

# SOLIDARITY

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## Herbert Read

Continental visionary in a visionless land

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## Fifty Daring Days

George Woodcock on the significance of Tienanmen Square





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COVER PICTURE: Tienanmen Square students in exuberant mood on the day the 'Goddess of Democracy' statue was erected, May 1989. Photo: Bob Gannon

## SOLIDARITY JOURNAL 27

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SOLIDARITY is also the imprint of a series of pamphlets and books which now numbers more than sixty titles; and which have been variously translated into fifteen foreign languages.

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THE GULF CONFLICT

# Divided we fell

**As Iraq's tragedy deepens, KEN WELLER says tough questions must be answered about the spectacular collapse of the anti-war movement.**

THE SPECTACLE of the world's most powerful military machine, assisted by the United Kingdom and the other 'Allies', systematically smashing Iraq's economic infrastructure, sweeping aside the crippled Iraqi army and finally massacring its routed and defenceless remnants, was a clear warning to those who threaten the 'New World Order'. Now in a macabre new war the Republican Guard is metering out a similar message to the Shia and Kurdish populations. In blazing Kuwait - where the environmental devastation emphasises the interrelation of economic and ecological critiques of capitalism - the large Palestinian minority is being brutally maltreated for collaboration (an accusation only too well justified in the case of the PLO leadership). As always, it is the ordinary people who pay the butcher's bills.

The conflict raises many other issues too, not least that of the extent by which the brutal butchery being done in their name was obscured from Western publics by the cynical cocktail of unheard-of media control and manipulation, technocratic military jargon, and speculation that modern 'smart' weapons technology allows almost bloodless 'surgical' warfare.

Surely most urgently, however, socialists must address the unprecedented collapse of domestic campaigns against the conflict. In Britain the campaign of 'opposition' to the war was pathetic.

(I use inverted commas because many

of the most vociferous opponents were not actually against the war but supporters of Saddam Hussein's regime. At least a handful of groups, by virtue of their previous incarnation as the Workers Revolutionary Party, had in the past received money from Iraq).

Although there was plenty of rhetoric, after a fairly promising start the movement declined steadily. It finished deeply split by a squabble between those - the CND and the stalinists, for example - who were for all power to the United Nations, and those - mainly trotskyist groups - who were for victory for Saddam Hussein. Neither policy was likely to prove the basis for a mass movement. A useful comparison could be made with the Suez adventure of 1956, a far smaller affair, in which (as we now know) a combination mass demonstrations and riots, as well as a number of strikes, actually shook the government.

The failure yet again of the 'left', and the fact that so-called revolutionaries can support regimes like Saddam's, is no accident. It flows from the ever growing isolation of the traditional 'left' milieu from the mass of ordinary people. This isolation itself emanates from the leninist ideology: that the masses cannot understand socialism and that they therefore have to be lied to, manipulated and terrorised by those who do. Hardly a basis from which to criticise the Iraq regime.



## TIENANMEN SQUARE

# Fifty days that shook the world

Although a great setback, the events of last June proved a profound political education for many Chinese, whose libertarian impulse, writes GEORGE WOODCOCK, has hardy roots and will blossom again.

**T**HERE ARE a number of things I now remember sadly and with a little incredulity about the China in whose northern regions, up to the Gobi desert. I travelled in 1987. One was the way in which people I encountered would talk with a kind of reserved satisfaction about the freedoms that appeared to have entered in all directions into Chinese life during the 1980s. Surprisingly often they ended in a kind of undertone: "We only hope it will last".

I also remember the coded circumlocutions in which political matters that should not be discussed openly were presented. Classic Chinese figures had now - after the end of the Cultural Revolution - settled down again into their old niches, and Confucius once again represented established authority, so that a remark in favour of Lao Tzu would be regarded - and often received with broad grins - as a remark in favour of a more libertarian way than the party line.

