

FREEEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

Vol. 61 No. 6

25th March 2000

50p

Summerhill on trial

Summerhill, the world's most famous free school, is fighting for its life. A quasi-judicial tribunal has convened in Court Number One, in London's Chancery Lane, to pronounce judgement on the school's survival. The verdict is imminent and if it goes against Summerhill the Secretary of State for Education will strike it from the list of registered independent schools. Once off the register Summerhill cannot legally operate. In this new educational Dark Age the State seems intent on snuffing-out every last flickering flame of freedom.

Since Alexander Sutherland Neill first opened Summerhill, in 1921, the school has demonstrated to the world that freedom in education works. Others followed Neill's pioneering example and it wasn't long before more free-schools opened: Beacon Hill, Dartington Hall, Monkton Wyld, Red Hill and Kilquhanity, to name but a few. In the 1960s and '70s the movement really took off and free-schools opened in all the major cities of Britain. A lack of funds and a surfeit of State interference eventually killed off all Summerhill's companions, but alone it survives and continues to practice freedom. All lessons are optional and the only rules are ones invented, discussed and agreed by the weekly Summerhill meeting. All children and adults in the school community have an equal say and an equal vote in these meetings. A practice quite alien to New Labour but an integral part of the school's 'self-government' that teaches children far more about living peacefully in society than any National Curriculum Citizenship programme. Love, equality and democracy have always been at the heart of the Summerhill community, but the State demands different priorities from schools.

The pretext for the proposed closure is

a critical report drawn up by an OFSTED (Office Standards in Education) inspection team who visited Summerhill in March 1999. As a result of this report the Secretary of State issued the school with a statutory 'Notice of Complaint', demanding that unless six specific changes were made the school would be closed down. The school accepted the validity of three of OFSTED's criticisms; relating to Health and Safety, security and curriculum planning and has now rectified these problems. Summerhill totally rejects the three remaining complaints as they represent a fundamental attack on the founding principles and practices of the school.

The contested complaints relate to the provision of segregated toilets, testing and compulsory lessons. Firstly, OFSTED demands segregated toilets, whilst Summerhill prefers not to discriminate between who can use which toilets. It may seem trivial to contest whether girls and boys and male and female teachers should be allotted different facilities but families don't segregate toilets and Summerhill wants to maintain its close, trusting family-like community. Secondly, OFSTED demands regular, compulsory testing of children but Summerhill is sticking to its principles and insists that students will only be tested when they want to be tested. The third contested complaint clearly reveals the authoritarian agenda being pursued by OFSTED, on behalf of the State. OFSTED demands an end to "the school's practice of voluntary attendance at lessons" and insists that "the school must ensure that all pupils engage regularly in learning, either within timetabled lessons or within prescribed self-supported study programmes, and that they study a sufficiently broad and balanced curricu-

lum, aiming at standards of attainment in line with national expectations".

Parents and children unanimously support Summerhill's principled position but OFSTED doesn't consider it necessary to demonstrate that the school fails to meet the expectations of either pupils or parents, it considers it sufficient that Summerhill fails to meet the demands of the State. What moral right has any State to decide what any individual must learn? What moral right has any State to enforce testing on any learner? All libertarians will whole-

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"In consequence of the Dominie's go-as-you-please methods of educating village children, the inevitable happens - he is dismissed, giving place to an approved disciplinarian" (the cover illustration and these prescient words are taken from the book *A Dominie Dismissed*, written in 1917 by Alexander Sutherland Neill, the founder of Summerhill).

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For the 'Tameside Eighteen' careworkers and the tribunal it is ...

The end of an industrial dispute

Last month, the Tameside Eighteen took their case for unfair dismissal to the Manchester Industrial Tribunal. Two years after the troubles of Tameside Care Group (a 'not for profit' company of twelve old people's homes) began, eighteen sacked careworkers had their day in court. This was the end of what some local newspapers have called 'the longest and bitterest dispute an Tameside', in which 214 careworkers struck against their management's threat to impose inferior new contract terms and conditions.

Most of the original strikers accepted a compensation deal worked out between the company and their trade unions last May, but a hardcore wanted to force Tameside Care Group to face them in the tribunal. This was a risk they took against the advice of the anarchist activists of the Northern Anarchist Network.

Throughout the dispute the strikers were sustained by the Strike Support Group. Besides the anarchists, the support group was made up of a wide spectrum of backers from around Manchester: Martin and Celia Ralph and the Revolutionary Socialist League deserve special mention, as does Tameside Trades Council. Margaret Manning, formerly of the Socialist Party but now in the RSL, also springs to mind. In the early days the Revolutionary Communist Group and Workers Power were active in support of the strikers, as was John Bevan of the Tameside Unemployed Workers' Alliance and Tameside Trades Council. Bob Pounder, local secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, raised funds on behalf of the careworkers.

Soft underbelly shows its muscle

This was a case in which the libertarians on the Strike Support Group and legal opinion agreed was risky – too risky if the careworkers wanted to win. Derek Pattison, libertarian leader of Tameside Trades Council, told the careworkers early on not to expect to draw big money at the tribunal, and he added that "you could lose, you may not get anything". In September 1999 Louise Christian, the London solicitor, declared: "You will see ... the law on unfair dismissal and the situation when an employer tries to reduce pay that the law is very heavily weighted in favour of the employer".

That was the advice of the anarchists and the civil rights lawyers. But the women rejected their advice. They didn't even accept the last minute offer, in January, put up by the company, Tameside Care Group.

'Three card trick'

So the case opened on 14th February with the warning of Louise Christian ringing in Rose Young's ears: "You will appreciate that as lawyers we have to advise you on the law as it stands however unfair we may feel it to be". Beside Rose Young sat her adviser, Pattison, the pessimistic plebeian. Before her Alan Firth, chief executive of Tameside Care Group, was in the witness box.

The company's highly-paid barrister, Paul Gilroy, was determined to show that Mr Firth and his business did "not have the credentials of a cynical organisation determined to pursue profit at any or all costs". Indeed, the boss's case was that this was a 'not for profit' company which ploughs its profits back into the business, and that Mr Firth had come into the firm in 1993 as a knight in shining armour to rescue the business from the corruption and financial mismanagement of the early 1990s.

The worker's case was that Mr Firth had his feet under the table with the Bank of Scotland – the Tameside Care Group's bankers. This

bank, which has a reputation of dealing harshly with bad debts, had the company by the throat with tough banking undertakings. In the worker's view both the bank and Mr Firth, an accountant by profession, were keen to cut pay and conditions for staff, and had been for a long time.

Mrs Sheila Carpenter, in a closing speech for the careworkers, claimed that Mr Firth lacked a "human touch as a manager". She argued that there was "a human relations backdrop, and murky pre-history [when the company was Tameside Enterprises Ltd.] against which more current developments should be set".

Mr Firth, in his statement, said he "became aware from late 1996 onwards of three key financial factors which seriously undermined the position of [the] business". These three problems – the mismanagement of the pensions fund, the Labour Council's cuts in fees and the health authority's withdrawal of its grant – became known as the 'triple whammy' in the tribunal.

But because Mr Firth was an aloof pen-pushing number-crunching accountant, the staff in the New Year of 1998 were suspicious. They saw it as a 'three card trick' put on by management. And who can blame them? Stories of corruption, mismanagement of the Tameside old people's homes and financial fiddling had been around for years. Even the local politician, Andrew Bennett MP, had his suspicions. In December 1997 in a letter to Alan Firth, Mr Bennett (a member of the trust which oversees TCG management) wrote: "I realise for political purposes you had to paint a very gloomy picture ... I was just a little worried you had convinced yourself". And then suggesting that management should win the unions on side, he added that "I don't think it is impossible – providing you play all your best cards".

But Mr Firth didn't win the unions over. Perhaps he didn't want to! Instead a strike against the cuts began on 30th March 1998.

Tameside family resemblances

The workers' representatives at the tribunal argued that the bosses, and particularly Mr Firth, had acted in bad faith. Mrs Biddle, a sacked domestic from Sunnyside Home, dropped a bombshell when she said: "Mr Firth said he would not be happy until everyone was on £2.80 an hour". This she claimed Firth had told her as long ago as 1993. It caused some consternation for the employer's barrister, Mr Gilroy, who accused the woman of using a "scattergun approach".

The line of cross-examination conducted by Rose Young, under the guidance of Derek Pattison, was that the board of management delayed informing the unions or their staff that the flames of a financial tragedy had begun to burn early in 1997. Instead they allowed glossy magazines to be published giving the impression that the company was becoming more profitable.

It seems that even the Labour Council was taken in by these glossy figures, which was the reason it sought to cut its fees to the TCG residential homes. An accountant consulted by *Freedom* and the sacked careworkers told us that in 1990 when the Labour Council transferred the twelve old people's homes, they did so on the cheap. The result, in his view, was that the company floated was an 'under-capitalised' sinking ship which went to the rocks as Tameside Enterprises Ltd. in 1993, and was reflected as Tameside Care group under the captaincy of Alan Firth.

Sheila Carpenter, in her address to the tribunal, declared that the workers are "anxious about the relationship between the council and the [TCG] trust". The boss's

barrister, Mr Gilroy, boasted that the TCG "has a non-executive chairman who has spent his working life as a trade union activist". Indeed, in Mr Wainwright it has a tame trade unionist in tow. Mr Wainwright has been a member of the Labour Party for thirty years, and was an agent for Tom Pendry MP.

It has long been the argument of both the anarchists and the careworkers that there are certain 'family resemblances' between the so-called independent board of directors of Tameside Care Group and the shareholders' trust which oversees the company. Mr Wainwright told us that when the ruling trust was first set up it was made up of local Labour MPs and an MEP. Now, apart from Alan Bennett MP, it seems to be made up of Labour Party has-beens. The Tameside Council is dominated by the Labour Party, and it apparently appoints the trustees.

The tribunal did not accept this view, but saw the Tameside Care Group as legally separate from the council.

Nero and the fire insurance

Did the company consult the workforce when Mr Firth first knew of the financial problems? Mrs Carpenter told us: "Instead of consulting with the people who were about to be directly hit by these problems, Mr Firth took legal advice and commissioned an accountant's report". She added that "he knew at the latest on 4th October 1997 that a fire had broken out, but instead of dousing it with water at that early stage he sought to take out a fire insurance policy".

