

Letters

Dear Editor

Thanks for your letter plus T.L. As you can see I've not moved, and I can see you've not changed.

The TL you sent me is probably the best ever, but I go all queasy when you tell the world you are friends with the Libertarian Alliance, and can print their article "Listening to the Conservatives"(!) which makes clear the intention to privatise welfare. Are you trying to wind me up? If so you have succeeded.

You send me friendly letters, seemingly without realising that you are giving me the finger at the same time. But then maybe you enjoy playing "silly buggers": your lead article opens with "Anarchism is a joke in Britain". Well he's dead right there!

You have given me plenty of cause to suspect that you simply do not know what you're doing. Now you have confirmed it.

Please do not reply to this, I can't stand any more of your contradictory signals and evasions.

In haste and rage.

John Griffin

London

Dear Comrades

I was very pleased to find a copy of your mag at Word Power here in Edinburgh. Although I spent 6 years helping to build the anarchist movement in the South of England I will never again call myself an anarchist and for many years have referred to myself almost entirely as a communist (albeit Green). My main problem with Anarchism in Britain is that it is hopeless on heavy industry - *small may be beautiful but big is amazing!* Until anarchism can deal with iron, steel, coal, potato distribution etc within a Soviet (ideal) Workers State you can save yourself the effort of publishing any further pulp apologies for past behaviour and inadequacy! No doubt even I would have supported a Tolstoyan peasant economy in 1917, but it would not have gone beyond the steam engine and no doubt would have been crushed by imperialism both social and foreign invader.

I campaign for state ownership and control of all motor driven vehicles and the collectivisation of bicycles.

Yours for a Green Workers State Scotland

Name with-held

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EDITORIAL

IT is hard to keep a positive attitude at times. So many are the contemporary events which press upon the freedom of the individual and to the detriment of the wider society and humanity. The ongoing disastrous civil war in Iraq and conflicts in other parts of the world, the recent debacle of the Danish cartoons which saw militant fundamentalist Islam attempting to exercise censorship across the world, all contribute to this trend. The values of freedom of thought, expression and the press are worth nothing if it is not possible to exercise them. There is now a real threat that freedom of expression will no longer be possible if we cannot print, write or say what we wish to due to fear.

Of the radical press in Britain only the avowedly secularist *Freethinker* reprinted some of the cartoons along with articles containing intelligent discussion of the issues. They deserve support from other journals of the Libertarian sector for their stand.

With the ongoing effects of global warming being stoked by the industrial expansion of India and China, and with the American Corporate Capitalist system unwilling to put a break on its own consumption of energy and resources, global conflicts are only likely to worsen in the wake of climate change, flood, drought, famine and mass transfer of populations seeking to flee such disasters. The values of individual freedom and voluntary co-operation have never in history faced such a high level of threat as Governments install knee jerk, populist and authoritarian laws in response to the latest perceived emergency. We have likely al-

ready passed the 'tipping point' in terms of climate change, it is all too likely that we are approaching the tipping point for the future survival of a free society. So to quote The Cunningham Amendment, here's to braver, better times.

Jonathan Simcock



Is This the Right Room for an Argument?

In middle age it's interesting to look back and consider the formative influences on one's early life. My own intellectual development owes little to formal education but an inestimable debt to *Private Eye* magazine and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Many cartoons and sketches spring to mind: an *Eye* cover depicting costumed Zulus joyfully leaping into the air beneath the headline, *Dr Verwoerd Dies - a Nation Mourns!*; an issue featuring the chairman of Distillers, the manufacturers of thalidomide, then being sued by limbless victims of the drug, who's speech bubble proclaims, *They haven't got a leg to stand on!*; but most memorable and intriguing has always been *Monty Python's* "Five Minute Argument".

I Came Here For an Argument

In the sketch a chap appears a little lost as he strolls around an office building. *Ah, is this the right room for an argument?* he inquires of a man seated at a desk. *I told you once*, was the reply. *No you haven't*, asserts the first man. *Yes I have*. And as this surreal performance unfolds we realise that the inquirer has paid a fee to engage in an intellectual dispute with a professional arguer as a recreational pursuit. *Is this a five minute argument or a full half-hour?* asks the arguer, *I'm not allowed to argue unless you've paid*.

When the arguer continues arguing despite insisting that the other fellow hasn't yet handed over requisite fee for the argument the client plays a masterstroke. *Aha, if I didn't pay, why are you arguing? I got you! If you're arguing, I must have paid*. But he is immediately trumped. *Not necessarily, I could be arguing in my spare time*.

Absolutely brilliant. Entertaining, amusing but also intellectually rigorous and stimulating. A perfect example of how you can formulate an argument, challenge, yet not lose your temper or resort to ill-tempered insults. The very intensity of the disagreement exemplifies intellectual respect for an opponent.

Without the intervention of *Python's* argument sketch I'd have persevered with my original plan to study Physics at college instead of switching

to Philosophy.

The Automatic Gainsaying of a Position

That initial stimulus wasn't the entire extent of the sketch's influence on me. At one point the chap who had in fact actually paid the appropriate fee becomes dissatisfied with the quality of the service contracted for. *Oh, look this isn't an argument...it's just contradiction...I came here for a good argument...an argument isn't just contradiction*. Of course, the arguer disagrees, claiming the client simply came for an argument that might well consist of mere contradiction, of simply taking a contrary position.

At that juncture the client makes a profound distinction. *An argument is a connected series of statements intended to establish a proposition...argument is an intellectual process. Contradiction is just the automatic gainsaying of any statement the other person makes*. Unfortunately modern political argument seldom resembles the former and all too frequently consists of little more than adopting a contrary position.

One Dimensional Politics

Anarchists are rightly dismissive of party politicians whose response to criticism routinely consists of claiming the other lot are worse but have we got any right to throw stones? *Monty Python* changed my life but most libertarian literature relies on clichéd criticism that convinces nobody. Too often anarchist magazines have the intellectual appeal of the *Beano* without the high production values or humour. I don't think anarchists are more stupid than anyone else but we are often more lazy, more critical of others, and less critical of our own ideas and activities. Our critique is too commonly confined to ill informed, one-dimensional responses to complex, multi-faceted issues.

Room for a Good Argument

As I write I've just checked out the web site of the 2005 *Manchester Anarchist Bookfair* and was unfortunately not surprised to learn its logo consists of a policeman making a crude, one-fingered gesture to the viewer. If the police, the army, elected politicians, businessmen, celebrities, journalists, priests and countless others are automatically considered enemies, who are our friends?

That highly recommended parody of English history teaching, *1066 And All That*, provides readers with an instant analysis of all significant historic individuals and events as either a *good thing* or a *bad thing*. Most anarchists adopt the same approach. Test yourself out, how would you classify each of the following; nationalism, Marx, nuclear power, capitalism, private education, syndicalism, Bakunin, the internet, revolution and free National Health dentistry.

Most anarchists would leap to knee-jerk criticism of the first five and automatic defence of the second five but it doesn't take much imagination to appreciate that there are both commendable and critical elements in each. The last issue of *Total Liberty* included a welcome contribution from a right wing libertarian. Such cross fertilisation is essential for 4 reasons:

- 1.) Entertainment value – eventually everyone gets bored of hearing the same voices
- 2.) Accuracy – no one faction or individual has a monopoly on truth
- 3.) Marketing – you don't attract converts by denouncing the unconverted
- 4.) Intellectual development – unless we challenge our own intellectual paradigms our imagination and insight atrophies into prejudice

Lessons from the Pet Shop

Misanthropic denunciation of modern society is fun but it makes for unattractive companionship and ineffective advocacy of anarchism. Effective arguments for anarchism require analysis of our abysmal track record and poor public image as well as an appreciation of the seductive appeal of our opponents. Instead we ineffectually parrot denunciations of the rest of the world.

British anarchism is in a bad way. Some fear it's already deceased, with only a lifeless corpse nailed to the perch by die-hard fanatics. Fortunately the man in the pet shop assures me that it can be revived, for like the *Norwegian Blue*, it's just resting, shagged out after a long squawk.

Chris Draper



ONE of the most frequently met reasons for dismissing anarchism as a social theory is the argument that while one can imagine it existing in a small, isolated, primitive community it cannot possibly be conceived in the context of large, complex, industrial societies. This view misunderstands both the nature of anarchism and the nature of tribal societies. Certainly the knowledge that human societies exist, or have existed, without government, without institutionalised authority, and with social and sexual codes quite different from those of our own society, is bound to interest the advocates of anarchy, if only to rebut the suggestion that their ideas run contrary to 'human nature', and you will often find quoted in the anarchist press some attractive description of a tribal anarchy, some pocket of the Golden Age (seen from the outside) among the Eskimo, innocent of property, or the sex-happy Trobrianders.

Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (1973)

This Is Not A Public Right Of Way

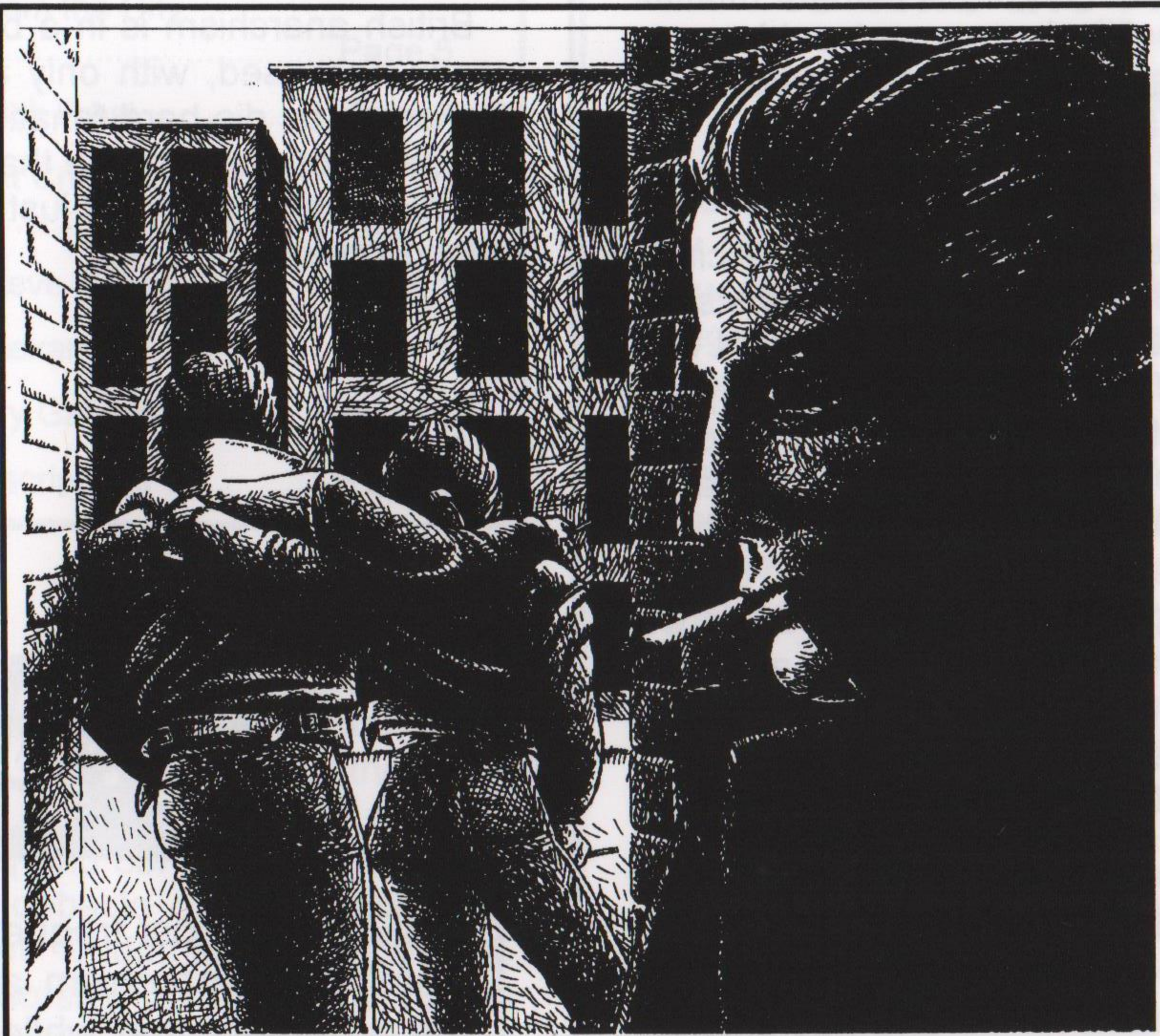
According to the publicity, Birmingham's 'Bull Ring' shopping centre is the biggest in Europe. Or, perhaps that was only when it was opened a few years ago, maybe some other city holds that accolade now. It's a big place, in any event, and links a multi-site, multi-level 'mall', with Birmingham's more traditional markets, and shopping streets full of the familiar names of UK and global retailing, from 'Gap' to 'Waterstone's', via 'Starbucks'. Walking from Birmingham's Moor Street rail station to Birmingham New Street station, takes you through the 'Bull Ring', past the larger than life statue of a golden bull (or, should that be golden calf?) at bay. Huge posters loom over you, ~ advertising sports gear, clothes, jewellery, and perfumes, while on lamp posts there are much smaller signs saying, 'This is Not a Public Right of Way', and referring to some Act of Parliament to support that assertion. But while I was wandering around looking for a post box, it struck me that in those private streets, full of the shopping public, there were plenty of signs of people taking the public nature of open spaces for granted.

Down one street, the crowd of shoppers flowed away from a young black man like a river around a small island. The man was clasping a bible in his hand, and preaching the word of his god - 'Some of you say that Jesus was just a man...'. I don't particularly care for religion in any of its forms, but here was a proselytiser doing what he was supposed to be doing, and, in the process, ignoring the 'This is Not a Public Right of Way' signs. But he wasn't the only one, as further down the same street, a young American, dressed for Tibet in the summer, rather than the West Midlands in the winter, and sporting a rather dashing orange stripe down his nose, was talking to a student about the Buddha, or Hare Krishna, or whoever he was talking about. Anyway, it was clear that he didn't give much for 'This is Not a Public Right of Way'.

Down by the post-box, there was a middle-aged couple with a sort of trolley contraption, piled with open cardboard boxes, from which they were selling perfume. The man was wearing a sweat shirt which announced, 'I guarantee that everything will go'. Maybe it was a multi-function sweat shirt, as the slogan could have been used by the black Christian, the Hare Krishna fan, or even a wandering anarchist. I suppose the trolley would have given the couple a

chance to escape with their goods, assuming that they were there 'illegally', and it was nice to think that the giants of retailing, with their shiny shop fronts, and Sunday supplement interiors, were being challenged by a couple with a barrow, ignoring both them and the 'This is Not a Public Right of Way' signs. There were also several groups of Big Issue sellers, including two with a pack of dogs asleep in a sandwich of coats and blankets. The dogs were clearly ignoring the signs, and so were the paper sellers, although it struck me that they may well have a right to sell in those private streets, as part of society's sop to the homeless.

I'll have to admit that I bought a book in Waterstones, and drank a coffee in one of the global coffee chains. It was 'Fair Trade' coffee. It's funny how all the other types of coffee aren't labelled, 'Unfair Trade', but I suppose the implication is there, if you think about it for half a second. Just in the same way that the implications of the 'This is Not a Public Right of Way' signs are there.



Those signs say that you may go that way to shop, but you may not preach, convert, sell, sleep, campaign or protest in those streets. You may shop, but remember, that to enjoy that right you must not do anything else. But, as fifteen minutes spent wandering around those streets showed, a lot of people ignore those little signs, with their bullying overtones. The Christian, the Buddhist, the street entrepreneurs, the dogs and the Big Issue sellers, they were like grass

growing between the concrete, in places where the planners of signs thought that they had cleared in the interests of profit.

Steve Cullen

People like simple ideas and are right to like them. Unfortunately, the simplicity they seek is only to be found in elementary things; and the world, society, and man are made up of insoluble problems, contrary principles, and conflicting forces. Organism means complication, and multiplicity means contradiction, opposition, independence.

P.J. PROUDHON, The Theory of Taxation (1861)

A Caring Society: a View from the City

The following is an account of a recent event that is personal experience. I don't have any training in dealing with this kind of situation, nonetheless, I found that simple caring and common sense guided me through to making a very hard decision. Admittedly, this is an extreme example, but it brought home to me the importance of taking responsibility for someone temporarily not able to exercise informed consent.