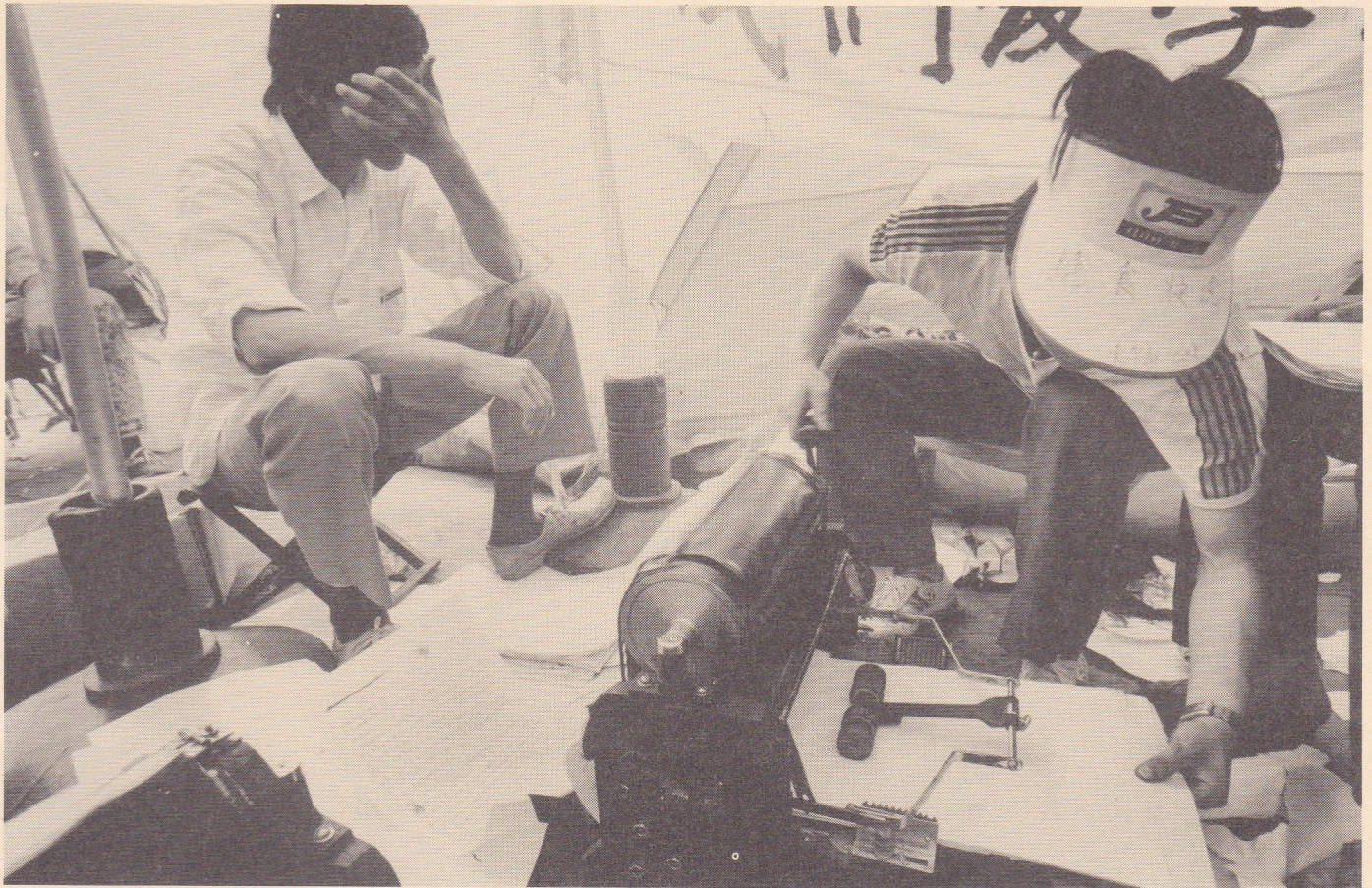
One piece of coding I found particularly directed towards me. Nowhere was I directly asked about my political attitudes, nor was it even openly said that they were

known to the people I encountered. Instead what I found to be a standard coded circumlocution was applied to me. "You are the Canadian Ba Jin". Ba Jin is that marvellous survivor Li Pei-kan, the devoted anarchist whom I knew through correspondence in the middle 1940s and who has since gone through purge after purge as a dissident, always to emerge again to resume his position as one of China's leading men of letters, a fine translator and notable novelist.

Half a century and more ago he was already translating Kropotkin into Chinese, and it was then that he adopted the pen name he still uses - Ba from the first syllable of Bakunin's name and Jin from the last syllable of Kropotkin's. Now in his eighties, he has become a kind of symbol of steadfastness among the younger writers.

I could not fail to be flattered by the identification with him or to be pleased by the subtle way in which so many people seemed to be expressing their tolerance for anarchist ideas. Perhaps I should have paid more attention to the fact that even in 1947 such ideas were evoked but never mentioned, never named. Tolerance - or daring - had not yet gone so far.





Shielding their faces to avoid identification students allow a photographer into the information tent, Tienanmen Square, a day or two before the June 3/4 attack.

