

FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

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50p

After the elections and events in Belgrade, we say ...

It woz the people wot won it!

A detested but apparently immovable old tyrant. Protesters riot in the streets. The tyrant's supporters turn their backs on the dear leader. The boss's oldest friends suggest that, yes, perhaps now would be a good time to retire to the country. It's ten years since this joyful sequence of events saw Mrs Thatcher's downfall in Britain, and they were repeated earlier this month when the people of Serbia overthrew another elected dictator.

Sloboda is the Serbian word for freedom. But the Balkans stopped being a place for jokes long ago and it is with bitterness that their inhabitants point out the incongruity of Slobodan Milosevic's name. Nothing in his political life has lived up to the early promise of his birth certificate. He came late to politics, but soon proved to be a master of the game. He was, simply, better at winning and keeping power than anybody else. Coming to prominence in the late 1980s, he almost immediately had to face a dilemma. How to keep his grip on power with the advent of the ballot box? The answer of course was nationalism, a particularly virulent form. Not only did it propel him to the Serbian presidency in 1988, it also ensured his domination

for years to come. Smooth move, Slobster.

Fast forward to 2000. There are, we suggest, four lessons to be learned from the latest revolution. The first – surprise surprise in an anarchist paper – is that politicians have nothing to offer us except blood, toil, tears and sweat. Our own, to be precise. The history of politicians who opposed Milosevic is a story of manipulation, ego and vendetta. In other words, just another day at the office. Following Slobbo's lead opposition bosses too jumped on the nationalist bandwagon (when was the last time a politician didn't clamber aboard?). The two prime contenders for his crown had to distinguish themselves in other ways, so Draskovic stood for nationalism plus a return of the monarchy while Seselj stood for nationalism plus a lot more nationalism. Both were guilty of supporting atrocities during the wars of the early 1990s. Naturally this didn't stop Draskovic being praised as a statesman in the west, any more than it stopped Milosevic from being when it suited his counterparts here.

The second lesson comes from how the revolution happened. When Milosevic's Socialist Party was defeated in the 1996 local

elections he refused to accept the result. Several months of massive street protests made the government totter, but protesters obediently followed opposition bosses' calls to quit in favour of obtaining change by constitutional means. Funnily enough, the minute opposition politicians supped at the monster's table all their dreams of change vanished. They happily took any goodies the president offered and got on with the real business of squabbling over who would finally succeed him. This time round has been different, and the difference has been the emergence in 1999 of Otpor (Resistance). What began as a students' movement working for academic freedom quickly saw that lack of freedom in the university couldn't be separated from a lack of freedom elsewhere. Its organisation was anarchistic. The state found it almost impossible to repress something with no membership list and no leadership structure, which had no head to buy or lop off. Remembering the compromises of 1996 Otpor also refused any role in party politics, preferring to run alone and set a pace for all other opponents of the regime to follow.

The third lesson is an old one, the weakness of power. Right in the end triumphs over might, if right speaks its name loudly enough. Where were his 80,000 police when Milosevic needed them? Sensibly they deserted him. "They're giving up, saying they didn't want to fight against the people", one demonstrator reported. Journalists who had previously sung the official song made the same choice. All these props of the dictator's power were human beings with the same experiences as other members of the society they lived in. They could lie to other people, maybe, but they couldn't lie to themselves.

The fourth lesson starts now. Otpor campaigned for what it called 'free and fair elections', but why? What Yugoslavia has shown is that we don't need politicians to run our lives for us, or to make our lives better. We can do it for ourselves. It wasn't an election that overthrew Slobodan but the combined efforts of the people. It is us who must overthrow all the other sources of our oppression too.



Serbian demonstrators storm the parliament building in Belgrade

RSG

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To reformists outside the Labour Party, we say ...

Socialist Alliances - no thanks!

In the latest issue of *Red Pepper* (October 2000), Mike Marqusee sets out his agenda for the series of 'Socialist Alliances' forming around the UK. The title ought to give the game away; 'Unity Around the Ballot Box'. Marqusee is concerned by the "deepening cynicism about politics in general; and the increasingly conscious determination not to vote." His solution to this is to build a left reformist project which sees its primary task as reasserting the "historic championship of the principles and practice of universal suffrage." Marqusee's article is backed up by an editorial which pleads with Labour MPs to join a campaign against the 'awakening of right wing populism' which the magazine sees located in part in the recent fuel tax protests. The right wing aspect of the fuel blockades is, apparently, borne out in its 'resistance to taxation'.

Faced with the collapse of any notion of Keynesian accommodation between capital and labour, that section of the left which has pinned its 'r-r-r-revolutionary' hopes on tailing social democracy, has, rather than conclude that reformism is a dead end, particularly when the ruling class decides not to play the game, decided to try and rebuild the reformist project outside the Labour Party, and give us all lessons in 'good citizenship' along the way.

Confused? You will be. The Tory Shadow Cabinet member Francis Maude, in a speech

to the Bow Group, expressed his concern recently that the fuel protests were "prompted by a sense that the politicians had in some really profound way broken the covenant of trust with the people". Popular disenchantment with politics is, Maude grasps, a result of the betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of 'ordinary people' by politicians from all parties. This refusal to accept the promises of Parliamentary democracy ought to present an opportunity for all those on the left who have long preached that the game of politics covers up the fundamental inequality between labour and capital which is the essence of bourgeois democracy. There is, as *Red Pepper* note, a danger that a "growing number of people who feel left out and hard done by" might "in the absence of any principled lead, search for easy scapegoats." This begs the question, though, of what a 'principled lead' might be. More and more people refuse to buy any longer the notion that the Labour Party represents working class interests. (The left which saw the flirtation with local government as an attempt to build a pluralist socialism "has never been able to grasp that the experience of local government was precisely what broke the working classes' faith in Labour - the idea that the biggest slum landlord and the most ruthless employer in town could somehow manifest itself as a progressive force nationally was, as anyone who paid rent to a Labour council realised long ago, patent nonsense.) What results is a

profound disenchantment with the *status quo*. Both Tory and New Labour have in recent memory pursued ruthlessly anti-working class agendas. No-one takes the Lib Dems seriously. Just when the game appears to be up, along comes the ghost of the Labour left to seek to repair the social contract. Marqusee suggests that "a vital part of the left's electoral intervention must be to highlight the democratic deficit within the existing democratic process", which amounts to saying 'Vote for me, so I can show you how little I can deliver'. Given that the reason most people don't vote is because they're already well aware of the 'democratic deficit', any electoral intervention can only play out as an attempt to shore up the system, a last desperate fudge over what is conceded in the *Red Pepper* editorial, that "those looking for real changes in their conditions of life are forced to construct a new politics from the bottom up". Such politics will necessarily involve the self-organisation of working class communities in ways the left can't control (the hit squads during the miners strike are a case in point). Moreover, so wedded is the left to the state that it is sick to its soul at the possibility of such 'organisation from below' and doesn't trust the plebs to come up with the right answers without its help. Hence the lesson in 'good citizenship' embodied in its characterisation of the fuel protests as reactionary simply because they are 'against taxation'.

There is nothing inherently progressive about taxation in a capitalist society. It used to be the case that the richest in society moaned about the 'iniquity' of taxation. No longer. The policy of the Thatcher government was, as the CPAG described it, one of "intensified inequality through tax cuts for the rich and benefit cuts for the poor." By 1991 52% of the tax cuts implemented since 1979 had gone to the top 10% of income earners. Under New Labour, the redistribution of wealth from poor to rich has been continued, with cuts to the basic rate of income tax directly benefiting those who earn the most, and the lowest rate of corporation tax in Europe. 'Progressive taxation' was abandoned by the ruling class when it gave up its attempts at conciliation in the 1970s and declared the 'class war' on again instead. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation records that by the end of 1999 26% of the British population were living in poverty, measured in terms of low income and mutual deprivation of necessities. In 1983 14% of households lacked three or more necessities because they could not afford them. That proportion had increased to over 24% by 1999. So much for New Labour's war on poverty. Most people (so far as opinion polls show) want more spent on the NHS and education, on pensioners and on the elimination of poverty. They also want an end to stealth taxes such as tax on fuel (which invariably hit the poor hardest). All of this suggests, not a rightward-drifting new

selfishness, but a gradual alienation from a system where the average earner pays more to support a system of social protection which delivers less and less. Under New Labour, personal taxation has risen by eight pence in the pound, while corporation tax has been reduced to 30%, and capital gains tax levied on higher rate tax payers has been cut from 40% to 10%. As George Monbiot reveals in his book *The Captive State* (Macmillan, 2000): "To some corporations operating in Britain, taxation levels are



An innovative banner!

irrelevant, for they manage to pay nothing ... News Corporation Rupert Murdoch's main British holding company, made £1.4bn in profits in the twelve years to 1999. But as a result of legal tax avoidance measures it has paid no net British corporation tax." Moreover, contra the left, you cannot cherry pick progressive elements from taxation policy and ignore the rest. Taxation funds the arming of the RUC and British army as well as paying the (low) wages of nurses and teachers.

Errico Malatesta once observed that "the government does not change its nature ... if it administers public services, it always ignores the interests of the working masses, except in so far as is necessary to make the masses willing to endure their share of taxation." If more and more people have begun to recognise the 'interests of government', those of us who purport to oppose the "brutal, violent arbitrary domination of the few over the many" should recognise the opportunity. If, however, those who pretend to be opponents of capital continue to seek to dally with a reformism the ruling class has long abandoned, and thereby obfuscate the fact that "the only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it" (Malatesta, *Il Programma Anarchico*) then the only beneficiaries will be precisely the forces the likes of *Red Pepper* fear - the BNP and the Tory right, left to posture unchallenged as opponents of the status quo by the 'good citizens' of the reformist left.

Nick S.