In evidence Mr Firth told us he only sought

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HEALTH SERVICE

WILDCAT

Scripted by Victoria N. Furmurry. Drawn by Donald Roofm.

Drawn by Donald Roofm and scripted by Victoria N. Furmurry, *Health Service Wildcat* is available from Freedom Press (post free inland, overseas add 15%)

ISBN 0 900384 73 5 48 pages £1.95

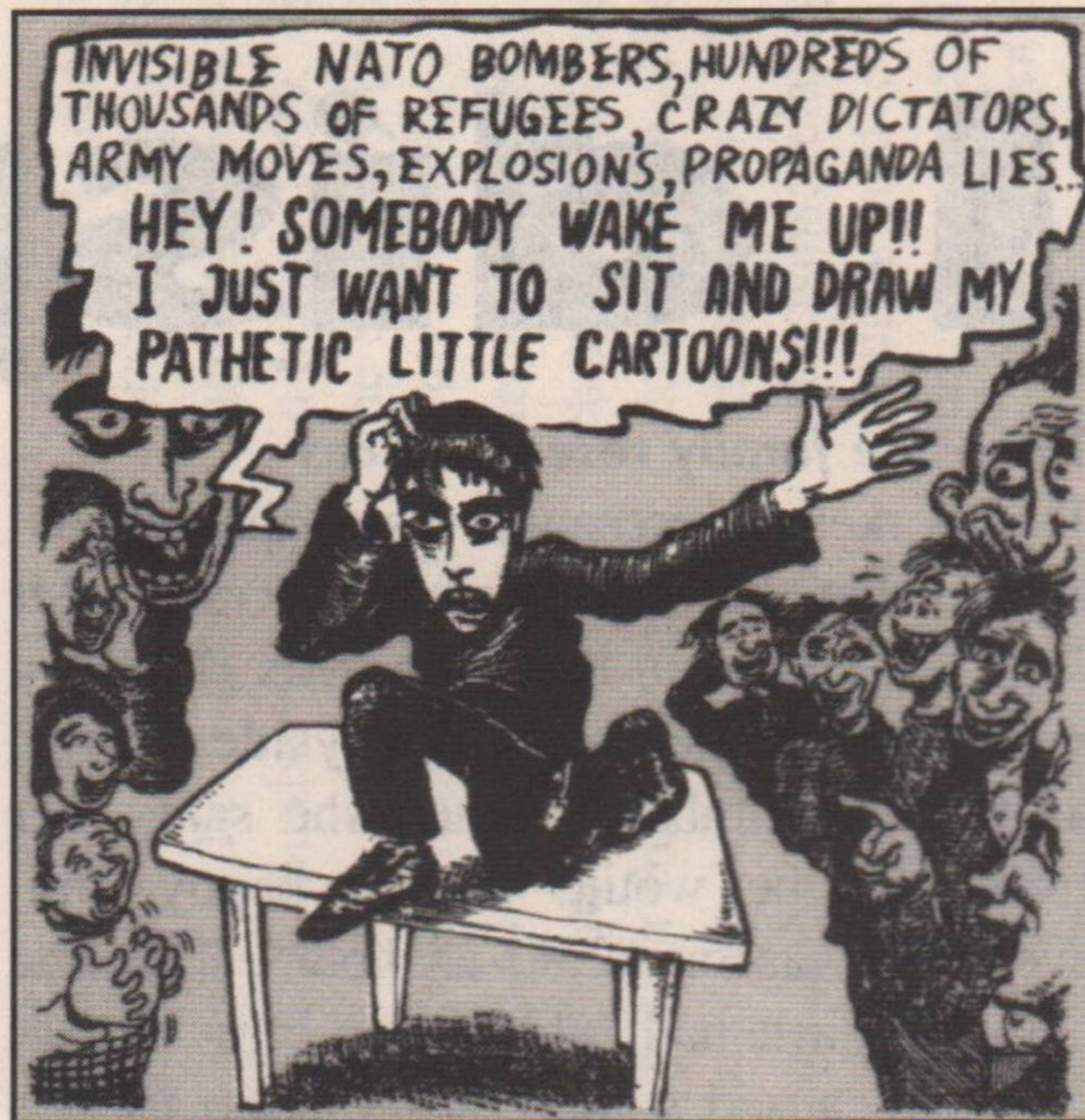
Food for Thought ... and Action

Recent additions to the Freedom Press bookshop stock

Jewish Socialist no. 40, JSG. Of interest in this issue is a history of the Workers' Circle, *Arbeter Ring*, one prominent member of whose East London group was the anarchist Rudolf Rocker. Many of the buildings mentioned in the article, which they used for meetings and social events, are still in existence and just a stone's throw from Freedom Press. Other features include sectarianism in the Kosova anti-war movements, anti-semitism and state racism in Lithuania, a report on the plight of children in the war zones of central Africa, and exchange visits to each other's countries by women from Northern Ireland and Israel. The magazine also announces in this issue that it is to change its format later on in the year. 32 pages, £1.50.

Bulletins from Serbia: e-mails and cartoon strips from behind the front line by Alexander Zograf with introduction by Terry Jones, Slab-o-Concrete Publications. This is a delightful, if disturbing, book. The beautifully designed cover contrasts sharply with the sometimes painful and tragic day-by-day accounts of NATO's bombing of Serbia and the progress of the war, which began exactly a year ago, from the perspective of a resident

of Pancevo, fifteen miles from Belgrade. Two things about this work stand out: the author is a Serbian artist and cartoonist familiar to many people worldwide who has been writing and drawing about the Balkans crisis since the early 1990s without any nationalist sentiment, proving that not all people support 'their' governments, even in times of war; and the unique nature of the material, put together from the daily e-mails sent out by Zograf over the internet, consisting of both reportage and personal observations.



on the results of NATO's massive air strikes in terms of human suffering and physical devastation, which people even in obscure corners of the world were able to read as it was happening, indeed sometimes while he was actually being bombed. So popular was he as an eyewitness that his reports were soon being duplicated to all sorts of other sites until many thousands of people across the globe were reading the other side of the story (and replying to him with encouragement), including NATO air crews at the Italian base from which most of the attacks were launched, who suddenly found themselves receiving uncomplimentary messages from the people they were bombing! As the publishers say, this is "an important document of human conflict and endurance, demonstrating all too clearly what it is to be trapped between the political and military ambitions of the world's regimes". But there are also unexpected and hilarious side-effects of the bombing which Zograf is not slow to pick up on. In fact it was just this surreal aspect of the whole affair that prompted him to use the very funny introduction by ex-Python Terry Jones. Some of the author's distinctive cartoons and illustrations accompany the text. 95 pages, hardback, £6.50.

The Zinn Reader: writings on disobedience and democracy by Howard Zinn, Seven Stories Press. Anyone who has read his *A People's History of the United States* will know what an excellent writer Zinn is, apart from being an eminent radical historian and a 'people-loving troublemaker' as Alice Walker called him. Here he has presented for the first time a collection of his writings designed to give an idea of the scope of his concerns in a number of fields. These range from class and race to war, law and history, and end with a chapter called 'Means and Ends'. Dipping into this truly monumental book we find Sacco and Vanzetti and Upton Sinclair, Rockefeller, Nixon and Jack London, the southern racists and the abolitionists, terrorism, Vietnam and Freedom Schools, anarchism, rebellion and violence, the Wobblies, voting, and much, much more. At the back there are half a dozen pages on further reading. Along with Chomsky and Edward Said, Zinn is one of the few prominent North American

(continued from page 8)

heartedly support Summerhill's defence of the rights of students to control their own learning. I am myself a conscientious objector to State education, having resigned, after 22 years in the classroom, in protest against the State's imposition of its 'broad and balanced' National(ist) Curriculum with its concomitant regime of testing and control. I have witnessed at first hand how the State abuses and exploits children for its own, economic and political ends; how ironic that State lackeys now dare to put Summerhill in the dock! The battle for freedom in education has been fought and lost in State schools so it is crucial that Summerhill survives as a precious independent island of liberated learning.

British education has been colonised by government appointees, toadying heads and armies of commercial 'consultants'. Collaboration is rife and children and teachers are kept chained to approved curricula by rigid testing and assessment. It was inevitable that sooner or later Blunkett's OFSTED shock-troops would be sent to invade Summerhill and suppress freedom, but the school is fighting back. Their counter-attack is supported by a report from an independent inspection team, composed of respectable academics and including the well-known poet and children's broadcaster, Michael Rosen. This alternative report exposes the inconsistencies and intellectual superficiality of OFSTED's critique. Understandably, this document is couched in terms calculated to appeal to bureaucrats and education officials and perhaps leans a little heavily on defending Summerhill's record of exam results.

Nevertheless, it raises principled, philosophical and political objections to the State's domination of education. Examples of free-schools in New Zealand, Israel and Canada illustrate how other countries tolerate and even encourage alternative models of free-education. This independent report demonstrates that the British State has become more authoritarian in its demands, whilst Summerhill has consistently stuck to its founding principles and practice. These have always proved acceptable to previous

teams of official inspectors. Although Neill often found inspectors irritating and obsessed with trivialities, throughout Summerhill's 79 year history it has never previously faced such a determined, politically inspired, attempt to close it down.

It is enlightening to look back and read the words of one of those earlier (1949), official inspection reports: "The children are full of life and zest. Of boredom and apathy there was no sign. An atmosphere of contentment and tolerance pervades the school ... the children's manners are delightful. They may lack, here and there, some of the conventions of manners, but their friendliness, ease and naturalness, and their total lack of shyness and self-consciousness, made them very easy pleasant people to get on with ... initiative, responsibility and integrity are all encouraged by the system" (IND:38B/6/8). The school has not changed much over the years but the State has clearly become less tolerant. The official language of education no longer includes the language of feelings, emotions and relationships, the buzz-words are now 'curricula', 'tests' and 'learning outcomes' and, of course, not forgetting Blunkett's own expression for learners, 'human capital'. These changes are real, significant and dangerous. It is to Neill's eternal credit that he always said, "I'd be very disappointed if a Summerhill child became Prime Minister. I'd feel I'd failed". Or as Zoe, Neill's daughter who now runs the school puts it, "I would rather Summerhill produced a happy street sweeper than a neurotic Prime Minister".