The daring would emerge - and counter to it the open intolerance - in the China of 1989, when the students and many of the ordinary people of Beijing acted as most anarchists merely intend to act, by fighting magnificently and non-violently in their fifty days of demonstrations for freedom of speech, assembly and political life. For their part, the authorities cancelled out years of apparently increasing tolerance in a few hours on the night of June 3-4, when the cruel gerontocrats who had seized control of the Communist Party ordered the massacre of the students in Tienanmen Square and then tried by propaganda lies, like the rulers in 1984, to wash their crimes into the memory holes of history.

So the "it" of 1987, the promise of freedom, did not endure, and old Ba Jin, who had as always expressed his support and admiration for the

students, was imprisoned once again. But like Malatesta in Mussolini's Italy and Tolstoy in Tsarist Russia, he was considered a figure whose moral stature made it impossible for him to be done away with, and he was finally released.

We need all the eye-witnesses we can get to that night which may in the end be one of the turning points of history. In a new book, Tienanmen Square (Douglas and McIntyre, Canada), rushed to completion two months after the massacre, Scott Simmie and Bob Nixon are among the first to give written evidence from on-the-spot observation.

Their voices were familiar to many of us who listened to CBC radio as they gave their day-by-day account of the student occupation of the Square that since the days of the Ming emperors has been the symbolic heart of China. It is, one



should say at the start, a circumscribed book, concerned mainly with what happened in the Square and in other parts of Beijing, but reporting only second hand on events at the same time in the rest of China.

Simmie and Nixon are conscious, as they should be, of performing a historic duty, as John Reed did when he described Russia's October Revolution of 1917 almost hour by hour in Ten Days that Shook the World. In fact, they deliberately echo Reed when they say: "It lasted fifty days, and ended in a murderous ten hours that shook the world".

The comparison is a good one, for Reed's book has been considered - though it is a highly partisan book - as a model description of a great event seen white-hot in the caldron of history. Perhaps because they were not involved as true believers as Reed had been, and because they write of something less planned and less violent and above all less successful than the Bolshevik seizure of power, the writers of Tienanmen Square do not evoke the same quality of focused intensity as Ten Days.

**T**he book's virtue lies in its slow diurnal and even banal quality, as the narrators show the students living from day to day in all their steadfastness and vacillation, building up in obstinacy, in debate, in the human mingling of courage and fear, a revolution of a rare and true kind that challenged no particular government but rather the principle of unchallenged authority itself.

Day by day the authors followed where the action moved, in the Square itself among the students, wandering along the streets when the great processions made their way through applauding crowds, riding their bicycles to places where action suddenly broke the stagnation of stalemate, like the universities themselves or the

crossroads where the people would build and maintain their barricades to hold up convoys of troops and try to talk them out of attacking the students.

It is a book rich in detail but low in hype. One senses the atmosphere of the Square, the mood of its inhabitants, the long hours of excitement when the students think of a new tactic or when a government leader or spokesperson appears and hope of a sane encounter flares up and dies. One gets the feeling of the little streets of Beijing and the inhabitants stirring out, sometimes with food in their hands to support the students, sometimes with sticks, stones or bare hands to oppose and attack the onslaughts of the military power.

There are the exalted moments of the great peaceful marches through the city, singing the International, and the humble moments when the students talk of the odours of their bodies, and the pathetic moments when the hunger strikers, already underfed on university canteen food, protest as they are being carried off to hospital by their friends for resuscitation.

The penultimate chapter, 'The Massacre', which tells how this great peaceful movement was destroyed without any attempt at creating a real dialogue between the freedom fighters and the party leaders, is one of the shortest, but is very intense in its concentration on the actual events: the columns of heavily armed troops moving into the city, the quixotic attempts of the populace to halt them, the naked cruelty with which the army of brutalised men eventually sliced its way through, and the final ruthless assault on the Square in which perhaps as many as three thousand students and citizens of Beijing were martyred to the power-hunger of a few men, as the aspirations towards freedom of a whole decade were drowned in their blood. Not the least extraordinary thing to emerge from this



chapter is the courage with which Canadian and other Western journalists, aware of the profound historic importance of the events they were witnessing, constantly risked their lives to see and record what was happening.

I must make a qualification here, partly about the objectivity so overtly cherished among journalists, and also about the ambivalent halfway zone journalists reach when they try, to paraphrase Wordsworth, to present excitement recollected in tranquillity, and to turn the immediacy of their spontaneous impressions into the permanence of a book. The 'objectivity' of the journalist is largely a rationalisation of their situation; they are not and cannot afford to be involved as actors, and so there is always the sense that we are participating indirectly, not on the stage but out in the audience.

