

# FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

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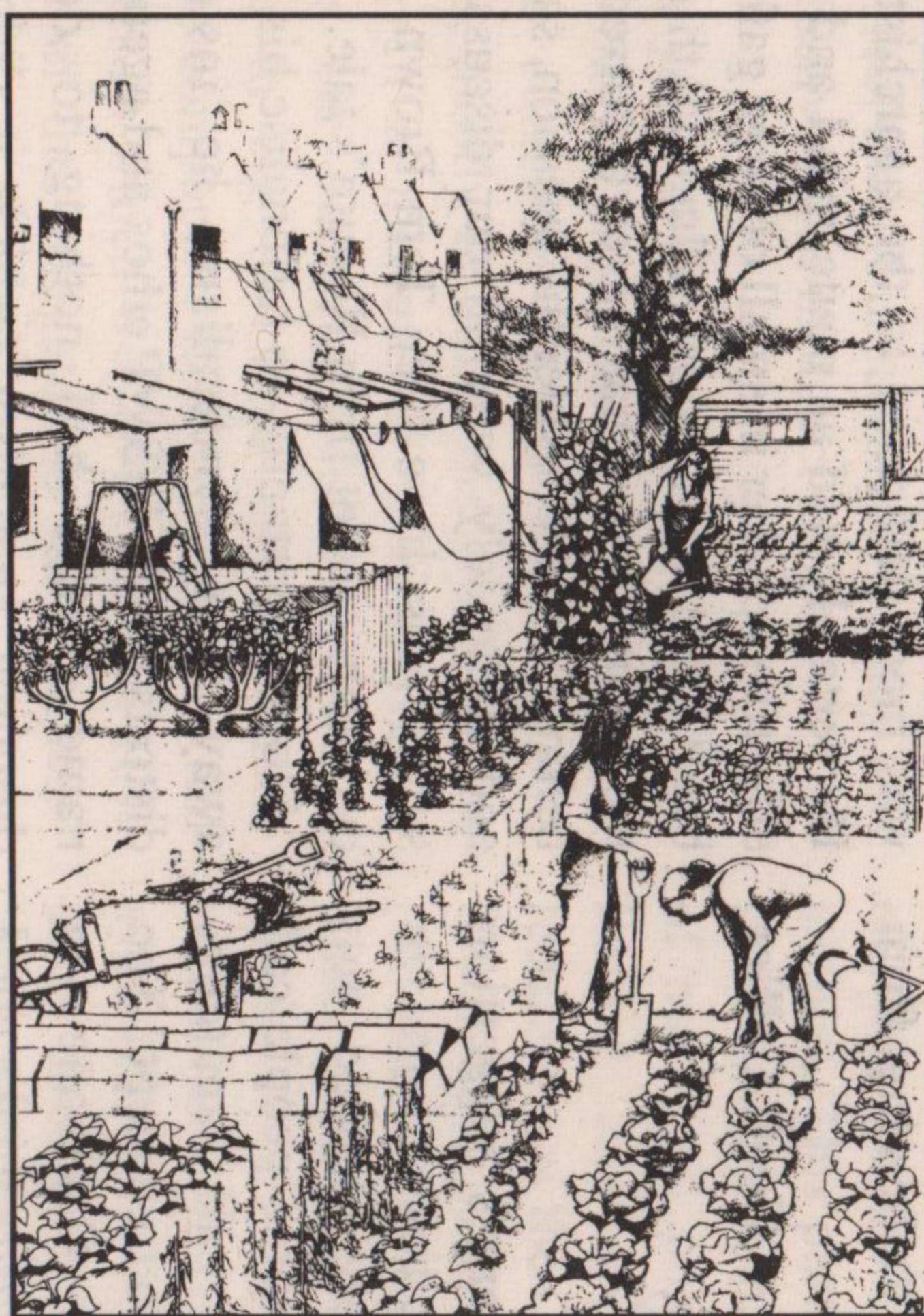
We anarchists value work, but ...

## Life is what matters

The heading of *The Independent* editorial on 2nd April is "Work matters, hours don't". This writer at least believes that *both* matter. In an anarchist society work is important because it produces all the material needs of a civilised life: food, shelter, health and so on. But at the same time we value every waking hour of our lives *to enjoy*. What would be the point of life if, having provided for the material needs of our bodies, we did not make the time to enjoy the desires and the fantasies of that mind of ours which also soars into the 'outer space' of imagination. And the latter needs the leisure and access to wonders not of outer space, water on the moon and the latest brainstorms of the scientists (*water* in outer space) but the wonders of the human brain and imagination that have been expressed over the millennia and many preserved and nurtured by our fellows for all to admire and enjoy ... and why not emulate?

Far from saying, as the *Independent* does, that "Work matters, hours don't" thereby confirming the New Labour government's refusal to even *accept* a minimum 48-hour working week, anarchists *value work which produces the real necessities of life*. But in this country more people today are working in offices in the city centres simply tapping away at computers which produce nothing but more and more paper which benefits stockholders, investors who are only 'valuable' in a capitalist society.

But mankind does not live by capitalism alone and we anarchists go on making our propaganda because we are convinced that more and more people look upon this life as the only one they



Detail of a drawing by Clifford Harper of 'Collectivised Gardens' taken from *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society* (Freedom Press, £4.95\*)

will have (rejecting the religious mumbo-jumbo of the everlasting utopia among the angels in the never-never world, in spite of the discovery of water on the moon). Anarchists are the most practical of the political animals. We want to make life exciting and stimulating since we only have this one life.

You, our readers and comrades, can start by managing to run your lives without making demands from the state. And you will find they ignore you. In other words, they will leave you alone to run your own life. Obviously demand your rights – pensions, dole to which you have paid your whack, etc. – but don't expect charity or solidarity from the state machine nor from capitalism.

One of Freedom Press's most popular titles is *Why Work? Arguments for the*

*Leisure Society*, first published in 1983 and in three reprints since. Far from imagining that for anarchists work is inimical, we include in the introduction two classic essays by workaholics William Morris ('Useless Work versus Useless Toil') and Bertrand Russell ('In Praise of Idleness'). But the whole volume, from the delightful essay by Ifan Edwards as a labourer in 'The Art of Shovelling' to Tony Gibson's ever-provocative contribution 'Who Will Do the Dirty Work?', makes it so clear that anarchists attack the capitalist system because it is not concerned with *needs* but with *profit*. And we go on making anarchist propaganda because only the anarchists are concerned with *needs* and therefore anarchism is the politico-economic philosophy which is based on human needs, happiness and leisure for all.

### Peace on paper in Northern Ireland

There can be no solution to the Northern Ireland problem so long as the politicians insist that it is somehow part of the so-called United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland is a chunk of the island of Ireland and, as *Freedom* has been arguing all the time, there is no point in going on keeping those provinces as independent when in fact both the Irish and British governments remain *involved*.

Blair and his mates in the Republic congratulate themselves for what has been achieved. We are quite sure that *nothing has been achieved*.

# anarchist fortnightly Freedom

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## Nanny State ... or a case of acting the goat

In May of last year dole offices in many towns of the North West were occupied by jobless protesters against the introduction of the Job Seekers' Allowance scheme.

As reported in *Freedom* (7th and 21st June 1997) Job Centres in Bury, Oldham and other towns in the Greater Manchester area were hijacked by the demonstrators, some with their goat mascots – until the authorities decided to intervene ...

Although my musical tastes are varied I have always liked comic opera, and I was certainly not disappointed by what I saw acted out in Court No. 10 at the Manchester Magistrates Court in April. Even the defence solicitor likened his client's case to the trial of Diedre Rachid in *Coronation Street*.

The defendant, Brian Bamford, a 57 year old man from Todmorden in West Yorkshire, had been charged with breach of the peace and with assaulting a police officer following an incident which took place at Victoria Station in May 1997. In giving evidence Bamford stated that he was a member of the West Yorkshire Goat Society and that on 22nd May 1997 he had boarded a passenger train at Castleton Station near Rochdale, where he had been accompanied by a friend and three goats. He explained that he had purchased two tickets on the train for a return journey to Farnworth in Bolton, and that his goats (Doris, Edna and Victor) had travelled with him on the train on at least twenty previous occasions during the past eight years.

Bamford stated that at Victoria Station it had been necessary to change trains, and that there had been a 45 minute delay. He explained that he had left his goats with Shaun Dempsey, an Irish friend, whilst he went to purchase some film for his camera. On returning to Victoria Station he had been told by an employee of North West Trains that he could not continue his journey because the carriage of goats was prohibited. He was also told that having a valid ticket made no difference and that he could not continue his journey accompanied by his goats.

On boarding the train for Bolton, Bamford stated that he had been confronted by two constables from the British Transport Police who told him that he could not continue with his journey. Despite his protests, he was removed feet first from the train attached to his three goats and forcibly restrained on the platform. He stated in evidence that he had been concerned for the welfare of his goats, who had been so distressed by the actions of the two officers that they had defecated on the train. He also stated that he felt that the two officers had dealt with him like he was a lager lout or football hooligan. In denying assault Bamford said he first became aware of the alleged assault when reading the duty solicitor's report.

