

IN FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

Vol. 61 No. 3

12th February 2000

50p

Revisions to the Prevention of Terrorism Act ...

Virtual Politics

Good as it is to see the gradual realisation within the anarchist movement of the threat posed by the new Terrorism Bill, in order to be able to oppose its implementation effectively we need to grasp the historical background to the bill and the political specificity of the rationale for its introduction.

The December 1998 consultation paper *Legislation Against Terrorism* stated that the government's agenda included the 'normalisation' of politics in Northern Ireland and the transformation of the security environment. This would be achieved through the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the 1996 Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act and their "replacement with one piece of permanent legislation which will apply throughout the United Kingdom to all forms of terrorism, including new forms of terrorism which may apply in the future". In this context, the definition of 'terrorism' would be widened to "the use of serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public, for political, religious or ideological ends". Thus, what was actually proposed was the 'normalisation' of the previously 'temporary' provision and the extension of the 'security environment' of the Six Counties to the entire UK. Far from seeking within the 'normalisation' of politics within the Six Counties a reason to extend and deepen civil liberties, New Labour has determined that "regardless of the threat of terrorism related to Northern Ireland ... the time has come to put the legislation onto a permanent footing".

When the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act was passed

in 1974, the Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins declared that "these powers are draconian. In combination, they are unprecedented in peacetime. I believe they are fully justified to meet the clear and present dangers". The Prevention of Terrorism Act was rushed through Parliament in 42 hours, ostensibly in response to public fury at the 21st November 1974 Birmingham pub bombings. When the Bill was introduced, Roy Jenkins was explicit in endorsing the element of proscription in the bill: "the proscribing of named organisations is for us a wholly exceptional measure and can be justified only by a wholly exceptional situation - a clear and present danger". Jenkins was explicit also in his acknowledgement that as a measure against political organisations themselves, proscription was entirely hollow. That, though, was far from the point: "I have never claimed, and do not

claim now, that proscription of the IRA will itself reduce terrorist outrages. But the public should no longer have to endure the affront of public demonstrations in support of that body" (a reference to clause 2 of the bill, prohibiting displays of support in public for a proscribed organisation).

In Lord Jellicoe's review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1976 he conceded that "proscribing an organisation is unlikely to impair substantially its capacity for carrying out terrorist attacks or to deter those most deeply involved in its activities". Its importance lay in the fact that it enshrines in legislation public aversion to organisations which use, and espouse, violence as a means to a political end. But not all such organisations. When Gerry Fitt MP attempted to have added to the list of proscribed organisations the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the Red Hand Commandos and the Ulster Protestant Action Group, Jenkins refused. The real purpose of the Prevention of Terrorism Act was therein betrayed. The Loyalist militias proved no 'clear and present danger' to the British state, which armed and directed them, only to the nationalist community in revolt against that state. The purpose of the Prevention of Terrorism Act was not to combat 'terrorism' but to allow the state to set the ideological agenda, to proscribe organisations hostile to it so as to provide a means for 1) reducing such organisations' capacity to propagandise, and 2) intimidating any community which might recognise some commonality of interest with the purported 'terrorists'. The Prevention of Terrorism Act served to establish at the level of ideology the state's monopoly of force. The 1989 Colville review of the Preven-

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Picture by Clifford Harper.

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Anarchism is the only solution to ...

Slavery old and new

One of the most frequent criticisms of anarchism (and of socialism or pacifism) is that it is against human nature. Human beings, we are told, are by nature – whether through biological evolution or through social development – essentially authoritarian (and competitive and aggressive). We are said to be programmed either by our genes or by our environment to give and take orders, to make and keep laws, to rule and be ruled, to command and obey. As Aristotle put it, man is by nature a political animal. (In just the same way, we are told that man is by nature a religious animal, despite the evidence of so many people who aren't religious.)

This is in fact a difficult criticism to counter, because so many examples at so many times and in so many places seem to confirm it. One of the most striking such examples is the institution of slavery. Most people know that slavery was once very common, but few people know how common it still is. The economy of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisation depended on slavery. A few Classical thinkers worried about the treatment of slaves, but virtually none worried about their situation, until a few Stoics and Epicureans began to do so two thousand years ago. Aristotle himself said that slaves were slaves by nature, and this was the normal belief all over the world.

The civilisations of China and India depended on slavery into modern times. Slavery was endemic all over Africa and America before the Europeans came. And everyone knows that when the Europeans did come the economies of America depended on slaves transported from Africa.

In Europe itself slavery survived until it was replaced by serfdom, in which the victims were bound to the land. Even then slavery remained a normal form of punishment; when Oliver Cromwell conquered Ireland, three and a half centuries ago, many of the prisoners he took were sold into slavery. The European slave trade was abolished less than two centuries ago, and the American slaves and the Russian serfs were not emancipated until the 1860s.

All the so-called great religions accepted and justified slavery. It is a normal phenomenon in both parts of the Bible, described in detail in the Old Testament and taken for granted in the New Testament; realisation of this is obscured by the Hebrew and Greek words for *slave* being translated as *servant*. It is an integral part of Hinduism and Islam, of Confucianism and Taoism. During the Middle Ages there was an international trade in which pagan Slavs were captured by Christian Europeans, passed through Jewish merchants to other Christian Europeans, and finally sold to Muslim Africans; this is indeed the origin of the use of the word *slave* in almost every language.

The great and glorious campaigns against the Atlantic slave trade and all the other manifestations of European slavery were

fought against all the established forces of church as well as state in every country, and owed more to the Enlightenment philosophy of human rights than to any religion.

But today we heave a sigh of relief that slavery is a thing of the past, like human sacrifice or witch-hunts, and think of its abolition as a mark of general progress on the way towards a free and equal society. Almost every country in the world has ratified the many individual treaties and several international conventions outlawing slavery, and no country in the world has legal slaves. But slavery is actually a thing of the present, and hasn't been abolished at all. Last year the British sociologist Kevin Bales published *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, describing the many varieties of slavery which operate in many parts of the world, and the latest issue of the quarterly magazine *Index on Censorship* (January/February 2000) includes a horrifying section on 'The New Slavery' focusing on some of the varieties.

Of course we must be careful about what we mean by slavery. When Winston Churchill was the Liberal Home Secretary, nearly a century ago, he said in the first of his famous witticisms that a system of labour, however unpleasant, which people could join and leave voluntarily and were paid could not be "classified as slavery in the extreme acceptance of the world without some risk of

terminological inexactitude" – and terminological inexactitude is still a problem here.

The traditional definition of slavery was that a slave was legally the personal property of the owner and could be bought and sold. This covers the slaves of Ancient Greece and Rome or of modern America, but not the Medieval serfs or Modern share-croppers who may be bound to the land but are legally free and the contract labourers in many parts of the world who may be subject to forced labour for a period but are paid and eventually released. But there are many questionable areas. Does it cover the forced labourers of the Nazi or Soviet regimes, or indeed the inmates of the prison systems of the West, who are not owned or bought or sold, but are not free? What about prostitutes, and indeed what about many wives?

The new definition of slavery shifts from legal theory and the power of money to actual practice and the power of force. "The key is not ownership, but control through violence," says Bales; and his exhaustive research has concluded that there are about 27 million slaves in the world right now.

The various articles in *Index* describe poor people in Pakistan who are trapped by family debt into perpetual forced labour; the women in Asian families in Britain who are trapped by custom into forced marriage; the political prisoners in the Chinese Laogai system; the children in the Sudanese civil war who are

enslaved (sometimes by people who then sell them to aid workers who are buying them out of slavery!); the distortion of the history of African slavery for ideological reasons; the young girls in Ghana who are given as slaves to priests by their parents to exorcise imaginary wrongs; the revival of the white slave trade between Eastern and Western Europe since the collapse of the Communist regimes, and the particular example of Albania, where the wrecked economy depends on the business; and the spreading economic slavery imposed by the debt bondage of a growing number of third world states.

Of course anarchists reject all this evidence as any kind of proof that the most extreme forms of forced labour are somehow endemic to human existence. But the modern world, with all its vast capital of wealth and knowledge and skill and power, has a terrible case to answer. Apart from a few fortunate pockets here and there – in one of which most of us are lucky enough to live – it is quite possible that the total sum of man's inhumanity to man (and woman) is greater today than it was hundreds or even thousands of years ago. So it is up to us to show that anarchism in the sense of liberty, equality and fraternity, in work as everywhere else, far from being contrary to human nature, is the only solution to the ills of the human species.

NW

Mass murderer on Market Street

At the end of the twentieth century Tameside, Greater Manchester, has not been a good place to grow old. The saga of the Tameside Labour Council, which bungled the establishment of a Community Trust to shunt its responsibilities for residential care of the old into the Trust's subsidiary company (Tameside Enterprises Ltd that later became Tameside Care Group), has been a tale of financial wrongdoing and mismanagement well known to readers. By the time you read this up to eighteen of the company's former employees should be fighting a case for 'wrongful dismissal' at the Manchester Industrial Tribunal.