I live in a block of flats in a leafy residential area. It's a street of fairly grand Victorian houses that have been through the vicissitudes of history; some are still very desirable family dwellings, (if you have the odd half million!) and some are the inevitable bed sits and privately let flats. There is a complex of flats for people with learning difficulties, and there are housing association flats. Where I live it's a mixed 'community'. However, I'm of the opinion that calling it a *community* is something of a misnomer. Virtually the only people who will greet you in the street are the tenants from the complex of flats for people with learning difficulties, though my direct neighbours will always say hello when meeting. Most of the other residents in the street totally ignore us 'social tenants' and have accordingly invested more in their security systems. This includes some who at least lay the claim to the lie of being socialists (Labour and SWP, but middle-class, of course).

In these flats, we all enjoy a fairly quiet environment, and everyone generally rubs along well. Of course, on occasion there are frictions, such as when someone turns the volume up on their stereo, or has the television on too loud, but generally disturbances of this nature are few, and would be of far less impact if there was any sound insulation incorporated.

When I first came to live here some fifteen years ago, there was a general agreement that we'd all keep an eye out for each other: Not in order to be nosy, or even to be in a situation of living in each other's pockets, but so that if someone's regular patterns changed, or a particular person hadn't been seen, (or heard!) for a while, someone would knock on their door to check that they were alright. Of recent years, due to new tenants moving in etc, that agreement seems to have gone by the bye, and now it's just like the majority of so called communities which are really atomised collections of humanity; a horrible description, but I think apt. The previous situation meant that tenants were able to live their private lives, and keep them private yet have the reassurance that their welfare was a collective responsibility. How often do we hear of deaths going undiscovered for months in very populous complexes of flats or dwellings? And afterwards we then hear reports of people realising that they hadn't seen the deceased for a while? Why did no-one spend a few minutes checking up, and alerting relevant agen-

cies if concerned?

My particular experience involves a personal friend, who I shall call Sally, which served to add to the poignancy to the situation, but nonetheless remains fundamentally one of taking some responsibility for those around us who may be going through a period of distress, and therefore in need of help. In this particular case, it was quite serious, and Sally unfortunately needed hospitalisation, but it could be that someone was depressed, or just merely lonely, just needing the reassurance of someone knocking on their door and enquiring after their welfare. Maybe it's a case of ignorance, of perhaps an expectation that they will be left taking the brunt of the responsibility, and not knowing which agencies to contact. The whole point about this kind of responsibility is that it is a *shared responsibility*, and that we also have a responsibility to ourselves which means knowing when to pass it on, and to whom, when we reach the limits of our abilities or knowledge.

But the present dilemma faced by anyone who does care is exacerbated by the atomised nature of our living condition. Despite the howls of derision and criticism of the Left all those years ago when Margaret Thatcher asserted that there was "...no such thing as society" fundamentally she was correct, and the only 'crime' she was guilty of was one of heresy against the Marxist faiths. Ironically, the followers of those faiths had over a period of some half a century created the very conditions where the Iron Lady could make such an assertion — after all, they had created the monolithic welfare state that had removed the people's own institutions, destroying grass-roots solutions to social problems. It was only a matter of time before such a person as Margaret Thatcher took over the reins of that monolithic state and then sought to demolish it. Even Thatcher saw a value in the family, when she went on to state that there was "...only the individual and the family...". Blair, that acolyte of the Reformed Marxist Church, has gone a step further, and seeks to undermine the institution of the family by insisting that both parents go out to work, and that even single parents have to 'work'. Is not raising the next generation regarded as valuable, and necessary work? Thus we are left with an atomised collection of humanity uneducated and unable to cope when problems arise. I had not been close to Sally for a while due to personal differences, but it has transpired over the recent past that she had been demonstrating unusual behaviour over a period of several months. People had noticed this, but as the behaviour was only a slight exaggeration, they had let it pass. I include myself here. Things weren't helped in that Sally is an immensely proud person, who tends to deny that anything is wrong, and indeed, is often in denial, even when it is obvious that something is seriously wrong. Her independence is to be admired, but it does make things difficult, and certainly given the consideration of basic human rights, makes the situation one that is somewhat fraught. Though Sally's problems built up over a period of a few months, and other friends had noticed, sadly no-one networked. I know who some of Sally's friends are, and they know who I am. But none of us are directly friends of one another, and unsure as to the

relative status of friendship at this given time, no-one was sure whether, or indeed whom, to contact to enquire and compare about Sally's mental health.

The past week has been a very fraught and stressful one, and for many valid reasons it had fallen to me to take some responsibility for Sally. I realised very quickly that I needed support and advice, and fortunately I found the telephone number of a friend of hers who was able to give me the advice and support I needed. I also rang another friend who knows Sally, and she too gave me a lot of moral and practical support. One of these people was on the ball enough to contact other friends of Sally who, as it happened, had some concerns about her welfare. I contacted her family, and they came out to see her, but this just exacerbated the situation and Sally called the police to insist that they left. It must have been very upsetting for them, as it was now obvious that something was seriously wrong, but as yet nothing could be done as Sally was not yet a significant threat to her own or others' safety, and not a threat to property. All that could be done was to monitor her behaviour and decide when it became crucial to act in her best interests — not an easy thing to do. Her behaviour became progressively erratic as the week went on, and other tenants were being disturbed by her behaviour. Gradually Sally became a danger to both herself and others, as she was going out at night and wandering around some of the less salubrious areas of the city, and also throwing objects out of her window, which is located on the second floor and facing the street. Sally was also exhibiting other behaviours of a nature that would be extremely distressing to her in her normal state, but again this is information that people knew but had not shared with anyone. I don't seek to blame anyone. I do think that responsible action should have been taken. It's quite well known that I do care quite a lot for Sally, and that her and I share a sometimes stormy relationship, that I am always concerned for her welfare, and would not let our differences cloud that. Admittedly, Sally's behaviour had angered some of the other tenants. As a result they were not at all well disposed to her, but they should have expressed their concerns to either me or the housing association, neither of which they did until Sally was hospitalised. Here I do apportion some blame. Those individuals did not act responsibly, but rather sought to blame Sally for her apparently anti-social behaviour (hardly the case as Sally was temporarily incapable of acting in a social way) and at times being verbally abusive towards her, hardly helping the situation.

I have learnt a lot over the past week, and I shall keep an eye out for people in distress. There isn't much we can do, but at the very least we can be vigilant and flag up potential problems before they get out of hand. It may mean that little or nothing can be done immediately, but at least if the agencies are alerted, they are aware of the situation and can offer advice or monitor the situation. I have to praise the actions of the police. They handled the emergency in a prompt and very professional way, and the speed with which they acted is to be commended, especially as they were acting in a role for which though they are legally obliged to act, they receive little or no training for this

role. I have also learned how important it is to overcome personal prejudices when it comes to someone I care about, and the importance of keeping in touch with people who also care about Sally. I've also learned that it's equally important to show concern and a caring and responsible attitude towards people who are not close to me; as demonstrated to me when a community minded individual alerted me about the welfare of another tenant who needs support. His problem is more than likely one of loneliness, and though I do not want to become personally involved, I do care, and I have alerted the housing association, who will now alert the relevant agency.

It doesn't demand much of anyone to knock on a door, or to telephone the landlord, social services, or even the police if they are at all concerned about another person. Perhaps we should adopt that slogan more famous in another sphere, "It could be you!" We do not have to like a person, but I think we should care, even if that caring is a form of enlightened self-interest. I shall now write to the housing association suggesting that an addition is made to the tenant's handbook about looking out for the welfare of those



around them, emphasising that it does not necessarily mean personal intervention, or even taking on a great deal of responsibility. I even think it should emphasise the self-interest aspects in this, as we never know when it could be we ourselves who are going a little off the rails.

A much more sane approach to mental illness is needed. Not all, or even the majority of people suffering from it are potential axe murderers. Incidences where this is the case are surely exacerbated because no-one sees fit to alert the relevant agencies in a timely manner before a crisis. It is also a sad comment on our much-vaunted 'civilisation' that mental health services are so under-funded and too bureaucratic,

with staff weighed down with an overlarge workload. If we are to have caring communities, then it has to start with taking an interest in the welfare of those around us. That we sensitise ourselves to the plight of others, and that at times we let it be known that we care enough to be there when someone is in crisis. Empowerment is needed, and this can only come through education, which should ideally happen in our schools, were they not dedicated to the inculcation of a rampant consumerist individualism that is the very antithesis of civilised society. However, in the absence of this, ways must be found to spread this basic knowledge. I personally would prefer to see bus shelter advertising promote such information rather than products of dubious worth that only seek to prey on our perceived inadequacies. I believe that social landlords not only have a duty to disseminate such information, but that they are also ideally placed to do so. It could be you.

