

On Voting



why
I won't
vote

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Editorial

So far as we are concerned we cannot prevent anybody from calling himself an anarchist. But we do consider an anarchist who at election time goes and votes rather in the same way as we would consider a vegetarian who is caught eating a ten-ounce underdone steak, or a Christian who tells us he hates his neighbour, or a pacifist who refuses to turn the other cheek when he is assaulted.

A convinced anarchist, we would suggest, does not vote, not because of dogma, but because all the evidence over a very long period indicates that no person however intelligent, however well-meaning, is fit to run the lives of millions of people without sooner or later becoming their oppressor.

Three contributions to this issue of *The Raven* label our opposition to voting for instance as 'quasi-dogmatic' or a 'political straight-jacket' which condemns us to futility. We would certainly not have the presumption of accusing *them* of not being anarchists. What we would wish to ask them is in what respect any Green, Labour, Liberal or any other government it elected would change any of the basic structures of capitalism (which we consider are responsible for the injustices in our society) including the organisation of society. Do they really not realise that governments come and go *but the permanent officials and civil servants, the police, the army go on ruling as before?*

The Green Party in Germany after its electoral honeymoon has collapsed, divided with power-seekers fighting the 'idealists'. In this country they are divided even before they have won a seat in Parliament. The two million votes at the MEP elections obviously gave some of them ideas of grandeur. And what about the 'gang of four' who were going to 'break the mould' in politics. They are the broken reeds and those who voted for them the disillusioned suckers.

One of our contributors, Tony Powell, in his article on 'The "Purists" and "Realists" and the Straightjacket', a study of the February 1936 election in Spain, far from demonstrating that the anarchist 'tradition' is an 'impossible' one, surely indicates, in our humble opinion, that in spite of all his research he has understood very little of the disastrous consequences of the Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalists' com-

promises in the February elections and subsequently in not only joining the Republican government but all the local and regional authorities as well as accepting the militarisation of the militia and conscription. It may have prolonged the *war* but it destroyed the *social revolution*. Had our contribution relied less on English academic sources and taken the trouble to read José Peirats' three-volume history of the CNT in the Spanish Revolution or even Freedom Press' three titles on the subject, he might have come to the conclusion that voting in the February 1936 elections had no relevance at all to subsequent events. Spain was in ferment. It was the series of general strikes which took place in the months following the February elections which contributed (obviously with the results of the elections) to the military uprising in July 1936. *But* had it not been for the ferment – the general strikes – the Popular Front government was prepared to make a deal with Franco.

And this brings us to the anarchist alternative to voting. The only time governments take notice of the people's wishes is when the people go on the streets to protest – direct action. Before our three contributions for voting forget, let us remind them of a small piece of recent history. If people in their thousands throughout the country had not taken to the streets to protest against the poll tax all the Labour opposition in Parliament would have achieved *nothing*.

Again in 1968 in Paris, the students' protests resulted in a fundamental reform of education in schools and universities in France. To the social democrats and self-proclaimed anarchists who pin their hopes on good politicians and good governments, we reply that social progress has only been achieved by *struggle*, by minorities who have been prepared to give their time and even their liberty for the commonweal. Today in the 'affluent' capitalist Western world the depth of moral corruption in this consumerist society is surely reflected in the fact that with, as we write, possibly 2½ million unemployed and, in addition, their dependents, there has not been one protest march of the unemployed in the whole country.

Our contributors in favour of voting are basically concerned with the 'problem' (for them) of the lesser evil. This is not new at election time. We are not proposing to give our point of view here because we have included in this volume a polemic with two *Freedom* readers way back in 1964 when passions to get rid of a Tory government that had been in office for twelve years in this country and a threatening right wing candidate in the USA, who had argued that we should vote to get rid of the one and prevent the other – just as now we are expected to vote to get rid of Thatcher-Major and vote for the lesser evil – Kinnock!

Surely it is obvious that in the affluent West, the left – all shades including many self-declared anarchists – is bankrupt. It's not the ideology which is at fault. Whether we agree or not with their objectives, the only people who are 'alive' today are those in the third world who are prepared to stake all for what they see as 'a better world' for them. The West is rotten to the core with its corruption and greed for more and more of the material things of which it tires so quickly, encouraged by the ad-men.

Some readers might well ask us, in view of the foregoing: why do we continue to be anarchist propagandists in spite of the more 'progressive' anarchists telling us that we are missing so much by refusing to vote. The obvious response is to tell these well-wishers that first of all we enjoy spending more of our time making our own bread, brewing our own beer, growing our own vegetables, than having to work for somebody in order to earn money to pay somebody else to supply us with the bread, the beer and the vegetables. There's nothing very revolutionary about that: Agreed! Not for this writer either. *BUT you can only understand what matters in life when you are involved in actually producing the means (including the beer!).* Thereafter you begin to be a free person.

You need shelter, heating and clothing, of course, but your whole approach to the material needs of life are realistic and not ambitious. Anarchists are more than convinced that these basic material needs for a healthy and comfortable life could be provided with a minimum of effort given all the technological advantages available – meaning that we would have more leisure to do the things we want to do – including what the majority of people today *say they haven't the time to do: to run their own lives!* And yet we have the nerve to talk of freedom and democracy and all the other slogans with which we surround ourselves.

Perhaps Malatesta expressed more eloquently than we can why we are non-voting anarchists and feel neither 'dogmatic' nor constrained in our contributor's 'straightjacket':

"I am an anarchist because it seems to me that anarchy would correspond better than any other way of social life, to my desire for the good of all, to my aspirations towards a society which reconciles the liberty of everyone with co-operation and love among men, and not because anarchism is a scientific truth and a natural law. It is enough for me that it should not contradict any known law of nature to consider it possible and to struggle to win the support needed to achieve it."

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The next issue of *The Raven* will be 'On Health' and is being edited

by Silvia Edwards. Readers wishing to contribute to that issue should get in touch with our comrade as soon as possible.

We are still intending to bring out a *Raven* 'On the Use of Land' and would welcome hearing from interested readers with perhaps a brief summary of their intended contributions in order to avoid duplication.

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Our thanks to those readers who have contributed to our Raven Deficit Fund as well as those who have introduced our quarterly to friends. At present Freedom Press Distribution is financing the deficit (about £1,000 per issue) but of course this is at the expense of our Freedom Press publishing programme.

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Peter Cadogan

Freedom to Vote? Freedom from Voting?

Democracy happens when people decide for themselves what they want to do and then do it. It is done directly. There are no intermediaries, no representatives, no officials.

There is another kind of democracy, one that the State and its Establishment has conceded under pressure. It is indirect and representative. Under it people are allowed to vote for their MPs or Councillors, making their mark against the names of pre-selected candidates. The vetting of candidates is such that very few authentic non-conformists ever get through the net.

But that is only the first half of the story. MPs and Councillors, when elected, do very little actual governing. This is done by a vast army of civil servants and local government officers who, theoretically at least, carry out the wishes of the elected politicians. The officials have a near-monopoly over the information upon which decision-making depends, on the strength of which they make recommendations to their political chiefs. Those recommendations are usually accepted and duly proceed through the Commons, the Lords and the Council Chamber in the name of a Minister or the Chair of a Committee.

So it is that Our Masters have provided a double safety net with which to protect themselves i.e. the electoral system and the full-time machine – both of which are effectively under their control. MPs do not control Civil Service appointments and, if the Civil Service requires it, our representatives can live in the dark. Many do.

The truth about what goes is withheld from us under the Thirty Years Rule and even to that there are exceptions. There are things we shall never be allowed to know.

However Our Masters, being in the business of government, are required to act. They do so both publicly and in clandestine fashion, but deeds are something we can locate and upon which we can put our own interpretation, so the picture is not necessarily a black one. With eyes and ears open, with some freedom of speech and the media (albeit constrained) and with some freedom from arbitrary arrest (also qualified, especially if one happens to be Irish), it is possible to recognise the forms of tyranny on the one hand and the potentialities of freedom on the other, so as to make some advance from the first to the second. The

threat of tyranny is always as real as the promise of freedom. We live in dynamic suspension between two worlds. To pass the buck is to yield to Big Brother.

Myth on the Left has it that our masters are villains. Some are, but not necessarily so. It is rather that for 925 years (by 1991) they have been the governors; it is their vocation, they are born and bred to it, they cannot imagine any other kind of world except that of a Communist dictatorship which really does scare them, or it used to before *glasnost* and *perestroika* revealed the pathetic truth about Communism. Now they are more relaxed in the absence of a common enemy – no Moscow, no Arthur Scargill or Tony Benn to be taken seriously – they can afford to fall out among themselves and dispatch their own Leader. But they are into serious and unprecedented trouble; they, like the State, are lost without an enemy. Where now is the *raison d'être* of power? It fled the stage in 1989 with the end of the Cold War. The defence of propertied relations of course remains central, but if those relations are not under threat, externally nor internally, where lies the warrant for centralised government by the few? Where indeed!

The outcome is extraordinary. Our masters have to claim virtue. What else can they claim if war and the class struggle belong to the past? Thus the Prime Minister proclaims the goal of a classless society and the Chancellor of the Exchequer extols the merit of the social market. The True Blues are going green. We might as well take them at their word and hold them to it, knowing full well that what is really at stake is the retention of the Norman Yoke that they will do *anything* to retain.

Consider what is at issue. . . Their command and control of Prep Schools, Public Schools, Oxford and Cambridge, the Inns of Court, Sandhurst, Dartmouth and Cranwell, the Administrative Grave of the Civil Service, the City, great estates, Royal patronage, vast properties yielding huge inheritances, the Old Boy Net, the Church of England, the Stock Market, investments, Westminster and Whitehall, county families, ancestral pride, the tradition of the Regiment and a way of life that assumes privilege as God-given and everlasting. Nothing must be allowed to threaten it. The Conservative Party, 'the natural party of government', will see to that. The Opposition will be bought and the vote used as a prop. It has always been so. So long as the centre holds, the vote will change nothing of substance. Will the centre hold? That is the question. The centre collapsed before – in 1066, 1485, 1642 and 1832. Might it happen again?

The Record of the Vote

The nature and power of the vote varies as the changing forms of the State. The vote is not an absolute thing, its character is immensely variable. What is its constitutional context? Does voting in a given set of circumstances promote or inhibit freedom? How do we measure freedom and justice and relate the vote to them? Is voting in General Elections a means to emancipation or the mark of servitude?

The incredible power of custom and the age-long skill of our masters in drawing discreet curtains over things are such that people who regard themselves as 'radicals', even 'revolutionaries', take political power as an eternal 'given' and assume that the road to it is either via the ballot box or violent revolution and in neither case have any idea about what to do on the morrow of success. So, either way, the old system falls back upon itself and all we get is a new set of masters, very little different to the old.

The only way to avoid this unfortunate fate is to rise above an empirical stumble, to study and grasp the nature of power in advance of the event and be ready with a workable alternative – being aware that this has never been done before and will be as difficult to do as it is easy to say. We ought to have been well warned by the events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 when people power found that it did not know what to do with itself. Our general obtuseness and insularity, however, being what they are, the likelihood is that we shall only learn, as usual, when we have to. The more is the pity but perhaps a few might do some homework?

As to the nature of the vote the best place is to begin at the beginning: in aboriginal hunter-gatherer societies. Happily quite a few of these have survived to the present day, so the evidence is not hard to come by. Some years ago the primal decision-making process was filmed somewhere in the vicinity of the Upper Nile. The community consisted of less than twenty men, their wives and children. The issue before them was that their hunting territory had been invaded by another group – should they move on and avoid conflict or should they stand and fight?

A meeting was called. Only the men took part. The women and children sat in the long grass some yards away and followed the proceedings intently. There was no chairman, the meeting was self-regulating. Each man in turn rose to his feet, walked backwards and forwards and put his point of view slowly and deliberately. No speech lasted more than three or four minutes. The older men accused the younger men of being gutless and cowardly. All listened closely to what the others had to say. There was no barracking, no interruptions. The last man

to speak was the shaman, the spiritual-political leader of the community, and what he said was taken to be the consensus and agreed. There was no voting, no demur. There was no assertion of authority as such and suitable action followed. Has civilised society ever equalled that example? Clearly not. Civilised society brought property, slavery, conquest, internal and external violence, class, kings, priests, professional warriors and empires without end until the twentieth century. It also brought scholarship, science, arts, crafts, the humanities, scope for individual genius, industry, agriculture, trade – new horizons without end. Throughout both these positive and negative achievements *homo sapiens* has wrestled with his decision-making process, vaguely aware that there was a better answer somewhere, but never finding it. It was there in the beginning – and now, at an entirely new and different level of sophistication it is up to us, self-consciously, to recreate it. It turns upon the twin problems of inventiveness and scale, given that historic circumstances are appropriate. The evidence suggests that they soon will be.

The secret of success lies in the smallness of the group, the shared nature of their experience, the closeness of their relations, the comparability of their talents and custom, loyalty, trust. To what extent does the same model obtain amongst us today? Clearly it applies to orchestras, theatrical companies, sports teams, scientific research workers, management groups, religious communities and anywhere where single-figure associations thrive. But none of these are political, they have nothing to do with the State.

The Classical Model

In fifth century Athens there were no professional politicians, no professional soldiers and no professional priests, for all those 'professions' were the civic duties of every citizen. Citizens were about one-fifth of the population. The remaining four-fifths were women, slaves and non-Athenians. Before yielding to the common dismissal of Athens on these grounds, it is as well to reflect on the comparable condition in our own society. Are one-fifth of our people actively engaged in public life? The figure is nearer to one-tenth than one fifth. The comparison is unreal because of the voluntary sector unknown in Athens, yet it is worth making if only to highlight the exceptionally large proportion of the people in Athens engaged in making democracy, their invention, work.

The *polis*, the city-state was everything; life apart from the *polis* was unthinkable to an Athenian. This was also the original tribal condition, once all-inclusive, now in Athens the opposite, exclusive. Was there, is there, such a thing as a tribal memory? The species *homo* is some

five million years old and we have been tribal for nearly all of that time. There has to be a genetic factor that makes for belonging, sharing, equality without sameness. These are conditions of the human spirit, of a higher order than matters of mere physical substance. Is it from this that the stubborn universal myth of a golden age proceeds? Is it for this that Elysium persists, and Ithica, Eden, Jerusalem and the Millenium? What once was, shall it be so again?

For most of human history we have lived in groups of fifty much like that tribal group by the Upper Nile. We are genetically programmed to live like that, i.e. in a condition in which everyone knows everyone else in a socially static situation. When it comes to making decisions, consensus underwritten by a little shamanic genius is all that is required. All that breaks down under the urban conditions of civilisation. For dozens of people, read thousands and tens of thousands. For equality, read great disparity. For common skills, read an endless division of labour. For the static condition, read change. For the power of the spirits, read the power of the sword. For consensus, read voting; it was the best that was possible under the circumstances.

In the long run voting failed in Athens. Democracy fell before the tyranny of the majority. Athens exploited its victory over the Persians to make itself the imperial master of Hellas, demanding and getting tribute from other city-states. Its citizens fattened and grew lax on the loot of the Confederacy of Delos. Then it was Sparta's turn to submit and they thought differently. Athens lost the Peleponnesian War. Hubris, arrogance, brought them down. Wisdom cannot be counted in a ballot-box and it is wisdom or force, not the franchise, that decides.

Yet the legacy of Athens remains with us and we make too little of it. The *Ecclesia* or Assembly met several times a month in the open, starting at daybreak on the Pnix near the Acropolis. Some 600 citizens would be expected to attend. Amongst them a *Council of 500* had special powers. The 500 were not elected, they were chosen by lot, for one year. Each citizen carried a little bronze plaque about the size of a credit card and when new officers were called for these cards were put in a machine and out came a black or white token deciding choice or rejection. There was therefore no bureaucracy, no civil service. Citizens thus made an extraordinary assertion of faith in each other. In all cases save one they rejected voting and so solved countless power problems at a stroke. The one case concerned the election of the most important officers of State – the Generals of the Army. Athens pivoted on war and held its empire together by force so this was one area in which chance had to give way to known experience. The established custom was that military command was vested in certain aristocratic families,

such as that of Pericles, and at that point voting came into its own. War, life and death, could not be a lottery.

All citizens were expected to serve as magistrates, again chosen by lot, and serve on huge juries each manned by hundreds. Athens was big in litigation on just about everything. The Greeks, therefore, practised direct democracy and despised mere representation – they would do everything for themselves. The ultimate fault, that was their undoing, was not slavery (as the successful Roman Empire was to show), or male chauvinism (endemic in civilisation anyway), but their militarism and that of their neighbours. That was the great unresolved dilemma of all Mediterranean societies. Athens was brought low twice, first by Sparta and then by Macedon, until Athens and Macedon both fell to Rome. Civilisations, in the last analysis, are made and unmade by the sword. This is the pity of it. The only possible answer is for the sword itself to go, as now seems the case, internationally, at least in Europe. It may have 50 years to go in the Third World.

If the Greek experience is of value, as one can be sure it is, we can look forward to the return of the lottery. Its prerequisite is the creation of conditions of educational equality within a given constituency, not an unreasonable aspiration.

But the Greek example is not our only model of direct democracy. All over the world its practice remains the commonplace of those tribal societies that have not been overtaken by the military power of nomadic pastoralism or intrusive white empires. In Africa, for example, it survives in Botswana. In Nigeria it survives among the Ibos, but has departed from the areas dominated by the conquering Hausa-Fulanis of the North.

Voting in the Middle Ages

Parliament was originally a royal device, a High Court of the Crown. It had nothing to do with sovereignty and even less to do with democracy. This condition lasted from the C13th to 1642. It had two main purposes, firstly to raise taxes from the counties and chartered towns and secondly to give legislative form to the will of the King in Council. The Judiciary was a hundred years older (dating from the reign of Henry II, when Common Law began) and needed formally drafted laws on which to base its case judgements. Parliaments attended the King's person, wherever he happened to be, and did what it was told. It did not settle into St Stephen's Chamber in Westminster Palace until the C16th. The King was not absolute until Tudor times, he was first-among-equals in the company of the barons of his Court. It was from them and not from the Commons that opposition and revolt came: Magna Carta, Simon

de Montfort, the deposition and killing of Edward II, Richard II and Richard III.

The greatest transforming change of the period did not come from Parliament at all. It came from a quarter that we are blinkered not to recognise. It constituted voting by the deed rather than by the franchise. It came from monks and scholars. Benedictine monks, Black Monks, had been about since St Benedict founded Monte Cassino in the C5th. They had a Rule but they were not an Order in the new medieval sense. From the C11th to the C13th new Orders changed the spiritual, political and economic structure of Christendom: Cluniacs, Cistercians, Savigniacs, Augustinians, Gilbertines, Premonstratensians, Franciscans and Dominicans. The Cistercians, deep in the wildernesses, created the first great sheep farms and invented an export trade in wool; the Augustinians were the first bankers. It was a dynamic period *par excellence*, Gothic architecture, the Crusades, chivalry, the troubadours, the first chartered towns, the new Universities of Padua, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, the invention of part-singing, great scholars from Bernard of Clairvaux, Joachim of Fiore, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, the first anarchists, the Cathars and the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and the steps taken to crush them – the Albigensian Crusade and the invention of the Inquisition.

The political change was slight – the social, economic and spiritual change was immense. It was the real source of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The message was not to reform or revolutionise the State but to transform one's way of life either forming a new community or transforming an existing one. And they were dangerous times: every town was walled, every monastery built like a fortress. The new social inventions were not individualistic, they were communal. A group of scholars would announce themselves as a group prepared to teach – and a college formed round them. Lay brethren flocked round the regular clergy. There were no national frontiers; the wandering scholars took all of Christendom as their patch.

At the end of it all modern political theory was born. Throughout the whole period there had been a gigantic struggle between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. The Pope claimed the warrant of God and had that much advantage. The party of the Emperor needed a warrant of a different kind and scholars were ready to provide it. In 1324 Marsilio of Padua, physician to the future Emperor Lewis IV, produced his classic *Defensor Pacis*, which argued (a) that the people, the citizens, were the ultimate source of authority, (b) as such they empowered the Executive, (c) the Executive (the Emperor) might then maintain that the power of the Church was not compatible with the well-being of the State and dismiss it. This was 200 years before

Machiavelli and it was not just an idea. Marsilio was describing what was already the case in Italy itself where many of the newly republican states were in open defiance of Rome. Thus the notion of parliamentary sovereignty was born in Italy in the early C14th. The various theories and practices of voting were to fill it out over the centuries.

The Modern Period

It is not true that there was no reciprocity in the High Court of Parliament. When reluctant MPs made their way to the prescribed venue knowing that it was money, not counsel, they had to provide, it was the custom for them to take with them *Petitions for the Redress of Grievances* concerning local matters that had not proved capable of resolution locally. Again by custom, the King and his Councillors sat in judgment and the royal fiat decided the matter. In our time petitions have become something of a token or propaganda exercise. It was not so in Plantagenet and Tudor times. Behind the petition there was money that the King needed; it was a rudimentary source of representative muscle. The poll tax crisis, 1991, brings it all back. The Government bent before the Grievance.