My own most vivid impressions of the situation in Beijing - as well as a few inside bits of information - came from a Westerner who was inside and not outside the struggle, a disillusioned true believer, a maoist who had for long been a devoted servant of the Chinese regime and now saw the movement of the students as the true way towards liberation through dialogue. He had become involved at the grassroots level, working among the people of Beijing, living among them, and eventually marching among them; for him now this was the Revolution almost accomplished - and now bitterly destroyed.

Fresh from flight, he carried within him the emotions of those long days as a Chinese student would do. Because of promises of secrecy I cannot for a long time tell openly all he said, still less identify him, but I know I shall never again live the fifty days of Beijing as I did for the two hours after this man arrived on my doorstep with his memories and his grief.

History, of course, is made up of recollections like these and of the 'objective' observations of journalists, mingled with the grit of statistics and other sociological data when they are available - but all contained within the fluid element of collective memory. To fix that element in some comprehensible form is the task of the historian, and it needs imagination and the sense of grand perspective that only distance can bring.

Tienanmen Square is thus the material of history and not history itself, for which I am not blaming its authors. They offer their share of experience, which historians will later find invaluable, but they were not in the position - and probably no-one else was - to see the events in Beijing as part of the greater whole which is the current evolution of China. The narrative is inevitably concentrated in the Beijing where the authors happened to be, and the very nature of the situation means that they were deprived of information from other parts of China.

This deliberate and necessary restriction on their narrative to what they actually saw or could confirm on the spot intensifies one's impression of Beijing as the point of origination and the continuing heart of the movement. It leaves its readers incompletely aware of what was happening in the other great cities (and a great deal was) so that we shall have to wait a while for a really comprehensive picture of the popular movement in China at that time.

Moreover, there is not very much in Tienanmen Square that can satisfy our speculations on the political background to the events. Though the soldiers are evoked as first an ambivalent and then a malevolent presence, much that seemed evident at the time - even in the authors' own broadcast statements - tends to be pushed into the background. We do not hear very much about the good 38th and



the bad 27th Armies who haunted our airwaves during the crisis.

And no attention is given to the possibility that China, like many other nations whose revolutions have grown old and corrupt, may be entering a Napoleonic phase, when the Army no longer obeys the Party or shares power with it, but dominates it. Throughout the fifty days of crisis, even in the incomplete news that we received, it was evident that struggles were going on within the Army at the same time as the Party seemed to be paralysed by the students' challenge and its own internal dissensions.

**T**he stories of clashes between various military factions are evidently not without foundation; there are persistent reports from sources I trust that six or seven generals were summarily executed by the faction that eventually emerged in control. This was the faction headed by no less than the President of China, Yang Shangkun, a Long Marcher as aged as Deng Xiaoping, who emerged from ceremonial inactivity to play a key role in the forced resolution of the crisis.

The nepotistic Yang is not only the head of state; he is also the head of a clan of high officers - sons, sons-in-law, and nephews - one of whom commanded the troops who were brought down from the isolation of the north-easterly provincial capital of Shenyang to crush the popular revolt. In Shenyang they had been carefully isolated and filled with hardline propaganda until the government released them - hepped up on amphetamines - to carry out the massacre.

We shall probably have to wait years to know what went on within the Chinese government during the crucial days before martial law was declared, obviously with the intent of moving into more drastic action. But it is clear that the Communist Party hardliners could not have

triumphed if they had not plotted with a similar military faction whose victory in the Army put them in the position of dominating the Party. It is the generals, with their allies in the security police, who are now in control of China - and there is no prospect of a revolt of the colonels!

Deng has become the fragile figurehead of the military, and the two principal political figures in China today, premier Li Peng and Party secretary Jiang Zemin, are men of straw. Li cut away his own popular following (such as it was) and his base within the Party when he obeyed Yang and proclaimed martial law: when the time for his downfall comes he will not have a single friend. Jiang was the Party boss of Shanghai, but he has no base elsewhere, and this is why he was chosen. When Deng dies, either or both of these men can be dismissed without fear of effective protest within the Party or elsewhere.

And that, of course, brings us around to the fate of Zhao Ziyang, of whom we have recently heard so little. Is he dead? Or is he being kept as a high-grade recyclable, ready to assume the appropriate role when the People's Army decides to re-emerge in the guise of the Army of the People? Such populist initiatives are entirely within the Napoleonic tradition that now rules China.

