

FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

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50p

With all this new technology around ...

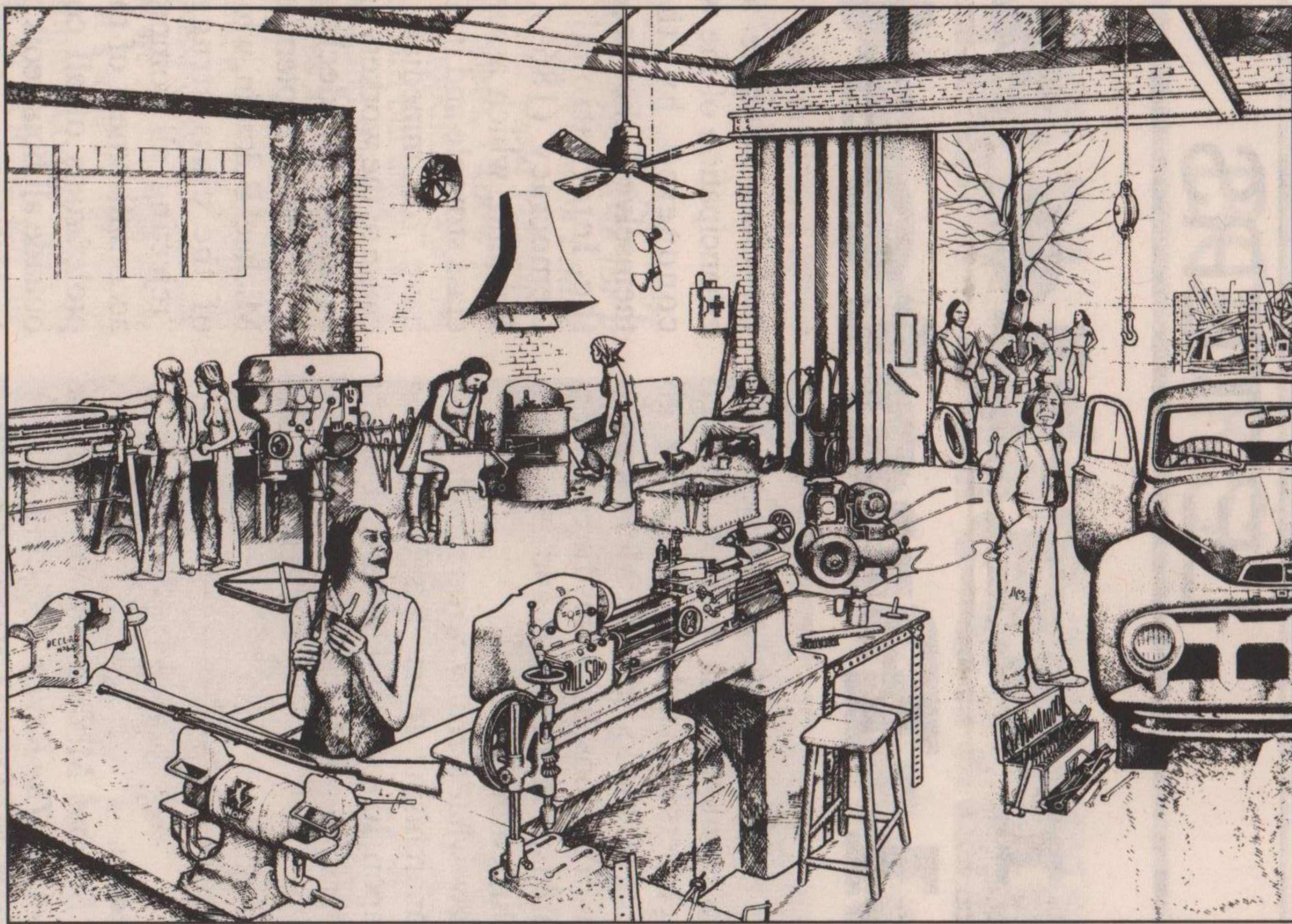
WHAT ABOUT THE LEISURE SOCIETY?

The new year has been ushered in in two of the most 'prosperous' EU countries, France and Germany, with large scale workers' demonstrations against the growing unemployment. Both countries each actually admit to more than four million unemployed. Only Great Britain announces fewer unemployed every month, and the Labour government has done nothing to look into the way the statistics are fiddled, in spite of the fact that apparently, before the May elections, "Jobcentres fiddled figures before poll" (*Guardian*, 7th January 1998). Their correspondent reports that:

"An investigation is to be launched to verify that 1.75 million unemployed went back to work last year after an internal inquiry revealed that jobcentres fiddled placements by an estimated 320,000 in the run-up to the election.

Leigh Lewis, chief executive of the Employment Service, has asked the National Audit Office to verify his staff's figures for the current year after auditors proved that as many as one in five job placements made last year could have been faked."

Be that as it may, surely it is obvious that as technology takes over, especially from office workers whose 'production' only consists of filing paper and more paper, there are fewer and fewer jobs. And the manual jobs which provide everybody with the food and services which make life almost bearable (for even the poor, the sick and the disabled) are being reduced partly by government economies but also by the patriotic employers exporting their capital to that part of the world – the Far East – where at present labour is cheap and certainly hard working. Which is not to say that it isn't in the West. In the West the 'resistance' is to excessive working hours. And it was interesting to see



A fully equipped community engineering workshop

Drawing by Clifford Harper taken from *Why Work?* (Freedom Press, £4.95)

the new year's greetings from the Transport & General Workers' Union, South East and East Anglia, in *The Tribune* (2nd January) which presented "three shocking facts for 1998".

Firstly, that a billion people, a quarter of those who could work, are unemployed or under-employed. Secondly, because "75% of all tasks in the global economy are simple repetitive tasks" they are vulnerable not only to the "existing technologies" but to a "new technology revolution". And their third point is in a way the most damning of our world society. They maintain that "356 individuals own the combined wealth of the bottom 40% of humanity – two billion people".

Their solution – though we think most anarchists will have more than just reservations – is nevertheless a very powerful message to all workers who think of themselves as wage slaves, but not victims of the capitalist system:

"We need urgent action to cut the working week, to create jobs and to redistribute income and wealth. Let the vast gains of technological achievement be shared in order to *liberate* people, rather than enslave them."

As realists in the world we live in, this writer argues that workers *should* demonstrate, to cut the working week and even accept a little less money in order to discover the possibilities of some leisure in the prime years of their lives. Don't wait to enjoy life after 70. By then it's too late!

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GREATER MANCHESTER AND NORTH WEST TRAINS: WHAT A WAY TO RUN A RAILWAY!

Last week Tony Blair said: "What we want is a system fit for the twenty-first century". He was about to embark on his 'Welfare Roadshow' to convince Labour activists and the public about New Labour's schemes for welfare.

Pity he didn't tell North West Trains, the British Transport Police Crime Management Centre and their administration, which communicates with the Crown Prosecution Service, and their passengers. We are not here, of course, going to re-open the current debate between North West Trains bosses and northern anarchists, North West Anti-JSA activists and Euro-marchers, about the wisdom of transporting goats on public transport. This is going to be a matter for the courts.

But why do the rail authorities and the Transport Police have so much trouble communicating? It's been like a Harold Pinter play up here these last few weeks!

First we have *Freedom* reporting that the 'Trial of the Mancunian Goat Herders' would take place on 12th January at Manchester Magistrate's Court. The Crown Prosecution Service solicitors gather at the appointed time and date. The defence team assemble, together with 'mucky realists', anarchists and anti-JSA activists from across the north of England. Some of the witnesses for the prosecution arrive. The magistrates wriggle their bums and twiddle their thumbs, together with their clerk.

But where is the main prosecution witness? On the sick, recovering from a car accident! Nobody, it seems, thought to tell the Crown Prosecution Service. Nobody let the defence solicitors or their witness know.

Consequently the case has been adjourned until 2nd April. The trial is due to start at 10am, and a day has been set aside for the case.

COMMUNICATING WITH VICTIMS

This is not the only blunder that springs to mind concerning North West trains in recent times. On 9th December 1997, a 21 year old man called Broderick was returning from a 'do' at Huddersfield University on the Manchester train. At about 9.35pm someone threw a stone at the train just before it arrived at Manchester Victoria. The stone broke the glass window, hitting the man on the side of his head and knocking him out for a few minutes and drawing blood. There was a witness to the incident, and it was claimed that stones had been being thrown all evening at passing trains before they scored a bullseye on Mr Broderick's skull.

Riding on North West Trains these days is like being in the wild west. One doesn't yet have to endure Indians and outlaws, but must accept it as a normal risk that one is to be bombarded by rocks and stones. On 9th December nothing was done by the British Transport Police to stop the stone-throwing earlier in the day.

There is a danger to staff as well, because the driver could have been hit. When this case was raised at a meeting of STORM (Support The Oldham, Rochdale, Manchester Rail Line Group) it was pointed out that guns are also discharged at trains. STORM noted that a private security force is about to be employed on some trains, which it was thought couldn't do worse than the British Transport Police.

A letter to Mr Broderick, now nursing a sore skull, was sent by a detective inspector confirming the offence of actual bodily harm had been recorded, but stating: "I am sorry that you were caused inconvenience as the result of the offence being committed and I can assure you that the matter is receiving attention. Unfortunately we are unable to promise a result in every instance, but I shall

endeavour to keep you advised if and when any progress is made."

Again the Transport Police began to have communication problems. Instead of sending the above letter to the victim Mr Christian Broderick in Eccles, Salford, they sent it to a witness to the crime in Yorkshire. It doesn't come as a surprise then that we are now being told that no one has yet been apprehended for the offence.

What hope is there for us? We know that the Transport Police can chase goats and their herders around Victoria Station, but can we expect proper communication when they can't tell the difference between witnesses and victims after an offence? Nor, it seems, can they pass simple messages to their own prosecutors.