The old political order killed itself off, literally, in the Hundred Years War and the Wars of the Roses that followed. England, in default of an old ruling class, needed a new one. It was found to be up and coming in the persons of the gentry. The foundation of their wealth was wool. They had entered politics, in structured fashion, as JPs in the *Quarter Sessions* first constituted in the 1360s. Henry VII had used them to lead his militia (there was no standing Army) from 1485. His son had sold them the huge estates of the monasteries at prices they could pay. It took them about another hundred years to find their feet and take over the government of England, which they did in 1642. They believed in freedom of worship and of speech and the press, they believed in the independence of the Judiciary over against the Prerogative, they believed in the sovereignty of a representative parliament – ‘no taxation without representation’ – given that the representatives were men of property elected by men of property. These turned out, in the deed, to be matters of great substance, but democracy was anathema to them. They used the democrats, the Levellers, who as yeoman farmers were great cavalry (much better than undisciplined Cavaliers) and then destroyed them at the Battle of Burford and by locking their leaders up in the Tower. So in the climactic 1640/1660 period the vote was used to crush the non-voters who were the great majority. The result was the standing Army (notice that it is not ‘royal’ – it had defeated the King), the Royal Navy (which in 1648 had supported the

King) and the British Empire; with Wales, Ireland and Scotland crushed in that order and Jamaica taken from the Spaniards. There had been a proto-empire in the making since the days of the Muscovy Company in the time of Queen Mary, but it had no centralised and military direction – that came with Cromwell.

The historic order of the achievement is important – it still is today. First there came freedom of conscience as the Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists struggled to get out from under the Church of England – the Catholics too, but they had the complication of Rome and its politics. Second was the independence of the Judiciary, led brilliantly for thirty years by Sir Edward Coke, who invented the title of Lord Chief Justice of England for himself. The sovereign power of an elected Parliament was first asserted over the *Petition of Right* in 1628, only to be sent into the wilderness for eleven years in 1629.

It was matters military and their cost in pounds, shillings and pence that brought things to a head. *Plus ça change*. . . Charles was Head of the Church of England but he was not Head of the Church in his other kingdom viz., Scotland. That was fiercely Presbyterian. The media in both countries was twofold; the Universities and schools and the pulpit. In Scotland Charles controlled neither. He determined to invade Scotland in order to impose episcopalian government upon its Church. He launched two Bishops Wars (1639 and 1640) and they were both miserable failures. The Scots occupied Northumberland and Durham and refused to leave until the King had paid them an indemnity to meet the cost of the war that was not of their choosing. He had no money to pay it and to find the money summoned the Long Parliament. They paid off the Scots and levied a Poll Tax to meet its liability. Royal authority had had to turn to the vote.

There was no way that personal absolutism could be reconciled with parliamentary sovereignty, although no one at that stage even dreamt of the eventual outcome. After two years of fruitless argument the King tried a *coup d'état* with his attempted *Arrest of the Five Members* and when that failed he took off for York to rally an Army. He launched the civil war from Nottingham shortly afterwards. He ended, of course, at the receiving end of the executioner's axe on the platform before the Banqueting House in Whitehall in January 1649. The telling of the story of those years awaits its Shakespeare.

The English Puritan Revolution has endless lessons for us, besides flatly contradicting the absurd myth of English gradualism. There is one that some people may find uncomfortable. Given that Westminster is fundamentally inadequate and one day will have to be replaced by something else (see the concluding part of this paper) it remains the case that representative government mandated by the vote, with all its

property qualifications, is absolutely better than personal government by divine right. It therefore behoves us to take care and take our time, lest we throw out the baby of the vote with the bathwater of tyranny. It has been a necessary interim device and we are still within that interim.

Another lesson, even more uncomfortable to some, is that the sovereignty of Parliament was not established by Parliament – it was established by the New Model Army. Likewise it was the Army that defeated James II at the Boyne in 1690 and it is still the Army, not Parliament, that today underwrites the power of the Secretary of State in Northern Ireland. The Army is trained to fight, not to govern, its Generals usually make reluctant politicians, but they know that at the end of the day the authority of the State rests with them as it always has done throughout the whole history of civilisation. We have just seen the power of the Generals in the Gulf War – it remains formidable. We need to think carefully about what this might mean for the future. Voting is also a figleaf for the sword.

We are told by our teachers, or most of them, that the C19th saw ‘the struggle for democracy’, i.e. the democratisation of Westminster – and that is how it looks on the surface with the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884. The male franchise and the secret ballot did, indeed, arrive. What was really happening was a fierce struggle for power between the new affluent, commercial and professional classes on the one hand and the old landed classes on the other. The real political landmarks were free trade and the transformation of English law to accommodate the new industrial revolution. Its architects were the Benthamites. They swept the board by the 1850s and the landed classes retired hurt over Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill of 1886.

There was a real danger, however, that the new vote might put political power in the hands of the plebs. There was a surgical way of dealing with that i.e. to take power away from the Commons (and the Lords) and lodge it somewhere else. A House of Commons that is powerless will avail little to a ‘working class’ take-over.

The Civil Service was cleaned up by the introduction of competitive examinations; the Army and the Navy were purged and given Sandhurst and Dartmouth; Parliamentary constituencies were invented to break the structural link between town, county and Westminster; MPs were paid and politics thus turned into a career. The Permanent Secretary, Sir Humphrey, took over the reins of real government; and the real Sir Humphrey is *not* a comedian – he is the hard man. In nine cases out of ten what he says goes.

Sidney Webb invented modern political management and a College, LSE, to teach it in. All power was to go to the experts, all Parliament had to do was to find the money. The red thread of Bentham-Webb-

Thatcher has governed us for some 165 years. They accepted and used the vote to get what they wanted, an interesting marriage of self-interest and bureaucracy, the focus varying between wealth and power, nature's gift, so it is supposed, to the few.

The English establishment since the C13th has always been willing to recruit the brightest sons (and marry the most promising daughters) of the up and coming classes. It began with the distraint of knighthood in 1252 when the *nouveau riche* were required to accept knightly rank and the obligations that went with it. This happened nowhere else in Christendom, and indicates the time and occasion for England taking an insular course peculiar to itself. It is still happening as witness Edward Heath, Mrs Thatcher and John Major. John Major is the tenth Prime Minister since the war. All the previous nine failed and he will fail too. It is not a question of personal merit or the lack of it. There is no way that centralised-militarised government can be made to work. The rest of Europe is moving rapidly in the opposite direction – towards decentralisation. Only in England does the Gadarene syndrome operate.

The present decay of the vote began on the morrow of its success. In 1832 the middle classes entered the political arena. They got there with the help of *Political Unions of the Middle and Working Classes* that had led the great campaign for the Reform Bill. In 1834 these Benthamites turned savagely upon their allies and, through the *Poor Law Amendment Act*, invented a new hell for the poor – the Workhouse. The 'two nations' were born. It was this betrayal that led to Chartism and Dickens' life-long devotion to the cause of the underdog.

In 1840 England was a pretty barbarous place, its peasantry destroyed, future slums being built apace, crime rife, the streets unsafe, a chaotic society sustained by ever-burgeoning wealth for some and grinding poverty for those that failed. But industrial and imperial success meant that by 1900 the English people were transformed into a law-abiding, god-fearing, conforming, jingoistic society prepared to die unthinkingly and *en masse*, at the behest of officers and gentlemen, on the fields of the Somme and Ypres. The residue of that strangely Roman-imperial mentality is still with us. People will still not lift their eyes beyond Westminster, Whitehall and the vote – not until something hits where it hurts. The pity is that the truth may need trauma – and that means suffering on some large scale in circumstances we cannot yet foresee. But there is the immensity of the past to go on and the power of the imagination.

The Future

The nation-state in Britain cannot be reformed – not in a country that has never known the meaning of enemy occupation. The rest of Europe has had to rethink everything and reconstitute itself from scratch, because its very institutional life was massively destroyed in World War II. We and the Americans rode the storm and retained imperial values that are essentially without substance. They dog us still: Suez, the Falklands, the Gulf War, Trident. . . Research and development has been crippled and confined by the military ever since 1945. There is as yet no serious sign of change, nor will there be so long as the centre holds. It can therefore be argued that the serious party is the Conservative Party because that is where the centre is; and the key to the political future thus lies more in its internal divisions than it does in any Opposition. It was, after all, the Conservative Party, not the Opposition, that dispatched Mrs Thatcher.

When the Conservative Party disintegrates and the others have nothing better to offer, what price General Elections? There has to be something else – there is no future in a vacuum. At least we know its name – people-power.

People-power has at least four main components: they need all to be present in a mutually sustaining relationship if the thing is to succeed.

The first concerns individuals and small groups. Creative thinking leading to constructive action can only start in individual heads and hearts. Such thinking needs a critical and supportive context such as is provided by single-figure groups of comparably motivated people. This, the power of inventive originality, is the bottom line.

Assuming that the first component exists and is functioning well, the next is collective action of every imaginable kind in all sectors, public, private and voluntary, all edging towards the time when people will take over the functions of central government when they fall from its nerveless fingers. This means regional sovereignty and a working alliance of principled professionals, volunteers and the disadvantaged focussed on identifiable and achievable goals. Piecemeal success is the essential confidence-builder.

The third component concerns action on the streets and facing the important truth against which we have blinkered ourselves for too long, viz., that a demonstration is insurrection in embryo. It needs to be non-violent partly because respect for people is a first principle of people-power and partly on pragmatic grounds, in that if men with guns take over they will end up in power and we, the people, shall be back where we began and have to do it all over again. This time let there be no mere change of masters! In 1989 in Eastern Europe we saw demonstra-

tions turn into successful insurrections in a matter of days. These are very special and rare situations and they cannot be laid on to order – they depend upon a concatenation of historic circumstances such as is liable to happen only once in several centuries in a given culture. In England not since 1642. And there can be no successful insurrection unless and until the old order breaks up from within because its leaders no longer know what to do. They abdicate, they disappear.

Then comes the final component, the ultimate test – what to do with victory. And this takes us back to the beginning, to the individuals and small groups who have burnt the midnight oil working out the alternatives. The transformation of society raises a vast complex of particular problems each calling for a particular solution involving varying degrees of specialist knowledge. Large conferences can choose between options but not work them out. There is no substitute for ground-work.

And voting then? If it is not margined 'the revolution' will have failed. Voting has a useful marginal function. We are all familiar with meetings that spend far too long discussing procedure and matters of little moment when a vote could get them out of the way. If there are three or four candidates equally well qualified for a particular job we can do what the Greeks did for so long and take the successful name out of a hat. When it comes to taking decisions the aim should be consensus and if there is deep division that matter should be referred back and looked at again at a later date. We need to get rid of the idea that there have to be winners and losers. Why should anyone 'lose'?

All this presupposes that we have dispatched the central mandate of the State – the prospect of war. Today, in Europe internationally, this can be confidently asserted. Given that, all depends upon our personal, social and political inventiveness. It cannot happen in isolation, it works in good company. Good company is the new dimension.



Brian Leslie

The Green Dilemma

Is the Anarchist Society attainable?

This has been hotly debated ever since the word 'anarchist' was coined, with many arguing that it can never be more than an ideal to measure other societies by.

I was brought to accept this ideal not by any contact with anarchism, but by contemplation of my parents' dictum (a quote from . . . someone or other) that 'that government is best which governs least'. They had been members of the Kibbo Kift, which split in the '20s into the Woodcraft Folk and the Social Credit Party (the Green Shirts). The SCP had decided that the financial system – essentially the banks' monopoly power to create the money supply as their own, and charge interest on their loans of it, manipulating the supply for their own power and profit – was the 'root of all evil' in the modern world.

This may have been over-simplistic, but I argued in the London Anarchist Group in the late '50s that anarchists should at least heed this argument to 'know their enemy'. Observation of events since has only strengthened my belief in this point.

For anarchists generally, government is anathema.

Why, then, do we find not merely in the broad Green movement but in the Green Party of this country, that there is a group of self-confessed anarchists, myself included, openly arguing their case – within a party seeking political power?

The Green Party itself is something of an anomaly. Though not using my parents' dictum, it has fully accepted its essence, and is seeking 'the devolution of power to the lowest appropriate level'.

How to achieve this remains unresolved. Some seek priority for the aim of success in Parliamentary elections, but most of those active in the debate argue that not only is the chance of electoral success greater at local level (there are already local Green councillors, despite our lack of proportional representation), but that local success is a necessary precondition for Parliamentary success.

But the Green Party aims to remove from the national government most of its powers, so why seek election to Parliament?

The recent history of Die Grunen might be seen as vindicating the

anarchist case against seeking political power in order to destroy it. Can a Green Party have any real hope of devolving power?

In the March issue of *Green Line*, in an article originally in the US *Left Green Notes*, an anonymous American writer argues that 'It is crucial for the green movement to clarify and make distinctions about what constitutes electoral activity that is in harmony with our principles as Greens', and that 'It is our courage in confronting institutional structures of power, the real sources of our social and ecological problems, which makes us strong'.

He argues against the formation of a national political party, but that Greens should nevertheless seek election at the local level, because that 'is potentially a realm of face-to-face democracy, which the state is not'.

This article, however, serves to illustrate the different public perceptions of politics in the US and the UK. The US has a federal structure, with a far greater measure of local autonomy. Here, the local authorities are firmly and increasingly under the control of the centre, and the public gives its support to political parties in both national and local elections; 'independents' have only a very slim chance of election. So, if only to boost its chances in local elections, the UK Green Party accepts that it must contest for Parliament.

It has just issued a 12-point 'Charter for Citizens' Power', backed by a campaigning document on 'Direct Democracy and Citizen Power' advocating 'Initiative, Recall and Referenda' as three ways for people to have a direct, democratic effect on legislation. It points out that these 'tools of direct democracy' are available to varying degrees to people of many other countries, and demands them for this country.

This brings us back to the dilemma – and to the Social Credit point. The attacks in recent years by the UK government on its local authorities have been firmly based on increasing financial restrictions in response to the exponential growth of the debts created by the financial system, exacerbated by the Government's insane high-interest policy to "curb inflation". It is this system which is at the root of the world's problems, and individually we are powerless to change it. Even for a nation, on its own, this would be dangerous.

Yet, if this system is allowed to continue without fundamental change, the total destruction of our life-support systems is the inevitable and imminent consequence.

I have no confidence that the Green Party, if it ever succeeds in forming a government, will have managed to retain its present determination to devolve power, or that even if it has it will achieve this against the concerted opposition of the powerful vested interests that will be ranged against it; but if it has first got wide local support, it may already have forced many concessions and swung the mood of the

public against the power structures, and have its active support. Apathy is the greatest enemy of progress.

A key policy of the Green Party (as of Social Credit) is the issue to everyone of Basic Incomes – unconditional payments to every citizen of an income sufficient to meet basic needs. This would remove the overriding need to ‘earn a living’, the basis of our ‘wage-slavery’, allowing more people the chance to opt out of conventional employment and removing the pressure on the system for ever-increasing production to provide that employment – and the profits-for-some which it generates. This in itself could be a powerful liberating experience, as well as a necessary change to save the environment. It has the potential to boost the ‘informal economy’, that is all those activities ignored by economists because no money changes hands, but which nevertheless make an essential contribution to the economy: child-rearing, housekeeping, ‘DIY’, food-growing on allotments, etc. – mutual aid.

This, however, is a policy which could only be effected initially by a national government – albeit perhaps one of a different colour, under pressure from the Greens.

Similarly, the Green Party has policies to encourage the development of local currencies, and to remove from the private banks their monopoly of credit-creation in the national currency. These too need either a revolution, or national legislation to introduce them.

The slimness of the chance of successful libertarian revolution in the modern world is widely acknowledged, events in Eastern Europe and Russia notwithstanding. In none of these events has any attempt to throw off their masters, rather than change them, had any success. The only alternative appears to be through the electoral system – but with the fundamental difference of aiming for the ‘bottom line’: use local campaigns to raise public awareness of its powers to demand change locally; get the local population involved; keep at the front of your campaigning the need to devolve power.

So far, this is what the UK Green Party is doing. As long as it continues to, and to reflect and strengthen within its own organisation these principles, it will continue to have my active support. It may not be fully anarchist, but it is pushing strongly in the right direction.

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Michael Duane

To Vote or Not to Vote?

One morning, it being Polling Day, the schools and church halls were open bright and early, tables laid out, voting booths erected, sharpened pencils dangling on string – half-pencils, that is, lest extravagance burst its bounds – and personnel on the alert, having waited for the last ten minutes, watch in hand, so as to open not a second too soon. Later that night, the ballot boxes having been taken down for the count, the magic spells for turning the sacred shrine of democracy back into school or church hall were intoned, the count was made in another place and the new bearer of the laurel whose devoted supporters had not forgotten it was Polling Day, been delayed at the pub, missed the bus, found the rain too heavy or changed their minds, was duly nominated to represent the wise, ignorant, Right, Left, Centre, virtuous, criminal or indifferent voters of the constituency for the next five years or so.

The next morning there began what had always happened before, the series of wars, money deals, high unemployment, slumps, booms, money deals, more unemployment, crashes, city scandals, even more unemployment, money deals, Cabinet scandals, murders, money deals, more unemployment, sex scandals (in and out of Cabinet) and all the mind-boggling, tear-jerking junk that has riveted the great British public to its TV or its tabloid since licences to print money were issued.

Five years later, it being Polling Day yet again, the shrines shone once more, ready for the great day under the tender ministrations of their priests and priestesses, but no one came. At the great places of the High the Great Ones with their Keys of Office, the Major, the Minor and the Middling, set the example. The early hours passed. No one came to worship at the shrines. There followed much consultation of watches.

“It’s early yet. May be the weather, or a hold-up on the buses or the trains or the Tubes. Give them time.”

Yet still none came. Officials with worried frowns paced back and forth across polished linoleum floors and peered out of school gates and church hall doors as if to welcome a flood, four-abreast, with open arms, and looked saddened when they saw not even the postman.

Throughout the morning tea and coffee was brewed and cups and saucers washed up, again and again. Frowns deepened, phones rang,

seniors were consulted. Lunch was taken in turn. More tea and coffee was brewed. Briefcases were carried back to Town Hall, District Office and County.

Past edicts were read and re-read and precedents sought. Higher went the phone calls until they were dinging from Department to Ministry, from Ministry to Cabinet and back again. By late evening an Emergency Cabinet Meeting had been called. A very discreet phonecall summoned the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces to appear at No. 10, in mufti. No reason for alarm at this stage. Later the Chiefs of Staff left discreetly and separately and still in mufti to draw up immediate plans for the next few days and contingent plans in the event of the Emergency continuing.

Meanwhile senior civil servants were to prepare secret plans for the government of the country. They sat through the night so that they could prepare the various stages necessary for promulgation in the Emergency, to be approved by Cabinet. Civil servants at all levels; local government officials, after quick meetings summoned by Leaders of Council and their senior officials, called their assistants to prepare for the mass of paperwork about to flood the country.

Lawyers, from the Lord Chancellor downwards, were sitting in conclave seeking a solution to the problem, Is a Member of Parliament a Member of Parliament if he has not been re-elected and no one has been elected in his place? There were many possible ways of dealing with a lack of government if it had been blown up by the IRA, captured by enemy agents or held to ransom. But what did you do if people just did not vote?

This was all very awkward. If it got out Saddam Hussein might start getting stropky again, then we wouldn't be able to bring the troops, guns and tanks home to deal with what could turn out to be a very nasty crisis indeed. If we could ignore it for a while perhaps no one might notice. So far, at least, nothing seemed to be causing a stir. People were still behaving much as usual. Could it be that many of them hadn't actually noticed anything?

Next morning Mr Bun went to his bank to draw a float of cash for the day. He'd got enough to last him for a couple of hours but he would have to pay for six sacks of flour when they came by lorry and pay cash to three of his staff who preferred it that way. As he handed over his cheque and the pretty young girl who reminded him of his daughter started to pay out the notes and coins a phone in the rear office rang and a senior clerk came out shortly afterwards, saying to the girl, "Hold on to all cash for the moment, I must have a word with the Manager". The girl looked puzzled, then nervous, "Had there been a slump over-

night?", while Mr Bun drummed his fingers on the counter and looked at his watch.

The senior cashier left the Manager's office – the great man was now obviously on the phone – and came over to Mr Bun. "There's a bit of a hold up in cash. Don't know why yet, but I'll have to ask you to make do with a couple of hundred pounds for the moment. Should be all cleared up soon."

"That's no good to me, Jack"; they were members of the Bowls Club. "I'll need at least seven hundred quid with wages to pay today. You'll have most of it back in the morning anyway as the hotels and restaurants pay me today."

"Right, then, but keep this under your hat until we've got to the bottom of it."

That evening the bank was keeping mum as money was flowing in and out fairly normally. Drastic action was held in abeyance, as a money scare would start people switching from shares thought dodgy and might thereby threaten to cause a slide of those shares into bankruptcy, close-down and job loss. Better to let things ride for a few hours at least.

The roads were as full as ever. No shops had their shutters up. Schools opened, teachers arrived, lessons were given. People bought tickets, trains ran. Cows were milked. The one odd thing appeared: nobody was talking about the election results. It was as though they had other things to think about. They bought the papers for the football results and the latest score in the Test Match and the English-French rugby match. They looked at the cookery recipes and the fashions; they did the crossword puzzles. They studied the form and laid bets. They built houses and mended roads, planted crops, drove buses, cleaned hospitals, cut hair, bought and sold goods. In general they carried on with their daily life as they had done for weeks, decades and centuries.

