers outside the anarchist movement used to sensationalise their works, and bring it down to the level of a joke. The sisters also poke fun at physiognomy - Isabel several times notes facial characteristics which show laziness or fanaticism, and later 'proves' them true. Perhaps most interesting of all is that almost all the incidents are based in some sort of true experience, even if they are slightly changed.

The Rossetti sisters' novel provides a very important foil for the anti-anarchist propaganda that was so much in evidence at this time, and there are other examples of this sort of writing to be found. In one way they were writing for an anarchist audience that had no other way of retaliating against the backlash against Propaganda by Deed, and by making fun of the conventions of the anti-anarchist novel they were playing the media at its own game, and making fun of those who take this sensationally named novel seriously.

PUNCH AND THE GRAPHIC

Illustrations of anarchists were as equally popular as novels which described their exploits. All different sorts of papers, whether they were family newspapers, humourous magazines like Punch or 'respectable' papers like the Pall Mall Gazette all featured anarchists extensively. This satisfied a need in the public which physiognomy and caricature helped: if you believed you could recognise the bomb-hurling maniacs because they looked odd, you would also believe there was a greater chance of them being caught, and so anarchism could be stopped.

Physical appearance was extremely important to Victorians; they had a rigidly exaggerated dress code, magazines and journals regularly contained physiognomy columns whereby the public could send a photo to be 'analysed'. If you read virtually any novel from Victorian times you will find a great stress on the appearance of the beautiful

heroine, the 'nasty Jasper' villain, and the handsome hero, and one very good example of this is The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins.

Punch cartoons were not only popular and easily remembered but were influential, not just on public opinion but on politicians as well, and could sway the decisions of cabinet meetings (10). Punch's leading cartoonist was Sir John Tenniel whose drawings on anarchism attacked it from two different angles: either by showing anarchists themselves, or "Anarchy" as a representative figure like his more famous ones of Britannia, La France and John Bull. Although Punch was a Liberal paper, the politics it expressed were highly reactionary, and during the era of Propaganda by Deed were almost hysterically anti-anarchist.

"Reckoning Without Their Host" (p 13) shows the picture of anarchists we read about in Victorian novels: both are foreign, the short, stooped revolutionary wears the overcoat beloved of the Professor, Isabel Meredith's friend, and so on. He conforms very accurately to Lombroso's description of an anarchist, in his height, stature and facial appearance, even having a turned up nose which is, he says, an unmistakeable sign which is so common in Italian anarchists that there are proverbs about it (11). His friend, meanwhile, is representative of the fat anarchist, who is to be found in many novels; both carry bags, presumably full of anarchist paraphernalia, and looking very like the black bags that became so unpopular during Jack the Ripper's reign of terror. The policeman is there, of course, as a foil; his terribly English florid cheeks, curling hair and well-fed stomach all contrast with the other two, and again he reminds us of Conrad's policeman in The Secret Agent.

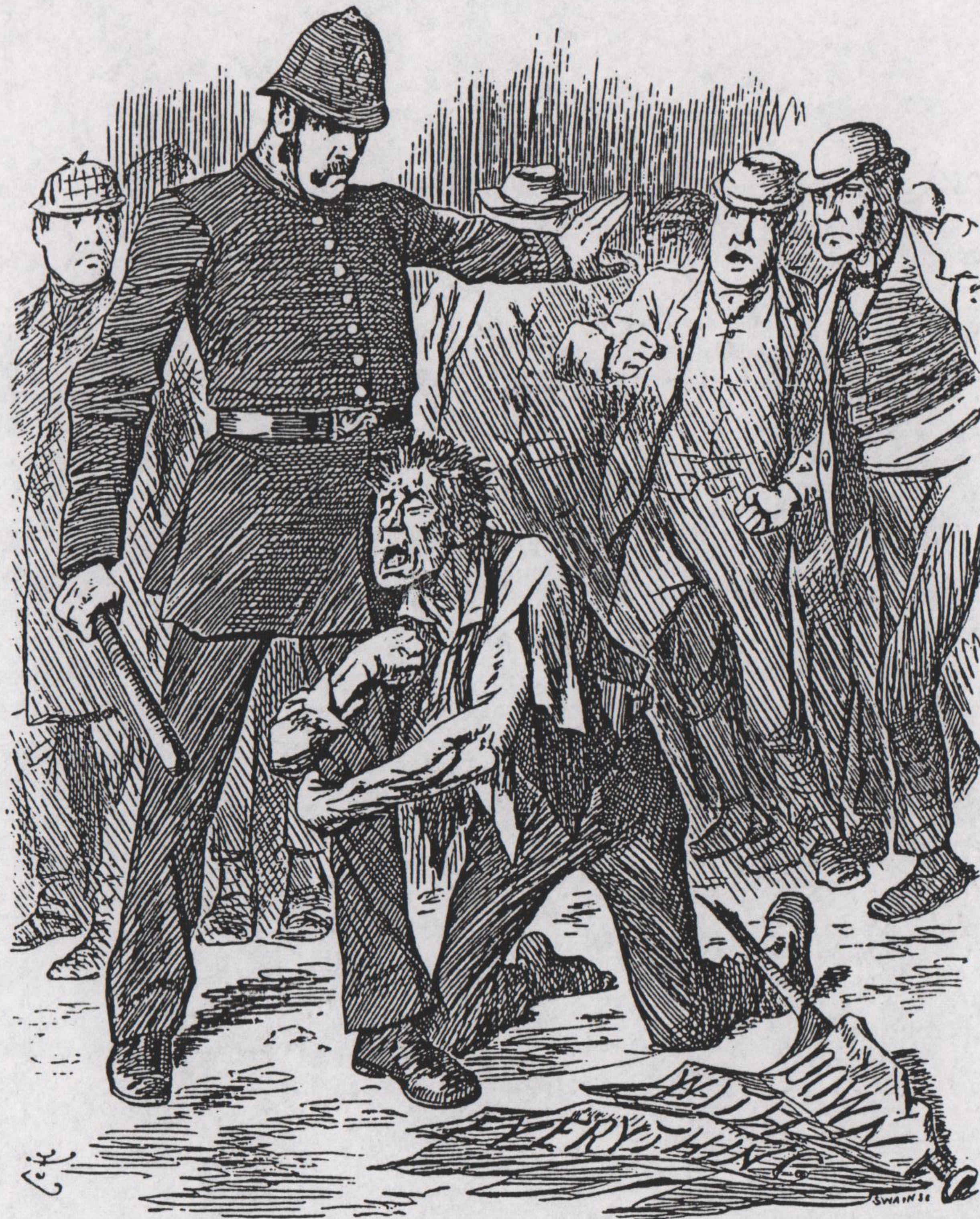
A very similar pair are found in "A Friend in Need" (p 13): the anarchist is the recognisable scruffy figure with a thin face, and, interestingly enough a "Brutus" haircut, which was associated with revolutionaries from the French Revolution onwards, and which Helen Rossetti mentions ("his limp yellow hair brushed ferociously on end"). Again the policeman is much more "normal" looking, and his strong, upright figure defends the naughty anarchist because it is his duty. Because Tenniel believes the attackers, though violent, are directing their violence towards a justified target, he makes them, too, look "normal", and though they are in the background they also provide a contrast to the anarchist. The underlying assumption of this cartoon clearly shows how Tenniel thought of anarchists, as people who are willing to loudly shout "Down with Everything", but at the first sign of trouble run cringing for help.