In his evidence PC Thornborough stated

that Bamford had kicked him in his shin but couldn't remember which leg it was. He confirmed that there was no reference to the assault in his notebook and that Bamford had apologised after kicking him. He stated that Bamford was very agitated and was kicking out, and had said "Go on then, break my arm, you'll be sorry". Under questioning from defence solicitor Jeff Wilner, PC Thornborough stated that he had not asked to see Bamford's train ticket. The other arresting officer, PC Taylor, claimed that he had seen Bamford kick PC Thornborough on the left foot while Bamford had been holding onto a rail in the stairwell attached to his goats.

Mr Nicholson, an employee of North West Trains, stated that whilst some pets were allowed on trains under the conditions of carriage, goats were certainly not covered. Under questioning from Mr Wilner he accepted that Bamford had been sold a valid ticket by a guard on the train at Castleton and that the guard was an employee of North West Trains. He also confirmed that he had not asked to see Mr Bamford's ticket but had spoken to the guard later.

As regards the alleged assault on PC Thornborough, Mr Nicholson stated that Bamford had acted in a violent manner and had been eventually arrested and taken away in a police van. He stated that he had been left with the custody of the three goats following Bamford's arrest because his friend "had done a runner". Under questioning from Mr Wilner he confirmed (to the amusement of many in the court) that whilst

having custody of the three goats he did not know their names. He also confirmed that his main concern was to ensure that the Bolton train was not delayed because North West Trains could be fined.

As the only defence witness, Mr Dempsey stated that he had been present with Bamford on the Bolton train when they had both been confronted by the two police officers. He said that both constables had been very agitated and had said that they couldn't care less if we had train tickets. Mr Dempsey said that he had been very afraid and had left the train to walk onto the platform. He stated that Bamford had been dragged from the train onto the platform whilst holding onto his goats and had been forcibly held down by the two constables. Mr Dempsey stated that he had appealed to both officers not to hit a 57 year old man who not been violent. He confirmed under questioning that, like Mr Bamford, his main concern had been that they were being stranded in Manchester with three goats because the police were not allowing them to continue their journey.

In summing up the case for the defence, Mr Wilner stated that it had been a difficult week and he likened the trial of his client to the trial of Diedre Rachid in *Coronation Street*. Both cases, he argued, involved some people being unable to distinguish between reality and unreality. The reality as regards the case against his client was that he had a valid return train ticket and was therefore an invited contracted passenger of North West Trains. He suggested that there had been no

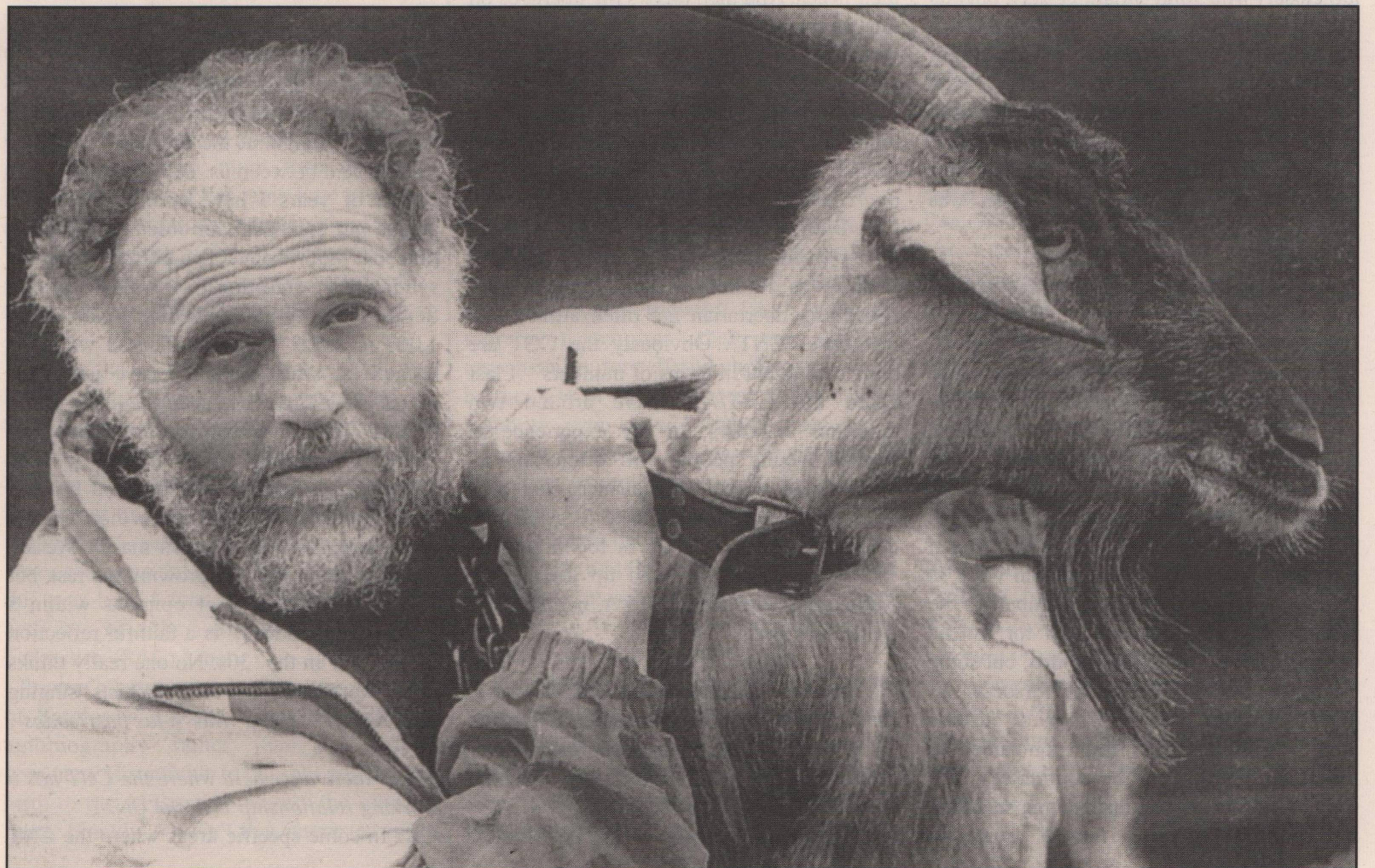
legal justification for his client being removed from the train irrespective of the regulations because his client had been entitled to continue his journey.

Mr Wilner told the court that the case against his client was that of the little man who found himself up against a bureaucratic authority which was not prepared to listen to him. Both police officers, he suggested, had acted illegally in touching his client because he had a legal contract which entitled him to be on the train. This contract took away the right of the railway to authorise the police officers to take the action that they did against his client. He told the court that his client had been effectively kidnapped and detained illegally in custody.

On being found guilty of assaulting a constable and a breach of the peace, Mr Bamford immediately declared his intention to appeal. Apart from being bound over to keep the peace and being fined £100 with £150 costs, Mr Bamford also spent 23 hours locked up in a Manchester police cell when he had been arrested in May 1997.

As with other victims of injustice, whether it be Alfred Dreyfus or Diedre Rachid, Mr Bamford also feels a sense of outrage and, judging from the amount of media interest already shown, this case has all the makings of another *cause célèbre*. As for myself, I was left to wonder whether this was a case of the nanny state or more a case of acting the goat. Either way I seem to be on the horns of a dilemma.

Joe McCarthy



# The role of the CGT in Spain

On Franco's death in 1976 there was a political vacuum in industrial organisation in Spain. Workers flocked to join the CNT anarcho-syndicalist union which had managed to maintain a minimum underground structure in Spain as well as the official exiled structure in France throughout the years of dictatorship. This re-emergence of anarchism caused the Spanish Minister for the Interior, Martin Villa to, remark, when questioned about ETA, that his biggest concern was in fact the CNT. Soon, however, doctrinal differences became apparent (as always with the CNT) and at the Congress of Madrid in 1979 the union split into two factions which in due time became known as the CNT/AIT and the CNT/U. In the early '80s motivated by the chance of having confiscated property returned by the state, the CNT/AIT took the CNT/U to court for 'usurpation'. After three court cases the CNT/AIT finally won the rights to historical patrimony of the CNT name and property. In 1989 the CNT/U were forced to change their name to CGT.

In March 1998 Christopher Robinson, a Canadian who has lived seventeen years in Barcelona and Madrid, attended a conference of syndicalists in Bradford as an official observer for the CGT. John Lawrence took the opportunity to interview Chris on the role of the CGT in Spain. The following is the substance of their conversation.

**JL:** Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am particularly interested in your views on the CNT-CGT split, how it came about and what the present situation is.

**CR:** First of all I'd like to stress that anything I say here is my own personal opinion and not offered as an official CGT position. I have been highly critical of the CGT myself and it can be difficult to be always objective. People are so used to hearing affirmations of principle from both parties, while honesty can tend to dwell on the negative, and so help to re-affirm dogmatic views. People don't realise that you're touching nerves – in this country (UK) people seem to take sides like choosing a football team.

**JL:** Are you saying that people here identify too closely with what should be seen only as internal wrangles?

**CR:** Partly. Though there are important theoretical differences. History will probably record that the split was caused by the issue of whether or not to participate in Workers' Committees, as the CGT does. But personally I think the main reason was personal differences.