And why? Because it suited their interests that life should be lived from day to day in much the same way as it had always been lived. Walk down the street and ask every man and woman you pass how much they would gain by starting a war? Go into a pub one evening and ask a group of workmen how you could set about getting half-a-dozen houses built for a few friends of yours. They'll soon tell you, because it's been done many times before, by saving up, bit by bit, sharing skills, thinking well ahead and working together. In fact it's been done like that from the dawn of time but we use different materials and we have to be more careful about where we put houses.

How often does the Ministry of Transport tell railwaymen how to keep a railway system going? What causes a complete breakdown more

often on the railways, a dispute between management and workers or bad weather? Who gets the railway going again, a Prime Minister?

Who knows how to teach children and university students – the local M.P.? Who builds generating plants – the M.P. or the Minister? Who gives the Minister the knowledge of how or where to build the plant, lawmakers, administrators, or engineers and geographers? And why is it that myriads of tiny workshops are filling the contracts of the big car-makers of Northern Italy? And why are hundreds of thousands of small odd-job men earning a reasonable living doing things for their neighbours, like Garry the electrician, Bert the plumber and Brian the fireman in his off time?

And over the centuries did the planning departments make the little roads, tracks and pathways that covered the British Isles like a fine mesh of nerves, growing where there was need? Did a Ministry in Chaucer's day set up a YOP scheme to get his poems printed, or give Caxton a loan to set up a press? How did a lad learn to become a silversmith? By going to City and Guilds and getting his Cert? Or by running errands and filling in the odd half-hours watching his Master and trying his hand when his Master wasn't busy? How did Yuppies qualify in those days?

“So what made the real difference between those days and now, Lord Richseam?”

“The discovery that we could make money faster than working the land. Watt's steam engine could keep the bottom of deep coal mines pumped dry so we found we could extract many times the amount of coal from our mines. Then we applied the money to making uniforms and weapons and boots for the armies at a really tidy profit, to beat Napoleon and stop him getting his hands on all the raw materials overseas that we wanted for our factories. So our patriotism marched nicely with our pocket as it seems to do under Good Queen Bess the Second.

“But to do that you have to build mills and factories and fill them with men and women. Who better than the country folk now being pushed off the land by the new agricultural machines? They've got no money to feed their kids so they'll settle for anything you choose to give 'em. Feed them with the soliders' rations you've been manufacturing for the army anyway, until these new back-to-backs are built. That'll keep them fed and not let the stocks unsold between wars go to waste. Why not set up a few Company Stores while you're at it. Cheaper than giving them everything in wages, *and* carrying a modest profit.

“And if they get uppity, kick 'em out and get some new ones. The 'Closure Acts are still working. A bullet or two in their backsides will cool their blood if they go too far. The Magistrate will always call in

the Militia. After all he drinks many a bottle of my port so he should do something for it.”

“What else made the difference between those days and now, old man? What happened to the proud, free yeoman of England?”

“He was alright, Master, so long as he had his own cottage and could grow a few vegetables in the garden or snare a rabbit or two in the wood and catch a few fish. He didn’t have to call anyone his master. When there were some extra harvesting he could earn an extra penny if he liked. But when he was turned off his land he was a beggar. He had been robbed. William had given the land to his Dukes when it wasn’t his to give, but because in daily life they didn’t stamp about saying, “This is mine; you can’t use this field,” everyone used what fitted in with their neighbours, so good and bad was shared by all. No one depended on others for work but they worked together when they worked the common lands and shared the crops. The land was theirs, no matter what the tricky lawyers said when they turned them off later. Then they couldn’t catch even a rabbit in the wood. The new owners put gamekeepers with guns in them, and you can’t catch rabbits in a town. If you can feed yourself you’re a freeman. If you can’t you’re a slave. From then on the English were slaves because they either begged for a job or starved.

“But it was the work that changed it all. Them new machines worked day and night. Like monsters they were; take an arm or a leg off you before you could say ‘Knife!’. Many a child they’ve smashed and even killed. Engines of death; no other way to describe them. You couldn’t work for yourself; they made things cheaper, even a few nails. You could make your own billhook or hammer but not to sell and earn a penny. Fewer and fewer craftsmen. More and more forced into the mills to earn a crust, and crust it was. Poverty! Never seen anything like it. Such poverty that the poor were hidden away in cities and towns so the rich wouldn’t see them.

“People were so poorly paid that, instead of paying them proper wages to keep themselves well fed and healthy and their children educated, charities were raised for the poor and the sick. Later, to keep you off the parish, they started making you save out of your wages, and them low enough, to pay for when you could not work; Old-age pension they called it. Yet the rich were making millions and millions out of our work. Then we got pensions, education and health on the cheap. The rich had always got those things for themselves anyway because they never paid the proper wages for their workers to buy them for themselves.”

“But I still don’t understand why doesn’t Parliament speak for the mass of the people? Most people don’t want to have to put up with a

high infant mortality, an atrocious level of education for more than half their children with near illiteracy for nearly a fifth and a level of pension after nearly fifty years of work that makes them paupers. How is it that so many M.P.s, at the end of the twentieth century, are not unhappy to see more than one-quarter of all adults officially living below the poverty level in the country which gave birth to democracy in its modern form?"

"Well, two things! First we've never accepted the fact that Parliament never *was* meant to represent the mass of the people. It was there to rule the country on behalf of the rich and to curb the excesses of the King. For all but the last century you could not be an M.P. if you were not a property owner. For a long time money, simple bribery, could get you a seat in the House of Commons and even then, as today, the Monarch was and is addressed as if she were conferring a favour rather than responding to a demand for a right. Parliament today rules on behalf of the wealthy and the powerful! Keep saying that out loud until at last it strikes you that it is and has always been true! Many, many honourable but deluded people, charmed to the back teeth by the manners, flair, wit, style – call it what you will – of the upper classes (the boors keep their traps shut and work behind the scenes anyway): its objective is the same, namely to divert the hoi polloi from getting at the truth and beginning to exercise their rightful power.

"The second thing is that the spirit of the Englishman was broken during the two generations that spanned 1800 and has never recovered. Why? Because his whole way of life had been ruined. First by pushing him off the land he had owned by use and custom for over seventeen hundred years, during which he'd absorbed Romans, Normans, Spaniards and God knows who else and taught them his ways and learned some of theirs.

"Then by destroying the skills he had learned over that time with new machinery on the land and new machines that worked night and day in long shifts, at work that turned craftsmen into machine-minders. All the old tools, all the old skills were vanishing before his eyes. No longer was he able to educate his own children in the best way possible, by teaching them as he did his work, and letting them work with him.

"And when he tried to get reasonable wages he was sacked, forced to move to another county to get a job and sacked again as soon as his name was known. If he tried to persuade his mates of the justice of his claims he was deported. Kept on miserly wages he could not feed himself properly. Are you surprised that his spirit was broken? Back-to-backs were build to house only the workers and their children. The old extended families of the countryside had gone. There was no room for them in these new boxes; no room to have the children who would help

to look after them when they were old. Many women died of abortions or were crippled because there was no room for more children.

“When men are cowed and starved and beaten year after year they’ll do anything to keep their family; tell any lie, steal, even kill. But after years, tens of years, a generation or more the spirit is gone. Like the old prisoner in the Bastille. When the revolutionaries came to open the Bastille he could never remember what freedom was like. He could only go round and round doing the things he had done for the whole of his life since he had been a young man. Ask a man what happens when you’ve been jailed for life, even for sixteen years?

“Your generation has inherited a new slavery. Because you’ve never known freedom you think you don’t miss it. Because you grew up in little boxes, because you were slapped at home and caned at school for disobeying teacher, because you had to keep quiet while your neighbour was on night shift; because your house was full of dangerous things like gas and electric points and high windows and fast traffic outside the door, some adult always had to keep an eye on you for your own safety. Of course you soon thought there must be something wrong with you if you couldn’t be trusted; if you always had to have a minder. How can a child be free in a city? You nearly all live in cities now. So you began to need to have someone to tell you what to do and what to think. You think like everyone else. It’s safer! In school they dealt with you in groups of thirty or forty – you were a ganger from the start. Who cared for your personal opinion? Who cared whether you even had a personal opinion? What would it matter even if you did, since *you don’t have any power!* Now, in this country, money and power are the same thing. No one with money lets anyone stand in his way. That is the beginning and end of it, so get it into your noddle and either do something about it or belt up!

“Who cares what you think? Certainly not your M.P.! All he wants is your vote. Otherwise for him you’re just a thug, a thing he has to cultivate when it gets near election time! The few good ones often find their marriages crack up! So you feel guilty about asking them to do anything for you! What a choice – useless or overworked!”

Don’t forget to vote! It keeps up the myth that M.P.s can do something that people can’t do for themselves much more simply and very much more cheaply. Think! We could actually be taken round the House of Commons on a guided tour and learn about the history of our great democracy!

Jonathan Simcock

Election Tactics

At a time when the government and opposition political parties are poised for yet another round of general elections it is perhaps time to re-examine the traditional anarchist response/tactic of abstention. For many anarchists the justification for abstention is expressed by the slogan 'If voting changed anything they would make it illegal' – and indeed everyday life is often largely unaffected by a change of personnel at the top of the political structure, but life in Britain over the last 11 years or as seen in Eastern Europe or Latin America since the war does seem to indicate that activity as anarchists can be determined by the relative oppressiveness of the regimes under which we live. As Nicholas Walter put it in his pamphlet *About Anarchism*: 'Government by rulers we have chosen is different from and generally better than government by rulers who have chosen themselves' and 'every normal person would prefer to live under a less authoritarian one than a more authoritarian one'.

The recent growth of anarchist activity in Eastern Europe and Russia, as related in *The Raven* number 13, has largely been made possible by the fall from power of the Communist Parties in those countries. Likewise in Latin America, opposition politics is once more possible following the retreat from power of military regimes in countries such as Argentina and Brazil.

Colin Ward and Ruth Rendall, in the pamphlet *Undermining the Central Line*, argue the case for decentralisation of political power to local democratically controlled municipalities. They further point out that local initiatives favourable to ordinary people occur more often in countries with weak governments, as in Italy, than under strong and centralised regimes as in Britain.

I believe that observations as made by Walter, Ward and Rendall call into question the continued validity of the 'traditional' anarchist tactic of abstention from voting.

Many anarchists believe that to vote confers legitimacy on the electoral system, but I for one do not believe that such an anonymous act in the privacy of a secret ballot does so.

Voting on a tactical basis on the merits of each situation is surely a better proposition. For example, in Spain the CNT in the elections of

February 1936 dropped the anarchist tactic of abstention in order to secure a left wing republican government which would release large numbers of political prisoners.

Tactical voting in contemporary Britain could be used as a means of producing weak governments. A weak coalition government would be far less likely to introduce measures such as the poll tax, or to proceed with socially regressive legislation on the abolition of the NHS, tax cuts for the rich, etc. The electoral system known as proportional representation is more likely to produce such weak governments than the current 'first past the post' system. At present the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats support proportional representation and Labour and the Tories support 'first past the post'.

I believe that now is the time for anarchists to drop our quasi-dogmatic opposition to voting per se, and to consider the use of tactical voting not elect this government or that, but to attempt to weaken the power of the central state and political parties in favour of the ordinary people. Hopefully this will make local initiatives easier in a whole range of fields . . . housing, leisure, transport, etc. It will also make anarchist propaganda easier to spread than under either Tory or Labour centralised regimes.

In working for a more libertarian society we should use all methods which are consistent with anarchist ethics and not be dogmatic about this. If voting tactically can help in the process of moving towards an anarchist society then vote, as the SWP says, 'without illusions'.



Zeb Korycinska
The Exercise of Real Power

At each general election a great number of the electorate abstain from voting, and we all have a quiet smile as *Freedom* claims another moral victory for anarchism.

The discontent is already there. A majority of people are so dissatisfied with parliamentary democracy that they don't even bother to vote. The question is, how to nudge that apathy along and turn it into something more positive? Top-heavy bureaucracy gives little incentive to the individual to exercise his or her own right. From newspaper reports it appears that many people are choosing not to be placed on the electoral register once they reach eighteen years of age, to avoid paying the poll tax. This is causing large numbers to be disenfranchised. In a Sunday newspaper one such man, asked if he felt like an outsider, far from the centre of power and powerless to change anything, replied "Yes, but doesn't everybody?"

Anarchism stands for a deliberate choice towards taking control of one's own life. The trouble is, anarchy has always had a very bad press, and a poor public image. The popular press plays on this, so that each new terrorist outrage is said to be 'the work of anarchists'. To most people, the black raven, spherical bomb tucked under its wing, is all too apt. Just think, how much money would an anarchist flag day collect in your town?

Maybe what we need to do is sneak up on people, and gently encourage them to think and act for themselves, in all sorts of ways: anti-war and anti-poll tax demonstrations, yes, but also practical, everyday things like co-operative wholefood shopping with neighbours, full use of allotments and gardens, book/record swaps, skill-sharing and teaching, home education for children, using sheds for recycling for old equipment, and setting up community centres in schools in the evenings. Not much to do with politics on the face of it, but once people get used to making their own decisions, and see that they can do things for themselves, then it could spill over into politics too.

We'd have to work with society as it exists now, and not wait for utopia. Traditionally, anarchism hasn't had a lot of time for the family, preferring communes, free marriage, and so on. In fact, families have long been considered suspect by extremists, whether religious or polit-

ical. The suspicion is that they might divert the devotee/fanatic from the true path. Just listen to what Jesus had to say about family commitments:

“If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

There is probably quite a lot of justification in regarding the family as a diversion, but let's look on the positive side. Many people don't vote, principally because they recognise how little true influence they have over the government. The one place people feel they do have power is within their own family, whether this is the heterosexual 'norm' of two adults plus two children, or a same-sex grouping. 'Family' just means those you choose to make your home with.

Instead of cold-shouldering the family, let's consider it as a potential subversive unit. The fact that the family has been so feared and reviled through the ages shows that those in power realise its potential. A selection of people in the street, when asked where their initial loyalties lie will mostly say with their family. Now, this could lead to a very selfish, self-seeking attitude, with each family unit encased in its own little territory. But it doesn't need to be like that. If we can show how much richer life can be with a bit of sharing and co-operation, then more and more families would be willing to join in.

Historically, communities based around families have worked well. Before serfdom and the feudal system, life centred around the village community, regulated by the folkmoot, which consisted of members of the community who were chosen to settle disputes, and regulate any transgressions against the common good. Along with the privilege of self-government came the rights and responsibilities of looking after each member.

In medieval times people lived in self-governing communities, with common grazing rights, and co-operative farming, the land being divided into strips so that each person had an equal share of the land, both barren and fertile. The Frankpledge, established well before the Norman Conquest in the Danelaw area, dealt with any transgressions, levying fines to ensure that the common good did not suffer. People worked their own land, and lived by cottage industry. Children grew up, taking part in the labour, and learning as they grew.

Guilds and apprenticeships flourished, but the Reformation, the Enclosure Acts and the Industrial Revolution put an end to this kind of community life. Instead of people living a full life, responsible for their mutual well-being, they were made into 'hands', fit only to serve machinery.

Nearer to present day, Paul Goodman recounts how the early settlers in America initially organised themselves into small autonomous groups, sharing a network of skills. As soon as the concept of cash-cropping was introduced, then agriculture began to be practised for profit rather than to supply need, with little care for the condition of the soil. Newer immigrants, instead of being welcomed as equals, were seen in terms of potential labour. Once materialism is introduced, collaboration seems to fall apart.

Patrick Geddes introduced the concept of a vertical village into the tenements of Edinburgh's Lawnmarket, where each common close grouped around the courtyard was the focus of the families who lived in the flats. While Geddes and his wife lived there it seems to have been successful, but it needed his guiding spirit to help it continue. Throughout all his town planning schemes Geddes showed how much he had been influenced by Kropotkin. He planned homes for families which would maximise their ability to work together for the common good.

Looking at family life today, whether urban or rural, it is clear that women have always been adept at using informal network systems for advice and support. We have had to be. Women have had to get on with their daily lives, circumventing restrictions as they come to them. Some examples will help to illuminate the sorts of problems that can occur: for pregnant women there is a National Childbirth Trust, to teach women how to achieve a more natural childbirth, and to show the choices that exist, within the hospital system. However, if you choose to have a home birth, unless you are extremely lucky, you are faced with a series of hostile doctors, male and female, who do not want to contemplate this possibility, even if there is no medical reason against it. This is where you have to turn to the unofficial network of women who have been there before you, and who can help you to fight for your rights, and may be able to tell you which of your local doctors is more sympathetic.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is often women who have to care for elderly relatives who are terminally ill. Sometimes the person who is ill knows that he or she is about to die, and wants to have the right to die with dignity. At the moment this is denied to them. Suicide is not illegal, but assisted suicide is, and anyone found helping someone to die in peace is liable to be charged with manslaughter. The irony of the situation is that by the time someone is suffering so much that they want to die sooner rather than a few days later in even more pain, they are often incapable of suicide. Once again, it is the informal networks which can give support and advice to both the carer and the sufferer.

Between the extremes of birth and death, parents have to keep their

children going, making sure that have a meaningful life. If you are serious about individual rights, one way of coping with this is to have your children learn from home, rather than entering the school system. Children are naturally curious about everything, including authority. If they learn from home, their curiosity can be encouraged, rather than squashed, as it would be in school.

Home education is one area where the benefits of collaboration are obvious. The more families in the area who are involved, the more fun it can be. There are more skills to share, and more mutual support.

By their very nature these kind of networks cannot be classified and encoded, but they are the lifeblood of any organisation which helps people to stand up for their own rights against authority.

This might well be seen as a rather soft approach, but the hard truth is that people in general are scared of anything that demands some thought. It's quite comforting to be told what to do, and what to think. There was a story in one of my daughter's library books about pet rabbits abandoned after Christmas in one of the London parks. One day someone came along and chucked out not only the rabbit, but the hutch too. All the pet rabbits scabbled forward, because they knew that if only they could get into it, food would fall down from the sky.

The hutch mentality is an insidious one: personal choices depend on one's priorities. Life is certainly much tougher if you don't keep in line. What we are trying to do is change people's attitudes, which is always a long, slow job, but greater political awareness will come with greater self-confidence.

We seem to have strayed very far from voting. Well, maybe, but voting is merely the illusion of exercising power. Learning how to take charge of your own life, and helping others to do the same, is where the real power lies.

Reading list

Paul Goodman, *People or Personnel*

Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person – an introduction to the ideas and life of Patrick Geddes*

Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*

Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family*

L.T.C. Rolt, *High Horse Riderless*

Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*

Brian Martin

Compulsory voting: a useful target for anti-state action?

Opponents of the state are faced with a daunting task. Not only is state power formidable, but it is pervasive. As a result, though, there are a multitude of ways to try to oppose it.

One attractive approach is to confront state power as directly exercised in various types of compulsion. Compulsory taxation and compulsory education affect the greatest number of people for the longest periods of time, and they indeed have been the target of campaigns. Also high on the list is compulsory military service, against which there have been mighty struggles, mainly by those opposed to war in general or particular wars, but also by some who reject the legitimacy of the state and its right to conscript.

It is not widely known that some Western states exercise another compulsion: compulsory voting. It is standard practice in Australia and Belgium, and was in the Netherlands until 1970.

At first glance, compulsory voting is a curious concept. It requires citizens to participate in the so-called democratic process. Rather than allowing governments to be elected with the support of a minority of potential voters, it enforces something closer to a true 'majority rule' situation. The irony is that the goal of electoral participation is promoted by authoritarian means.

Looking a bit deeper, voting is a means not only to select rulers – usually from a limited set of offerings – but also a means to legitimise the system of rulers and ruled. If people participate in choosing their rulers, on whatever limited terms, this is a powerful tool to show they support them. Psychology is involved too. People who vote are more likely to support the formal political process.

This is a key reason why states with voluntary voting spend so much effort trying to convince people to vote. (There are other reasons, too, of course, including the competition between political parties.) A small turnout suggests that the government has limited legitimacy. This applies both for national and international consumption. Elections under military dictatorship and bureaucratic socialist systems would hardly be worth the effort if not for the rhetorical value of high voter turnout and electoral success.

Compulsory voting, then, serves as a means to increase legitimacy

for the state. But like all compulsions, it is a double-edged sword. Opposition to compulsion can serve as a rallying point for opponents of state power. Anti-tax and anti-conscription campaigns are potent challenges to the state. What then are the prospects of a campaign against compulsory voting?

The question I want to address here is why compulsory voting in Australia is so readily accepted. Why has there been so very little organised resistance to it? The wider interest here is in assessing what sorts of campaigns to challenge state power are likely to mobilise widespread support. If there are some techniques by which governments can defuse obvious libertarian objections to the exercise of state power to enforce voting, this may provide insights useful for deciding on and promoting campaigns on other issues.

As a case study, I use the system of compulsory voting in Australia. The insights from the Australian experience should apply elsewhere. The Australian culture and political system are generally similar to those in other English-speaking countries. The difference in voting systems are not obviously correlated with other systematic differences in social structures.