OUT OF TUNE WITH HUMAN RACE

There is worse to come. Not only do the Transport Police go sick and clog up the courts, but if station staff go sick it can end up barricading passengers inside the station. This happened in November when an employee of North West Trains at Rochdale station reported sick.

Passengers on the 6.15am train arriving at Rochdale found themselves locked inside the station. The rail-man with the key was on the sick. As the station began to fill up with the arrival of more trains, a man was sent with a key from Manchester by train. But he too found himself imprisoned because the station door would only unlock from the outside. Then, when he found a ladder and climbed over the station wall, he discovered he'd got the wrong key, so he had to go back to Manchester (ten miles away) to get the right one.

By now the crowds of passengers were gathering, because not only could people not get off the station but others could not get on to catch their trains to work! It was now the time of the rush-hour. It was getting beyond a joke!

Even English people get angry after a while. In exasperation someone rang the fire brigade. Oxy-acetylene gear was assembled. When, after two hours, the release came and the doors were opened it was, some said, like the relief of Mafeking.

Anarchists up here are anxious that this kind of conduct by North West Trains and the North West British Transport Police may end up bringing us all into disrepute in the north of England. It all makes it look as if we are not part of the human race, as though we are not on a normal wavelength with the rest of humanity. Please, please, for Christ's sake, will North West Trains and the Transport Police get their act together for the goat-herding case on 2nd April. Otherwise we are all going to end up looking like a laughing stock to the rest of the country.

Northern Reporter



'Let the train take the strain'

IS THIS WHAT WE READ?

On 8th January the *Guardian Magazine* devoted a page to the "100 Fast sellers of 1997". Number 1 sold a million copies and Number 100 sold 116,000. At least the latter was a gardening book. But with a few exceptions – four 'sagas', two 'humour', two 'romance' and odd ones of 'memoirs', 'autobiography', 'myth', 'fantasy', 'stories', 'horror' and even one on 'superplonk' – the other 'fast sellers' were either 'thrillers', 'novels' or 'crime'. This occupies a whole page of a supposedly serious paper like the *Guardian*.

But at the same time those of us engaged in anarchist propaganda must be *made aware of the enormous obstacles we are faced with*. The problem is that for most people reading is an escape from living and knowing what one wants from one's life. Anarchist propaganda is aiming at trying to persuade people that this life is the only one we have and therefore we must not let others tell us how we should live it. The capitalist system pre-supposes that there are those who, because they have the means and therefore the power, tell the rest of society how they should live. Only the

anarchists struggle for a society of *free* women and men who can live without authority because the authority of our time, capitalism, will have been replaced, through revolution, by co-operation in a world where we are all equals, as well as being all ourselves, and enjoying the differences.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE READING?

Freedom Press has not got one title in the *Guardian's* 'Fast sellers of 1997' in spite of some sixty valuable titles on our publications list. Apart from one or two left-wing book-sellers, the 'big boys' – Waterstones, Dillons, Blackwells – won't stock Freedom Press titles but will deal with orders, and we appreciate this because it's not very profitable for them. Far from expecting to be there, we anarchists must recognise that the *Guardian's* list will do very little to attract the attention of the other millions of humans who are not buying the 'thrillers' and the 'novels' of the top 100. The capitalist media will not do it for us, that's for sure. We must act for ourselves.

Libertarian

This is a very much abridged version of a tape-recorded interview. We hope to publish the full text at a later date.

JR: Tell me something about yourself and your life for readers of *Freedom*.

AM: I was born in 1932 so I was evacuated during the Second World War from London to a village called Coombe Down in Somerset, but my mother came with us so we – my brother and I – weren't left with a strange family, so it wasn't traumatic. My father stayed and worked in London at his research laboratory.

JR: So one good thing about it is that you didn't have to make a decision about the war as you were too young to involve yourself.

AM: Yes, I was too young and as a boy I wanted to take part in the war and I used to make bombs which I was ready to drop on Hitler if he came marching down Church Road, Coombe Down, which I was sure he was going to. I was longing for an invasion so I could fight Hitler. I had no doubts at that time. One of the things about childhood was that, because I went to that terrible school, I really did not want to grow up to become a bully and I think it was then that I determined to try always to be on the side of the underdog.

JR: The war finished in 1945 when you were 13. When did you realise that you wanted to be a writer?

AM: Soon after that, when I was about fourteen, I fell in love for the first time. Well, I had written before that and I'd had a play put on by my teacher when I was nine, that was a wonderful gift. But when I was fourteen I was writing every night because of this fruitless love affair. Also it was about that time that I started getting worried about people being killed in wars and I was writing to try and understand that, as well as trying to understand about love.

JR: Have you noticed a great change in your ideas as you got older?

AM: My principles took a serious change around that time, around 1946, when I was surrounded by Tories. I was at a private school and almost everyone was Tory, and I suddenly realised they were all talking bollocks, and it was malicious bollocks. I thought that this Labour government we had at the time were doing some really good things and I could see that the National Health Service was a marvellous thing and people were sneering and trying to undermine it, and I thought this was ridiculous. I wrote to Transport House and I got lots of pamphlets, at 14, and I began reading the *New Statesman* and became one of the few school radicals. Kingsley Martin was the editor then.

JR: When did you get your first poems published?

AM: Do you count school magazines? I suppose when I first went to Oxford, I started getting published then.

JR: What did you study at Oxford?

AM: I didn't do much academic work. I survived thanks to a very understanding tutor who knew that I was trying to learn to write my own stuff. This was after 21 months in the air force, which I hated, loathed and despised very deeply. National service. I wasn't quite a convinced enough pacifist to go as a conscientious objector. I went into the air force, but I didn't have to kill anyone – I became a teleprinter operator. Maybe that helped to kill someone, I hope not. There was some killing going on in Korea at the time [1952].

JR: Would you have been surprised if someone had forecast in 1952 that you would become a subscriber to *Freedom* and respected by anarchists?

AM: I'd have been pleased as by that time I'd discovered the poems of Kenneth Patchen and the poems and books of Alex Comfort. I was reading *Art and Social Disobedience* by Alex Comfort, that was one of my bibles. In my airforce pack I used to carry Alex Comfort and Kenneth Patchen. Ginsberg wasn't available at that point, but later it was Ginsberg too. Anarchy was not a dirty word to me at that time. I'm not sure at what point I realised these

ADRIAN MITCHELL

interviewed by John Rety

people were anarchists, but certainly I loved their poems very much and I loved their attitudes, which I shared.

JR: I think I'm right in saying that you were one of the very few people who spoke for a generation. That poem about Vietnam I think everybody knew, 'Tell me lies about Vietnam'.

AM: I still perform this poem, I know it by heart and I think part of its popularity was that it was not just about Vietnam but about being in a safe country like England while a war is going on thousands of miles away, for which we're partly responsible, and sometimes saying 'Don't tell me about it, it's too horrible, I'm suffering from compassion fatigue, please let me go to sleep'. Now we all feel that from time to time, I feel it – it's a satire on me as much as anyone else. People recognise that in themselves, that feeling of 'Please tell me pretty lies'.

JR: When the Committee of 100 and CND were formed it was a surprise how many poets and intellectuals declared against the war. Did politics become a hindrance to you? Did you want to just write your poetry?

AM: No, I wanted to be a human being and I wanted that included. If there were things like the nuclear threat that included getting out and doing what I could about it on the marches and things like that. If you're doing that it gets into your poems. I didn't sit down and feel I'd got to write about the bomb, but the bomb was part of my nightmares as it was part of our nightmares and so I wrote about it because it was part of my life. I never felt I didn't want to do this, and I never felt that I ought to do this. It was part of my life so I wrote about it, just as dogs are part of my life and I write about them, love is part of my life and I write about it.

JR: Many poets have avoided political subjects.

AM: Yes, a lot of them do, but then a lot of poets avoid any kind of political action anyway. A lot of poets in England have felt that somehow they'd be soiled by politics – well, they might be, but a little soil isn't so bad. There are certain kinds of politics which are corrupting, but honest politics – which is a funny kind of conjunction of words – with action undertaken for right reasons using right methods, by which I mean our methods, by which I mean peaceful methods and not the methods of rulers, those sort of politics I believe in.

JR: It does leave you with a continuous programme, because if it's not happening here it's happening somewhere else and I know you have raised your voice on many issues.

AM: Raising voices on many issues, it is true, but you can't always. I've never written anything specifically about Angola, for instance, and there are many subjects I've not been able to write about simply because I just don't have the intimate knowledge or experience or met the particular people or whatever. You can't write about everything, but sometimes you'll write a poem about Vietnam or about the bomb or something and in fact it will apply to a lot of other situations, or you hope that people will apply it to other situations because they're recurring and recurring. I don't want every poem I write to be about torture and pain and things like that because I want to celebrate life as well.

JR: Recently I've been thinking that anarchy is not such a pipe dream after all. If we do have an educated and intelligent population maybe it is not such a difficult idea, maybe anarchism is possible as a political system. What does anarchy mean to you?

AM: I couldn't explain what I think anarchy is because it's a lot of different things and there are different kinds of anarchy. There had better be room for different kinds of anarchy because it doesn't mean imposing a set of



rules. I once was challenged for a self definition and I put it in a poem which read 'My brain socialist, My heart anarchist, My eyes pacifist, My blood revolutionary', and I would probably re-write that a little bit now, but you see the shape of that kind of thought (although the kind of revolutionary I mean is a pacifist revolutionary). I'm sure if I said I'm an anarchist then anyone could come along and say 'But you can't be an anarchist, look what you did, you voted, you voted to kick out the Tories'. Okay, I did, so I can't be an anarchist. But I think it's an honourable thing to be. It's a title I wouldn't like to award myself. If people call me an anarchist, I'm proud, that's fine. If they call me an anarchist because of what I write, that's great, I'm honoured. It's like I don't call myself a poet, I call myself a writer, but if people call me a poet that's an honour and I'm proud if they call me a poet. It's something that you earn by your work, but other people have to judge that. I find anarchy the most attractive and convincing of political philosophies and I think anarchy will always go on and even in the most repressive states it is possible for anarchy to flourish in some sort of corners. It affects the heart as well as the mind and it's to do with how you live your life in intimate situations as well as public ones, so I think nothing can kill it.