**JL:** What is the CNT's objection to Workers' Committees?

**CR:** The Workers' Committees are an opportunity to work together with other unions. Elections are invoked by the workers and the delegates deal with management. Some people might interpret this as a compromise with the state and I suppose it is a clear invitation to bureaucracy, too. One problem is with the horas sindicales – fifteen to twenty hours away from normal work in factories, given to the elected members of the Workers' Committees and paid for by the companies. CGT delegates do this, but some unions go further, like the UGT (socialists) and CCOO (communists) who survive largely with pay-offs from companies in return for sell-outs on the committees. The CGT strongly opposes this. Having said that, it wouldn't surprise me if someone

somewhere said "Yes but the CGT in such and such a place signed something to the effect that ..." and so on. The thing is, we are a union based on libertarian principles and we don't have an internal doctrinal police force. In short, the CNT view the Workers' Committees as indirect non-action whereas the CGT feel that, if used carefully, they can be an effective form of direct action.

**JL:** Can you tell me something about the CGT's work and organisation?

**CR:** We currently number about 35,000 members, mostly in cities and small towns, working in a mixture of industries, for example car factories. Actually we're strongest in big factories, and in banks, telephone companies, RENFE and other rail companies in which we have received 10% or more of the delegates in the Workers' Committees. We also have isolated strongholds like cinema workers in Barcelona, health workers in Malaga, teachers in Granada and even forest fire-fighters in Valencia! This is a reflection of the work of our militants. If we are not strong in, say, cinema workers in Madrid, it is because we don't have any active members in that sector. We have the same organic structure as the CNT; the nucleus is in local trade unions organised around a trade, for example education of transport. These local trade unions also have *secciones* – university professors in education of Metro Workers in transport, for example. Each trade union joins the others in their municipality in a federation and the several federations join a regional confederation. On a parallel level, each trade union forms part of a national federation of that particular trade.

**JL:** Do you have full-time paid officials?

**CR:** In the national permanent secretariat there tend to be one or two full or part-time paid officials, paid a worker's salary, invariably below what they were making before. Also different federations and confederations have full and part-time paid officials according to their needs. And then there's the liberados on the factory committees, as I mentioned earlier.

**JL:** Given that there are two high profile anarcho-syndicalist organisations, how would, say, a young person attracted to anarchism decide who to join?

**CR:** Both have members who are students, unemployed or retired. People who consider themselves libertarian and want to join something libertarian are often attracted to the name 'CNT'. Obviously the CGT are more prominent in terms of numbers – I last heard the CNT/AIT have around two thousand members. In my experience in Madrid, young people will often join an organisation *al azar* (by chance), but they often find the CNT/AIT too rigid and dogmatic while the CGT is too pragmatic and 'uncool', so they end up joining the Autonomos with the circled A, hammer and sickle, and star!

**JL:** You have touched on the pragmatism of the CGT. Is there a danger that this can lead to a loss of anarchist principles? For example, is there any truth in the allegation that the CGT has a police trade union?

**CR:** I can only speak for the post-Franco

years, when the CGT have never allowed police to join. It was clarified in a congress around 1980 that no member of military, repressive or armed forces like the police, including Guardia Civil, Policia Nacional, Policia Autonoma, Policia Municipal, Guardias Jurados (sworn security guards) can join the CGT and that's how it is in the statutes. This particular story originates in a small town in Catalunya when a small group of municipal police set up a Sindicato de Policia and applied to join the local federation of the CGT. Entrance was refused. Since then they have imitated our logo (clenched fists) and added their own initials. These people have no bilateral contacts at any level with the CGT. On their web page on the Internet they call themselves anarcho-syndicalists, admit that they were refused entry into the CGT because of our statutes, but declare that they have nevertheless based their model of organisation on the CGT. This is upsetting, of course, but what do you expect us to do? Take them to court? Set them on fire? I don't think we should waste our time on such things.

**JL:** What struggles is the CGT involved in at the moment?

**CR:** Obviously we're opposing the privatisation of RENFE and we're also trying to reduce overtime and reduce the working week in all sections of the economy. In Spain in major companies ninety million hours of overtime are worked yearly. In banks workers do twenty million hours of unpaid overtime, and in small companies there are uncountable hours of overtime worked, both paid and unpaid. Many workers do want to work overtime, but our stand on the issue has gained us respect. Other unions respond with all talk and no action, while the CGT has taken legal action and won several cases. It is said that the CGT is *el Sindicato del 'no'*. Much of our work on Workers' Committees is to reject sell-outs by the CCOO and the UGT and wherever possible mobilise workers, often successfully, against them.

**JL:** Can you tell me something about the situation in your home city of Madrid?

**CR:** Madrid has always been problematic. We seem to live more intensely any strife in the CGT throughout the country – it's very exaggerated between us. However in the last couple of years I have seen a *detente* as people put their goals in order. At the same time that Madrid never had a strong anarcho-syndicalist tradition, it has grown tremendously in the last five years, from 1,000 to 1,500 members. This is worrying because at times members have joined *en masse*, such as disenchanting members of the CCOO. They of course have to follow our libertarian statutes, but I suppose it's not always easy. Recently six hundred printers were virtually forced to leave their CCOO union and they joined us *en masse*. We are aware of the dangers of growing too fast, but I think this diversity of opinions within a libertarian framework is a faithful reflection of the CNT in the '30s. No one really thinks there were millions of anarchists singing their babies to sleep with 'a las barricadas'.

**JL:** Is there anywhere where the CGT has a working relationship with the CNT?

**CR:** In some specific areas where the CNT

organise we work together, for example Cadiz Docks and in Madrid postal workers and airport workers. Unfortunately I don't see full co-operation happening soon because both unions have members with extreme personal differences. There shouldn't exist two anarcho-syndicalist federations in the same country, in my opinion. People outside Spain might not realise that people like myself who are members of the CGT are at the same time perfectly capable of praising any action by the CNT/AIT who are very active in promoting anarchism, if in a non-syndicalist way.

**JL:** A letter to Freedom from the Manchester Solidarity Federation alleges that the CGT is "conducting high level secret negotiations with the CCOO (former Stalinists) and the UGT (socialists) of PSOE unions with a view to amalgamation." What do you say to that?

**CR:** That's completely laughable. It's written by someone who doesn't know what they're talking about. CCOO and UGT leaders would never dream of amalgamating with the CGT. On a national level, and at most local levels, our relations with them are bad, virtually non-existent. Our goals and strategies are radically different. Their leaders are trying to maintain the status quo and their cushy jobs while we want to create a new society. Although in membership the CGT is comparatively small, in militancy we are relatively strong, so a hypothetical amalgamation would be like injecting a libertarian virus into an authoritarian structure. It would make it easier for us to spread our views and actions and would shake its foundations.

**JL:** Has the CGT got any presence in rural areas?

**CR:** If you're asking about organising peasant farmers, the answer is 'very little'. Peasant farmers are an endangered species in this country. Historically it is true that the original CNT had different trends, with industrial workers in the north interpreting anarcho-syndicalism differently from farm workers in the south. And I suppose that nowadays there might be sympathy from farm workers, once again showing that Marx was wrong in expecting a revolution to come only from industrial city workers. But social conditions in the countryside have changed drastically in Spain since the turn of the century. Whereas unemployment is still high in the south, social exclusion and extreme poverty exist in both northern cities and southern farming villages and is often worse in the former. Farm workers still maintain specific demands like the *reforma agraria*, but they and their children now read the same papers, watch the same TV programmes and follow the same education systems as people in the cities. Perhaps you could say that economic globalisation is bringing about a single thinking process in the worker's psyche.

**JL:** What do you think of the slogan 'no compromise with the state in any shape or form'?

**CR:** Beautiful words which had meaning, have meaning, and will have meaning with different interpretations at each historical point of time.

**JL:** Thank you, Chris.

See also page 3 for the text of a speech delivered in Bradford to the Syndicalist Alliance organising committee by the CGT observer Christopher Robinson.



## Integrity: the voice of Spanish anarchism

Although our way of organising might be different from yours we share, as workers, the same problems: unemployment, bad employment, social exclusion. Our enemies have increased. When the AIT was formed, we fought against capitalism and the state. We now have a third and highly treacherous enemy: the bureaucracy of the official unions. It is in part due to the negligence and compliance of the UGT and CCOO that in Spain, out of nearly thirteen million workers, half of them are affected by unemployment. That is, over three million (one in four) unemployed and a similar number have precarious short-term contracts. There are one million families with no employed members. Two million jobless workers have no social benefits or income.

I believe that Britain has similar figures, especially in the north. The collaborationist trade unions have joined forces with company owners to improve competitiveness in ever-more difficult international markets in order to maintain jobs, while renouncing previously hard-won gains.

### SUSTAINING STRUGGLE

This is where anarcho-syndicalism comes in – an anarcho-syndicalism similar, but not the same, to that which had a glorious existence in the early days of the labour movement.

Many of us in Spain have spent years trying to re-build anarcho-syndicalism, but often we have mistakenly tried to reproduce the strategies used in the past when work and employment were central pillars of society – of working class society at least.

What we need now is an anarcho-syndicalism centred not only in the world of labour but also on the distribution of wealth at all levels of society. The old principles of anarcho-syndicalism are still essential – direct action, federalism and mutual aid are more than just organic strategies or methods of struggle. They are the libertarian component of the working class movement.

The workers' movement in Spain has been sustained over the last few decades not just by the anarcho-syndicalists but by many other spontaneous and grassroots movements active in both labour and social struggles. It is on these libertarian principles that we must base ourselves if we want to adapt our most efficient tool – the trade union – to the changes in the capitalist system of production.