The third Tenniel cartoon I have included shows the representative figure of Anarchy - and she is seen here as the ultimately evil female character, Medusa (p 14). Tenniel's message, that anarchism is a political creed that turns people (emotionally) to stone, must have been met with approval from his readers, as this cartoon appeared half way through the era of Propaganda by Deed. Anarchy's unkempt and snake-ridden hair, snake like legs and claws instead of hands, as well as her scrawny body and fierce expression all show her inherent evil. The figure of authority with the sword of law,



RECKONING WITHOUT THEIR HOST.

FIRST ANARCHIST. "ENFIN, MON AMI!—VE SHALL NOT BE INTERRUPT IN ZIS FREE ENGLAND!"
BULL A1 (solito voce). "DON'T BE TOO SURE, MOSSOO! YOU'LL FIND NO EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES HERE!!"

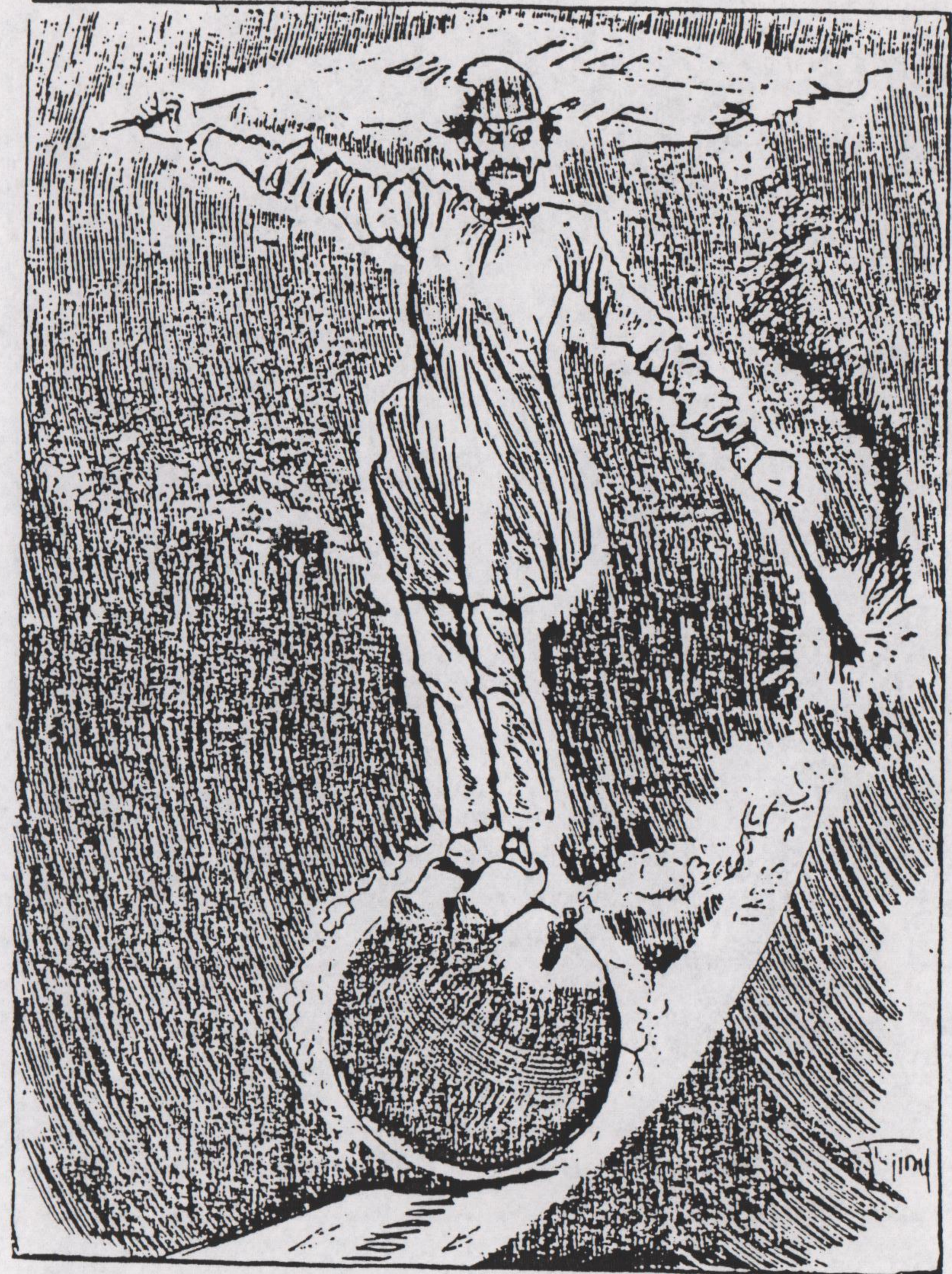


"A FRIEND IN NEED—"

ANARCHIST. "'ELP! 'ELP! PER-LICE!!"
CONSTABLE. "'DOWN WITH EVERYTHING,' INDEED! LUCKY FOR J'OU YOU HAVEN'T 'DOWN'D' ME!!"



THE MODERN MEDUSA.



A DANGEROUS PERFORMANCE

From Black and White,
March 3rd, 1894

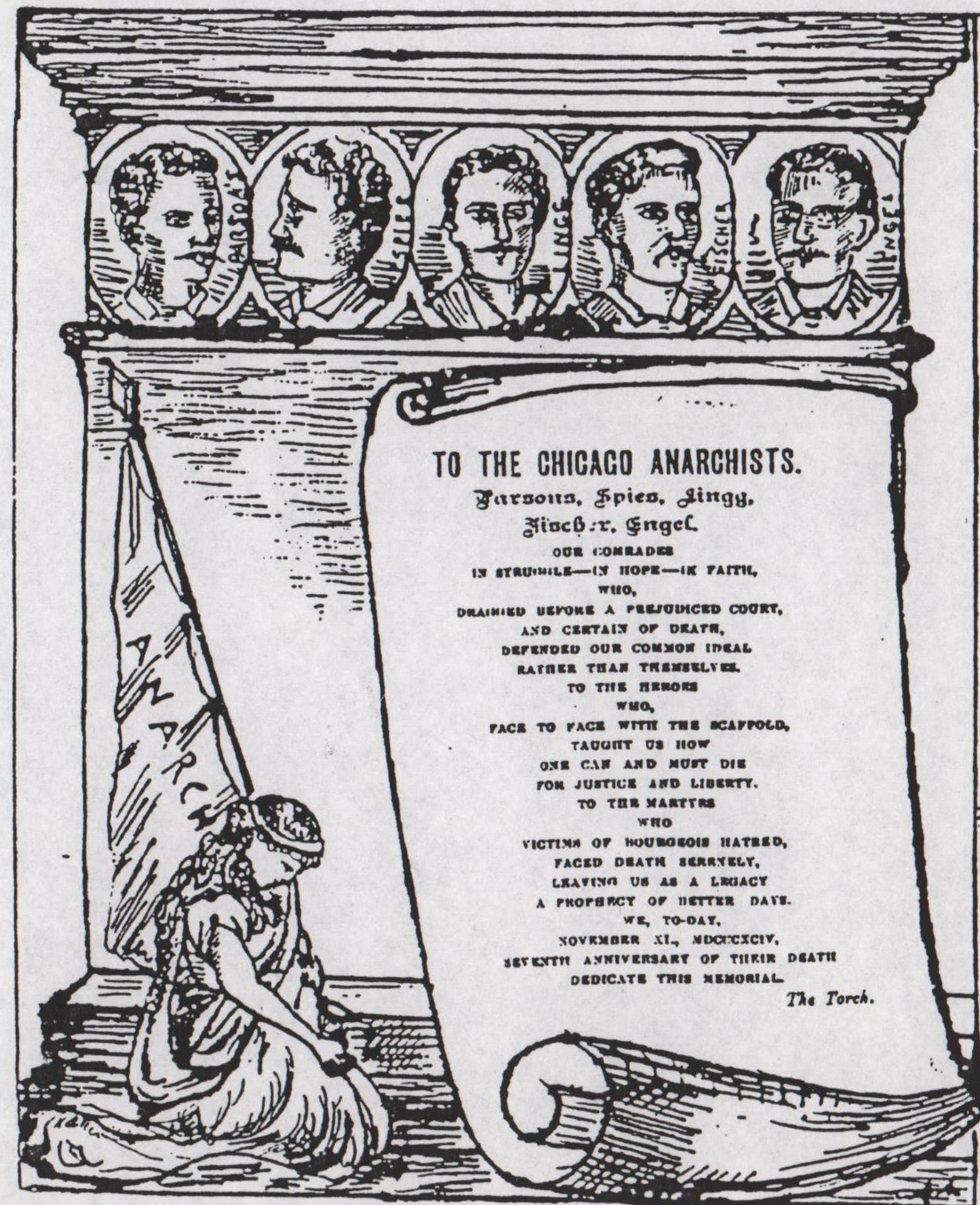
shield of justice and helmet of civilisation presents a very strong figure - but at the same time his impersonality is almost frightening.