One thing seems certain, and Simmie and Nixon more than hint at it. The people of Beijing have gone through a process of radical political education - and they are unlikely to forget or forgive Li Peng and his kind, who enacted - either on their own initiative or as the pawns of others - one of the worst atrocities of Chinese history, which has rarely been calm or bloodless. One day these people will act and speak again, and perhaps - as has happened before in China - their voices will carry what we metaphorically call the Mandate of Heaven.



IN REVIEW

HERBERT READ



# A rumble of big themes amid the clamour of obligations

Herbert Read devoted himself to implanting Continental ideals into British cultural life. But he was obliged more than some to expend his energies in hack work. ROBIN KINROSS considers a new biography.

**H**

HERBERT READ BEGS TO thank you for your letter, but has to inform you that he has retired from all unsolicited

correspondence, from lecturing, attending meetings and conferences, joining committees, writing prefaces and introductions, visiting studios and opening exhibitions, reading unsolicited



manuscripts and books, offering his opinion on drawings and paintings submitted to him through the post, and generally from all those activities which render his present existence fragmentary and futile".

This postcard, which Read had printed in the 1940s, is one of the more telling documents quoted by James King in his new biography of Read (**The Last Modern**, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £25.00) - though he cuts it clumsily; the full text was given by Vernon Richards in his memories of Read, in Anarchy 91. In the struggle to support a family, country house and town flat, to meet school fees and alimony payments - on the base of just part-time employments, mainly as a publisher's editor, Read took on a horrible load of odd jobs.

King's biography is an efficient catalogue or annotated engagement-diary of a life. It feels like not much more than a passing stop in the career of a busy academic author: one of a series of 'lives' (first William Cowper, then Paul Nash, now Read, next William Blake). And the game is given away by its 5-page index entry on 'Read, Herbert' which puts all the facts on display, for super-rapid consumption. Although the book may serve to reintroduce Read to us as a cultural phenomenon, it does him little service as writer or thinker. For that there are two better books: George Woodcock's Herbert Read: the Stream and the Source (1972) and David Thistlewood's Herbert Read: Formlessness and Form, An Introduction to his Aesthetics (1984).

Those who want a quick introduction to Read's politics should turn to chapter seven in Woodcock's book, which, as Thistlewood remarked, "cannot be improved upon". A distressing feature of King's account is the continual turn to Read's writings to pick out merely those passages in which Read seems to writing surreptitiously about himself (for

example, in the book on Wordsworth) - as if his work had or has no independent value.

The chief theme of the book is the fragmentation of Read's life: as if he was defeated both by his immediate circumstances and by the larger forces of the society in which he lived. The battle for coherence must be a leading motive in many lives, but in Read's case this took an acute form. His father - a 'gentleman-farmer' in North Yorkshire - died after a riding accident, when Read was ten years old. From the rural idyll of early childhood (at least, that was how he came to construct it), Read was thrown into the harsh society of an orphanage, then a bank clerk's job in Leeds. But through energetic self-education, with the help of an unusually lively local culture in Leeds - and via war service in the army - he found a way out of this predicament and into the world.

**T**he reputation of Herbert Read may now be as various as his interests: a writer on art and a promoter of modern art and design in Britain; a literary critic and poet; an 'unpolitical' but politically conscious writer. Or, in this third respect, maybe just as the anarchist who (in 1953) accepted a knighthood. With all of these components of Read, the Canadian James King deals impartially, neither as an uncritical partisan for his subject, nor with the axes to grind that a trueborn British person has. For example, about the incident of the knighthood, King puts the matter in the context of Read's life at that time, and demonstrates that biography can sometimes explain things.

Thus, it was Margaret ('Ludo') Read - his second wife - who especially wanted this honour, with its spin-off of turning 'Mrs' into 'Lady'. Their marriage had always had its tensions and agreements to differ (she was a strong Catholic, he an atheist) and had just been



through a difficult passage over Read's friendship with another woman. So, in accepting this title, Read made a domestic peace offering. King quotes a beautiful excuse that Read made to an acquaintance - "I didn't feel important enough to refuse" - and, knowing all this, even British dissenters might now be prepared to forgive him.

The other famous public incident in Read's life was his active engagement in the Freedom Defence Committee, during and immediately after the war, which centred on the trial and imprisonment of prominent anarchists around Freedom Press. Witnesses of his public appearances during this campaign have vivid memories of Read, white with anger and overcoming his marked shyness to deliver a forthright attack on the government and its war conduct, and to call for resistance. That mood of blunt statement was always present in Read - it seems to have been quite frequent in his private remarks and letters - but one could wish that he had been able to channel it more usefully into a public political engagement.