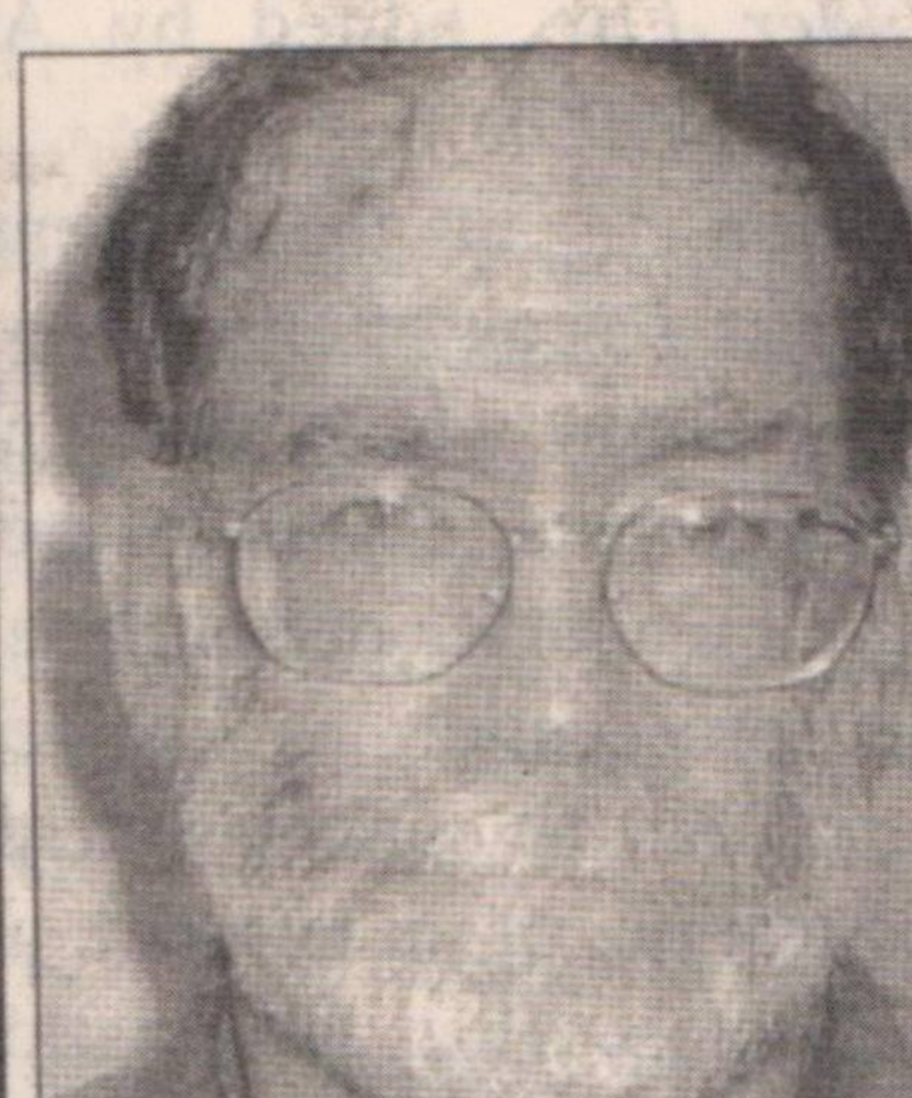
One former manager of Tameside Enterprises Ltd is reported to have complained to a member of staff that the old residents were not dying fast enough to keep the company afloat. Perhaps if they had employed Dr Shipman, whose surgery was just down the road from the Enterprise House headquarters of the TCG, on Market Street, Hyde, Greater Manchester, their turnover in residents may have been more rapid.

The pleasures in English murder

Last week, Dr Harold Shipman, poisoner and general practitioner, was found guilty of murdering fifteen old ladies – with newspapers estimating a final count of

ADVERTISER, THURSDAY, 3rd February, 2000

DR DEATH 'WOULD HAVE BEEN CAUGHT IN EAST END'



Harold Shipman's murderous crimes were spotted early in East London

A pioneering East End scheme could have stopped mass murdering Manchester doc Harold Shipman before he claimed the lives of more

Pioneering scheme could have stopped serial killer

Cutting from the East London Advertiser, 3rd February 2000

victims to rival anything in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Not since Dr Palmer of Rugeley, Victorian England's most notorious poisoner, does their seem to have been anything like this case. Like Dr Shipman, it seems Dr Palmer exploited his patients' faith in his professional authority to kill them with drugs from his black bag.

But Dr Palmer had pressing debts and a passion for horse-racing and gambling, and

the odd love child. By comparison Dr Shipman seems dull, colourless and respectable. Will the Dr Shipman case stand the test of time and join Dr Palmer, Dr Crippen and Jack the Ripper as a murderer who gives great pleasure to the British people and captures our imagination the long term?

The anarchist veteran from Tameside, Jim Pinkerton, told me last week that the case is

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Notes in the Margin

Arthur Lehning

In our issue of 15th January we published a notice of the one hundredth birthday of the Dutch anarchist and writer Arthur Lehning last October. We now regret to announce that he died a few weeks ago. An account of his life is currently being serialised in our French contemporary *Le Monde Libertaire* and we have been promised an English translation.

The Anarchist Federation

We have received a letter from a member of the Anarchist Federation about its recent change of name. Be it noted that what was the Anarchist Communist Federation is now the Anarchist Federation. He explains: "We are a federation but we aspire to be a federation of anarchist communists wherever they live, not the federation of anarchists in Britain". He goes on to say that "most comment has been positive, with people sharing our view that names don't matter, it's what you say and do that counts. People have asked if we were abandoning either our communist principles or the practice of revolutionary class struggle. We have answered forthrightly, no! We remain anarchist communists proudly. *Organise!* 52 has an outline analysis of our political roots. Our website at <http://burn.ucsd.edu/~acf/> has info on the issue and you can e-mail us on acf@burn.ucsd.edu

CC

Yevgeniya Taratuta

The Russian writer Andrey Platonov was born in Voronezh in September 1899, and his English translator Robert Chandler attended two conferences about him, one in Moscow and the other in Voronezh. On the train he met an old woman, Yevgeniya Taratuta, who had known Platonov. In the *Times Literary Supplement* (3rd December 1999) he tells something of her story: "Her father, a political exile under the Tsarist regime, had returned with his family in 1917 and then been shot in the 1930s. She herself still held to the anarchist beliefs her father had instilled in her, above all to Kropotkin's principle of 'mutual aid'. She talked of her life without bitterness, yet without minimising her ordeals. Almost destroyed by ten months of interrogation in the Lubyanka, she had been sent in the late 1940s to a camp for the disabled. Her job there had been to peel and slice icy lumps of potato with a strip cut from a tin can. Her hands, however, were by then so crippled with arthritis that she had been unable to do any work at all. In exchange for her telling them stories, they had peeled her potatoes: an example, she explained, of 'mutual aid'. Like many Russians, especially of the older generation, Taratuta has an extraordinary memory. Day after day, she had told stories, mostly those of Maupassant and O. Henry. She added that she had had to be careful to avoid any stories involving children – this, she said, would have occasioned an outbreak of inconsolable grief."

CW

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banal and uninteresting because it doesn't have a 'class' element to it. In the golden age of English murder (1850 to 1925) according to Orwell in his essay *Decline of the English Murder*: "sex was a powerful motive ... in one way or another". Respectability and money also figured quite strongly in the classic cases which Orwell portrayed as charming the public.

Apart from the final forging of Mrs Grundy's will, Dr Shipman's murders seem almost motiveless. Yet he does fit some of the requirements of the Orwellian model: "The murderer should be a little man of the professional class – a dentist or a solicitor, say – living an intensely respectable life somewhere in the suburbs, and preferably in a semi-detached house, which will allow the neighbours to hear suspicious sounds through the wall". Orwell adds that "he should be either chairman of the local Conservative Party branch, or a leading non-conformist and strong Temperance advocate." Dr Shipman had joined the Conservative Party, was an enthusiast in the Rochdale Canal Society, and his wife was in the local choral society when they lived in Todmorden in the 1970s.

Experts and laymen

The Shipman case does raise the issue the power and authority of experts and the extent

to which we should trust them. Paul Feyerabend in an essay entitled *Laymen can and must supervise Science*, argues that "many people trust a physician ... as they would have trusted a priest in earlier times. But doctors give incorrect diagnoses, prescribe harmful drugs, cut, x-ray, mutilate at the slightest provocation partly because they don't care and have so far been able to get away with murder, partly because the basic ideology of the medical profession which was formed in the aftermath of the scientific revolution can only deal with certain restricted aspects of the human organism but still tries to cover everything by the same method".

Feyerabend was philosopher of science and self-proclaimed 'epistemological anarchist'. We don't have to accept all he says, but, with the Shipman case in mind, we can go along with the general tenor of his argument – "that the errors of specialists can be discovered by ordinary people" and "that they make mistakes, even right in the centre of their speciality, that they try to cover up any source of uncertainty that might reduce the credibility of their ideas, that their expertise is not as inaccessible as they often insinuate".

Shipman saw himself as an expert who didn't take kindly to being questioned by laymen. Some of his own colleagues said he was arrogant, irascible and a man with a short fuse. In an earlier investigation in 1997,

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tion of Terrorism Act conceded this: Colville expressed in his report that he had "some sympathy" with the view that the Prevention of Terrorism Act "deters Irish people from expressing their political views and participating in ordinary community life in the United Kingdom".

Subsection 1(b) of the Act concerns the giving, collecting or asking for support for the resources of a proscribed organisation. One of those few successfully prosecuted under this subsection was James Fegan, who was alleged to have sold pro-Republican posters in a Glasgow pub and to have, in the process, urged people to 'support the boys'. Fegan got a six month jail sentence. In a detailed article on the aims of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the barrister Peter Hall contended that "the true purpose of the subsection must be to keep from public view those who, through political work rather than military activity, wish to express their support for Irish republicanism. The silencing of that support is one of the acknowledged reasons behind the Prevention of Terrorism Act" (in *Justice Under Fire*, edited by Anthony Jennings, Pluto, 1990).