In this darkness of child-hatred, joyless indoctrination and authoritarian control Summerhill's flame of freedom must not be extinguished - we must defend this precious place.

Christopher Draper

For messages of support: Summerhill School, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY (tel: 01728 830540)

Best Published Account: *Neill of Summerhill*, by Jonathan Croall (ISBN 0 71009300 4)

For Copies of the *Alternative Report: Centre for Self-Managed Learning*, 31 Harrington Road, Brighton, BN1 6RF (tel: 01273 703691)

For OFSTED Report, tel: 01715-100180 (ref: 144/99/IND)

intellectuals to put his head above the parapet and confront the lies of the state and the capitalists. Superb value for money, 668 pages, £12.99.

Lobster no. 38, edited by Robin Ramsay. Plenty of useful and thought-worthy stuff here for anarchists. What caught my eye first, having read the article in *Freedom* by Nick S. on the connections between Jörg Haider and the fascists was the piece by Robert Henderson entitled 'New Labour, New Fascism?' He points out that Tony Blair's rhetoric "is heavily if unconsciously littered with fascist buzzwords: nation, new, renewal and so on". He then lists a long selection of anonymous quotes and asks the reader to guess who said them - Tony Blair or Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s. You can check your accuracy using the key at the end of the article, and you may be rather surprised. A friend and I got quite carried away with this little game down the pub and had to remind ourselves of the sinister implications behind the entertainment.

John Newsinger's piece, 'George Orwell and the IRD', is a timely confirmation of Orwell's staunch anti-Stalinism and to my mind firmly lays to rest recent accusations that he had defected to the right by knowingly collaborating with part of the secret state (the Information Research Department was an anti-Soviet Cold War propaganda organisation set up by the Labour government). At the time he was approached by them he believed its role was "to advocate a social-democratic-reformist alternative to Stalinism and to expose the real nature of the Communist regimes", and having been on the receiving end of Stalinism in the Spanish Civil War but, unlike many of his comrades, having lived to tell the tale, his main concern was understandably to prevent the spread of this nefarious creed. This is underlined in the Freedom Press book *George Orwell at Home (and among the anarchists)*. It was not until 1951, after his death, that the IRD became an openly right-wing organisation.

Another Cold War front organisation, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, active in the same period was receiving \$1 million a year from the CIA by the 1960s. But as Giles Scott-Smith is careful to point out in Part II of his essay on the CCF's history (Part I is in *Lobster* no. 36) "it is important to realise that the CIA involvement was centred on the promotion and manipulation of existing viewpoints on the left (e.g. anti-Stalinism) and not the actual creation of them out of thin air". Many prominent and influential people were deeply mixed up in its propaganda which was in part intellectual and cultural, in part aimed at pushing suspicious Europeans into accepting the US Marshall Plan. Other fascinating topics in this issue include Letty Norwood the Streatham spy granny, Libya and WPC Fletcher, and Ken Livingstone's memory as regards certain facts pertaining to Northern Ireland. 42 pages, £3.00.

Media Control: the spectacular achievements of propaganda by Noam Chomsky, Seven Stories Press. This is a reprint in a more attractive and convenient format of one of Chomsky's best writings on the media, which has yet to be surpassed. 58 pages, £3.99.

KM

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Some of the 'Tameside Eighteen' and their adviser, Derek Pattison, at the tribunal after the closing speeches.

(continued from page 1)

the advice from ACAS following legal advice. When he got the advice from ACAS to consult the workforce and their unions, he sat on it for a further five weeks and then called the unions in. Armed with his accountant's report, he told the unions on New Years Eve 1997 that "the clock is ticking, you have 28 days to respond to the business evaluation document".

Mrs Carpenter told the tribunal: "Since August 1997 Mr Firth knew the trade unions were preparing a pay claim, believing the company to be staging a financial recovery". Yet for months he did nothing. She concluded that there was "no attempt to pour cold water on the flames until after he'd been notified by UNISON of a ballot on industrial action in December 1997 ... again we have the impression of fiddling while Rome burns".

The tribunal did not accept this view. The chairman, Mr Russell, states: "We do not find that the respondent can be sensibly criticised for providing the trade unions with the 'full picture' in late December 1997, as opposed to providing the unions with a partial picture earlier".

One of the reasons that the tribunal was able to take this view was that Mr Russell himself, as tribunal chairman, showed himself throughout the proceedings to be bitten by the bug of free market economics. At one point he even referred to the former council employees on 'protested pay' as the "soft underbelly of the company". He was later forced to withdraw this description and apologise.

Nevertheless, while Mr Russell didn't repeat the remark of one company manager that "careworkers are ten a penny" he clearly thought that there was a plentiful market in careworkers and that even experienced care assistants could be readily replaced. This was the reason they didn't cut the managers' pay, because managers, unlike carers, are in scarce supply.

Mr Gilroy, for the employers, put it like this: "The option chosen by the respondent amounted to no more than simple economic logic. If they had cut the wages of the unprotected staff or management they would have left. Cutting the pay of the protected staff did not present such problems because such staff realised that they could not better their position by moving elsewhere".

Mr Gilroy was in fact wrong. The result was a bitter industrial dispute with costly consequences for both the company and the workforce. Tameside Care Group lost the cream of its experienced careworkers in 1998.

In the end the tribunal found all the applicants had been 'fairly dismissed'. In this it was assisted by a dizzy performance in the witness box by Noel Pine, the branch secretary of UNISON on Tameside.

So bizarre was Mr Pine's performance in the witness box that the boss's barrister, Mr Gilroy, was provoked to ask the careworkers advocate "Who is he giving evidence for, us or you?" Mr Pine, the UNISON representative, freely admitted that he "sympathised with Mr Firth's plight, having to make plans for the company's future on the eve of a strike".

Mr Pine, it should be noted, as well as being

the UNISON union representative is employed as a social worker by the Labour controlled Tameside Council. Was he frightened? Was he protecting his own job? Mr Pine was a member of the Labour Party until the early 1990s. He later joined Militant and is now a member of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance in Manchester.

The Tameside Eighteen lost their case at the tribunal and are considering an appeal. But they fought a good battle on uneven ground. It was always going to be a tussle in which a pygmy took on a giant. The polished advocacy of the boss's barrister, Mr Gilroy, helped to seal their fate. But the frame of mind of Mr Russell on the 'soft underbelly' and political economics, and the cowardly incompetence of the snivelling Mr Noel Pine (formerly of the Militant Tendency) cannot have helped matters.

Mack the Knife

— COPY DEADLINE —
The next issue of Freedom will be dated 8th April, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 30th March.
 ♦ ♦ ♦
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).

Rejecting comparison

It has long been the case that the public's tastes are manipulated by the fashion industry. A certain style of dress, language or music may be associated exclusively with a particular decade, and to use or admire that style once it is 'outdated' is thought of as absurd. What is essentially the same thing can be useless if it has a '70s label on it, but useful (or 'cutting-edge', 'cool' or 'retro') if it has been repackaged with a '90s or millennial label.

This imposition of taste from 'above' by television producers, newspaper editors and record company executives has reached a peak now that the twentieth century is over. These self-appointed experts act as filters distinguishing 'good' from 'bad', to save the public the hardship of doing so themselves, as we are treated to retrospectives, reviews and overviews of artistic phenomena of the past 100 years.

Just as a political being may choose to reject decisions made on their behalf by a centralised parliament, so may an artistic being disregard any 'Top Tens', award ceremonies or critical 'discussion', which serve one purpose: to stimulate demand for the entertainment industry.

The philosophy which is implicit in all of these media traditions is that the item that sells the most or gets the most thumbs ups from the taste guardians is the best. It is 'them' telling 'us' what is good, and the result is that shops and libraries are increasingly phasing out what 'they' don't say is good and only giving 'us' access to what has passed the test. It seems to me that we need to be more aware of this and act accordingly. In short, we must reject comparison.

Ben Ward

A friend of anarchists

In the *Guardian* of 15th March was a letter from Dr C. Poulton referring to Ken Livingstone: "So the Labour Party is attempting to paint Ken as a 'friend of anarchists' (7th March). I once lived with a couple of anarchists and found them to be courteous and considerate. And they always did their share of the washing up."

Anger over 'bag of bones' in care home

As we learn about the matters on Tameside, we discover that a scandal has also occurred in neighbouring Oldham, with the death of Ada Birchall in a care home. When she died she weighed less than three stones.

Care homes are not supposed to be concentration camps keeping their inmates on a starvation diet. But when Ada Birchall died this month she was described as a bag of bones.

Oldham Council, which runs the social services home which looked after her in Oldham, refused to accept responsibility for her death. The council claimed her health was the responsibility of her doctor.

