SOLIDARITY

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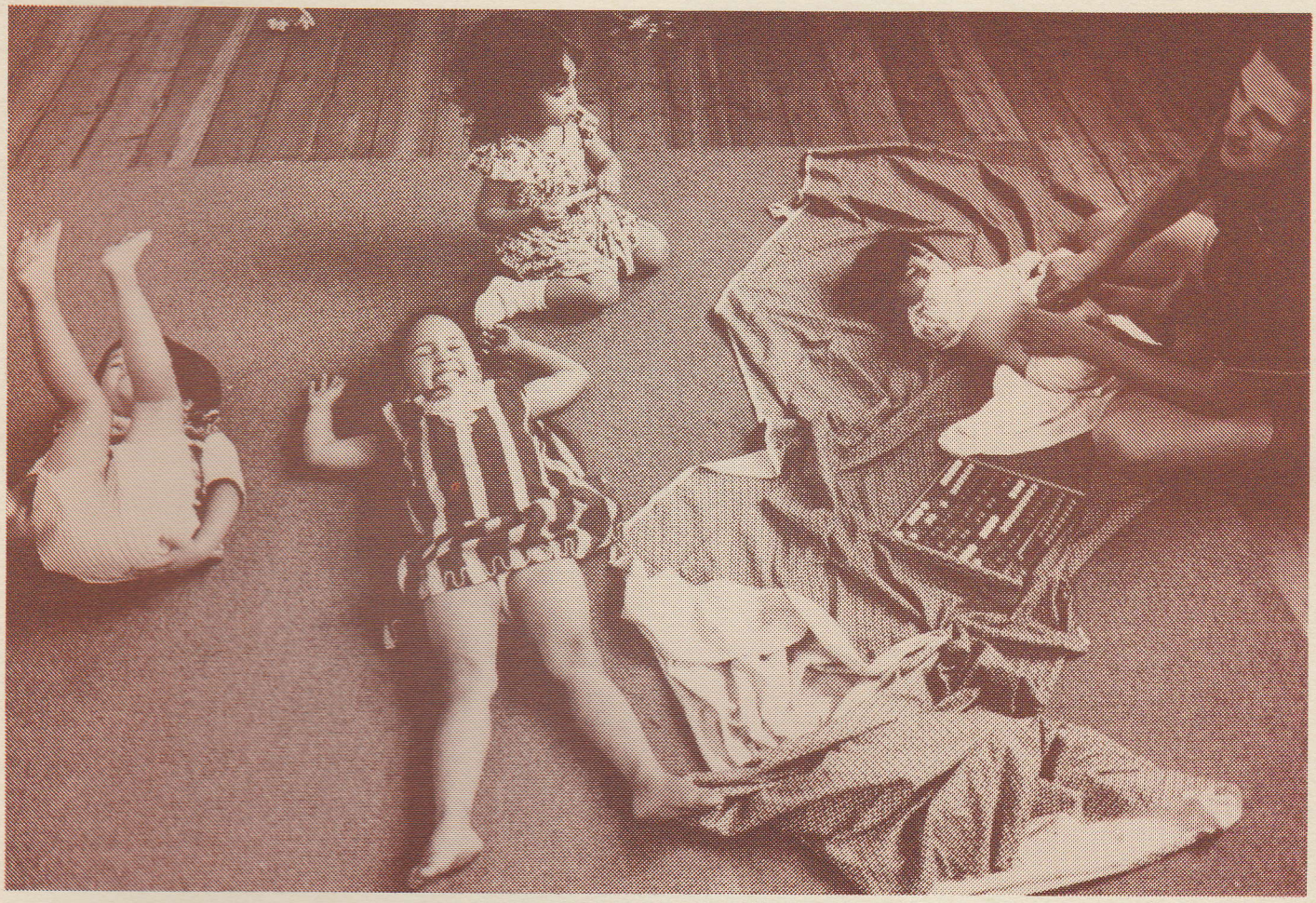
A Journal of Libertarian Socialism. Number 25/26. Autumn 90



Play Power

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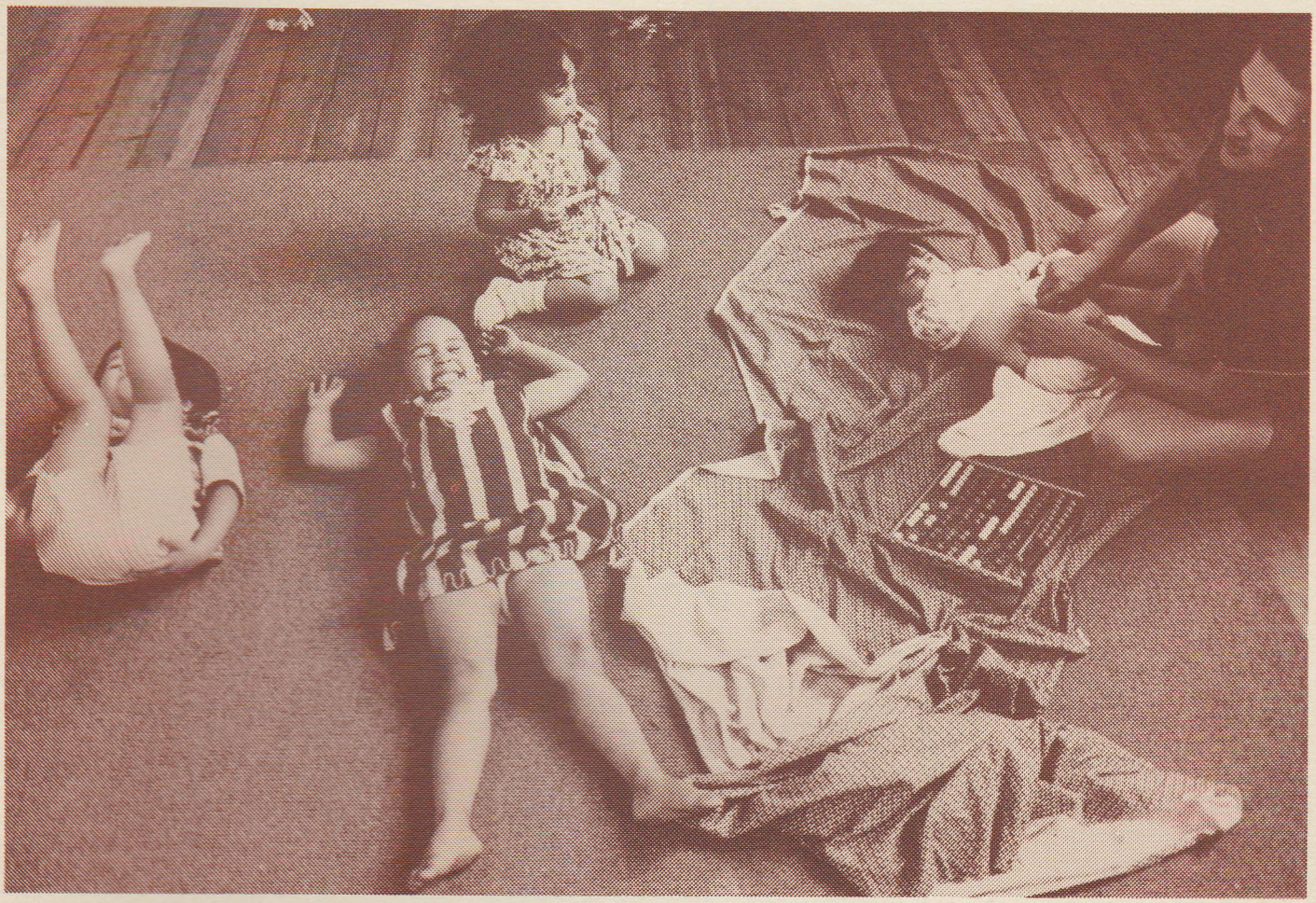

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SOLIDARITY JOURNAL 25/26

AUTUMN 1990 NUMBER (NEW SERIES)

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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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COVER PICTURE: The nursery at Islington's White Lion Street free school. White Lion children's ages ranged from three to sixteen. Photo: Sara Hannant