Widespread abuse in Prague jails after S26

After the S26 protest against the IMF and World Bank in Prague last month, up to a thousand protesters were held in Czech jails. The conditions they were held in were more than usually degrading and brutal. One American protester, Paul Rosenthal, released after forty hours in the Olsanska prison said "What is happening inside the Czech jails is more than frightening. People have no rights, they are being beaten severely, they are disappearing. Women are being forced to strip in front of male guards and perform exercises. People with serious medical problems have been denied help". Others released confirmed that prisoners were denied food, water and sleep. Beatings were common, the greatest brutality being directed at Czech and Jewish prisoners. Of course, the mainstream media and politicians roundly condemned the protesters and the anti-globalisation

movement as mindless thugs. Crap! But for the thugs in uniform who attacked the protesters, there was only sympathy and respect. After all, "if anyone feels they have been badly treated they can go to the department of complaints" as a police PR woman explained.



Police arrest an S26 demonstrator in Prague

Travelling from Hannover to Prague ...

Nix Da 2000 Karavane

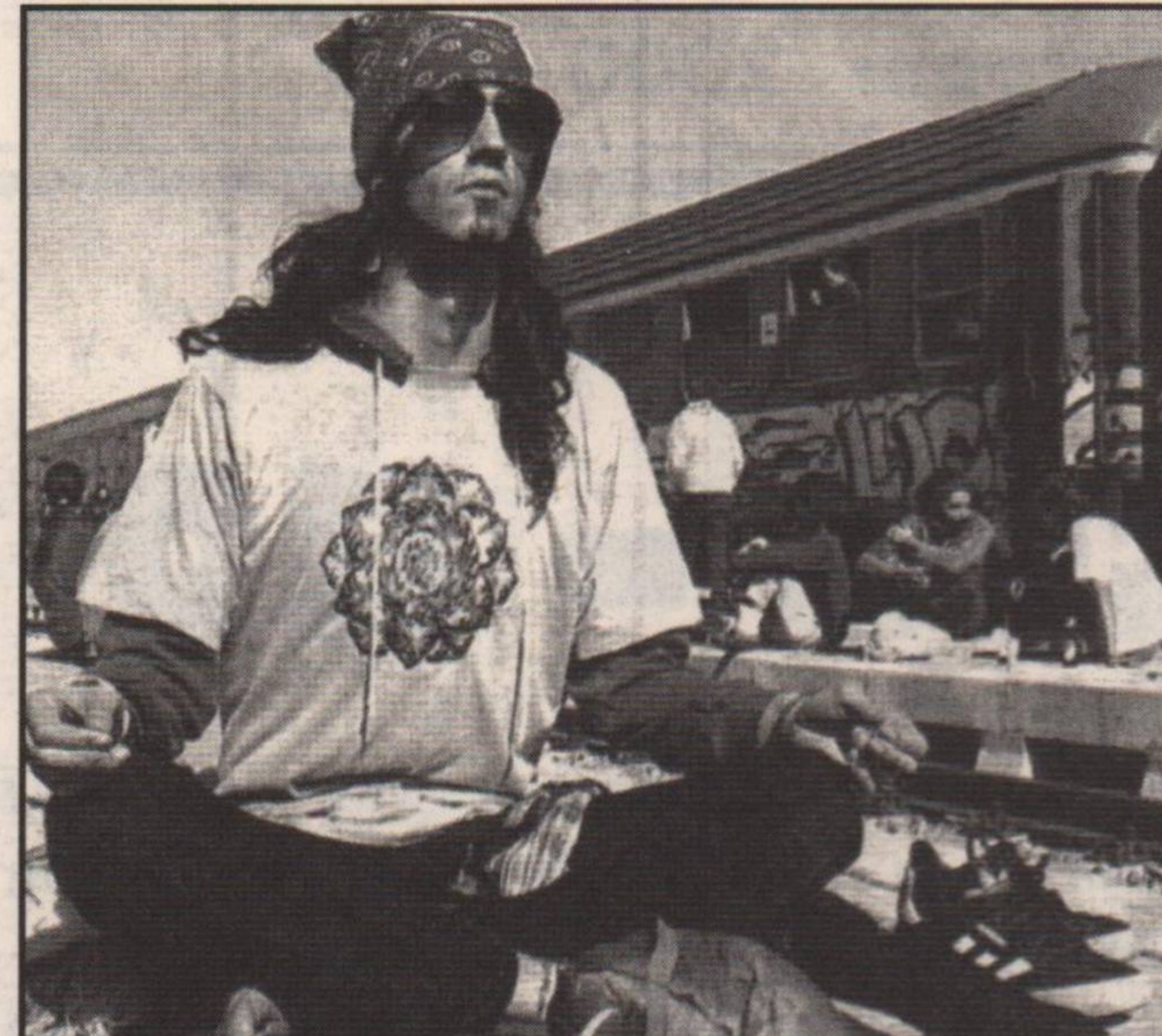
Some weeks ago in *Freedom* there was an article about the Nix Da 2000 Bicycle Karavane from Hannover to Prague. I travelled to Hannover to participate and hope that readers of *Freedom* find the following report of interest.

There is a strong anarchist scene in Germany. Young people are proud to call themselves anarchists and have a clear understanding of what that means for them. There are five big squats in the Hannover region and also a well-established *wagenplatz* or trailer park. On the journey across Germany the Karavane stopped at a number of such places. The *wagenplatz* in Hannover was a community of people who had built their own wagons and communal areas, including vegetable gardens and water heating. The *wagenplatz* in Goettingen was especially vibrant and keenly political.

The meeting point for the Karavane was at a large squat in Hannover called 'Sprenkel'. Food and accommodation was free though voluntary contributions were required to cover costs (this was common practice throughout the journey and worked very well). The Karavane was international with participants from England, the US, Australia and Switzerland.

About forty cyclists started out on 10th September accompanied by two trucks, one tractor and three trailers. The idea was to create a mobile political message: that we are

free to travel as and where we want. Often, this led to direct confrontation with the police. In Gera, for example, two rows of fully armoured riot cops blockaded our route



An S26 protester at the Czech border ...

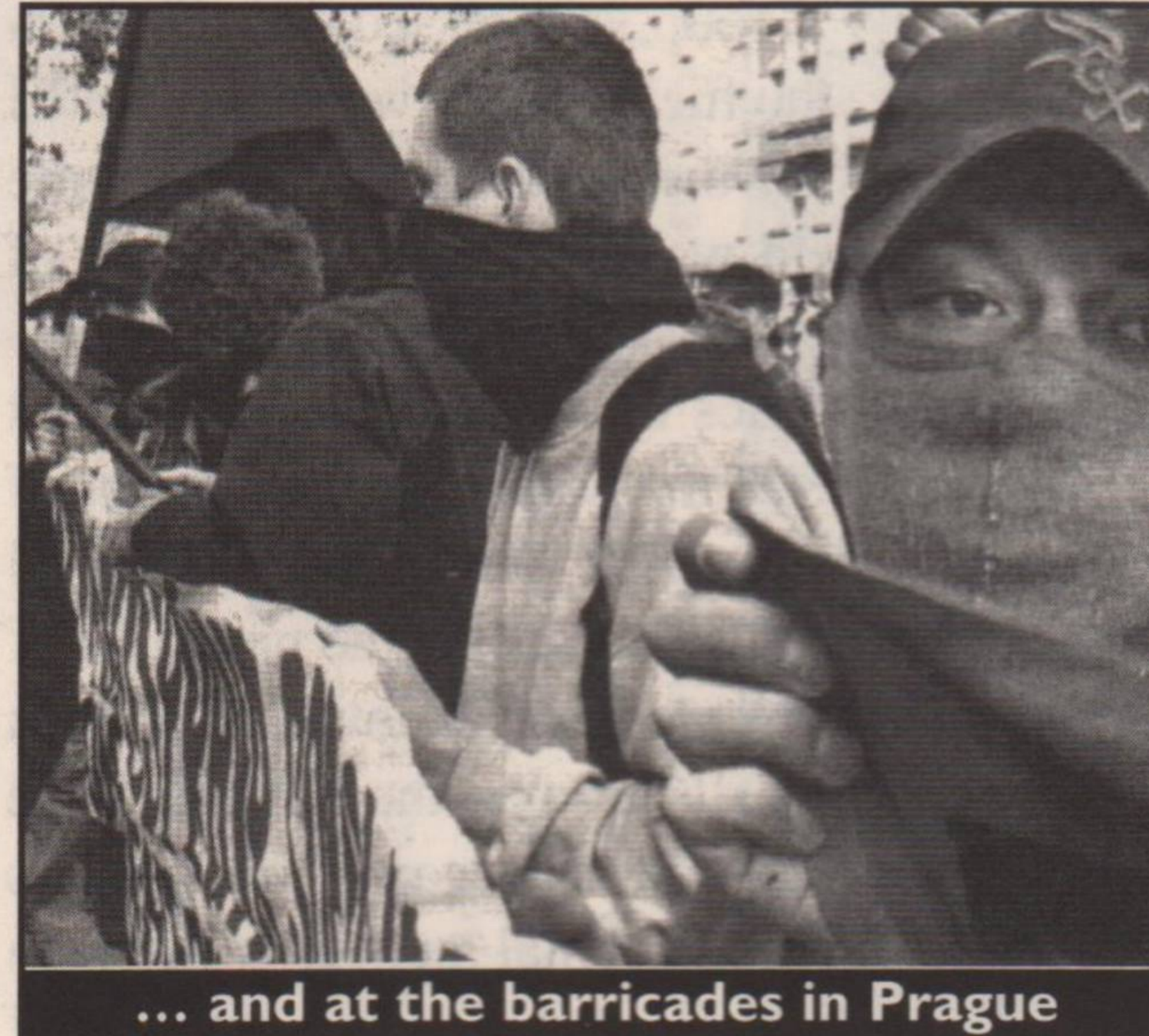
and only relented after our stubborn refusal to move from the main road. Typically the police escort numbered two motorbikes and two or three police vans. Occasionally we had a helicopter escort too. But the idea was also to raise awareness of the IMF/ World Bank conference in Prague and to show opposition to global capitalism. All the trailers had banners and painted messages of resistance, and there was a sound system blasting out our message and some fine tunes.