Under section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act it was an offence for a person to have information which s/he knows or believes might be material in either preventing a terrorist act by another person or ensuring the capture, prosecution or conviction of another person for the commission, preparation or instigation of a terrorist act, and failing to disclose that information. The purpose of the section was two-fold. Firstly, to provide the police with a means of pressuring family and acquaintances of suspected 'activists' to provide information, and secondly to prevent unbiased access to the media. In March 1988 two armed plain-clothed soldiers drove their car at a funeral procession in Belfast. They were detained by mourners, beaten and killed. Their detention was filmed by television crews and journalists, who were subsequently threatened with arrest and charge under section 11 if they failed to provide footage of those involved.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced to deal with what was claimed to

be a 'clear and present danger'. Whatever the merits of the argument then, it is clear that no such dangers exist for the state at present. So why move to extend the powers and jurisdiction of the Act? A clue can be found in another of the Colville review proposals. Colville proposed that the right to silence was an obstacle to the successful prosecution of 'terrorists' and argued that a court should be entitled to draw adverse inferences from the exercise of the right. Significantly this was a change already adapted into English criminal law prior to the revisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act currently under discussion. Writing in 1990, Pady Hillyard noted that "sixteen years of direct rule in Northern Ireland have had a direct impact on Britain. The state has become increasingly coercive. Taking a lesson from Northern Ireland, it now defines dissent – such as the miners' strike, the Greenham Common protest, inner city riots and the peace convoy – as issues of 'law and order'. Many of the changes in the criminal justice systems in Northern Ireland have now been applied to Britain. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the Public Order Act, police powers have now risen dramatically, and their tactics resemble those used in Northern Ireland" (*Justice Under Fire*). The capacity to criminalise whole communities devised so effectively in the Six Counties is a capacity they've been eager to extend. But there's more to it.

The right wing German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, writing in his *Political Theology* (1922) gave as a definition of sovereignty: "Sovereign is he who defines the exception". The state of the exception – a severe political crisis or disturbance requiring extraordinary measures involving the partial or total suspension of constitutional laws – reveals who has the power to decide upon the moment of crisis. The obvious comparison, then, is with the 'clear and present danger', which led to the institution of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. But today, no such 'clear and present danger' can be observed. We have, instead, under New Labour, a kind of 'virtual politics' where, because there are no contending social forces challenging the power of government, no real politics takes

the Greater Manchester police failed to find sufficient evidence to launch a criminal investigation against Dr Shipman.

And yet, according to a local anarchist activist Derek Pattison, a Hyde taxi-driver had already nicknamed Shipman 'Doctor Death'. A local undertaker was also expressing concern at the large amount of work being referred to him from Shipman's surgery. Ordinary people were beginning to notice extraordinary things about Shipman, while colleagues and other experts either covered-up or dismissed the discrepancies in the death statistics.

One woman stepped in to stop Shipman from injecting her husband for a non-existent cancer because she had taken a dislike to the man.

Some puffed-up pundits in the media have complained that these suspicious ordinary people didn't go out and alert the authorities. But that I suspect boils down to an Anglo-Saxon anarchism inherent in most common folk, which often shows itself in a distrust of authority of all kinds – 'they can't be arsed', as one woman said to me the other week referring to the police after her car had been broken into. The fake will of Mrs Grundy, former Mayor of Hyde, finally pointed the finger at Dr Shipman. But, the crimes came to light in the classical way, elaborated by Orwell, slowly beginning with local suspicions and anxious relatives.

Albert Shore

place. Thus, the abolition of section 28 leads only to a manufactured furore and its re-introduction in a new form. In his stimulating and abrasive new book, *After Britain* (Granta, 2000), Tom Nairn has demonstrated how this 'virtualisation' has applied in relation to the issue of constitutional reform. Nairn notes how, in the name of reform, hereditary privilege was replaced by a "pseudo-nobility ... the termination of mere inheritance is now required in order to safeguard and rebuild heritage. It is time bloodline gave way to focus group. Fibreglass Lords and Ladies ... will provide a strong buttress for the still-crystallising new elite". Nairn ferociously pinpoints the extent to which the process of devolution has been carried through while democracy was at the same time denied, through "safety first redressment rather than the unsettling music of republican constitutionalism".

Comfortable in this cocoon of virtualisation, Blair has determined that the 'clear and present danger' of militant dissent should be now once and for all headed off. The Terrorism Bill represents Schmitt's 'exception' transformed into the norm – a permanent threat of criminalisation of dissent and resistance.

We have, then, a responsibility. We need to learn from the methods and strategies of those communities already criminalised under the Prevention of Terrorism Act how to seek to resist the process of criminalisation, and continue to defy the 'exception' – the traditions of solidarity, of collective refusal of criminalisation developed within the nationalist communities. Above all, though, we have to seek to defy the process of ideological normalisation through physical defiance of the criminalisation of direct action, through opening up our journals and spaces to those deemed proscribed; bluntly, we have to bring the methods of Seattle to the day to day struggles we engage in. As Walter Benjamin wrote in response to Schmitt: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live is the rule ... Then we will leave the production of the real state of exception before us as a task".

Nick S.

Northern Anarchist Network

On 15th January 2000 at Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, we held a Northern Anarchist Network (NAN) meeting. Twenty-two people came from a wide area, both geographically and politically. We began with reports from groups and individuals, indicating a huge range of activity. Environmental issues, use of community centres, squats, letters in the local press, different types of community action and education, CND, book stalls, 'laughter therapy', support of political prisoners and walkers' rights. Two of our number had recently been on television.

D. from Class War reported that he and his mates are up against The Countryside Alliance, who are now associated with the British Movement and other right wing groups. It was also worrying to hear that the Bury Unemployed Workers Centre, (which has a good track record of defending peoples' rights) is now under threat of being revamped by local government officers, who plan to sideline unemployed people on its committees, replacing them with poverty professionals; and managers who manage other managers. This was found to be consistent with what New Labour is doing in the North West and elsewhere. Unemployed Workers Centres were supported when the Labour party were in opposition, providing effective bases for all sorts of activity such as the Campaign Against the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). Now, they are an embarrassment to their former TUC and Labour supporters whose social philosophy only extends to 'partnership' with business and managerialism. The meeting agreed that work against the JSA, and other benefits-based issues has much decreased since Blair came to power in spite of the attacks on the disabled, unemployed and other groups.

We then discussed the organisation of NAN, what is it for, how can we do it better and what do people want out of it. On the plus side it is good for giving us a perspective and keeping in touch with each other. It is one of the best cross-group forums in the North West. Comrades living in isolated areas, surrounded by reaction and oppression, can feel that there is some solidarity around them, even occasionally getting some inspiration from the NAN. There are a minimum number of points that we can agree upon. It has become a useful clearinghouse for ideas. Minus points are that NAN ought to have a web site, or produce some sort of newsletter. Although, as clearly shown at the beginning of the meeting, the main focus of our actions is usually in the local community, NAN could do more about organising regionally-based activity. However, it can only produce what its constituent parts will contribute. Collectively, we can provide consistent action, in a variety of ways against the same targets such as oppression, racism, militarism and environmental damage.

News of developments in the Tameside careworkers' dispute was heard. It was reported that local anarchists are giving advice to the eighteen careworkers out of the two hundred strikers, who are choosing to take their cases to the Manchester Industrial Tribunal on 14th February, appealing against Tameside Care Group for 'unfair dismissal'. It was also claimed that Derek Pattison plans to write a history of the conflict for a forthcoming issue of *The Raven*, with lessons for anarchists as well as the left in general.

No one suggested that we should have abstract theoretical discussions, unrelated to action. However, under 'future action' there was some agreement that we should discuss such topics as the care of children and the

elderly, the relationship between workers and bosses, and the lack of guaranteed care in the health service – seeing how such themes can be highlighted with anarchist principals. Hopefully, such discussions would be guides to action. The demonstrations, against capitalism on 18th June and 30th November were mentioned to see where we go from here. *Reflections on June 18*, published by The Editorial Collective, was recommended because it's written 'from the inside' and will help us to be self-critical. This made us briefly ask, 'what do we replace capitalism with?' Whatever the answers, it was agreed that we are in for a long haul. However, the general tone of this conference

was fairly optimistic, recognising that there is growing resistance to the oppression around us. It was agreed that 'there is a buzz in the air'.

Any sort of political action disapproved of by the state could be made illegal if the worst effects of The Anti-Terrorism Bill come into force. We were unanimous in agreeing to work against this pernicious legislation. Preparations for Mayday will also give us opportunities to come together, share ideas and make plans.

The next NAN will be at the 1 in 12 club, Bradford on 1st and 2nd April, and the one after that in Bury.

Martin S. Gilbert

Preserve us from Democracy

I always find it depressing when people who call themselves anarchists demand true democracy. I thought that anarchism, if it means anything, means the freedom of the individual from rule, from compulsion. But democracy is just as much a system of rule as any other 'cracy' or 'archy'. Its compulsion can be, for individuals ruled by it, the most savage and terrifying of all.

I am thankful that at the moment Britain is a 'representative', not a 'direct' democracy. If it was a direct democracy, we would have the death penalty. In all probability the boys who killed James Bulger would be kept in prison for the rest of their lives. And is the lynch mob not a perfect example of local direct democracy in action?

AH wrote in *Freedom* (11th December) that "in a democracy people contribute directly to decisions that effect their lives – there is no middle man, no compulsion, no institutional authority to fix, spin and manipulate our lives". But how can a decision – a democratic decision – affect my life if there is no compulsion? Particularly if it is a decision I do not like. I do not vote in elections, above all because I do not want to contribute to imposing my or anybody else's will on other people. In a direct democracy I would hate voting even more; except for purely practical reasons in cases where I might be able to help prevent some barbarous or tyrannical act of the sacred people.

Preserve us from 'true' democracy. In a democracy I do not control my own life. I have to wait and see what everybody else has decided is to happen to me. There will be no decent world until people change their attitudes, abandon the holy cow of democracy and recognise that all individuals need understanding, tenderness, protection, consideration and comradeship, and that nobody, however many they are, has the right to boss those individuals about.