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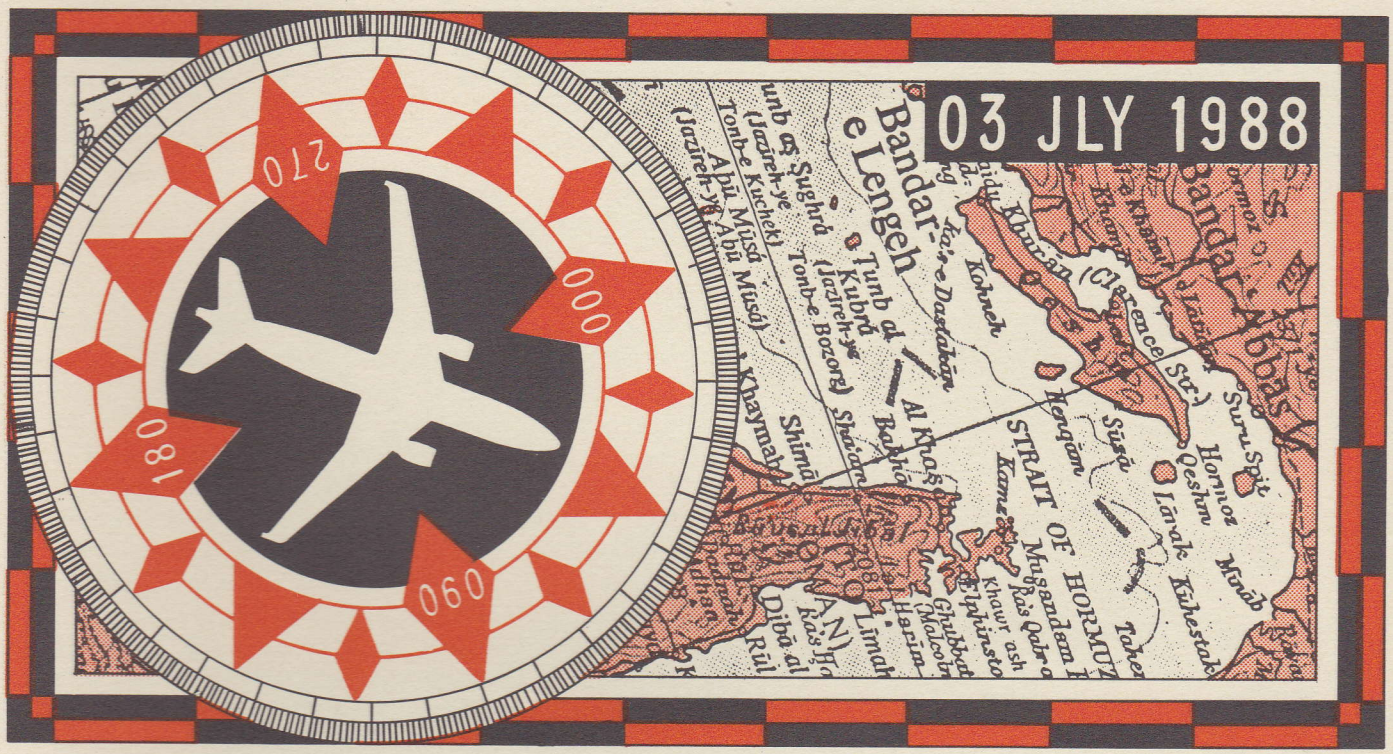


Two years ago the US Navy blew apart an Iranian airliner on a routine flight to Dubai, killing 290 people. In a detailed analysis of how this act of terrorism was reported here, MILAN RAI demonstrates that when the Pentagon can rely on the British press, it's time we stopped.

ON JULY 3 1988, the United States guided missile carrier USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian civilian Airbus A300 airliner. 290 passengers and crew died when the aircraft was blown apart by a direct hit from a Standard missile. Ronald Reagan, then president, defended the shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 as an "understandable accident" and a "proper defensive action". Here, in the UK, Margaret Thatcher was quick to support "the right of forces engaged in such hostilities to defend themselves". We learn something about British culture by observing the response of the mass media to these events. Generally, the UK press was cautious in its response. The more sceptical refused to accept the official

Richard Schofield

version in its entirety. Nevertheless, news reports and commentary were produced within the framework of assumptions set by the Pentagon.

The limits of permissible thought were laid down firmly by the Financial Times, which, while casting doubt on the US justification of 'defensive action', declared that no "fair-minded person will believe Iran's charge that the US shot down a civilian airliner in cold blood" (July 5). The properly disciplined reader will exclude this possibility as "nonsensical" (Independent). Near the liberal extreme of mainstream opinion, we have the editorial reaction of the Guardian; "It was an accident. Of course it was an accident". At the liberal extreme, the Observer corrected the Guardian: it "was not an accident. It was... an error" (July 10). Here we see how the harshest critics of the Pentagon incorporated the party line into their criticism. The main theme of US propaganda was that the shootdown was a mistake, either a mechanical "accident", or a human "error", and not an intentional flouting of the law.

Before examining the events of July 1988, it is worth remembering the KAL 007 incident on 31 August 1983, when the Soviet Union shot down Korean Airlines Flight 007 killing 269 passengers. Soviet military chiefs had ordered a fighter pilot to "stop the flight" of the Boeing 747 as it flew over Sakhalin Island off Siberia on a flight from New York to Seoul. Outstripping Israeli terrorism against a Libyan Boeing in 1973 which claimed 74 lives, KAL 007 had been the worst incident of its kind, and provoked cold war hysteria in the West as the ultimate proof of the true nature of the "Evil Empire". In the case of Flight 655, the propaganda machine was switched into reverse, and the public was subjected to a disinformation campaign to ensure that it would not reach any unpleasant conclusions. The parallels between the two atrocities were too close to ignore. As usual, US propaganda was supported by the British mass media in a display of cultural subordination to the 'leader of the free world'.

"The fundamental differences" between the two attacks, said US Admiral William Crowe, were that KAL 007 "was not in a war zone, there was no combat in progress. Nor was there, as far as I can tell, any attempt made to warn". The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff failed to specify which sections of international law permit the mass killing of civilians in war zones, or near combat areas.

As for the warnings given to Flight 655, it was revealed within days that the majority of the warnings were sent on military frequencies which the civil aircraft was physically incapable of receiving. The report into the incident by the International Civil Aviation Organisation found that, of the four warnings which were sent over the civil air distress network, only the last "could be expected to be immediately recognisable to the flight crew" (Telegraph December 6). This final warning was transmitted only forty seconds before the Vincennes launched its two missiles.

This crucial fact was simply suppressed until the ICAO report in December 1988. However the majority of the Pentagon's fabrications disintegrated during the first week after the shootdown and had to be nursed by the press. The American cover story had two main elements: allegations about the "hostile behaviour" of the Airbus, and the claim that the USS Vincennes had mistaken the passenger plane for an F-14 Tomcat fighter. These fictions were in any case irrelevant to the main issue. Even taken at face value the US version amounts to an openly acknowledged massacre.

Within hours of the shootdown, Admiral Crowe was announcing the US

version of events. He declared that the Airbus had been descending from 9,000 feet towards the Vincennes, four to five miles outside the "prescribed air corridor" when it was shot down. Later, through unofficial channels, the Pentagon also claimed that the aircraft's transponder, which should have been transmitting a civilian identification signal, was turned off. As Captain Richard Sharpe, editor of the authoritative Jane's Fighting Ships commented, "If the transponder was not working, if the voice communications were not answered, if the aircraft was not flying in the designated corridor, to conclude that it was hostile was not unreasonable". We have already noted some facts about the "voice communications".

By Thursday July 7, only four days after Crowe's press conference, it had been conceded that the Airbus had in reality been flying level at an altitude of 12,000 feet, and was well within

Richard Schofield

Amber 59, the official air corridor across the Gulf, when it was destroyed. In contrast, KAL 007 was 400 miles north of the Red 20 corridor overflying Soviet territory, not in international airspace, when it was shot down. This was not taken as evidence of "hostile intent" by Western commentators in September 1983.