JR: Tell me about your work for children.

AM: That's been a change in the last ten or fifteen years, that I've been writing more and more for children. I write plays for children. I've just written three plays based on Greek myths for a Japanese children's theatre, a trilogy. I'm writing plays for five to seven year olds as well and I'm writing books for children, story books and so on, and I've just had a book of poems for children published. I have done a new play for children, *The Snow Queen*, which comes to the Unicorn Theatre for a month on 24th January. Dick Peaslee did the music (he also wrote the music for *Marat/Sade* and for *US*, the Peter Brook play on the Vietnam war). The way things have turned out more and more of my time I'm writing for children and I'm very happy about it. I think about 80% of my time I'm writing for children. They're a wonderful audience. I go into primary schools a lot and I do a show called *Thirteen Secrets of Poetry* where I try and help kids write their own poems. It's quite a visual show. I have the thirteen secrets in brightly coloured bundles in a semi-circle on the floor when I come in, and I unwrap them one by one and we have a lot of interchange and sometimes this leads into a workshop later and we all go out into the fields, the woods, the park or whatever as well and find poems

to write about. I've done this in lots of places. Last February I went with my wife Celia to South Africa for the first time and we worked with kids from the townships in Johannesburg and in Cape Town too – 250 kids at a time. It was very, very exciting. They're the future. I must say that I'm not trying to brainwash children with my work, but I do hope I reinforce some of their natural feeling about justice. Children are very keen on things being fair, very against bullies. I talk about those things, and I do talk about war as well, and when it comes down to it children are against people killing each other and don't like that kind of thing, so it's natural. Those things need reinforcing because a lot of the culture is reinforcing mass murder, war and so on.

JR: There's not been a lot of libertarian literature for children available. Do you think such publications should be encouraged?

AM: Certainly, especially things by children. But in children's literature there's quite a lot of libertarian writing. Some of it is just unconsciously like that. *Just William* for instance. Richmal Crompton was a bit of a Tory, I think, but in fact the message that comes over from *Just William* is like the message that comes over from any good version of Robin Hood. He's a people's hero. E.E. Nesbit was a socialist and her feeling for children and for their rights and their integrity and their need for freedom is tremendous. In a lot of the best children's books it comes over without being put on a special shelf as libertarian children's books. I think that's the last thing we need to do. Arthur Ransome, all sorts of writers like that, have a strong radical streak.

JR: Do you share the opinion that, although suspicious of New Labour, people are glad that the Tories have gone?

AM: I'm very glad the Tories were kicked out. I've no illusions whatsoever about New Labour, but I do think they're more susceptible to pressure. It's harder for them to fight us in such a brutal way as the Tory government used to fight us. We must keep up the pressure on the arms trade, on overseas aid and so on, and we must make it impossible for them to join in any of these stupid wars against Iraq or China or whoever the United States might decide to go to war with. New Labour are more vulnerable to our attacks.

JR: What about civil liberties in this country? It would have been unbelievable in the '60s that, for example, Stonehenge would become an exclusion zone. Now people are taking some of these losses of liberty for granted thinking there's nothing they can do about it.

AM: Like Wilfred Owen says, 'All a poet can do today is warn'. To warn is one of the functions of a poet and poets ought to be warning people about those things. Poets can do it better than most people because they can concentrate the language so that it's full of a strength which is more diffuse than prose.

Adrian Mitchell

To celebrate his 65th birthday, two books of his poems have been published:

HEART ON THE LEFT Poems 1953-1984

is a handsomely produced paperback with illustrations by Ralph Steadman (Bloodaxe Books, 320 pages, £9.95)

BALLOON LAGOON and the Magic Islands of Poetry

is a collection of poems for children, in a large format, lavishly illustrated by Tony Ross (Orchard Books, 110 pages, £9.99)

We shall be pleased to take orders for these titles. Please add 10% p&p inland, 20% overseas.

MAGNET WORKERS STRIKE

Striking Magnet workers in Darlington are scalling for an intensified leafleting campaign outside the over two hundred retail showrooms across the country. Company profits plunge. The longest official strike for seventeen years goes largely ignored by the media. When the Magnet workers of Darlington chose to strike on 3rd September 1996 it was only after immense provocation. The 350 seasoned workers averaged ten years service and produced high quality fitted kitchens. Returns to the factory of faulty units were down to 3% and the factory had seen a trading profit of 11 million for the previous year. Despite all this, the workers had tolerated a three-year pay freeze and been subject to constant pressure from management to change in-company agreements.

Management strategy was to reduce labour costs and worker unity; they wanted to impose a five-tier pay structure in which higher levels would only receive pay increases when the level below them began to approach theirs. The slow knock-on effect would leave highly skilled workers waiting up to fourteen years for a pay rise. In effect the company wanted to 'de-skill' the labour force and pave the way for bringing in cheap casualised labour, which short sighted strategy neglected the fact that even so called unskilled workers at Magnet had, through long service, attained a high degree of expertise and flexibility within the factory. The final straw came when an average £35 per week pay cut was imposed for all workers, reducing the basic wage for a worker with over ten years service to £169. Workers responded with a demand for a £12 a week pay increase across the board, which management refused.

Abiding by anti-union legislation, five ballots were held and each affirmed the call for strike action. With the factory halted, management told workers to return to work or face the sack for breach of contract. Fifty-two returned to work, the rest have remained out since. The company refused to enter into negotiations and sacked the men, at the same time awarding 3% pay rises at the sister factories in Keighley and Penrith. According to Ian Crammond,

secretary of the strike committee, the workers at Darlington would have accepted the 3% but were not even given the chance. Management immediately recruited scabs from the Employment Service and other agencies and the workforce now fluctuates between 160 and 180 scabs paid £3.20 an hour.

The obvious question is 'how can the factory with the loss of 3,500 years accumulated skill and experience, and with a much reduced and now disloyal workforce continue to operate at previous levels of efficiency?' Of course they can't! But in the light of this, how can top level management receive huge pay rises? A brief look at Magnet's recent history is informative and an object lesson in modern capitalism.

The beginnings of the present crisis can be traced to 1987 when a management buy-out was effected. Chairman Duxbury paid £470 million for the publicly over-quoted company (a subsequent more realistic valuation was £240 million). The company, unable to cover interest payments, had to relinquish control to their bankers in 1988. The banks cut their losses in 1993 selling out to Berisford for a snip at £56 million (really only £26 million given the £30 million in the Magnet account). By 1996, with the debt apparently written off, the factory at Darlington alone was trading at a £11 million profit. Instead of recognising the contribution of the workers, the company brought in hatchet man David Williams as managing director (formally of Blue Circle) and within 42 days he had provoked the present dispute, at the same time that Magnet workers in Darlington and Penrith received 3% pay rises. In November 1996 Williams appeared on Tyne-Tees television to say that Magnet were "getting their act together" while *Magnet News*, the internal Darlington factory newsletter, admitted a trading loss of £1.6million for 1997. Recently the financial director of Berisford received a £423,000 bonus, enough money to settle the pay claims of all the sacked Darlington workers for 1996 to 1998.

Our anarchist group has been doing street and pub collections for the Magnet Workers' Hardship fund and some leafleting outside the local showroom. We recently visited the picket lines on the Yarm Road industrial estate in Darlington to show our support and deliver a Christmas box. We were struck by the determination of the men and constantly heard two views expressed, whoever we spoke to: that none of them would vote Labour again;

and that their unions were not doing enough to resolve the dispute. "In seventeen months Bill Morris has never been anywhere near - tell a lie, he came to York to open a fun day" said Kenny Baker, a labourer with nineteen years service at Magnet, whose son, also on strike has done eleven years as a machinist. "Years ago they couldn't sack you 'cause all the country would've been out. The unions need to get round the table to get our jobs back on the same terms as before". Despite this longing for an old fashioned solution, Kenny also thinks "we should've occupied the place on the second day!"

It must be hard for such people when you spend how many days and nights on a picket line and members of the same union regularly drive their wagons into the factory. Due to the lack of solidarity, the strikers are largely pinning their hopes on the leafleting campaign and they would welcome anyone anywhere getting involved in this. There is lots to show that quality has plummeted, for example transport contractors Merlin are refusing to be held responsible for returns to the factory due to damage because they insist the goods were damaged before transport. Clearly buying a Magnet kitchen is a lottery for consumer. Now standing outside Magnet showrooms to deter prospective customers might not be your idea of fun, but it can be very effective - we reckon weekends in the late morning up to lunch time is when most punters go itchin for a kitchen. Remember, if you get bored, some strikers spend several nights a week on the picket and have suffered arson and other violence from scabs. The last time we were there all the telesales staff came out to talk to us and showed a lot of sympathy. However, the recent *Financial Times* report of a strike at the two hundred Magnet stores is unfortunately not true.