A spokesperson for Age Concern said: "It is

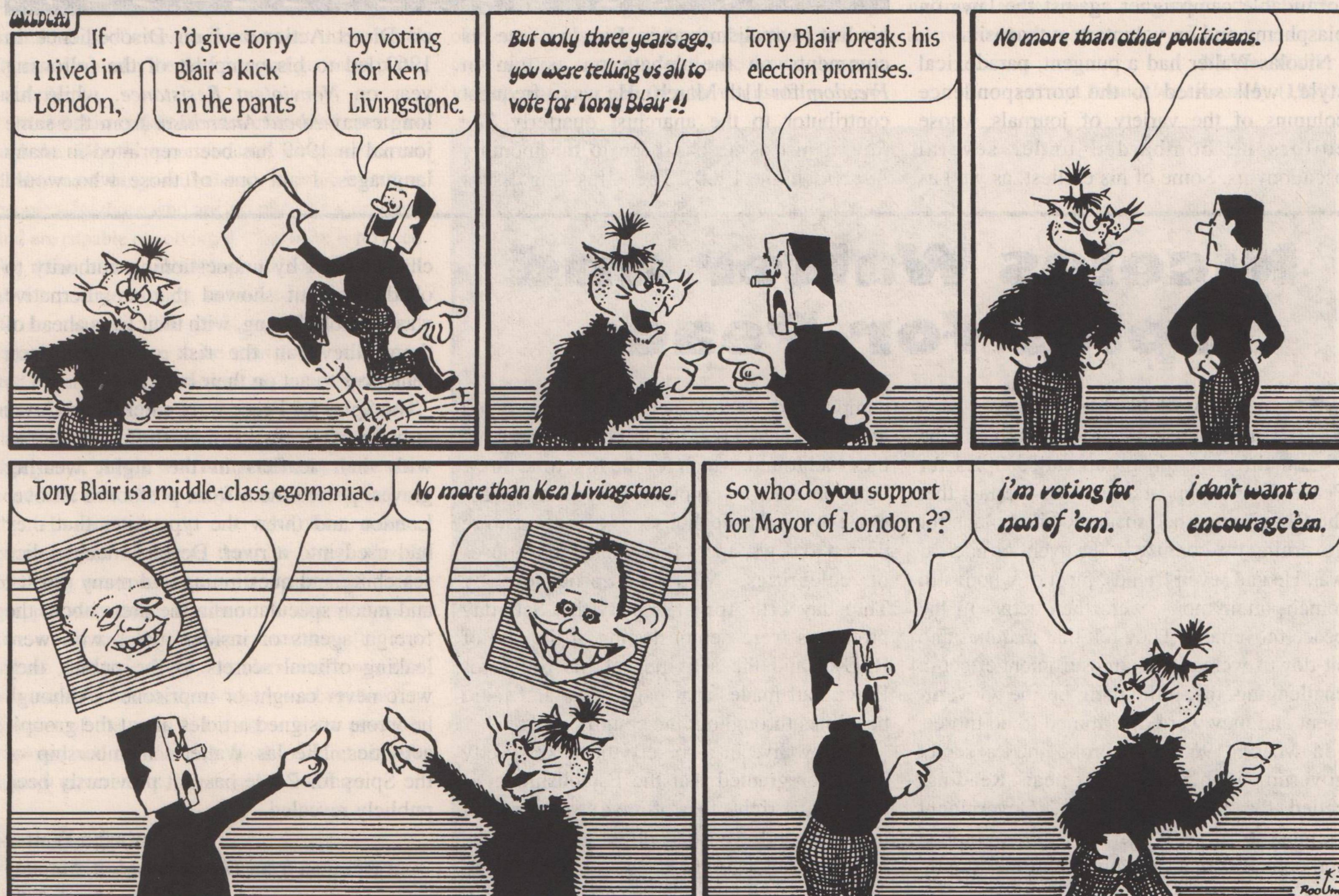
appalling that someone can go into a care home and have serious malnutrition which results in her death".

After her death the coroner called for a prompt review of procedures and the development of a local policy for assessing body weight.

The editor of the *Manchester Evening News* wrote: "Oldham's elected representatives have a duty to the town's elderly citizens to set up an immediate inquiry into this case to find out exactly how an old woman starved to death in the council's care".

Instead they passing the buck on to the doctors. One wonders how many more have starved to death unnoticed by the authorities.

BB



Everyone involved in anarchist propaganda in Britain will learn with great sorrow of the death of Nicolas Walter on 7th March 2000 at the age of 65. For many of us he was a warm and witty friend who knew more than any of us about anarchist history, its personalities and ideologies. He was also tireless writer of letters to editors and an effective speaker, debater and broadcaster.

He called himself a journalist and lecturer and took a certain pride in the fact that the same phrase described both his grandfathers, Karl Walter, who reported on the International Anarchist Congress of 1907, and the radical propagandist S. K. Ratcliffe.

Nicolas Walter was taught Russian by the RAF and history at Oxford and, after a spell as a teacher, worked in publishing and journalism (including six years as chief sub-editor for the *Times Literary Supplement*) until he found his niche with the Rationalist Press Association. He was based at Conway Hall, first as editor of *The New Humanist* and then as director, from 1975 until his retirement in 1999. He was the link-man drawing together venerable bodies like the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and the South Place Ethical Society. On those rare occasions when he was given Sunday morning radio time for humanist homilies, they were, like those of Barbara Smoker, distinguished by their warmth and common sense.

Inevitably his political position was that of anarchism, and together with his discovery of religious and political dissent came his involvement on the anti-nuclear movement. Walter was a founding member of the Committee of 100, and of the Spies for Peace (revealing the existence of Regional Seats of Government for use in a nuclear war) and was a participant in innumerable demonstrations. A founder of the Vietnam Action Group, he was imprisoned for two months for interrupting the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who was reading the lesson at a Brighton church in 1966.

When the squatters' movement re-emerged in 1968, as large numbers of houses compulsorily purchased by local authorities were lying empty, he and his first wife Ruth Oppenheim, were active in support of the homeless families involved, and with his considerable skills as an advocate, he was a formidable campaigner against the laws on blasphemy and on voluntary euthanasia.

Nicolas Walter had a pungent, paradoxical style, well suited to the correspondence columns of the variety of journals whose editors he bombarded under several pseudonyms. Some of his earliest, as well as

Nicolas Walter 1934-2000



Portrait by Clifford Harper

his last journalism was in *Freedom* (see his comments on the debate on asylum in *Freedom* for 11th March). He was a frequent contributor to the anarchist quarterly *The Raven*, just as he had been to the monthly *Anarchy* in the 1960s. There, his long essays

on Direct Action and on Disobedience in 1962 led to his pamphlet of the following year on *Nonviolent Resistance*, while his long essay *About Anarchism* from the same journal in 1969 has been reprinted in many languages. I am one of those who would

welcome a new reprint, though I gather that with his usual scrupulousness he insisted that it needed revision.

To my surprise, Nicolas attributed his introduction to anarchism to me, telling Richard Boston that it was a letter of his to the Manchester *Guardian* at the time of the Hungarian uprising and the Suez invasion in 1956 that led me to send him a copy of *Freedom*. But I can't imagine him ever being anything but an anarchist. Nearly thirty years earlier he had told the same interviewer that "in a sense I was an anarchist before I was born, in that I had an anarchist grandfather, but I was in fact brought up more or less as a Labour Party supporter – an extreme left-wing Labour Party supporter, and it gradually occurred to me that in fact I was an anarchist as well as being a socialist."

Many admirers regret that, because of the scrupulous regard for accuracy that distinguished all his writings, his own list of his publications was limited to *Nonviolent Resistance: Men Against War* (1963) and his two RPA books *Blasphemy Ancient and Modern* (1990) and *Humanism: What's in the Word* (1997). But perhaps his greatest literary strength was in his scrupulous editing of radical classics. The variety of the pamphleteers he had edited and introduced included Michael Bakunin, Edward Carpenter, Denis Diderot, Sébastien Faure, G.W. Foote, E.M. Forster, Peter Kropotkin, Etienne de la Boétie, Joseph Lane, Henry Seymour, G. Bernard Shaw, P.B. Shelley, Oscar Wilde, and Charlotte Wilson.

To take just the last two of these, he told me last month of his hopes for his edition of Wilde's marvellous essay on *The Soul of Man under Socialism* and it was good to learn from last week's *Freedom* that his edition of the anarchist essays of Charlotte Wilson is expected this year (she was the co-founder of this journal with Peter Kropotkin in 1886).

Nicolas faced worsening illness with deeply impressive stoicism, explaining seven years ago that "I contracted cancer in my thirties, began to suffer the long-term side-effects in my forties and am now suffering from progressive paralysis". When an interviewer asked why he did not sue the NHS, he asked what possible good could result from an attempt to reduce the budget available to his fellow-citizens.

With immense support from his second wife, Christine Morris, who had a busy work schedule of her own, he managed a demanding paraplegic life in central London, daring motorists to ignore his manual wheelchair as he shot across busy roads, and he planned a retirement built around research, on the assumption that he could propel his chair from his new house at Linslade to the new British Library by way of St Pancras.

But last month, increasingly unwell, he told friends how he had to get into hospital by squatting in Casualty, "and this week I was told I have cancer again. Next week I start treatment, but I don't have much hope ..."

He leaves two daughters, Susannah and Natasha, three grandchildren and three stepchildren and a host of friends remembering him as an exemplar of so many human virtues: wit, rationality, scepticism and consideration.

Colin Ward

A memorial meeting will be held on Sunday 4th June at 2pm in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. For information contact 020 8348 9955.

Obituaries also appeared on Monday 13th March in *The Independent* (by Natasha Walter), in *The Guardian* (by Donald Room) and on Tuesday 14th March in *The Times* (by Colin Ward).

Nicolas Walter and Spies for Peace

One story of his life has never been fully told, and that was his role in the direct action group called Spies for Peace. This group first exposed the fact that the Government had made detailed plans for governing the country in the event of nuclear war. He and seven friends, most of whom still remain anonymous, were then active in the peace movement. They felt that marches and sit-downs were not having sufficient effect in challenging the militarism of the Government and they were determined to do more.

In March 1963 they broke into a secret government headquarters near Reading, called the Regional Seat of Government Number 6, or RSG-6. They photographed and copied as many documents as they could, and then, in the days before desktop

computers or the Internet, they secretly typed and duplicated 3,000 leaflets explaining what they had found, which for the first time threw light on the Government's preparations for nuclear war. Those thousands of leaflets were posted to newspaper offices and to the houses of celebrities, MPs and protesters by Thursday 11th April 1963. By that Saturday protesters were demonstrating at the site of RSG-6, and the activities of the Spies for Peace had made front-page news and radio headlines throughout the country.

We now live in a society that takes pretty much for granted that the Establishment is not always right, that official secrecy is not infallible and even that direct action can be used to challenge bad laws and bad leaders. The Spies for Peace grew up in a society

characterised by unquestioning authority to obedience, but showed that an alternative was possible. Young, with their lives ahead of them, they ran the risk of long prison sentences to act on their beliefs.

The Spies for Peace were careful and clever at hiding their tracks: they stuffed envelopes with their leaflets in the night, wearing gloves, posted them from postboxes all over London and threw the typewriter that they had used into a river. Despite much police searching and questioning and many arrests, and much speculation in the press about the foreign agents or insider moles who were leaking official secrets to the public, they were never caught or imprisoned. Although he wrote unsigned articles about the group's activities, Nicolas Walter's membership of the Spies for Peace has not previously been publicly revealed.