### EVOLVING IN MODERN SOCIETY

Syndicalism must evolve. We must try new scenarios for direct action in order to find a way to spark a revolt – a social response against the capitalist system of consumerism and production. We must address ourselves to the consumer, as we used to do to the producer – a plurality of consumers who logically consume differently according to their means.

Syndical action (anarcho-syndicalism), in its struggle against social processes, has to break the identity of the consumer. Our lives, the way we live, should not be limited by the salaries that we earn and should not be limited by consumerism.

As anarcho-syndicalists our objectives remain the same, but what has changed is the scenario. This is no longer totally linked to salaries and employment (or the equivalent of employment equals salary equals ability to consume) and must be wider ranging. The breath of our action must cover the entire workforce: wage workers, the unemployed, the yet-to-be employed, the so-called inactive housewife. We must invent and apply new ways to satisfy our needs by re-

appropriating and distributing the socially produced wealth.

I am hoping that the alliance here will propose interesting ways of achieving these goals. To end, I'd like to read a quote by Diego de Santilla: "I didn't come to anarchism after reading books or pamphlets by Kropotkin or anyone else. I came to it because of the moral integrity of the workers who I had met and dealt with. This integrity

was our treasure, and we won't be anything if it ceases to exist."

*The above is the text of a speech delivered by Christopher Robinson, the CGT observer (the CGT is the biggest anarcho-syndicalist union federation, with 35,000 members, in Spain and the world) to the Syndicalist Alliance organising committee in Bradford last month.*

— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 9th May, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 30th April.

## Reclaim May Day for Anarchism

On Friday 1st May there will be events held in Bradford and Portsmouth, among other places, aimed at reclaiming May Day for anarchism.

The Portsmouth event will be a party with live bands and DJs at Unity Hall, Arundel Street (admission at £4 waged, £2.50 unwaged) with all proceeds going to workers in dispute.

The Bradford event will be a May Day march assembling at 1pm at Infirmary Fields, Westgate. This will inaugurate four days of anarchist activity including a three-day national conference (participation £15 waged, £10 low-waged, £5 unwaged). Registration is at the 1 in 12 Club, Albion Street, where those who register will learn the actual location.

May Day commemorates the death of five Chicago anarchists convicted of a murder they did not commit simply because they were anarchists.

On 3rd May 1886 there was a fight outside a factory in Chicago between two groups of workers, on one side trade unionists locked out for union activity and on the other side scabs, police and 'Pinkertons' (security men hired from the Pinkerton detective agency). The police deliberately fired their revolvers into the crowd, killing at least two and injuring many more.

On 4th May a protest meeting was organised by anarchists in the Haymarket,

Chicago. The speakers were August Spies, Albert Parsons and Samuel Fielden, all of whom denounced the police violence but explicitly discouraged violence in revenge. As the meeting was dispersing at 10pm two hundred armed police arrived ready for another battle. They were preparing to charge when a bomb went off among them, killing one policeman and injuring others. Some police panicked and fired their revolvers at no particular target. Seven more police were killed and sixty injured, and there were similar casualties among the demonstrators.

Subsequently ten anarchists – August Spies, Albert Parsons, Samuel Fielden, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, Louis Lingg, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe, Rudolph Schnaubelt and William Seliger – were indicted for murder of the policeman killed by the bomb (no one was charged with killing the seven in the subsequent riot as most of these were found to have died from police bullets).

Seliger gave evidence for the prosecution. Schnaubelt was never caught. Neebe was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Death sentences on Fielden and Schwab were commuted to life imprisonment. Lingg was killed by a dynamite bomb in the condemned cell. Spies, Fischer, Engel and Parsons were hung before two hundred witnesses on 11th November 1887.

In 1893 the verdicts were annulled and the

survivors released. Nobody ever said that any of those convicted threw the bomb. The prosecution contention was that, by advocating revolution, they somehow caused the bomb to be thrown.

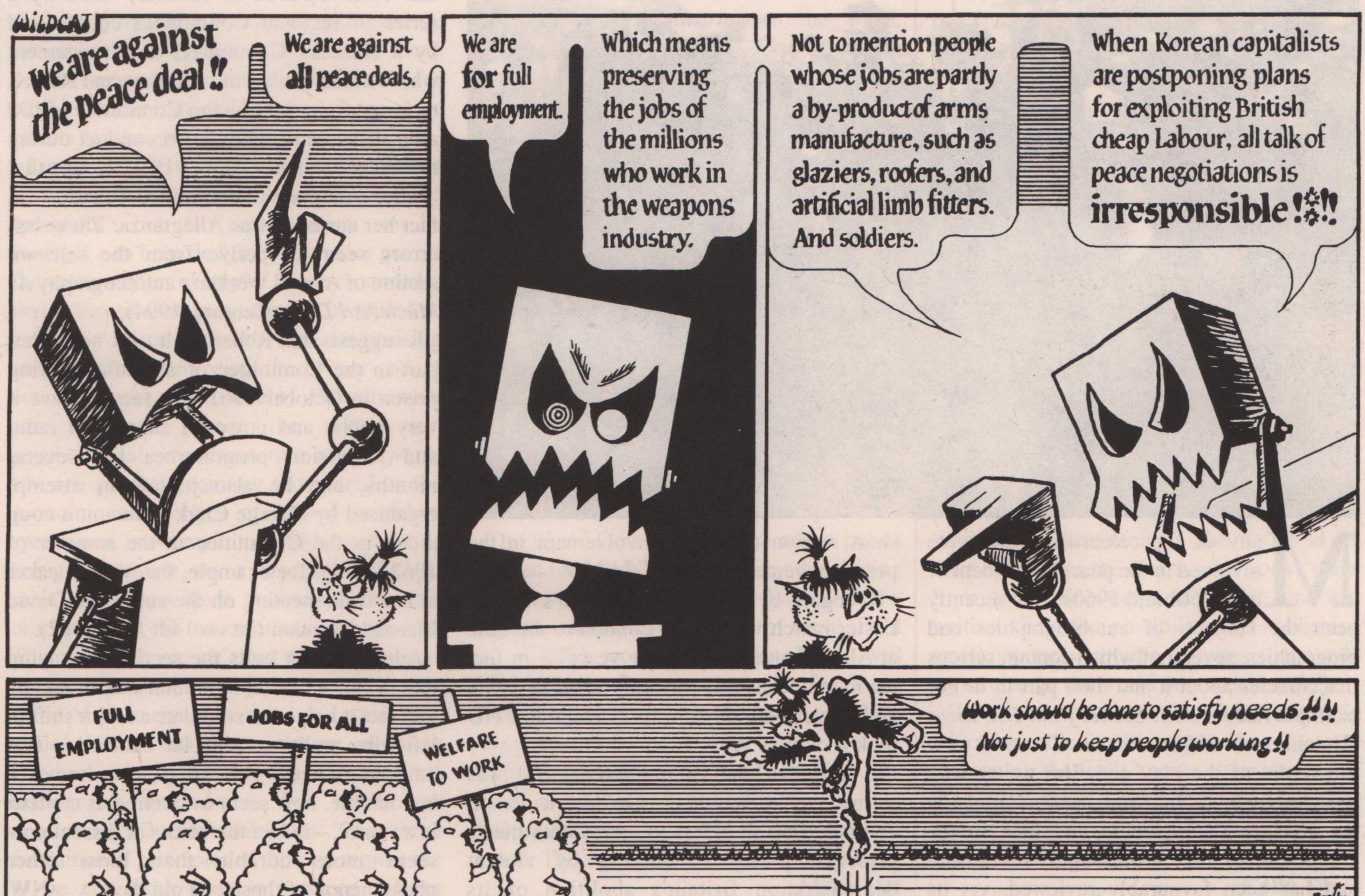
May Day was a traditional working class holiday, a survival into Christian times of a pagan spring festival, and in 1888 conferences in Europe and America, neither dominated by anarchists, separately decided to call general strikes on May Day in commemoration of the anarchist Chicago martyrs.

Naturally the forces of authority moved to prevent unauthorised stoppages. In 1890 a conference of the British labour movement accepted a proposal (anarchists and some others dissenting) to move May Day to the first Sunday in May. The 1st May became a day for celebrating Soviet power with a parade of weaponry. The Nazis in Germany made 1st May a public holiday, Adolf Hitler Day. The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany are no more, and now seems a good time to reclaim May Day for anarchism.

- For further information about Chicago 1886 – most of the many books are out of print, but Freedom Press still has a few copies left of Nicolas Walter's erudite *The Anarchists of Chicago* (50p UK, 60p elsewhere, post free – while stocks last).

- For further information about Bradford 1998 contact May Day 98, PO Box HH57, Leeds LS8 5XG

- For further information about Portsmouth contact Portsmouth May Day Collective, Box M, 167 Fawcett Road, Southsea PO4 0DH.