The two-week journey was overtly anarchist in nature. For me this was positive living anarchism and truly inspirational. Much to the irritation of the police (and amusement for the rest of us) there were no individuals responsible for any aspect of the Karavane. The tractor, for example, temporarily escaped legal documentation on the grounds that it was not owned by anyone! Unfortunately the Czech border police were not impressed by this anarchist principle and refused to allow the tractor into the country.

Anyone who wanted to drive could, thus I drove a tractor for the first time in my life. Anyone who wanted to cook did. Anyone who was keen to plot the route was given a map. Slowly a strong group responsibility developed. Questions such as 'should I ...?' or 'can I ...?' became less frequent as everyone realised that there was no-one but themselves to make the Karavane work. Thus the fires were made, the cooking done, the dishes washed, the water collected, tents erected spontaneously and efficiently.

Other anarchist principles were put into practice too. Group decisions were made at plenums. These sessions were voluntary but there was encouragement to attend. They were not always successful and because of the length of time they took often dissolved simply because of general fatigue. As the Karavane progressed the group became

larger and the group meetings more long-winded. At crucial moments, such as at the Czech border or when faced with the need to make firm and quick decisions this proved disastrous. However, despite the shortcomings of the meetings the Karavane continued to make progress. We started and stopped and things just seemed to get done. This is one consequence of anarchist practice that I took encouragement from, another even more liberating consequence was freedom from the pressure of deadlines. Often the police would say that they expected decisions in one hour, two hours, etc. Often newcomers to the Karavane (people were joining the group all the time) would be frustrated at the slow pace, 'we must get going ...' they would say. But there was no 'must' and no



... and at the barricades in Prague

requirement to have things done by a certain time. For me, this was an aspect of living anarchism that I had not appreciated before. Time became redundant.

The Karavane was also an opportunity for men and women to share experiences. The weather was hot and rivers were a great way to cool down. Most people swam naked and thus the barrier of clothing and the mystery of the naked form dissolved. Again this is not

something I have really appreciated before. How the physical differences between the sexes and the taboo of nakedness get in the way of communication and separate us. The police would ogle the women and recoil from the men simply because they were naked. Interestingly, they would laugh or show disgust when the women squatted down to take a piss, but not when the men did. Of course, a policeman has to overcome a double barrier in this respect. He doesn't just wear clothes, he wears a uniform. Is a uniform something one can ever remove?

The Karavane came from an idea earlier in the year when various German groups met up to demonstrate against the EXPO2000 in Hannover. E-mail was essential to contact possible accommodation for the Karavane and to keep constant updates. Thus for the two weeks there was always a place to stay for the night. Usually they were squats or *wagenplatz* but often they were fields offered by sympathetic farmers. Food was essential and usually 'skipped' from supermarkets. The amount of food thrown out by foodstores is disgraceful but it did feed our Karavane for two weeks. Of course we had to also rely on donations and occasionally bought supplies, but it was possible to live without relying on money too much.

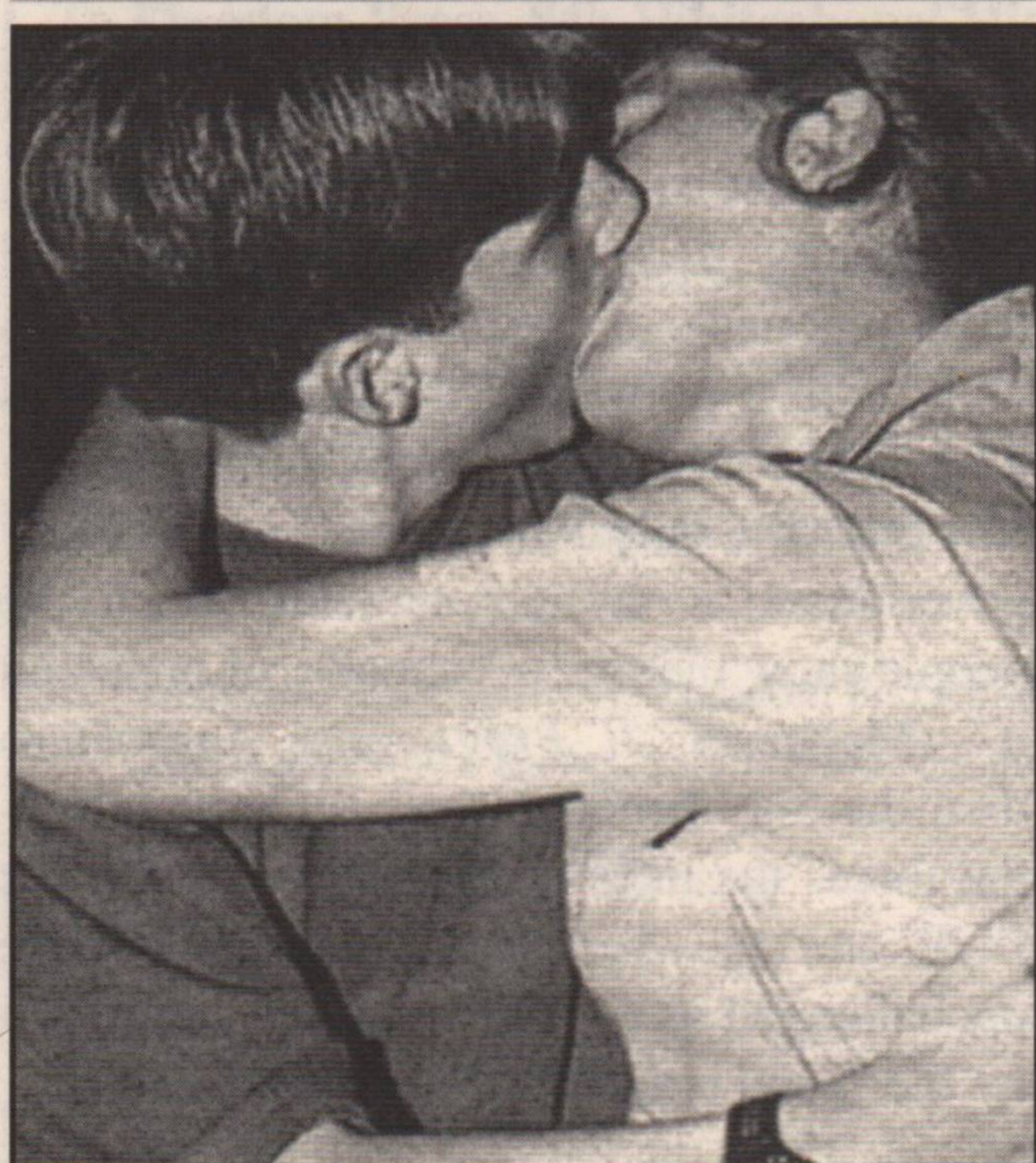
For me the Karavane was living anarchy. An opportunity to live apart from the capitalist system and free from so many of the barriers that capitalism puts in our way. It was positive and inspiring and has made me more determined to continue to live life the way I want to and not the way somebody else wants me to. *Die revolution ist grobartig, alles andere ist qark.*

Our next issue will include an eye-witness account of the demonstrations in Prague on 26th September

Who cares?

We couldn't help noticing that the BBC has just moved the *Nine O'Clock News* to a new time. Rescheduling what the corporation has always liked to present as a much-loved national institution has provoked the usual (and predictable) gnashing of teeth from people who don't have anything better to do with their time (i.e. politicians). "Hugely regrettable" said one. "Incompatible with the BBC's public service responsibility" said another. "Blah blah blah" moaned a third. As if our access to important information about the world will be affected by changing the time of the pap they call television 'news'. Actually we agree with musician Roni Size, who said last week that "mainstream commercial" was the language of the media. Quite right. We noticed that the time of the news had changed. But we really didn't care, and we never watched it any way. It's full of the same pompous gits who spend so much time complaining about the shift, and who wants to watch them?

Johnny M.

Just say no, guys

Britain has the highest rate for teenage pregnancies in Europe, many of them unplanned. The government wants to cut the figure. So does it provide more and better contraceptive advice, for people to do what they want with their bodies safely and without risk? Of course it doesn't. What it does instead is to spend £2million on a campaign which asks "are you thinking about it enough?" and goes on to plead with teenagers to resist the call of their hormones. Ministers have ordered that advice be given in a 'hip groovy' way (they know how to talk to yoof, these ministers - right on). Here's a hip groovy response: patronising gits, get lost!

Johnny M.

Two new Freedom Press titles ...

Charlotte Wilson
Anarchist Essays

edited by Nicolas Walter

Freedom Press dates from the first issue of *Freedom* in September 1886. The chief founder and first editor was Charlotte Wilson, who had been writing about anarchism in the socialist press since 1884, and led an anarchist fraction in the Fabian Society. The most prominent contributor, Peter Kropotkin, had been released from prison in France in January 1886, and invited to London by Wilson and her group. Charlotte Wilson was for a decade the best-known native anarchist in Britain, but her life and work has been generally neglected. This volume includes the most important of her writings, with a biography and notes by the editor.

96 pages

ISBN 0 900384 99 9

£5.95

Colin Ward
Social Policy:
an anarchist response

Colin Ward was visiting Centenary Professor in the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics during the academic year 1995-96. His lectures on the history of informal housing movements were very popular among LSE students.

This volume, first published by the LSE and now kept in print by Freedom Press, includes all the talks he gave during his professorship.