Natasha Walter

extract taken from *The Independent*, Monday 13th March 2000

About Anarchy

Liberalism and socialism

Anarchism may be seen as a development from either liberalism or socialism, or from both liberalism and socialism. Like liberals, anarchists want freedom; like socialists, anarchists want equality. But we are not satisfied by liberalism alone or by socialism alone. Freedom without equality means that the poor and weak are less free than the rich and strong, and equality without freedom means that we are all slaves together. Freedom and equality are not contradictory, but complementary; in place of the old polarisation of freedom versus equality – according to which we are told that more freedom equals less equality, and more equality equals less freedom – anarchists point out that in practice you cannot have one without the other. Freedom is not genuine if some people are too poor or too weak to enjoy it, and equality is not genuine if some people are ruled by others. The crucial contribution to political theory made by anarchists is this realisation that freedom and equality are in the end the same thing.

Anarchism also departs from both liberalism and socialism in taking a different view of progress. Liberals see history as a linear development from savagery, superstition, intolerance and tyranny to civilisation, enlightenment, tolerance and emancipation. There are advances and retreats, but the true progress of mankind is from a bad past to a good future. Socialists see history as a dialectical development from savagery, through despotism, feudalism and capitalism, to the triumph of the proletariat and the abolition of the class system. There are revolutions and reactions, but the true progress of mankind is again from a bad past to a good future.

Anarchists see progress quite differently; in fact they often do not see progress at all. We see history not as a linear or a dialectical development in one direction, but as a dualistic process. The history of all human society is the story of a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, between the haves and the have-nots, between the people who want to govern and be governed and the people who want to free themselves and their fellows; the principles of authority and liberty, of government and rebellion, of state and society, are in perpetual opposition. This tension is never resolved, the movement of mankind is now in one direction, now in another. The rise of a new regime or the fall of an old one is not a mysterious break in development or an even more mysterious part of development, but is exactly what it seems to be. Historical events are welcome only to the extent that they increase freedom and equality for the whole people; there is no hidden reason for calling a bad thing good because it is inevitable. We cannot make any useful predictions of the future, and we cannot be sure that the world is going to get better. Our only hope is that, as knowledge and consciousness increase, people will become more aware that they can look after themselves without any need for authority.

Nevertheless, anarchism does derive from liberalism and socialism both historically and ideologically. Liberalism and socialism came before anarchism, and anarchism arose from the contradiction between them; most anarchists still begin as either liberals or socialists, or both. The spirit of revolt is seldom born fully grown, and it generally grows into rather than within anarchism. In a sense, anarchists always remain liberals and socialists, and whenever they reject what is good in either they betray anarchism itself. On one hand we depend on freedom of speech, assembly, movement, behaviour, and especially on the freedom to differ; on the other hand we depend on equality of possessions, on human solidarity, and especially on the sharing of power. We are liberals but more so, and socialists but more so.

Yet anarchism is not just a mixture of liberalism and socialism; that is social democracy, or welfare capitalism, the system which prevails in this

country. Whatever we owe to and however close we are to liberals and socialists, we differ fundamentally from them – and from social democrats – in rejecting the institution of government. Both liberals and socialists depend on government – liberals ostensibly to preserve freedom but actually to prevent equality, socialists ostensibly to preserve equality but actually to prevent freedom. Even the most extreme liberals and socialists cannot do without government, the exercise of authority by some people over other people. The essence of anarchism, the one thing without which it is not anarchism, is the negation of authority over anyone by anyone.

Democracy and representation

Many people oppose undemocratic government, but anarchists differ from them in also opposing democratic government. Some people oppose democratic government as well, but anarchists differ from them in doing so not because they fear or hate the rule of the people but because they believe that democracy is not the rule of the people – that democracy is in fact a logical contradiction, a physical impossibility. Genuine democracy is possible only in a small community where everyone can take part in every decision; and then it is not necessary. What is called democracy and is alleged to be the government of the people by themselves is in fact the government of the people by elected rulers and would be better called 'consenting oligarchy'.

Government by rulers whom we have chosen is different from and generally better than government by rulers who have chosen themselves, but it is still government of some people by other people. Even the most democratic government still depends on someone making someone else do something or stopping someone else doing something. Even when we are governed by our representatives we are still governed, and as soon as they begin to govern us against our will they cease to be our representatives. Most people now agree that we have no obligation to a government in which we have no voice; anarchists go further and insist that we have no obligation to a government we have chosen. We may obey it because we agree with it or because we are too weak to disobey it, but we have no obligation to obey it when we disagree with it and are strong enough not to do so. Most people now agree that those who are involved in any change should be consulted about it before any decision is made: anarchists go further and insist that they should themselves make the decision and go on to put it into effect.

So anarchists reject the idea of a social construct and the idea of representation. In practice, no doubt, most things will always be done by a few people – by those who are interested in a problem and are capable of solving it – but there is no need for them to be selected or elected. They will always emerge anyway, and it is better for them to do so naturally. The point is that leaders and experts do not have to be rulers, that leadership and expertise are not necessarily connected with authority. And when representation is convenient, that is all it is; the only true representative is the delegate or deputy who is mandated by those who send him and who is subject to instant recall by them. In some ways the ruler who claims to be a representative is worse than the ruler who is obviously a usurper, because it is more difficult to grapple with authority when it is wrapped up in fine words and abstract arguments. The fact that we are able to vote for our rulers once every few years does not mean that we have to obey them for the rest of the time. If we do, it is for practical reasons, not on moral grounds. Anarchists are against government, however it is built up.

State and class

Anarchists have traditionally concentrated their opposition to authority on the state – that is, the

institution which claims the monopoly of power within a certain area. This is because the state is the supreme example of authority in a society and also the source or confirmation of the use of authority throughout it. Moreover, anarchists have traditionally opposed all kinds of state – not just the obvious tyranny of a king, dictator or conqueror, but also such variations as enlightened despotism, progressive monarchy, feudal or commercial oligarchy, parliamentary democracy, soviet communism, and so on. Anarchists have even tended to say that all states are the same, and that there is nothing to choose between them.

This is an over-simplification. All states are certainly authoritarian, but some states are just as certainly more authoritarian than others, and every normal person would prefer to live under a less authoritarian rather than a more authoritarian one. To give a simple example, this statement of anarchism could not have been published under most states of the past, and it still could not be published under most states of both left and right, in both East and West; I would rather live where it can be published, and so would most of my readers.

Few anarchists still have such a simplistic attitude to an abstract thing called "the state", and anarchists concentrate on attacking the central government and the institutions which derive from it not just because they are part of the state but because they are the extreme examples of the use of authority in society. We contrast the state with society, but we no longer see it as alien to society, as an artificial growth; instead we see it as part of society, as a natural growth. Authority is a normal form of behaviour, just as aggression is; but it is a form of behaviour which must be controlled and grown out of. This will not be done by trying to find ways of institutionalising it, but only by finding ways of doing without it.

Anarchists object to the obviously repressive institutions of government – officials, laws, police, courts, prisons, armies, and so on – and also to those which are apparently benevolent – subsidised bodies and local councils, nationalised industries and public corporations, banks and insurance companies, schools and universities, press and broadcasting, and all the rest. Anyone can see that the former depend not on consent but on compulsion and ultimately on force; anarchists insist that the latter have the same iron hand, even if it does wear a velvet glove.

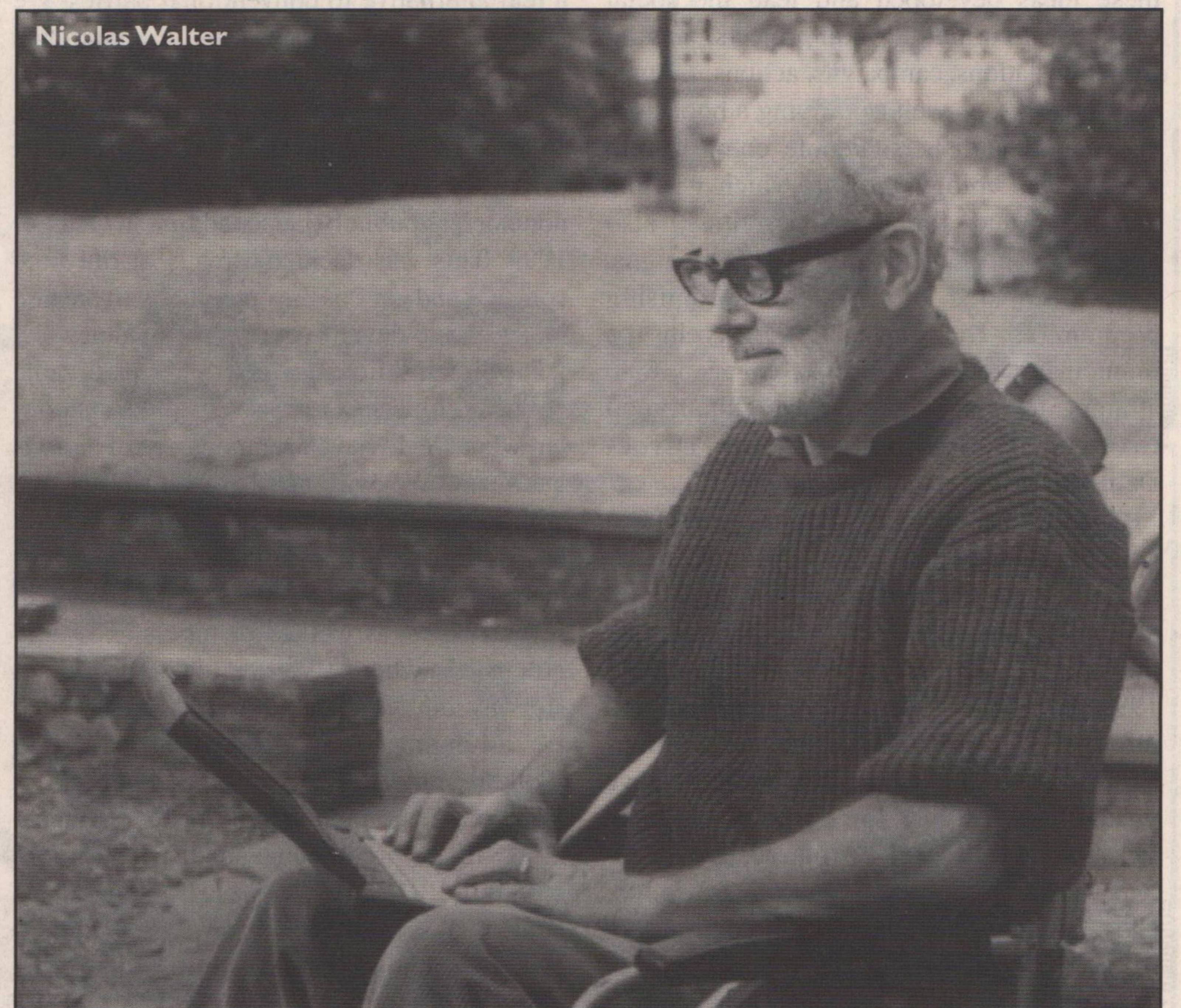
Nevertheless, the institutions which derive directly or indirectly from the state cannot be understood if they are thought of as being purely bad. They can have a good side, in two ways. They have a useful negative function when they challenge the use of authority by other such as cruel parents, greedy landlords, brutal bosses, violent criminals; and they have a useful positive

function when they promote desirable social activities, such as public works, disaster operations, communication and transport systems, art and culture, medical services, pension schemes, poor relief, education, broadcasting. Thus we have the liberatory state and the welfare state, the state working for freedom and the state working for equality.