**A Weekend Photographer's Notebook\***

by Vernon Richards

Freedom Press, London, 1996, £6.95

The title of Richards' book is perfect. His 170 photographs are glimpses from his travels. A visual diary of captured moments, symmetrical patterns, shapes and forms which delight and intrigue. We have a wide range of images, mostly from the 1940s to the '60s, clustered around such themes and places *'60s Fashion on the Aldermaston Marches, Naples 1946, London Docks 1950s, Animals and Trees and Tree Stumps.*

All the images are black and white. I especially like two of his group shots of children. In *La Escala in Evening Sunshine* shot into the sun, a small group of boys are silhouetted against a bay with fishing boats. *Paris, Parc des Sceaux* repeats the theme with silhouetted children climbing an old graceful tree, their tiny figures preoccupied with exploring an aerial dimension. His images from *Naples 1946* match those in our head from the neo-realist film makers de Sica and Rossellini, and give a quiet dignity to young and old in rags living through poverty.

He has a sensitive eye and a keen sense of composition, often juxtaposing two points of interest, such as in *Lovers on the Banks of the Seine* which centres a couple embracing foregrounded by a man reading a book, or the photograph entitled *Winkle-pickers and the Young Philosopher, Hyde Park 1958* where a young dandified marcher, wing-

## A Weekend Photographer's Notebook



collar, leather waistcoat and buckled shoes, stands in tension to a seated thoughtful young man, hands caressing a walking stick, the worn tweed jacket signalling other interests in his life.

This book is a collection of images from a photographer who has no pretensions. They are moments of truth celebrated by a man

with a gentle vision. We can share his way of seeing the world, which reveals human dignity and vitality. The photographs have a quality of integrity and sensitivity which mirror the photographer himself. This is a book for quiet reflection and enjoyment, and to be recommended.

Liz Ashton Hill

## Lies about the peace movement



Many of the celebrities who were involved in the peace movement of the 1950s and 1960s have recently been the subjects of autobiographies and biographies, several of which contain serious inaccuracies about it and their part in it. For example *Robert Bolt: Scenes from Two Lives* (Hutchinson, 1998), Adrian Turner's new biography of the play and film writer who was briefly involved first in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and then in the Committee of 100, is thoroughly researched and has been favourably reviewed, yet its

short section on Bolt's involvement in the peace movement is full of errors.

It begins by saying that "CND's annual Easter march went from London to the base at Aldermaston" for "a few years" – in fact the march went that way only once, in 1958, and it went the other way as soon as CND took it over in 1959.

It says that the Committee of 100 was formed in "early 1961" – in fact it was in autumn 1960. It refers to "the Committee's principal policy of forcing by violent demonstration Britain's abolition of its

nuclear deterrent" – in fact the Committee's principal policy was of course total non-violence. It says that the members of the Committee who were imprisoned in September 1961 were 'convicted' for organising the Trafalgar Square demonstration – in fact they merely refused to be bound over to keep the peace. In says that, apart from Bertrand and Edith Russell, they were all sentenced to a month in prison – in fact three of them had longer sentences.

It says that "the Committee of 100 was disbanded in January 1963 after Bertrand Russell resigned" – in fact the original Committee had been replaced in February 1962 by a series of regional Committees coordinated by a National Committee, an arrangement which lasted until 1968, and Bertrand Russell resigned from the London Committee of 100 after disagreements over his conduct during the Cuba crisis of October 1962. It says that "Helen Anagransa" committed suicide – in fact her surname was Allegranza. These last errors seem to derive from the relevant section of Arnold Wesker's autobiography *As Much As I Dare* (Century, 1994).

It suggests that Robert Bolt took no further part in the Committee of 100 after leaving prison in October 1961 – in fact he gave it very public and powerful support in radio and television programmes for several months, and he also joined an attempt organised by George Clark to mount a coup d'état in the Committee in the summer of 1962 (being, for example, the main speaker at a private meeting on the subject at David Mercer's London flat on 14th June 1962).

Adrian Turner ends the section by saying that "CND's impact in Britain was minimal" – in fact it helped to stimulate a major shift in left-wing politics. And he concludes that "those voices of dissent, however honourable, now seem as fleeting as confetti in a storm" – in fact the voices of dissent now seem more durable than most other phenomenon of those bad old days. NW

## An Affair with Anarchism

Lionel Blue is described as "Britain's most popular Rabbi" by his publishers, who have just produced his intellectual autobiography as *My Affair with Christianity* (Hodder & Stoughton, £15.99).

Despite the combined handicaps of extreme unorthodoxy, open homosexuality and severe epilepsy, Blue managed to work as a Reform rabbi for 35 years, during which he became popular as a skillful radio broadcaster. Most of his book has interest only for people who care about mystical religion, and his adventures in Christianity are so individualistic as to be virtually private, though he is attractive for his open-minded approach and down-to-earth manner – and he is very clear about the evil aspects of both Judaism and Christianity and very wise about many other things (as his radio listeners know). But some of the book has wider interest because Blue also describes his earlier non-religious beliefs.

At the age of five he abandoned his grandmother's primitive Judaism and adopted his uncle's dogmatic Marxism (which he compares with both Judaism and Christianity). At the age of twenty he abandoned this too, and adopted what he calls "its disestablished, heretical mirror-image: idealistic anarchism". He gives a brief description of this phase of his youth, in the early 1950s, before he went to university and began his religious quest: "*In cellars in central London and obscure coffee bars, I met a new set of comrades, and was reminded of my grandmother because of their sheer goodness. They were honest, too, in a way established cults and ideologies never were. They were the only ones who were open about sex, even homosex, and I listened astonished ... The anarchists were the first and only group I met who weren't furtive. But then they had no power, poor dears, so they could not be corrupted by what they never had. This is why I sadly bade them goodbye. They believed in the natural goodness of people, and I wasn't so optimistic ... I just wasn't good enough for them.*"

He includes in his list of "adolescent saints" Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker (though he transfers the latter's trade union activities from London to New York), and he approves of Joe Hill's song about "pie in the sky" (though he misquotes it and oddly describes it as a "left-wing student song").

Blue may not be one of the greatest figures who have passed through the anarchist movement, but he seems to be one of the nicest. NW

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## Rich and Poor



Anarchism is a condition of society, says Alexander Berkman, where we all enjoy equally the benefits of an ordered and sensible life.

How can anarchism come about? There is no charted account of an anarchist society. There have been attempts all over the world. Certainly the idea has been kept alive, the numbers of people advocating anarchism have varied.

The greater the repression, the greater the resistance. Repression itself has many faces and many forms. Those who are in power control all the instruments of power. It has been said that people's idealism is a constant, if not the main target, for repression. Those in power make the rules, make the laws and there are no loopholes.

The hereditary principle is a myth created out of fiction and fantasy culminating in the law. Rights of rulers, the rights of hereditary rulers, is a fiction enshrined, as they say, in the constitution. Upon this palpable fiction depends the continuation of the status quo. No amount of shoddy calligraphy will disguise the sleight of hand. A piece of paper will determine who you are. No child knows in advance whether it is born into rags or riches. Those who can trace their family tree back to the Domesday Book still have the whip-hand.

This legitimising of ownership and possession was born in the blood of the terror and conquest. Each country, no matter which, has its legitimacy born out of subjugation. Only a few are able to see through the imposed set of conditions. Power is concentrated in the hands of the rulers. Through the taxes they collect they accumulate an immense wealth which is spent in employing all the various armies and forces of restraint to uphold their rule. Some leashes are longer than others, but all and everyone is on a leash.

In the early days of conquest it was the naked sword alone which secured the tribute to the victor. The sword is still there but now it is disguised in many forms. The list is tediously long: the police, the bailiffs, the judges and the courts, even what they are pleased to call the education system, the dependency culture all grind away and the wealth and power which the masses produce and meekly hand over is incalculable.

Where does anarchism stand today? The idea itself has persisted. At times there have been communal attempts not so much to advocate it but to put it into practice. The difficulty has been that the political arena itself is a bought constituency.

This is a new concept and it needs to be explained. It is a well known fact that the laws and regulations are numerous and enforceable. The enforcers are mainly from the 'trustees', a circle of people distinguished by outward signs of title and their oaths of allegiance. Nobody knows the exact number of these 'honourables' and 'gracious' people, but that they are in full control is not to be doubted.

The control encompasses all public and private manifestations, including those of manufacture and commerce which are regarded as so many taps for tax collecting.

The advocacy of anarchism is channelled into the political arena, a paid and bought professional section whose main purpose is to reconcile the irreconcilable. Its practitioners, by and large, are mouthpieces for the civil service and the majority of them are by profession part of the ruling elite.

As the system only exists for its own perpetuation and for the tapping of wealth, its success is measured not by the mask it wears but by the level of obedience and wealth it can extract from the toiling masses.

Here again is the difficulty for anarchism. The vehicles of organisation – such as parliament, trade unions, local councils – are the creation of the system and they also exist for the same reason of perpetuating their spheres of influence and power. The bolsheviks tried to circumvent this paradox but ended up running the state which they intended to abolish.

For anarchism to succeed once more – for I believe that before the robber barons and the legions came and conquered, pre-history was anarchist – is as difficult as for the unwary to withstand the hypnotist's gaze.

The day after anarchism will come about, however, future generations will be unable to understand the motives for 'voluntary servitude' without which the coercive system is unable to flourish.

John Rety

The best British monthly of literary and social observation in the 1940s was *Horizon*, edited by the unlovable Cyril Connolly and his far more unlovable assistant Sonia Brownell. I used to buy the copies that turned up second-hand at Freedom Bookshop. That was how I read Mary McCarthy's *The Oasis* which filled the February 1949 edition as the winner of the journal's competition for a short novel.