96 pages

ISBN 0 900384 98 0

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NAN Conference

Saturday, 30th September 2000, saw the Northern Anarchist Network (NAN) Autumn Festival and Conference at Bury, Greater Manchester. Breaking away from our usual format, we decided to have a communal meal, in a two hour lunch break in which we would also show a choice of films and some shorts. The enticing menu led one conservative comrade to say that "we used to be revolutionaries and now we are restaurateurs! However, the formula worked well to make a warm friendly atmosphere that kept people too busy talking to go to the pub or watch the films. At our last conference it was agreed that we should see what common ground we share with other organisations. Accordingly we were joined by four supporters of the Revolutionary Socialist Network, who are a loose group of anarchists, syndicalists and marxists, based mainly in the South West. We began, as usual, by reporting on what we are doing politically and culturally in our respective areas. I summarise the long list of activities in which those present are engaged, by saying that we are concerned with the struggles of daily life, while trying to keep some long

term vision. We had discussion on strategy and tactics (to be continued at our next gathering) recognising that we need to go far beyond ritualised fights with the police. However, we broadly agreed not to shop around for bandwagons to jump on, as the Socialist Workers Party and others tend to do. We also agreed on the difficulties people have with the dole. In spite of the Government's continual bleating about full employment, too many jobs are very low paid and casual. Clearly the attitude of many dole offices is that if you cannot find a job it's your fault, not a problem with the system.

Steve, from the Disabled Persons Network, led a wide-ranging discussion. He spoke of how disabled people are organising to overcome their marginalisation by using non violent direct action. In many ways, we were told the idea of disabled access is only tokenism in a society obsessed with profits rather than human need.

It was recommended that we should draw to the attention of our neighbours that town councillors now receive around £9,000 a year for their 'expenses', suggesting that any form of social organisation could be more efficient

and humane than we presently endure. A main problem is that however strongly our non-activist friends and neighbours feel about things, it is very hard to get them to take action.

Our friends from Earth First! and related groups were still travelling back from Prague or recovering from that demo. A few younger people were mixed with the grey heads at this NAN conference. In the main there is an age gap between people who come to our conferences and the new generation of activists. But we will of course continue to invite them to participate in any way they like at our conferences. Reports suggest that this age-gap is as true for the North East as it is for the Greater Manchester area. This is not discouraging. Two years ago we were wondering how to influence the eco-warriors. Many of them now call themselves some variant of anarchist. This has been due to developments in their thinking rather than the influence of the NAN. A handful came to one of our conferences in April 1999 almost like a duty-visit to Grandma. You might love and respect her, but she is peripheral to your thinking. What the collective thinking of our younger activists will be, we await with interest. As usual, they will be invited to attend the next NAN conference in January 2001.

Martin S. Gilbert

'Very naughty' says court

A father of two was sent to a 'category A' prison last week for refusing to remove his cap in court. Appearing before magistrates in south London for driving offences (the charges were later dropped) Roland Renaud was sentenced to seven days for contempt of court. To make matters worse, not only did he keep his hat on but he also refused to apologise. Roland's been very naughty, but wouldn't it be easier just to make him stand in the corner, or write 100 times 'the law is not an ass'?

Johnny M.

COPY DEADLINE

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 4th November, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 26th October. 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).

Festivals in Ludlow and Bury

It is always a treat to get an enemy or someone who's done a dirty trick on you in your gunsights. In that sense revenge is sweet. This happened to me at the Ludlow Food Festival last month.

Let me just explain about the Ludlow food phenomenon. The Food and Drink Festival has been going on there for about ten years. In a way it represents a bit of a provincial renaissance in English cuisine. Several 'master chefs' moved there from London, and there is a vast array of small food and drink shops such as is rarely to be found in an English town of this size (about 10,000).

The town has just lost a campaign to stop Tesco setting up a branch. As I got off the train I went straight to Tesco for some breakfast and to buy some of their plastic 'bags-for-life' at 10p each to carry the produce I hoped to buy at the festival and in some of the town's specialist shops.

These bags gave me an opportunity to talk with the shopkeepers at the Ludlow Larder and the Farmer's Produce Market, where I went to buy cheese and vegetables. I would open the conversation by saying "at least Tesco's is good for something!" as I stuffed Buttercup cheese and purple cauliflower into the bags.

It would be impossible to list here all the treats in food and drink which Ludlow and the festival had to offer. The town itself has several butchers shops which would set any English carnivore salivating from the mouth. There is A.G. Griffith's with its own Soil Association registered - slaughterhouse, offering Hereford beef, Shropshire pork and Marches lamb. Or Reg Martin with his local hares and rabbits, free-range rare breed pork and wild venison.

The Broad Bean on Broad Street sells speciality flour from local mills. Myriad Organics has ethically traded specialities including organic meat from Craig Farm and local bread. Craig Farm, who had a stall at the festival, would seem to deserve an article to itself. The Craig Farm Producers Group ensures animals are sourced as locally as possible; that each farmer has a personal knowledge about each animal reared; that Craig Farm has personal knowledge of the farms and farmers; and that there are no 'middle-men'. They offer Welsh Mountain lamb and mutton, organic free-range pork and chickens, additive-free goat, local venison and wild rabbit, additive-free wild boar, and a range of fish certified by the Soil Association.

Though it is difficult for us to defend English cuisine against, say, French and Italian, English ingredients can be exceptionally good. It is often what they do with them that is the problem.

Apart from the food and drink stars there were talks and demonstrations by food writers and chefs. Bob Kennard of Craig Farm gave a talk about the threat to the small slaughterhouse from government policies. Lesley

Mackley presented 'Dishes from the Dairy'.

My treat was Ken Adams' turn. Short, stocky and sweating, he told me he hadn't done any recipes to go with his demonstration. Mr Adams now runs the Waterline Restaurant in a Shropshire village, but he used to run The Oaks in Ludlow. He strikes me as something of a sadist in the kitchen - far kinder, I suspect, to the crab and lobster in the sea food salad than to the staff who work for him. But despite his shape and misogynistic manner, clearly attractive to the opposite sex at the demonstration.

Merrily he trimmed the lettuce and endive, throwing away most of them and using only the tips of the leaves; blanching the samphire; chilling the lobster briefly in the freezer so it went into hibernation before being boiled to death; steaming the clams and mussels; frying the squid in butter, man-handling the huge crab and chucking away the 'dead-men's fingers'.

Finally to try the resulting dish. The people of Middle England hovered around the plate like a swarm of locusts.

A man next to me snatched an oyster, and I grabbed the tentacles of the squid. I was reassured for, although the squid was tender and not like rubber, as it can be if overcooked, it was gritty, perhaps because the shell of the clams and mussels had not been washed sufficiently.

Now I must declare a bit of bias towards Mr Adams. Last year I went to his Oaks restaurant in Ludlow. I'm not sure which was the most memorable on that occasion, the delicious food or the Portuguese wine he served as his house wine. At the demonstration he boasted that he was steaming the clams and mussels in his own house wine, and not using 'cooking wine'. Having tasted that Portuguese house wine, I should have thought that cooking wine would be a blessing by comparison.

Should anarchists have views on the quality of wine served up by 'master chefs' in Ludlow? Isn't it a rather bourgeois topic?

I see the Northern Anarchists produced a sample menu for their autumn festival and conference. There was a pretentious attempt to tart-up the presentation using foreign titles for the dishes: *Ensalad de Arroz* for rice salad *Boudin Grillé* for Bury black puddings, *Pasta con*

Legumbres for vegetable pasta. And what the hell is a Russian Fruit Salad when it's a home? Some concoction out of Elizabeth David's *Summer Cooking*? Well, I bet those anarchists at the Unemployed Centre didn't puree raspberries diluted in Champagne as required in the Russian original.

It is clear that there is developing a kind of political rivalry between the libertarians around Riotous Assembly - who put on strictly 'anarcho-vegan cuisine' - and these anarchists on the north side of Manchester who go for black puddings and locally sourced cuisine and ingredients.

One wonders, given the shortage of crockery at the Bury Unemployed Centre, did the anarchists eating *Paella Valenciana* have the bottle to eat it in the traditional style? That is, without plates and direct from the paella pan - each comrade seated around the pan eating a segment of the saffron rice. I reckon the anarchists compromised and used plastic plates.

Typically the formal political agenda was squeezed in at either end of the long lunch break.

Blasco



Another leak ...

MEMO: STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

To: Rt Hon David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment

From: Edward Procrustes, Special Adviser

Subject: Educational equality

With the next election figuring ever more in our thoughts, I want to alert you to what I believe is a serious danger of losing sight of our educational objectives, and thereby losing credibility with the electorate.

It is agreed by all Parties, of course, that all children have the same educational needs, and must learn the same subjects to the same level, regardless of their differences in ability, aptitudes, interests, cultural background and so on. Indeed it was – dare I mention it – the Conservative Party that introduced the National Curriculum, by which for the very first time Government determined the content of every child's education. No more untidy and irrelevant choices by schools or parents (except for the independent sector, of course). Incidentally one also has reluctantly to admit the wisdom of

Kenneth Baker in insisting that the actual Curriculum should resemble, as far as possible, that of grammar schools of a century ago. Unfortunately since then certain innovations have crept in, and there have even been suggestions that what children learn at school should be of some use to them thereafter. I'm reliably informed there are even a few lunatics who propose that *children themselves* should have some say in their own education. As yet, luckily, none of this has got very far, but it needs to be suppressed firmly.

The present administration has made great progress with ensuring equality of performance, by its ever-growing system of examinations and inspections. This policy naturally ignores the experience of teachers, and the research of 150 years or so, to the effect that children develop at different rates, and have individual needs which vary at different ages. Who do these people think they are? We are doing what we know to be right.

Some busybodies are also claiming that both teachers and children are suffering severe effects of stress under the system. What of it? Teachers,

in general lazy and incompetent, have had it easy for far too long. Stress will do them good. As for children, it is obviously far more important for all to be treated identically than to worry about those who collapse under the strain. We must redouble our efforts. Our good friends in the commercial world are doing much to ensure that all young people wear the same clothes, eat the same junk food, watch the same 'soaps', rave to the same sounds and so on. As Government, we can and do assist them by favouring vast corporations over the mess of small independent producers.