It was eleven at night, nearly Christmas Eve, as I left the main picket line and strolled up Allington Way to another encampment fashioned like a mini wooden stockade. There I found Paul and Dave sitting like two football managers in their dug-outs, watching a oil barrel furnace raging in the centre. There was no shortage of wood and I made a limp joke about burning the reject kitchens. But with the wind howling and the sparks flying, it was a Dantesque scene more conducive to philosophy. We sat there a while, sharing experiences, when Dave asked me what I thought about the unions. Now we anarchists like to make a

— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of
Freedom will be dated
7th February, and the
last day for copy
intended for this issue
will be first post on
Thursday 29th January

virtue out of offering unconditional support to workers in the class struggle and encourage people to run their own disputes, and anarchist ideas might seem a million miles away from the immediate concern of workers to get their jobs back. But the idea that the union is really on the side of the workers is illusory. The bureaucrats in their offices and with their high salaries have their own agendas, and serve merely as instruments of social control in the interest of capitalism and against the interests of the working class. It is the form of organisation that is at fault, not the idea behind it, but the idea has been betrayed.

The Newslane, the journal of the Workers' Revolutionary Party, on 21st November headlined: "We need a new trade union and political leadership say Magnet strikers". The article fails to explain what type of union and why this new political leadership will differ from the old type. There is nothing in their story to back the assertion that this is what the Magnet strikers are thinking, and I think the politicians are putting words into the mouths of the strikers. Anarchists agree that we do need a new type of union run by the members without elevating leaders to higher circles where they forget the concerns of those in the inferno below. We need to use the unions, bad as they are in the short run; in the long run we need to put our efforts (and funds) into something we have control of. It would be wonderful if people like the dockers and the Magnet strikers were seeing things along these lines.

JL

Contacts / donations to: The Magnet Families Hardship Fund, c/o Ian Crammond, 109 Jedburgh Drive, Darlington, Co Durham DL3 9UP

Trades Unions: TGWU, AEEU, UCAT, GMB.

e-mail: www.gn.apc.org/magnetstrikers/ 1

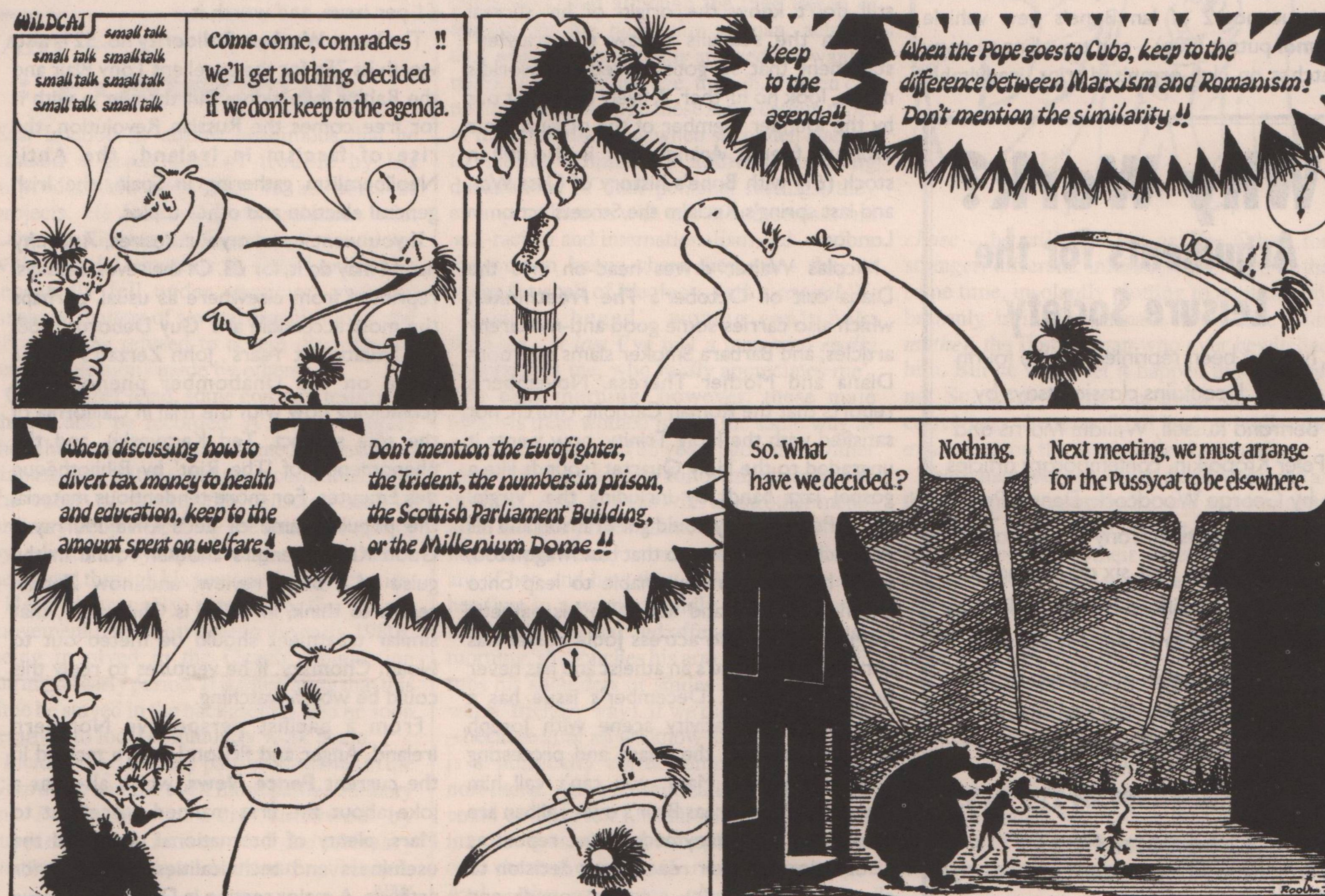
FOR DOERS, NOT DREAMERS

On 20th September 1997 anarcho-syndicalists and anarchists active in struggles ranging from combating the Job Seeker's Act to supporting the Liverpool dockers met in Bury and decided to set in motion a process that will lead to a new national anarcho-syndicalist organisation.

In Britain in the last few decades the labour movement has suffered and been rendered impotent owing to the historical absence of an anarchist vision or active libertarian involvement within it. Now the clear moral and intellectual bankruptcy of political marxism, and the increasing authoritarianism of New Labour, places an obligation on all anarchists and libertarians in this country to co-ordinate their activities into a coherent social and political force.

Membership of the new organisation is open to anyone who believes in solidarity and internationalism and who rejects party politics and militarism.

A launch conference organised by Guy Cheverton (Hull), Brian Bamford (Bury), Martin Gilbert (Manchester), Ian Holmes (Hull), John Lawrence (Leeds), Mick Parkin (Glasgow), Derek Pattison (Ashton-under-Lyne), Jim Petty (Burnley) and Harold Sculthorpe (Hebden Bridge) is to be held in Bradford on 14th March. If interested write for details to Harold Sculthorpe, Spring Bank, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, HX7 7AA, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.



ONLY ANARCHISTS CAN BE ETHICAL!

Can anarchists be ethical? Can we consider the question? I know matters of ethics and/or morality are frequently swept aside by anarchists. Usually it is considered that 'freedom' of itself somehow produces satisfactory answers to all ethical questions. Some thought usually adds the condition that one person's freedom should end where that of another begins.

Fair enough, as far as it goes. There are two immediate criticisms. First, that while freedom is a necessary condition, because freedom is right, it does not mean that its consequences are. The choices of the privileged or powerful are not 'right' simply because they are free (able) to make them. Second, relying upon freedom to achieve ethical harmony is the same as relying upon the market to produce economic harmony. It requires belief in the same benevolent 'unseen hand' for its outcome, and we know that is a nonsense.

It could also be said that historically 'freedom' was/is a demand to be free from various things, principally oppression by governments, etc. And that is also fine, as far as it goes. It is when the question of what we should be free to do, or be, is asked that ethics comes in. Being against something is simple, deciding what to put in its place can be complicated.

Ethics, basically, is about making choices in life. And anarchists are right – if you are not free, you cannot make choices. More correctly ethics is about making the 'right' choices, and it can become very tangled when the concept of 'right' is examined and reasons for choices are considered and criticised.

I don't propose to recite the established ethical theories. I would just note that paternalistic liberals tend to go for utilitarianism, assuming that they know what the greatest happiness for the greatest number may consist in, whereas more rational individualistic types will tend to favour Kant, even if, while totally rational, as a guide to personal behaviour his categorical imperative may be impossible to live with. (Something Kant recognised, although this does not detract from its logic or use as a guide or ideal.)

Broad anarchist criticism of ethical systems *per se* runs in parallel to the criticism of legal systems. The law, in general, is seen as a means of containment, a means of maintaining the *status quo* in favour of a privileged minority against the interests of the majority (a sort of counter-balance to the potential excesses of democracy). Ethics has been tarred with the same conceptual brush, but this has been achieved by linking ethics with morality. If the two are untangled, the tar can be seen as misapplied.

Part of the appeal of systems of morality is that they involve minimal thought and only one choice; accept the system, the whole system and nothing but the system. Such morality consists of dogmatic rules, such as thou shalt not fuck unless married, which are given by an authority which, according to the rules, cannot be questioned. This sort of morality is literally self-containing and clearly unacceptable to anarchists. But if dogmatic morality cannot be rejected because it is dogmatic (something which anarchists can be on occasions) it should be unacceptable

because it depends on the authority of a third party.

The third party authority is usually a god, but it may be a guru, a charismatic leader, lumps of stone or a book. Whatever, the system depends on power. In return for accepting the dogma, one (traditionally a male) is given the reflected power of the rules. This power is backed up by the god or its local representative. Thus, for example, in traditional marriage relationships the representative and the rules may be invoked to compel the woman to 'perform her wifely duties'. The third party will also sanction or bless war, murder or practically anything else. Morality of this sort is obviously unethical nonsense. It is also inherently corrupt. As Lord Acton (whom we never tire of quoting) put it: "All power tends to corrupt..."

By contrast, ethics are based on reason and rational or logical thought. To undertake such reasoning one has to be free, at the very least free to think what moralists would regard as unthinkable. And the only ethical dimension in personal relationships is face-to-face argument (a form of contractarianism) with some honest regard for the effects of your decisions on others not party to your agreement, such as children.