Read's political radicalism was formed in his Leeds days and stayed with him, in various registers, throughout the rest of his life. Like others in his generation, it was the events of the 1930s, and particularly those in Spain, which brought him to a more explicit concern with political issues. The titles of his books from those years showed him 'coming out' politically: Art and Society (1937), Poetry and Anarchism (1938), The Philosophy of Anarchism (1940), To Hell with Culture (1941)... Big themes rumbled through his work: the human and cultural damage entailed almost equally by capitalism and by socialist totalitarianism; the possibilities of resistance to these processes, within small centres of human endeavour, and through the fostering of imagination - especially visual imagination - in education.

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Occasionally he could be direct and precise in his cultural-political formulations. But through most of Read's intellectual production there is a pervading sense of vagueness and generality, so that it is hard to recall any exact arguments, and a hasty inspection might see him as just another English man of letters. Thinking back to an extended reading of his critical work some years ago, I remember especially the citations and recommendations: Jung, Kierkegaard, Buber, Kropotkin, Lao-Tsu, Coleridge... After a while one longs for something tougher, more analytical.

Yet, imagining oneself back into his context, it may be that in a culturally barren situation there was no other course for him but to work in this generous way. And one could add that Read was quite largely forced into criticism and theory by the need to earn cash, and his work in these forms inevitably suffers from the speed and frequency of its production: he wanted, much more, to write poems and imaginative prose. There are exceptions to this verdict: especially his one novel, The Green Child (1935). And Education through Art (1943), is a sustained and thorough discussion of its subject (written with a two-year university fellowship), and one that brings together the major themes of his work.

The special interest of Read's life and work now is as that of an exception to the patterns of British culture - to the assumptions that ideas and politics don't mix, that parliamentary sovereignty is unquestionable good sense, that literary culture is dominant and is unrelated to visual culture (but then perhaps, as he once argued, the English have no visual culture?). Read's endeavour, which had its heroic aspects, was to transgress and question these patterns. In the latter part of his life he became a totem-figure - the knighthood reinforced this -

representing an established modernism in culture. In the inevitable revolt of the sons, younger critics began to distance themselves from him. King quotes one of them (Lawrence Alloway): "There was nobody much else to attack... Herbert was really all there was."

Nowadays, although conditions have changed, the deep structures of English-British culture continue to make Read's kind of boundary-breaking very difficult. It is hard to think of individuals carrying on in the same spirit. John Berger may be the best candidate - and no accident that he has chosen Continental exile. The British climate isn't kind to wide-ranging freelance artist-intellectuals: the ground is occupied by academics and journalists, both categories being hampered by limited vision.

As to the cross-disciplinary meeting ground - the ideal community that Read wanted to found (in 1932 he made a proposal to set up a Bauhaus-type centre for arts - in Edinburgh!) - this has been allowed to suffer only brief and intermittent forms of life. The Institute of Contemporary Arts was his best attempt, and though never living up to the best hopes for it - King provides an account of the involvement of the CIA, and of the English aristocracy, in the early life of the ICA - it has proved to be a notable legacy. Less known (King doesn't mention it) is the part Read played in setting up the Aberdeen Arts Centre and the Herbert Read Arts Centre, York.

Within formal education, the Construction School at the West of England College of Art, Bristol, was another, more concerted experiment in cultural bridge-building. Norman Potter reported on it in his book What is a Designer, itself an attempt to locate and continue the tradition in which Read worked. These have been fragments, isolated endeavours; they are also signs that Herbert Read's struggles still have their after-effects.



## STATE TERRORISM

# Bring down Airbus, pick up medal

From NOAM CHOMSKY, Massachusetts:

I read with interest the article on the shooting down of the Iranian Airbus by the USS Vincennes (Solidarity 25/26). There is more to the story. US Navy commander David Carlson, who commanded a nearby vessel, describes how he "wondered aloud in disbelief" as he monitored the events, watching as the Vincennes shot down what was obviously a civilian airliner out of "a need to prove the viability of Aegis", its high-tech missile system, in his judgment (US Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1989; also Los Angeles Times 3 September 1989).

The next act in the drama took place in April 1990, when the commander of the Vincennes, along with the officer in charge of anti-war warfare, was given the Legion of Merit award for "exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service" and for the "calm and professional atmosphere" under his command during the period of the destruction of the Airbus. This was reported on the wires, hence available to all news organisations, but I found nothing - though Iranian condemnations of the destruction of the airliner are occasionally noted and dismissed with derision as "boiler plate attacks on the United States" (Associated Press, 23 April 1990; Philip Shenon, New York Times, 6 July 1990). Doubtless the Independent (sic) would hasten

to assure us that this is all more "nonsense".