This representation of Anarchy is repeated by Tenniel again and again, sometimes disguised as La France, sometimes completely differently for instance as the dragon being slain by St George (who has wings with 'civilisation' emblazoned on them). Anarchists, however, did fight this particular stereotype, and the two examples I have included here show this admirably. Walter Crane's 1894 drawing commemorating the Chicago Martyrs (p 16) shows a very beautiful figure of Anarchy who is the complete anti-thesis of Tenniel's conception. 'Anarchy' is embodied as a beautiful instead of an ugly woman, and this is emphasised by the flowing drapery of her dress and her rounded arms, and Crane uses a very similar figure in his logo for James Tochatti's Liberty Press, which can also be found in this booklet. The second drawing which commemorates the Chicago anarchists (p 16) is from Helen and Olivia Rossetti's journal the Torch, and seems to be influenced by Crane's illustration, as there are similar drawings of the anarchists and a figure of Anarchy who again wears a draped dress and has a rounded figure. Although the quality of the drawing is not nearly as fine as Crane's, it still shows clearly that this is the anarchists' version of anarchy - with all the political implications - and it is anarchist artists fighting the stereotype. Indeed Crane uses the typical late Victorian image of the beautiful woman to represent Anarchy - her dress, appearance and voluptuous figure is identical to how women were portrayed in contemporary pictures by Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton, Marcus Stone and Albert Moore.

The almost hysterical fear of anarchists is perhaps best summed up by the illustration "A Dangerous Performance" (p 14) that appeared in the weekly newspaper Black and White shortly after the explosion in Greenwich Park. The manic expression of the anarchist shows the evil nature of Propaganda by Deed, and the bomb he is balancing on (this doesn't show up very clearly in the photocopy) is rolling along a path which is marked from Paris to London. This drawing must have embodied the fear that the Parisian bombings were beginning in London - and it was a fear the popular press encouraged.

The weekly newspaper The Graphic seemed to be fascinated by anarchism: the artists Paul Rénouard and C H Staniland regularly illustrated articles which were usually observations of goings on in anarchist clubs, and often bore the title 'a sketch from life'. The drawings in The Graphic were of an extremely high standard, and one writer has noted their influence on Van Gogh (12). All this, of course, added to their validity in the eyes of the reader, and so this factual, unhysterical approach might be taken as a "genuine" version of anarchists.

After the Greenwich bomb, the police, led by the head of the anarchist investigators, Chief Inspector Melville, raided the Autonomie Club, one of the most popular anarchist clubs in London (there is more information on The Graphic's account of this in the next section). The whole page of illustrations (p 17) which illustrate the raid show clearly The Graphic's tactic: firstly we see the horrific scene at Greenwich Park, where



TO THE CHICAGO ANARCHISTS.

Parsons, Spies, Lingg,
Fischer, Engel

OUR COMRADES
IN STRUGGLE—IN HOPE—IN FAITH,
WHO,
DRAINED BEFORE A PREJUDICED COURT,
AND CERTAIN OF DEATH,
DEFENDED OUR COMMON IDEAL
RATHER THAN THEMSELVES
TO THE HEROES
WHO,
FACE TO FACE WITH THE SCAFFOLD,
TAUGHT US HOW
ONE CAN AND MUST DIE
FOR JUSTICE AND LIBERTY.
TO THE MARTYRS
WHO

VICTIMS OF HOUSSON'S HATRED,
FACED DEATH BERRIVELY,
LEAVING US AS A LEGACY
A PROPERTY OF BETTER DAYS.
WE, TO-DAY,

NOVEMBER XI, MDCXCIV,
SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR DEATH
DEDICATE THIS MEMORIAL

The Torch.

From the Torch,
November 18th, 1894



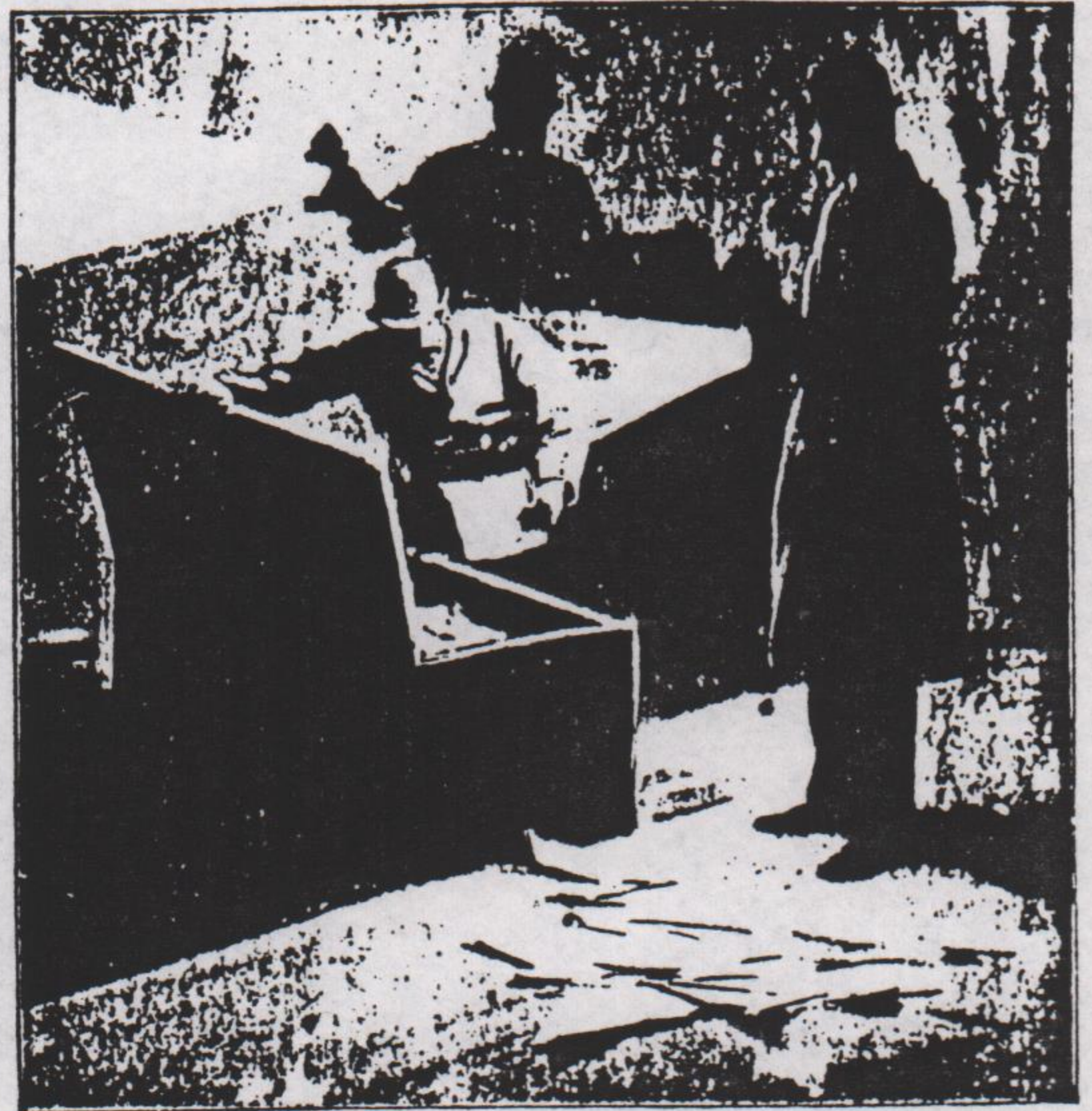
THE SCENE OUTSIDE THE GREENWICH OBSERVATORY: THE FINDING OF BOURDIN AFTER THE EXPLOSION