However, this is all, as I am sure you will agree, only a beginning. One only has to glance at an average school (if one can bear to do so), to see that children vary in almost innumerable unacceptable ways. In many cases they are not even all dressed alike. Even when they are, they vary enormously in both physical and cultural characteristics. They come in all sorts of sizes, *even at the same age!* They are differently coloured as to hair and skin, from pretty well black to a sort of whitish pink. Some are redheads. Some of the fairer ones are confusingly freckled. And so on. There are even variations in children's own preferences, though these are less marked. They don't all eat the same diet, especially at home. There are actually a few boys who are not devoted to football, and girls not obsessed with clothes and make-up.

This chaos must be ended as soon as feasible. It may take longer in some cases than others. Regulations as to diet, dress and pastimes, for example, could be very simply introduced, and should be backed up by a substantial new inspectorate, overseen by a system of national, regional, county, district, catchment area, parish and individual school committees.

The scandal of varying physical development at the same age may be harder. In the long run, of course, genetic modification promises a final solution. In the meantime, parents must learn to do their bit, by for example not marrying those who differ markedly from themselves, and then when children arrive, feeding them differentially to compensate for varying growth rates. Growth

hormones can be controlled by medication. In extreme cases surgery may be a last resort.

And this is not just a problem at school level. Far from it. It gets much worse as they get older. For example, once the sensible constraints of the National Curriculum are removed, students obstinately diverge into different choices. Men and women rapidly segregate into sex-linked patterns. It is worse still at university level. Not only is there a bewildering variety of subjects. Physical characteristics are wildly chaotic. The Vice-Chancellor of a very well-known university has told me that at graduation ceremonies (naturally the only occasion he has to observe them), he regularly sees students varying from under five feet to well over six in height, and correspondingly in weight, strength and many other dimensions, some too embarrassing to mention.

Universities have made great efforts, under the Government's beneficent policy of increasing numbers and control while decreasing funding, to reduce all education to the same level of mediocrity, that is to say to provide equal opportunities for all. But students still unaccountably end up with a range of performances from brilliant first class to drop-out.

It is obviously of the greatest urgency that education beyond secondary level should be subjected to an extended National Curriculum. All students up to and including Doctoral level should sit weekly examinations, in the same subjects. If the standard is low enough this will ensure equality of performance. And universities should introduce measures for physical equality. These could readily take the form of an Entrance Examination consisting of an actual doorway to the institution which all students should fit, to some small degree of tolerance. Platform shoes not allowed. Exceptions should either be rejected, or adjusted by the sort of means adopted by my classical namesake.

Forward to uniformity!

One nation, one party, one leader!

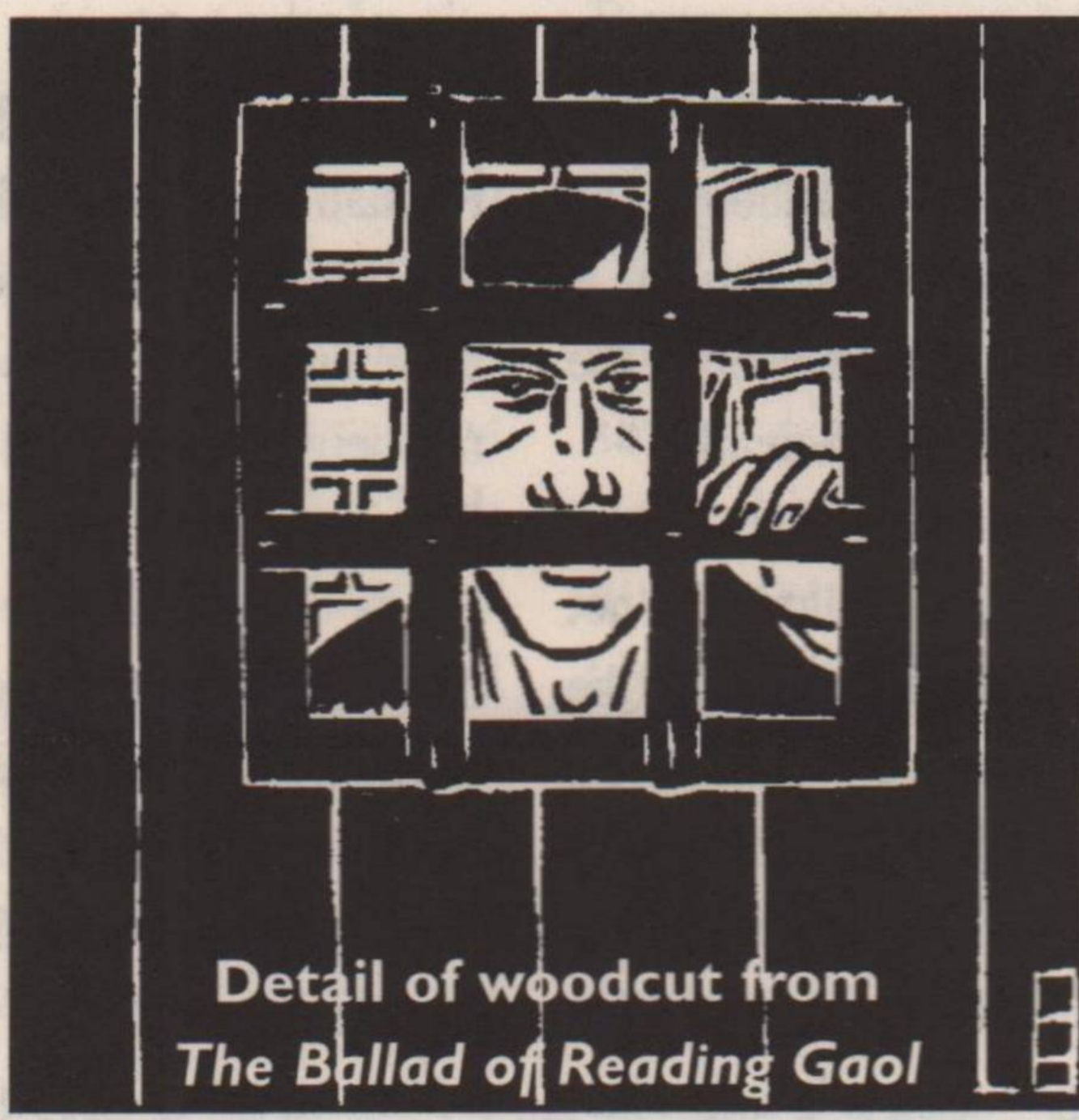
[Signed: Edward]

This memorandum was found in unusual circumstances by John Radford.

Church adds insult to injury

“There is no sin except stupidity”, as Oscar Wilde once said.

Perhaps he had the Roman Catholic church in mind. A century after condemning him for his sexual preferences (something the church still condemns today of course) bishops have rehabilitated him. According to the latest issue of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, a Vatican paper, he made “an implicit journey of faith” during his time in



Reading jail for offending against the laws of god and state. Wilde's lucky that god can

break hearts of stone and bring to them “mercy and forgiveness”.

Which is all very well, but any decent person will ask what it is he needs to be forgiven for and who gave god the right to judge him for it in the first place. “There's now't so queer as priests”, as Oscar didn't say.

Johnny M.

Marxism and 'Anarchism': a reply to the SWP

— Part Two —

The SWP continue their diatribe against anarchism ('Marxism and Anarchism', in *Socialist Worker*, 16th September 2000): “Big workers' struggles throw up an alternative form of authority to the capitalist state. Militant mass strikes throw up workers' councils. These are democratic bodies, like strike committees. But they take on organising 'state functions' – transport, food distribution, defence of picket lines and workers' areas from the police and army, and so on.”

To state the obvious, transportation and food distribution are not 'state functions'. They are economic functions. Similarly, defence is not a 'state function' as such – after all, individuals can and do defend themselves against aggression. Defence can be organised in a libertarian fashion, based on self-managed workers' militias and federations of free communes. It need not be a hierarchical system like the Bolshevik Red Army where the election of officers, soldiers' councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above. What is a 'state function' is imposing the will of a minority – the government, the boss, the bureaucrat – onto the population via professional bodies such as the police and military. This is what the Bolshevik state did, with workers' councils turned into state bodies executing the decrees of the government and using a specialised and hierarchical army and police force to do so. The difference is important.

Luigi Fabbri sums up it well:

“The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.

Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and ... if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle.”

Thus the difference between anarchists and Leninists is not whether the organisations workers create in struggle will be the framework of a free society (or the basis of the Commune). Indeed, anarchists have been arguing this for longer than Marxists have. The difference is whether these organisations remain

self-managed or whether they become part of a centralised state. In the words of Camillo Berneri: “The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration – corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national – freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation.”

So, anarchists agree, in 'big workers' struggles' organisation is essential and can form an alternative to the capitalist state. However, such a framework only becomes an 'authority' when power is transferred from the base into the hands of an executive committee at the top. Strike and community assemblies, by being organs of self-management, are not an 'authority' in the same sense that the state is or the boss is. Rather, they are the means by which people can

manage their own affairs directly, to govern themselves and so do without the need for hierarchical authority. The SWP, in other words, confuse two very different things.

After misunderstanding basic concepts, the SWP treat us to a history lesson: “Such councils were a feature of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German Revolution after the First World War, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, and many other great struggles. Socialists argue that these democratic workers' organisations need to take power from the capitalists and break up their state.”

Anarchists agree. Indeed, they argued that workers' organisations should 'break up' and replace the state long before Lenin discovered this in 1917. For example, Bakunin argued in the 1860s as follows: “the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation ...”