For exactly the reasons you give, it is a rare Western reader who knows about these matters, but they did not go unnoticed in the Third World. Third World Resurgence (Malaysia, October 1990) lists the downing of the Iranian Airbus among acts of US terrorism in the Middle East, quoting the words of the award and adding that "the Western public, fed on the media, sees the situation in black-and-white one-dimensional terms", unable to perceive what is obvious to those who escape the grip of the Western propaganda system.

Sincerely

## WHITE LION FREE SCHOOL

# Juggling many pressures

From NIGEL WRIGHT, Sheffield:

It was nice to see Graham Wade writing about White Lion Free School in Solidarity 25/26. From its inception in 1972 White Lion tried to get funding from the ILEA. ILEA did offer to fund White Lion (as it had funded other free schools like North Kensington, Freightliners and Bermondsey Lamppost) so long as White Lion accepted the designation 'special unit': a place for kids who had got into trouble at school. White Lion couldn't accept this for two reasons: first, special units were required to have as their aim the returning of children to mainstream schools as soon as possible, that is, after their 'cure'; second, if White Lion had been a special unit it would have been virtually



impossible to recruit children who had not been in trouble at school. White Lion was keen to get a cross-section of kids and offer them an education which was in no way 'treatment' but an alternative to mainstream schooling. That's why White Lion took every opportunity in public statements to insist that it was not a special unit.

In truth, though, the great majority of White Lion kids had been in trouble at school, either as 'persistent truants' or as 'disruptive pupils'. When I made the statement Graham quotes I was putting the official White Lion line. We were juggling with a great number of pressures which required us to be economical with the truth.

I don't think this is an important point and only deal with it because he raises it. I would have been much happier if Graham had used the space to discuss some of the theoretical issues about education which Free School (and my Assessing Radical Education) raise. Radicals - whether libertarians or socialists or both - have been very sloppy about educational theory. Commonly they either deny any need for theory ("let's stop talking and get on with it") or else accept uncritically conventional College of Education textbook theory.

May I make a plea for radicals concerned with education to address the problem of theory? May be people are bewildered by too many issues at once; perhaps we could focus on just one: what does it mean to be a libertarian parent? People like A S Neill are worth reading on this subject, but in my view Neill was seriously mistaken in crucial ways. Centrally, he rides over the fact that children grow up in society (although of course rural boarding schools like Summerhill try to minimise the impact of this). Neill's starting point, like Margaret Thatcher's, is Hobbes' bare individual. Mine would be society. Is there anyone out there interested in discussing this question?

## HISTORY WORKSHOP

# An excellently libertarian process

From DAVID GOODWAY, Keighley:

It is always gratifying for authors (including editors) to receive such an appreciative and perceptive review as the one John Quail gave For Anarchism in Solidarity 25/26. On the other hand, far from putting my "emphasis on the study of anarchism and the study of anarchist history", I actually agree with him that it is fatal for anarchists to contemplate their navels in this way. The thing which really excited me about the papers was the extent to which they seemed to be pushing beyond the anarchist sages and hidebound anarchist dogma to highlighting contemporary libertarian theory and, in general, applying libertarian analysis to the world of the here and now.

My main purpose in writing this letter, though, is to set the record straight concerning my part in the anarchist strands at recent History Workshops. John, in effect, accuses me of taking all the credit - at Bob Jones's and his expense. I have convened anarchist strands at the History Workshops from 1985 in Leeds to 1990 in Glasgow, in my role as convenor of the Anarchist Research Group (ARG). The strand has served in fact as the group's annual conference. For Anarchism, derived from the '85 and '86 Workshops, both held in Leeds, is presented as a volume "by writers who are themselves libertarians and mostly members of the ARG".

The ARG originated in 1984-85 as an advisory group on anarchism of the History Workshop Centre for Social History. As John would have recalled had he followed up the



reference in my introduction to a report I wrote for History Workshop Journal 22, during Autumn '84 papers were being sought by the advisory group as an anarchist contribution to the '85 Workshop. Coincidentally, this initiative occurred at the same time as Bob Jones was, independently, organising a strand on 'Anarchism and the British Labour Movement' for the '84 Workshop at Leicester. Contact and collaboration were rapidly established. A substantial section on this background did appear in my original draft but was cut for reasons of space at Routledge's insistence.