ABOUT NINE O'CLOCK, WHEN LEAST CROWDED, THE POLICE, IN PLAIN CLOTHES, ARRIVED AND TOOK POSSESSION OF THE CLUB AUTONOMIE, IN WINDMILL STREET



SERGEANT MICHAEL WALSH, WHO WAS TEMPORARY DOORKEEPER, USHERED THE MEMBERS IN WITH A POLITE, "THIS WAY, PLEASE"



EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY OF THE CLUB WAS INVESTIGATED WITH DARK LANTERNS FOR INCRIMINATING DOCUMENTS



SEARCHING THE POCKETS OF THE CAPTURED ANARCHISTS



ALL THE MEN WHOM CHIEF INSPECTOR MELVILLE SUSPECTED WERE TAKEN INTO THE BAR OF THE CLUB AND CLOSELY INTERROGATED

ANARCHISM IN LONDON: THE GREENWICH EXPLOSION AND SUBSEQUENT RAID ON THE CLUB AUTONOMIE



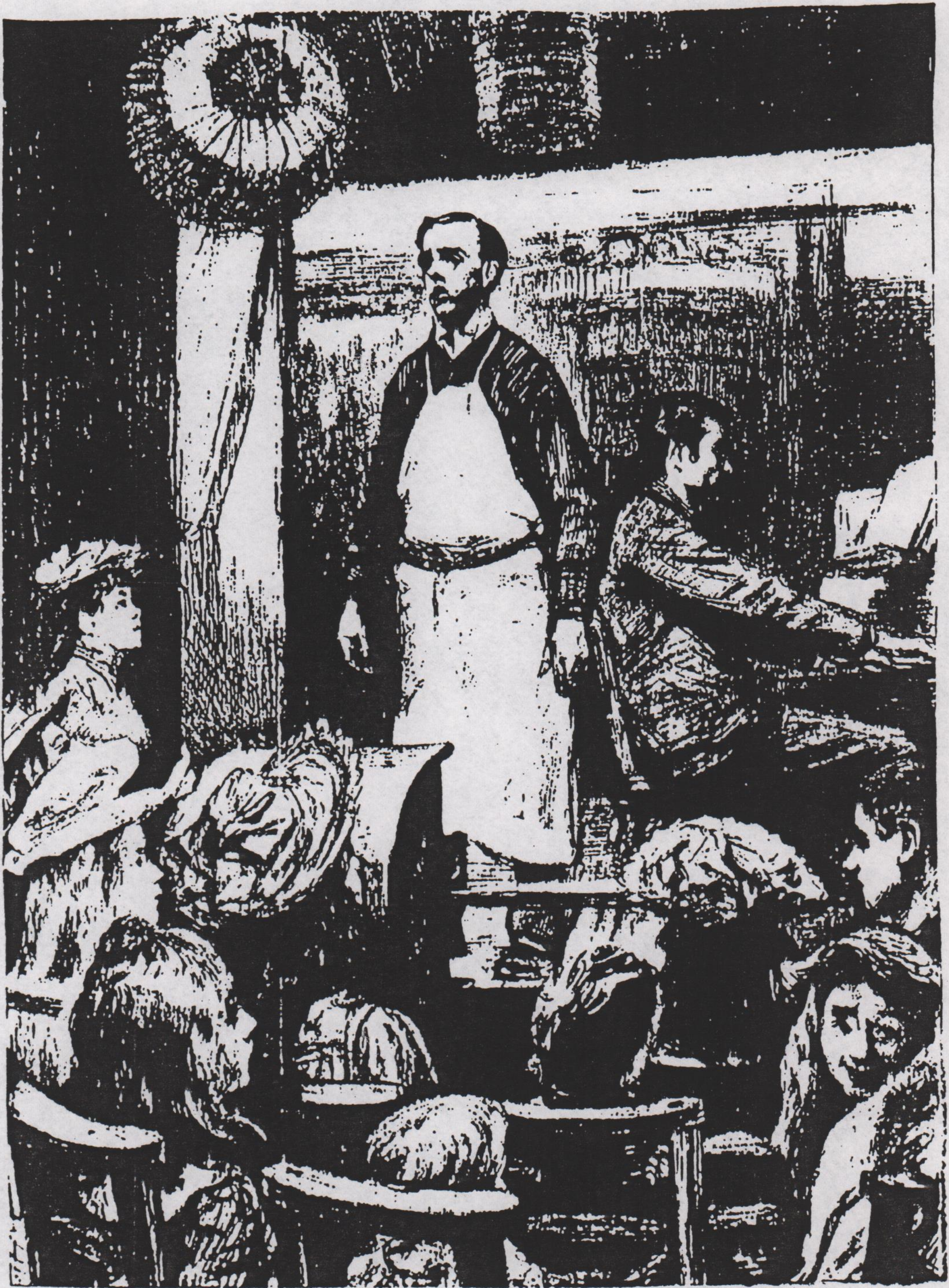
Bourdin is dying - and the illustration shows a tantalising glimpse of his gory wounds. This, we should remember, was in a family newspaper, and to show someone like this is an indication of the contempt with which anarchists were viewed.