(continued on page 5)

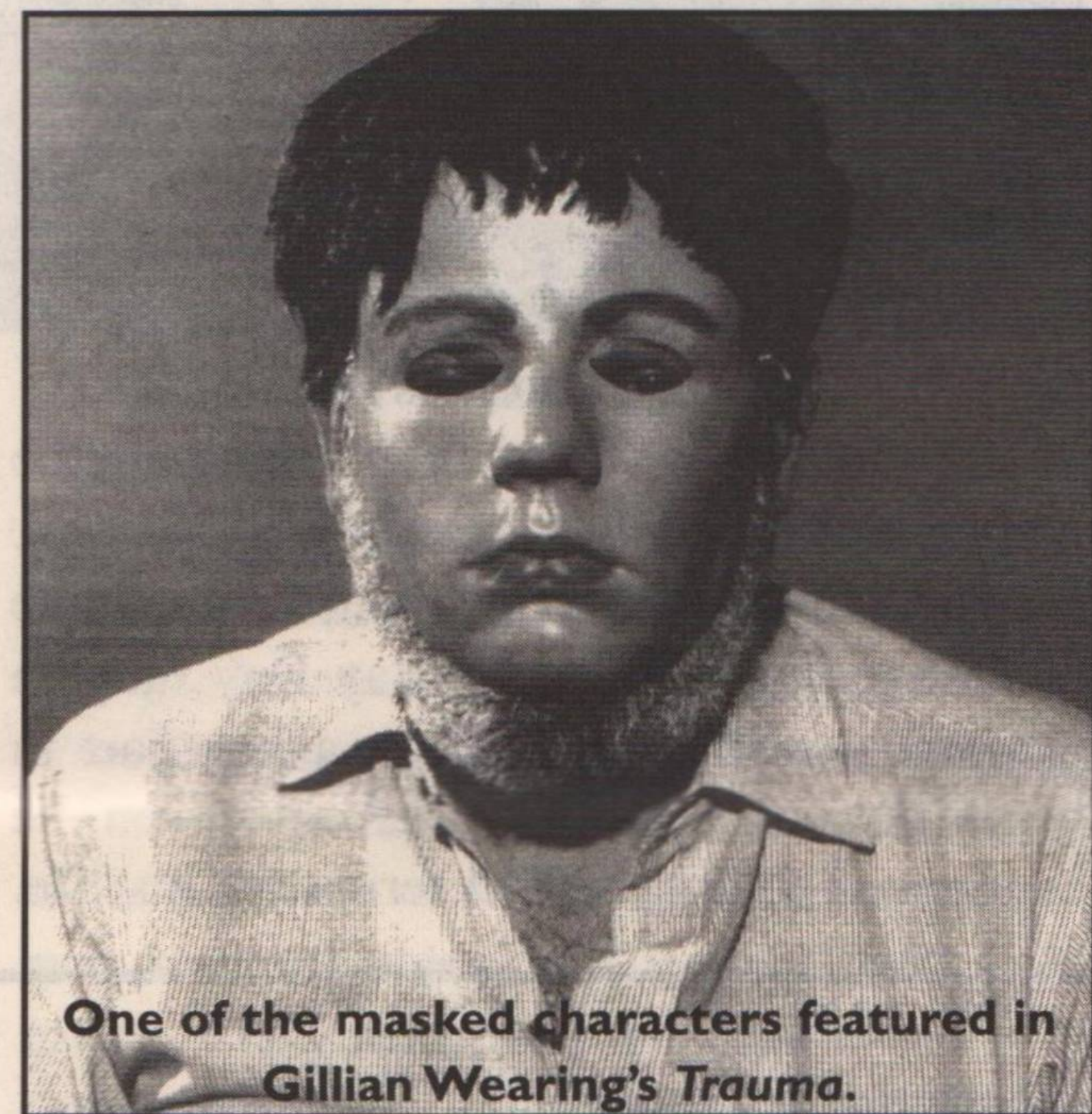
Gillian Wearing at the Serpentine Gallery

Gillian Wearing won the Turner Prize in 1997. The exhibition of her photographs and videos at The Serpentine is her first major solo exhibition in London. Wearing claims to "explore the intimacies and complexities of human relationships". After an hour staring at her works I couldn't help but think of Gustave Courbet, his attempts in paintings like *A Burial at Ornans* and *The Meeting* to create a politics-without-words, a way in which the egalitarian frenzy of revolutionary France could be captured in a line, the weight given to characters of differing social status in his canvasses, a way of painting that captured the essence of a world as its structures of power and wealth were disrupted by spectres of barricades, rifles and the dream of a Red France. Courbet's work speaks of a truth of its age – that justice, the demands of the voiceless to be heard, were of the essence of the politics of the time. I thought of Courbet because, faced with Gillian Wearing's numbing exercises in bland sadism, I could think of few artists further removed from the mean, brutal bankruptcy of her work. It would be fair to Wearing though to offer as compensation the fact that her work also speaks to a truth of its times.

Wearing's videos and photos are essentially misanthropic. Their characters are dumb, performing animals, holding up signs that speak only of their inability to communicate, in *Signs That Say What You Want Them To Say*, or pointedly solipsistic in *Two into One*. There is something fake about all of Wearing's work, a pretence at depth, when really all there is here is surface, life reduced to a series of scripted gestures, without context, without any attempt to historicise. In *Sacha and Mum*, a mother brutalises her daughter, but the scenes are so obviously, clumsily, acted that we feel nothing, and after a while just look away. In *Trauma*, people talk to camera about their childhood

experiences, some banal, some funny, some speaking of awful abuse. All we are aware of ultimately, though, is the presence and ego of Wearing, who deliberately dehumanises the tellers by having them wear grotesque masks. This is a work that shouts 'Notice me'. It is Wearing stamping her presence over everything, asking her participants to put forward something of themselves and then, in masking them, making the video about her, her ability to edit, distort, control. The problem, though, is that Wearing herself has nothing to tell us. The intrusions make us aware always that all of this is her product, but beyond that, there is no real point. Like most Young British Artists, she has nothing to say at all. Art becomes an exercise in capturing space, but as an end in itself. All is signature, but the signature doesn't parody the intent of art, it tells us that the signature is itself art. Self-importance is passed off, grotesquely, as insight.

A series of photographs portray a young alcoholic woman, Teresa. Texts attached tell us what the drunks she fucks for small change think of her. Most of the comments are rambling, misogynist. Wearing does not allow us to hear or



of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets." The Soviet Congress just provided "the legal cover" for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society (*The Lessons of October*).

In 1920, he argued that "[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class" (*Terrorism and Communism*).

In 1937 he continued this theme by arguing that "the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard". Thus, rather than the working class as a whole 'seizing power', it is the 'vanguard' which takes power – "a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society". He mocked the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations: "Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat" (*Stalinism and Bolshevism*).

As can be seen, over a seventeen year period

read what Teresa might think of them or of herself, nor are we allowed any insight into how they came to be as they are. They are put forward as misfits, in a freak show Wearing has created for our entertainment. Worst of all though, is *Drunks*, in which a group of drunks stagger about and fall over in front of a white backdrop. A close up lingers on the face of one as he falls into stupor, dribbling. Whatever Wearing thinks she's doing here, she should watch *Drunks* in the company of the happy, sneering middle class hordes who frequent the Serpentine. Wearing is, if you will, a kind of anti-Beckett. As spectators of her work, we all get the chance to kick the shit out of Lucky,

but we need lose no sleep because Wearing's central message is that Lucky had nothing to say worth hearing anyway. *Drunks* could equally well have been filmed around Wearing, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst staggering around Soho like the pissed up second rate art students they still are. That it depicts, instead, a group of stereotypical street drinkers acting as Wearing's audience would expect, says everything about Wearing's intent. All is in its place, and we can stare at the drunks in this cosy urban pastoral, rather than feeling threatened and embarrassed when they accost us on the way home.

Nick S.

Art and Anarchism

The first thing to remark on is that art and anarchism have at least this in common: both are concepts. The human being strives to achieve both, whereas other creatures have the ability of creating innumerable varieties of art forms of their heedless anarchist societies. A peculiarity of the human is that it needs to learn slowly and laboriously, whereas all other creatures know from the instant they are alive everything they ought to know.

It is also part of the human condition that we disregard natural creation and esteem artificiality.

The other day in Brixham the sun shone through the mist of the dawn and the dew settled on the spider-webs and the gossamers sparkled. A work of art was thus created which included the beholder. There was no constraint, no diktat from some unknown power. The sun didn't shine to order, neither did the mist rise at anyone's command and the amazed beholder could have looked another way.

It is no good saying, as post modernists maintain, that we have reached the plateau of our achievements and all we should do is to gaze around.

Perhaps it only shows that they are tired of creating new definitions for the same old thing ad infinitum. That may be so. But any practising artist will agree, your drawing's failure may nevertheless be acknowledged for its tribute paid to the moment, Robert Browning once said that "all we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist".

A critic may remark that 'good' is also a concept, but it is much more difficult to define than either art or anarchism. But it is true to say that whereas other creatures live what to the beholder appear to be a state of natural anarchy, both connected and in a sense unconnected, we on the other hand are superimposed. This is a trivia in philosophical terms, yet the cause of misery, poverty, famine and the rest.

Another paradox is the that for us many years must pass in learning what to other creatures come instantaneously. A fly just buzzes about – we take innumerable lessons before we learn how to crash.

Perhaps we should just say simply that art is a branch of art inestimable learning and anarchism is a harmonious condition of society without superimposition.

John Rety

(continued from page 4)

And: "The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."

Thus it is somewhat ironic to have Leninists present basic anarchist ideas as if they had thought of them first!

Their history lesson continues: "This happened in Russia in October 1917 in a revolution led by the Bolshevik Party."

In reality, this did not happen. In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party took power in the name of the workers' councils, the councils themselves did not take power. This is confirmed by Trotsky, who notes that the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917 "was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin's position was this: ... the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets." Note, through the soviets not by the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. Moreover, he states that "to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us." He continued by noting that it was "one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan

Trotsky argued that it was the party which ruled, not the councils. The workers' councils became little more than rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik government (and not even that, as the central government only submitted a fraction of its decrees to the Central Executive of the national soviet, and that soviet was not even in permanent session). As Russian Anarchist Voline made clear "for, the anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets".