Hostile intent was also demonstrated, said the Pentagon, by the mysterious transponder. There were four versions of the mystery. At first, the Pentagon maintained that the Airbus's transponder was switched off. Then it was claimed that the Airbus' transponder "was actually sending on military channels" (Evening Standard July 4). On Wednesday July 6, the Pentagon produced two new stories. In public it announced that the Airbus had been transmitting both military and civilian identification signals simultaneously, while Congress was being told in confidence that the Airbus was only sending civilian signals, but might have been "masking" the presence of a separate military aircraft. The signals of this previously unmentioned aircraft could have been confused with those from Flight 655. Notice that all four versions succeed in transferring responsibility from those who fired the missiles to the victims of the attack.

Sadly for the Pentagon, it was soon public knowledge that another US warship in the area of the shootdown, the John H Sides, had detected a transponder signal from Flight 655. Only one signal: a civilian signal (Observer July 10). On July 15, Iran released the transcript of radio exchanges between Flight 655 and Gulf air traffic controllers just before the attack. Dubai air traffic control, according to press reports, was heard providing the transponder code SQUAWK 6760. This evidence was not challenged by the US. Contradictory evidence from another US

warship is of course highly credible, while the uncontested transcripts would appear to discredit the official US version entirely. These facts were reported by the press, but without comment.

In any case, a "missing transponder" would not have been interpreted as a threat. Britain's Air Commodore G S Cooper pointed out in the Daily Telegraph that in the Middle East, transponders do not have to be switched on below 15,000 feet. Recall that the Pentagon had claimed the Airbus was at 9,000 feet; thus there would have been nothing suspicious if the transponder had not been operating. Furthermore, on the shuttle route the Airbus was taking, aircraft generally receive their transponder codes from Dubai at the Mobar point, forty miles out from Bandar Abbas. "If the Airbus was shot down before it reached the Mobar point, as seems likely, it would not yet have had its transponder working", Cooper observed (July 5). These simple facts were also suppressed apart from this single mention in the Telegraph. Thus, even if we accept Washington's account, the "missing transponder" is exposed as a propaganda device to divert criticism, a conclusion which Fleet Street signally failed to draw.

So much for the hostile behaviour of the Airbus. Let us turn to the mechanical "error" invoked by the Pentagon. President Reagan, dismissing comparisons with KAL 007, said that the difference was that the Soviet fighters had clearly identified the plane before destroying it. The evidence for this assertion has never been produced. In the case of Flight 655, the Pentagon claimed that the warship's Aegis air defence system failed to distinguish between the oncoming Airbus (wingspan 147 feet) and an F-14 (wingspan 64 feet). This claim was supported by among others, Speaker of the House of Representatives Jim Wright, who said he had made similar mistakes of identification during the Second World War. This was accepted by the more supine segments of the British press, notably in the Times leader already cited, which stated that a modern captain "cannot tell much more about the shape or size of a target than he could have done decades ago". In particular, the Aegis system "could not tell an approaching Airbus from an attacking F-14 fighter".

However, radar has progressed somewhat since the 1940s. The Times' big lie was exposed in, among other places, the pages of the Independent: "the computer software at the heart of the Aegis system includes a library of radar profiles to help it distinguish aircraft types" (July 5). If there is a radar profile which the system should be able to identify, it is the F-14. The F-14 is the primary American naval fighter.

Even if Aegis had failed to identify the radar profile of the oncoming aircraft, it could still have recognised the plane by means of the Electronic Support Measures which pick up signals "such as the aircraft's navigation system, making clear its nature and origin"... a "combat aircraft would probably have used its own radars to pinpoint its intended target. These signals can give away the exact type of attacking aircraft, but could not have been produced by an Airbus" (Financial Times July 5).

Even if all three of these sophisticated recognition systems had failed, there remained an elementary role for the Aegis computer banks; checking the civilian air timetable. For example, "the ABC World Airways Guide, widely used by travel agents - would have told them that the aircraft they were tracking had left within three minutes of the scheduled departure time for Iran Air Flight 655 to Dubai", as the Independent pointed out (July 5).

The Pentagon inquiry, headed by Rear Admiral William Fogarty,

and leaked a month after the shoot-down, found no malfunction in the Aegis system, and blamed human error for the "accident" (Independent July 5). It recommended that the operations officer be sent a letter of reprimand, which was not to be entered in his record, however. In the event, the Joint Chiefs decided not to impose this vicious punishment, and completely exonerated the crew. In law this is known as being accessories after the fact. To my knowledge these moves provoked no UK editorial comment.

Even if we accept the claim that the Vincennes mistook the Airbus for an F-14, this cannot justify the identification of the oncoming aircraft as a threat. The F-14 is a naval interceptor aircraft, carrying air-to-air missiles; it could not have threatened the Aegis cruiser without sophisticated alterations beyond the reach of the Iranian military. In the words of a former US pilot, an F-14 would have been "eaten up" by the Vincennes defences in any case. Another ex-F-14 pilot asked "So what was the big threat to his ship?".

Furthermore, according to the original story, the 'F-14' was flying in a straight line towards the Vincennes at a height of 9,000 feet dropping towards 7000 feet. This leaves something to be desired as an attack approach. "A military pilot might have favoured a lower approach with frequent changes in course to confuse radar operators" (Independent August 4). This point was conceded in the Pentagon inquiry, which acknowledged that the Airbus course and flight-path should have told the Vincennes that it was not a hostile fighter.

All the main components of the US version are thus completely exploded. Significantly, the necessary information was largely available at the time of the shootdown, but, as the Pentagon correctly assumed, the press remained obedient and reported within the framework of official propaganda. Some elements of the original story, such as the

"warnings" claim, were not exposed until much later. However such gambits as the "missing transponder", or the lies about the Aegis system, however, could have been exposed at the time. As the US later admitted, the Airbus was not acting in a hostile manner, and the Aegis system was not only capable of identifying the Airbus, but actually did so. The British press, however, was unable to draw the obvious conclusions.

But there is a sense in which all these considerations are irrelevant to the main point. The Vincennes' Captain, William Rogers, ordered the Airbus to be destroyed under the US Navy's 'Rules Of Engagement' (ROE) in the Persian Gulf. These rules permit commanders to shoot first when, in their judgement, 'hostile intent' is apparent. Admiral Crowe was explicit on this point: "They do not have to be shot at before responding" (Guardian July 4). The Guardian's editors appeared to understand the significance of this point when they observed that the Vincennes failed to "distinguish between legitimate self-defence against attack, [and] pre-emptive strike and shoot first, ask questions afterwards" (July 13). However, the paper failed to point out that while the former policy is permissible under international law, the latter is not.

The US ROE must therefore be seen to constitute a criminal code of practice, which empowers naval commanders to carry out any murderous attack. We may remember that KAL 007 was shot down under the new 'Soviet Law for the Protection of the State Border' which was a similar license to kill, if the "provocation of an intruding aircraft cannot be terminated or the provocator (sic) detained by any other means". This was not passed over in silence in the West as reasonable and justifying the Soviet atrocity. The failure of the liberal press to make these elementary observations, or to subject US claims to the scrutiny they deserved, while posing as critics of the Pentagon, is an example of what the American thinker Noam Chomsky terms "feigned dissent". In this process, mainstream critics reinforce state propaganda in a way that open support cannot. The assumptions of state propaganda are assimilated into criticism and set the boundaries for permissible thought. In the case of Flight 655, the main boundary assumptions were that the plane's destruction was not intentional, or, more importantly, criminal. The debate over the incident was not over the evil nature of the US system, as it had been in the case of KAL 007, but whether the US should pay compensation to the victims of a "mechanical mishap".

The fact that it is possible to counteract official disinformation with documentation from the press demonstrates nothing about the adequacy of press coverage. As Chomsky and his colleague Edward Herman wrote recently, "That a careful reader looking for a fact can sometimes find it, with diligence and a sceptical eye, tells us nothing about whether that fact received the attention and context it deserved, whether it was intelligible to most readers, or whether it was effectively distorted or suppressed" (Progressive June 1988).