So the answer to the original question 'Can anarchists be ethical?' is that *only* anarchists can be ethical. That does not mean to say that all anarchists are ethical beings, but that the freedom anarchy espouses is a necessary pre-condition to thinking ethically. One might add that the degree to which individuals reason rationally about ethical questions is a

measure of the degree of anarchy which they display. For anarchists, however, it is probable that each will reach a separate set of ethical conclusions on any question they care to consider.

This leads to some of the apparent anomalies in our literature. For instance, there have been several pieces in *Freedom* in support of the striking/locked-out Liverpool dockers. While one may have some sympathy with almost anyone deprived of a means of livelihood (surely not striking/sacked germ warfare production workers?) what is the reason for supporting the dockers? Do we really, as anarchists, want people to be given wage-slave jobs by mega-business capitalist employers? Surely we should be encouraging people to form cooperative self-owned and controlled ventures? Especially when, as with the Liverpool dockers, they are offered large sums of money to go away and do something else. Over the decades various agencies have emerged to help people find their own factories, fields or workshops. Is there any other ethically acceptable answer to the 'what about the workers?' question?

Ethical questions – dull, tendentious and boring though they may appear (especially when dealt with by most British philosophers) – are unavoidable if we want to get our philosophy across. Particularly if, despite the many and varied streams of anarchist thought, we want to avoid anomalies and contradictions and offer clear and defensible positive common ground upon which others may join us.

Colin Johnson

So those fun-loving Afghanistan folk known as the Taliban militia have ruled that football shorts must start above the navel and terminate below the knee (funny, most of them look too young to have seen Stanley Matthews' great grandfather in action), and that the only appropriate chant at matches is 'God is Great!' Yeah, but supposing he's not in your team? Perhaps 'God is Great, but not quite as great as Kabul Killers FC'. Over here the problems for ordinary fans are a bit less mundane than exposing too much flesh. Gentrification of the game and consequent ticket price inflation to start with, and the embarrassment of celebrity fans – or tossers, as issue no. 2 of Ian Bone's new vehicle *Animal* puts it (80p) – and travelling to away matches on club-organised trips, inadvisable

Freedom Press Bookshop READERS' ROUND-UP

before reading Colin Ward's descriptions of them, we're told. Also in this Football Special is a review of football protests, 'When the Fans Hit the Shits', Nationalism and Football, Combat 18 and the Dublin Riot, and a fascinating piece on Eric Cantona. with quotes about anarchy and freedom. Oh, and if you still don't know the origin of his surreal "When the seagulls follow the trawler" statement that so gobsmacked the world's media, look no further. A lively effort put out by the founder member of the original *Class War* and friends. *Animal* no. 1 is also still in stock (£1) with Bone's history of *Class War*, and last spring's Reclaim the Streets action in London.

Nicolas Walter drives head-on into the Diana cult on October's *The Freethinker*, which also carries some good anti-monarchy articles, and Barbara Smoker slams into both Diana and Mother Theresa. November's reports that the Roman Catholic church, not satisfied with the Holy Trinity, now wants it upgraded to the Holy Quartet (sounds like a gospel jazz band) by including the 'Virgin' Mary. Perhaps they could get Branson and his PR machine to leap onto that bandwagon too, while he's temporarily unable to leap onto another balloon, and add it to his pathetic Virgin empire. Also actress Jodie Foster has announced that she's an atheist and has never practised religion. December's issue has a picture of the nativity scene with Joseph beaming down at the infant and protesting "Christ almighty, Mary, you can't call him Darren!", and whereas Blair's own Taliban are presenting the Runnymede Trust report as justification for their reactionary decision to allow Islamic schools – a report roundly and

deservedly attacked here by Nicolas Walter for defending special treatment for Muslims on the grounds of supposed Islamophobia – it is clear that the real reason for this arse-licking decision is to repay British Muslims for voting Labour at the election. What next, special schools for Scientologists? £1 per issue, and worth it.

The latest *Workers Solidarity* no. 52 is also worth its 75p for the excellent Tony Blair and the Rabbit joke alone. But thrown in with it for free comes the Russian Revolution, the rise of fascism in Ireland, the Anti-Neoliberalism gathering in Spain, the Irish general election and other topics.

If you want to arm your desires, *Anarchy* no. 44 may do it, for £3. Of the several essays, reprinted from elsewhere as usual, perhaps the most accessible are 'Guy Debord, 1968: the Situationist Years', John Zerzan's earlier piece on the Unabomber phenomenon (coinciding now with the trial in California of the sole suspect, Ted Kaczynski), and the phenomenon of 'The Riot' by Bibliothèque des Emeutes. For more tendentious material the popular game of Let's Give Murray a Good Kicking enters another round in the guise of a book review, and now Zerzan seems to think, in 'Who is Chomsky?', that similar treatment should be meted out to Noam Chomsky. If he ventures to reply this could be worth watching.

From a pacifist perspective Northern Ireland, Anger and Prison Life are tackled in the current *Peace News*, which also has a joke about the first manned spaceflight to Mars, plenty of international news and the usefulness and technicalities of e-mail for activists. A major section in December's issue

is devoted to Prisoners For Peace Day, and a report on the Alvis Peace Camp set up to protest against the hypocrisy of Labour's 'ethical foreign policy' and its refusal to cancel the tanks and Hawk military jet sales to Indonesia. November's offers an account of a 72-strong commune in Germany which runs twelve cooperative companies. £1 per issue.

Two new publications are *Notes from the Borderland* published and edited by Larry O'Hara and intended to examine the secret state (MI5, MI6, Special Branch, etc.) and 'the hidden in politics'. The launch issue looks at the International Third Position, the prospects of the Ku Klux Klan establishing any serious following in the UK, and a long and tortuous tale about a nazi 'honeytrap', a hermaphrodite and the new Communist Party, all for £2.50. And the ACF has published the pilot issue of *Resistance* (20p), a news sheet aiming at bi-monthly appearance. Its four pages cover the dockers' dispute, parliamentary sleaze and the millennium dome.

NB: An earlier report in *Freedom* that William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* was out of print is incorrect. The publishers still have plenty of copies at £11. The mis-informant has been disposed of in the wet concrete at the base of the millennium dome as a warning to future generations.

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has just been reprinted for the fourth time. It contains classic essays by Bertrand Russell, William Morris and Peter Kropotkin, contemporary articles by George Woodcock, Dennis Pym, John Hewetson, Tony Gibson and many more, plus six double-page drawings by Clifford Harper, edited by Vernon Richards with an eighteen page introduction and fifteen articles on 'Production for Use versus Production for Profit'.

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— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

COUNTRY LIFE

Britain, with its heavily-subsidised agriculture, has fewer land workers per head of population than any other European country. It has fewer even than Hong Kong.

Plenty of us have sought for explanations of the absence of a British peasantry and of a tradition of food production linked to other sources of family income than the standard historical explanations provide. Into this gap steps a celebrated agricultural historian, Joan Thirsk, who was an economic historian at Oxford for many years and was editor of several volumes in the massive *Cambridge Agrarian History of England and Wales*. Her new book, *Alternative Agriculture: a history from the black death to the present day* (Oxford University Press, £25), explains a great deal.

She finds that for centuries farmers, land-owners, tithe-gatherers and even statisticians have been concerned almost exclusively with the production of basic foodstuffs in the forms of grain and meat. But there have been periods when, for a variety of reasons, markets have collapsed and a greater diversity of products has crept in. After each of these periods, she argues, though farmers return to the pursuit of mainstream foodstuffs, some new procedures or specialities in each phase "carried positive benefits onto the next".

Her argument is that three phases of alternative agriculture can be documented in English history: "The first occurred after the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, and lasted from 1350 until about 1500. The second occurred in the early modern period, and lasted between about 1650 and 1750, though the way was being paved for it from at least 1590 if not earlier. The third occurred in the later nineteenth century, from 1879, and lasted until 1939. We are now in the 1990s involved in the fourth phase, for which a path was being opened from the 1970s."

There were different causes for each of the historical phases of searching for alternative crops, and for our current situation which results, as we all realise, from heavily subsidised chemical grain production which has done devastating damage to the environment. And one of the fascinations of Joan Thirsk's book is the way many of the same crops which we regard as alien to British farming today, were produced in the earlier alternative periods.

Amusingly she cites a manual by Walter Blith of 1652 recommending the cultivation of "clover, sainfoin, lucerne, woad, weld, madder, hops, saffron, liquorice, rape and colseeds, hemp, flax, and orchard and garden fruits". Rapeseed, far from being an intruder, first appeared here as a serious crop in the 1560s and remained until the nineteenth century as a



Picture taken from *The Allotment: its landscape and culture*, by David Crouch and Colin Ward, has been reprinted by Five Leaves Publications, £5.99

source of industrial oils. European subsidies for its use as a vegetable oil made it by 1986 "the third most widely grown arable crop in England after wheat and barley". Subsidy changes have caused a decline, but the modified oil "is already being used experimentally to drive public transport vehicles, including a ferry to Italy, taxis in Berlin, two buses in Reading, two pleasure boats on the Norfolk Broads, and post office vans ... Through genetic engineering, scientists also see another use for rapeseed in cheap plastics".

Dr Thirsk pays particular attention to those turn-of-the-century land reformers like Howard or Kropotkin, who sought the repopulation of the empty countryside through the combination of intensive agriculture and industrial work. In her conclusion she reminds us that:

"In the late nineteenth century phase of alternative agriculture, Peter Kropotkin argued most eloquently in favour of labour-intensive work on

the land. Demanding more horticulture, he stressed first and foremost the common sense of growing fruit and vegetables at home to replace rising imports, but he also pleaded the good sense of providing work for all. A policy of 'low labour and high technology' had met the situation until 1870, he argued, but after that it was no longer appropriate. The same may be said today. A notable characteristic of many horticultural ventures is again their labour-intensity, and in a climate of opinion which also acknowledges labour as a therapy, it is striking how often the horticulturalists themselves stress the value of their work, despite the hard manual labour.