I haven't read the story since then, but have cited it ever since as a moral fable about the cruel fact that those who talk most about establishing autonomous communities are those who, through their own unconscious egoism and moralism, are least suited to be community members. I have also, without intending to, changed the story in memory to suit the point I want to make.

Now I haven't had a chance to re-read it, but last week I borrowed from the library Carol Gelderman's *Mary McCarthy, A Life* (1989). This corrected some of my memories of the story and of its reception. It is "a fable about a group of New York intellectuals – clearly based on her own circle – and one businessman, who together form a utopian colony in an antiquated abandoned hotel in the Taconic Mountains, Vermont ... Founded in accordance with the precepts of an Italian anarchist ... the colony is supposed to set an example for 'a network of autonomous, cooperative communities with unlimited

— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

## Back to the Oasis



Picture taken from *Diggers & Dreamers 1998-99: The Guide to Communal Living* (D&D Publications, £9.50, available from the Freedom Press Bookshop)

freedom for the individual'."

Of course, in the story it didn't happen like that. In my remembrance the tolerated businessman member, an older man who had made good in the New York garment industry, was also the one who got up at the

right time to feed the chickens and hoe and water the cauliflowers, but wasn't into the level of intellectual discussion of the other pioneers. He was a practical guy who is "determined to get more spiritual profit out of the oasis than anyone else, and is finally accepted since 'ostracism ... would indeed have been an ugly beginning for a community devoted to brotherhood'."

Carol Gelderman has some interesting comments. She observes how: "That the utopians fail to make a genuine community is unfortunate, but their attempt should not be held against them. They try because they are intellectuals. All utopian colonies have failed, McCarthy implies, but society outside is a greater failure."

Evidently, from what I heard from New York anarchist friends in the 1950s and from Carol Gelderman's comments, the people who were satirised were various editors and contributors to left-wing New York journals *Partisan Review* (edited by Philip Rahv) and *politics* (edited by Dwight Macdonald), and they easily recognised their caricatured selves. Macdonald, "although he was the most comical character in the fable, reacted to it quite mildly" but others, like Philip Rahv, Harold Kaplan and Saul Bellow, were "outraged". Nicola Chiaromonte, who had been McCarthy's model for the anarchist founder, wrote from Paris to report that response to the story had been "on the whole quite negative, I am sorry to say. I myself should have liked to be enthusiastic about the story, but alas I am unable to do so."

Now perhaps the most interesting thing I learned from the Gelderman book is that McCarthy's assessment of these characters had been in a quite different context to that of utopian experiments. They had come together in 1948 to set up a body called Europe-America Groups because, "believing that the major political parties and large organisations merely preserved the status quo, they determined to form a small group that would interact with similar groups in Europe". They collected money, a quarter of which was spent on sending books to European intellectuals, rather like food parcels, while the rest was distributed in accordance with advice given to Chiaromonte by Albert Camus.

McCarthy's reputation as a writer doesn't stand or fall by way of *The Oasis* and people have different views about the novelist's way of using friends and acquaintances as raw material.

But beyond this issue of taste or good behaviour which people always argue about, there was a more subtle one. Her observations of these characters were made in the context of their willingness to collaborate in a gesture towards their equivalents in post-war Europe: an intellectual version of Marshall Aid. But they were exploited in a different context: that of participation in what Americans call an 'intentional community'. She had told an interviewer that the idea for the book "came from Arthur Koestler, who at that time was writing about the possibility of establishing small libertarian groups, or oases, that would try to change the world on a small scale".

Her friends provided the ideal context in which to ridicule this aspiration. She was illustrating that well-known characteristic of the far left: there is much more pleasure to be gained from lampooning the failures of our friends than in rejoicing in their successes.

Colin Ward

— VISIBLE HANDS —

## Unfree Trade

On 28th April the OECD was due to have secretly signed the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), opening up new frontiers in what is called 'free trade'. The club of 29 rich countries was hoping to effect a revolutionary transformation of international trade, creating a framework which would transfer power over national economies away from nation-states to trans-national corporations. For anyone interested in democracy, the choice between state control and corporate control is a choice between two evils. However, what the debate around the MAI reveals is the important advantages in terms of accountability and popular influence that attach to state control, which in the conditions we face today mean the difference between life and death for large numbers of people and large-scale effects for the environment.

Lipsey's *Positive Economics* (see last issue) states that the case for free trade is extremely 'powerful', but that protectionism can be justified – to help fledgling industries get off the ground, for example. Lipsey concedes that protectionism may also be instituted to achieve "objectives other than maximising output" (the latter being the proper end of economic activity, no doubt). Protectionism can help to garner the social and psychological advantages of a more diverse (though poorer) economy (compared to the economic advantages of having a richer, specialised economy); to avoid the risks of being dependent on a single market; to maintain (unspecified) 'national traditions'; or to maintain the means of national defence. This exhausts Lipsey's list of justifications for protectionism.

The MAI treaty is intended to create 'free trade' for investment, granting absolute freedom of movement for capital (and managers) unhindered by social or environmental responsibilities. The three fundamental principles of the new regime are to be non-discrimination between foreign

investors and domestic companies; no entry requirements for foreign businesses, allowing them into any sector of the economy except defence; and no conditions. This last principle means that governments are not allowed to impose 'performance requirements', such as requiring companies to employ local people, to buy a certain proportion of their components locally, to remain in the country for a specified minimum period, and so on. These kinds of conditions are prohibited even if they are applied to both domestic and foreign-owned companies.

Trans-national corporations are to gain sweeping new rights under the MAI, including the right to sue offending governments (including district and borough councils) in special new international courts. They are not assigned any responsibilities, to communities or to the environment. Nation-states and lower-level forms of government lose many of their powers over their economies, meaning that in parliamentary democracies citizens will lose a considerable number of democratic rights. Nations' abilities to protect themselves against currency speculators, to protect their environment, to protect the health of their citizens, to protect workers' rights, to prevent cultural imperialism and to ensure that investment creates real benefits for local communities, will all be swept away.

The World Development Movement points out that the MAI "would prohibit developing countries from using policies that have been important to the development of most, if not all, OECD countries". The MAI will effectively outlaw development for those third world countries which sign up – and the pressures will be intolerable.

All these effects of actually existing free trade escape Lipsey's discussion of free trade. Luckily for us, the MAI has been postponed. The struggle to cancel it continues.

Milan Rai

# Northern Quebec must not become another Chiapas

Quebec nationalists of the ruling Party Quebecois look forward to the day they win a referendum on independence. The Native People of Quebec, on the other hand, look upon such an event with unease. Their position is plain – 95% of Indians and Inuit voted to remain in Canada in the 1995 referendum. This was not the result of any great love for the Canadian state, but is an outcome of the history of relations between natives and their European conquerors. In 1670 the territory which is now Northern Quebec was seized by a coterie of English monopolists called the Hudson's Bay Company. The indigenous people were treated like serfs for the next two hundred years when the territory was ceded, without their permission, to the Dominion of Canada. In 1912 the territory was given to the Province of Quebec by the Dominion Government, and once more the inhabitants – who had been there for ten thousand years – were not consulted. 'Enough of this! it is now up to us to determine our future' say the native people. They do not wish to be pushed from pillar to post any longer.

Why then do they choose to stay in Canada and not join an independent Quebec? There are about one million people of native origin across Canada. The natives of Quebec feel more secure as part of this large minority than as a small minority isolated in an independent Quebec. Furthermore, the Canadian North West Territories are being given internal self-government, which means Indians and Inuit are beginning to reclaim their authority over this region. Quebec nationalists make promises (and we know all about the white man's promises!) but natives



can look across Hudson Bay and see the self-governing territory of Nunavut in actual operation.

Then there is racism and chauvinism. While it would be wrong to brand the majority of Francophone Quebecers with these traits, and people in the rest of Canada are not totally immunised against bigotry either, it is nonetheless a factor. Of all groups in Canada, Francophone Quebecers have the least support for the native struggles. There have also been some ugly incidents. During the Oka Crisis of 1990 (an armed stand-off involving Mohawk warriors, the police and the army) a howling mob hurling bricks and bottles attacked a caravan of Mohawk children and old people fleeing the potential

battle zone. At the same time, French language talk radio shows spewed hate propaganda against native people. The re-election of the mayor of Oka, who was more responsible than anyone for precipitating the crisis, was also seen as a slap in the face. Since Northern Quebec was never part of New France, most aboriginals speak English and the almost paranoid hostility of many Quebec nationalists to this language must also have a negative impact (however, the French-speaking minority of Indians also want to remain in Canada).

The chauvinism of the Quebec nationalists is evident in their statement that only the Quebecois are a people and the aboriginals do not merit the term. Like nationalists

everywhere, they want recognition for themselves but refuse to give it to others. It is no wonder that the indigenous people are wary of belonging to an independent Quebec.

The Party Quebecois government has declared that *no matter what its inhabitants choose* Northern Quebec is unalterably part of a future independent Quebec state (note that the overwhelming majority of people inhabiting this region are of Indian or Inuit ancestry). There have been hints that force may be used to implement this decree. This is not just a result of nationalist mysticism. The enormous James Bay hydro-electric project is located here. Native self-determination would, in the event of independence, leave this important source of government revenue in the hands of the Indians (and in another country). Furthermore, the Quebec government may well wish to extend this project and they will have enough trouble doing this over the wishes of the aboriginals as it is. With James Bay totally in their hands extension would be impossible.