In the case of Flight 655, the truth was effectively distorted and suppressed. A major crime has been deleted from the record. The significance of this accomplishment of the 'free press' goes beyond the nearly three hundred civilian deaths. It is part of a shameful pattern of long standing, and which has deep roots in our society. Furthermore, while the 'free press' continues to shape opinion without serious challenge, the public will continue to be pacified by "brainwashing under freedom", and there will continue to be few obstacles to further atrocities.

HUNGARY

From People's Republic to Republic in the name of the people

Despite sparking off the upheaval that convulsed the rest of Eastern Europe, Hungary has itself seen little radical change. Few reforms are afoot, even after recent elections. BOB DENT, in Budapest, asks why ?

IN SOME WAYS it was all because of Hungary. On 10 September 1989 Hungary opened its borders to allow thousands of East Germans encamped in Budapest and around Lake Balaton to flee via Austria to West Germany. More pressure for change followed inside the German Democratic Republic, the Wall came down, and the system began to crumble. Czechoslovakia

Reuter

Thirty two years after rolling into Hungary to crush the 1956 uprising, soldiers of the 13th Soviet Tank Division pack their bags in readiness for withdrawal.

followed quickly, the rumblings reached Bulgaria, and then, more spectacularly, Romania.

Despite this triggering role, Hungary itself has remained remarkably quiet. Before the September decision, it was only Hungary and Poland in Eastern Europe that were exhibiting signs of movement. Now it seems that Hungary is lagging behind.

Well, yes and no. Hungary was on the path of reform long before anyone had heard of Gorbachev. Paradoxically, despite its suppression, the 1956 uprising saw to that. The post-'56 authorities, under Janos Kadar, knew that the old way wouldn't work or be tolerated, and changes had to be implemented. Economic reform got under way in 1968 and has continued, in fits and starts, ever since.

What characterised Hungarian reform, however, was that it was essentially initiated from above. There was no mass movement equivalent to the Polish Solidarnosc at any time. This quiescence on the part of the population is still present, despite the fact that in the past year economic reform has spilled over into political reform, meaning a change from a one-party to a multi-party system. It's true that the change-over, implemented by the 'old regime', has been accompanied by greater freedom of expression and of travel. Understandably, however, while the latter is important to most people, the former remains the preserve of journalists, commentators and politicians.

The quiescence was clearly evident in the elections held in late spring, though the degree of apathy and of outright rejection are unclear. There was a complicated system involving two rounds of voting. Despite the (nearly fifty) parties all speaking 'in the name of the people' the turnout was extremely low - 65 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. Disproportionality gave the centre-right Democratic Forum over 40 per cent of the parliamentary seats and they, together with two smaller conservative and rather nationalist parties, set about forming a new government. The new prime minister, Jozsef Antall, continues to speak 'in the name of the people', and, indeed, in the name of the million Hungarians who live outside the country's borders. The fact is, however, that only about a fifth of the electorate actually supported his party, the Forum, at the polls.

So where does this leave Hungarian society? Very much the same as before. Life in Hungary today is basically no different from what it was a year ago, despite the new faces in government and the ding-dong parliamentary debates and discussions. Rising prices and low incomes continue to dominate most people's lives. Some can make the most of the new situation. Economic reform, meaning a greater market orientation, has allowed in the past, and is allowing now, the rise of a 'new class' of Forint millionaires. Political reform has allowed some people access to more power and influence.

Most remain outside these two possibilities. It's not that people's lives are drab, dreary and depressing; Hungary has not conformed to this East European stereotype for many years. On the contrary, lots of people have taken advantage of the black economy to earn extra for themselves under their own control. The police atmosphere of the old Stalinist days has for many years been a theme for history books and the cinema. People have been able to get on with their lives unhindered for some time.

The signs of a collective, democratic, libertarian, alternative - call it what you will - spirit, however, are few and far between. There is no real feminist discussion, for example, let alone a movement. In the elections only the

tiny Green Party paid even lip service to sexual equality of any kind (despite the protestations of some parties regarding their modernistic, democratic credentials). Yet the Greens did badly at the polls and are in the throes of splits and recriminations. Nevertheless, the green movement in its broadest sense remains the largest, perhaps the only, expression of popular politics outside the official structures, though it is essentially of a 'conservative', conservationist type. One could point to the prison protests (unusual in this part of the world?) in early June connected with the new government's rather limited amnesty for prisoners, but this is perhaps over-reading the situation.

Socialism has been, understandably, a dirty word here for some time, and libertarian socialism has not even entered the vocabulary. But as Hungarian society moves increasingly towards integration with the West, the concerns which give rise to the view that there can be a better alternative to both the 'free world' and the 'communist world' will surely be reproduced.

LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION

No uniform school

London's White Lion free school finally bowed to the inevitable and closed its doors on April 11. GRAHAM WADE salutes the achievements of Britain's only state-funded libertarian school, tenacious survivor of fourteen or so free schools established in the early seventies.

THE CLOSURE of north London's White Lion Street Free School on April 18 marks the end of a chapter in the history of the modern free school movement in Britain. White Lion was the trail blazer, embodying a range of libertarian educational ideas promoting learning in a non-hierarchical and democratic setting. It was established in 1972 in a pre-dominantly working class district in Islington, not far from King's Cross Station, next to one of London's busiest street markets, and only a stone's throw from Starcross Comprehensive, better known in a previous incarnation as Risinghill.

Students of radical educational experiments will recall that Risinghill under the influence of its headteacher, Michael Duane, rose to prominence through the early 1960s as it attempted to practise an educational philosophy whereby children were treated as people with rights rather than as pupils with none. Eventually Duane was hounded from the school by unsympathetic bureaucrats, who were so affronted by his creation that they had it closed and reopened under another name. At the centre of the media controversy of the time was Duane's abolition of corporal punishment, which provoked headlines such as 'Does Sparing the Rod Breed Crime?'.

In her avowedly partisan, but eminently readable, book Risinghill, Death of a Comprehensive School (Pelican Books, 1968), Leila Berg reports the sad affair in great detail. One passage, quoting

a social worker, is equally applicable to White Lion: "I have sent unhappy, deprived children who have got into trouble to Risinghill and they have become happy". Indeed, much of the spirit of what Michael Duane and many of his fellow teachers were trying to practise at Risinghill is the same as, or at the very least similar to, what was attempted at White Lion. Both schools have drawn sympathetic responses from the libertarian fringe.

When Risinghill closed its doors in 1965, Duane said in his final address to the school: "What is important is not examination results but our concern for each other". And that too could just as well stand as an epitaph for White Lion. There were even some real links between the two schools in that some children who attended Risinghill, during the Duane years and appreciated the atmosphere there, later sent their own children to White Lion in the hope that they, in their turn, would find a happy school environment.

So often in accounts of both schools appear contrasting comparisons between what children liked about Risinghill and White Lion and what they hated about conventional state schools. Over and over again they praise feelings of togetherness and community, while disliking the anonymity and alienation encouraged by huge comprehensives run on conventional lines. One of White Lion's former students, Karen McDaid, who uniquely spent her whole school life at the free school, remembered clearly one of her few visits to an ordinary state institution:

> "I went to Islington Green, my friend's school, and attended a maths lesson and the teacher didn't even notice me. I thought if this was White Lion, the teacher would know straight away if someone new came in. It seemed as if the teachers didn't notice anyone. The maths teacher didn't seem to know what he was doing and hardly anyone in the class was doing any work. Everyone was talking and I had thought it'd be dead quiet. As I left the class early, the head of year came up and said bossily: 'What are you doing out of your class?'. I answered I was going to the toilet. He didn't believe me, saying he didn't want any excuses. Then he began following me around, so I ran out. Some of them were so rude! Teachers were never like that at White Lion".

The free school tried to follow a democratic structure with weekly meetings for everyone at which all decisions were taken. Lessons were not compulsory, all staff wages were the same, there was no headteacher and children were offered a range of activities, including a lot of outside visits, and even holidays abroad. For its first decade the school struggled along financially relying on grants and various fund-raising activities. Then a breakthrough came in 1982 when the Inner London Education Authority was persuaded to fund the school on a fairly generous basis as an official 'offsite centre'. Full teachers' wages and money for materials and equipment all became available overnight, and despite some misgivings voiced by workers and staff, the transition went smoothly.