In other words, the workers' councils took power in name only. Real power rested with the central government and the workers' councils become little more than a means to elect the government. Rather than manage society directly, the soviets simply became a transmission belt for the decrees and orders of the Bolshevik party. Hardly a system to inspire anyone.

The SWP, after re-writing Russian history, move onto Spanish history: "It did not happen in Spain in 1936. The CNT, a trade union heavily influenced by anarchist ideas, led a workers' uprising in the city of Barcelona that year. Workers' councils effectively ran the city.

But the capitalist state machine did not simply disappear. The government and its army, which was fighting against Franco's fascist forces, remained, although it had no authority in Barcelona.

The government even offered to hand power over to the leaders of the CNT. But the CNT believed that any form of state was wrong. It turned down the possibility of forming a workers' state, which could have broken the fascists' coup and the capitalist state. Worse, it

accepted positions in a government that was dominated by pro-capitalist forces.

That government crushed workers' power in Barcelona, and in doing so fatally undermined the fight against fascism."

It is hard to know where to start in this distortion of history.

Firstly, we have to point out that the CNT did lead a workers' uprising in 1936 but it was in response to a military coup and occurred all across Spain. The army was not "fighting against Franco's fascist forces" but rather had been the means by which Franco had tried to impose his version of fascism. The government did nothing, even refusing to distribute arms to the workers. Thus the CNT faced the might of the Spanish army rising in a fascist coup. That, as we shall see influenced its decisions. By distorting the context of the events of 1936, the SWP distorts the reader's understanding of what happened.

Secondly, anarchism does not think that the 'capitalist state machine' will 'simply disappear'. Rather, anarchists think that (to quote Kropotkin) the revolution "must smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of workers' associations and communes] and it will act accordingly". In other words, the state does not disappear, it is destroyed and replaced with a new, libertarian, form of social structure. Thus the SWP misrepresents anarchist theory.

Thirdly, yes, the Catalan government did offer to stand aside for the CNT and the CNT rejected the offer. Why? The SWP claim that "the CNT believed that any form of state was wrong" and that is why it did not take power. That is true, but what the SWP fail to mention is more important. The CNT refused to (continued on page 6)

— OBITUARY —

Gogliardo Fiaschi

born 21st August 1930, died 29th July 2000

Gogliardo began his anarchist activism at the age of thirteen when he joined the resistance struggle against fascism, falsifying his birth certificate so that he appeared a year older. He helped supply the Resistance bands with food, often travelling 150km on round trips to Parma, Modena and Reggio.

In 1944 he became the mascot of the Constringano Brigade, and marched at the head of the column with its flag when it entered Modena in 1945.

He returned to his home town of Carrara, where he had started working in the marble quarries at the age of eight. He took part in the activities of the Circolo Anarchico Pietro Gori (the Pietro Gori anarchist circle named after the famous anarchist) of Canal del Rio, and also in the libertarian youth which from the end of the war organised fund-raising and subscription to the anarchist movement.

He became one of the organisers of the anarchist summer camps and of the solidarity committees that had been set up to help the Spanish comrades. He began to take part in activities organised by some of the Spanish anarchists, and this saw him join the group of José Luis Facerias, known as 'Alberto' by the Italian comrades. He crossed the Pyrenees with Facerias in August 1957, but by the 29th of that month Facerias had been shot dead by the Guardia Civil in an ambush and Gogliardo was caught in a wood near Tibidado. He was beaten and tortured.

At his trial he paid homage to his fallen comrade Facerias and was sentenced to

twenty years in prison. He was to spend the next ten years in forty different prisons – an average of three months in each! His spirit was not broken due to the strict regime of exercise he carried out every day, which kept him agile into late life, and also because of the atmosphere in the prisons, where the comrades of the CNT and FAI carried on their own universities in the discussion circles, examining everything under the sun: the future society, the examination of history, social justice. In addition, Gogliardo preserved his spirit by his artistic output, which included the pictures he drew on postcards that he was able to put in the mail.

With the amnesties in the '60s Gogliardo was dispatched back to Italy, where he was immediately arrested by the police who charged him with a hold-up allegedly carried out by Facerias. The Italian state had not forgotten his anti-fascist activities.

An international campaign was started to free him. Franco Leggio, an anarchist from Ragusa, managed to get hold of a good lawyer and Gogliardo was freed in 1974, having served seventeen years in prison.

He continued to work for the release of other anarchists still in prison. In Carrara he set up a bookshop and the Circolo Culturale Anarchico (anarchist cultural circle). He was also extremely active in the defence of Germinal, the historic seat of Carraran anarchism which had been occupied in 1945 in the main square. He organised many demonstrations, concerts and conferences in support of the centre, which was eventually



taken back by the authorities in 1990.

He also began to collect together the archives of the Italian anarchist movement. He knew he was suffering from an incurable disease and at last year's May Day rally in Carrara, which he had taken a key part in organising since his release from prison, he announced that he would terminate his life.

He later changed his mind on this, putting up with fourteen months of suffering in hospitals so that doctors could study his condition in order to bring about a cure for others. He died on 29th July 2000 at the age of 69.

At his funeral several hundred anarchists from all over Italy marched with his coffin, which was surrounded by a sea of anarchist flags.

He was buried near to Gino Lucetti and Stefano Vatteroni (who had both attempted to kill Mussolini) and Giuseppe Pinelli (the railway worker who had been thrown to his death from

the central police station windows in Milan in 1969) and tens of other anarchists. This had been his wish.

The Knight of the Ideal, as he was called by comrades, had a hard life full of suffering, but he never relinquished the ideas so dear to him.

Nick Heath

Remembering the 'Anarchist of Carrara'

Carrara is a small town lying protected within the arms of the high Apennine backbone of Italy. It feels different to its region of touristy Tuscany, as it quietly sports a proud anarchist identity that is rooted deeply in its work and its landscape. Reaching up from the town are three valleys, each full of vast quantities of white marble – the finest carving stone in the world.

Like all quarrying communities everywhere, the people are dour and independent, with a sense of cooperation that goes with the activity: cutting stone from cathedral-like quarries, transporting it down to the coastal factories and exporting it internationally. The whole town wakes daily to lorries thundering down narrow streets carrying blocks the size of Rolls Royces.

Since the 1980s, when I went to a carving symposium held in the hot main square, the industry has fully modernised. Lasers cut blocks from the mountainside now when the exchange rate is right, instead of the humming wires that criss-crossed each valley. These less destructive hand-techniques were still strongly alive in the quarrymen who benignly watched us youngsters.

Their old craft nurtured a respect for the environment, as well as a mixture of communal organisation and flexibility. It built a sense of justice which knew that fairness paid off: anyone could stake a piece of land, it was theirs while quarried, and it produced another pair of hands to help, high above the town. Dangerous, but the valley air was

sometimes full of singing – working songs, sensitive and lyrical. Home was rich too. Vegetables grew in the gardens, not flowers. The families collected mushrooms in the woods at dawn, they bartered, drove scooters and showed off at night, and the whole town seemed to be overwhelmingly self-employed.

Anarchism worked here, and had a history. As a partisan stronghold it was never fully occupied by the Germans, despite the war moving back and forth for months.

We were shown a grand building that Carrara's 'elders' refused to leave, or redecorate: a bar containing arms, flags, and faded photos, topped a baroque staircase pitted with bomb holes at every turn. These scars should never be forgotten, they said. And one day our carving was interrupted by the national media tracking the volatile unveiling of a statue of an anarchist hero. We struggled to understand the politics, and were directed to the local 'anarchist bookshop'.

This bookshop was run by Gogliardo Fiaschi. A quarry worker from the age of eight, a partisan at thirteen, he spent 17 years of his life unjustly in Spanish and Italian jails for his beliefs. Freed by the pressure of an international campaign in 1974, he was much respected in the local anarchist movement and was the man behind that prestigious building's occupation. Recently, after his death by cancer, his peers carried his coffin around Carrara, followed by a band and anarchists from all over Italy.

Anne Beatrice Nicholson

(continued from page 5)

implement libertarian communism after the defeat of the army uprising in 1936 simply because it did not want to be isolated nor have to fight the republican government as well as the fascists. It did not take power nor did it destroy the state, as anarchist argue. Rather it ignored the state and this was its undoing. Thus the SWP attacks anarchism for anarchists failing to act in an anarchist manner!

Obviously it is impossible to discuss the question of the CNT during the Spanish Revolution in depth here. Interested readers can visit this web page for a fuller discussion: <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1931/append32.html>

The SWP try and generalise from these experiences: "In different ways, the lessons of Russia and Spain are the same. The organisational questions thrown up in particular struggles are critical when it comes to the working class challenging capitalism.

Workers face conflicting pressures. On the one hand, they are forced to compete in the labour market. They feel powerless, as an individual, against the boss.

That is why workers can accept the bosses' view of the world. At the same time constant attacks on workers' conditions create a need for workers to unite and fight back together.

These two pressures mean workers' ideas are uneven. Some see through the bosses' lies. Others can be largely taken in. Most part accept and part reject capitalist ideas. The overall consciousness of the working class is always shifting. People become involved in struggles which lead them to break with pro-capitalist ideas."

That is very true and anarchists are well aware of it. That is why anarchists organise groups, produce propaganda, argue their ideas with others and encourage direct action and solidarity. We do so because we are aware that

the ideas within society are mixed and that struggle leads people to break with pro-capitalist ideas. To quote Bakunin: "the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary thought among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers' world ... is left with but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** ... It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trade-unions, organisation** ... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind ... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one."

Therefore anarchists are well aware of the importance of struggle and propaganda in winning people to anarchist ideas. No anarchist has ever argued otherwise.

(to be continued in our next issue)

New-fangled anarchism

Dear *Freedom*,

A thought-provoking article on the rise of direct action ('Notions of new-fangled anarchism', 23rd September) suggested that consumers have "become most radical at a time when the producers in their trade unions have become increasingly conservative". I think there are dangers in framing the issues this way.