As the quarrel between the two dinosaurs – Quebec nationalism versus Canadian nationalism – heats up, pressure will build upon native people. Should Quebec declare itself independent, there is a strong possibility that armed force will be used against them. *We must prepare now to stop this tragedy from happening. There must not be a Chiapas-type situation in Quebec.* We must make the Quebec nationalists aware that the eyes of the world are upon them. One way to do this is to write letters to the Quebec government in support of native self-determination. These can be addressed to: Prime Minister Lucien Bouchard, National Assembly, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

## SAC: the Swedish Connection

What follows is a conversation between Brian Bamford and Lars Hammarberg of the Swedish trade union federation the SAC (Sveriges Arbetares Central Organisation, or the central organisation of Swedish workers) which has been in existence since 1910 and has often identified itself with anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism internationally.

**BB:** How are things in Sweden with the SAC?  
**LH:** Hard times we are having. In June 1994 the decision to raise union dues at the congress sowed the seeds for a later split. In 1995-96 the membership went down from 13,000 to 10,000 when some local branches dropped out. The rise in union dues had been done democratically, but some people used it as an excuse to get out. Personality clashes were also a problem. But more recently some of the individuals have returned and new branches have been set up.

**BB:** Where is the main strength of the SAC – in which industries?

**LH:** Formerly the SAC was strong in the country areas among the loggers and farm workers, but now the SAC has more support in the big towns and cities among social workers and factory workers.

**BB:** How are the trade unions set up in Sweden?

**LH:** There are four central trade union federations: the LO (TUC) with a social democratic ideology, the TCO for white collar workers, SACO for academic and professional employees and the SAC organisation of radical and anarcho-syndicalist workers.

**BB:** How do you see the international situation generally?

**LH:** Recently we have had the good example of the Liverpool dockers. This dispute produced massive international backing throughout the world. The SAC gave many thousands of pounds



The cover of *Direkt Aktion*, youth journal of the SAC

sterling to the dockers. We have continuing contact with the dockers' organisation, which is currently organising a co-operative. It seems to me that the communist parties are finished generally. In Sweden they try to make an impact on the Social Democratic LO union federation, but have little impact on events. The Labour Parties and Social Democrats are everywhere compromised.

In Sweden itself our situation is stagnant, but there is a good opportunity for agitation among the young, who are looking to anarchism.

**BB:** What are your relations with the Spanish anarchist syndicalist unions?

**LH:** We have excellent relations with the Spanish CGT (anarcho-syndicalist). Our contact with the CNT (anarchist) is limited, as they do not respond

to invitations to our SAC's congresses (the next being held in June this year). The reason, I think, they don't have contact with us is because they consider us 'reformist'. They believe we want only to have relations with their rivals in the CGT, but this is not true. The SAC does not take a position on the problems between the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist unions.

**BB:** What do you make of the International Workers' Association (IWA/AIT)?

**LH:** Some SAC members want us to join the IWA/AIT, if we are invited – they think it best if the syndicalists have an international organisation – but others don't want membership because they see it as authoritarian, orthodox, and would try to dominate the SAC.

I don't think the IWA will invite us to join, and I don't think we should join.

**BB:** What about the formation of another International?

**LH:** The SAC has no plans for forming another International. We try to keep good relations with other foreign organisations everywhere. Also the IWA/AIT would be hostile to a new International. They would see it as a declaration of war.

The policy of the SAC now is to have good contacts with all syndicalist unions and anarchist groups. We also have good contacts with unions which don't call themselves anarcho-syndicalist but who act 'syndicalist'. We have relations with UniCOBAS in Italy, USI also in Italy, the SUD in France (which has postal workers and teachers among its members), the CNT in France, the IWW in the USA, the SOC in Spain, NSF in Norway, FAUD (anarcho-syndicalist) in Germany as well as contacts in Lithuania and in Russia with KAS and small anarcho-syndicalist groups in Siberia.

**BB:** Are there specific anarchist groups in Sweden?

**LH:** Yes, a lot of anarchists are organised in the SAC. Some are interested in feminism and

veganism, others in environmental things like motorways.

**BB:** Is the SAC involved in cultural things?

**LH:** The youth journal in a recent issue covered Chumbawamba, with several pages of interviews with band members. That paper is called *Direkt Aktion*, but our magazine *Arbetaren* (worker) has pages on culture, theatre, film, books, the visual arts and music. Punk music tended to be important in bringing in both young and older people to the SAC. Folk singing has also been important for us in Sweden. The famous folk singer Ewert Ljusberg, who frequents Swedish television, is a member of the SAC.

**BB:** A perennial criticism of the SAC has been its involvement in the payment of dole benefit. Jim Pinkerton, a secretary of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation in the 1960s, tells me that this was continually brought up at international congresses from way back. Can you explain?

**LH:** To understand this one must have some grasp of Swedish cultural background and our historical way of doing things. You have your welfare system and many UK anarchists and syndicalists no doubt take advantage by drawing state benefits.

All the trade union federations in Sweden assist in the distribution of the unemployment benefits. The other federations also administer other social benefits. The trust fund which distributes the unemployment benefit is not controlled directly by the SAC union federation. The trust fund is legally separate from the actual trade union structure.

Your campaign on the Job Seeker's Act seems interesting. The actions like the occupation of job centres, the demonstrations against the persecution of claimants and the militancy of the activists we would find interesting. The SAC, though it pays out the unemployment benefits, has no involvement with the punitive aspects of enforcing and policing the unemployed – that is in the realm of the state bureaucracy.

# Anarcho-syndicalism ... a derelict concept?

Dear *Freedom*,

Thank you for printing my comment on the first half of Brian Bamford's 'Anarcho-syndicalism: an English Eclipse'. Now that part two has appeared (7th March) I would like to comment on two other points.

First, about being "cursed with the cult of the dilettante and the weekend anarchist". Call me an adherent of the cult, if you like, because I approve of most anarchists devoting most of their time to working, studying, bringing up families and other activities that are not overtly political. If the only anarchists were full-time activists divorced from ordinary life, that surely would be a curse.

Mr Bamford cites as an example of a dilettante and weekend anarchist an ex-editor of *Freedom*, who wrote to say he could not continue to edit the paper and cope with the tomato crop of 1995. This comrade has devoted more of his time to anarchism than anyone else we know. He returned from Spain in 1936 to argue on behalf of the anarchists in the Spanish revolution, resuscitated the ailing *Freedom Press*, and has been energetically active ever since. In 1995 he was working an average of about thirty hours a week, unpaid of course, editing *Freedom* and doing the tedious but necessary office jobs which nobody else wanted. At the time he was earning a living as a market gardener. When at the age of 80 he chose to retire from editing (but to continue writing and doing office work) he mentioned the tomato crop as a reason for his decision.

Mr Bamford knows all this, and presumably intends the prosperous 'weekend anarchist' insult as a joke. Said in private to the victim's face it might even have got a laugh, but it is an in-joke, not funny when published.

Secondly, about the project for a National Syndicalist Alliance put up by Hull Syndicalists. It seems odd to mention this in an anarchist paper, seeing that only some anarchists are syndicalists and only some syndicalists are anarchists. Some anarchists are vegans, but we would not expect *Freedom* to report a proposal for a National Vegan Alliance.

Since the subject has appeared, however, it is worth remarking that there is already a national syndicalist alliance, the Solidarity Federation.

Hull Syndicalists parted company with the Direct Action Movement (an earlier name of the Solidarity Federation) when they disagreed about which side to support in a dispute about money between syndicalists in Spain. The case was settled in the Spanish courts years ago, and there is no sense in perpetuating the British rift. If Hull Syndicalists really want British syndicalists to be united, why not apply to join the Solidarity Federation.

**Donald Room**

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Dear *Freedom*,

Having read of the move to establish a new 'anarcho-syndicalist' group in your pages and the critical letter from Tony Crowther (21st March), I have several questions to ask.

Firstly, what is an anarcho-syndicalist anyway? I presume that Guy Cheverton spoke for his group when he outlined a theory of anarcho-syndicalism without syndicalism. Surely this merely makes them anarchists!

However, this leads me on to another point – are they anarchists at all? I understand anarchism to be about trying to build a movement independent of the state (and incidentally of political groups which are

deemed 'statist'). If a tendency seeks state funding for trades councils or believes in taking part in the management of the government's 'Welfare to Work' project, then can the term 'anarchism' be justified?

If any of Cheverton's current allies agree with these sort of policies I would be most surprised. I look forward to hearing from them.

**Geoff Collier**

◇ ◇ ◇

Dear Friends,

I agree with John R. Doheny's suggestion that traditional working class culture, in English society, is probably clapped out. Does this mean that what some people call 'syndicalism' and others call 'anarcho-syndicalism' is now a derelict concept? The Canadian writer Larry Gambone in *Syndicalism in Myth and Reality* thinks not. I am less optimistic, but have so far hesitated to say so openly for fear of losing what few anarchist friends I have left.

None of this ought to detract from the historical case I made in 'Anarcho-Syndicalism: An English Eclipse' – that the anarchist movement in this country missed the boat in the 1970s. That decade saw an upsurge in industrial activity on the shop-floor and in the factories. Anarchists in England had minimal influence on these events, and I continue to confess my own lack of effort during that time.