One of the by-products of ILEA funding was the idea that the state system was recognising White Lion's usefulness as a 'sin-bin' facility, where all the rejects from normal schools could be sent as a last resort. From the very start there had always been suggestions that White Lion was at least in part fulfilling this kind of function. These suggestions were always strenuously denied by the school.

In 1982 one of the school's workers, Nigel Wright, told me emphatically "It's very important to say that we're not a sin-bin. Our children are quite ordinary, absolutely average. We don't cater for children with special needs

Sara Hannant

Lunchtime at White Lion. If you weren't queuing you probably cooked the food that day.

beyond the fact that they and their parents think it is a good idea to be in a democratic and free environment". However, this line of argument masked a different reality. In his recent book Free School: the White Lion Experience (Libertarian Education, 1989), Wright points out: "... this open admissions policy led the school to be overloaded with 'problem' children". He admits that a consistent effort was made to mislead outsiders on this and other topics.

And this opens up a can of worms, for it becomes clear reading his book that many difficulties affecting the school were deliberately hidden from public gaze. Some children, for instance, were expelled. Many benefited little from their (often brief) periods at White Lion - and so on. But these revelations should not have the reverse effect of what the original propaganda intended. If everything in the garden was not rosy, it was not maggot-ridden either. What Nigel Wright's sometimes confused account highlights - and it is a lesson still unlearned by too many radicals - is simply that theory takes a lot of bumps and knocks when translated into practice.

In a brief space it is impossible to even hint at the complexity of what White Lion, or Risinghill, set out to achieve or actually accomplished. But both made very brave efforts and set their sights extremely high. Ironically, the fate of White Lion was inextricably linked to the Thatcher's strangulation of the ILEA. There was no way - even if there was a will - for the new Islington educational authority to carry on funding White Lion, because the provisions of the new national curriculum could never be met by a free school. The British free school movement is currently at a low ebb with virtually no surviving free schools, but the ideas remain alive.

RURAL IDEALS

Raising a nation of small-holders

Colin Ward
The Child in the Country
Robert Hale, £12.95

David Crouch and Colin Ward
The Allotment,
Its Landscape and Culture
Faber & Faber, £13.95

Ruth Rendell and Colin Ward
Undermining the Central Line
Chatto 'Counter Blasts', £2.99

IN THESE THREE publications Colin Ward, with occasional collaboration from the academic David Crouch and the novelist Ruth Rendell, continues his interest in anarchist applications, in seeing how people use their environment in a libertarian way in order to meet their needs. As with his other writing on housing, vandalism, shanty towns, and holiday camps, they are full of original insights and unexpected pleasures. They vividly show how people can be creative and responsible when allowed to pursue their own interests in their own way.

It is, of course, the children who will suffer most if the present trend towards centralised government and urbanisation continues. In his much praised study of The Child in the City, Ward has shown how children can find interstices in the urban landscape which enable them to grow and flourish. Now in The Child in the Country, he makes a similar point, but he is eager to go beyond the sentimental myths about rural childhood and to explore the relative benefits and disadvantages of growing up in the country. In the process, he makes clear that Marx's and Engels' view of "the idiocy of rural life" is as romantic as Shakespeare's talk of "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything".

Country life, despite the plush magazines and heritage industry, is not what it used to be. Even in the Welsh-speaking heartland of North Wales where I live, things have changed irreversibly. The idea of some timeless community, with a rigid hierarchy from the labourer to the squire, no longer exists in the age of the 'global village'. Taiwanese computers and American videos penetrate the most remote hamlets. Middle-class immigrants push up the price of property and introduce alien ways. A concern with consumption has begun to replace the effort of production. Access to woods and pastures is increasingly limited.

Yet in many ways a childhood in the country is still the best way to bring children up. They gain something of inestimable value from their early exposure to the forms and rhythms of the natural world. They soon learn about the processes of life and death, of the sources of food as well as of manure. Research in North Wales, quoted by Ward, suggests that children in rural areas have the most favourable attitude towards themselves, towards other people and towards learning.

Some of Colin Ward's most interesting comments are on children's play, especially about the desire to make dens and dams. A private place to play in is undoubtedly a fundamental need of children. Boys, it seems, explore their environment more than girls do, but all children love the freedom of fields and woods, the opportunity to climb trees, to crawl in long grass, to splatter themselves with mud and to

splash in water. It should be part of their natural birthright.

The disadvantages of living in the country increase as children grow older. To attend secondary school normally means a long haul - my own daughter has to walk across four fields in all weathers to catch a bus to the nearest town and then a train to another town. She hides her wellington boots in a stone wall. The "culture of the bus", as Ward calls it, is not inspiring and leaves few fine images; transport for most is merely a gangplank.

Many older teenagers also feel trapped, succumbing to the "tyranny of distance". The social desert of country life can mean that some lonely adolescents live in the most beautiful parts of the country. A quiet desperation often grips young people who congregate aimlessly in the centres of small provincial towns. Until unemployment hit youth in town and country alike, the big city with its bright lights and mystery remained the great magnet, representing mobility and opportunity. Having learned of the problems of inner-city living through television, an increasing number of rural children, however, now prefer to stay where they are.

But as Ward's fascinating study shows, the traditional divide between town and country is in fact breaking down. Only a few children are sons and daughters of farm workers. Children in remote places like to keep up with the latest fashion and music. Mass communications have proved a liberation. Indeed, the culture between town and country has merged to such an extent that Colin Ward concludes that children from rich families in town or country have more in common than children from rich and poor families in the same city or village. Your culture depends not so much on where you live, but how you live. Ward bases his study mainly on England and Wales. The picture, of course, is different in the Third World: there the gap between town and country is widening. Most of the world's hungry remain in the country where there are few amenities and opportunities. The country boy still spends most of his life in toil and has only destitution to look forward to.

Since children do not choose their parents, Ward hopes they will be able to make the best of what they have wherever they may be. But he makes some positive suggestions to improve the lot of the rural child. Good local transport should be available. There should be "schools for freedom" based in the local community, making education a "creative adventure rather than an administrative headache". Above all, people should have access to land and the opportunity to build their own home.

Access to land is a central issue in The Allotment, Its Landscape and Culture. Allotments are of course a familiar landscape. To most they represent ramshackle eye-sores seen from the train, with makeshift huts, smouldering bonfires, and broken fences. The traditional image of the allotment holder is an old man with a flat cap wheeling a bicycle home with a string of onions or sheaf of carrots over the handlebars. At best allotments are considered wastelands for harmless eccentrics; at worst untidy strips which need flattening for pasture, road or estate. "Who can endure a cabbage bed in October?", asked Jane Austen from the warm comfort of her well-appointed house.

The Allotment explores the history and culture of the allotment, and looks at the different ways in which that culture has produced particular landscapes. It is a process in which the allotment holders produce a shared culture, and then create their own landscape by their special use of space, materials and crops. As a result there is a wide regional variety, from the pigeon lofts and leek competitions of the north east, the suburbia of Birmingham, to the greening of the inner city.

The British Library baldly catalogues the subject as 'Working men's gardens'. The allotment has of course always been more than that. It has enabled the unemployed to escape starvation and the employed to supplement their diet with fresh produce. It has allowed the dispossessed city dweller to be in touch with his country roots and find joy in voluntary co-operation with nature.

In place of wage slavery, it has offered fulfilling work; exhausted after daily toil in the factory, the workers come alive again on their small patch of land. It provides the one area of their work in which they can feel in control of themselves and what they do. For some it offers an escape from the pressures of competitive life, for others the opportunity of privacy. In different ways, the allotment has offered a base, a refuge and a sanctuary in a troubled and alienated world.