The pictures of the subsequent raid are very dramatic and use light and shade to very good effect; more importantly they also use set facial features to identify the anarchists and the police. In the first of the pictures of the raid, the police outside the club can very easily be seen to be upstanding 'English' types from their faces, stature and clothes. The anarchists are always shown as being desperate, scruffy and distinctly foreign - the long face appears over and over again, and this is especially evident in the picture where the police are searching the anarchist's pockets.

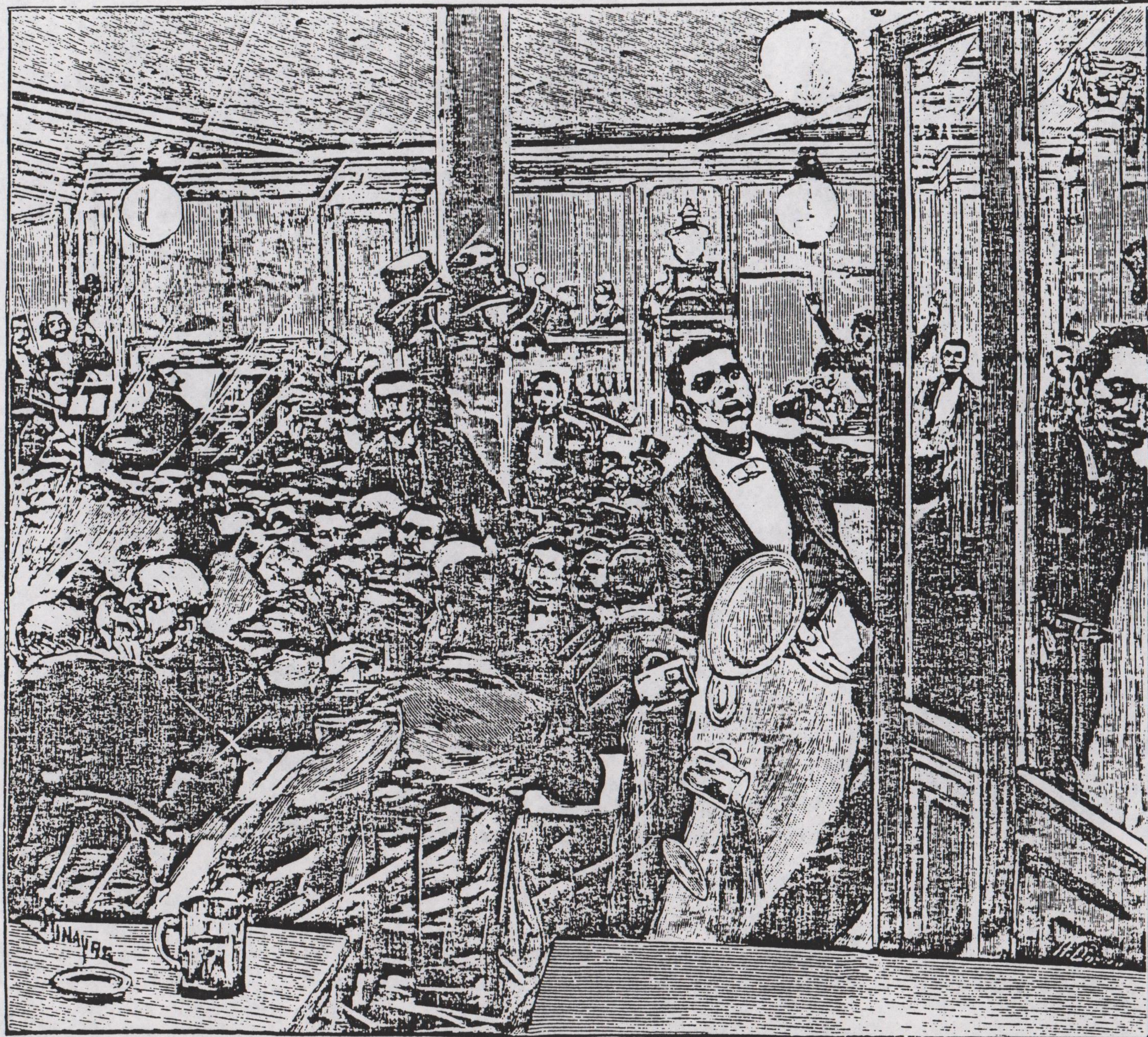
In the second picture of the raid where the anarchist is being 'ushered' into the club, the faces of the policeman and the anarchist are in close proximity, and this emphasises the difference between them; the calm stance of the policeman and the wild gesture of the anarchist reinforce this.