Padi Phillips



FAMILY MATTERS - OR NOT

The importance of the family is a prejudice seldom questioned. When children and young people become a nuisance and fail to respect the respectable, the breakdown of family life is blamed. Everyone agrees that the family must be supported and helped to regain its role as both the foundation and building block of society; and as the basic means of socialisation and control.

Such faith is difficult to understand since it is well enough known that the family was (and, world-wide, largely still is) an oppressive structure through which men dominate and own one or more women and the children they sire. Women have throughout the history of the family been the private property of fathers and husbands, to be used as trade goods and the glue of political alliances; as cheap labour in the house and breeding stock in the bedroom.

There are some wonderfully happy families but it is common knowledge that the most dangerous place for a woman and her children is indoors with husband, father or partner. Around 40 per cent of marriages in the UK end in divorce - and probably 20 per cent stagger along unhappily.

The origin of the family is obscure. It probably arose very late in the Palaeolithic for it was only then - and often much later - that hominids came to understand the nature of paternity: it is a long time from copulation to childbirth; some New Guinea people living an early Neolithic lifestyle last century thought that pregnancy was a gift of the wind.

It is all but impossible to find evidence for anything like family life in the archaeological record so why did - and do - so many experts assume that the family as an institution was aboriginal and universal?

Until quite recently archaeology and anthropology were dominated by white, male, often middle-aged, Europeans who looked at human evolution through the blinkers of ego and interest and were not surprised to find man the hunter staring boldly back at them from the fossil record, his women and children hardly visible in the safety of the cave. Few white, male, middle-class Europeans, whatever their disciplines, were inclined to disagree with that view; and what the academics could not establish, religion could.

It was accepted that the family evolved because primitive men had to hunt for food, and women, who could not hunt because they were pregnant or breastfeeding (and weaker!), had to rely on them. Sometime women realised it was wise for each to depend on one man and the men accepted their duty in exchange for reliable sex and home cooking. So the family was established.

In the last 40 or so years enough has been learned to destroy that myth. It was realised that most hunter-gatherers did not and do not rely on big game for their protein; it would have been a dangerous strategy since probably two out of three big game hunts ended in failure. In fact, hardly any hunter-gatherer community has ever depended on big game for as much as 50 per cent of its diet; the Inuit famously do because there is nothing to hand in the arctic except seal and whale. The food of hunter-gathers is, in order of priority: fruit, nuts, berries, roots etc; then worms, grubs, eggs etc; easy game like rabbits; fish from rivers, shell-fish from the shore. Deer and bison are much harder to "catch" and quite why anyone hunted mammoth is a mystery to me.

That is only a sketch of the dietary story but enough to show that women and children could get all the food they needed, and of a good quality, without relying on unreliable men: big game "hunting" was often just a big game.

It was also significant that throughout evolution - until civilisation arose - people lived in egalitarian communities and in affluence in the sense that what they needed was readily and reliably available; the San of South Africa know 150 different food sources; it was unlikely that all would fail at the same time.

The anthropologist Marshal Sahlins described hunter-gatherers as "the first affluent society" since what they wanted and needed was easily available in the neighbourhood.

Given their own abilities and a reliable, adequate food supply, women did not prostitute themselves for food; nor did they need to rely on men for defence. Even a quick visit to the hunter-gatherers of South Africa, Australia or South America would show that most lead secure lives, little threatened by wild animals.

In any case, defence is the duty of the whole tribe, not of individual family men.

Is there any other reason for the family to arise? Until civilisation, people lived in groups of 25 to 50. It is likely that the women and their young children lived closely together, supporting one another through

childbirth and the first three to five years of a child's life. Boys would then have graduated to male company; men would have foraged or gone hunting. Men and women would have had sexual intercourse when they wished because it is a basic human drive and very enjoyable.

The group or tribe was too small for the benefits of a chief or leader: there was no division of labour to be enforced; no power hierarchy, no shortages and no private property to be policed. Groups were certainly not made up of a ruling male with his harem; the moderate sexual dimorphism (the difference in size, strength etc. between man and woman) indicates an equality of the sexes and easy availability would have prevented sex from becoming a rare commodity. Elephant behaviour might be an analogy but perhaps bonobos, our closest relatives, are the best guide.

The story of early human life is unclear but it was not one of male domination, scarcity, competition and the family. However, things changed. There are several speculations about the demise of the original egalitarian human community during the upper Palaeolithic, which are often also speculations about the origin of civilisation as we know it. One of these points an accusing finger at the establishment of the family.

Consider: initially and for thousands of years, we have egalitarian, non-patriarchal groups but, humans being clever people, somewhere an understanding of paternity dawned. In perhaps just one tribe, a man realised that he was the father of a particular child and could say: that is my child; then, to its mother, you are my women; finally: we are us, we are a family. Immediately the community is riven, destroyed by one and then many families, each of which knows a new, peculiar solidarity separate from the group. In this process the communality of property is broken; the first private property is the family-man's woman and children. Each family-man now has interests separate from the original community and seeks to defend his own.

Out of dissension arises patriarchal leadership. With leadership come power and wealth, which in turn require the rationalisation of religion, the protection of fences, the organisation of defence, war.

That's family life; nothing changes. What this story suggests is the necessity to strengthen not a perverse institution - the family - but the community which it destroys.

The family is at best unstable, too easily undermined by death, desertion, dispute and fission; at worst, it is a disaster area. In contrast, a community is inherently stable; it outlasts the death of individuals (and families); it is ancient, tested, natural (!) and virtuous in ways I will describe.

What is "community". The word is used promiscuously by government and other authorities to describe any conglomeration of people: any town, village, neighbourhood, factory, interest group, gang, street, ethnic minority, nation, usually when something is going wrong. The decline of community is diagnosed as a major cause of the problem; strengthening the community is a large part of the solution.

As such, the word is a mere vacuous slogan. The only definition of community which I recognise goes back to nature. We - a social animal - evolved in

communities. We inherited from earlier social species types of behaviour which predisposed us for community life and we developed and refined that behaviour. We are genetically co-operative, conservative, law-abiding, obedient and capable of self-sacrifice.

These virtues are essential to social life and social life is essential for us as individuals. The first commandment is to support and preserve our community, on which we all depend.

Families are quite irrelevant to (as well as destructive of) social life. It is nonsense for a social animal to leave child-rearing to two people or, worse, one. Social duties and skills like co-operation, tolerance, compassion, are learned in social life from a variety of influences; like language, diet, dress and so on, behaviour is also social. But so is the protection and security of children and young people. It takes the whole village to bring up a child - I think Hillary Clinton said that; but whoever, it is true.

None of this implies genetic determinism. We have evolved to obey rules which make social life secure and viable but each culture is free to shape those rules in its own peculiar way, and each does.

Our cultures are as variable as our languages; and in the end, each of us as individuals manifests social behaviour in unique ways. I am not preaching palaeoprimitivism. There is no going back; but there is no safe way forward unless we change the way we think about our social life. We are hung up on a complex of conflicting prejudices of which the centrality of the family is a major one. What we need are self-organising, responsible communities with a built-in drive towards egalitarianism which can start to tackle problems of need, justice and the environment in their own varied ways.

Dick Frost

Footnote:

Most of the evidence for these ideas can be found in my book "The Social Gene and the survival of the fit enough", price £8 from Richard Frost 11 Catherine Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria. Great Britain CA2-7PA.

"The Ballot-Box Craze,"

"Is not the very beginning of privilege, monopoly and industrial slavery this erecting of the ballot-box above the individual? Is not the ballot-box unscientific, anti-social, and a simple transposition of the equation of monarchy?" "The oppressor housed in ballot-boxes is the same deadly genius that lurks in the Palaces..... disguised and parked in the ballot-box, . . (the reformer) is thrown off his wits and glorifies the very arch-devil who has deluded him by a change of base."

Benjamin Tucker

Some Thoughts on Thought Crimes

I am an anarchist. I oppose all governments and all laws. I believe that people can find better, more humane ways to regulate their affairs and protect themselves from aggression than laws, cops, courts, and prisons.