Amorey Gethin

Birnbaum's London

Some American visitors to the Freedom Press Bookshop had been led to us by a travel guide we'd not seen before, published in New York but not in Britain. Armed with *Birnbaum's London* the visitor can dispense with the services of a tour guide to the surrounding streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields which, as the author says, are still remembered by Jewish families as the places where their great-grandparents arrived owning nothing. We copied this extract from the book:

"Turn your back to the tube exit, then go 20 yards to the right until reaching the Kentucky Fried Chicken. Behind this bland, modern member of the multinational chain there is an old den of local subversion hidden. Turn right into tiny Angel Alley, its name crudely painted at the entrance. Thirty yards along the alley, on the left, is Freedom Books, a dark, Victorian building which has long been the chief meeting place and bookstore of anarchists in Britain. In the days of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, anarchism – not communism – was the secular faith of many of the poor in the district. Russia was the home of anarchist theory; the Russian aristocrats Bakunin and Kropotkin were its chief thinkers. Shortly after 1900, there was a thriving anarchist club for working men near here; it was this east London tradition

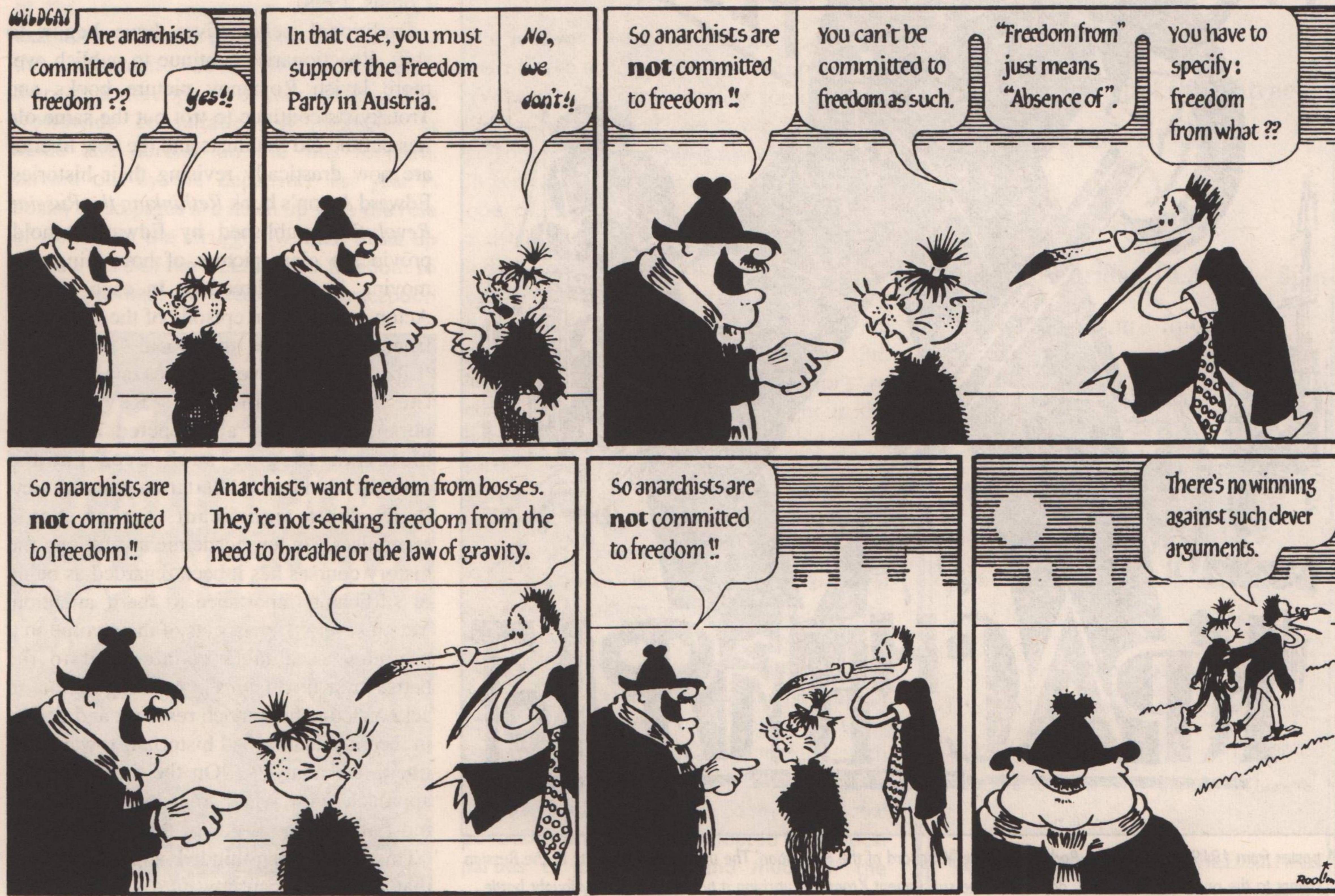
(now almost dead) that caused the anarchist headquarters to be sited here. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the organiser of these premises has been Vernon Richards, formerly a good friend of George Orwell. (Orwell's own sympathy with anarchism comes out strongly in his *Homage to Catalonia*.)"

— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 26th February, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 17th February.

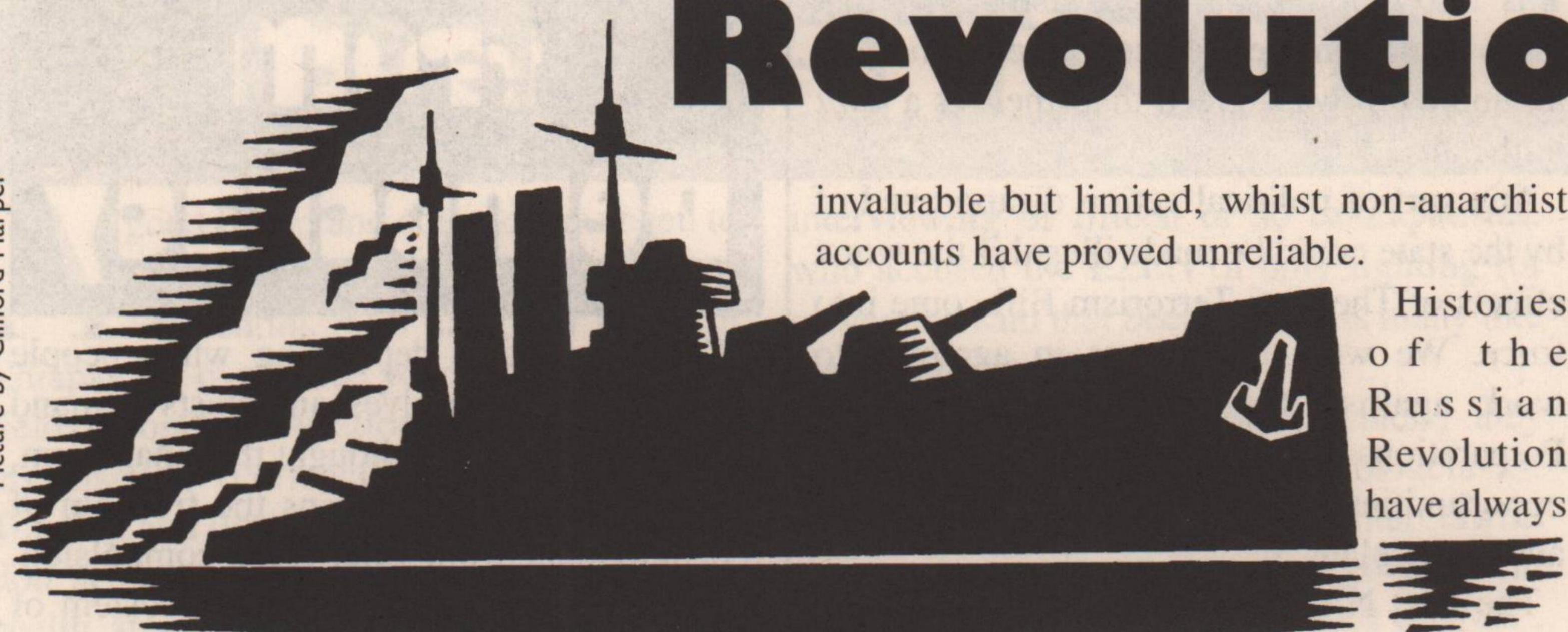
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If possible contributions should be typed using double-spacing between lines, or can be sent as text files on disc (with a print-out please).



Rethinking the Russian Revolution

Picture by Clifford Harper



invaluable but limited, whilst non-anarchist accounts have proved unreliable.

Histories of the Russian Revolution have always

Anarchists have long relied on libertarian authors, like Voline, Maximoff and Berkman for our understanding of the Russian Revolution. The collapse of the Soviet regime and the opening up of previously restricted archives has stimulated a lot of new thinking and liberal historians are now beginning to recognise and extend anarchist accounts of this crucial historical event.

The Russian Revolution was a watershed for anarchism. The Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm acknowledges that, "before 1914 anarchism had been far more of a driving ideology of revolutionary activists than Marxism", after the Russian Revolution activists deserted anarchism in droves and flocked to follow Lenin's winning Marxist formula. Learning the lessons of this historic disaster has not been easy. Libertarian accounts of the revolution have been

owed more to the ideology of the commentator than the truth of the events.