Since far-sighted individuals have forecast the impossibility of restoring full employment now that modern technology is daily reducing the work required, we plainly await another Peter Kropotkin to pronounce the same lesson

all over again. The continuing obsessive drive to foster technology and shed labour at all costs belongs appropriately to the phase of mainstream agriculture, and not to the alternative phase ..."

Naturally I find this an absorbing conclusion, especially since Dr Thirsk adds that:

"... judging by the experience of the three previous phases of alternative agriculture, the strong assumption of our age that omniscient governments will lead the way out of economic problems will not, in practice, serve. The solutions are more likely to come from below, from the initiatives of individuals, singly or in groups, groping their way, after many trials and errors, towards fresh undertakings. They will follow their own hunches, ideals, inspirations and obsessions, and along the way some will even be dismissed as harmless lunatics."

Her findings have great importance for the shapers of rural policy, and especially rural planning policy. Especially, since she is a veteran recorder of the economic history of agriculture, it is absorbing to see how far she is from current discussion on the need for new homes with its assumption that 'brown-field' sites (in existing towns and cities) are virtuous, and 'green-field' sites (in the country) are the rape of the countryside. For she automatically sees the "diversion of the rural economy, permitting agriculture and industry to co-exist in the same communities, and even in the same households", as a way of avoiding "the painful social disruption which followed later when industrial growth demanded that workers live in towns".

She hopes that maintaining and increasing village populations could "relieve the heavy pressure on towns". It is marvellous to see current assumptions turned upside down simply through paying attention to rural history instead of to un-historical nimbysm. This is the most significant book on the rural economy and on the assumptions of rural planning for many years.

Colin Ward

Colin Ward edited the modern edition of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (Freedom Press, £4.00*).

SEX, SINCERITY AND THE POLITICAL ANIMAL

Post-Freud, knowledge and understanding of the libido has passed into popular culture. But what has changed when it comes, so to speak, to sexual relations, i.e. what has changed in the real world? Nothing at all, I posit, unless you count the increase in misunderstandings which now occur.

Twenty-five years ago, certain men would attempt to seduce women with kisses and caresses and sweet talk of how much they really wanted those women. It was obvious, in those days, that although the men talked of feeling for the particular woman, actually they were simply sexually aroused and wanted relief. In this day and age, though, women can no longer see through these same certain types of men because now, when such men attempt to seduce women, in addition to using declarations of their personal feelings, they attempt seduction with talk of anti-sexism and anti-racism and internationalism and – before the women know where they are – they're under the spell of Ideology, with a capital 'I'.

'Equality, begad', women can't help thinking, 'at last I've met a man who really understands me, who really appreciates me'. The next morning, however, these male idealists treat women in just the same way as those other men did 25 years ago – those other men who were simply following their sexual instincts. And – just as with those other men – after all their protestations of how much they like that particular woman, and how fond they are of her, and how they really want to touch her (just in a warm, friendly way) these men look shell-shocked and offended when, in the morning, she touches his arm, strokes his hair, rubs his shoulders or smiles at him (just in a warm, friendly way). If we didn't know better – because after all we know that the New Man is a politically correct animal (non-sexist, non-racist, an internationalist) – a woman could be forgiven for believing, as she looks into his eyes, that his thoughts are the same ones she read in those other eyes 25 years ago. And – plus ça change, plus c'est la même



chose – he still sees her as The Other, the stranger, different, inferior, who's yet, at the same time, insolently plotting to control him, brazenly trying to ensnare him – she's his mother, the first woman who ever bewitched him. But he won't let it happen this time, oh no. So, from behind his mask of political correctness, he says 'Call me' – whilst the expression on the mask belies his words.

These men feel as confused and awkward as the women do, upon their rapid and complete change of heart. They are not deliberate and wanton deceivers, their sincerity is not in question – they mean what they say at the time that they say it – it's simply that, after their sexual urge has been satisfied, they no longer want what they thought they wanted.

We – men and women – have come a long way in the last 25 years. We've learned our political correctness lessons well, but perhaps it's now time for each person to put aside the PC mask and find out what we really want and who we really are, rather than basing our speech and behaviour on what we think we ought to want or who we think we ought to be.

Joy Wood

— OBITUARY —

George Clark : Postscript

The obituary of George Clark (18th October) may be supplemented by information omitted at or obtained after its publication.

When he first appeared in the original New Left, in 1959, he showed no interest in socialist theory, but he was the centre of a group of young people who met in the Partisan coffee house in Soho and talked about doing something practical about the squalid side of the affluent society. His first personal action was a campaign against the housing conditions in Notting Hill, which were considered to be the breeding-ground for the recent race riots there. He got some of us to conduct surveys of residents' opinions and tried to encourage tenants' associations, but the project didn't seem to get very far or last very long. He took part in the General Election campaign that year, and was bitterly disappointed at the third successive defeat of the Labour Party.

He then spent his short public career in the peace movement, as described. When he left it, in the mid-1960s, and returned to local community work in the London slums, he was the centre of much the same difficulties as before. Testimony from several of the local activists he worked with (or against) for a long time in West London, and for a short time in

East London, is almost unanimous that he caused a great deal of trouble by his unpredictable behaviour in all sorts of projects. He had ambiguous relations with Labour politicians in West London and later with Social Democrats in East London, he repeatedly fell under suspicion over the financial matters of several organisations, and above all he refused to accept discipline or respect decisions made by others.

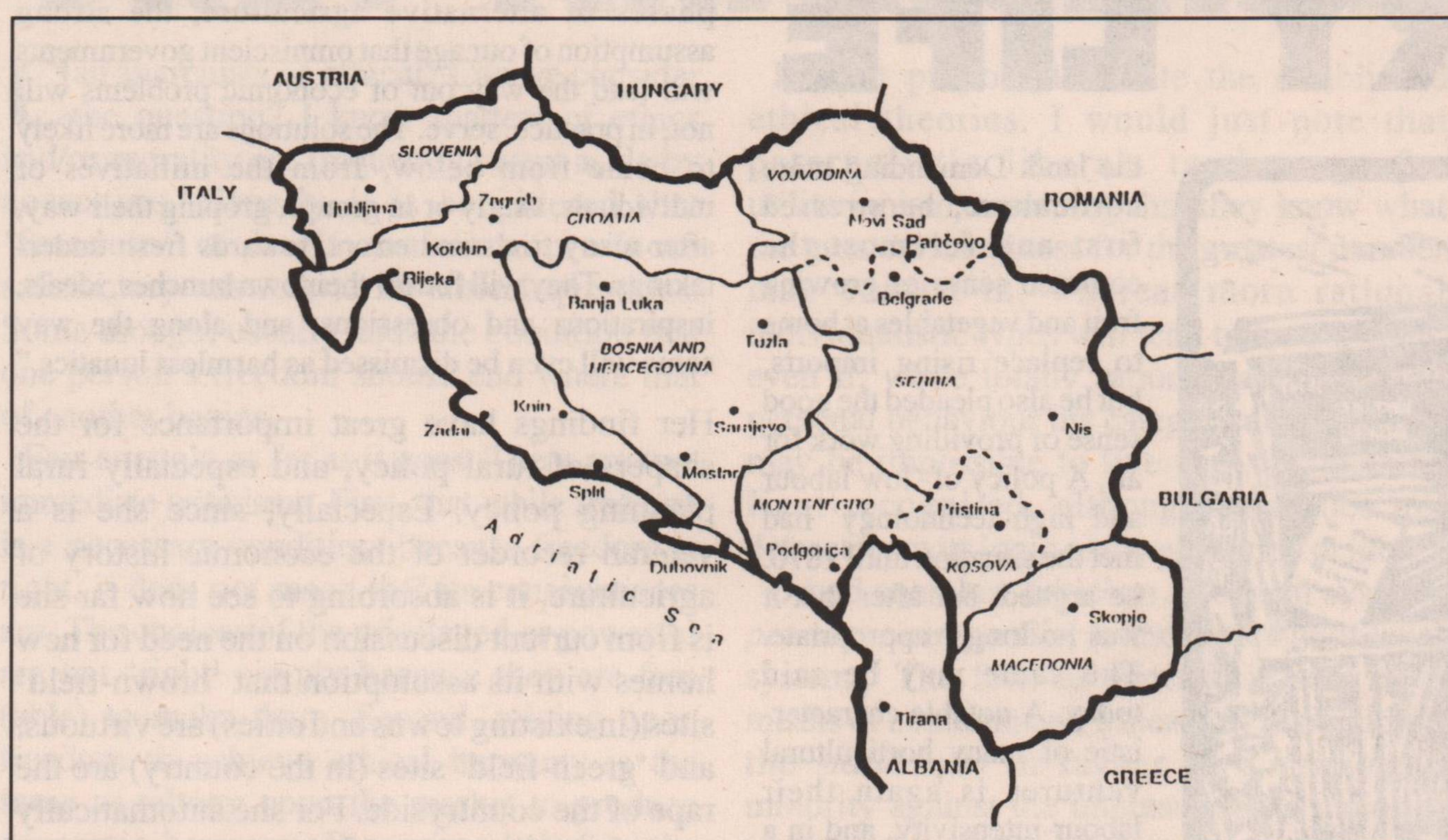
On the other hand, some contrary testimony should also be recorded. A few colleagues thought that he was more sinned against than sinning, and felt that his great commitment to the cause of raising the consciousness of ordinary people faced by the nuclear bomb or by individual poverty outweighed the troubles he caused through his personal idiosyncrasies.