The first anarchist answer to this is that we also have the oppressive state – that the main function of the state is in fact to hold down the people, to limit freedom – and that all the benevolent functions of the state can be exercised and often have been exercised by voluntary associations. Here the state resembles the medieval church. In the Middle Ages the church was involved in all essential social activities, and it was difficult to believe that the activities were possible without it. Only the church could baptise, marry and bury people, and they had to learn that it did not actually control birth, love and death. Every public act needed an official religious blessing – many still have one – and people had to learn that the act was just as effective without the blessing. The church interfered in and often controlled those aspects of communal life which are now dominated by the state. People have learnt to realise that the participation of the church is unnecessary and even harmful; what they now have to learn is that the domination of the state is equally pernicious and superfluous. We need the state just as long as we think we do, and everything it does can be done just as well or even better without the sanction of authority.

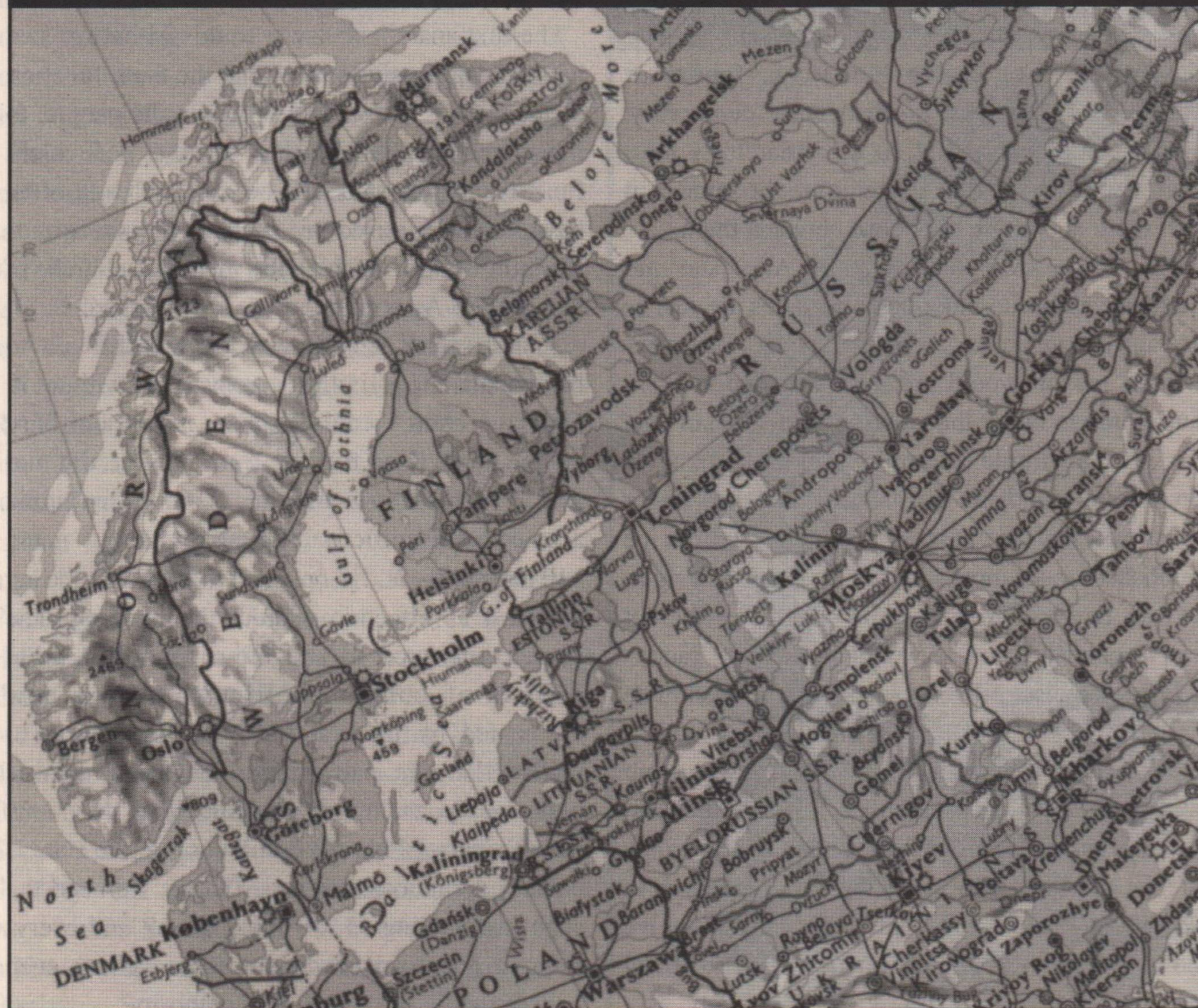
The second anarchist answer is that the essential function of the state is to maintain the existing inequality. Anarchists do not agree with Marxists that the basic unit of society is the class, but most agree that the state is the political expression of the economic structure, that it is the representative of the people who own or control the wealth of the community and the oppressor of the people who do the work which creates that wealth. The state cannot redistribute wealth fairly because it is the main agency of the unfair distribution. Anarchists agree with Marxists that the present system must be destroyed, but they do not agree that the future system can be established by a state in different hands; the state is a cause as well as a result of the class system, and a classless society which is established by a state will soon become a class society again. The state will not wither away – it must be deliberately abolished by people taking power away from the rulers and wealth away from the rich; these two actions are linked, and one without the other will always be futile. Anarchy in its truest sense means a society without either rulers or rich men.

Nicolas Walter
extract from *About Anarchy* (1969)



— NORWAY —

The Birth of a Democratic Alternativ



As October announced the end of yet another summer, several Norwegian cities saw posters, lectures, journals and leaflets announcing the establishment of a new political organisation. The organisation expressed its commitment to the struggle for direct democracy as a new political alternative, and has generally been well received by both ordinary people and existing radical circles.

The organisation is explicitly Communalist in orientation and presents itself as Demokratisk Alternativ. It is thus thoroughly grounded in radical ecological left approach, and is the first of its kind in the Nordic countries. But Demokratisk Alternativ did not come out of the blue. Since the early '90s the ideas of social ecology, as it was developed by Murray Bookchin, has been spread in radical circles in various parts of Norway.

First social ecology only attracted individuals coming out of the environmentalist and anti-militarist movement. These ideas got a certain foothold in the lower parts of Telemark, a county in the southern part of Norway. Small study groups was established, as well as a regional journal called *Okotopia*. Eventually these ideas developed and lead the social ecologists to initiate several projects, ranging from translations, campaigns, actions, lectures and seminars, as well as running a bookstore and being publishers. People connected to the Social Ecology Project, which was the general brand for these activities, also engaged in political activity and campaigns. Several enlisted on a non-compromising program as The Sauherad Greens in the municipal elections, as others engaged in an attempt to democratise a neighbourhood through The Committee for Direct Democracy in Porsgrunn.

Radicals involved in these projects has been active internationally, by attending the international conferences, first on social ecology in Dunoon 1995, then on libertarian municipalism in Lisbon 1998 and Plainfield 1999, as well as maintaining formal and informal contact with individuals and groups dedicated to the ideas. Individuals have visited The Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont, and in 1997 a group went over for two weeks to study with Murray Bookchin. Close international contact with comrades in many different parts of the world has been invaluable for the development of our own

political ideas and integrity.

The development from loosely organised study groups to a clearly defined political organisation seemed the only logical step. A social ecological analysis leads to political conclusions and the various projects and groups existed in some sort of vacuum. There was a void that had to be filled. The various projects were not properly coordinated and lacked a coherency, as well as a common external identity. This became more clear as time went by and our Communalist approach became more explicit. Communalist ideas demand organisation. As our vision is a society composed of self-managed democracies, in the form of municipal confederations, and a moral economy, today's irrational social order forces us to fight for this vision. As there were no existing Left alternatives with revolutionary credentials that gave us room to fight for our ideas, we had to undertake the establishment of such an organisation ourselves.

For many years the social ecologists worked in small groups but there was more and more talk about creating a genuine political organisation that could stand out as a real alternative to conventional parties. We arranged several meetings and a conference on the issue, and people was elected to draft a set of principles and by-laws, and finally in June 1998, Demokratisk Alternativ was officially formed. The organisation was nonetheless publicly launched first in October 1999. This was decided already at the June congress and gave us the opportunity to prepare material and develop our political stance.

The organisation has not yet considerable political influence or massive popular support, but what we do have is a good core of serious members. We will not let quantity be the criteria for the strength of our organisation but rather quality and dedication from our members. Still, we do have active groups in several cities, as well as members and study groups elsewhere. We are mainly based in Norway but have members in Sweden that are arranging study groups and initiating 'Folkbildningsgruppen for Socialekologi'.