All the same, there was no link between the anarchist strands at the 1984 and 1985 History Workshops. Each Workshop dissolves itself and the next year's collective is formed from scratch (an excellently libertarian procedure). As for John Quail's part in all of this, his memory is defective, for he was not "my co-convenor for the Leeds Workshops". In '85 and '86 we were both members of the History Workshop collectives, but in '85 John was not involved in convening any strand, organising instead the exhibitions and bookstalls with great flair.

In 1986 we did jointly convene a double anarchist strand, but this was divided into two parallel and largely independent workshops. John's concentrated on aspects of the English anarchist movement (indeed, I thought it was unhealthily devoted to "the study of anarchist history"! ). Mine dealt with international anarchism and theory and practice, with ARG members predominating among the speakers, and it was only from this strand, not John's, that papers were drawn upon for For Anarchism. When writing the introduction I did wonder whether to mention John's name. Still, I was intent on enhancing the profile of the ARG; and as readers will now see, the detail is burdensomely finicky.

Yours fraternally

## HUNGARY

# Brought to a standstill

From BOB DENT, Budapest:

Just a footnote to my article on Hungary (Solidarity 25/26) which gave the impression of an apathetic, quiet, inactive, albeit dissatisfied public, despite all the razzamatazz of recent political changes. At the time of writing that was certainly true and it remains true today. However, at the end of October something occurred to shatter that 'peace' which was very revealing of the fragile state of Hungarian society. For three days, October 26-28, the whole country was brought to a standstill by a blockade of taxi and lorry drivers protesting at a sudden government announcement that petrol prices would rise by 60 per cent.

Hungary ground to a halt. Borders were closed, the airport cut off, all the bridges in Budapest were blocked, thus paralysing the entire city. Queues for basic foodstuffs appeared for the first time in many years. Although denounced by the government as a selfish action, the drivers had much public sympathy (inflation is 30 per cent). Even the Budapest police chief said he would not support physical intervention to clear the roads. After tri-partite negotiations with employer and employee representatives the government backed down and the increase was reduced.

An interesting question is how did the drivers get organised so quickly to take such concerted action, only hours after the initial announcement of a price rise? Many pointed to the fact that their CB and other radios were the means of this. They must have helped, but the means of communication, albeit instant, can't explain everything. Was there any prior history of



# VERBATIM

"It seemed to me that the US and Britain were using their soldiers as mercenaries to support a family dynasty in the Middle East. I had no qualms about dying for my country if it was under direct threat, but flying 2,000 miles across the Mediterranean to fight for a foreign business concern did not seem to come under that category".

**LANCE CORPORAL VIC WILLIAMS**  
after 72 days on the run to avoid  
serving in the Gulf War

"Of course I'm disturbed by the tragedy for these six families. But what has really moved me is the thought that such a big lie can be sustained by so many intelligent people for so long. The world is being screwed up by people who are clever. What the world is short of is people with integrity".

**CHRIS MULLIN M.P**  
on the Birmingham Six

"All societies require capitalism for production and socialism for collective services".

**ARTHUR SELDON**  
Founder of the Institute for  
Economic Affairs

"This place would really have been paradise if only the Bolsheviks had managed to create people who don't need to eat".

One Muscovite's reaction  
to the Soviet Union's current  
food-supply crisis

organisation? Certainly there have been co-ordinated actions of taxi-drivers before, for example mass 'drive-ins' over murders colleagues. Or was it one of those 'spontaneous' developments which constantly occur in history and which later apparently disappear?

Further investigation is clearly needed, but a passive society is not always as quiet as it may appear on the surface.

All the best

## HISTORY WORKSHOP

# Stranded strand

From **KEITH FLETT**, London:

As John Quail notes (Solidarity 25/26), anarchism has been a significant strand in recent History Workshop conferences. At one level the HW is a loosely organised and democratic affair, but at another level it is dominated by the Labour left (and not-so-left these days). Anarchism is ignored as an influence, for example, in the History Workshop Journal. What then should we make of Quail's concluding comments? Namely, that anarchist history is all very well, but what is needed is more anarchist theory or, perhaps, an acceptance of marxist theory which can explain the course of events.

Well, anarchists and revolutionary socialists do need to explain the course of events such as the collapse of stalinism. But they cannot do so, as Quail's excellent The Slow Burning Fuse shows, without recourse to history. And a key part of that history is the need to stress that anarchists and trotskyists were around and were opposing stalinism in the 1930s, not just now when Stalin and all his works are kaput.

Yours fraternally