But I live in a world where few people share this outlook, so my life, as well as that of others, is constantly hemmed in by rules and regulations designed and enforced by people who have arrogated to themselves the right to dictate to others how they should behave. Some of the activities that governments and their agents purport to prevent and/or punish through the legal system, like killing, beating, or robbing other people are things that anarchists would also seek to avert or control, albeit through more libertarian arrangements. But often the activities prohibited by law are non-violent ones that people should be free to engage in both now and in any future society. It is problematic enough when the state seeks to punish people for using unapproved drugs or engaging in banned sexual acts, but is particularly scary when the politicians and judges seek to criminalise and control thought and its expression, which they increasingly do, as illustrated below.

The Assault on Free Speech

On February 2, in Leeds, two members of the nationalist and anti-immigrant British national party were cleared of some charges of attempting to stir up racial hatred using words or behaviour, but the jury was hung on some other, similar charges. Instead of dropping the charges on which the jurors could not reach a decision, the prosecution decided on a retrial.

Several days later, Abu Hamza al-Masri was convicted in London of a number of charges including soliciting to murder, "stirring up racial hatred," possessing "threatening, abusive or insulting recordings," and owning a "terrorist encyclopaedia." Although no evidence was presented of al-Masri's involvement in any specific acts of violence, the judge who sentenced him to seven years in jail said he had "created an atmosphere" promoting violence and murder.

Less than two weeks afterwards, David Irving was found guilty in Vienna of denying the holocaust and sentenced to three years in prison. Irving pled guilty to the charge, but even his contention that he has since changed his opinion and now believes that the nazis did kill millions of Jewish people did not keep the judge from sending him to prison for expressing his earlier ideas.

Within a few days of that court decision, an adjudication panel decreed that Ken Livingstone was to be suspended from office as mayor of London for four weeks for being "unnecessarily insensitive" in an exchange with a reporter. Livingstone said to the reporter, who is Jewish, "you are just like a concentration camp guard, you are just doing it because you are paid to."

Then, on March 10, at the conclusion of the Hofstad group trial in the Hague, a number of people were convicted of spreading hateful propaganda, including some who had no involvement in any violent acts, but simply may have discussed and written about them. The judge contended that "Anyone who preaches hate and violence lays the basis for committing crimes." But a defense attorney pointed out the true nature of these convictions: "You can be imprisoned for many years simply for having papers that the authorities say you shouldn't have."

The Creation of Thought Crimes

There is clearly a trend here. In all these cases, governments are criminalising and/or punishing people simply for their distasteful opinions and speech. And, as demonstrated in the cases of al-Masri and the Hofstad group, possession of banned books and recordings can now land you in jail, as well. It is of interest that all this is taking place in democratic countries whose rulers consider themselves advocates and defenders of free thought and free speech. This tendency on the part of the state to further circumscribe people's freedom to peacefully advocate unpleasant or "incorrect" ideas should be alarming to any freedom lover. Such laws and regulations create a category of offence that could rightly be called thought crime.

In addition to these rather obvious efforts on the part of governments to punish mere speech and expression, there are other means by which politicians and courts seek to punish people's ideas. These are hate crime laws of the type becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Such laws take different forms, from allowing the feds to intervene in investigations that would otherwise be outside their jurisdiction if bigotry is suspected as the motivation for a crime, to mandating more severe punishment for those who are convicted of offences which were committed because of dislike of someone's skin colour, sexual practices, ethnicity, or religion. While these kinds of laws purport to deal with violent or destructive actions, they are actually directed at the motives of the perpetrators, not their deeds. In other words, thought crimes again. In this way they are not very different from the kinds of laws which were used in the European cases cited above.

The Freedom to Offend

There are problems with these rules and laws on several levels. Most obvious, and most important, is that they interfere with something all people should be free to engage in at all times without restriction: the formation and communication of ideas and opinions. This is fundamental. Unless people are free to talk, discuss, debate they can never be free to figure out how to act and live their lives as they see fit.

Freedom of expression includes the freedom to lie, whether about what happened to oneself last week, or about what happened during the 1940s in Nazi concentration camps. And it includes the freedom to insult, to offend, to ridicule, to piss other people off. While it is common to hear people talk about such things as verbal abuse or assault, there really can be no such thing. Words may "hurt" someone in a

metaphorical sense, but equating emotional upset with physical pain confuses two quite distinct things. In a free society people need to have thick skins and deal peacefully with words they don't like, while they must be absolutely free to defend themselves with force against physical violence. There is no valid comparison between the two.

Even in the case of real physical violence motivated by bigoted feelings, hate crime laws penalise the thoughts of the attacker, not the actions. Laws banning battery and murder already deal with the physical abuse. Adding an additional penalty based on the mindset of the abuser punishes them for thinking "bad" thoughts.

Individual Accountability

Besides criminalising thought, some of these laws also punish individuals for the actions of others. The presumption in the charges against the nationalists in Leeds and the Islamists in the Hague is that they might drive others to commit some bigoted violent act against someone. And Al-Masri was jailed, in part, for "creat[ing] an atmosphere"

where others were led to believe killing was acceptable, even though he was never charged with any acts of violence. Because some members of his congregation have been accused of direct involvement in violent acts, he is being blamed, just as the four anarchists killed by the government in Chicago in 1887 were held responsible for the bomb thrown by someone else at a police riot in 1886.

There has been less outrage, however, at the al-Masri and Leeds decisions among progressives and radicals than was evident at the time of the Haymarket events. This is in part because al-Masri and the nationalists are rightly viewed as intolerant bigots for whom those on the left have little sympathy. But it is also because the left have bought into the idea, when it suits their arguments, that individuals are not responsible for their actions. Thus, at anti-war rallies and on liberal talk shows in the United States, one hears opponents of the war talk of supporting the troops and honouring "our" brave soldiers. Just as al-Masri is being held liable for the actions of others, Bush, Cheney and their associates in government are seen as solely responsible for the outrages committed by the American military in Iraq. The volunteer American troops who kill and torture are, apparently, just as much victims as those they abuse. This blaming of others for the conduct of individuals is, unfortunately, an all too common feature of contemporary society, making opposition to laws banning hateful speech much less likely.

Identity and Victimhood

Besides going against basic libertarian concepts like freedom of speech and individual responsibility, many of the attempts to punish expression should be unacceptable to anarchists for another reason. Hate crime laws, whether they involve bigotry-driven physical attacks or simply offensive words, do not punish people for causing offence to some individual, they penalise people for harming or giving offence to a member of a group. And although Livingstone was not charged with a criminal offence, he is being disciplined because the reporter he offended interpreted his remark as anti-Jewish, not because he was just being insulting to a journalist. While it remains generally permissible to cause affront to others, if the offensive speech or writing is based on the "victim's" skin colour, ethnicity, religion, sexual tastes or some other characteristic which place them in a protected class, rudeness can become an infraction of the law or some other regulation. This kind of thinking values people more as representatives of a larger group, than as worthwhile individuals in their own right.

Laws against holocaust denial share a similar concern with groups over individuals. Because the nazis focused much of their killing machine on certain groups or kinds of people, they are seen as somehow worse than other movements and governments which have caused many more deaths.* Even though the number of people killed by the soviet government was greater than the total killed by the nazi/fascist movements, there are no laws against claiming that the campaign of murder under Stalin's rule has been exaggerated by the capitalists in the west. But people can be put in jail for arguing that there were no

gas chambers in the nazi death camps. This is despite the fact that supporters of soviet-style socialism have been far more prevalent and influential in Europe since 1945, and therefore more of a "threat," than have been nazis and fascists.

A similar bias favouring identity groups motivates supporters of laws that punish those who use physical violence against others more severely if they are ethnic or religious bigots. If someone is beaten severely, the motivation of the attacker need not factor into the response to the crime. That is, unless some victims are of more value because they are seen to represent some group in the eyes of both their attackers and the law. If killing someone out of ethnic aversion is a hate crime, does that make other killings love crimes? The result in both cases is the same, a dead person—there is no reason for the penalties to differ. And those

who make and enforce the laws really don't care about the dead individual in either case, it's just that the "hate crime" victim serves as a proxy for a group that is supposedly protected by such laws. The person is still dead but the group feels avenged by the more severe punishment of the killer. It's all about political symbolism, not individual safety and security.

Supporters of hate crime legislation might argue that increased penalties will deter violence motivated by bigotry, but if the existing penalties for murder and battery don't already stop such brutality, why should one believe that steeper ones would? However, even if such laws might cause some small number of people to reconsider committing a violent act, the idea of criminalising thought should still make them unacceptable.