The main common activity of the organisation will be producing and distributing the magazine *Direkte Demokrati*, which is published six times a year (we intend to make it a monthly), and sold both on the street and by subscription. The first issue of

the journal was printed in 700 copies and sold out only within a couple of weeks.

Demokratisk Alternativ is organised around local groups which is truly the backbone of the organisation while a secretariat coordinate and administer the daily affairs on a national level. We intend to build a strong regional structure where local groups are coordinated efficiently, but with intimate contact with administrative bodies.

If there is one lesson we have drawn, and that we want to convey to other radicals, it is the necessity of serious engagement with political theories and radical ideas. Undoubtedly the best way to engage in such work is through study groups, where ideas are read and discussed. We must never forget that our political project is, above all, an educational one, and to be best equipped to educate the public we must educate ourselves, both as individuals and as an organisation. All activism that is not guided by theory is blind, and there is a great need for visionary and ambitious activism today, as the social and ecological crisis intensifies.

As mentioned above Demokratisk Alternativ has been well received, but our work has only begun. Most of our work has so far been directed towards making ourselves known as an organisation but we will participate more actively in political life, also on the municipal level. We have several plans for our future work which, besides actively engaging in front organisations and radical campaigns, include participation in municipal elections on a Communalist program by the next crossroads, the municipal elections in 2003.

At the same time as we aim to build and consolidate our organisation it is clear that we cannot function in isolation, and we encourage social ecologists and libertarian municipalists in other countries to found their own organisations on Communalist principles. It is the necessary leap forward if we are to build a radical ecological and libertarian socialist alternative today.

It is truly interesting to see the positive response we have received from ordinary people. It is obvious that we are considered something new – something radically different from the exhausted Left, whether in the form of social democratic and green parties, small anarchist circles or centralised Marxist-Leninist parties. Demokratisk Alternativ has explicit international aims to strengthen a principled and innovative Left, and hope to encourage the consolidation of a Communalist tendency. Exactly how we will work to achieve this aim is not yet decided, and depends heavily on the situation in other countries. We need help from dedicated Communalists elsewhere to develop the organisational framework necessary to constitute a real challenge.

Although October was as ordinary as could be, it witnessed the birth of an extraordinary organisation. There is no other existing Communalist organisation in the world, neither has there been organisations that was explicitly Communalist in orientation. So, in spite of all, the future looks bright – Demokratisk Alternativ do have a good organisational framework, well-educated and dedicated members, and, most important, far-reaching ideas that may guide us beyond the limitations enforced by today's capitalist reality.

As we enter the 21st century there is a dire need of creating radical Left that is willing and able to challenge the nation state and the market economy. We will not accept capitalism as 'the end of history'. We will not accept the given. Capitalism and the state must be challenged by a authentic democratic alternative. Whether the launch of our organisation really signifies the birth of such a democratic alternative remains to see. One thing is certain though: If radicals do not fight for a rational future we risk loosing it.

Demokratisk Alternativ
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www.motkraft.net/demalt

Donations

January 2000

Freedom Fortnightly Fighting Fund

Upminster, IP, £5; Cambridge, Massachusetts, JBK, £14; Pwllheli, MJ, £6; Llanelli, MP, £5; Rochdale, JH, £3; Manchester, IRT, £5; Tunbridge, BL, £2; London, JJ, £10; Shrewsbury, CP, £6; London, anon, £1.75; New York, DF, £14; Basildon, AJ, £1; Farnham, S<, £2; Hebden Bridge, HS, £100; Ilford, SG, £6; Armagh, RG, £5; Middlesborough, KR, £9; West Derby, BE, £10; Oslo, RM, £9; Sheffield, PC, £2; Manchester, EB, £3; Ontario, FA, £5; Tyne-and-Wear, PR, £4; London, PC, £5; Manchester, IT, £2.

January total = £236
2000 total to date = £236

Freedom Press Overheads Fund

Upminster, IP, £4; Cambridge, Massachusetts, JBK, £13; Pwllheli, MJ, £5; London, MB, £2; Rochdale, JH, £3; Builth Wells, DP, £10; Tunbridge, BL, £2; Vallejo, California, DK, £3; Hillsborough, California, LM, £3; London, JJ, £6; New York, DF, £13; Basildon, AJ, £1; Farnham, S<, £2; Reading, RB, £2; Oslo, RM, £8; Sheffield, PC, £2; Glasgow, FG, £1; Manchester, TS, £6; London, RW, £2; London, DR, £500.

January total = £588
2000 total to date = £588

Raven Deficit Fund

Tunbridge, BL, £2; Cambridge, Massachusetts, JBK, £14; Upminster, IP, £5; London, JJ, £10; Basildon, AJ, £1; Farnham, S<, £2; Hebden

Bridge, HS, £50; Middlesborough, KR, £9; Oslo, RM, £9; Sheffield, PC, £2; Ontario, FA, £5; Huddersfield, RR, £2.

January total = £111
2000 total to date = £111

February 2000

Freedom Fortnightly Fighting Fund

London, DE, £22; Plymouth, Massachusetts, JB, £3; London, NW, £5; Alfreton, PCM, £3; Wolverhampton, JL, £2; Honolulu, DL, £20; Burlington, Ontario, DN, £3; USA, BP, £8; Milton Keynes, DB, £3; Edinburgh, DH, £1; Manchester, MG, £2; London, AH, £3; Australia, SH, £3.

February total = £83
2000 total to date = £319

Freedom Press Overheads Fund

Plymouth, Massachusetts, JB, £14; London, NW, £6; Hove, WG, £6; Wolverhampton, JL, £2; Honolulu, ML, £20; Paisley, JM, £2; France, WP, £4.

February total = £44
2000 total to date = £632

Raven Deficit Fund

London, NW, £5; Plymouth, Massachusetts, JB, £3; Huddersfield, RR, £2; Alfreton, PCM, £3; Honolulu, ML, £20; Burlington, Ontario, DN, £3; Milton Keynes, DB, £3; Wales, RE, £6; Huddersfield, RR, £1.

February total = £46
2000 total to date = £157

Anarchism moving onwards?

Dear *Freedom*,

Do you publish letters anywhere in your journal? If so I'd like you to print this one. It's not very complimentary and it doesn't subscribe to the 'rant amongst ourselves aren't we revolutionary and dangerous' philosophy so popular amongst anarchists, but here goes.

I've just been web surfing and was surprised to find your journal online. I read the archive section on the Brixton riots with a mixture of nostalgia and irritation. I used to hang around the anarchist bookshop in Brixton sometime in the early '80s at an impressionable age and sadly got sucked into anarchism for a few years before I grew up a bit (like so many others). The punks I was hanging around with at the time had all learned their slogans and had adopted quite successfully the rules and regulations of Anarcho-coolness (mention boring French philosophers in casual conversation, buy large quantities of oatmeal from Islington food collectives, under no circumstances say 'cunt', etc). As these were my friends and they suddenly started taking the piss out of me for strange reasons, I gradually learned that these attacks would stop if I complied with a simple set of rules (see above examples). As we explored more deeply the heady and dangerous anarchist scene, I continued to pick up more tips and could direct my youthful angst at worthy targets. I was eventually accepted as cool and felt I belonged to a select terrorist-like organisation full of underground bookshops and collective meals. We all went to the Brixton riots and threw lots of bricks and hoped for the revolution. This was fun, I have to say. Genuinely one of the greatest days of my life. But, after a couple of years I started to have my suspicions. If all this thought was free why did everyone come out with the same stuff all the time? I mean, you'd think one of them would keep on saying 'cunt', but no. Also, why did the anarchist scene attract such a bunch of nutters? Not eccentrics or visionaries, but people with mental diseases. My period of doubt was largely spent in Australia, where I met lots of other anarchists. Their main preoccupation seemed to be drinking 'flagons' of wine, printing tedious tracts on animal vivisection and growing herbs (which possibly counteracted the detrimental effect of the wine on their livers). One of them was collecting hundreds and hundreds of very heavy electrical components and valves in the attempt to make a computer. He's probably still at it,

bless him. I also started to realise that being an anarchist really meant extreme conformity to a very oppressive and strict set of rules. The monster that was '70s feminism was still abroad in the land and potential guilt trips lurked around every sentence. Difficult to be okay with yourself at 20 years old knowing that you're a potential rapist waiting to happen. I did voice many of my religious doubts to my fellow zealots, but was met with such a wall of stern morality and accusations of 'fascism' that I decided these things were best left unsaid. I remember a particularly interesting conversation at that time regarding 'pigs' (policemen, politicians, heads of multinational corporations, people who found attractive women attractive ... that lot). The conversation was whether children of pigs should be shot come the revolution. One said 'yes' the other (a very middle-class girl desperately covering up her North Shore background) said 'no' but it would be okay if the parents were. I dared to say this all sounded suspiciously like Dachau (imagine the piles of Italian shoes at such a cull) but was met with stoic silence so I shut up. Anyway, I came back to England and tried to divorce myself completely from the anarchist scene. This proved as difficult as leaving a Californian religious sect. Also the guilt was unbelievable and I wrestled with my own thoughts to find out what I actually believed in. The pig killers from Australia came over to 'do Europe' and, naturally enough, stayed in Brixton for six months or so to acquire some street cred before returning home to sun, beaches and comfy white middleclassness. I went to see them in their squat along Railton Road one day. She - holding court to a coven of self-congratulatory wimmin seated around a large table and eating their rice dishes (presumably liberated from some local shopkeeper struggling to keep his family afloat). All the wimmin were from Australia, or Surrey or Oxford, and bragged continually about their run ins with the 'cops' (who the fuck talks about 'cops' in Britain?) and stealing from shops etc., etc. He - pissed off at a bunch of local blacks who'd verbally attacked them all one day in the street for fucking up the area and attracting the 'cops'. They were both claiming two dole cheques (more bragging) and gleefully conducting a scorched earth policy until that happy time when the police would come after them and they could flee the area, thus returning home with tales of unspeakable oppression and privation and leaving the real residents to carry the can. By this time they all made me want to throw up. But, against my better judgement I continued to flirt with the anarchist scene, going along to 'stop the city' just for the crack. This was another turning point as I witnessed several teenage zealots with green dreadlocks vainly try to convert bankers of their own age to the joys of living with twelve other revolutionaries all smelling of wet dog and patchouli oil. One of the bankers who bothered to stop and talk to this crowd argued them into the floor. Presumably a rampant Thatcherite, I found I thoroughly respected him, not for his views but because he actually had some, and could conduct an argument. He'd actually thought about what he believed in.