Nineteenth-century farmers in Hitcham were right in fearing that "the holding of an allotment will give the labourer a spirit of independence that will interfere with the services he owes his master". The rulers of marxist-leninist regimes this century thought likewise and tried to eradicate small plots of land. Indeed, as Crouch and Ward make clear, the allotment holder remains one of the "last bastions of individualism against the onslaughts of the professional designer, and against municipal tidiness and imposed order". But while the allotment holders work their own soil in their own way, they are not alone. They are aware of their companions and co-operate in the common work.

In well-established allotments, there is a strong sense of continuity and attachment. Mine in South London was typical in that it was on unprofitable ground, squeezed between suburban sprawl and playing fields. It was an intimate, protected space, a tiny wildlife refuge, with its wide variety of animals, birds, insects and plants. Hedgehogs were abundant and a vixen with her cubs lived nearby in a railway bank. In winter, a robin would always keep me company when I was digging.

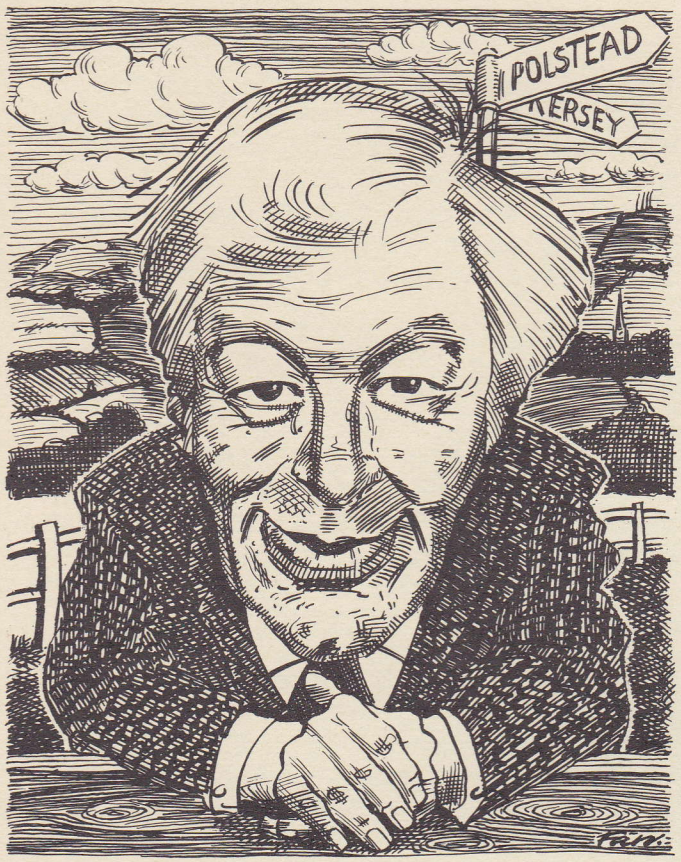
My neighbour was an old postman called Les. As a boy of seven, he planted with his father the plum tree against which my shed leaned. It was indeed a family affair. The fact that his father had worked the soil before him gave him great satisfaction and he was clearly pleased to see a young man, albeit of a different background and education, taking a keen interest in his old allotment.

Les became a companion and guide, offering me his extra seedlings, showing me the best way to dig and to make compost. We bought seeds and manure together. He grew flowers among veg. which he would give to elderly neighbours. In the autumn I would often find excess produce on the step of my hut; he always grew far more than he needed.

Les represented a dying working-class tradition of self-help and mutual aid which found expression in the last century in the creation of friendly societies, trade unions and the co-operative movement. But he also anticipated the Greens; he was the perfect recycler, making use of the flotsam of consumer society in his lovely wigwams and cloches. He illustrated perfectly what David Crouch and Colin Ward call the "gift relationship" which is so much a part of allotment culture. Reading The Allotment brings a kind of quiet pleasure and peace experienced by all allotment holders and gardeners. The authors not only explore regional developments but make international comparisons.

But Crouch and Ward do not lose sight of the political dimensions of the allotment. They point out that under the Allotments Act of 1908, every local council has a

Simon Farr



COLIN WARD: Local champion.

duty to provide allotments "on demand" when four or more local people request them. But while this means in theory that every one has a claim to a portion of land where they live, in practice councils do not fulfil their obligation. In war, the poor might be encouraged to 'dig for victory'; in peacetime they are ignored and pushed away.

In order to hold their ground and to make their voice heard, Crouch and Ward therefore urge that anyone interested should join the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. While most of the land in Britain is in the hands of a small elite, the allotment represents one of the last bastions of everyone's right to a patch of land. As our environment becomes more artificial, it offers one of the few remaining possibilities of being close to the earth. The land is a common treasury to which we all have a just claim. For Diggers of today to demand an allotment is to assert that claim and to make a small step to the eventual restoration of the commons.

Many of the general points raised in The Child in the Country and The Allotment are illustrated in the 'Counter Blasts' series pamphlet Undermining the Central Line. In William Morris spirit, Ruth Rendell and Colin Ward envisage their neighbouring Suffolk parishes of Kersey and Polstead in the twenty-first century. Local people can afford their own houses and enjoy decent public transport. The small village school is flourishing. The old railway line has become a nature reserve and intensive small-holdings spread outside Polstead. Above all, the citizens of Polstead make the key decisions affecting their lives in their parish council. The political debate is no longer about right and left, but about localism, regionalism and centralism.

It is, of course, a glimpse of the classic anarchist vision of society as a federation of self-governing communes. After their utopian dreaming, however, Rendell and Ward turn to Switzerland for a concrete example of local democracy and self-government. The commune in the Swiss cantonal system controls all the major services and a whole range of taxes. The inhabitants elect their civil servants and ratify expenditure. In some communes all the people meet in open assembly to discuss questions of common interest.

Rendell and Ward lament the gradual waning of local powers and responsibility this century from district to county councils and to national government. In bringing this about, Labour have been as guilty as the Tories. The authors of this pamphlet conclude that there is only one way of checking the creeping centralisation of Britain: to undermine the central line and to claw back power to the local communities.

It is heartening to see an anarchist writer like Colin Ward

earning his bread by encouraging libertarian initiatives, helping to create alternative institutions, and bringing back joy into living. A warm humanity pervades all his works which makes them so readable. Ward remains one of the most persuasive and endearing exponents of organic society against the artificial State in Britain today.

PETER MARSHALL

NEWS VALUES

Sounding the silent monopoly

Noam Chomsky
The Chomsky Reader
Edited by James Peck
Serpents Tail, £9.95

Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky
Manufacturing Consent
Pantheon Books, New York, $14.95

FOR THE PAST quarter-century Noam Chomsky, and his co-author Edward Herman, have been exposing the brutal realities of US foreign policy, and the reassuring lies which hide them from view, with an awesome depth of documentation. These two new books provide an overview and an introduction to their ground-breaking work. The Chomsky Reader is an indispensable selection of Chomsky's published writings on US foreign policy, plus two previously unpublished items, one being an rare interview conducted by editor James Peck. The crucial essay, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', dating from 1967 sets out the theme which has dominated Chomsky's political writings: how the intelligentsia has betrayed its responsibilities and contributed to US state terrorism.

Three brilliant essays deal with the intersection between politics and Chomsky's professional concerns in linguistics and psychology, but the bulk of the reader is taken up with his dispassionate and careful measurement of the gulf between the facts about US foreign policy and state propaganda. Chomsky's work has a particular power to winkle the reader out of the confines of conventional thought, and to think the previously unthinkable.

Together with Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky has been arguing for some years that despite the absence of governmental coercion, mainstream culture in the US is rigidly controlled by powerful forces which set the boundaries of what can and can't be thought. The evidence for this "brainwashing under freedom" is presented in Manufacturing Consent, a summary of their writings over many years. They conclude that, far from being independent and devoted to the truth, the US mass media work "to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state".

The two authors proceed to take on "the very examples offered in praise of the media for their independence, or criticism of their excessive zeal", and by rigorous scrutiny "illustrate exactly the opposite". It is an unsettling and a liberating experience. It also makes grim reading. In a chapter entitled 'Worthy and Unworthy Victims', they reveal that while the murder of the Polish priest Jerzy Popieluszko by the Polish police received 1183 column inches in the New York Times, the killing of one hundred religious figures in Latin America between 1964 and 1985, including Archbishop Romero, only received 604 inches in total in the same paper. The victims of our enemies are worth our outrage, the victims of our clients are not.