They have tended to fall into four main categories: *Reactionary-Conservative* accounts yearned for the return of the Tsar and Holy-Russia that was so cruelly destroyed by evil revolutionaries who cynically exploited the simple Russian peasants. These publications often contain endearing portrait illustrations of the Tsar enjoying family life and pampered luxury. Such histories employ all the values and intellectual rigour of a Barbara Cartland novel. *Official Russian* histories considered the revolution to have been the creation of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who led the masses out of Tsarist bondage into the Marxist promised-land of Soviet Communism. Such publications often included hagiographies of Soviet leaders, fabricated narratives and unreliable statistics. (Trotskyist histories are a sub-species of the genre, just as unreliable but with the role of two of the main characters reversed, with Trotsky as God and

Stalin as the Devil). *Liberal* histories generally considered the Tsar and the October Revolution to be a bad thing and Kerensky and the February Revolution to be a good thing. They tended to argue that the Bolsheviks, Anarchists and their fellow 'maximalist' revolutionaries destroyed a system that could have developed into a decent, moderate parliamentary-type democracy. Some admired the determination of the Bolsheviks, but not their aims or methods, whilst most either completely ignored the Anarchists or regarded them as no more than looters, gangsters and bandits. Amidst the mass of Soviet, Reactionary and liberal histories it was only in the *Libertarian* accounts of Voline, Berkman and a handful of others that we could read of the creative involvement of anarchists in the Russian Revolution. These libertarian accounts recognised the revolution as essentially the work of the masses themselves: the Bolsheviks did not create the revolution, they destroyed it.

Anarchist readers relied mainly on libertarian histories for their understanding of the Russian Revolution, whilst others who studied the period would seldom come across our version of events at all. That used to be the picture, but over the last few years things have changed dramatically. Just as the Bolshevik's 'success' originally convinced many that Lenin held the philosopher's stone, so the collapse of the Soviet regime has provoked a wave of profound scepticism. Even career Stalinists and erstwhile apologists for the Soviet regime, like Dmitri Volkogonov, are digging into previously secret archives to find out where it all went wrong and publishing their critical conclusions. "New material shows Lenin ordering the virtual starving of the Red Army prior to demobilisation, at the same time that he was telling his officials to conceal special privileges for the Party elite ... thus, the Stalin we see here is not a distortion of Leninism, but its continuation" (*The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, Harper-Collins, 1998).

Traditional perspectives have begun to shift. Reactionaries continue to publish ever more lavish Romanov picture books and Trotskyists continue to trot out the same old lies but the old Stalinists and the new liberals are now drastically revising their histories. Edward Acton's book *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, published by Edward Arnold, provides a clear picture of how things are moving in our direction. In each chapter Acton examines an episode of the revolution from not only the traditional 'Soviet' and 'Liberal' perspectives but goes on to consider the 'Libertarian' and 'Revisionist' perspectives. For a respected academic historian to give such even-handed consideration to the libertarian point of view is in itself significant, for as Acton recognises, "in few academic institutions and history courses has it been regarded as being of sufficient importance to merit attention. Yet on several key aspects of the revolution it provides a valuable counterpoint to the better-known versions". Acton goes on to acknowledge how much research and debate in recent years has led historians towards the libertarian analysis: "On the face of it, the approach with which revisionist work has most in common is that of the libertarians".

This more open-minded approach means that Anarchists can now find a lot of useful



Picture by Clifford Harper

material in modern, liberal histories. A *People's Tragedy* by Orlando Figes (Pimlico Publishers, 1996) is a good example. Figes draws on a lot of modern research material to provide a comprehensive account of the revolution from below. The classic anarchist texts are great but they obviously couldn't hope to tell the whole story. Within the 923 pages of Figes' account are a couple of howlers: he refers to the "Anarchist Party", and he thinks Berkman was American, but these are easily outweighed by his sympathetic treatment of anarchism, his critique of the Bolsheviks and above all by his detailing of the self-activity of the ordinary people.

Soviet interpretations are being transformed, liberal interpretations are being revised, but what of our own libertarian perspective? Should we revise anything of our analysis of the events and aftermath of 1917? Our classic accounts are invaluable and their authors often heroic but our literature on the subject has been notably free of the sort of debate and revisionism that liberal historians have engaged in. We should respect our texts but they are not tablets of stone. Do anarchist histories perhaps place too much blame for the death of the revolution on the Bolsheviks? Should the Anarchists in Russia have opposed the Bolsheviks from the beginning, instead of initially supporting them? Was the early revolutionary period of workers control and free co-operatives really evolving into libertarian socialism or descending into chaos and starvation, as the Bolsheviks claimed? The answers are not simple, but my feeling is that we too often pretend that they are. We rest on our laurels and quote the classics like Christians quote the bible. It is important to revisit and reconsider our history in order to keep it alive, isn't it time for a bit of libertarian historical revisionism?

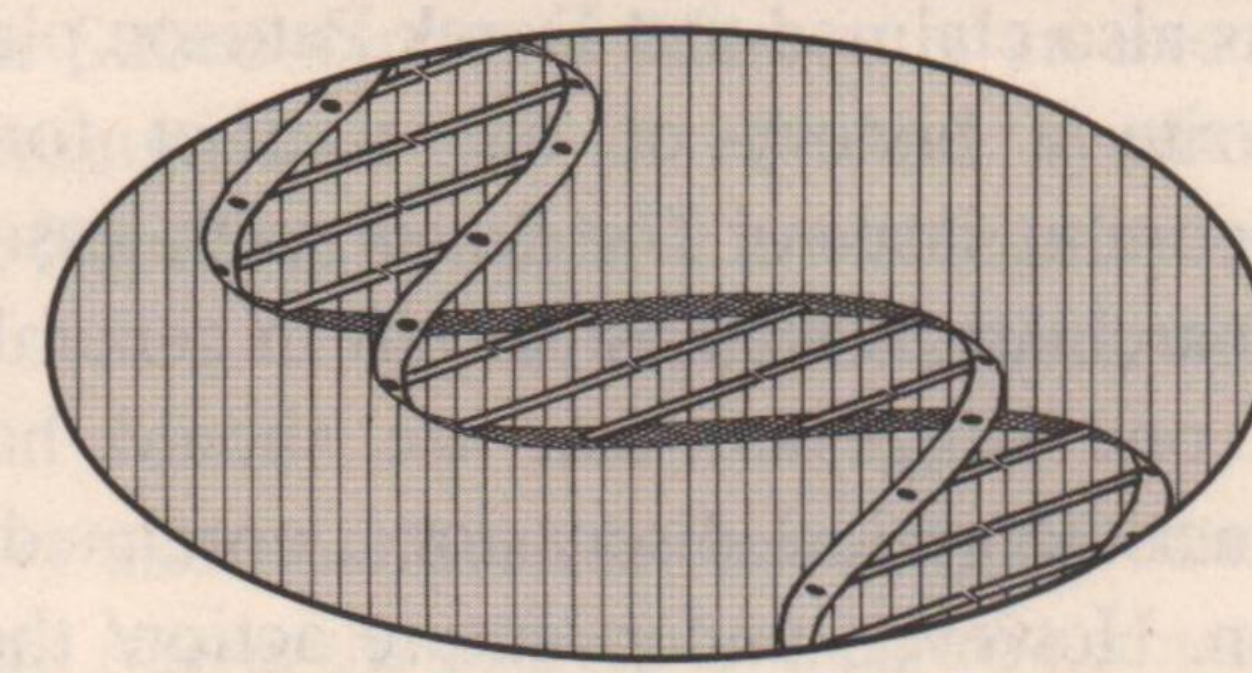
Christopher Draper



A poster from 1919 honouring the Red Fleet as the 'Vanguard of the Revolution'. The unquestioned loyalty of the Russian sailors to the revolution in its early days made the subsequent Kronstadt uprising a particularly bitterly fought battle.

Number 40 of the anarchist quarterly

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Food for thought ... and action



Traffic on New York's 42nd Street in the '20s – as motorists clamoured for more driving space the streetcar gave way to the private vehicle and public transportation began to falter.

Asphalt Nation: how the automobile took over America and how we can take it back by Jane Holtz Kay, University of California Press. Although many people see traffic congestion as a recent phenomenon, there were in fact already problems with it in US cities in the 1920s. Private motorists, fed up with traffic jams, began clamouring for more road space – which they duly got, not by a reduction in cars, of course, but by the removal of public transport in the form of streetcars, or trams. The publisher's information does not exaggerate when it says: "Asphalt Nation is a powerful examination of how the automobile has ravaged America's cities and landscape over the past 100 years, together with a compelling strategy for reversing our automobile-dependency. Jane Holtz Kay provides a history of the rapid spread of the automobile and documents the huge subsidies commanded by the highway lobby, to the detriment of once-efficient forms of mass transportation. Demonstrating that there are economic, political, architectural and personal solutions to the problem, she shows that radical change is entirely possible. This book is essential reading for everyone interested in the history of our relationship with the car, and in the prospect of returning to a world of human mobility."

Despite the book's size, the style is concise. The thick-and-fast facts are broken here and there with amusing anecdotes and illustrated with numerous excellent photographs. There are over thirty pages of notes, a large bibliography and an index, plus scores of enlightening quotes.

Kay is the planning and architecture critic for *The Nation*, and the well-known geographer Jane Jacobs says that her book "has given us a profound way of seeing the automobile's ruinous impact on American life". What's more, it puts forward some well-informed

solutions for the masses of people without cars, without access to what Colin Ward calls "the freedom to go" – i.e. mobility. 418 pages for £10.50.

Zapatista, Active Distribution. This is an interesting pamphlet that looks at the EZLN insurrection in Mexico from a different perspective. Instead of simply reprinting speeches and writings by Subcomandante Marcos, although there is a bit of that, most of the text is concerned with a deeper examination of the processes that underlie the movement's democratic base. Hence there is a description of the 'consulta', the worldwide consultation of Mexicans at home and abroad on the way forward, carried out by the Zapatistas last year. A dozen or so pages are taken up with the role of women in the struggle (women make up about a third of the EZLN), their freedom to choose partners and access to contraception



and abortion. And in two thoughtfully counterposed articles, the 'Masks and Silences from Above' are compared with the 'Masks and Silences from Below'. Other articles cover the continuing resistance from prison by those who have been arrested, and the government's operations to prevent foreign observers reporting the true situation in Chiapas. A well produced pamphlet with dozens of photographs, whose profits all go to projects in Chiapas. 30 pages, £1.00.