Force vs Freedom

Institutions of government in the west which arrest, imprison, or otherwise punish people for thoughts, speech, or writings of which they disapprove are not so different from the crowds of people who have been burning buildings in other parts of the world to protest cartoons to which they took offence. They are all bullies who would rather use force to suppress ideas and expression they dislike than take the time and effort to actually discuss and debate with those with whom they disagree. It's just that the censorious mobs in Europe and America are called judges, police, and prison guards.

Force is, of course, the basic principle of government, so its coercive approach to dealing with unpleasant ideas and speech comes as no surprise. However, the fact that these government actions are cloaked in the garb of ensuring public safety, or protecting some "oppressed" group from attack, has made them less open to criticism from many people who would otherwise howl about attacks on free speech and free expression. Protecting "the public" or some other group often results in the sacrifice of more of the dwindling freedoms of real, individual people.

Anarchists, though, are not concerned with majorities and minorities. Groups have no more worth than individuals, and are entitled to no special status. The fact that people exist as individuals is adequate justification to defend their freedom to be left alone and alive. This is the basis of all libertarian thought.

People should be free to say or otherwise communicate whatever they like, whenever they want, without risking arrest, imprisonment, or some other punishment from the state. This includes speech or writings glorifying terrorism, opposing war, denying the holocaust, ridiculing religious belief, calling people nasty names, advocating an anarchist society, or making and exchanging images of sadomasochistic sexual acts. Of course, people are also free to disagree with and debate the ideas and expression of others, but only peaceful exchanges are acceptable to anarchists.

Just as it is wrong to restrict ideas and speech, it is wrong to kill, beat, or rob anyone who has not initiated force against someone else. Therefore, anarchists oppose murder, war, rape, and all other forms of coercive violence. There is no need to appeal to some

higher authority, as it were, such as genocide or crimes against women or hate crimes or crimes against humanity, in order to organise or campaign against brutality against people. One's individual personhood is enough.

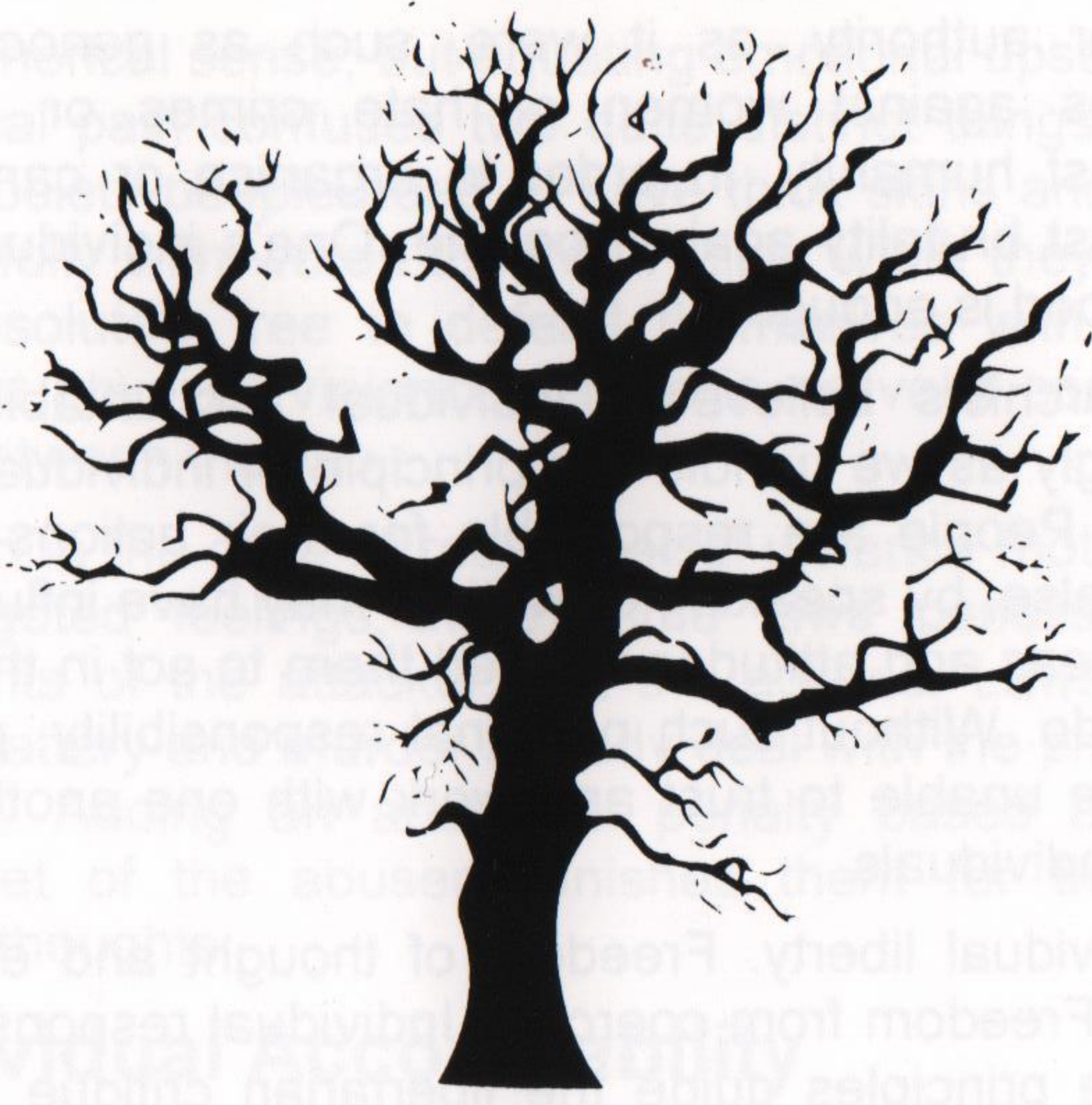
Anarchists believe in individual accountability as strongly as we uphold the principle of individual freedom. People are responsible for their actions, whoever else, by speaking or writing, may have influenced the ideas and attitudes that led them to act in the way they do. Without such personal responsibility, people will be unable to trust and work with one another as free individuals.

Individual liberty. Freedom of thought and expression. Freedom from coercion. Individual responsibility. These principles guide the libertarian critique of the world of politics. Therefore the only acceptable approaches to hateful or unpleasant speech, writing, and other expression are peaceful ones. And such methods range from ignoring loathsome ideas to engaging those with whom we disagree in discussion or debate. If our approach and our views are the right ones, we should be able to prevail in the marketplace of ideas.

Laws will not prevent another holocaust, stop crimes of violence motivated by ethnic bigotry, put an end to rape, or abolish wars. Only discussion and debate which challenges the accepted wisdom that leads people to form bigoted ideas about others and support or accept government and other forms of violence will bring about changes in people's ideas and encourage tolerance and respect for others' individuality and freedom. And since support for such an approach seems minimal at present, it is essential that anarchists try to revive moribund ideas like freedom of speech and freedom of expression before they die out completely.

* Such concern with identities instead of individuals influences politics in ways beyond the campaign against thought crimes. When politicians label some conflict in another part of the world genocide or "ethnic cleansing," as Clinton and Blair did in the case of the war against people in Serbia, it is easier to get support for interventionist military adventures. People lament the lack of western military intervention during the slaughter in Rwanda some years back, but one hears no similar sentiment in favour of invading Congo, where far more people have died, and continue dying. But one was called genocide and one isn't and that makes all the difference. It would appear that, in the eyes of many people, the slaughter of a million people of primarily one ethnic group is more vile than the killing three or four times as many of various ethnicities and languages. Only in a world where groups and identities are more important than actual living individuals could this be the case.

Joe Peacott



Out of the Classroom -

Into the Forest; the Forest School Movement

This week is school half term in most of England. Suddenly, you realise just how many children there are, as the usual daily traffic on the high street - made up of the old, young mothers with babies, the sick, the unemployed, and the odd anarchist - is enhanced by kids enjoying their freedom. Cafes are full of younger children eating cakes and chocolate with their parents, and groups of older kids wander around the streets, laughing, and probably worrying the *Daily Mail* readers just by existing. These children are, for a while at least, out of the classroom, a place where, especially under the English education system, they spend an inordinate amount of time, and a place they seem to be entering at ever younger ages. But the education system in this country, despite the constant public and private agonising about it, despite the endless reforms of recent decades, does not seem to lead to satisfied parents or children. The more targets, curricula, initiatives, faith groups, and millionaires that are thrown at schooling, the less seems to emerge that is of true and lasting value. 'Results' improve, targets are met and not met, teachers are trained, enter, and leave the system, and education secretaries talk nonsense, but what of the children?