All these drawings are designed to show a very factual view of anarchists, but precisely because of this we should be wary of them: for by using this realistic, unhysterical approach, people are far more likely to believe such illustrations as 'truth', whereas they might be influenced but still treat Punch cartoons in a less serious way. The power of The Graphic's illustrative material was proved when the front cover of 30 July 1892 showed a drawing of Ted Leggatt singing in the Berner Street Club; his boss at Butler's Wharf saw the drawing, and Leggatt was sacked. Ironically Leggatt was a very strong opponent of terror (13), and, moreover, the illustration shows him to look highly inoffensive and very neat and tidy - totally unlike the anarchists in the drawings of the raid on the Autonomie Club. This illustration can be found on p 19.

The last illustration from the 1890s is an example of a highly popular sort of drawing: the illustration of the explosion in the Café Terminus in Paris (p 20) is taken from the Penny Illustrated Paper of 24 February 1894. When Valliant threw his bomb into the Chamber of Deputies in 1893, The Graphic carried a two page illustration of the event, and the drawing here is of the same highly sensational type - and these are just two examples. These drawings are, of course, complete fabrications, because the chances of an artist being present - and being aware of what was happening - were obviously minimal. What these illustrations served to do was satisfy a voyeuristic inclination on the part of the reader: they could condemn anarchism in safety, and at the same time take endless delight



Ted Leggatt singing
in the Berner Street Club
From The Graphic,
30 July 1892



ANOTHER ANARCHIST BOMB EXPLOSION IN PARIS: OUTRAGE AT THE CAFÉ TERMINUS, ST. LAZARE.

in seeing the horrified faces of the victims and the blinding flash of the bomb.

What all these illustrations are designed to do is to both comfort and fascinate people. By seeing anarchists, the public could feel more secure, and the newspapers could be guaranteed of sales. The papers, as expected, treated anarchism and anarchists as just another scare story and indeed The Graphic altered its coverage of it to suit the occasion. For whereas it sent Paul Rénouard to the Berner Street Club to draw sensitive pictures of Ted Leggatt and other anarchists, after the Greenwich Park explosion when public fear and hatred of anarchists in London was at an all-time high, they sent C H Staniland to the Autonomie Club to draw stereotyped, near racist illustrations to satisfy public demand.

NEWSPAPERS

Of all the attacks on anarchists, the medium with the widest audience was undoubtedly the newspapers; in many cases these were also the most virulent of the critics in a campaign that was full of savagery. The weekly newspapers especially often printed long articles that were solely devoted to reviling anarchists, and a very good example is the Illustrated London News' article after Martial Bourdin blew himself up in Greenwich Park, and it is worth quoting at length:

An accidental death, hideous and horrible, but scarcely deplorable, as it deservedly ended the pernicious existence of one of those detestable criminals who plot the wholesale murder of the innocent, the destruction of private and public property, and every other cruel mischief that fiendish cunning devises for the vain purpose of terrifying society to overthrow all social and political institutions, took place on Thursday afternoon, February 15, in Greenwich Park. It is no new thing in London that gangs of foreign assassins should hold their secret meetings here, and should here prepare [their] explosive bombs ...

No-one, therefore, need be surprised at the discovery, now, of the "Autonomie Club", in Windmill Street, Tottenham Court Road, frequented by about a hundred of the Anarchists belonging to different European nationalities, one of whom, a Frenchman named Martial Bourdin, has, fortunately for mankind, killed himself unintentionally with the vile and dreadful instrument that is in vogue among them for their absurd and monstrous schemes.

The author goes on to give a gory description of Bourdin's wounds, and this article was accompanied by a page of drawings which included one of the scene at Greenwich where he had been killed - complete with an 'x' on the drawing to show the exact spot where he died. This sort of story was widespread after Bourdin's death, and it was only the ultra-conservative Lady's Pictorial which said it felt "a little sorry" that a 26 year old man had died.

This sort of sanctimonious writing that gloated over death was not uncommon; other papers added to this the demand for anarchists to be deported from England, for here they were free to plot. The Pall Mall Gazette warned:

We are warming

A SNAKE IN OUR BOSOM

in harbouring in this country the Anarchical refuse of the world. The popular impression is that England, so long as she provides asylum for those who flee from every other country, is securing her own immunity from the attacks of the anarchists. England is the last door open to them, and they dare not close that, says the man in the street. I fear he is comforting himself with an illusion ... Daily and nightly wholesale murder is preached in privacy which is but thinly veiled.

Every newspaper subscribed to the 'anarchist conspiracy' theory, that there was an international band of anarchists who were trying to topple Western civilisation by Propaganda by Deed. The truth was that the explosions were carried out by "isolated and often somewhat unbalanced individuals" (14), and one would have imagined that with the comprehensive links that anarchists had with Europe, that had such a theory been true, they might have been more successful.

As we have seen, The Graphic showed the Greenwich Park incident and the subsequent raid on the Autonomie Club with glee; the report that accompanied the illustrations of the raid is made more immediate and exciting because it is written by a first-person witness. The reporter writes:

... I stood aside to watch in full progress one of the best planned raids the English police ever carried out ... In the narrow lobby stood Walsh - a man showing no ear-marking of the police in walk or dress - and when a knock came to the door he swiftly opened it. From the gloom of squalid Windmill Street the Anarchist walked gaily into the well-lighted hall to suddenly realise that he would have been better outside.