Although some commentators have portrayed Australians as acquiescent to government impositions, there is evidence contrary to this. There were, for example, well organised anti-conscription movements during World War One and the Vietnam War. The plan by the federal government a few years ago to introduce a national identity card was defeated by a large, spontaneous opposition uniting both left and right wing forces. Government compulsion is neither automatically accepted nor automatically rejected in Australia.

I begin by outlining the introduction of compulsory voting in Australia in the first half of this century, and then turn to the practical details of voting. Next, I describe the attitudes and action of some contemporary anarchist groups. Finally, I comment on the implications of this evidence for the development of campaigns against state power.

The introduction of compulsory voting in Australia

Australia was a pioneer in the introduction of modern voting practices. In a burst of electoral reform in the 1850s, a number of measures were implemented in some or all of the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, including the secret ballot, an elected upper house, three-year parliaments, male suffrage, and equal-population electoral districts. Nothing much happened until the 1890s when, over the following two decades, these innovations were extended to the other colonies and further measures implemented: the abolition of voting in more than

one electorate, payment for members of parliament, and the vote for women.

Australia only became a separate country from Great Britain in 1901. The six colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania became states. Like the United States, Australia has a federal structure with a Commonwealth or federal government as well as the six state governments, plus two territories.

The parliamentary system is like Britain's. The key sources of power are the federal and state houses of representatives, elected from single-member electorates built around specific local geographic areas. Any party or group of parties with a majority in a house can form a government, with the consent of the Governor-General, a representative of the English Queen, and usually treated as an honorary position. The ruling party or coalition selects its leader who becomes Prime Minister (federal government) or Premier (state government), and the members of the Cabinet, from among the members of parliament. There are also senates (except in the state of Queensland), elected from larger, multi-member electorates.

Throughout Australia's history, the electoral system has been manipulated in various ways, usually by the current government in order to promote its prospects of remaining in power. For example, women's suffrage was introduced by conservative politicians, initially in South Australia in 1896. Conservative parties were worried about the radical politics in the bush, with its miners and shearers, compared to the cities. There were demands for a redistribution of the legislature according to population, which would give more votes to the bush. Since women were thought to be more conservative politically, women's suffrage would enfranchise many conservative voters and counteract the effect of the redistribution. (True, there were principled supporters of women's suffrage and there was a women's movement, but political pragmatism or opportunism played such a large role in Australia that it is fair to speak of the vote being 'given' to women, rather than it being 'won' as in Britain or the United States.)¹

Compulsory voting was another innovation in which electoral manipulations played a central role.² There are quite a number of arguments

1. Jebby Phillips, 'How the vote was won', *Women and Politics Conference 1975* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977, pp.81-93).

2. Useful sources on compulsory voting in Australia include: Clive Bean, 'Electoral law, electoral behaviour and electoral outcomes: Australia and New Zealand compared', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, volume 24, March 1986, pp.57-73; Murray Goot, 'Electoral systems', in Don Aitkin (ed.), *Surveys of Australian Political*

raised for and against compulsory voting. In its favour, among other reasons, it is said that democratic government requires formal endorsement from a majority of all electors, that voting is a civic duty like paying taxes, and that without it voting turnout would be too low. The main arguments against compulsion are that it violates the liberty of the citizen and that it does not guarantee a wise vote.

Compulsory voting requires, as a prerequisite, registration of all electors on electoral rolls. This was introduced in Australia federally in 1911, justified on the grounds that it made the task of the electoral officers easier. Compulsory registration was not a heated issue. At the time, much more parliamentary debate was devoted to the question of Saturday elections and the opportunity for postal voting. In each case, perceived party advantage was a central factor in the decision-making.

Universal registration lays the basis for compulsory voting, but there is no automatic progression from one to the other. Most European countries today have automatic registration (from census records and the like). The Australian system of compulsory registration, with the onus on the citizen to enrol, is rare, as is compulsory voting.

The state government of Queensland was the first to introduce compulsory voting. This was done in 1914 by the Ministerialist Party, in the expectation that it would help them in the upcoming election. Their assumption was that they had more apathetic supporters, who would be brought to the polls by compulsion, than did the Australian Labor Party. Although expediency was the motivation for this initial introduction of compulsory voting, the measure was justified on the grounds that voting was a duty rather than a privilege: the idea of "compulsory democracy" was supported in some quarters.

In the event, Labor won the 1915 Queensland election. This created greater interest in compulsory voting in the Labor Party.

In 1915, the federal government desultorily considered compulsory voting, but decided to adopt it only for referenda. In the following decades, the Commonwealth and other state governments each adopted compulsory voting. Often the trigger was a low turnout at an election. The Commonwealth passed its law in 1924; South Australia was the last state government to follow suit, in 1942.

The introduction of compulsory voting was not accompanied by very much heated debate, compared to other issues. Debates in parliaments were not especially spirited. In the federal Parliament's debate in 1924,

neither major party bothered to adopt a policy. The whole issue was not treated very seriously.

As I mentioned before, compulsory voting was only one innovation at the time. Another was preferential voting: every voter was required to rank all candidates standing for a position with a sequence of numbers, from 1 to 2 or 1 to 100 depending on the number of candidates. In counting the votes, if no candidate had a majority of first-preference votes, then the candidate with the least first preference votes was eliminated and the second preference votes for these ballots allocated to the other candidates. This system allows the two conservative parties to "exchange preferences" (that is, encourage voters for their party to give second preference to the other one) and prevent the Labor Party being elected with a minority of the votes in a plurality or "first-past-the-post" system such as found in Britain and the United States. (Since 1984, Australian senate ballots have allowed voters to either allocate preferences themselves or to select a party; in the latter case, preferences are then allocated in a fixed manner decided in advance by the party.)

Since compulsory voting was introduced, there has been no serious attempt by any political party to return to voluntary voting. Compulsion removes from parties one of their onerous tasks: getting out the vote. With voluntary voting, parties must compete in this task at the risk of losing due to a larger turnout organised by opponents. Party memberships in Australia are lower than in comparable countries; the laborious task of getting out the vote is done for them by the compulsory voting law.

The standard studies of the introduction of compulsory voting in Australia give no indication that there was any significant popular concern about the measure. True, there were and are critics of compulsion, but these have mainly been individual protests. The main point to be drawn from history is that compulsory voting was an issue mainly of party politics, not of principle. The hope that compulsion would increase the ruling party's vote and the virtual elimination of efforts to get out the vote seem to have been the primary motivations.

The pragmatics of compulsion

Compulsion sounds unpleasant, but Australian compulsory voting is not nearly as repressive as it may sound. This probably explains why it has been so widely supported and tolerated.

The first point is that compulsory voting has increased the vote considerably, probably by between 10 and 20 percent. Turnout in Australian elections is regularly over 90 percent of registered voters. Prior to compulsory voting the figure was often less than 70 percent.

Even with compulsion, Australian turnout figures are not exceptionally high by international standards. Some European countries with voluntary voting have turnouts as high as 90 percent. The United States, with a turnout of perhaps 50 percent for federal elections, has one of the lowest figures. Part of the explanation here is registration. Automatic registration, common in Europe, ensures that it is easy to vote, whether compulsory or not. Voluntary registration, sometimes with various obstacles (especially for stigmatised groups), inevitably reduces voting.

In Australia, it is relatively easy to avoid the compulsory registration. In moving to a new address in a different electoral district, for example, it is simple to fail to register, by neglect or by choice, in the new district. Few of the officials looking after the rolls vigilantly seek out the unregistered.

Even for those on the rolls, the penalties for not voting are slight. Many of those not voting are never followed up at all. Of those asked to explain their failure to vote, a sensible-sounding excuse, such as sickness or sudden business outside the district, often is sufficient to satisfy the electoral officials. Only a small fraction of non-voters are ever fined for breaking the law, and even in this case the cost is small, such as \$20.

The law on compulsory voting works mainly by voluntary compliance rather than fear of the penalties. The weak and sporadic enforcement of the letter of the law, and the small penalties involved, are not enough to stop those who conscientiously refuse to vote. On the other hand, the expectation of voting is what counts for most people, aided by the avoidance of possible annoying enquiries about not voting. This expectation of voting can also occur without legal backing, as in New Zealand where the turnout is often above 90 percent.

Contrary to what might be expected, opinion polls have shown that Australians who oppose compulsory voting are more likely to be apathetic about politics. They oppose compulsion because they do not want to bother to vote. Apparently, only a minority have a principled opposition to compulsion or to representative democracy.

Another escape route for dissatisfaction is the informal vote. Strictly speaking, compulsory voting is a misnomer: the elector is only required to cast a ballot, but it does not have to be a valid vote. What is called an "informal" vote in Australia is any ballot that is not properly marked, such as a blank ballot or one in which the numbering of preferences is not correct or complete.

The informal vote is usually a few percent of the ballots cast. The greatest source of informal votes is probably mistakes, especially in senate tickets where there are typically dozens of candidates. But con-

scious informal votes are one avenue for venting displeasure with all candidates or with voting generally.

It was commonly thought that compulsion would lead to a significant increase in the informal vote, as more indifferent or reluctant electors were brought to the polling booth. In reality, compulsion had little effect on the size of the informal vote. This suggests that most electors, once enticed to the polling booth by whatever means, choose to express their preferences.

Another response by some voters is what is called the "donkey vote", in which the voter simply numbers the candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper. The candidate listed at the top gains an extra advantage which often amounts to several percent and can make the difference in a close election. The donkey vote is usually made by an uninterested voter, and is one response to the compulsion involved.

Preferential voting itself makes it easy to express discontent with the major parties. A first preference vote for a minor party is a standard way of expressing discontent. (The voter nevertheless must, to cast a formal vote, include a preference for one major party over another somewhere down the ballot.) Preferential voting allows a greater proportion of voters to be catered for, reducing the dissatisfaction that might otherwise occur with compulsion.

Protest can also be expressed by write-ins. This has been most effective in opposition to the building of dams in south-west Tasmania. "No dams" was written on perhaps a third of ballots in a Tasmanian referendum about hydroelectric options (which did not list no dams as a choice), and it has also been used in other elections. Messages written on the ballot are not officially counted; nor do they automatically invalidate the vote cast.

In practice, therefore, compulsory voting in Australia is not nearly as regimented as it sounds. It is easy to escape registration, the penalties for not voting are slight and infrequently imposed, and there are further options of informal and donkey voting. Finally, preferential voting is a convenient way to vent dissatisfaction with the major parties.

Opposition to compulsory voting

The main interest in compulsory voting by historians and political scientists has been on its impact on voting patterns. There are studies assessing the impact on voter turnout, the advantages to different political parties, and the effect on the informal vote. There is relatively little said about the opposition to (or, indeed, the support for) compulsion. I think this is because the issue in fact has caused little public controversy. In the

major histories of Australia, compulsory voting rates hardly more than a footnote.

Opinion polls show that about one-third of people oppose compulsion, a substantial minority. There are occasional articles in newspapers attacking the practice, such as one by prominent historian Geoffrey Blainey just before the 1990 federal election. But few of those who voice opposition feel strongly enough about it to try to develop a campaign of resistance.

There are, however, some principled resisters to voting. In Canberra, the national capital, Ian Warden's refusal to vote became known through his regular column in the *Canberra Times*.

John Zube, an anarchist, sometimes failed to vote and was sent a standard letter demanding an explanation or payment of a fine. He sent electoral officials a list of numerous sayings against voting. Seemingly as a result, in some cases the fines were dropped.

Robert Burrowes, a nonviolent activist, refused to vote on several occasions in the early 1980s because he opposes any system based on rulers. He refused to pay the resulting fines and, as a result, on two occasions spent a few hours in jail. Burrowes aimed to build a vote refusal support group but this did not happen at the time.

No doubt there are a large number of fascinating stories of individual resistance to compulsory voting. So far, though, they have not posed any substantial threat to the practice.

Most Australian anarchist groups have not paid special attention to compulsory voting.³ In Sydney, Australia's largest city with one-fifth of the country's population, there has been little anarchist action against voting. This is mainly because the relatively small anarchist groups have had their hands full in other activities, including running bookshops and holding conferences. Compulsory voting has simply not been a high priority.

The main exception to this pattern is in Melbourne, a city nearly the size of Sydney, where the Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society since 1977 have devoted considerable energy opposing electoral politics.⁴ Their bulletins over the years have featured articles against voting, and during election campaigns they have run anti-electoral campaigns with posters ("Voting: stop it or you'll go blind") and forums.

3. The classical anarchist literature gives little help in choosing or developing campaigns concerning the electoral system, much less compulsory voting. P. Kropotkin, 'Representative government', *The Commonwealth*, volume 7, 7 May-9 July 1892, an attack on representative government, has no discussion of alternatives or campaigns. Errico Malatesta, *Vote: What For?* (London: Freedom Press, 1942), is a simple polemic against electoral politics.

4. Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society, P.O. Box 20, Parkville Victoria 3052, Australia.

This group appears to be the only one that has consistently conducted anti-electoral campaigns.

Noticeably, the efforts of the Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society do not focus on the compulsion associated with voting. Removing compulsion would remove only a limited part of what they oppose, namely a system based on rulers, elected or otherwise. They want to abolish government altogether.

By contrast, Drew Hutton, a leading Brisbane anarchist, supports involvement in local elections through a green party. Indeed, the rise of green parties seems to have attracted many people who might otherwise have become more disillusioned with the system of representative democracy.

Aside from the efforts of a few anarchist groups, there appears to have been little organised opposition to compulsory voting in Australia. It is certainly true that party politics has a tight grip on the political imagination. Many members of the Australian Labor Party became intensely disillusioned when, after Labor was elected federally in 1983, the party elite rapidly abandoned long-standing promises and directions. But these disillusioned members could not grasp the possibility of a non-party politics. Instead, many of them joined the new Nuclear Disarmament Party.

This process of creating new parties rather than rejecting electoral politics continues to be popular. Yet few minor parties even so much as elect a single parliamentarian. The alternative to supporting a minor party is seen as working from within one of the major parties. The major bone of contention, for those on the left, has been whether to work through the Labor Party or to apply pressure from the outside through one of the minor parties. The assumption underlying this debate is that 'real politics' means electoral politics. Is it any wonder that compulsory voting is not of central concern?

Conclusion

One implication of this analysis is that the most effective targets for opposing state power are not necessarily the ones that seem obvious. State compulsion seems like an obvious target, but a closer analysis reveals differences between compulsions in different areas. Compulsory taxation is central to state power; compulsory voting is not.

Another example of a compulsion that isn't central to state power is compulsory jury duty. This is at most a very occasional activity, and like compulsory voting it is an enforced participation in decision-making that provides legitimacy to the state, in this case the legal system. Abolishing compulsory jury duty would hardly undermine the state,

and indeed the jury thrives in only a few countries of the world, especially the United States.

Even if there were a major campaign against compulsory voting, the net result would probably just be voluntary voting rather than any real undermining of the state.

There are many other areas, in which overt compulsion is not involved, where campaigns against state power can generate considerable support. One is government surveillance, whether through computer databases or old-fashioned spying. Another is government control over travel, through passports and visas. Yet another is state preparations for mass warfare, whether with conscripts or volunteer armed forces.

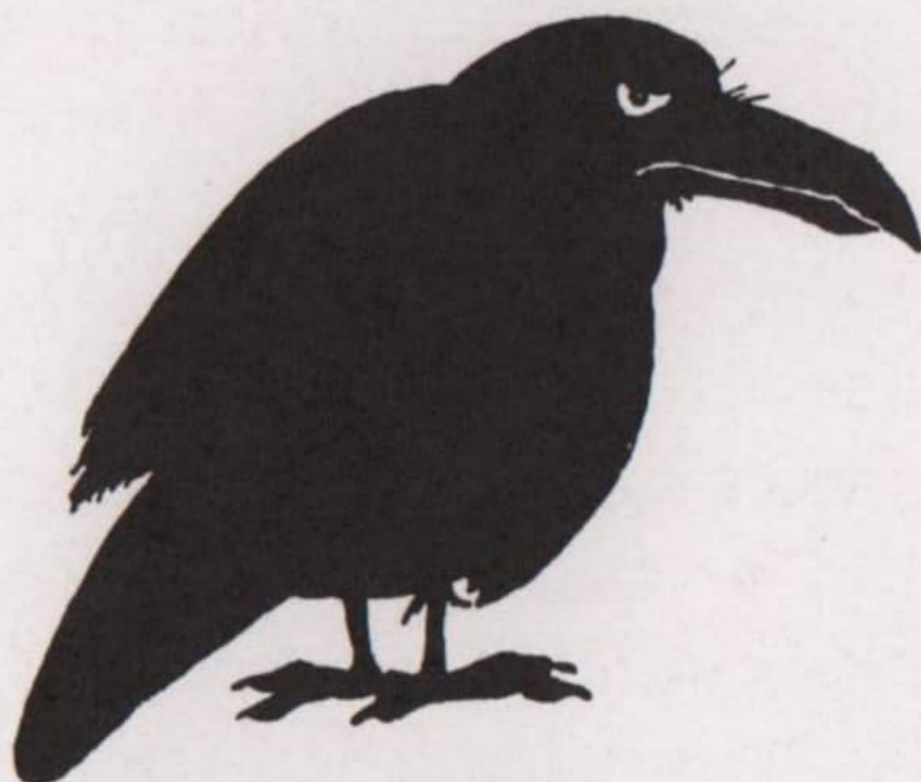
The role of government compulsion is undoubtedly important, but there is a danger in becoming focused on the evil of formal, overt compulsion. Some compulsions are much more significant than others, and some are much better campaign targets than others. Concentrating on compulsions should not distract attention from other forms of state power.

This does not mean that campaigns against compulsory voting are a waste of time. Their greatest value comes when they are tied to a critique of electoral politics generally and to arguments for alternative systems.

I believe that critiques and campaigns against representative systems are needed, linked to promotion of alternatives that increase autonomy and participation. In this endeavour, it is not compulsory voting that is the main target, but the system of government of which voting is a key part. The issue of compulsion may provide an extra argument or lever in countries like Australia, but it is not the crux of the matter.

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Marianne Enckell & Philippe Tonnelier

Democracy Destroyed by its Very Institutions: The example of Switzerland

"The Swiss are people who know how to govern themselves: they are also a people who do not know very much else."

ARTHUR DE GOBINEAU

Switzerland was not created by popular alliance nor by a federation of free communes. The three mythical personages who, on August 1st 1291, took the "Grütli Oath" to defend themselves against the tutelage of the Austrian Empire were powerful men: a local chieftain (Landamann), a wealthy land owner, and a nobleman.

Modern Switzerland came into existence in 1848, when Parliament assembled to draft a new federal constitution. The revised constitution adopted in 1874 brings with it some elements of modernisation: it introduces both more centralism (the army becomes the domain of the confederation and no longer of the cantons) and more individual rights, with more initiatives and the referendum. The economic, professional and corporative associations from then on have a role to play on two levels: they function independently with respect to federalism, and the protection of the State. The "democracy of associations" comes into being at the end of the 19th Century and develops more rapidly during World War I; the associations are given the special task of administering the unemployment funds and later are invited in a consultative capacity, to participate in accident insurance as well as professional training schemes.

The tradition of association has a long history in Switzerland. In the smallest of our villages, there have existed for more than two centuries clubs for marksmen, and gymnastics; choral and some patriotic societies, but also Mutual Insurance societies and others for education and development. Today, in order to present an initiative, or to expect to be consulted on a legal project, or to have some influence on the members of parliament or to support prospective political candidates, the interested parties form a more or less long term and more or less active association. Nothing could be easier legally: all one needs to do is to deposit the Articles of Association and to follow a number of simple rules; control is entirely in the hands of members without outside interference. At present there exists at least one association per 100

inhabitants, and from 60% to 80% of the population are members of one or more of them.

The Federative State

Switzerland is a confederation of 26 states called cantons, divided into three tiers: the commune, the canton, the confederation. Unlike most democracies which are more or less clearly centralising, in Switzerland those functions which devolve on the cantons and the communes are important ones and are jealously guarded from the confederation to such an extent that many federal parliamentarians have as their main task that of opposing every centralised tendency.

For technical reasons direct democracy has given way to a semi-direct democracy, a mixture of representative democracy and of possibilities of direct intervention by the roundabout way such as the popular initiative and of the referendum.

Nevertheless there are still five small cantons which still exercise direct democracy. They are the *Landsgemeinden*, popular assemblies which meet in the town square and represent the legal power. Often in these cantons conservative tendencies are strongest. It is there, for example, that women only obtained the right to vote in 1990.

Switzerland is such a good democracy that nothing changes there except by chance and not for long. A triple structure guarantees this stability: the collegiate of governments, the militia system and paradoxically the recourse to the popular voting (initiatives and referendum).

The Laws

The Swiss political class is horrified by rush and adventure. Above all it suits them to avoid conflict by proposing laws that suit everybody yet some more than others. Which explains why procedure is extremely drawn out and cautious, and allows for the intervention direct or indirect for the various interests at all levels. The search for a consensus, the partial acceptance of minority opinions offers the enormous advantage of integrating all the important forces in taking a decision and the legitimation of a law as being 'that of everybody'. This is the plan!

Proposal of a Law: through a parliamentary motion or a governmental proposal. At this stage first negotiations take place.

Draft Project: drafted by the federal administration, which needless to say does not escape from pressure groups – 82% of the top Civil Servants are members of the four large political parties which always form the government.

Procedure for Consultation: it is a remarkable aspect of Swiss democracy.