After the green dreadlocks had run out of slogans they had nowhere to go. Their main speaker was lost for words and argument, and went very red (which contrasted very fetchingly with the hair). All his mates resorted to taunts, threats and slogans and the banker got intimidated and walked off. But he'd won and they all knew it. Also, the banker was working class. And, surprise

surprise, he wanted to make some money. Good for him I say.

So, what's the upshot of all those '70s, Stoke Newington, Elgin Avenue, Islington, etc., '80s anarchists in Brixton, etc? Run down, violent, working class area = squatters = squatter industries (health food/anarchist bookshops, etc.) = middle class politicos pretending to be working class = health food restaurants and cafes with leaflets and posters = wine bars = a nice diffusion of the area and no more nasty black people but its still a cool place to live. And you get to slum it for a while with authentic working class people. By the way, it's interesting how anarchists are always looking down their noses at people slumming it isn't it?

Congratulations then Peter (why don't you use your real names in the paper ... hey, nobody cares) *et al* ... you finally did it! Against all the odds you turned one of the most run down and depressed areas in London into a safe place for decent Middle Class Bohemians like yourselves. The stormtroopers of the middle class liberate yet another area from the unrevolutionary clutches of the working classes! I expect you've moved further afield now and are working your magic somewhere else. Now, you may wonder why I'm writing you this somewhat bitter letter all these years later. The reason is I cannot understand why you still believe in all this crap. Maybe the anarchist scene has actually moved on in the last few years, but when I was involved it was depressingly rooted in nineteenth century philosophy with a sprinkling of '60s situationism (arty, boring and much more interesting as an album cover concept). Oh, and let's not forget Spain 1936. They took over the trams didn't they (yawn)? The fact is, is that unbeknownst to you, you neatly further the spread of what you're all supposed to be against. You gentrify cities, diffuse areas, give governments excuses to bring about oppressive laws which largely affect those who have nowhere else to run to and fuck up impressionable kids like I once was. I'm still angry about it (can you tell?). You screw with people's minds and no, not in a way that leads to intelligent other glimpses of the world. You simply create divisions, internally and externally from which people have a hard time coming back from intact. I didn't throw the baby out with the bathwater - there was a lot of good in all of that too (women's

rights, anti-racism, etc.) but let's face it, it was something that ordinary people strove towards at that time anyhow. And it got taken seriously because non-freaks entered the debate (god bless Channel 4). I learned by rote, along with everyone else, how families were 'bad' and collective upbringings were 'good'. I do not believe this, nor did I ever but somehow my family has been lost to me ever since. I loved my parents until I realised they were uncool and made great targets and I've never been able to quite return despite what I really feel. Anarchism is a smug club for anarchists ... it's not for the rest of the world ... nobody wants it. It's a rite of passage for disaffected middle class teenagers like I was and crusty old '60s and '70s hangovers like yourselves (I presume). And maybe if you recognised that, you'd stop pretending the state is scared of you. You're a godsend, for fuck's sake.

Sam Morrow

Darwinian Right

Dear *Freedom*,

Thanks to Donald for the title of 'Social Darwinism'. My interest comes from lifting Masters of Philosophy from EF! Gathering. They were adamant that Darwinian scientists were using the wrong paradigm.

They quoted Karl Popper as source. Popper does not have to be wrong about everything, he might be right in that.

Maybe Darwin misunderstood Wallace's later attack on Spencer's 'Social Darwinism' when he asked why Wallace was disagreeing with Darwin. But if Darwin made no such attack himself, is he not then a right winger?

But was the disagreement to do with the mechanism of natural selection? Is Spencer or Darwin the source of the superman idea of evolution that Wallace was contradicting with his idea of an evolving community? Unbalanced evolution leads to extinction.

Ilyan

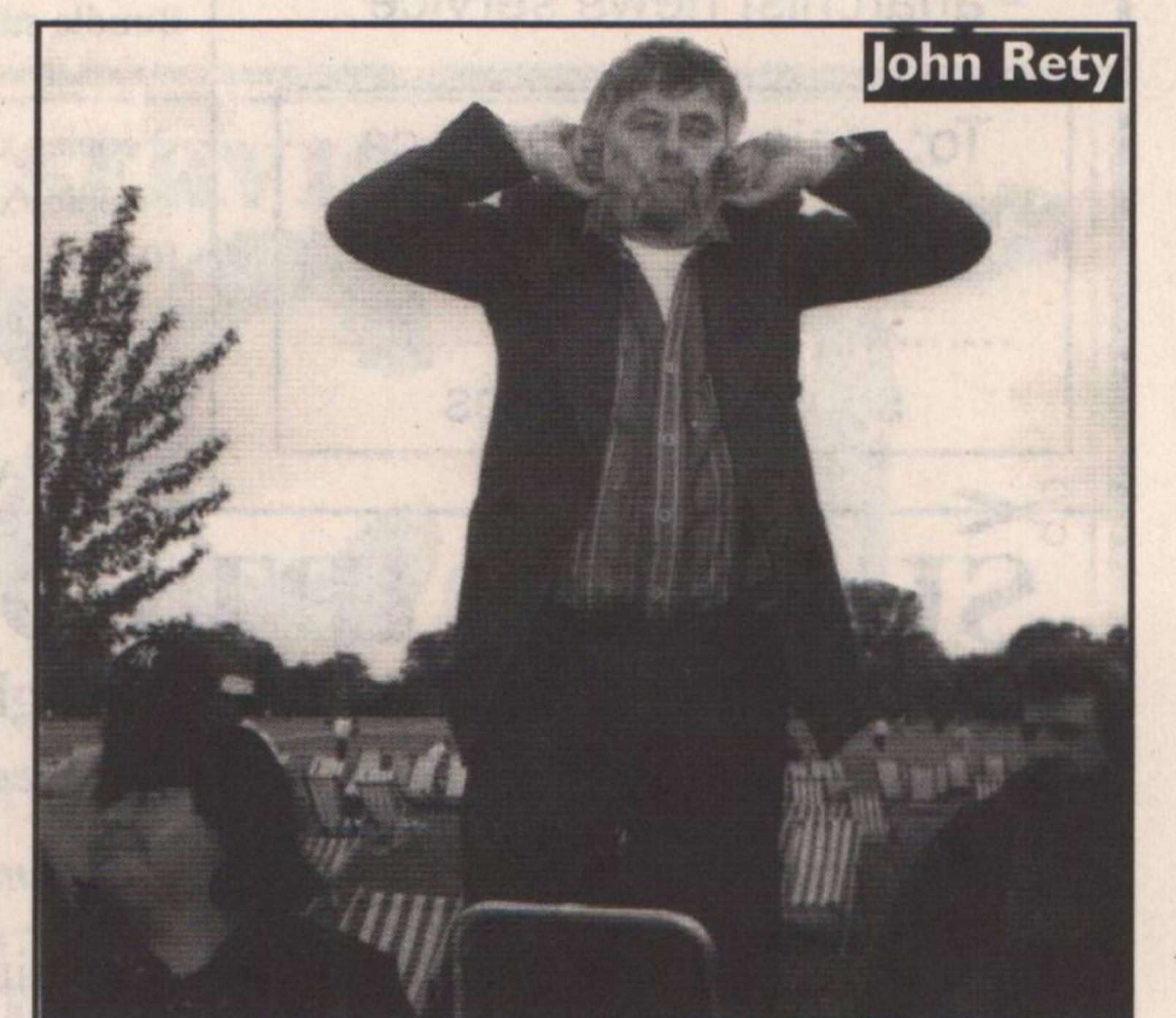
P.S. If anyone would like the text of Alfred Russel Wallace's 1913 political book *The Revolt of Democracy*, send an sae and about a poundsworth of stamps to: Plebs' College, 137 Priory Street, Camarthen, SA31 1LR for a floppy disc containing much more besides (for PC in ASCII format).

Anarchists at Speakers' Corner

Dear *Freedom*,

Good to read in *Freedom* (11th March 2000) of AH's plan to revive an anarchist presence at Speakers' Corner, but whoever wrote the editorial parenthesis at the end was to some degree inaccurate. Philip Sansom was definitely the finest of all the anarchist orators and bids fair to being the finest orator of them all, but Philip stopped speaking regularly at Hyde Park in about 1960 - returning for special occasions like Mayday meetings or rallies by the Stuart Christie defence committee at the time of his imprisonment in Spain, etc.

After that John Rety (particularly) and yours truly kept the black and red flag flying at Speakers' Corner until the mid 1980s, with much-appreciated help from such as Nigel Wilson, John Pilgrim and others. Donald Room had also been a stalwart in the '50s and '60s. At one time we had three anarchist platforms in the park - but the extent to which Gerry Bree and Bill Dwyer could be contained within the very properly wide framework of anarchism could be said to be debatable.



It would be good to see an anarchist presence in the park revived.

I was extremely sorry to read about the death of Nicolas Walter. He was an extremely able - indefatigable - advocate of the anarchist cause, courageous, extremely knowledgeable, a good friend and a very fine human being - a rare combination of attributes indeed.

Jim Huggon

[See pages 4 and 5 of this issue for obituaries and more on Nicolas Walter]

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FREEDOM fortnightly
ISSN 0016 0504

Published by Freedom Press
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
Printed in Great Britain by Aldgate Press,
London E1 7RQ

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is made to cover the cost of the room.

— PROGRAMME 2000 —

- 24th March** Further Thoughts on Situation-
ism (symposium)
- 31st March** General discussion
- 7th April** Chomsky's Anarchism: an
illustrated discussion
- 14th April** General discussion
- 21st April** Bank holiday (no meeting)
- 28th April** General discussion
- 5th May** The Lessons of Mayday
(discussion)
- 12th May** 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
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www.freespeech.org/mayday2k

mayday2000-subscribe@egroups.com

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for further information please call
Martin on 0161 7079652

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(forming now)

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