Last year, I visited a school in Newcastle to talk to some children who were involved in a project that was outside the normal curriculum, and was outside the classroom. The three kids I was talking to were really good to be with: they were bright, funny, and lively. But the school was an eye-opener. It was surrounded by an electrified fence, and a new innovation had just been brought in - allowing the kids to go outside into a small yard, for twenty minutes a day. Electric fence? Exercise yard? Does that sound familiar? I am not saying that the school was typical of English schools, but it was typical in the idea that children need to be

inside a building, under the close and constant supervision of adults.

A pupil at a school that I taught in once asked, 'whatever happened to nature walks?'. I'm not sure, but at a conference I attended recently, addressed by, amongst others, Jane Williams-Sieghfredsen of Viborg University College, Denmark, I found out about a scheme that is very well established in Scandinavia, especially in Denmark, and has begun to make an appearance here. This is the Forest School Movement that has its origins in Sweden, but is most successful in Denmark. The basic idea is to use the outdoors as the educational environment, particularly for young children. It is not a new idea, either in Scandinavia, here, or elsewhere. In fact, like many outdoors education projects, it dates back to reactions to industrialised education that appeared in Europe in the mid and late nineteenth century. But, although we have a long tradition of groups and movements like the Scouts, and the Woodcraft Folk, in Scandinavia the use of the outdoors for education has a much wider and deeper presence in the education system. The Danish pioneers of this approach found inspiration in the Froebel kindergarten movement, established in Germany in the 1840s, and an early Danish outdoors pioneer, Soeren Soerensen summed up the attitude of these educators in 1854 when he wrote, 'Children at the ages of 4 and 5 years should not be imprisoned in a dirty airless schoolroom. At such a young age they should have play and movement, especially in the fresh air'. But it was not until the 1940s that the movement emerged in its modern form, when John Bertelsen started an adventure playground, Emdrup Banke, in Copenhagen. From those beginnings, the forest school movement grew, especially since the 1980s, to a situation today where forest or nature nurseries are common in Denmark.

Danish forest schools are permanent institutions located in woodland, or which have built up their own natural environment around them. All the education for the children takes place outside. The forest schools are equipped with the necessary services for children, and a shelter for use in very bad weather. Most of the forest schools keep animals, and grow vegetables and fruit. Some nurseries use these type of facilities once a week, and share them with other institutions, grouped together as 'wood groups'. The woodland, the trees, the natural landscape, the animals, and vegetables are the starting point and the main resource for the children in these schools. The goals of the forest schools are basic and fundamental to the whole development of a child. The Danish early years curriculum is a short document (unlike the lengthy, highly prescriptive, and directional English equivalent), and focuses on six areas of a child's learning:

1. The child's all-round development
2. Social development
3. Language
4. Body and movement
5. Nature and natural phenomenon
6. Cultural expression and ideas

All these educational areas are attained, for the young children, in the outdoor opportunities available in the forest schools. For example, goal 1, 'to develop the child's all round personal development', contains within it five sub-headings:

- to develop physical skills
- to develop a positive self image
- to 'test' oneself
- self-regulation
- fellowship

To illustrate how being part of a forest school enabled one boy to attain these goals, Jane Williams-Sieghfredsen presented, in her talk, a series of photographs following a boy's life at a forest school. Photographs showed the boy on his first day at the school, walking along a large fallen tree, his arms out, carefully, cautiously stepping along the tree trunk, followed by another little boy. Eventually, we saw photographs of the same boy happily ensconced high up in a living tree, beaming down at his playmates. In a few months, he had built up essential motor skills, co-ordination skills, and self-confidence, all by testing himself (at his own pace) from his initial, tentative steps on the tree trunk, to his confident climbing of the living tree, and all of it with other children enjoying the same journey. Other photographs from forest schools showed small children cooking on open fires, using small axes and knives to fashion tools and whittle wood, fishing in a stream with home-made fishing rods, feeding hens and goats, and cultivating vegetables. All this was a long way from the English child's normal experience of early schooling, but it did ring bells with me, not of school, but of happy times with the Cub Scouts, doing many of the things the forest school children do every day, only I enjoyed it just once a week in the evening, and on the occasional weekend.

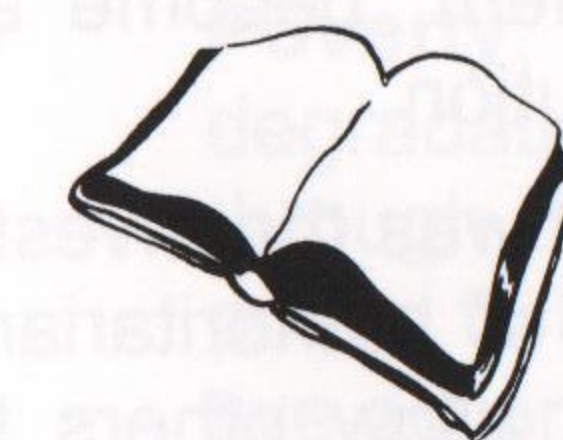
The forest school movement has begun to appear in England now, and at the same session of the conference, there was a very illuminating account of an attempt to introduce two primary school teachers to the forest school experience, along with one of their classes. This experience was presented by Trisha Maynard of Swansea University, and, in my mind, was interesting for what it told me about the first principles of schooling - control and the authority of the teacher. Dr Maynard outlined the way in which the primary school teachers had quickly come into conflict with the trained forest school workers, and the way in which the primary school teachers felt disturbed and undermined by the fact that they could not control the children in the open woodland that they found themselves. For example, as soon as the children were 'released' into the woodland, they not unnaturally ran off to explore the natural environment. As they ran to the trees, one of the teachers cried out, 'No! Stop! Come back!'. But, no longer restricted by the four walls of a building, the children didn't - there were too many trees, too many holes in the ground, muddy patches, bushes, and other things to explore. And that was just the beginning of the development of tension between the forest school staff, with their approach of

child-led education, and the primary school authoritarians, with their desire to control and lead in the prescribed manner, as laid down in standing orders. The problem was deep-set, and essentially the differences were differences of educational philosophy. The case also provided an insight into the training that the primary school teachers had had themselves, not to mention their lack of imagination, or their inability to realise that their charges were in a different environment. They were out of the classroom, into the forest, and that required the adults to take on a different role, a facilitating role, and be able to stand back, to let the children explore and learn by themselves.

The forest school movement is, as yet, a very small one in England, but it is a hopeful movement, and one that may catch on, at least in a small way. I know of a new forest school that is planned for a relatively deprived area in the West Midlands, with the heavy involvement of local parents. Let us hope that they will soon be able to bring good 'songs from the wood' to other children and parents in their area.

Steve Cullen

Further information: on forest schools, www.insideoutnature.com; and, on anarchism, schooling and children, Steve Cullen, *Children in Society; a libertarian critique* (Freedom Press, 1991); along with numbers 10 and 16 of *The Raven; Anarchist Quarterly*



BOOK REVIEW

For Workers' Power: the selected writings of Maurice Brinton. Edited by David Goodway. 2004. AK Press, Edinburgh, Scotland and Oakland CA, USA. 379pp. index. ISBN 1-904859-07-0. \$21.95 / £12.00

For anyone active in radical politics in Britain in the 1960's - 1980's the magazine *Solidarity*, with its various sub-titles, was one of the more influential and best liked of those produced in the libertarian milieu. Together with the series of excellent pamphlets it published, the group, which rarely numbered more than 100 active members, had a disproportionate effect on radical politics. And central to that were the writings of Maurice Brinton, the nom de plume of Christopher Pallis, an eminent medical scientist, who had moved from the Trotskyism of his 20's and 30's (he was born in 1923) following a split from the Socialist Labour League (then under the control of the odious demagogue Gerry Healy) to a more libertarian socialist position which he followed until his death in 2005.