The draft project is sent to the political parties and the interested associations in the cantons for discussion. Everyone can therefore adopt a position and suggest modifications. This procedure allows on the one hand the gathering of a great number of opinions and thus to realise which way the wind is blowing and on the other hand to involve in the drafting of the law the greatest possible number of interests. This procedure is very important insofar as everybody becomes a beneficiary of the law and will therefore have to, to a certain degree, accept responsibility for it. The large recognised associations (trade unions, employers and other interested associations) act as a conveyor belt when action goes from top to bottom and as a filter when it goes from bottom to top.

Message from the Government: taking into account the opinions expressed, the government drafts a new project and submits it to the legislative assemblies.

The Work of the Commissions: each of the two chambers nominates its commission which examines the project of law, modifies as they wish and submit their recommendations.

The Commissions, consisting of parliamentarians and 'non-parliamentary experts' have already taken part in the preceding phases in the drafting of a law. The latter are nominated for their technical expertise on the subject. Thus the chairman of the board of a large multinational enterprise involved in the construction and operation of nuclear power stations presided over a commission entrusted with the task of drafting a law on atomic energy.

Obviously these experts are not apolitical, and the composition of commissions has less to do with their technical expertise than with their political opinions. Very roughly one can say that the Right occupy two to the Left's one seat on the commissions, which follows the pattern in government and in parliament.

Debate in Parliament: the two chambers separate the articles in the new law and vote on each of these articles. Differences between the two chambers have to be eliminated by agreement.

Publication: once the two chambers have reached agreement on the law and have voted for it, it is officially made public. At this stage a delay is available for an optional referendum.

The Vote: If it results in a referendum then the whole law is submitted to the popular vote and is either accepted or turned down.

Implementation: It is often the case that the implementation of laws devolves on the cantons and even the communes, and this allows important modifications to legislation according to local conditions.

If the decision is formally devolved to the legislative power or to the people, in fact the real decisions are taken elsewhere. But the democratic principle and appearances remain safe.

Popular Initiative

Popular initiative is the dynamic pivot of Swiss democracy – each citizen or group of citizens (party, trade union, professional association) can propose or modify an article in the constitution. To do so requires the signatures of 100,000 citizens with the vote to be collected within 18 months. If that is achieved, the initiative is passed to a popular vote, and if it results in a majority of the people and of the cantons the constitution will be amended.

This system would be of some interest if there were not so many institutional, economic and other obstacles hampering the free use of the popular initiative, thereby considerably reducing its chances of success:

- The rule of the double majority of the people and of the cantons almost presents a right of veto to the many small cantons which have remained resolutely traditional.
- Parliament can oppose a counter-project from the beginning. Such a counter-project generally takes up some of the proposals of the initiative at the same time reducing them. Since it is not possible to vote in favour of the initiative and the counter-project, the voices that are in favour of progress are dispersed and it is very rarely that one of the two projects wins the day over the *status quo*. The only purpose of the counter-project is to torpedo the initiative.
- The initiative can modify the constitution, but not the legislation. It is left to Parliament to decide, in the event that the initiative succeeds, the rules for its application. It has therefore ample scope in drafting the law to reduce the effects, or to modify the sense, of the popular initiative.
- Finally, many are the citizens who doubt the durability of a modification of the constitution and prefer action at legislative level, through the influence of the deputies.

These four elements make the success of a popular initiative very hazardous if they clash with the interests of the parliamentary majority and its sponsors. One must also take into account the fact that in the campaign preceding the voting, those who own the means of communication use all their powers to influence public opinion.

To launch an initiative is not in fact within the means of anybody. Only the large existing associations in the country can afford to do so with the possibility of success, for they have the means to finance a campaign of information and a sufficient number of activists willing to

engage themselves in the task of collecting the signatures. Now those large associations are those which, strongly institutionalised, have chosen to apply the rules of the game and are already integrated in the decision-taking machinery. They are part of the traditional landscape of the vested interests, broken into the art of consensus and the possible in politics. The initiatives they propose measure up exactly to what is acceptable.

It happens quite frequently that minority or marginal groups take the plunge with an initiative hoping that it will be successful. A defeat in popular voting produces a deep feeling of discouragement among the activists who feel misunderstood, and rejected not just by the political powers but also by the majority of the population, and who then start to doubt as to the ability of Swiss democracy to take into account minority demands. On the other hand, failed initiatives make enormous inroads in the funds and the activists must again find the energy, in a period of demoralisation, to repay all debts, which means that all future positive activities are hampered for a number of years. This, for instance, is what happened in 1984 for the initiative "for an authentic Civil Service", in spite of its measured objectives. The pacifist groups are still suffering materially.

Sometimes small marginal groups launch initiatives with the main objective of propagating their ideas and starting a debate. An example is that of the initiative aiming at the abolition of the Swiss army. To everybody's amazement it won more than a third of the votes cast. Two weeks later, Parliament agreed to a budget for the army which was higher than it had ever been!

If an initiative, even if rejected, receives a very large number of votes, Parliament sometimes takes it into account with future legislation. When the minority groupings are sufficiently strong, the search for a consensus fully operates in order to prevent confirmation. For instance this is what happened as a result of the popular initiatives launched by the xenophobic circles to reduce the number of foreigners in Switzerland. Though they were all turned down in the popular voting, the government and Parliament took steps though, it is true, less drastic, in that direction.

The Referendum

The referendum is the instrument for popular control. It is automatic for any modification of the constitution, and optional when it is a case of a law or of a departmental order. For an optional referendum 50,000 signatures must be collected within 90 days. If the referendum is successful, the people decide in the end, by yes or no, whether the law will be applied. Whereas in the case of the popular initiative the double majority,

of the people and the cantons, is demanded, in the case of the referendum a simple majority of the people is sufficient. Furthermore, there is no question but that it is easier to be successful with the referendum than with the initiative (no text to prepare, no counter-project, a simple majority, fewer signatures required). Thus Swiss democracy favours the *status quo* rather than evolution or change.

The referendum has in fact performed its role of controlling 'on the way out'. For instance, a few years ago the people refused the formation of a federal police force. But agreements between the cantons allows for the sovereign states (the cantons) to take into their own hands the tasks which should have been devolved to the federal police. It is a constant of Swiss democracy to perform on two stages – the cantons and the confederation – according to the circumstances.

For some years now the referendum has tended to become more a means for pressure rather than a real instrument of control. It is when the elaboration of laws by the commissions and by the legislative powers are taking place that some *milieux* launch the threat of a referendum 'if the law goes too far'. This method of dissuasion explains in part the minimal and cautious characteristic of Swiss laws.

The referendum plays a powerful role on the popular discontent, mistrust of the State ('too much State') and the 'neinsager', those who always say NO. The Conservative Right and the liberal *milieux* in the economy are the biggest users of referenda. Probably Swiss laws acquire, just because of the possibility of a popular refusal, a greater legitimacy than in the other democracies.

The Innate and the Acquired

"What should make us reflect is not just the attempt by the powerful to promote their vested interests at the centre of public relations, of recognised political cells and double mandates within the collectivity. Yet what is most worrying is that this distortion of democracy is actually part of the legalised system and that the process of forming opinion not being sufficiently openly available to the public, the possibility of real change disappears."

(Hans Tschani *Qui dirige la Suisse – Who rules Switzerland – Lausanne éd 24 heures 1984*)

Is it really a question of a "distortion of democracy" in Switzerland or rather a constitutive perversion of the system?

We have here a somewhat special illustration of the "new bosses" thesis. There is not only a close interlocking of the political and the economic, but between all private and public interests. This is reflected in the universal acceptance of the model. The Swiss grumble against the government just as much as in other countries, against "them" who

take our taxes and are held responsible for there being more rain than sunshine; but the Swiss conform to the imaginary and to the dominant imagery in a very profound way, sometimes in a very insidious way.

As to the Communes, they have a relative autonomy vis-à-vis the cantonal or federal state. When M. de Tocqueville returned from America in 1832, he began his presentation of American democracy with the commune and vividly brought out the contradiction:

“Of all the freedoms, that of the communes, which are established with such difficulty, is also the one most exposed to the invasion of Power. Left to themselves, communal institutions would certainly not know how to struggle against an enterprising and strong government: to be able to defend themselves successfully, they must have achieved their full stature and be involved in the national ideas and customs (. . .) Yet it is in the commune that the strength of free peoples resides. Communal institutions are to freedom what primary schools are to science: they place them at the disposal of the people: they get them to taste the possibilities and to get accustomed to make best use of them. Without communal institutions, a nation can give itself a free government but it has not the spirit of freedom.”

(Alexis de Tocqueville *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, Paris 1835)

It remains to be seen whether today there exists in the communes a feeling of belonging and of community which could be the making of a counter power. It remains to be seen what is their autonomy. If they can exchange among themselves agreements on which they have complete authority, they also undergo decrees imposed and controlled by the State. Such is a current interpretation of Swiss federalism.

The mechanisms of institutionalisation are probably more powerful than the purely democratic ones. Democracy in the 19th Century was founded on a universalist vision: the sovereignty of the people, equality before the law, the majority principle, which could mean the exclusion of minority interest groups, that is of parties. On the other hand the pluralism of allegiances such as exist in Switzerland today (political, corporative, regional, confessional . . . allegiances) could be seen both as a guarantee of pluralism in democracy as well as a strengthening of the system of compromise, of consensus, that is to say of no-decision, of no-change.

One observes this in the institutionalisation of popular movements, which are constantly tempted to transform their aims (their *raison d'être*) into texts for initiatives or into party programmes, and to call their activists to go to the polling booths rather than into the street.

The ecological party of Geneva, in the front rank of which are to be found a fair number of former anti-nuclear militants and former advocates of direct action, limits its demands to “getting a few laws passed

on energy saving” or more or less, and thus limits its ambition to be part of the system. A system which indicates the force of integration of a well-oiled political democracy and the stifling effect it has on all the forces of social change.

“If you were to live in the Swiss republics, under our normal democratic institutions, thanks to which the people believe themselves to be free, do not perceive their economic bondage and submissively allow themselves to be enrolled by political charlatans who need them in order to capture power – if you lived in those surroundings, you would no doubt feel, as we do, the need to protest against the immoral farce that is universal suffrage and to propose to the workers in your country that the first thing to do in order to work for their emancipation is to get rid of the political schemers who seek to burke the social questions in the simplest way: by refusing to vote for them.”

(Letter from the Committee of the Jurasian Federation of the International Workers Association to the English sections of the International, 1871)



Tony Powell

The 'Purists', the 'Realists' and the Straitjacket:

**Emma Goldman, the Spanish Anarchists,
and the February Elections, 1936**

“Part of the reason why anarchist strategy fails lies in the radicalism of its objective. Any theorist whose objective is as sweeping, abstractly defined and strongly opposed as the anarchists’ will find his choice of means treacherous and unreliable.”¹

“every organization (however revolutionary its rhetoric and however well-intentioned its goals) which models itself structurally on the very system it seeks to overthrow becomes assimilated and subverted by bourgeois relations”²

Anarchism is an exacting political credo; it makes almost insuperable demands upon its proponents. In both its desired goals and the means proffered for their realization, the room for compromise is effectively negligible. We can therefore visualize the anarchist doctrine as an ideological straitjacket – from which no-one has yet to escape with his/her integrity still intact!

The problem is two-fold: firstly, anarchism is what might be generically referred to as an ‘absolutist’ ideology. It propounds a series of tenets which perceive society in terms of totalities. Expressing an hostility to half-measures, ameliorative reforms and palliative gestures, it is firmly located in the ‘impossibilist’ tradition of socialist thought. To be more precise, as one writer noted, anarchism is “an all-or-nothing creed”³: it questions the very foundations of the existing capitalist society; it advocates an all-embracing transformation of our economic and ethical

1. Alan Ritter, *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis*, (1980), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.110.
2. Murray Bookchin, *Anarchy and Organization*, (1969), (New York: Friends of Malatesta), p.5.
3. Raymond Carr, “All or Nothing”, in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XXIV, No. 16, 13 October 1977, p.22.

bases of existence; and it advances an apocalyptical rather than evolutionary schema as a herald to the desired anarchist millenium.

Secondly, anarchism demands that the means employed to achieve these fundamental social changes are commensurate with the revolutionary ends to which they are directed. This argument was clearly articulated in the *Sonvillier Circular* of 1871 where it unequivocally stated that "the form of the revolutionary movement itself must foreshadow the form of the society after the revolution"⁴. In short, the means of liberation of humanity must embody those social and ethical precepts which characterize the post-revolutionary society.

As has often been pointed out, the word 'anarchy' is derived from Greek usage, and in literal translation means 'without government'. This point was elaborated upon by one of the movement's leading theoreticians, Peter Kropotkin. In 1910 he defined anarchism as:

"the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being"⁵.

Clearly, personal autonomy assumes a central role in such a pattern of thought. The aversion to externally imposed authority per se is fundamental to the argument, so much so that it becomes a principle for the creed. Consequently, any question concerning the relative merits of the form that authority may adopt becomes an irrelevancy. Moreover, the arch embodiment of such authority is perceived to be the State, the adjunct of the propertied and dominating classes in society. On both counts, then, anarchists unambiguously oppose the State. This point was succinctly made by J.B. Robinson in 1925 when he argued:

"Government – otherwise called The State – is an organization of the propertied classes to maintain property – to protect propertied interests – to uphold the rule of property. . .

"There is no real difference among the various forms of governmental organization, whether called aristocracies, monarchies, oligarchies, or democracies; they are all plutocracies"⁶.

4. Quoted in James Joll, "Anarchism – A Living Tradition", in David E. Apter and James Joll, (eds), *Anarchism Today*, (1971), (London: The Macmillans Press Ltd), p.216.

5. Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchism", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., (1910), (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Company), p.914.

6. J.B. Robinson, *Rebuilding the World: an Outline of the Principles of Anarchism*, (1925), (Indore: Modern Publishers), p.19.

In this argument, elections in the most liberal democratic of societies become a matter of inconsequence. Moreover, not only do they entail the withdrawal of personal autonomy in the determination of an individual's life, but by positive participation in them, they also imply a moral approval of the existing political system.

Clearly, anarchism demonstrates no predisposition to the 'relatives' of everyday politics. The so-called 'art of the possible' is considered wholly anathema. . . . To be more exact, anarchism shows no orientation to what may vaguely be called 'the notion of the preferred state'. That is, its theoretical inflexibility, its 'absoluteness', experiences profound difficulties when attempting to embrace those non-revolutionary situations in which the immediately available choice is restricted to the so-called 'lesser-of-two-evils' within existing society. Dilemmas are confronted; unsatisfactory decisions are sometimes taken. The most notable example in this respect, of course, is the notorious position adopted by Kropotkin during the early months of World War One. Throughout this period the highly respected anarchist theoretician renounced his former anti-militarism and radical critiques on the origins of modern warfare, and instead espoused an allegiance to the Entente against Germany and its allies – on the basis that the iniquities of the former were insubstantial when compared with the threat posed by the reactionism of the latter.

Anarchist history is punctuated with such instances of fundamental disagreement and divergence. Some anarchists (the 'purists') have strictly maintained the consistency of their political convictions when faced by particular social developments. Others, however (the 'realists'), have delivered unspoken acknowledgement to the American proverb, "In politics a man must learn to rise above principle"⁷ – whilst simultaneously reneging on any attempt to revise anarchist theory in the light of their preferred standpoint.

This paper, then, will address one such example of a situation in which the aforementioned discrepancies of opinion arose: that is, the participation of the Spanish anarchists in the Cortes (Spanish government) elections of February 1936. In the light of the preceding discussion regarding the anti-political character of the anarchist credo, it will first look at the political and social background to the elections of February 1936 in order to set the anarchists' responses in their particular historical context. Secondly, it will analyse the reasons, voiced and otherwise, for Spanish anarchist involvement in the elections. Lastly, it will proceed

7. Quoted in H.L. Mencken, (ed), *H.L. Mencken's Dictionary of Quotations: on historical principles from Ancient and Modern Sources*, (1982), (London: William Collins, Sons and Company Limited), p.974.

to study the views of the Lithuanian anarchist Emma Goldman on the issue of anarchists and electoral participation, which she articulated three months after February 1936.

Background to the Elections of 1936

Spain is a country with a long anarchist tradition. The reasons for its popularity have been varyingly attributed over the years to both the religious and the profane. Some writers have emphasised the supposed Messianic element of a millenarian movement pursuing a secular paradise; others, on the other hand, have instead attempted to depict anarchism as a rational doctrine directed towards attainable economic goals whose popularity is founded upon its daily efficacy.⁸

Modern Spanish anarchism is usually traced back to the Proudhonian ideas propagated in a journal entitled *El Porvenir*, edited by Ramon de la Sagra in 1845. By the 1890s syndicalism was infiltrating Spain as it had in many other countries in Europe. Strikes erupted across the country and in 1907 the more militant unions coalesced to form a new organization: Solidaridad Obrera. In 1909 the group initiated a strike which culminated in the so-called "Tragic Week" in Barcelona. Among those subsequently killed was the progressive educationalist Francisco Ferrer, who had been in England during the time of the disturbances. This draconian recrimination helped establish the Confederacion Nacional Del Trabajo (C.N.T.), an organization which could claim a membership of approximately 700,000 by 1919⁹. In 1927 the C.N.T., which had embraced anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and syndicalists under its umbrella, witnessed the formation of the epicentre of revolutionary aspiration within the movement: the Federacion Anarquista Iberica (F.A.I.). The F.A.I. based itself around the organizational notion of affinity groups, which were numerically limited and linked via a local, district and regional network of federated units. At a national level co-ordination was assured by the Peninsular Committee, with the most oratorically gifted referred to euphemistically as 'leading militants'.

By the mid-1930s the Spanish anarchist movement was both numerically and iconically significant. As the only libertarian associations to succeed in advocating an anarchist credo to a mass movement, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. were the defiant figureheads of twentieth century anarchism. They embodied the revolutionary spirit of Michael Bakunin

8. For a brief survey of the views of both camps see Martha Grace Duncan, "Spanish Anarchism Refracted: Theme and Image in the Millenarian and Revisionist Literature", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July 1988, pp.323-346.

9. George Woodcock, "Anarchism in Spain", *History Today*, Vol. XII, No. 1, January 1962, p.28.

and carried forward many long-cherished hopes, aspirations and dreams. The policies and fate of the Spanish anarchists, therefore, attracted the attention of those militants outside Spain as much as they did the indigenous revolutionaries. Any deviations from the ideological norm were subsequently subject to close scrutiny.

By the 1930s Spanish society was experiencing the strains of modernism. The political system had abjectly failed to successfully mediate between and appease the various polarized groupings. Against such a chaotic background the ruling Spanish monarch, King Alfonso XIII, abdicated in April 1931. The Second Republic was declared on 14 April 1931, and in the elections for the Constituent Cortes in June a Left-Republican coalition government assumed power. Manuel Azana became Prime Minister and Largo Caballero, who was to play a greater role in Spanish affairs a few years later, was appointed Minister of Labour.

Legislation was subsequently introduced which attempted to eliminate some of the vestiges of the old regime. The changes affected the church (cemeteries were secularized and state financial aid was severed) and the army (the law of jurisdictions was eliminated; military and civil justice were integrated; surplus generals were retired from service; the combat-based merit promotion scheme was annulled; and the army's overall budget was reduced). Moreover, regional autonomy was granted to Catalonia, thereby further alienating the army, which considered itself the guardian of national unity. Agrarian legislation was also passed which was sympathetic to the impoverished peasants (arbitrating committees were established to settle labour disputes; employers were forbidden to contract workers from outside the immediate locality; a maximum eight-hour day was introduced; and substantial landholdings were expropriated, though the largest landowners were not affected too adversely).

However, such enactments did not achieve their desired results in an increasingly polarized society. Conservative groups felt that the existing reforms impinged upon their material interests. The more revolutionary elements in Spanish society complained that the legislation was too circumscribed and failed to satisfy their aspirations. In an effectively antipodal political situation, public dissension was rife among the extremist factions of both Left and Right. Strikes, assassinations and mass insurrections became commonplace events. Stanley Payne has recently estimated that approximately 2119 political killings occurred between the inception of the Second Republic to the outbreak of the ensuing civil war, with those of the early years predominantly anarchist-inspired mini-insurrections and peasant confrontations with the Civil Guard.¹⁰

The C.N.T. were initially quite disposed to the Second Republic

and anxious to afford it the opportunity to pursue its legislative programme – and more. Reflecting on the period nearly forty years later the anarchist militant Federica Montseny said,

“We hoped that the Republic of April 14 might be a federal, socialist Republic which might give much more than indeed it did.”¹¹

Rank-and-file disturbances on the street generated apprehension and a curt official response. Only eight days after the Republic was announced, on 22 April, the C.N.T.’s *Solidaridad Obrera* published an editorial entitled “It’s Time to Stop”, which instructed the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees to declare to its members:

“that they are absolutely opposed to a return to individual attentados (killings), a procedure that is completely inefficient in the material order and in the moral order renders abhorrent those who resort to such tactics”¹²

However, continued support among anarchist officials for the Republic was conditional upon its material achievements and was weighted with the proviso that there was to be no “retreat towards dictatorial and reactionary conditions”¹³. Disturbances persisted as qualified indifference became outright opposition. In January 1933 an insurrection led by anarchist rural labourers in the hamlet of Casas Viejas was ruthlessly suppressed by the Assault Guards. Twenty-three peasants were killed in the event and thousands of anarcho-syndicalists were arrested and imprisoned.