He did actually return to the peace movement for a short time in the early 1980s, being involved in the Gandhi Foundation during its early period. It is interesting that this time he stayed in the background, and he soon returned to local community work again.

Incidentally, the very partial obituaries in the *Guardian*, and the even more partial obituary in *Peace News*, were followed by supplementary letters; and the obituary written for the *Independent* wasn't published.

NW

Balkan Peace Team



The Balkan Peace Team works on peace and reconciliation projects, non-violent conflict resolution, civil society development and monitoring human rights. We work for the peaceful resolution of conflict, demonstrating and working to increase an international commitment to peace.

The Balkan Peace Team is an NGO with experience in non-violent conflict resolution, and seeks to promote a peaceful development by maintaining a permanent presence of international volunteers in some crisis areas. We have been invited to work by local peace groups, but maintain a non-partisan position, willing to work with all sides concerned.

The team is led by the principles of non-violence, independence and non-partisanship with a strong concern for human rights. We work with local initiatives rather than create our own, in the interests of sustainable development – working towards the time when our presence is no longer needed.

We aim to:

- seek to identify possibilities for dialogue between the different groups in conflict;
- serve as a channel of independent and non-partisan information from the regions, reflecting all points of view;
- contribute team members' skills for the benefit of all citizens, e.g. offering workshops in mediation and non-violent conflict resolution;
- act as third-party observers at the scene of incidents or potential flashpoints;
- escort individuals, or maintain a presence in threatening situations.

At present there are three offices in the former Yugoslavia. The North and South Croatia teams based in Karlovac and Split, working mainly in the former Krajina, and East and West Slovenia, and a team based in Belgrade working mainly in Serbia and Kosovo. The Croatian teams are known as Otvorene Oci (Open Eyes).

Kate Witham will be working with the North Croatia team for a year from January 1998. The office is presently based in Karlovac, but will possibly be moving to Zagreb in the near future. This team works in the former UN sectors North, East and West, the northern part of the Krajina, and the areas around Pakrac, Osijek and Vukovar.

During the war these areas were Serbian controlled, and were seized back by the Croatian army in August 1995 with Operations Storm and Flash. These areas have suffered much physical damage, are often sparsely populated as Croats fled, and then Serbs left too. Presently tensions are high as both Croats and Serbs are trying to return to their homes which have been destroyed or damaged or are being occupied by others. There are often evictions, mines being set, court cases to establish rightful ownership of houses and much antagonism within communities.

There are also many peace and human rights groups working in these areas, and several very positive reconciliation projects.

The work of Otvorene Oci is varied and ever-changing, but presently the main work areas are: meeting and working with local NGOs working in these areas, co-ordinating with international groups, journalists, UN and EC bodies as well as embassies. Open Eyes monitor the local political situation and special events, accompany human rights activists in the 'field', monitor 'town hall meetings' and work on a NVCR project called Iskorak u Sutra (Step in Tomorrow). Bi-weekly reports are written, as well as more specific reports on any special event. Recent reports cover topics such as tensions in Vojnic against returnees, houses destroyed by mines in sector North, murder trial for the killing of civilians, and media suppression.

This work is only possible with support. Please get in touch: Peace House, 34 Byrom Street, Todmorden OL14 5HS.

E-mail: peacehouse@gn.apc.org

SWEDEN

In spite of the controversy and disagreement from some of their members, Amnesty International's Swedish section have nominated a police lawyer as their new general secretary. In the face of some criticism, she remarked, if I am not mistaken: "Sometimes one has to be a beginner and start from the beginning".

Some years ago an American immigrant here wrote a 100-page book giving his analysis of the Swedish mentality. He entitled his book *How Dumb Can You Get!* – a rather harsh comment on us, no doubt, but after this very Swedish incident I wonder if we shouldn't give his title some consideration?

Up to now the Swedish Amnesty press and the 'committee' haven't given their members with negative judgements an opportunity to be listened to. One hopes they will give them a hearing.

H (Stockholm, Sweden)

— OBITUARY —

Abraham (Abe) Bluestein

Further to our obituary of Abraham Bluestein (10th January 1998), we thank those readers who sent us copies of the obituary which appeared in the *New York Times* on 14th December 1997.

Jim Huggon adds: "On a personal note, I remember him from my association with Freedom Bookshop in the 1970s as a loyal subscriber to *Freedom*, a generous donor to our Deficit Fund and a very good customer of the bookshop. Many is the time I shipped across the Atlantic to Abe Bluestein."

More on post-modernism

Dear Friends,

I much appreciated Paul Tremlett's response (10th January 1998) to my letter, which indicated that there is no great gulf between us. However, in the style typical of the post-modernist intellectual – who deal only in dramatic extremes – Paul misleadingly interprets my suggestion that 'post-modern' culture is an effect of rampant capitalism as not only implying theoretical absolutism – equated with a form of reductive marxism that denies the autonomy of the human subject – but, by innuendo, links my suggestion to the atrocities inflicted by Stalin. This is a complete caricature of my thoughts and that of marxism.

Apart from determinist marxists like Althusser, most marxists, such as the likes of Fromm, Reich and Habermas, are, whatever their other failings, neither reductive materialists nor absolutists, for they recognise both human agency and the historical contingency of all forms of social knowledge. I find it amusing that while in his first letter Paul defended a realist perspective (contrary to most post-modernists) he now leaps to the defence of human agency and autonomy, oblivious to the fact that it is precisely the post-modernists who tend to deny human agency, for they have long been telling us that the human subject is simply an 'effect' (their term) of ideology, language, discourses or power-knowledge. But, of course, the recognition that knowledge is historically and culturally contingent does not deny the validity of theory or objective knowledge; nor does empirical knowledge, the act of representation, or the emphasis that humans are intrinsically social beings oblate human agency. To think only in either/or extremes is scholastic and unhelpful.

I too recommend the writings of Foucault, and for the very reason that this 'teacher', as he described himself, was *not* a post-modernist. Like his mentor Nietzsche, Foucault was not an extreme cultural relativist: in fact he had a real sense of both history and truth, both repudiated by the run-of-the-mill post-modernists. He also recognised and stressed – unlike Paul – that humans are both determined *and* free, and, as his writings on Kant denote, unlike the post-modernists he defended the ideals of the enlightenment. The whole idea of being for or against the enlightenment (in all its complexity and diversity) was for Foucault ahistoric and unhelpful. That is why he refused to succumb to this kind of 'blackmail' (as he described it) and why he thought Lyotard's concept of the 'post-modern' virtually meaningless. There is a wide gulf between Foucault and the pretentious musings of the post-modernists. Indeed, Foucault's theoretical and political perspective is quite different from the obscurantist textual navel-gazing of the post-modernists.

Of course, anarchists shouldn't isolate themselves from the intellectual currents around them, of which post-modernism is only one, and not the most interesting. And it goes without saying that there is much that is valid and important in the post-modern critique – as there is in the writings of their intellectual gurus Nietzsche and Heidegger. The emphasis on the historicity of being; the critique of Cartesian metaphysics and the transcendental subject; the undermining of the dualistic opposition between humans (culture) and nature; the importance of hermeneutic understanding; the stress that there is no unmediated relationship between language (or consciousness) and the world; the notion that social experience (the human life-world) forms the basis and

background of any theoretical standpoint (that humans are both practical and contemplative beings); an awareness of the close connection between knowledge and power; the problematic nature of instrumental reason and the dangers of equating truth with science – all these have been highlighted by post-modernists. However, eager to stress their own intellectual importance and originality, and suffering from a kind of historical amnesia (history also being repudiated) post-modernists fail to recognise that all these issues have been explored for more than a century by a host of people – neo-Kantian scholars like Dilthey and Boas, marxists, naturalists and evolutionary biologists,

anthropologists and social scientists more generally, romantic poets, pragmatic and Hegelian philosophers, quite apart from anarchists. Post-modernists – mostly literary critics, the philosophical acolytes of the fascist Heidegger, and pseudo-intellectuals in elite universities – have in recent years been discovering for themselves, and presenting in the most obscurantist jargon, what has been common knowledge for a long time.

Paul is surprised at my critical attitude towards post-modernism. I am surprised that Paul is so taken in by the intellectual pretensions of the post-modernists.

Brian Morris

Creeping fascism

Dear *Freedom*,

It used to be utterly beyond me how fascism came to be accepted by millions of seemingly decent ordinary people in the '30s nazi Germany, ostensibly people who were simply normal human beings going about their business of everyday living as best they could under capitalist conditions of the time – that is, until I came face to face with the UK's embryonic fascist state harassing the lines of workless in the dole queue. Make no mistake, the language and methods used by Employment Service bureaucrats in their zeal to remove people from the unemployment register into totally useless jobs paying peanuts, without a future, bears all the hallmarks of a creeping fascist mentality running rampant and virtually unchecked through ES ranks. In accepting New Labour's forced labour Workfare policies, the dole-workers unions have completely betrayed the unemployed, both young and old, leaving us at the mercy of wannabee Himmlers and Grilses up and down the country. More than anything else, what is so frighteningly disturbing about it is the language used by ES bullies – training

providers, course leaders, etc., a language carefully chosen with seeming open meaning when in fact it is full of ambiguity made up of nothing less than stalinist/fascist compulsion diktat. And the unions, to their shame, have allowed this to happen without so much as a whimper of protest. How can they sleep at night? But that's the question I used to ask myself about the nazis.

In the past, being unwaged as now, I have gratefully availed myself of *Freedom's* generosity in providing reduced subscriptions to comrades in straitened circumstances, but I cannot allow myself that luxury this time around. *Freedom* really needs every penny of revenue we can realise for the struggle against the jack-boot and Jesus brigade fostering sinister political trends out of Walworth Road. Here, then, a full subscription towards another (possibly vital) year's *Freedom* and *Raven*. As for the spineless, gutless, self-indulgent CPSA, perhaps they'll feel just a twinge of conscience when Frank Field issues an order that above every Job Centre entrance throughout the country is to be erected a wrought-iron sign reading: ARBEIT MACHT FREI.