Brinton was the founder of the *Solidarity* group

(original name, "Socialism Reaffirmed") with fellow SLL'ers such as Ken Weller, and the group drew much of its initial inspiration from the writings of fellow ex-Trotskyist Cornelius Castoriadis (perhaps better known in Britain as Paul Cardan) who had founded the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Indeed Brinton, an excellent linguist, due to having been schooled in Switzerland with Anglo-Greek parents, and thus being fluent in English, Greek and French, is primarily responsible for the translation and first publication of Castoriadis's writings into English. And one of the constituents of this book are his introductions to several of Castoriadis' pamphlets that *Solidarity* published over a period of 15 years or so. Brinton, however, was not an academic revolutionary, he was also an excellent reporter on political struggles as they happened. His account of the Belgian General Strike of 1960 (not one that has passed into the revolutionary / canon) is exemplary and is used to show up one of the key themes that run through this book. That is that workers need to take control of their struggles with capital and the state and not leave them to intermediaries. This is true also of his account of the events of May 1968 in Paris (which were written contemporaneously with the events – he just so happened to be there) which was originally published as a pamphlet and which is supplemented by two further essays reflecting on the events.

The political upheavals of the 1970's are reflected in his diary of events during the Portuguese revolution in 1975 / 76 and his introduction to *Solidarity's* largest publishing project, Phil Meyler / Mailer's Portugal: *The Impossible Revolution*. As ever Brinton emphasises the potential creativity of working people and the numerous ways in which those who seek power over them whilst claiming to represent them, become as much a part of the problem as the solution.

Another part of the *Solidarity* project was the investigation of the psychological aspects of authoritarianism, mainly in terms of how people allow others to make decisions for them when those decisions plainly are only in the interest of the order-givers and not those on the receiving end. This finds expression in this book in two ways. Firstly the reviews of two texts by Wilhelm Reich and one by George Frankl and secondly by one of the texts by which Maurice Brinton is best known: "The Irrational In Politics". I suspect that one of the major criticisms that can be levelled against Brinton in these texts is that he deals almost exclusively with male authors. He simply doesn't engage with feminism in any direct and meaningful way (no feminist texts are cited, for example.) This is, I suspect, mainly a generational problem, Brinton had grown up in a society where feminism was not a central issue (yes women had the vote, but the working class was seen overwhelmingly as male) – and among revolutionaries the writings of Reich, Lenin, Engels and Freud were taken more seriously than any by feminist writers. It is not surprising then that in the period after the text was first published, the *Solidarity* magazines had a long-running debate on the issue between those who were advocating a trad rev position and those aligning themselves with contemporary feminist and anti-sexist mens positions.

Another aspect of Brinton's work was his historical analyses. And that primarily meant the Russian revolution. Brinton's second major work "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917 – 1921: The State and Counter Revolution" is the final section of the book and, in its own terms, remains an exemplary piece of work, showing clearly how the Bolsheviks, under Lenin's command set about destroying any gains workers had made in the initial stages of the revolution in taking control of the means of production, by a combination of cynical manoeuvring, repression and misrepresentation (tactics still used by many Marxists to this day in their attempts to take control of popular movements). It gives the lie to any attempt by the followers of Trotsky, who want to blame just about everyone else except their "man" for the disaster that befell the Russian working class. Having defeated Tsarism and capitalist social democracy, it was in turn defeated by the new rulers the bureaucrats and political place men who, backed to the hilt by Lenin, Trotsky and their followers, destroyed any independent centres of economic or political power and invested it, instead in the central organs of the Communist Party. This is not, however, the only piece on the topic. He reviews, quite favourably, Paul Avrich's "The Russian Anarchists" and he also provided the preface to Ida Mett's text "The Kronstadt Commune", which *Solidarity* issued as a pamphlet. The book also includes what is probably his most significant political text published by a different publisher, his intervention in the journal *Critique* on the topic of "Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". Another item is his co-authored text "The Commune, Paris 1871" co-authored with Philippe Guillaume, first published in the journal but later issued as a pamphlet. The final major grouping of articles (although the items do appear to have been put into an order, which is not explicit in its rationale) is those, which can be summarised as contemporary society and the revolutionary alternatives. Into this section one can put the variations on the theme of "Who we (*Solidarity*) are and what we believe in", together with his introductions to a variety of Castoriadis's pamphlets, which *Solidarity* issued throughout the 1960's and well into the 1970s. One should also include his polemical reply to *Big Flame's* account of the Merseyside dispute at the Fisher-Bendix factory and his introduction to the (then) anarchist theoretician Murray Bookchin's "On Spontaneity and Organisation". The texts are supplemented by a name index (but it lacks a subject index) and the introduction by Davis Goodway does a splendid job of situating Brinton in his time and political reference points. Sadly Chris Pallis died shortly after the book was published after a long illness, so is no longer around to defend his works. He did however, outlive the organisation he helped create, with *Solidarity* finally ceasing publication in 1992. Strangely, there doesn't seem to have been any successor organisation willing to carry on their good work. This may be accounted for by the fact that, despite Brinton himself refusing the label of "anarchist", the journal ended its days as a well-produced magazine that no longer had much of a difference, politically, with the rest of the anarchist political scene. The timing of the publication of this book is exemplary and AK Press has done a

splendid production job on it. One could argue that some of the blank white pages could have carried some of *Solidarity's* trademark graphics, which would have given some relief to the text. More importantly is the puzzling absence of one of Brinton's most interesting articles: "Suicide for socialism" which dealt with the Jonestown mass-killing / suicide. This was issued as a supplement to one of the later series of *Solidarity* magazines and any collection of Brinton's works really should have it. Luckily it is on the Internet so remains accessible to those who know where to look for it. It would also have been helpful if a full bibliography of the 108 items the Introduction mentions as being identified as being written solely or mainly by Brinton could have been included so that people could search them out. Probably what is most difficult is trying to work out exactly what the legacy of the *Solidarity* group and Brinton in particular is. Castoriadis has been well served with collections of his texts and is becoming quite academically respectable (especially since he died) but *Solidarity* risks becoming forgotten. It was a small group of revolutionaries in a country without a revolution, who didn't spawn any dramatic off-spring (although it is claimed that Ken Livingstone was once a member (nobody's perfect) and who'd want to claim the Bordigist text machine called "World Revolution"?). It is certain that the worldwide economic crisis in capitalism severely shook the faithful who believed (along with their mentor Castoriadis) that modern bureaucratic capitalism has solved such crises. (Ironically, the fact we are currently living in a period of capitalist stability, doesn't seem to have revived their fortunes, perhaps because it is coupled with a greater reliance on the so-called "free market" to achieve that social and economic stability.) And history has been a trifle unkind as some pronouncements currently look a little off target, but one doubts, for example, that he would have been too surprised at the outcome of the Polish worker's struggle (also covered herein) which promised so much with the founding of *Solidarnosc*, only for it to become a free market social democratic government. But overall the critique of capitalism remains as valid as ever. Wage slavery remains and the struggle between workers and their bosses continues, as it will as long as capitalism remains the dominant economic system. I understand that John Quail is currently writing a history of the *Solidarity* group and one or two memoirs by former members are appearing on the Internet. As yet, however, nobody appears to want to revive the franchise. That said the book is an eloquent testimony to Maurice Brinton's life and works, but I am sure he would be most disappointed if people see it as an epitaph, as the work he started and the vision he held are as valid now as they were 50 years ago. The struggle, as they say, continues, and there is much here that can inform that struggle. Overall, a splendid book. Required reading for anyone wanting a view of how libertarians saw the world in the past 50 years.

Richard Alexander



AN ANARCHIST CREDO

- **Anarchism** is not terrorism or violence and Anarchists do not support, aid or sympathise with terrorists or so-called liberation movements.
- **Anarchism** does not mean irresponsibility, parasitism, criminality, nihilism or immorality, but entails the highest level of ethics and personal responsibility.
- **Anarchism** does not mean hostility toward organisation. Anarchists only desire that all organisations be voluntary and that a peaceful social order will exist only when this is so.
- **Anarchists** are resolute anti-statists and do not defend either "limited states" or "welfare states".
- **Anarchists** are opposed to all coercion.
- **Poverty**, bigotry, sexism and environmental degradation cannot be successfully overcome through the State. Anarchists are therefore opposed to taxation, censorship, so-called affirmative action and government regulation.
- **Anarchists** do not need scapegoats. Poverty and environmental destruction are not ultimately caused by transnationals, IMF, the USA, the "developed world", imperialism, technology or any other devil figure, but are rooted in the power to coerce. Only the abolition of coercion will overcome these problems.
- **Anarchism** does not posit any particular economic system but only desires that the economy be non-coercive and composed of voluntary organisations.
- **Anarchists** are not utopians or sectarians, but are sympathetic to any effort to decrease statism and coercion and the replacement of authoritarian relations with voluntary ones.

Larry Gambone