Profit Over People: neoliberalism and global order by Noam Chomsky, Seven Stories Press. When the Zapatista uprising took place in 1994, Chomsky was one of the first people to go into print exposing the economic and historical causes of the crisis in Chiapas, and one of the chapters in this collection of articles is on that topic. "The protest of Indian peasants in Chiapas" he says, "gives only a bare glimpse of 'time bombs' waiting to explode, not only in Mexico". After the global actions against neo-liberalism on 18th June and 30th November, with more to come, who can doubt it. Throughout the book Chomsky employs his admirable skill at turning the ruling class's statements back against them, as in the chapter "Consent Without Consent". Robert McChesney's introduction is worth quoting from at length: "Neoliberalism is the defining political economic paradigm of our time – it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit. Associated initially with Reagan and Thatcher, for the past two decades neoliberalism has been the dominant global political economic trend adopted by political parties of the centre and much of the traditional left as well as the right. These

parties and the policies they enact represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and less than one thousand large corporations. Aside from some academics and members of the business community, the term neoliberalism is largely unknown and unused by the public-at-large, especially in the United States. There, to the contrary, neoliberal initiatives are characterised as free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic and parasitic government, that can never do good even if well intended, which it rarely is. A generation of corporate-financed public relations efforts has given these terms and ideas a near sacred aura. As a result, the claims they make rarely require defence, and are invoked to rationalise anything from lowering taxes on the wealthy and scrapping environmental regulations to dismantling public education and social welfare programs. Indeed, any activity that might interfere with corporate domination of society is automatically suspect because it would interfere with the workings of the free market, which is advanced as the only rational, fair, and democratic allocator of goods and services. At their most eloquent, proponents of neoliberalism sound as if they are doing poor people, the environment, and everybody else a tremendous service as they enact policies on behalf of the wealthy few."

Howard Zinn says "Profit Over People is Chomsky at his best. His critique of our political and economic system is brilliant and devastating. This is a powerful rush of facts and ideas. Don't stand too close". 175 pages, with notes and index, £12.99.

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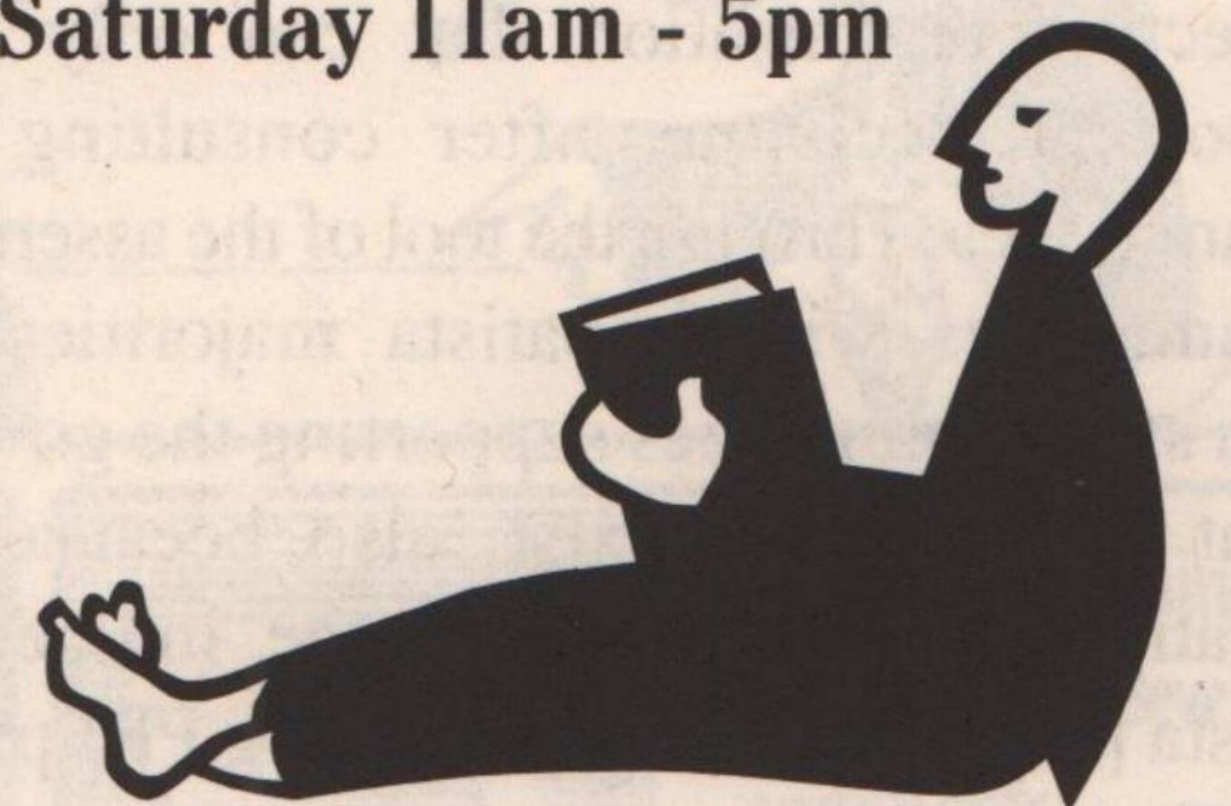
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An interview with Pietro Vermentini by Dino Taddei

Libertarian Chiapas

A good friend and comrade has been to visit us in Milan: he is Pietro Vermentini, who has been living in Chiapas for over three years, working in the field of popular education through the FOCA organisation (Formación y Capacitación – Training and Education), a Mexican organisation active in both the educational and the health spheres, focusing its actions on the recovery of traditional indigenous medicine.

Of course, we could not miss out on this opportunity to find out more about what is happening in Mexico.

Dino Taddei: Not so long ago, not a day passed without news of what was happening in Chiapas. Is the fact that we hear less talk of it today due to a conscious choice by the media, or has the situation really changed?

Pietro Vermentini: I believe there have been events recently, such as the Ocalan case or the war in Kosovo, that have – obviously – attracted the attention of both the media and our comrades here, but this doesn't mean that the situation in Chiapas has 'normalised'.

DT: From what you have been able to observe, in what situations can you detect the strongest trace of a libertarian attitude?

PV: There are certainly very strong traces in the autonomous municipalities; we need only think that one of the most important Zapatista communities is called Flores Magon, named after the Mexican anarchist who was most representative of the libertarian side of the Mexican revolution. The municipalities are an experience that links up with the indigenous community tradition. While in other South American guerrilla wars of a Marxist mould there are orthodox links with models used at any latitude and with any culture, with forced collectivisation of the land, in the Zapatista case, each community decides for itself, creating a large variety of situations, with communities that have decided on completely communal ownership of the land and others where a mixed system is in force, with common land and individual land; in some cases a couple that has married receives a piece of land from the community. All through direct forms of democracy, without decisions from above. There is a substantial difference between the Zapatista army, which has its own internal rules, and the bases of grassroots support, which self-organise by means of the community assembly. Contacts between the communities are maintained by the CCRI (Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee), a collective organisation that can only take important decisions after consulting the communities. Through the tool of the assembly, communities with Zapatista majorities but with strong minorities supporting the government manage to coexist, also because the Zapatistas have never seen the indigenous Priista [supporter of the governing PRI party] as an enemy, but more simply as someone who has bowed down in order to eat.

A tactic widely used by the government to divide indigenous communities is to guarantee privileges to those who move away from the Zapatistas – a sack or two of corn or a tractor are very convincing arguments for those who are struggling to survive. This campaign of delegitimisation had its peak in May last year, with the psychological offensive of desertion: in all the Mexican media, great prominence was given to the supposed mass desertion from the Zapatista ranks, with the

interviewing of fifteen or so ex-Zapatistas, who accused the EZLN of only fighting for power and said that because of this many like them were leaving.