The trade union movement is undeniably less militant than the French labour movement, to take but one example, and citizen groups over here *are* taking more and more to direct action to deal with a variety of social problems (real or perceived). But is it fair – or accurate – to describe the increased cautiousness of the official British trade union movement over recent decades as increased 'conservatism'? And should we describe the use of direct action as necessarily 'radical'?

The British trade union movement has been the subject of a barrage of legal and extra-legal attacks over the past twenty years, at the very same time that 'globalisation' and EU integration has undermined labour's bargaining power. When someone has been thoroughly beaten up and is left with an abiding fear of confronting bigger, stronger, and more aggressive people, is it appropriate to describe this as 'conservatism'? This is not to argue that this person should not be encouraged to struggle to throw off this fear and assert herself, it's just to warn against inappropriate labelling.

Nicolas Walter

Dear *Freedom*,

Comrades will be pleased, and perhaps proud, to hear that Nicolas Walter's splendid booklet *Anarchism* has been translated into yet another language, and is now available in Portuguese, published by Imaginário od São Paulo (Brasil). This is certainly one excellent way of honouring – and transcending – his death.

Jonn Roe

P.S. My congratulations to Christopher Draper for his interesting and informative articles.

As for the popular direct action movements which spring up with increasing frequency – including the anti-paedophile lynch mobs of the summer – it is important to recognise that tactics are not in themselves 'radical'. Chomsky warned in February 1969 of the use of the phrase 'radical tactics': "When people start concentrating on the character of the tactics, and regarding them as an index of political character, then they are taking an ultimately self-destructive approach."

Chomsky suggested that it was "very important to recognise that tactics should be judged as to whether they are successful or unsuccessful in reaching certain goals which may themselves be the subject of political judgement". The objective of the action may be progressive, radical, conservative, or something else. The tactic itself could not and should not be described as such.

In other words, direct action (even 'non-violent direct action') is not necessarily 'radical'. If the aim of the direct action is to restrict or destroy human freedom (as with the lynch mobs) the word 'radical' is completely inappropriate.

As Chomsky warns, we risk closing ourselves into a self-destructive frame of mind if we judge our own actions and those of others, in terms of the tactics used rather than the goals sought.

In the anti-sanctions movement, for example, people are engaged in a range of campaigning activities all aimed at increasing pressure on the government to support the lifting of economic sanctions on Iraq. The group I am involved in, Voices in the Wilderness UK, organises civil disobedience on the street, sanctions-breaking civil disobedience, a letter-writing campaign, and holds a weekly vigil outside the Foreign Office (with ARROW, the nonviolent direct action affinity group).

These activities have different actual and potential costs, and different benefits in terms of their effects on public opinion and on decision-makers, but it would be extremely harmful to the organisation and to the movement, if we were to start judging the different contributions in terms of how 'radical' (and therefore how 'worthwhile') they were.

Quick comments on three other aspects of the article.

1) I was puzzled by the suggestion that the miner's strike of 1984-85 was defeated because "governments could smash the predictable solid strikes of militant trade unions precisely because they lacked the imagination, initiative and flexibility of smaller groups of activists". Firstly, as we now know from Seamus Milne's *The Enemy Within*, the miners came very very close to defeating the government. Secondly, one of the weaknesses of the strike was that it started without a ballot – one might say with the kind of 'imagination, initiative and flexibility' that Brian extols – leading to a damaging split in the union, so that it was not a 'solid strike'. Thirdly, the strike was in many ways a precursor to the Liverpool Dockers' Strike in the 'imagination, initiative, flexibility' and diversity of 'smaller groups of activists' among the miners, their wives, and their supporters.

2) I wonder if it is true that today "the police are reluctant to act because they were brought into public disrepute and lost popularity owing to their actions at the time of the poll tax", given the events of May Day this year in London, to take only one example.

3) The article implies that the rise of direct action is a 'vogue of anarchism' caused in part 'by the crisis of the traditional and marxist left'. Firstly, it seems difficult to argue that engagement direct action is itself engagement with, or a movement towards, anarchism.

And secondly, it also seems unlikely to me that the turn towards mass direct action that we've seen in, for example, the environmental and anti-globalisation movements over the past decade, has any relation to the fading attractions of the traditional left or of organised Marxism. The activists I know in these movements are for the most part people who would never have been attracted by conventional politics of those kinds, and who may well have been attracted into their

movements in large part because of the different ways of relating, the different cultures, that these movements have created.

Mil Rai

Billy Turncoat

Dear Comrades,

The film *Billy Elliot* is a blatant attack on the working class. Miners, striking to protect their jobs, communities, homes, livelihoods, families and way of life, are portrayed not as heroes, but as boorish, loutish oafs.

The boy Billy is portrayed as a hero for turning his back on his class and going over to the bourgeoisie.

His father is shown as a homophobic brute, only achieving a sympathetic portrayal when he starts to scab, to betray his mates and his entire class, to raise the money so that his son can continue in his fantasy of becoming a prancing idiot pandering to the snobbish pretensions of the bourgeoisie.

The boy's ballet teacher is played by Julie Walters, notorious for her first film part in *Educating Rita* as a snobbish, stuck-up little cow who is ashamed of her working class origins, who regards her building-worker husband as a boorish oaf, and who seeks to find "a better song to sing" by adopting the pretensions postures of the bourgeoisie. This film is nothing but an attack on the culture and values of the working class, it represents class treason and snobbery as virtues and solidarity as the preserve of neanderthals and dinosaurs; it is no surprise that it gets its highest praise from those sections of the gutter press responsible for the most vicious, vituperative slanders perpetrated against the miners, and which said that the miners should accept their redundancy with *gratitude*, and accused the men who refused to lie down and die of 'standing in the way of progress'.

All workers should picket every cinema where this farrago is being shown, or at the very least boycott them and go to the video shop and get out something by Ken Loach instead; I recommend *Riff Raff* and *Hidden Agenda*.

Keith Ackermann

Please keep sending in
your letters and
donations

History Group

Dear Editors,

I am writing on behalf of the North West Labour History Group. As part of our work in popularising knowledge of labour history we publish an annual journal and I would like to appeal to your readers for contributions to two forthcoming issues, one on the 1960s to be published in 2001 and one on the 1970s to be published in 2002.

We believe the time has come to examine the radical social, political and labour movements of those decades in the North West. We are interested in contributions on a wide range of topics including CND, Rock Against Racism, Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, the miners strikes of 1972 and 1974, arts labs, Women's Liberation, the 'alternative society', anti-fascism, black power, factory occupations, Gay Liberation Front, the New Left and much else. We are interested in contributions from both academic researchers and equally importantly those who were politically active themselves during those years.

We invite anybody interested in writing an article to contact us in the first instance at: North West Labour History Group, c/o Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford, M5 4WX.

Michael Herbert

Direct democracy and law

Dear *Freedom*,

I am afraid I have to disagree with Nick S. once again, this time with what seems a key point in his letter in the 23rd September issue. Nick writes "It seems to me that taking the law into our own hands is exactly what direct democracy is all about."

We should clearly refuse to accept the dictates of those in authority just because it is authority. But in itself, there is no virtue in taking the law into our own hands. I believe few, if any, readers of *Freedom* would approve of people taking the law into their own hands to attack asylum seekers. Nor, presumably, did any of them applaud the neo-Nazis who took the law into their own hands and attacked the office of *Freedom* a few years back. The whole edifice of law imposed on us by our rulers is basically wrong. But so long as it controls us, we have to be thankful that at least there are some 'good' laws, good because, to some extent at least, they protect people from assault or discrimination. Such laws should not be necessary, but as things are, they are.

On the other hand, *Freedom* readers no

doubt applauded the women who took the law into their own hands to attack military aircraft with hammers, and we would rightly applaud anybody who took the law into their own hands in a lasting practical way to get justice for Mark Barnsley, whose case was reported on in the same issue as Nick's letter. So surely we should judge actions solely by whether their aims and their methods are what we consider good or bad, not by whether they accord with the law or not.

The same goes for direct democracy. But direct democracy is fundamentally more dangerous, because it is a system of power, and power without restraints. It is all too easy to think of examples where that power has been used, or would be used, to hurt people rather than help them, and I have mentioned some in previous letters. It is striking that even in cases where people are not hurt, most expressions of what would probably be termed direct democracy are on behalf of selfish interests. I suspect that the widespread support for the fuel price protesters was driven by the concerns of the private motorists who make up the affluent majority

in this country, not by compassion for hard-pressed farmers or self-employed hauliers. Can anarchists really welcome a movement which resulted in a sensational success in the polls for the Conservatives? The poll tax protests were no doubt a good thing. But again it was a largely selfish movement. Where was the direct democracy on behalf of the Liverpool dockers, or the many other groups or individuals who have needed or still need support? Unless there are profound changes in attitude, the triumph of direct democracy is something to be anticipated with fearfulness, not gladness. (It is impossible to imagine in either this country or the US a massive protest against the death penalty in another country as there was fairly recently in Rome.)

As for the motives of the police who restrained the paedophile hunters in Portsmouth, I don't think we know anything about those of individual policemen. Perhaps some or most were merely pleased to be able to assert their jurisdiction, as Nick suggests; but maybe some were pleased to be able to protect individuals from nastiness. The fact remains that their actions were on the side of decency on that occasion.

Amorey Gethin

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— MEETINGS FOR 2000 —

14th October Anarchist Bookfair LAF debate: Wot Is Anarchy?

20th October 21st Century Revolution? (with guests from SWP and SPGB)

27th October Reformist? Revolutionist? (speaker Ron Bailey)

3rd November Guy Fawkes Remembered

Anyone wanting to give a talk or facilitate a discussion should contact Steve Ash, or any other regular, at a meeting, giving topic and preferred dates. A contact address will be available soon. Monthly free dialogues may be cancelled at short notice and used for scheduled talks if necessary.

For more information on the London Anarchist Forum see: LAF@anarchic.co.uk or www.trak.to/LAF

Steve Ash
for London Anarchist Forum

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