For those familiar with previous works such as the monumental two-volume Political Economy of Human Rights, the most valuable aspect of Manufacturing Consent may be the most detailed explanation yet provided of the mechanics of the

'free press' propaganda system. For those new to Chomsky and Herman, this is a very readable introduction to an important and powerful critique of one of the central institutions of Western society.

MILAN RAI

HISTORY WORKSHOP

Not the millenarian loons of legend

Edited by David Goodway
For Anarchism.
History, Theory, Practice
Routledge History Workshop Series
£12.99

FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS the History Workshop has been having annual get-togethers organised on admirably libertarian principles. At the core of these assemblies as they move around the country are the 'strands'. These are topics - women's history, childhood, nostalgia, etc. - around which an individual or group arrange a series of papers, discussions, exhibitions or even video shows. The organisation of the event as a whole is done by a collective of strand convenors or reps. They've generally worked out pretty well in my experience. There has been an anarchist strand at History Workshops since 1984 and the present volume is a selection of ten papers worked up from those given at the two Workshops held in Leeds in 1985 and 1986. None of the papers are less than interesting, some are very interesting indeed, and the introduction by David Goodway is competent and useful.

I shall make a couple of minor observations before looking at the contributions in more detail. Firstly, a collection of papers of this kind favours the professional and the academic. This doesn't really allow the History Workshop flavour to come through, where such papers would be mixed with, say, a slide and talk show on the Sheffield Anarchists or a taped interview with pioneers of the Ferrer Schools interspersed with commentary. And of course there is no discussion. History Workshops are rather democratic affairs.

Secondly, while David Goodway has played a major part in keeping the anarchist strand going over the years, he ought to have mentioned the pioneering role of Bob Jones, the amiable bookseller who set it up the first year. (It would also have been nice if he could have mentioned that I was his co-convenor for the Leeds Workshops).

In my view three contributions stand out. Two are historical and one theoretical. The former are pieces by Carl Levy on 'Italian Anarchism 1870-1926' and Nick Rider on 'The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931'. Both these studies place the anarchists in their social context, something which many writers both anarchist and non-anarchist have failed to do. In Italy a relatively weak state (though capable of savage repression) combined with weak national political organisation went with a correspondingly strong set of local traditions. Here the anarchists were dug in deep: in unions, the local equivalents of trade councils and local papers. These local networks in turn had extensive contacts with others. In times of more violent struggle these networks could become activated and spread and generalise opposition amazingly quickly.

This "second socialist culture" as Carl Levy calls it, is a close cousin of the "rebel milieu" that Ken Weller describes (in his book Don't Be A Soldier) as the life-blood of the socialist agitation against the First World War in north London. Carl's given reasons for the decline of Italian anarchism - Mussolini's intense local

state terrorism, his 'replacement' fascist labour organisation, combined with the growth of corporate capitalist mass culture - are most suggestive and have parallels with the United States and possibly elsewhere. He must surely produce a longer treatment to cover the ground more fully.

Nick Rider's piece shows how FAI-CNT militants approached with considerable agility the problem of oppressively exploitative rents in a city with an acute housing shortage. He takes the matter out of the 'reform or revolution' straitjacket and shows that the anarchists of the FAI were not the delirious millenarian loons of liberal or marxist legend and that this was classic direct action "seeking to obtain immediate practical improvements through the actual developments... of autonomous, libertarian forms of self-organisation... ". It is made clear that the middle classes' rabid insistence on the rights of property and the need for 'social discipline' were rather more the cause of social conflict under the Republic than anarchist intransigence. It is also clear that the marxists and liberals have been telling lies for years.

If the historical pieces are of great interest, the third outstanding contribution may well turn out to be rather important too: Alan Carter's 'Outline of an Anarchist Theory of History'. The advantage of marxism over anarchism in theoretical terms has been the explanatory power of marxism, a power which may well be keeping it in current use long after its sell-by date. He uses logical analysis to examine the claims of marxism to explain the institutional superstructure (the government, the administration, the military, the police, parliament, etc.) in terms of the economic base.

I am not entirely convinced by this logical method, or his rather curt dismissal of the dialectic, and I would like to see some public disputation on these knotty points. But what works really well is Alan's development of the explanatory power of the notion of history driven by the need of the state to develop the "forces of coercion" in turn conditioning the development of the forces and relations of production. This needs a fuller treatment using historical examples and I call on him to set about it. The problem of reification of the state will have to be confronted - the state does not have interests, the people who make up the discrete institutions have interests...

David Goodway in his introduction makes substantial claims for the health of anarchist thought, but appears to put his emphasis on the study of anarchism and the study of anarchist history. Given the History Workshop origin of these papers, this is not surprising. It is not a criticism of the book to say that pieces in it are largely surveys of the views of the anarchist sages - I made a contribution of that type to a History Workshop myself. The general vigour of the papers makes them all worth reading. Other contributors include Daniel Guerin, Geoffrey Ostergaard, Michael Smith and Murray Bookchin. But anarchism (or libertarianism or whatever) will not advance through the study of itself and its history. The former will turn in the end into the latter.

Rather than study libertarianism we should have libertarian studies which seek to find new ways to explain the world, and demonstrate the points of entry which make popular action not so much possible - riots will always happen - but which make action coherent, and thus connect separate activity and make a new movement possible. Of the contributions to this book the most theoretical - Alan Carter's - is the most useful in that longer aim. But the two historical articles that stress the importance of intense local networks historically are also telling us something for right now.

JOHN QUAIL

GUY ALDRED

Knickerbocker glories

From JOHN TAYLOR CALDWELL, Glasgow:

I was pleased to read Sam Tollady's review (in Solidarity #22) of Come Dungeons Dark, my account of the life and times of Glasgow anarchist Guy Aldred, despite the absurd heading 'The David Owen of the British Far Left' - the reviewer seems to know enough about the subject not to have made such an unfortunate analogy. Sam Tollady is worried about Guy's financial dealings with the Duke of Bedford and Sir Walter Strickland, assuming there to be something dark and sinister about it. As I didn't go into all this in detail in the book, first, due to shortage of space, and second, because the Bedford and Strickland connections were far from being among the main features of Guy's life, perhaps I may throw some light upon this question now.

There is understandably some suspicion of abused integrity if an extremist socialist or anarchist associates with a wealthy person, especially if there is evidence of an enhanced life-style. It was to Guy Aldred's credit that he knew wealthy and titled persons yet always lived at the poorest level. He had no car, secret villa, or extravagant tastes. Nor did he dress well. Guy owned only the suit in which he stood, a change of underwear, a 5/- Platignum fountain pen and a 5/6d Ingersol watch from Boots, and absolutely nothing else. He did not smoke or drink, and never went on holiday. He and Jenny occupied one room - latterly two - in a decaying tenement, and at night he slept on an armchair.

Victor Rose, recalling a visit to Aldred in Glasgow for Andrew Whitehead's BBC World Service portrait of Guy Aldred, Against the War, remembered:

> "... I got a shock to find him in such a poverty-stricken condition. He was obviously dressed in other men's clothes. From my point of view it was a rather pitiful situation. The food on the table was very sparse. I don't think there was anything else for him to eat. He was a soft-spoken man... "

The only false note here is the conjecture that Guy wore "other men's clothes". He didn't. For reasons of personal sentiment he always wore a knickerbocker suit. It was the style of suit - in fashion at the time - which his beloved grandmother bought him just before she died. Fourteen and heart-broken, he had adopted it in her memory, wearing each suit until it was in the dilapidated state Victor Rose mentions before allowing himself a new one.

Our style of living (Guy, Jenny, Ethel and me) did not suggest a 'special arrangement' with Bedford or anyone else. We printed Bedford's pamphlets. We did not send him a bill, in due course he sent us a cheque. Whatever it was it went into the running of the Strickland Press, for the publication of socialist, freethought and anti-war propaganda. Nobody was paid wages, nor even regular pocket-money.