In November 1933 new elections were held for the Cortes. The

10. See Table 2, “Political killings between 1931 and 1936”, in Stanley G. Payne, “Political Violence During the Spanish Second Republic”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, Nos. 2-3, 1990, p.284. Payne delineates two distinct periods of violence under the Second Republic: the ‘anarchist phase’ (from its foundation to the end of 1933), and the ‘socialist phase’ (from early 1934 to the beginning of the civil war), where the revolutionary socialists, under Caballero, attempted to undermine the regime and provoke a revolution.
11. Interview with Shirley Fredricks, 5 August 1972, quoted in Shirley F. Fredricks, “Federica Montseny and Spanish Anarchist Feminism”, in *Frontiers: a journal of women studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Winter 1976, p.75.
12. Quoted in Stanley G. Payne, *op.cit.*, p.271.
13. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 May 1931, quoted in Graham Kelsey, “Anarchism in Aragon during the Second Republic: the emergence of a mass movement”, in Martin Blinkhorn, (ed), *Spain in Conflict, 1931-1939: Democracy and its Enemies*, (1986), (London: Sage Publications), p.66. Three weeks later the temperament was changing as it became obvious that “the government is showing its colours all too clearly with the adoption of measures which are more than equal of those put into practice by the dictatorship”, in *Heraldo de Aragon*, 4 June 1931, quoted in Graham Kelsey, *ibid.*, p.66.

C.N.T. abided to the traditional abstentionist policy of the anarchists by refusing to differentiate between the rival suitors to government office and led a vigorous anti-electoral campaign. Looking back upon its anti-political stand in 1935 the C.N.T. remarked:

“Tyranny and crime are equally deserving of condemnation, no matter whether they exist under the red-yellow flag of monarchy or in the name of the tricolour of the Republic or even under the red banner of the dictatorship of the proletariat”¹⁴

The political bias of the Cortes swung to the Right, partly as a consequence of the non-participation of the anarchists. Dominated by liberals and conservatives and led by the Radical Alejandro Lerroux, the new government directed a Cortes in which the Confederacion Espanola de Derechas Autonomas (C.E.D.A.) held the largest number of seats. In the true tradition of adversary politics, Lerroux proceeded to rescind many of the legislative reforms which the preceding administration had introduced. The distribution of power on the land was tilted back towards the landowners; Catalan regional autonomy was suspended; the merit promotion scheme was restored for the army and a pardon was granted to the so-called ‘Lion of the Rif’, General Sanjurjo, who had inspired and led an abortive *pronunciamento* in Seville in August 1932. In response to these changes, Left-wing political parties participated in the formation of an Anti-Fascist Workers’ Alliance in 1934 under the joint leadership of Joaquim Maurin and Caballero. In October of the same year the government was reorganized to reflect the composition of the Cortes and thereby included three representatives from the C.E.D.A.. However, followers of the C.E.D.A. were generally perceived of as fascists in disguise by those activists on the Spanish Left. They had refused to swear their constitutional allegiance to the Republic and their leader Gil Robles, an unashamed admirer of the Austrian dictator Dolfuss, was referred to as “Gil Hitler de Espana” by Montseny.¹⁵

An insurrection, somewhat romantically referred to as the ‘October Revolution’, was launched against the new government in October 1934 to re-establish the Republican policies of 1931. However, as one writer remarked, the rising was an unmitigated disaster.¹⁶ “The proletariat of the great cities,” one historian commented,

14. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 January 1935, quoted in Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, (1936), (London: Victor Gollancz), p.267.

15. Quoted in Shirley Fay Fredricks, *Social and Political Thought of Federica Montseny, Spanish Anarchist, 1923-1937*, (1972), (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New Mexico), p.193.

16. Joseph Harrison, “Review: *The Road to Revolution in Spain: the Coal Miners of*

“did not raise their rebellion much above the level of a general strike. In some towns they did not even stop work; in others, the general strike lasted twenty-four, forty-eight hours. In Madrid the strike lasted nine days and the revolution was not a rising of the masses which imperils the State, but a spasmodic disturbance which harasses the police.”¹⁷

The whole venture was poorly organized and eventually became isolated in the mining areas of the North, including Viscaya, Leon, Santander, Palencia and, especially, Asturias. The Asturian miners were ripe for stubborn resistance: in the 1920s they had witnessed a drop in real wages, a rise in their productivity levels and a fall in employment. They had embraced the dawn of the Second Republic with unrivalled enthusiasm as their saviour. Their disappointment was the greatest.¹⁸ It was in Asturias that the Workers' Alliance achieved a living reality; a local unity between the anarchists, socialists and communists was successfully, if only temporarily, achieved. However, the insurrection was finally crushed by Moorish and Foreign Legion troops which had been brought into the area from North Africa under the control of Generals Francisco Franco and Manuel Llopi Goded. Figures relating to the forceful suppression of the miners vary. However, approximately 900 people were killed, some in summary executions, and between 20,000-40,000 Left-wing militants were imprisoned in the reprisals which ensued.

In late 1935 the Lerroux government collapsed amid rumours of malpractice, corruption and nepotism. New elections were arranged for February of the following year. Unwilling to tolerate a successive Right-dominated administration, many political factions coalesced on an anti-fascist basis as a “Popular Front”.¹⁹ The groups included the Republican Left (including those led by Azana, Marcelino Domingo and the Galician autonomist and later Prime Minister Santiago Casares Quiroga); the Republican Union of Diego Martinez Barrio; the separatist Esquerra

Asturias, 1860-1934, by Adrian Shubert”, in *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 1990, p.312.

17. A. Ramos-Oliveira, “The Asturian Revolution of October 1934”, in Gabriel Jackson, (ed), *The Spanish Civil War: Domestic Crisis or International Conspiracy?*, (1967), (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company), p.30.
18. For a brief study of the plight of the Asturian miners see Adrian Shubert, “The epic failure: the Asturian revolution of October 1934”, in Paul Preston, (ed), *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939*, (1984), (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd), pp. 113-136.
19. For the formation of the Popular Front in Spain see Helen Graham, “The Road to a Popular Front”, *History Today*, Vol. 36, July 1986, pp.19-23. For a study of the evolution of the Popular Front in Europe generally see Paul Preston, “Barricades against Fascism: the Popular Front in Europe”, *History Today*, Vol. 36, July 1986, pp.15-18.

of Luis Companys; the small syndicalist party of Angel Pestana and the anti-Stalinist communists of the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (P.O.U.M.) of Maurin and Andres Nin. The Popular Front was finally signed on 15 January 1936 and committed the various political parties to a moderate electoral platform: the reintroduction of the secular, educational, agricultural, military and regional practices of the Republican government of 1931-1933 and a complete amnesty for the thousands of political prisoners interned following the failure of the Catalan and Asturian revolts.²⁰

By this point, however, Spanish political opinion had become highly polarized. There was little opportunity for reconciling the Right and Left. As one commentator noted:

“New elections in February 1936 ended all hope of a republic for all Spaniards, or even for all republicans. They had become a battle for power between right and left coalitions more deeply hostile to each other than ever extremes had been under the monarchy”²¹

The Popular Front emerged as victors in the elections with 270 out of the 470 seats in the Cortes. Part of this success can be attributed to the action of the anarchists. Many at the rank-and-file level decided to participate in the electoral process while at the national level a deliberately subdued abstentionist campaign was observed.

Spanish Anarchists and the February Elections, 1936

Throughout the initial weeks of January 1936 the anarchists attempted to clarify their position regarding the forthcoming elections. Theoretical consistency remained largely unimpaired; anti-politicism was still perceived as a paramount consideration. The issue at stake was rather more simplistic.

“From the theoretical point of view the question presented no problems, because the anarchists never intended to intervene directly in politics, but, on the other hand, they could either mount an active abstentionist propaganda as in 1933 or omit it, which, of course, would have quite considerable importance at the moment of counting the votes.”²²

20. Gabriel Jackson, “The Spanish Popular Front, 1934-7”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1970, pp.27-28.

21. W.C. Atkinson, “Disillusion and Instability, 1898-1936”, in Gabriel Jackson, (ed), *The Spanish Civil War: Domestic Crisis or International Conspiracy?*, (1967), (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company). p.7.

22. Xavier Tusell Gomez, “The Popular Front Elections in Spain, 1936”, in Stanley G. Payne, (ed), *Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century Spain*, (1976), New York: New Viewpoints), p.106.

The end result of this deliberation was the recommendation of a clear abstentionist policy to anarchist followers. However, the recommendation was only mutely voiced. As one follower noted, the anti-electoral campaign of the C.N.T. went "unnoticed by reason of its timidity".²³ The pre-election manifestos of the C.N.T. didn't exhort their followers not to vote. Moreover, such noticeable laxity was juxtaposed with the contradictory statements of highly influential anarchist militants. The father of Federica Montseny, Federico Urales, remarked:

"I would consider it a great error on the part of the anarchists if, as a consequence of their action during the electoral period, the rightists triumphed over the leftists."²⁴

At the same time, the demigodic figure of Buenaventura Durruti announced in the press:

"I cannot recommend to anyone that he not vote."²⁵

It is hardly surprising that in this context many anarchists participated in the elections.

The question that needs to be asked is *why* the anarchists renounced effectively their traditional anti-electoral standpoint. There could be a number of reasons to account for such activity, a variety of short- and medium-term advantages which could have accrued from such an action. These were: firstly, the recovery of personal liberties for those individuals imprisoned after the failed uprisings in the Catalan and Asturian areas.

Secondly, the reabsorption of these militant political prisoners into the revolutionary movement, thereby securing additional mental and physical strength for the on-going social struggle.

Thirdly, the deprivation of continued power from the forces of the Right and, therefore, the denial of further opportunities to accentuate existing anti-working-class legislation.

Fourthly, the likelihood of noticeable palliative gains from a Republican Popular Front government receptive to the demands of the working classes. As the F.A.I. revolutionary Abad de Santillan later remarked, "We gave power to the leftists, convinced that under the circumstances they were a lesser evil"²⁶.

23. Quoted in Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution 1936-1939*, (1983 ed), (London: Freedom Press), p.18.

24. Quoted in Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868-1936*, (1977), (New York: Free Life Edition, Inc), p.278.

25. Quoted in Xavier Tusell Gomes, *op.cit.*, p.106.

26. Quoted in Stephen John Brademas, *Revolution and Social Revolution: A Contribution to the History of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement in Spain, 1930-1937*, (1953), (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brasenose College, University of Oxford), p.262.

Lastly, the awareness that any political successes attained by the forces of the Left, and the reformist legislation that would inevitably ensue, would further polarize political differences in Spanish society and help bring forward the much vaunted revolutionary conflagration.²⁷

However, the issue of anarchist participation in the electoral process is not usually framed in terms of 'political expediency'. Traditionally objections are raised on the grounds of principle, and deviations from this position are usually decried. Such objections were articulated by the veteran anarchist Emma Goldman (1869-1940) and it is to these that we now turn.

Emma Goldman: Anarchists and Elections

The eminent theoreticians of nineteenth century anarchism were Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. Twentieth century anarchism, however, was propounded by, what may be referred to non-pejoratively as, 'notable advocates' rather than intellectuals of a comparable grandiose standing. Two such individuals were the Lithuanians Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) and Emma Goldman (1869-1940), the latter once described as "the most compelling woman ever involved in the anarchist movement".²⁸

By 1936 Goldman was 67 years old. Over the years her exhausting and extraordinary career as a dedicated militant had practically confirmed many of the ideas she had read earlier in political tracts. No less a confirmation was the contention of Lord Acton that:

"Nearly all great men are bad men. Power is poison. . . The danger is not that a particular class is unfit to govern; every class is unfit to govern".²⁹

A formative experience in this regard was her disillusionment with events unfolding in Russia after the revolution of 1917. It was the lessons she learnt then that were to serve her twenty years later in discussions on the February elections in Spain. Goldman had been deported back to Russia from a hostile United States with 248 other internees in

27. Vernon Richards argued that the C.N.T. were utterly irresponsible in this matter. Aware that a Popular Front success would further alienate the military and accelerate their known plans for an attempted coup, he argues that the C.N.T. failed in their responsibility to address the practical questions of such a scenario: how would such an attack be resisted and how would the anarchists convert such a development into a revolutionary situation? See Vernon Richards, *op.cit.*, pp.23-24.

28. N[icolas] W[alter], "Review: Emma Goldman in Exile", *Freedom*, Vol. 51, No. 9, 5 May 1990, p.5.

29. Quoted in Anon, "Power is poison", *Freedom*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 410, September 1923, p.50.

December 1919 upon the forbidding *Buford*. Wide-eyed with hope for the future, Goldman was soon to experience disappointment. By April 1921 her initial euphoria had been effectively muted by her experience of Bolshevik rule. With the increasing centralization of political power, the diminution of the authority of the local soviet, the ascendancy of the Party, the ruthless suppression of dissenting voices and the 'expedient' introduction of the New Economic Policy, Goldman's doubts were heightened³⁰. In December of the same year she and Berkman left Russia and attempted to convince others of Bolshevik realities. However, in this capacity, they were often to face unreceptive audiences. The philosopher Bertrand Russell later recalled a dinner which had been given in Goldman's honour:

"When she rose to speak, she was welcomed enthusiastically; but when she sat down, there was dead silence. This was because almost the whole of her speech was against the Bolsheviks."³¹

But Goldman was a determined character. She lectured widely on "The Bolshevik Myth", spreading the word as much as she could to anyone who was prepared to listen. For her the lesson to be learnt was a clear one:

"the experience of Russia", she wrote, "more than any theories, has demonstrated that all government, whatever its form or pretences, is a dead weight that paralyses the free spirit and activities of the masses".³²

However, some British anarchists, like many others on the Left, were reluctant to criticize the Bolsheviks – even though their Russian counterparts were being persecuted.³³ The misdemeanours of the leading Bolsheviks were often seen as either the erroneous rumours of the capitalist press or as inevitable expedients in the transitional phase of the revolutionary struggle. Some anarchists were willing to tolerate deviations from traditional principles on the grounds that reality demanded it. Divisions arose between the 'realists' and the 'purists'. Fred Tyler criticized the latter in the pages of *Freedom* as those who:

30. For details see Harold J. Goldberg, "Goldman and Berkman view the Bolshevik Regime", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. LIII, No. 131, April 1975, pp.272-276.

31. Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1914-1944*, vol. II, (1968), (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd), p.123.

32. Emma Goldman, "Emma Goldman on the Bolsheviks", *Freedom*, vol. XXXVI, No. 395, May 1922, p.31.

33. For details see Martin Durham, "British Revolutionaries and the Suppression of the Left in Lenin's Russia, 1918-1924", *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 20, 1985, pp.203-219.

“subordinate their actions to a theory, and proceed to define their opinions upon current topics in due accord with what they please to term ‘consistency’”.³⁴

Others, like William C. Owen, defended their principles as well as Emma Goldman. Writing in January 1921 he wrote:

“to abandon principles for the sake of gaining . . . a temporary advantage is despicable.”³⁵

For ‘purists’, concessions to political power were intolerable. The Bolsheviks had simply demonstrated the anarchist belief that the means and ends in the revolutionary equation had to balance. Goldman concluded:

“There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it and presently the aims and means become identical. . . Psychologically and socially the means necessarily influence and alter the means”.³⁶

At some point in March/April 1936 Alexander Berkman received a questionnaire from the ‘Mas Legas’ group in Spain regarding the issue of anarchists and elections. Berkman, however, had only recently undergone a second prostate gland operation and was too ill to reply. Consequently, Goldman, who had just completed a lecture tour of South Wales, assumed the responsibility. Her letter, which was written on 1 May 1936, was later selectively reprinted in the New York paper *Vanguard*.³⁷

Goldman was more than aware of the number and character of those militants imprisoned in the preceding years by the Republican government. She also acknowledged the fact that their promised release had amounted to a strong incentive for electoral participation. However, the basic thrust of her response was a simple one. Bearing in mind her experiences in Russia, she argued that anarchists should recognise the

34. *Freedom*, Vol. XXXV, No. 382, April 1921, p. 23. Tyler was specifically discussing the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

35. W.C.O., “Bolshevik’s Failure”, *Freedom*, Vol. XXXV, No. 379, January 1921, p.4.

36. Emma Goldman, “Afterward to *My Disillusionment in Russia*”, in Alix Kates Shulman, (ed), *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman*, (1972), (New York: Vintage Books), pp.355-356.

37. Emma Goldman, “Anarchists and Elections”, *Vanguard*, III, June-July 1936, pp.19-20. A carbon copy of the original reply is located in Folder XXIX.E, #23085-23088, Emma Goldman Archive, International Institute of Social History [EGA., I.I.S.H.].

primacy of their principles when discussing the question of anti-politicism. 'Expediency' was a blanket term under which many indiscretions could be committed. Therefore they should not flirt with the notion of political abstentionism in terms of its tactical efficacy in particular circumstances.

More particularly, she outlined three main points: firstly, personal autonomy, the primary consideration of the anarchist, is severely negated by the abrogation of power to delegated representatives.

"After all," she argued, "participation in elections means the transfer of one's will and decisions to another, which is contrary to the fundamental principles of anarchism."³⁸

Secondly, it was important to remember that the means of transition to the anarchist society had to be compatible with the desired ends. In 1923 Errico Malatesta had written that:

"each end carries with it its own means. The morality or immorality lies in the end sought; there is no option as to the means."³⁹

Goldman was in complete agreement. Some ideologies, she argued (such as Marxism-Leninism) were favourably inclined to the State and therefore were understandably not repulsed by the use of existing political processes. However, she asked,

"how can the Anarchists[,] whose social philosophy repudiates the state, and political power, all government authority, in short, every sort of power and authority over fellow man? To me it is a denial of Anarchism. . .".⁴⁰

Her last point concerned the nature of power itself. In repeating the argument expressed earlier by Lord Acton, she could draw upon the Bolshevik experience once more. For Goldman, it wasn't the abuse of power which has a corrupting influence upon individuals.

"it is the thing itself, namely power which is evil and which takes the very spirit and revolutionary fighting strength out of everybody who wields power. Does not the Russian reality stand as a living example of this fact. . . Precisely the same thing would happen to Anarchists were they to seize power. Not only would they not 'hasten the march towards the realisation of Anarchism', they would sink into the swamp of corruption and demoralisation inherent in all power. Namely they would cling to power and forget their Anarchism. There

38. Emma Goldman, "Anarchists and Elections", op.cit., p.19.

39. E. Malatesta, "A Bit of Theory", *Freedom*, vol. XXXVII, No. 411, October 1923, p.52.

40. Emma Goldman, "Anarchists and Elections", op.cit., p.19.

is no reason whatever to believe that the Anarchists would not succumb to the same influence as the Socialists and Communists have."⁴¹

Her concluding comments were a summation of the whole letter and a prophetic warning to her Spanish comrades:

"The future belongs to those who continue daringly, consistently to fight power and authority. . . Any divergence from this stand will only retard our movement and make of it a stepping stone for political climbers."⁴²

Conclusion

In an endearing introduction to his book on *Utopia*, Colin Ward wrote:

"Everyone has an ideal place. When you're five it is probably the sweet counter at Woolworths; when you're ten it might be a toyshop or the seaside on a summer day. But when you're fifteen, twenty, thirty, fifty? The older you get, the more varied and complicated your version of an ideal place becomes."⁴³

Anarchists too have their particular preferred ideal: a society in which individual autonomy is encouraged at the expense of externally imposed authority. However, as mentioned earlier, such an ideal places anarchism firmly in the 'impossibilist' tradition of socialist thought. There is very little opportunity for flexibility in everyday political matters. The lively debate on whether or not anarchists should participate in the electoral process is as much a reflection upon this 'absolutist' nature of the anarchist doctrine, as it is a question of theoretical consistency. Situations such as we have just discussed occur in periods of non-revolutionary activity. The glorious apocalypse is viewed as anything but imminent by its prophets. Moreover, the affect that can be realistically exerted by the anarchist movement is seen a wholly negligible one. Anarchists perceive their own political strength as falling far short of that considered necessary to actually create history rather than be simply subject to it.

However, the desire to influence the course of social events is a powerful force. If the impelling nature of the latter is to be at least partially satisfied, the transgression of traditionally held principles is inevitable. In 1838 J. Fenimore Cooper wrote that:

"Principles become modified in practice by facts."⁴⁴

41. Emma Goldman to 'Mas Lejos', op.cit., #23086.

42. Emma Goldman, "Anarchists and Elections", op.cit., p.20.

43. Colin Ward, *Utopia*, (1974), (Middlesex: Penguin Education), p.7.

44. J. Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat*, XXIX, (1838), quoted in H.L. Mencken, op.cit., p.974.

However, anarchists who have found themselves faced by this dilemma have not attempted to revise the anarchist doctrine. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they would. In short, how does one embrace a positive political disposition when one is constrained by an anti-political straitjacket?