Frank (Merseyside)

Class Struggle and Social Protest

Dear *Freedom*,

I find Seamas Mhor's review (or was it an advertisement?) of *The Raven* on 'Class Struggle and Social Protest' rather disturbing, at least in respect to my contribution. There are two glaring errors in his review.

He says I rubbish "the idea of class struggle through an attack on Marx and Weber". Not so. As a sociologist I have always regarded myself as a Weberian, although I have perhaps gone beyond Weber a little, embracing the ideas of Norbert Elias's 'Figurational' or 'Process' sociology about which I submitted an article to *The Raven* on 'Sociology' which was accepted by the guest editor, John Pilgrim, but which did not appear in the issue, and although I was assured it would appear later it never has. Mhor has simply not read my article thoroughly enough. I was briefly describing Weber's ideas, not attacking them.

He then goes on to read into the article his own ideas and attacks me for something I never said: "Neville makes no attempt to take any prisoners, speaking about anarcho-syndicalists: 'their ways of decision-taking and their exclusivity is far closer to Trotskyism than anarchism ... In what way can class struggle anarchism be seen as anarchism?'"

I fact what I said was: "It therefore puzzles many as to how class struggle anarchists hold to a position already believed to be well on the way out by serious Marxian thinkers. That many class struggle anarchists clearly come from a Marxist background may be true, but as a fellow anarchist recently said, their ideas may be Marxist in origin but they talk as if they are anarchists – however their whole approach to movement activity, their organisations, their sets of dogmatic principles, their ways of decision-taking and their exclusivity is far closer to Trotskyism than anarchism. In what way can class struggle be seen as anarchism?"

Who said anything about anarcho-syndicalism, unless Mhor wishes anarcho-syndicalists to be tarred with that brush which many syndicalists might object to. I said "class struggle anarchists".

He then goes on to attack my writing as exhibiting "bitterness", being "shocking and disturbing" and being willing to write people off or feather them out of photographs – a Marxist trick surely? He then accuses me (and Brian Bamford) of "carping" when all we are really doing is setting the record straight. Class struggle is, I believe, a Marxist concept which has no place in anarchism. Brian may think differently.

He concludes by talking about "solidarity" but it is the solidarity of holding to one position, his (presumably class struggle) position, in which all who disagree with his (their) viewpoints will be excluded, a position groups like the ACF, for instance, have taken since ORA was created (see my article in the first issue of *Total Liberty* and another in a coming issue). This kind of imitation solidarity does not work. It simply re-creates a state. One of the important aspects of

anarchism is its diversity. A myriad set of beliefs and opinions. This seems to frighten some newcomers to anarchism who want to go around tying up the loose ends. Me, I want to undo them. This looseness, this flexibility, is what anarchism is all about and it is what makes it difficult to defeat.

You know what's really wrong with class struggle anarchism? It has a self-defeating secret weapon, like a computer virus, brought in from Marxism – it bores people to death.

Peter Neville

Dear *Freedom*,

I support Seumas Mhor's criticism of some contributions to *The Raven* 36 (10th January).

The articles by Donald Rooum and Peter Neville both contain statements denying the relevance of the concept of the class struggle to anarchism and alleging that it derives from authoritarian socialism, especially Marxism. Rooum: "The term *class struggle* is not of anarchist origin, but introduced into the anarchist movement from authoritarian socialism". Neville: "I can find no justification for the acceptance of a class struggle linkage with anarchism". And so on.

The fact is that virtually all forms of revolutionary socialism during the 19th century, whether authoritarian or libertarian, were based on the concept of the class struggle. No working man or woman needed to read Karl Marx – let alone Max Weber – to know that they lived in a class system. Long before Marx and Engels developed their particular version of the class struggle and before socialism split into authoritarian and libertarian wings – let alone before Weber produced his sociological work – virtually all revolutionary socialists were assuming the primacy of the class struggle, and all kinds of politically minded working-class militants were taking an active part in it.

Consideration of the place of the concept of the class struggle in the specifically anarchist movement depends what is meant by *anarchist*. But serious study of anarchism should be based on fact rather than fantasy, and concentrate on people and movements that actually used the word. However old and wide the ideas of anarchism may be, however significant such people as William Godwin and Max Stirner and all the other early libertarian figures may seem, no one called himself an anarchist before 1840, and no movement called itself anarchist before the 1870s.

The term anarchist was first adopted by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840, and although he disliked the class struggle, he recognised that it existed, and he took sides in it when he had to. At the time of the violent confrontation between middle-class and working-class forces during the French revolution of 1848, he insisted that he was on the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie – in his speech in the Chamber of Deputies (31st July 1848); and his last book was a positive study of the need for specifically proletarian politics – *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865).

Proudhon didn't found a movement, and neither did the people who followed him in calling themselves *anarchists* (rather than *mutualists* or *federalists*); but the latter – such as Anselme Bellegarrigue, Ernest Coeudero, Joseph Déjacque – accepted and indeed welcomed the class struggle.

The actual anarchist movement was founded later, by the anti-authoritarian sections of the First International after the split at the Hague Congress in September 1872. They accepted the founding Address of the International Working Men's Association (1864), drafted by Karl Marx, which assumed the primacy of

the class struggle and insisted that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves"; they accepted the Programme of the International Alliance of Social Democracy (1869), drafted by Michael Bakunin, which assumed the primacy of the class struggle and insisted that all action must have "for immediate end the triumph of the cause of the workers against capital"; and they accepted the declaration of the St Imier Congress in September 1872, also drafted by Michael Bakunin, which assumed the primacy of the class struggle and insisted that "rejecting all compromise to arrive at the accomplishment of the social revolution, the proletarians of all countries must establish, outside all bourgeois politics, the solidarity of revolutionary action". The members of this movement originally called themselves collectivists, but gradually adopted the word *anarchist* in 1876-1877. This was certainly the first anarchist movement, and this movement was certainly based on a libertarian version of the concept of the class struggle.

Most of the leaders of this movement – first Michael Bakunin, James Guillaume, Errico Malatesta, Carlo Cafiero, later Peter Kropotkin, Louise Michel, Emile Pouget, Jean Grave, and so on – took for granted that there was a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and that the social revolution would be conducted by the former against the latter. They derived such ideas neither from authoritarian socialism in general nor from Marxism in particular, but from the traditional theory of revolutionary socialism and the traditional practice of working-class action.

The special variety of libertarian socialism which took the form of the revolutionary syndicalist movement from the 1890s until the First World War, and which laid particular emphasis on the class struggle, was supported by most anarchists, including the leading figures in the movement; though there was disagreement about the emphasis on working-class action – as in the debate between Malatesta and Pierre Monatte at the Amsterdam Congress in 1907.

The great revolutions of the early twentieth century – in Mexico, Russia, Spain – all derived from the class struggle and all involved anarchist intervention on the side of the working class. The great martyrs of the anarchist movement – from Haymarket in 1887 through Francisco Ferrer in 1909 to Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 – were all killed in the class struggle. The great partisans of anarchist warfare – from Emiliano Zapata through Nestor Makhno to Buenaventura Durruti – were all fighting in the class struggle.

So, although the place of the concept of the class struggle in anarchism in the past may be regrettable and such a concept may not seem relevant to many anarchists today, its importance in the anarchist movement is incontrovertible and we cannot hide it – any more than we can hide the place of violence in our history.

Donald Rooum's article was presumably meant to tease, and Peter Neville's article was presumably meant to annoy. (There were some other odd things in the latter: he says that "proletariat means being landless", when it actually means having only offspring; he assumes that socialists who support the class struggle also support the dictatorship of the proletariat, when class struggle anarchists have usually supported the destruction of the class system by the revolution; he says that "class struggle anarchists" are not really anarchists, when much the same could be said about him.) It takes all sorts to make a revolution; freedom of speech is a good thing; but so is telling the truth.

NW

NEWS FROM ANGEL ALLEY

We include in this issue the final donations list for 1997, to the end of our 'financial year' on 19th December, but excluding any payments received at the end of last year and the contributions received with the many subscription renewals for 1998 which have arrived early this year and will be acknowledged in our next list. We thank everyone who has contributed to our three funds, every penny of which goes directly to the costs involved in the production of our two journals, *Freedom* and *The Raven*, and paying the regular costs involved in maintaining our building (rates, insurance, telephone and other bills) in Angel Alley. And we have been enabled to avoid increasing the cover price or the subscription rates for one more year.

We were a little worried, on returning to work after the Christmas break, to find that some items we had been expecting seemed to have gone astray in the post – including Colin Ward's regular column, which explains his absence from the last issue. All subscribers who have sent money between 20th December and 16th January should have received a personal acknowledgement by the time you read these words. If anyone has not, please contact the subscriptions department.

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- PROGRAMME 1998 -

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30th January General discussion

6th February Satanic Abuse Hysteria in Britain 1990-91 (speaker Donald Room)

13th February General discussion

20th February For Anarchism or For Leftism: a non-aligned response to class struggle anarchism (speaker Peter Neville)

27th February General discussion

6th March Is Anarchism Anti-Radical? (speaker Steve Ash)

13th March General discussion

20th March Symposium on 'Anarchism and Violence'

27th March General discussion

Anyone interested in giving a talk or leading a discussion please contact Carol Saunders or Peter Neville at the meetings (or Peter Neville at 4 Copper Beeches, Witham Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 4AW, tel: 0181-847 0203) giving subject and prospective dates and we will do our best to accommodate. Donations are accepted from those who cannot attend regularly but wish to see the continuation of these meetings.

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