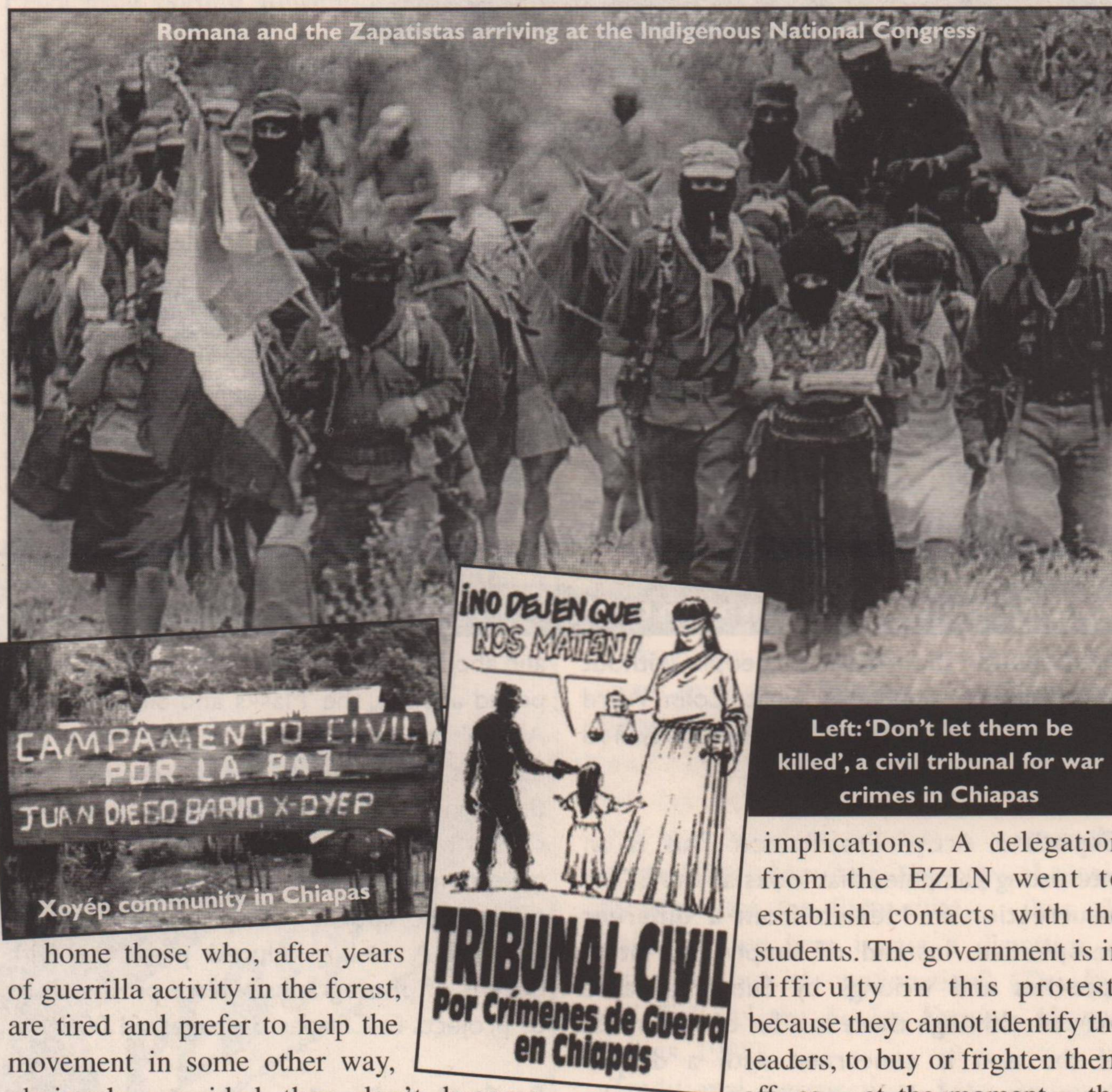
Filed by the television channels, they ostentatiously took off their balaclavas, declaring that they wished to enter lawful society again, accepting the government proposal: 'A machine gun for a sack of grain'. Of course, two days later the Zapatista army provided the names of these people and their communities of origin, declaring that they had never been Zapatistas, and that they had each received a new tractor for this service: you need only go and see them at their homes. But this counter-information had no outlet in the media.

It is also true that one quality of the Zapatista army is that of allowing to return

population is under fifteen years old, that the news of the consultation was by word of mouth alone and that only a million people participated in a similar initiative in 1995.

DT: What type of relationships have the Zapatistas been able to create with Mexican civil society?

PV: Despite the continuing desire to forge alliances involving other sectors of Mexican society, it is hard to make any headway. Yet something is moving; the university was occupied recently, something that hadn't happened since the harsh repression of '68. The protest started in Mexico City and spread to the other universities in the country. The reason that sparked the protest was the shocking increase in university fees, but very soon the matter began to take on political



Left: 'Don't let them be killed', a civil tribunal for war crimes in Chiapas

home those who, after years of guerrilla activity in the forest, are tired and prefer to help the movement in some other way, obviously provided they don't become informers. This is no minor difference from other guerrilla wars, for which there is no return ticket.

DT: What role do Mexican anarchists have?

PV: The Mexican anarchist movement is small-scale; nevertheless, it is seeking to support the Zapatista initiative to the maximum. In the past the 'Love and Rage' collective opened a libertarian school in Zapatista territory, but the experiment ended badly, because of the ambiguous attitude of certain individuals. Currently small groups or individuals operate in Chiapas, and in Mexico City there is a large group of youngsters who publish the magazine *Letra Negra*.

DT: What kind of numbers can the Zapatista movement count on today?

PV: It is difficult to quantify the support the movement enjoys in the cities and towns, particularly in a reality so multiform as Mexico. One indicative figure – though numbers may well be considerably larger – is that of the voters at the last consultation launched by the Zapatistas: over three million people voted. This is not an exceptional number, considering that the country has ninety million inhabitants, but you must consider that almost half the

implications. A delegation from the EZLN went to establish contacts with the students. The government is in difficulty in this protest, because they cannot identify the leaders, to buy or frighten them off, as – at the moment – the movement is based on an assembly model and those negotiating are only spokespersons on behalf of the assembly.

This method was borrowed from the Zapatistas, who don't take any important decision without first consulting the communities supporting them. This is the great challenge for the Zapatistas: not to win a war militarily (one already lost at the start) but to involve the people, to decide their own destiny.

This challenge meets with powerful resistance from Mexican civil society, dominated by logics of power, by micro-factions, so grass roots organisations struggle to take off.

The Zapatista Front (an organisation created precisely to co-ordinate civil initiatives) continually seeks to stimulate the birth of new autonomous focuses and indeed that was the purpose of the latest consultation: to encourage self-organisation. In fact, to administer this vote two thousand civil brigades were formed throughout the country. These did not dissolve after the consultation; quite the opposite, they created a national co-ordinated structure. The Zapatistas refuse to direct movements from above; their proposal is very simple: 'we will not structure you, organise yourselves'. Unfortunately Mexican civil society is not used to this libertarian approach, and many can't manage to free

themselves from authoritarian mechanisms, those of delegation. At some meetings of the Zapatista Front, when faced with important decisions, some delegates ask to adjourn the meeting to report back to the community, while others – with the excuse that it is necessary to act quickly – go beyond the delegate powers they have received. Unfortunately civil society finds it difficult to accept direct forms of democracy. This type of resistance is less noticeable in Chiapas, in the indigenous communities that traditionally adopt these methods.

And perhaps the peculiarity of the Zapatista movement is their knowledge of how to interact with this basic cultural identity.

The difficulties are our own: a lot of Mexican and foreign organisations that use the Zapatista message as a reference point in reality have an internal structure that is hierarchical and authoritarian.

But the Zapatistas do not give up; they know that much time is needed for change to take place: they direct their message at society, not at power, and therefore the time needed for the transformation is long, but the important thing is to proceed along the right path. The EZLN discourse is this: 'we don't want power for ourselves, because nothing guarantees that we will not end up like our oppressors. On the contrary, we want to decentralise it, to dilute it, so there is less power and more participation'.

DT: Currently, what is the effect of the presence of the government army?

PV: Considerable; among the guerrilleros operating in the Lacandona Forest and the support communities, the possibilities for exchange have been weakened: the strategy of the army is to deprive the Zapatistas of their social hinterland. This initiative has borne fruit for the army, because now it is much more difficult for the Zapatistas to participate in the life of the community. Yet these community experiences are hard to liquidate, as they are so deep-rooted; they have brought about substantial changes not only to land management plans but also at a cultural level. We need only consider the role acquired by women in community decision-making; for instance, in the Zapatista communities it is forbidden to drink alcohol, on account of the clearly devastating effects this produces on indigenous people, and this decision was made at the insistence of the women. Let's not forget that women represent one third of the Zapatista forces, the highest presence among Latin American guerrillas. As Comandante Ana Maria recalls: "In the EZLN relationships between men and women are on a level of perfect parity". This is no small matter, considering the ultra-macho attitudes existing in Mexico.

DT: But don't you think there is a contradiction here, with Marcos' role within this experience, as a charismatic leader?

PV: The danger of transforming Marcos into a sort of icon does exist, but he is the first to be aware of this, and does not waste a single opportunity to ironize about it. After all, the Marcos myth is more a construction that is external to the Zapatistas, where in reality a very much more collective decision-making process exists than people would think: the Command of the EZLN is not Marcos, but a collective body, it's as simple as that; the fact that Subcomandante Marcos is an excellent communicator and an effective symbol for the Zapatista struggle is a whole other story.

rivista anarchica, no. 257

* For those interested in contacting the editors of *Letra Negra*, the address is: inegra@hotmail.com or C.P. 8935 Admon. Palacio Postal, 1 06002 Mexico, D.F.

And after Seattle and Euston ...

Dear *Freedom*,

Luigi Fabbri's and Ed Stamm's articles in the *Freedom* of 15th January are, I believe, in their moral responsibility and realism, among the most important things to be published in the journal in recent years.

Some anarchists appear to want us to instil fear in our rulers. Do we want to live in a world that is the result of success in a fear-instilling competition? But we shall in any case never have the choice. In any such fear-instilling competition with capitalism and governments there can never be any doubt about who would always win. The history of the last century, if nothing else, should have taught us that. It is fatal, often literally so, to provoke and confront those forces. It is taking them on at their own game, one where they hold all the cards. It is futile to shout 'Smash the State!' in the streets; if you got remotely near smashing the state, the state would smash you. Instead, try to bypass governments and the institutions of capitalism, make them irrelevant, so that in the end they may atrophy, wither and eventually vanish.

It is an illusion to believe events at Seattle and Euston on 30th November signify that we are on the brink of taking back control of our lives, that, as AH believes (*Freedom*, 15th January), "it has started". I am afraid, at least as far as anarchism is concerned, it has done nothing of the sort. Almost everywhere in the world anarchists are still a pathetic little sect of misunderstood eccentrics bickering among themselves.

It will not start until we have convinced millions of people that anarchism – or whatever we choose to call it – stands for solidarity, compassion, mutual aid, gentleness, peace, responsibility, freedom, tolerance, respect for others and their individuality. Yet there has probably never been such a good time to argue for a real third way as now. Both Soviet 'communism' and capitalism have shown themselves brutal, tragic and stupid disasters. Humans should try at last the only way that is both humane and efficient, and makes sense. Voluntary co-operation.