The question in these circumstances, then, becomes a matter of sketching out the parameters of permissible political expediency. The problem, of course, is the ambiguity of the word 'permissible'. What is considered permissible by one may be totally abhorrent to another. Moreover, any action can conceivably be justified satisfactorily if it is merely prefixed with the phrase 'politically expedient'. Such a situation was to arise once more in Spain only nine months after the February elections. Taking this line of thought to its extreme, leading Spanish anarchists once again asked for comradely understanding. This time, however, it was not to condone electoral participation, but in order to sanction their acceptance of ministerial positions in the government of Caballero.

In this case, where does political expediency end and renegadism begin? What is left of anarchism as a serious political doctrine when one of its central tenets has been removed? In this particular situation, some former 'purists' were suddenly transformed into 'realists' in the light of perceived extenuating circumstances. Ironically, one such individual was none other than Emma Goldman herself. Acting as the accredited representative of the CNT-FAI in London during the years of the Spanish Civil War, Goldman was later to reprimand a Dutch comrade for his critical appraisal of the actions of the Spanish anarchists in the conflict:

"it is all very well, dear comrade," she wrote, "to remain consistent and to be tied by theories when one is far away from a battlefield, but REALITY imposes many things not provided in theoretical hairsplitting of this or that idea."⁴⁵

It might well be that anarchist concessions to the political process are inevitable and even acceptable in particular circumstances. But one

45. Emma Goldman to Wim Jong, 10 February 1937, Folder X.1, #6490, EGA., I.I.S.H.. For information on Goldman during the Civil War, see Robert W. Kern, "Anarchist Principles and Spanish Reality: Emma Goldman as a Participant in the Civil War, 1936-39", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, Nos. 2 and 3, July 1976, pp.237-259; David Porter, (ed), *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, (1983), (New York: Commonground Press); and Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War*, (1989), (Boston: Beacon Press).

question remains which has to be addressed: what is left of the anarchist after his/her straitjacket has been dispensed with?

Footnotes

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Peter Kropotkin

Revolutionary Government

I

That existing governments ought to be abolished, so that liberty, equality and fraternity need no longer be vain words and may become living realities; that all forms of government attempted until our time have been no more than forms of oppression and ought to be replaced by a new form of association – so far all those who have a mind and temperament which are at all revolutionary are in complete agreement. To tell the truth, it isn't even necessary to be much of an innovator to come to this conclusion; the vices of existing governments and the impossibility of reforming them are too striking not to leap to the eyes of every reasonable observer. And as for overthrowing governments, it is generally known that at certain periods this may be achieved without many difficulties. There are moments when governments collapse almost by themselves, like houses of cards, before the breath of the people in revolt. This was seen clearly [in France] in 1848 and 1870; it will be seen again soon.

This essay first appeared as 'Le gouvernement pendant la révolution', three anonymous articles published in Kropotkin's paper *Le Révolté* (2nd September – 14th October 1882). A slightly revised version appeared as 'Le gouvernement révolutionnaire', a chapter included in Kropotkin's book *Paroles d'un Révolté* (Paris, 1885). It was soon translated into several languages. An American translation (by W. C. Owen) was published in the Portland *Avant-Courier* in 1887. An English translation (probably by David Nicoll) was published in the Socialist League paper *The Commonweal* on two occasions (23rd August – 6th September 1890, 6th – 20th August 1892).

Revolutionary Government was first published as a Socialist League pamphlet by the Commonweal office in 1892, and continued to be sold by the Freedom office for many years. A new edition was published by the Freedom Press in 1923. It was included in Roger N. Baldwin's collection of *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York, 1927). A slightly revised and abridged translation with an anonymous postscript by Marie Louise Berneri was published by the Freedom Press in 1941, and new editions appeared in 1943 and 1945. Other English-language editions have appeared at various times as pamphlets or as articles in the anarchist press. The present version is a new translation from the text in *Paroles d'un Révolté* by Nicolas Walter.

To overthrow a government – this is everything for a bourgeois revolutionary. For us, it is only the beginning of the Social Revolution. Once the machine of the State is out of order, the hierarchy of officials fallen into disarray and no longer knowing which direction to move in, the soldiers losing confidence in their leaders – in a word, once the army of the defenders of Capital is put to flight – it is then that the great work of the destruction of the institutions which serve to perpetuate economic and political slavery arises before us. The possibility of acting freely is acquired – what are the revolutionaries going to do?

To this question it is only the anarchists who reply: 'No government, anarchy!' All the others say: 'A revolutionary government!' They differ only over the form to give this government. Some want it elected by universal suffrage, as a State or as a Commune; others declare for a revolutionary dictatorship.

A 'revolutionary government'! These two words sound very strangely to those who realise what the Social Revolution should mean and what a government does mean. The two words contradict one another, destroy one another. We have of course seen despotic governments – it is the essence of all government to take the side of reaction against the revolution, and to have an inevitable tendency towards despotism – but we have never seen a revolutionary government, and for a good reason. It is that revolution – the synonym of 'disorder', of the upsetting and overthrowing in a few days of time-honoured institutions, of the violent demolition of the established forms of property, the destruction of castes, the rapid transformation of received ideas about morality (or rather about the hypocrisy which takes its place), of individual liberty, and of spontaneous action – is precisely the opposite, the negation of government, this being the synonym of 'established order', of conservatism, of the maintenance of existing institutions, the negation of initiative and individual action. And yet we continually hear talk of this white blackbird, as if a 'revolutionary government' were the simplest thing in the world, as common and as well known to everyone as monarchy, empire or papacy!

That the so-called revolutionaries of the bourgeoisie should preach this idea is understandable. We know what they mean by Revolution. That is quite simply a patching up of the bourgeois republic; it is the taking possession by the so-called republicans of the lucrative jobs reserved today for the Bonapartists or Royalists. It means at the most the divorce of Church and State, replaced by the concubinage of the two, the confiscation of the property of the clergy for the benefit of the State and above all of the future administrators of this property; perhaps also the referendum, or some other political mechanism of the same kind. But that revolutionary socialists should make themselves the advocates

of this idea – we can explain this only by supposing one of two things. Either those who accept it are imbued with bourgeois prejudices which they have drawn without realising it from literature and above all from history, written by bourgeois writers to suit bourgeois ideas; and, still possessed with the spirit of servility resulting from centuries of slavery, they cannot even imagine themselves free. Or else they do not really want this Revolution whose name is always on their lips: they would be content with a simple patching up of existing institutions, provided that they would be put in power, leaving until later to see what should be done to satisfy ‘the beast’ – that is, the people. They oppose the present rulers only in order to take their places. With these people we do not care to argue. We shall speak only to those who are honestly deceived.

Let us begin with the first of the two forms of ‘revolutionary government’ which is advocated – elected government.

The royal or some other power has been overthrown, the army of the defenders of Capital is in full flight; everywhere there is ferment, discussion of public affairs, the desire to move forwards. New ideas are arising, the need for serious change is recognised – it is necessary to act, and ruthlessly begin the work of demolition, so as to prepare the ground for the new life. But what do they suggest we should do? To call the people together for elections, to elect a government at once, to entrust it with the work which each and all of us should be doing on our own initiative!

This is what Paris did after March 18th, 1871. ‘I shall always remember’, a friend [Elisée Reclus] told us, ‘those fine moments of deliverance. I had come down from my upper room in the Latin Quarter to join that immense open-air club which filled the boulevards from one end of Paris to the other. Everyone was talking about public affairs; all personal preoccupation was forgotten; there was no thought of buying and selling; everyone was ready to throw themselves body and soul towards the future. Even members of the bourgeoisie, carried away by the universal enthusiasm, saw with joy a new world opening up. “If it is necessary to make a social revolution, well then, let’s make it! Let’s put everything in common; we are prepared to do so!” All the elements of revolution were there: it was only necessary to set them to work. When I returned to my room in the evening, I said to myself: “How fine mankind is! We didn’t know it, and we always slandered it!” Then came the elections, the members of the Commune were named – and little by little the force of devotion and the zeal for action were extinguished. Everyone returned to his usual task, saying: “Now we have an honest government, let it get on with it.” . . . What followed is well known.’

Instead of acting for themselves, instead of moving forwards, instead of advancing boldly towards a new order of things, the people, trusting their rulers, left them the responsibility of taking the initiative. This was the first consequence – the inevitable result of elections. What then do these rulers do, invested with the confidence of everyone?

Never were elections more free than those of March 1871. The opponents of the Commune themselves have admitted this. Never was the great mass of electors more imbued with the desire to put into power the best men, the men of the future, the revolutionaries. And that is what they did. All the well-known revolutionaries were elected with overwhelming majorities; Jacobins, Blanquists, Internationalists – all the three revolutionary fractions were represented on the Commune Council. The election couldn't have produced a better government.

The result is well known. Shut up in the Town Hall, with the task of proceeding according to the forms established by previous governments, these ardent revolutionaries, these reformers were struck with incompetence and sterility. With all their good will and their courage, they couldn't even organise the defence of Paris. Of course people nowadays blame this on the men, the individuals; but it was not the individuals who were the cause of this failure – it was the system that was used.

In fact universal suffrage, when it is free, can only produce at most an assembly representing the average of the opinions which prevail in the mass of the people at the time; and this average at the outbreak of the revolution generally has only a vague, a very vague, idea of the work which must be accomplished, without realising at all how to go about it. Oh, if the bulk of the nation, of the Commune, could understand before the movement what should be done as soon as the government is overthrown! If this dream of armchair utopians could be put into practice, we would never have bloody revolutions: the will of the bulk of the nation being expressed, the rest would submit to it with good grace. But this is not how things happen. The revolution breaks out long before a general understanding can be established, and those who have a clear idea of what is to be done the next day are at that moment only a small minority. The great mass of the people still have only a general idea of the end which they want to see put into practice, without knowing very well how to move towards that end, nor having much confidence about the direction to take. The practical solution won't be found, won't be made clear, until the change has already begun: it will be the result of the revolution itself, of the people in action – or else it will be nothing, the minds of a few individuals being absolutely incapable of finding solutions which can only spring from the life of the people.

This is the situation which is reflected in the body elected by universal suffrage, even if it didn't have all the vices inherent in representative governments in general. The few men who represent the revolutionary idea of the epoch are swamped among the representatives of the revolutionary schools of the past and of the existing order of things. Those men who would be so necessary among the people, precisely at this stage of the revolution, to propagate their ideas widely, to stimulate the masses to movement, to demolish the institutions of the past – they are shut up there in a hall, vainly discussing how to wring concessions from the moderates and how to convert their enemies, whereas there is only one way of bringing them to accept the new idea: that is, to put it into practice. The government turns into a parliament, with all the vices of bourgeois parliaments. Far from being a 'revolutionary' government, it becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and in order to stop marking time the people find themselves obliged to get it out of the way, to dismiss those who were acclaimed yesterday as their representatives. But this is no longer so easy. The new government, which has hastened to organise a whole new administrative system so as to extend its domination and to make itself obeyed, doesn't intend to give up its position so lightly. Jealous of maintaining its power, it hangs on with all the energy of an institution which has not yet had time to fall into senile decay. It has decided to oppose force with force; and to dislodge it there is only one way, that of taking arms to make another revolution so as to dismiss those in whom the people had put all their hope.

And there you have the revolution divided against itself! After losing precious time in procrastination, it will now lose its strength in internal divisions between the friends of the new government and those who see the need to get rid of it! And all this because it has not been understood that a new life requires new forms; that it is not by hanging on to old forms that a revolution is to be carried out! All this because the incompatibility between revolution and government hasn't been understood, because it hasn't been seen that one – whatever form it takes – is the negation of the other, and that without anarchy there can be no revolution. It is the same with that other form of 'revolutionary government' which is praised to us – revolutionary dictatorship.

II

The dangers which the Revolution is exposed to if it allows itself to be mastered by an elected government are so obvious that a whole school of revolutionaries completely renounce this idea. They understand that it is impossible for an insurgent people to obtain through the path of elections a government which doesn't represent the past, which isn't a

drag on the feet of the people, above all when it is a question of accomplishing that immense economic, political and moral regeneration which we understand by the Social Revolution. They therefore renounce the idea of a 'legal' government, at least for the period which is a rebellion against legality, and they advocate 'revolutionary dictatorship'.

'The party', they say, 'which has overturned the government will replace it by force. It will seize hold of power and proceed in a revolutionary manner. It will take the measures necessary to ensure the success of the uprising; it will demolish the old institutions; it will organise the defence of the territory. As for those who don't wish to recognise its authority – the guillotine; to those, whether they come from the people or the bourgeoisie, who refuse to obey the orders which it will issue to regulate the advance of the revolution – the guillotine again!' This is the reasoning of the budding Robespierres – those who have retained from the great epic of the last century only its declining phase, those who have learnt only the speeches of the republican prosecutors.

For us anarchists the dictatorship of an individual or of a party – at bottom, it is the same thing – is completely condemned. We know that a social revolution cannot be directed by the mind of a single man or of a group. We know that revolution and government are incompatible; one kills the other, no matter what name is given to the government: dictatorship, monarchy, or parliament. We know that what gives our party its force and truth lies in its basic formula: 'Nothing good and lasting may be done except by the free initiative of the people, and all power tends to kill this.' This is why the best of us, if their ideas did not have to pass through the crucible of the people to be put into practice, and if they became masters of this formidable engine of government, which would allow them to do what they wanted, would become within a week fit only for assassination. We know where every dictatorship leads, even the best-intentioned one – to the death of the revolution. And we know finally that this idea of dictatorship is always just an unhealthy product of governmental fetishism which, in the same way as religious fetishism, has always perpetuated slavery.

But today it isn't the anarchists we are addressing. We are speaking to those governmental revolutionaries who, led astray by the prejudices of their education, are sincerely mistaken and ask nothing better than to discuss the issue. We shall therefore speak to them from their own point of view.

And first, a general observation. Those who preach dictatorship don't generally perceive that in maintaining this prejudice they are only preparing the ground for those who will later cut their throats. There is nevertheless one saying of Robespierre which his admirers would do well to remember. He didn't deny dictatorship in principle. But: 'Take

care', he abruptly replied to Mandar when the latter spoke to him about it, '*Brissot would be the Dictator!*' Yes, Brissot, the evil Girondin, deadly enemy of the egalitarian tendencies of the people, passionate defender of property (which he had once described as theft) – Brissot, who would calmly have consigned to the Abbaye prison Hébert, Marat, and all the moderate Jacobins!

But this remark dates from 1792! At that time France had already been in revolution for three years! In practice the monarchy no longer existed: it was only waiting to receive its death stroke; in practice, the feudal system had already been abolished. And nevertheless, even at this stage, when the revolution was surging forward, it was still the counter-revolutionary Brissot who had the best chance of becoming dictator! And who would it have been before, in 1789? It is Mirabeau who would have been recognised as the head of the government! The man who made a bargain with the King to sell him his eloquence – this is the person who would have been carried to power at that stage, if the insurgent people hadn't imposed its sovereignty, supported by its pikes, and if it hadn't proceeded by the accomplished facts of the *Jacquerie* in making illusory every power set up in Paris or in the provinces.

But governmental prejudice so thoroughly blinds those who talk of dictatorship that they prefer to prepare the dictatorship of a new Brissot or a Napoleon to abandoning the idea of giving another master to men who are breaking their chains!

The secret societies of the time of the Restoration and of Louis-Philippe contributed powerfully to the maintenance of this prejudice in favour of dictatorship. The bourgeois republicans of that time, supported by the workers, made a long series of conspiracies to overthrow the monarchy and proclaim the Republic. Not realising the profound transformation which would have to be effected in France even for a bourgeois republican regime to be established, they imagined that by means of a wide conspiracy they would one day overthrow the government and proclaim the Republic. For nearly thirty years, these secret societies did not cease working with unlimited devotion, heroic perseverance and courage. If the Republic emerged quite naturally from the rising of February 1848, it was thanks to these societies, it was thanks to the propaganda by deed which they made for thirty years. Without their noble efforts, the Republic would have been impossible until the present.

Their aim was therefore to take over power themselves, to install themselves as a republican dictatorship. But of course they never managed to do so. As always, by the inevitable nature of things, it was not through conspiracy that the monarchy was overturned. The conspirators

had prepared the way for its collapse. They had spread the republican idea widely; their martyrs had made it the ideal of the people. But the final effort which definitively overturned the King and the bourgeoisie was much wider and much stronger than anything which could have come from a secret society; it came from the mass of the people.

The result is well known. The party which had prepared the fall of the monarchy found itself pushed off the steps of the Town Hall. Others, too cautious to take the risks of conspiracy, but better known and also more moderate, awaiting the moment to take power, took the place which the conspirators thought they would conquer through armed force. Journalists, lawyers, fine speakers who worked to make their names while the true republicans prepared their weapons or languished in jail, seized power. Some who were already well known were acclaimed by the passers by; others pushed themselves forward and were accepted because their names represented nothing but a programme of agreeing with everyone.

There is no point telling us that this happened because of a lack of a practical spirit among the party of action, and that others will be able to do better . . . No, a thousand times no! It is a law like that of the movement of the heavenly bodies, that the party of action is left outside while the intriguers and talkers take power. They are better known in the great mass which makes the final thrust. They gain more votes, because with or without voting papers, by acclamation or through the ballot-box, at bottom it is always a kind of tacit election which is made at this moment by acclamation. They are accepted by everyone, above all by the enemies of the revolution who prefer to put forward nonentities, and acclamation thus recognises as leaders those who at bottom are the enemies of the movement or indifferent to it.

The man [Auguste Blanqui] who more than anyone else was the incarnation of this system of conspiracy, the man who paid with a life in prison for his devotion to this system, on the eve of his death issued those words which amount to a whole programme: *Neither God nor Master!*

III

To imagine that a government may be overturned by a secret society, and that this society can take its place – this is an error committed by all the revolutionary organisations born from the republican bourgeoisie since 1820. Yet other facts abound which prove what an error it is. What devotion, what self-denial, what perseverance were displayed by the republican secret societies of Young Italy – and nevertheless all this immense work, all these sacrifices made by the Italian youth, before

which even those of the Russian revolutionary youth pale, all the corpses piled up in the casemates of Austrian fortresses, victims of the blade and the bullets of the executioner – the only beneficiaries of all this were the evil bourgeoisie and monarchy!

It's the same story in Russia. It is rare to find in history a secret organisation which has achieved with so few means such immense results as those obtained by the Russian youth, who have made proof of an energy and activity as powerful as the Executive Committee [of the People's Will]. It has shaken that colossus which seemed invulnerable – Tsarism; and it has made autocratic government henceforward impossible in Russia. And nevertheless, it would be very naive to imagine that the Executive Committee will become the master of power on the day the crown of Alexander III is dragged in the mud. Others – the cautious ones who work to make their names while the revolutionaries dig their tunnels or perish in Siberia; others – the intriguers, talkers, lawyers, writers who from time to time drop a very quickly dried tear on the tomb of the heroes and pose as friends of the people – it is they who will come forward to take the vacant place of the government and will shout 'Get back!' at the 'unknowns' who have prepared the revolution.

It is inevitable, it is bound to happen. For it is not secret societies nor even revolutionary organisations that can give the death blow to governments. Their function, their historic mission, is to prepare men's minds for the revolution. And when men's minds are prepared – and external circumstances are favourable – the final thrust is made not by the group that initiated the movement, but by the mass of the people who are outside the ranks of the society. On 31st August [1870] Paris was deaf to the appeals of Blanqui. Four days later he proclaimed the fall of the government; but then the Blanquists were no longer the initiators of the movement. It was the people, the millions, who dethroned the man of December [Napoleon III] and acclaimed the jokers whose names for two years had resounded in their ears. When the revolution is ready to break out, when the movement is felt in the air, when its success has already become *certain*, then a thousand new men, on whom the organisation has never exercised any direct influence, come to join the movement, like birds of prey coming to the battlefield to feed on the victims. These help to make the final thrust, but it is not in the ranks of the sincere and irreconcilable conspirators, it is among the men on the fence that they look for their leaders – so much are they possessed by the idea that a leader is necessary.

The conspirators who maintain the prejudice in favour of dictatorship are therefore unconsciously working to put their own enemies into power.

But if all this we have just said is true with regard to revolutions (or rather, political risings), it is much more true with regard to the revolution we want – the Social Revolution. To allow the establishment of any government, a strong and recognised power – this is to paralyse the work of the revolution from the start. The good that this government would do is nil, and the evil immense.

After all, what do we understand by Revolution? It is not a simple change of rulers. It is the taking possession by the people of all social wealth. It is the abolition of all the forces which have so long hampered the development of humanity. But is it by decrees emanating from a government that this immense economic revolution can be accomplished? We have seen in the last century [in 1794] the Polish dictator Kosciusko decree the abolition of personal servitude; yet servitude continued to exist for eighty years after this decree. We have seen the Convention, the omnipotent Convention – the terrible Convention, as its admirers call it – decree [in 1792] the equal division per head of all the communal lands taken from the nobles. Like so many others, this decree remained a dead letter, because in order to carry it out it was necessary that the proletariat of the rural districts should make an entirely new revolution, and revolutions are not made by the force of decrees. In order that the taking possession of the social wealth should become an accomplished fact, it is necessary that the people should have a free hand, that they should shake off the slavery to which they are too much accustomed, that they should act according to their own will, that they should move forward without waiting for orders from anyone. Now it is this very thing which a dictatorship would prevent, however well intentioned it might be, and at the same time it would be incapable of advancing the revolution by a single inch.