I am not suggesting that a strategy of 'anarcho-syndicalism' which may have been appropriate in the 1970s is now valid in specific detail. That would be a cookbook approach to politics. As it is too many anarchists, and syndicalists, in England address social problems and workers as though they have learnt the language out of some outdated phrase book.

The abrasive approach for which Mr Doheny chastises me in his letter to *Freedom* (4th April) does have the virtue of bringing forth erudite responses like his own.

**Brian Bamford**

◇ ◇ ◇

Dear *Freedom*,

As an active member of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation in the '50s and early '60s and still (*pace* Donald Room, letters, 7th March) anarcho-syndicalist in outlook, I read Brian Bamford's two articles, 'Anarcho-Syndicalism: An English Eclipse', with deep sympathy, and with admiration for his all-too-rare resolve not to inflate the 'anarcho' part of his (much more than 'autobiographical') story, at the same time as giving due credit to its (to use a metaphor of which Tom Brown was perhaps over-fond) yeast-like significance in the context of syndicalist-type action in workers' struggles in post-war Britain.

Having just come back from what was billed as a 'syndicalist conference' in Stockholm, but turned out (not surprisingly, I suppose, considering its university venue) to be more like an archaeological dig, it was also heartening to be offered history with a purpose and realism tempered by a spirit of never giving up the fight. And I must add that this was how I found it with every single activist of the Swedish Syndicalist Federation (SAC) I met.

Room's letter, prompted by the first part of Bamford's account, should be taken as autobiography rather than as serious comment. His attitude to the split which gave birth to the AFB was precisely the same as mine. Frankly, I wasn't that interested in its

causes or in the rights and wrongs of the affair, but Ken Hawkes I did get to know very well. I worked closely with him up to the time I decided to train as a teacher, and I cannot recognise the figure who emerges from Room's letter. For one thing, Ken was a brilliant and tireless organiser, and no one was more dedicated to the anarchist cause. He certainly had an acute mind and was an effective speaker in small or large gatherings, but if there was a 'most influential thinker' in the group (and it has never occurred to me before even to consider the question, so openly and comradely were all our discussions) it surely must have been Tom Brown, who is curiously absent from Room's tale.

More importantly, to rationalise his turning away from syndicalism, he insidiously distorts the AFB/SWP ethos and agenda. The name change had nothing to do with dropping anarchism (which it didn't) but resulted from the decision to join the AIT, whose constituent groups either had to be national confederations of labour or propagandist groups with 'syndicalist' in their titles. It simply will not do to characterise Ken's stance by alluding to a remark made by an (unnamed, but I guess he means Frank Rowe) ex-Trot to whom Room says he was referred for enlightenment. In the first place, he might have misconstrued Frank's remark about "putting the working class in power", and secondly, if he didn't, his deductions get dangerously close to a guilt-by-association judgement.

As for Room's concluding paragraph, quoting Larry Gambone on the tendency for

"the anarchist bit" to get discarded when it's coupled with something else, well it's just a non-argument. We all know that anarchism comes in many more than 57 varieties, that some of them have little in common with others, and that people who profess them sometimes give up anarchism anyway. Those anarchists who add 'syndicalist' to their 'job description' do so because they consider that in industrialised societies syndicalism offers the best way to get the job done. The belief is in anarchism; syndicalism is just a vehicle for making it actually work. Room's problem, I suspect, is to do with that classic anarchist bogey 'organisation'; but anarchism without organisation (and the facing up to all the headaches that brings) might just as well be called fairylandism.

John R. Doheny's 'bizarre' and intemperate bit of Bamford-bashing (letters, 4th April) also cries out for rebuttal. Bamford is certainly candid, but he is also singularly free from animus. Where "for no obvious reason" Doheny sees "demonising, scolding, bullying and sneering" I can find nothing but calm and reasoned argument. And as for Doheny's positive paranoia about leadership, if everyone who proposes a strategy for advancing towards a freer and more equal society is to be charged with "the cult of leadership", hadn't we better all shut up?

What we need is a higher degree of mutual regard, based on mutual recognition – which should not be beyond the capacities of anarchists, of all people – that there are many different ways of contributing to progress towards such a society. 'Mutual Aid', comrades, is surely a watchword for very nearly every anarchist.

**Don Pedelty**

## Freedom, Anarchy and Ethics

Dear *Freedom*,

Following the letters from Paul Tremlett and Francis Ellingham (21st March 1998) where I am once more accused of offering 'garbage' in the guise of thought, may I recapitulate for the benefit of new or confused readers?

Under the heading 'Only Anarchists Can Be Ethical' I offered the following points:

- That freedom (of thought) is necessary for ethical thinking, although it also requires that those thoughts be subject to reason, logic and rationality.
- That anything which does not meet these criteria is, to a greater or lesser degree, dogma. That is a set of rules of the 'thou shalt not' type, which depend for their validity upon the acceptance of third party authority such as that derived from a government, a god or a theoretical dogmatist like Marx.
- That because ethical thinking requires freedom and the absence of dogmatic authority, ethical thinking (as opposed to moralism) requires that one accepts responsibility for self and choices (as would be the case in the absence of governmental authority – you know, a state of anarchy).
- Finally, 'that does not mean to say that all anarchists are ethical beings, but that (I maintain) 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'.

I still fail to see why this can be said to be rubbish or garbage. Francis Ellingham, in his original rejection, went back to the Ancient Greeks whose cosmos of Earth, Air, Fire and Water were bound together by Love, which Francis also relied upon as a basis for values

and choices. In his recent letter he confuses the Kantian act of willing that something should happen, e.g. a suicide switching off the world as he left, with its axiomatic promotion to a universal law. How, if your act cancels the known universe of conscious laws, can such an act become a universal law? He also seems to regard the nature of humans, and presumably everything else, as fixed (god given?). Oh dear, try 'evolution' in a library subject index.

Paul Tremlett draws his 'garbage' conclusion from my failure to *situate* the subject of the discussion. Does he mean to locate its historical context? I suspect so, he claims, rightly, that we are born into a preconceived world. But does this mean we cannot think of other worldly conceptions, of better ways of doing things? Really, Paul? I thought that was what philosophy was all about, and anarchy one of its more logical rational and reasonable products. (Can I suggest a little Hegel? "History teaches us that people have never learned anything from history.")

Paul then argues that thinking has rules, inherent structural forms which "transcend time or place" (and he introduces the slippery notion of 'truth' somewhere along the way). This, to me, is obvious garbage. Thought has evolved along with everything else. Ask Ramapithecus, or your average caveman, Galileo, Newton or Einstein, let alone Kropotkin, Malatesta or Proudhon. Where it is useful organic and recyclable garbage is in the inherent structural qualities which have evolved and *presently* validate all thought in its communication between people. And what might they be? Reason, logic and rationality ... oh dear.

**Colin Johnson**



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# Meetings & Events

## The London Anarchist Forum

Meet Fridays at about 8pm at Conway Hall,  
Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL  
(nearest tube Holborn). Admission is free  
but a collection is made to cover the cost of  
the room.

### — PROGRAMME 1998 —

**24th April** 'An Anarchist Future for  
London' (symposium)

**1st May** General discussion

**8th May** 'Anarchist Alternatives'  
(symposium)

**15th May** 'May '68 in Paris by a  
Participant' (speaker Sebastian Hays)

**22nd May** General discussion

**29th May** 'Anarchism and Science Fiction'  
(symposium)

**5th June** General discussion

**12th June** 'Does Social Class Matter?'  
(symposium)

**19th June** 'What I Want is Facts' (speaker  
Nicolas Walter)

**26th June** General discussion

*Please note that this is an amended list of dates*

## Saturday 25th April Picket of the Irish Embassy in London 17 Grosvenor Place, London SW1 at 1pm

The demonstration has been called for by  
the Workers' Solidarity Movement in  
Ireland to protest against the Irish  
government's oppressive and  
discriminatory policy towards asylum  
seekers. The London demonstration is  
being organised by the Anarchist  
Communist Federation. There will also be  
demonstrations at other Irish Embassies  
on 25th April 1p (local time).

## Red Rambles

A programme of monthly guided walks in  
Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire for  
Socialists, Libertarians, Greens, Anarchists and  
others. All walkers are reminded to wear boots  
and suitable clothing and to bring food and  
drink. Walks are 5 to 8 miles in length.

### Sunday 26th April Upper Lathkill Dale

Meet 12 noon at The Hobbit Pub (formerly  
The Bull's Head), Monyash, Derbyshire, for five-  
mile circular walk.

Telephone for further details  
01773 827513

## Third Anarchist Summer Camp in Berlin

This year the Anarchist Summer Camp  
will be held in Berlin from Friday 31st  
July to Sunday 9th August 1998.

This is a self-organised camp where we do  
the cooking and washing-up together as  
well as the dancing, singing, discussion,  
climbing, playing ... whatever you like.  
In previous years (held in Hamburg)  
various study groups and also film  
sessions and presentations.

This year's camp site is situated in  
woodland on the outskirts of Berlin  
(a lake for bathing is not far away).  
Your share of costs should be between  
90DM and 140DM depending on personal  
means and income (meals are included).

### For details, suggestions, enrolment:

Postal address: Jugendumweltladen, c/o  
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*For enrolment we require the following details:  
your address (postal or fax), the number of persons  
enrolling, details of any planned study groups,  
projects, if you wish to play in a band, etc.*