Amorey Gethin



Dear *Freedom*,

I feel that Ed Stamm's article in the *Freedom* of 29th January, 'Most anarchists are not masked rioters', cannot go without reply. Stamm continually uses the word 'we' when attacking those anarchists who physically disrupted the WTO Third Ministerial Conference in Seattle, November 30th last year. Who exactly does he claim to be speaking on behalf of? Certainly not what, I suspect would be the vast majority of anarchists worldwide.

Most anarchists are indeed not masked rioters. But then most of those anarchists who, sensibly, masked-up prior to confronting the armoured forces of oppression in Seattle aren't full-time 'masked rioters' either (unless, of course, we concur with the bourgeois media that it was all down to the infamous 'rent-a-mob' of seemingly well paid 'professional rioters'). Rather, I would suggest, they are akin to most anarchists, usually active in their communities and workplaces, agitating, educating and organising for libertarian social revolution!

Whilst I agree with Stamm that the imposition of change upon society by small groups using violence is indeed incompatible with anarchism, it does not follow that comrades engaged in the social struggle should refrain from physically attacking their oppressors and exploiters until they have

"massive popular support". Demonstrations, pickets, riots aren't ends in themselves but rather moments in a larger struggle. Whilst reserving the right to criticise aspects of activities which I consider political dead-ends I do not think it acceptable to effectively take the side of the state against its opponents. To suggest, as Stamm does, that it is "ethically wrong" to "break up meetings" or even to simply "block public movement" when we are not being actively coerced by the state (whatever that means) really isn't anarchism as I understand it. Isn't it obvious our rulers are always engaged in coercive action against the exploited and dispossessed? Rest assured that when the vast majority imposes its will upon the exploiting, dispossessing and violent minority, I'll not be shedding any tears for the latter.

Finally, I would like to end with a quote from a statement made by comrades who were in Seattle. "We, the initiative for a north-eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists, express our deepest solidarity with our comrades who took it upon themselves to strike capitalism where it hurts and demonstrate to the world the important role militant resistance will play in the struggles yet to come. Do not let the blows against the capitalist system cease ... our anarchist resistance is and will continue to be as transnational as Capital".

Yours for anarchism

Declan McCormick



Dear *Freedom*,

Thank you to Ed Stamm for pointing out clearly and correctly why a comrade like myself needn't bother labelling myself an 'anarchist' these days. 'Anarchism' ends up being too much of a muddled philosophy, existing predominantly on the level of supposedly timeless moralistic principles and ideas. It bares little relationship to the practical necessities of class struggle and social struggles as they develop in daily life. If proletarians in struggle assert their material needs, interests and desires, like reclaiming the streets, squatting or striking, then unavoidably that involves an obstruction, imposition and coercion against authority, bosses and the capitalist economy. If 'anarchist' freedom means freedom for capital to conduct its business of exploiting me, then I say down with 'anarchist' freedom.

For me politics is not a Sunday school exercise in preaching some nice idea to a consumer public, but a process of organising together with others who have an interest in struggle in order to create global communistic human relations.

Paul Petard



Dear *Freedom*,

A spectre is haunting the *Freedom* letters page – the phantom presence of the *Freedom* editors. In the issue of 29th January myself, Nick Heath and Steve Ash are taken to task for purportedly failing to address issues raised by Ed Stamm as to "whether the tactics adopted by some of the protesters at the WTO meeting ... furthered propaganda for anarchism" outside 'the movement' and whether there is an anarchist movement as such.

I'd thought that the first question had been dealt with adequately by myself and Nick Heath, but clearly this isn't the case. I'll try therefore to reduce my position in this regard to the simplest terms. Capitalism is a system

based, ultimately (and the anxious liberals out there should note the presence here of the word 'ultimately' before they begin to pen their sweat-stained missives accusing me of suggesting capital is ordinarily totalitarian) upon the preservation of relations of inequality (between labour and capital, principally, but not exclusively) by force. Seattle was important therefore, 1) for tearing away the veil of normalisation that usually obscures this, and 2) for demonstrating that the physical organisation underpinning the force of law, police, military, etc., can be successfully and effectively resisted.

As events in Austria so clearly illustrate, people in large numbers are beginning to abandon the politics of compromise that have seen the miseries of our daily lives talked away by a social democracy increasingly recognised to be no more than the best defence available to a system that survives by derailing rebellion through the appearance of accommodation of desires. So long as the anarchist movement believes (as Stamm does) that the ethics of recognition and respect we try to develop in our personal lives (and believe are necessarily the best hope of a society-to-come) can be our sole weapon in the battle against a system which refuses to acknowledge such values; so long as we believe we can avoid finally having to meet force with force, then the anger most people feel will be deflected towards a radical right which, offers force alone an it's alternative. We cannot beg Utopia. Alexander Berkman once observed that "the social structure rests on the basis of ideas, which implies that changing the structure presupposes changing ideas". Undoubtedly this is the case; the revolution Berkman sought, though, cannot come about through ideological struggle alone – not least because those with most to lose won't allow it to. We have to keep at the fore the notion that "to divest one's methods of ethical concepts means to sink into the depths of utter demoralisation" (quote from Emma Goldman) but to assume that this means we reduce the idea(l) of anarchism to flabby pacifism or nineteenth century liberalism is to assume the position of defeat.

Do I believe there is an anarchist movement? Yes and no. Yes to the extent that there are

groups of people struggling to apply the revolutionary values fought for by the likes of Bakunin and Malatesta in the present, sometimes working separately, sometimes converging; no, to the extent that the ideas of anarchism as they've accreted historically are (as they should be if they are attempts to understand and change world in historically specific circumstances) inconsistent, aporetic. But all of this begs a question of those who asked the question – who speaks? From whence, did this editorial colon (which appears to have moved from singular to plural, from editor to editors) suddenly emerge? Is there now an editorial line – as yet undisclosed – to those who read/buy/contribute to *Freedom*? Why ask the questions asked in the way they were asked? Why ask these rather than other questions? On what basis seek to assert that the debate thus far is unsatisfactory or fails to address the issues raised by Ed Stamm? In other words, to assert, to raise questions, betrays the notion of a separate position, a difference with what has been said thus far. Fair enough – but if a debacle is to be an honest one it needs to be open – no spectres allowed at the table. If the 'editors' have a position on the questions they ask, do they not have a duty to put it forward to be debated alongside the rest? Or are we to be subjected to an authorial 'voice of God' that speaks from the margins of the page, forever intervening but never properly declaring itself?

Nick S.



New Military Humanism

Dear *Freedom*,

Well wha'd'y' know! The editors have only just declared the war of words in the columns of *Freedom* between Nick S., Jonn Roe, and myself over the Kosovo butchery to be at an end, when along comes a book by Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism*, which provides Nick with another opportunity to sound off.

Chomsky is a megastar among anti-establishment intellectuals for whose existence we beleaguered anarchists have to be grateful. But that doesn't mean we should bark joyfully and rush off for our leads every time he says 'Walkies!' Of course we can trot along happily beside him as Chomsky chats to us about the ulterior motives of the leaders of God's-own-country and so forth. Who ever thought these people ever acted out of pure philanthropy? But who needs his insulting admonitions to pay "attention to historical fact and the documentary record, not simply [the] adulation of our leaders and the 'principles and values' attributed to them by admirers".

And the last debate of all always takes place in our own hearts. Would we or would we not

feel a little less sad if, disregarding those sacred "concepts of sovereignty and international law", the Romans had marched into Judea to put a stop to the massacre of the innocents?

Donovan Pedely

Darwinian Left

Dear *Freedom*,

This nonsense of a Darwinian Left (*Freedom*, 11th December 1999) must stop. The Darwinians are on the right and opposed to co-evolutionist Alfred Russel Wallace on the left who insisted that evolution came not from the evolved superman but from co-evolving communities.

Get the paradigm right! The Darwinian paradigm stupidity of scientists, including government advisers, led to GM, BSE, and CFCs. Their 'superman' stupidity destroys the Earth's ability to support life. And it is probably too late stop the mass extermination now in progress becoming near total.

Ilyan

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Meetings & Events

**The London
Anarchist Forum**

Meet Fridays at about 8pm at Conway Hall, 25
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 2000 —

11th February Anarchy, Psychotherapy and
Psychological Well Being (a symposium led
by Steve Ash)

18th February General discussion

25th February What is Situationism?
(symposium)

3rd March General discussion

10th March Effective Action: what do you
think we should do on May Day?

17th March General discussion

Anyone interested in giving a talk or leading
a discussion, please contact Peter Neville at the
meetings giving your subject and prospective
dates and we will do our best to accommodate.

Peter Neville for London Anarchist Forum

Mayday 2000

A festival of anarchist ideas and action from

28th April to 1st May

Mayday 2000 will be a four-day gathering of
revolutionaries to be held across London.

We would like to hear from groups and
individuals interested in joining us in
co-ordinating the activities.

Mayday 200, BM Mayday, London WC1N 3XX

www.freespeech.org/mayday2k

mayday2000-subscribe@egroups.com

**Northern Anarchist
Network Conference**

on Saturday and Sunday

1st and 2nd April 2000

at the 1 in 12 Club, Albion Street,
Bradford BD1 2LY

for further information please call
Martin on 0161 7079652

**Libertarian Socialist
Discussion Group**

(forming now)

will meet on the second Wednesday of the month
for action and discussion

at 8pm in The Vine, Kennedy Street

(off Fountain Street), near Manchester Town Hall

Joint meeting of the

Bury Unemployed Workers' Association,
Tameside Unemployed Workers' Alliance and
the Libertarian Discussion Group

will be held on 2nd March at 1pm

at Bury Unemployed Centre (off The Rock)

12 Tithebarn Street, Bury

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humanism?**



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