As for Strickland, he was an eccentric radical. He left England in the late 1880's, in objection to its imperialism, and supported anti-colonialists everywhere in writing, and in cash. He gave large sums to Tilak, the pre-Gandhian Indian nationalist. When he heard that a young man in England had gone to prison for printing a

banned Indian paper he sent him £10. This was not a great sum when you consider that he gave Masaryk, the founder (at that time, prospective founder) of Czechovslovakia £10,000. From time to time he donated £50 to the maintenance fund of the Herald of Revolt, I don't think he gave anything to The Spur, and nothing after Guy opposed the Bolsheviks.

Yours fraternally

LENIN, MARX, ETC.

Once again, what is to be done?

From CAJO BRENDEL, Amersfoort, Holland:

Issue 21 contained some interesting coments by Robin Blick on the new Penguin edition of Lenin's What Is To Be Done? with its fresh introduction by Robert Service. "One major shortcoming" of the introduction, the reviewer says, is "that it fails to situate Lenin's theories, either within the history of manipulative politics, or even within the context of the then prevailing marxist tradition". Whether Service should or could have done so within the limit of 66 pages is questionable. But even if he ought to be blamed for this omission, in my view it is not his major one.

Blick seems perfectly right to me when noting that both Marx and Engels made clear enough their objections to vanguardism. And of course manipulative politics go back in history as far as the existence of class divisions. However, the most interesting and most important point is not that Lenin and Marx had different opinions - on this subject and many others - but why! And likewise, one has to explain where the Bolshevik manipulations come from.

Service doesn't face up to this. Nowhere in what could be characterised as 'a short history of the Bolshevik Party and its internal disputes' does he exchange his role of storyteller for one of critical examiner. And he certainly never examines the inter-relationship between social reality and social theories.

The point to be made at the outset is that the form of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was not in any way influenced by pre-revolutionary Bolshevik ideology or by ideas specified in Lenin's early writings. anyway. In fact, it was largely the other way round. Lenin's writings before 1917 in general and especially What Is To Be Done? foreshadow the essential and very special problems of the future revolution. And that revolution is not a proletarian revolution, but - as Lenin himself anticipated - "a bourgeois revolution, not executed by the bourgeoisie, but by the working class".

"What Is To Be Done?", Robert Service tells us, "discusses the task of instigating revolution". In fact, it discusses the task of instigating the Russian revolution. And the big difference between the industrial and capitalist Britain of the nineteenth century and the primitive and feudal Russia of the beginning of the twentieth explains the difference between Marx - analysing the former - and Lenin, aiming at the overthrow of the Tsarist rule of the latter.

Lenin was not a marxist, though Service calls him one. He was a political forerunner of that special Russian revolution, which by no means could have been a mere repetition of the classic bourgeois revolution in France in the late eighteenth century, but which nonetheless unfettered, albeit in another form, capitalist relations of production. Lenin's political and theoretical language is interspersed with marxist terminology. This doesn't keep him from divergence from marxist points and from

affinity with the French r volutionists of 1789 and after, though their political and social tasks and problems were not exactly his.

This brings me to those paragraphs of Blick's review in which the French Jacobins come up. Lenin referred to them in his pamphlet 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' and defined "the revolutionary social-democrat" as "a Jacobin who links up with the masses". Service is conspicuously silent about this, not accidentally, one may suppose. He mentions 'One Step Forward' for pointing to quite different things than Lenin's connection with Robespierre and the 'Montagne'. Robin Blick is right in saying that Lenin's view of the Jacobins was almost a romantic idealisation which obscured their social composition and hence contradictory relationship with the major classes of the French Revolution.

He is also right when he describes how the Jacobins disengaged themselves from their plebeian allies once the moderate republicans had been driven from power. Blick has an eye for the resemblance of the Jacobin attitude and that of the Bolsheviks. The Jacobins paved the way for a new ruling class. The Bolsheviks have been the germ of a new ruling class. This is why they were manipulating the Russian workers and peasants, just as once upon a time the Jacobins manipulated the French poor. But it's not clear whether Blick believes that the fundamental bourgeois character of both revolutions accounts for this.

I do have doubts, however, over Blick's speculations about how such a rigid critic of leninism (the leninism of What Is To Be Done?) as Leon Trotsky came to make his peace with Lenin in 1917. (Blick makes a small error here: Trotsky's pamphlet in question was not entitled 'Our Political Tasks' but 'Our Political Problems'). Moreover, I don't think that Trotsky in this last work is separating Lenin from the Bolshevik party machine, as Blick's interpretation runs. So Trotsky's words there are not what Blick calls "a clue to the mystery". However, a clue can be found in the undeniable fact that both Lenin and Trotsky proved to be the spokesmen of that coming non-classic bourgeois revolution in Russia, reflecting and representing different aspects of it. In other words, both Lenin and Trotsky were Russian Jacobins. Lenin wanted to be one; Trotsky was one without being aware of it.

Finally, if Blick takes Trotsky's 'Our Political Problems' for "a root and branch critique of leninism for a marxist", I don't! It is neither fundamental - like Pannekoek's critique in his Lenin as Philosopher - nor was Trotsky a marxist. Everything I've said about Lenin as a typical Russian revolutionist counts for Trotsky as well. Consequently, what sundry offshoots of leninism have called an "unprincipled fusion" (i.e. the collaboration of Lenin and Trotsky during the revolution) has nothing to do with inconsistency on the part of Lenin or Trotsky. In this respect, I agree with Blick, although we possibly came to the same conclusion by different ways.

SOLIDARITY

Post-modernism or barbarism?

From KEITH FLETT, London:

I did not agree with much of what B L Spenser ('Such, such were the joys', Solidarity #22) had to say. For example, I support strikes, however narrow the aim is, because in activity workers are open to discussion and persuasion, and ideas are changed as a result. Besides that, it is a class matter. Still, what he said was interesting, and there should be more

VERBATIM

"This was purely an editorial decision and nothing to do with politics".

Official **BBC** comment after the decision to sack sports presenter and Green activist David Icke, who refuses to pay his poll tax.

"My interest in the photocopier was philosophical really. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's that technology which brought down Communism".

DAVID HOCKNEY

"I'm almost totally incapable of learning languages - for one thing, because I find it so boring".

NOAM CHOMSKY
MIT Professor of Linguistics

"We are all of us more or less Socialists nowadays... I think I am rather more than a Socialist. I am something of a Anarchist, but, of course, the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed".

OSCAR WILDE
Quote from a rediscovered 1894 interview, in Richard Ellmann's new life of Wilde.

"Roll on the day when our hospitals have everything they need and the Army has a jumble sale when it wants to buy a missile".

Handmade car sticker, London

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discussion along similar lines.

As a historian looking at the period of the 1860s to 70s, after the collapse of Chartism but before the birth of the SDF and ILP, I am only too aware of how important it is for comparatively small groups to leave coherent records. In fact Spenser's letter raises many of the points asked about such activity in any period.

For example, is it true to say that there is a coherent political line from the original Solidarity of the early 1960s to the present journal? I doubt it, though you presumably feel there is. At any rate, the impulse which made Cardan/Castoriadis and others raise the slogan of socialism or barbarism, a mixture of anti-Stalinism and the first Cold War, is past. The slogan is no less valid for that, but I don't get much sense of it in the current Solidarity. What I do sense is a strange echo of tendencies elsewhere on the left, of post-modernism, retreat from any idea of class and emphasis on the local, the diverse, and so on. Too much more of that kind of talk and your reason for existence will disappear entirely.

Then the question of political influence. Spenser seems to feel that it was much greater than the size of Solidarity might have suggested. Perhaps. That's what the Communist Party used to say, as well. Indeed, it is probably a refrain of most political activists. Still, the claim is of interest in itself and perhaps in keeping with the kind of analysis of British anarchism suggested in Quail's The Slow Burning Fuse.

Finally, the humour and irreverence. Unquestionably petty-bourgeois, of course. Still, none of us can afford to take ourselves too seriously, as long as we bear in mind that the alternatives of socialism or barbarism are still at the top of the agenda.

Yours sincerely