This sort of first-hand reporting was obviously very exciting to contemporary readers, and so popular a subject was anarchism that The Graphic devoted almost four pages to it, as well as a front cover.

Readers would have been thrilled by reports of such goings on, especially hearing of the ease with which the police found and entrapped the wicked revolutionaries. The reporter goes on:

Some of the special police had meanwhile disappeared from the Club, and it began to flash across the minds of several of the men that the police were most likely paying domiciliary visits to their lodgings and the result might not be pleasing to them. This made them restless, and one began to resist. He was siezed with a knack due to some experience, thrown down, and threatened with the handcuff. After that he remained quiet.

This sort of reporting re-inforces the Conrad-type myth that the police were the bosses and could control the anarchist movement - which was naturally very reassuring to the public. The Graphic further calms fears that anarchism is a virus that has spread to English people:

It is worth remarking that he [the policeman] found not one English name in the whole gang. There were many Germans, a good many French, and a fair sprinkling of other nationalities.

To imply that no English people were anarchists is clearly a lie - John Quail and Hermia Oliver have both shown the strength of the specifically English anarchist movement, so either the reporter is not telling the truth, or he was present on an evening when the French and German sections of the Club were meeting, rather than the English section. The most blatant mistake in the article is that the raid on the Club did not take place, as The Graphic claimed, on the Thursday (the day Bourdin died), but Friday 16 February. The Penny Illustrated Paper also claimed to have had a reporter present at the raid, and they featured a virtually identical story to The Graphic's. These are just two papers who claim to give a first-hand account of the raid, and we must wonder whether such claims are true - after all, drawings of the Autonomie Club could be made on another night (and some from just looking in the window), and details of the raid itself could have been gained from either the anarchists or the police.

Newspapers, then, adopted whatever tone of voice they believed their readers wanted to hear. While the Pall Mall Gazette and the Illustrated London News adopted a moral tone, The Graphic aimed to thrill its readership. Anarchism was the best-selling story of the day - and the papers certainly weren't going to risk their sales by saying that the facts or the stereotype weren't true.

* * * * *

At one time or another, we've all made judgements about people from their appearance and up to a certain point this is normal and part of a natural discernment we possess. When society does it so that it becomes a cult that is threatening, when it whips up irrational terror and frenzy, it sometimes can't be controlled. Because of the decline of Propaganda by Deed after 1894, anarchists (in England) merely became a sort of all-purpose bogeyman. A rather ridiculous new stereotype began to develop of the anarchist in a long cloak (here helped by Chesterton), with a wide hat and a smoking bomb in his hand. If you ask people today what they think an anarchist looks like, you'll hear something like a hippy with a bomb, or a North London Poly student. Someone even once told me quite seriously (the person shared a house with an anarchist) that anarchists were "different" in Victorian times than they are today, and that they all wore long cloaks, wide hats and had bombs under their cloaks.

Stereotypes, of course, are popular, and because they are popular - and simple - people remember them. The political stereotype that grew up alongside the physical one, that anarchists are shams who use politics for their own ends, ie wanton terror, has been as durable. "Anarchy" is still used to describe anything wild, criminal or pointless, and the phrase 'a state of anarchy' is regularly used in the news in a totally untrue way. But precisely because the Victorian media used stereotypes, they could keep the true facts about anarchism quiet, so hopefully people would not be interested in it - saying someone is fat or ugly, after all, doesn't say anything about anarchism, only the person making the statement. And although anarchists certainly countered the stereotype with fun or beauty, this didn't have any impression on general opinion.

The stereotype, though, worked against anarchists extremely successfully - not only were anarchists physically attacked on May Day 1894, but after 1896 the movement declined into virtual non-existence, and though the reasons of the backlash against Propaganda by Deed and the success of trade unions are usually given as the reason for this decline (15), the media campaign is, I believe, equally responsible.

Anarchists, of course, aren't the only political or social group to have a stereotype built up around them, or a media campaign directed against them: the 1789 French revolutionaries and the Irish nationalist movement are but two of the many who have sparked similar reactions. The anti-anarchist campaign was conducted, however, with particular savagery and venom, and used totally indiscriminately. It is not an experience we should forget.

* * *

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- 5 Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad, p 237
- 6 Hermia Oliver, op cit, p 100
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- 8 Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World, chapter 23
- 9 John Quail, The Slow Burning Fuse, p 204
- 10 R G G Price, A History of 'Punch', chapter 5
- 11 Cesare Lombroso, Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso, p 236
- 12 Ronald Pickvance, English Influences on Van Gogh
- 13 John Quail, op cit, p 142
- 14 David Miller, op cit, pp 112-13
- 15 Hermia Oliver, op cit, p 141

FURTHER READING

As there is very little material on this specific subject, I would direct interested readers to the novels and papers I have discussed, and then look themselves for related material. Martyn Everett has written an excellent article on "Art and the Anarchist Movement in Britain" which appeared in the Centenary Edition of Freedom, and I am very grateful to him for his kindness towards my work. Barbara Arnett Melchiori's Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel (1987) is useful, but only discusses two specifically anarchist novels, while Liz Curtis' excellent little book Nothing but the Same Old Story (1984) has useful information on Victorian physiognomy. One article I haven't read so far is Maia Shapeyer's "Anarchism in British Public Opinion, 1880-1914" which can be found in Victorian Studies Vol 31 No 4, Summer 1988.



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