But if government – even an ideal revolutionary government – creates no new force and gives no help to the work of demolition which we must accomplish, still less can we count on it for the work of reorganisation which must follow the demolition. The economic change which will result from the Social Revolution will be so immense and so profound, it must so change all the relations based today on property and exchange, that it is impossible for one or any individual to elaborate the different forms which must spring up in the society of the future. This elaboration of new social forms can be made only by the collective work of the masses. To satisfy the immense variety of conditions and needs which will spring up as soon as private property is abolished, it is necessary to have the flexibility of the collective spirit of the country. Any external authority will only be a hindrance, an obstacle to that organic work which should be done, and besides a source of discord and hatred.

But it is high time to give up this illusion, so often proved false and so often dearly paid for, of a *revolutionary* government. It is time to tell ourselves once for all and to admit this political axiom, that *a government cannot be revolutionary*. People talk of the Convention, but let us not forget that the few measures taken by the Convention which were at all revolutionary were only sanctions of action accomplished by the people who at that time were trampling all governments under foot. As Victor Hugo said in his vivid style, Danton pushed Robespierre, Marat watched and pushed Danton, and Marat himself was pushed by Cimourdain – that personification of the clubs of ‘enragés’ and rebels. Like all the governments which preceded and followed it, the Convention was only a drag on the action of the people.

The lessons which history teaches us are so conclusive in this respect; the impossibility of a revolutionary government and the harmfulness of that which is called by the name are so evident, that it would seem difficult to explain the passion with which a certain school calling itself socialist maintains the idea of a government. But the explanation is very simple. It is that, although they call themselves socialists, the followers of this school have an entirely different conception from ours of the Revolution which we must accomplish. For them – as for all bourgeois radicals – the Social Revolution is rather an affair of the future which we don’t have to think about today. What they dream of at the bottom of their hearts, though they don’t dare to confess it, is quite another thing. It is the installation of a government like that of Switzerland or the United States, making a few attempts at appropriation by the State of what they ingeniously call ‘public services’. It is something like the ideal of Bismarck and of the man [Grover Cleveland in 1885] who has become President of the United States. It is a compromise made in advance between the socialist aspirations of the masses and the desires of the bourgeoisie. They would indeed like a complete expropriation, but they don’t have the courage to attempt it; so they put it off to the next century, and before the battle begins they are already entering into negotiations with the enemy.

For us who understand that the moment is near for giving a mortal blow to the bourgeoisie; that the time is not far off when the people will be able to lay hands on all social wealth and reduce the class of exploiters to impotence – for us, I say, there can be no hesitation in the matter. We shall throw ourselves body and soul into the social revolution, and since on this path a government, whatever colour it wears, is an obstacle, we shall reduce to impotence and sweep away all ambitious men who try to impose themselves upon us as rulers of our destinies. Enough of governments; make way for the people, for anarchy!

FREEDOM

Anarchists and Voting

Introduction

We are reprinting three editorials which were published in FREEDOM in 1964 not for any possible historical interest but because we feel that apart from references to politicians long since forgotten, they could have been written this year.

1964 was Election Year and in the 'Left' a crucial one since the Tories had been in office thirteen years (1951-1964), as many years as the present government if, as we expect, the elections will be delayed for as long as possible, perhaps into 1992. The one difference is that there were a number of Prime Ministers during those 'thirteen wasted years' compared with one for all of eleven years this time. Last year the theme of the 'Left' was that we should unite to get rid of Thatcher. In the event it was her own ministers who stabbed her in the back and not the Left's slogans. And now, with the cricket loving, classless John Major, has anything really changed?

In 1964 American 'democracy' according to the Left was threatened by an ultra Right wing candidate, Barry Goldwater, in the California primary elections and once more the argument was advanced that Americans should all vote just to keep out the real enemy of democracy. In the first two articles the Editors replied to declared anarchist correspondents who thought so too.

The third article should be of interest to Labour Party supporters who lament the fact that Kinnock and his front bench have watered down their past programmes for socialism in their bid to win votes. For it will be seen that the Manifesto for 1964, while containing some interesting ideas (never realised in spite of having been in office from 1964-1970, and 1974-1979), contained not a word about attacking capitalism, and the unequal society. Just as today, the then Labour Party 'socialists' wanted equality of opportunity for all to try and get to the top. But as we pointed out in that editorial: you cannot have a top without a bottom, and as one knows only too well you need an awful lot of wage slaves at the bottom to maintain a privileged minority – and not such a small minority at that – at the top.

1. Anarchists and 'The Lesser Evil'

Editorial comments inspired by an article from an American contributor.

Comrade Anderson puts a number of questions to us as anarchists and suggests that 'the intellectual respectability of anarchism will grow with efforts' to answer them. As a matter of fact we would suggest that these questions have often been answered by anarchists, though one must assume that they have been answered unconvincingly at least for some readers.

It seems to us that so long as the anarchist movement is as small as it is in the States and in this country, its role should be to use every possible occasion to make anarchist propaganda, and to oppose all governments. If the anarchist movement became strong enough to be considered a decisive factor, electorally speaking, between a Hitler and a socialist, then, asks comrade Anderson, what do we suggest anarchists should do, and he makes it clear that he would hope our answer would be the 'reasonable' one of saying we would choose 'the lesser evil'. Actually the question as well as the circumstances are even more 'hypothetical' than he admits! The role of a strong anarchist movement in such a situation would surely be to advocate the social revolution, not out of a sense of bravado, or indifference to the issues at stake. On the contrary we say this with a strong sense of social responsibility, and because we do distinguish between 'evils'. In the first place, if parliamentary democracy has any validity as a form of social organisation, it is that everybody plays the game according to rules with which they agree, and in those circumstances there can be very little to choose, for an anarchist at least, between one Administration and another. But where a Party seeks to capture the administration by breaking the rules, to oppose its intentions by securing a majority of votes may well give the majority a moral advantage, but will not prevent those seeking to take over by force ignoring electoral majorities and the like. Hitler came to power though he could not poll a majority of votes at the elections held in March 1933. Mussolini ignored the voting majority and 'marched' to power. The Popular Front government in France in 1936 under the Socialist Blum only delayed the assaults of the Right, and was in office for only a year. In Spain the victory of the Popular Front was only the signal to the alliance of Military- Church- and Landowners to redouble their plans to seize power irrespective of the votes of the majority. If the anarchist movement has a role to play in practical politics it is surely that of suggesting to, and persuading, as many people as possible that their freedom from the Hitlers, Francos and the rest, depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes 'for the

candidate of one's choice', but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent weakening of the power, as well as of the social role, of government in the life of the community.

When comrade Anderson tells us that in America, State and local government are more racist, more oppressive, more corrupt than the 'highly centralised federal government', and that Goldwater supports the former against the latter* he sees a dilemma for anarchists because they believe in a decentralisation of power. It is true, but there would only be a dilemma if we ever suggested, or believed, to come nearer home, that Home Rule for Wales or Scotland, involving government, Parliament, police, judiciary and the rest would be any less oppressive than government in Westminster. We have never in fact fallen for the arguments of the Welsh and Scottish Nationalists, any more than for the Nationalist movements in India and Africa.

Individual freedom is only possible in a society in which no one has the power or possibility to exploit his fellow men, and in which no able-bodied person is dependent on another for the right to work to live. The Goldwaters of this world are concerned with 'individual freedom' *to exploit one's fellow beings*. But in this respect is he all that different from a Johnson, or a Kennedy, or a Truman? Anyway as to degree, governments are much more influenced by the pressures exerted on them than by the personal preferences, or background of those who compose them.

And this is a point which comrade Anderson overlooks in part. He recognises that Goldwater's nomination is not so much a popular trend (in fact he forecasts that 'a crushing defeat . . . in November . . . seems likely'), as the success of one group of interests at the expense of another. (Incidentally, why should anarchists find anything to choose between these and 'the older Eastern economic establishment'?) But in this hour and age, government policy is necessarily the resultant of all the political and economic pressures that are powerful enough to influence policy one way or another. And obviously in the Western world at least, organised Labour as such is a power which no government can ignore. Government therefore is possible in such a situation only so long as the capitalist class and the working class each accept the existence of the other as a kind of 'law of nature': accept the existing approach to production and distribution: and accept the administrative machine by which the life of the community is regulated.

As anarchists we seek to create a situation in which there can be no

* (why then is he standing for the highest office in the *federal government*? To destroy its power from within? But if he is, then how could Goldwater pursue the aggressive, war-like foreign policy Anderson attributes to him?)

modus vivendi possible between exploiters and exploited, between the privileged and the non-privileged, between employer and employee, where government as such can no longer maintain the balance of power. In other words we are not concerned with choosing between governments but with creating the situation where governments can no longer operate, because only then will we organise locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to satisfy real needs and common aspirations.

And in the meantime comrade Anderson poses the question when he writes:

Now, on the assumption that local enlightenment is unlikely in the near future and that capitalism is far from dead, what is the anarchist to say of (e.g. federal aid to housing, education and health insurance)? Is every social welfare law a further barrier to the growth of an anarchist consciousness, or is it possible to make discriminations? Is it possible for an anarchist to argue in the following fashion: As long as we have capitalism such and such laws are good – and such and such are bad.

We would reply that so long as we have capitalism and government the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives.

Without the money it raises by taxation from the people, the federal government could do nothing about housing, education and health insurance. In a sense 'every social welfare law' is 'a further barrier to the growth of an anarchist consciousness' because as well as consolidating the power of the State, it means that yet another initiative has been taken by some outside agency, and becomes consolidated as part of the State machinery, while we, as ordinary human beings, are trying to make up our minds about what action *we* should take. On the other hand, since we are anarchists because we seek our own well-being as well as that of all our fellow beings we would hesitate to condemn those measures taken by governments which obviously benefited the people, unless we saw the immediate possibility of people carrying them out for themselves. This would not inhibit us from declaring at the same time that what initiatives governments take could be more successfully taken by the people themselves if they put their minds to the same problems. And comrade Anderson must surely see the soundness of this approach: to build up a hospital service or a transport system, for instance, from local needs into a national organisation, by agreement and consent at all levels is surely both more economical as well as efficient than one which is conceived at top level, firstly in the ledgers of the Treasury then in the Ministry departments concerned with the specific problems, where the Treasury, political and other pressures, not necessarily connected with what we would describe as *needs*, influence the shaping of policies.

But we must resist the temptation of going beyond our correspondent's 'term of reference'. What we have been saying at some length, Malatesta summarised in a sentence when he wrote (1924): 'Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct'.

The anarchist propagandist cannot at the same time attack government and point to the alternatives *and* be involved in the electoral struggle without either his propaganda suffering or his becoming a supporter of government. There are today in this country and the United States thousands of pressure groups representing as many interests and millions of supporters to ensure that no government pursues policies which have not the acquiescence of a section of the community which counts. But those reformists who expect socialism from the Wilson government or the Russian or Chinese governments are barking up the wrong tree. All they will get is more government. Socialism – no less than anarchism – is society without privilege, but government cannot abolish privilege without creating privilege. Anarchists therefore reject *all* governments. But, we repeat, this does not mean we do not recognise that some governments or political leaders are worse than others. This awareness does not, however, distract us from our anarchist objectives because we think that if anarchists have anything to contribute to the future well-being of the community it is as anarchists, and for anarchism.

24th October 1964

2. The Only Valid Revolution . . . Demands No Compromises!

Dear Editors,

Surely, we must have realised by now that the working class has no messianic role to play, it is a worthless concept, a myth belonging to the last century. The idea of revolution, as still envisaged by some anarchists, is like Krishnamurti's definition of religion: 'A peg on which people seek to hang all their unsolved problems'. History shows that a revolution can only lead to great suffering, possibly greater tyranny, but never a free society.

Let us face facts, we are going to be with government for the rest of our lives, and we might as well accept this, just as we have to accept the reality of money.

There is a world of difference between a socialist government on the Scandinavian pattern, and a fascist regime; if you don't believe it, brother, try living under Franco! This is no apology for government, but let us hope that anarchists have something better to offer than a

rather puerile anti-election campaign. I say this, even though in a past election I, with others, had great fun taking the mickey out of the Labour leaders at St. Pancras Town Hall; I consider that this proved nothing, achieved nothing, save perhaps, to make us seem like a bunch of eccentric cranks to some people who might, otherwise, have been sympathetic to our libertarian ideas.

The Labour Party, like all other organisations, has its quota of power-seeking maniacs, but it is also supported by a great many people who do so out of a genuine desire for social justice. Could one say as much for right-wing parties?

The only valid revolution that which takes place within an individual, when he discovers that he can be free; he may do this without even having heard of Anarchism, although contact with the libertarian body of ideas will confirm and give cohesion to his experiments with, and quest for freedom. The integration of the individual, the responsibilities which his newly found freedom imposes upon him, is the only worthwhile revolution, he is now on his own, and not answerable to any outside authority. To such an individual, relationship with his fellow men will now be based on complete integrity both in thought and deed.

To me, an anarchist is an integrated being, who can be free regardless of his social environment, and, as such, can act as a catalyst within society, his liberty of both thought and action setting an example to his less fortunate fellows, still shackled by their conforming hedonism, fears and prejudices. As I see it, there is no other valid way of changing society, for this can only change for the better to the extent that the individuals who constitute it are successful in becoming their own masters, instead of by violent upheaval, which can do nothing to change the personality of a man, except possibly for the worse.

London, February 14

E.J.B.

Editor's Reply

If, as our correspondent maintains, an anarchist 'is an integrated being, who can be free regardless of his social environment' etc., why does he worry about 'changing society', or make distinctions between political parties and regimes? At the beginning of his letter he tells us anti-election-anarchists that there is 'a world of difference between a socialist government on the Scandinavian pattern and a fascist regime' and that if we don't believe this then 'brother, try living under Franco'. But friend, you have also said that an integrated anarchist is one who is 'free regardless of his social environment', and you made your meaning even clearer when you referred to 'his liberty of both thought and action setting an example'. Now which is it? Is not our correspondent confusing between freedom of thought which is possible for some individuals in whatever environment they find themselves, and real freedom of action

which is not possible in any authoritarian – that is governmental – society for all but the few individuals who wield the power?

Anarchists are opposed to all governments – and therefore to the elections by which, in the ‘democracies’, rival contenders for office are chosen – *because* they cannot think and act freely so long as other individuals are empowered to determine and control their daily lives for them. To say that some governments or regimes are less oppressive than others is too obvious to deserve repeating, least of all in an anarchist paper. It is as obvious as saying that a broken leg is less crippling than an amputation. But just as nobody would express a preference for either, and could at most look upon the former as a lesser evil, so with governments, surely?

We quite agree that among Labour Party supporters there are those who are ‘motivated by a genuine desire for social justice’. The same could be said of some Communist Party supporters; and that some also strongly believe in socialism. And we anarchists obviously find ourselves having much in common with them over ends. But socialism by the ballot box is a question of means, not ends, and on the means we profoundly disagree with them.

For our correspondent *revolution* ‘can only lead to great suffering, possibly greater tyranny, but never a free society’, but it will be noticed that though he implies that we should use our votes since ‘we are going to be with government for the rest of our lives’ he does not tell us as categorically as he did in defining revolution where *government* leads us. Indeed after his piece on good government versus bad, he switches to a definition of his one-man revolutionary who is so perfect that he obviously intends him to play the ‘messianic role’ which he, wrongly, alleges we anarchists have allotted to the working class!

If authoritarian revolutions produce ‘possibly greater tyranny’, then by the same logic governments, all of which, by definition, must be authoritarian, can never lead to freedom of the individual, or to a free society. One has only to use one’s powers of observation to see that the trend in this age of technology, mass communications, mass production and consumption, is that the power of the ruling class, and the role of governments, is greater than it ever was in the past.

And the improved standards of living in the ‘developed’ (by which we mean the ‘have’) nations of the world cannot be attributed to good government as opposed to bad. If anything they are the by-products of the rival groups within the capitalist system whose insatiable appetite for more power and profits has inevitably created a need for mass markets. That the overriding considerations of the capitalist system are markets and not people (though people make up the markets) can, it seems to us, be demonstrated beyond any shadow of doubt. All govern-

ments, and aspirants to office, declare that their policies are directed to increasing production and consumption (which is a vote-catching formula to which every party must subscribe if it doesn't intend to commit political *hara-kiri*). However, when it comes to the point the party in office, Labour or Communist, Liberal or Tory, it makes no difference, is at the controls of a 'machine' designed to perform a particular function, and just as you cannot make a motor car fly, neither can the machinery of government be used to introduce socialism or the free society.

Now, when our correspondent writes that revolution can only lead to greater tyranny possibly, and never to a free society, it seems to us that he is confusing revolution with government. All popular revolutions, unlike *coups d'état*, generally have had as their intention not a violent *change of government* but *the breakdown of all the institutions of government*. Many have succeeded to that extent. They have failed because the successful revolutionaries did not always have a clear idea of what kind of organisation should take over the functions of government which dealt with the day to day affairs of the community; or because they believed in 'revolutionary government' as do the Marxists and other authoritarian revolutionaries; or because the revolution produced courageous and capable leaders (in the best sense of the word) who found themselves increasingly being urged to take decisions for others; or because of *force majeure* it was not possible to immobilise all the political leaders of the establishment (left or right). And so the oversights, the hesitations and the doubts have been seized upon by the 'politicians' and have led to the reintroduction of government. It is not, however, the revolutions that have produced 'greater tyranny', etc., but the governments which have taken over.

So, if our correspondent is pessimistic about the chances of revolution to pave the way for a free society, then he should be a thousand times more pessimistic where governments are concerned. And therefore *if he really desires a free society* the last thing he should do is waste his time, or seek to use our columns, to peddle the reformist arguments about government.

Let us repeat: we are anarchists and not parliamentary socialists (or communists) not because of any fundamental disagreement over ends but because of a disagreement over means.

Far from believing in the 'messianic role' of the working class, the anarchists' aim is to *abolish* the working class in so far as this term refers to the underprivileged majority in all existing societies, whether they are referred to as capitalist, socialist, democratic, people's republic, African people's federation, or what have you. What we do say is that no revolution can succeed without the active participation of a large

section of the working, producing, section of the population. We make our own one-man revolutions, which in more prosaic language means that we are clear where we stand in relation to the State and to society. In so doing we may well have transformed ourselves; but we should have no illusions that we have also done very much to change society or undermine the State. Our attitude to the State has changed but *its* attitude to us has not. The power of the State, the values of authoritarian society can only be challenged, and destroyed by a greater power and new values.

If one accepts this approach then one must also recognise that the only potential power capable of overthrowing the authoritarian system of privilege under which we live, is to be found among those members of the community who are not privileged, and this comprises most of the working population and their families. Those of us who are anarchist propagandists direct, therefore, our arguments to 'the people in the streets' and not to their masters. We do not advocate or seek a compromise, a *modus vivendi*, between the haves and the have-nots, between employer and employee, between equality and inequality. Such contortions we leave to the parliamentary socialists and their supporters in the knowledge that their methods do no more than prolong the evils, the social inequalities and the tensions we seek to destroy.

Because we hold these views we are anarchists, and when elections take place, we use the occasion to make propaganda for anarchism by attacking the extravagant promises made by the politicians in their scramble for votes and by seeking to persuade our fellow beings that if they want to be free and responsible people they must be prepared, and want, to run their own lives. Our correspondent and others recently who have been apologists for the Labour Party and voting, are, in our opinion, not anarchists – or at most they are jaded anarchists – and it seems to us that their contributions are more suited to journals such as *Tribune* and *The New Statesman* than *Freedom*. No reasonable person surely expects an anarchist journal to give space even to ballot-box revolutionaries when virtually every political journal and all mass communications (not to mention the politicians themselves) are at present engaged in conditioning the people for the (still unknown) day when they will be solemnly called upon to entrust life and liberty to others by simply making a cross on a piece of paper. If the anarchists' 'rather puerile anti-election campaign' succeeds only in making some people feel uncomfortable it will have done something towards breaking down the blind faith many otherwise progressive people have in the potentialities of the ballot-box. But given a concerted campaign by all anarchists we can do more than make some people feel uncomfortable.

22nd February 1964

3. Room at the Top?

The Labour Party's Election Manifesto, 'The New Britain', is an important document; it is not however, in any sense of the term, a revolutionary manifesto.

An election manifesto by a party strongly 'tipped' to win at the polls, must obviously be couched in terms which aim at winning the votes of the majority of the electorate. Only those parties doomed to defeat can afford extravagant manifestos and revolutionary programmes. From which, we anarchists conclude, that the social revolution will never be achieved *via* the polls. For not only are political programmes revolutionary in inverse ratio to one's chances of vote catching, but equally important such programmes must be 'practical', which means possible within the existing social, political and economic framework.

So when we say that Labour's Manifesto is an important document, we are not also saying that it is so far reaching that anarchists should drop their traditional opposition to voting and give theirs to Mr Wilson and Co. when the time comes! It is a reformist manifesto *par excellence*, one which *The Guardian* describes as 'serious and convincing'. What is important and serious is that it raises a number of practical questions, which will face a free society no less than existing authoritarian society, as well as offering criticisms of injustices in society as it is, which, apart from confirming many anarchist arguments, reveal that even politicians no longer feel able to treat the public as morons and slaves:

Labour does not accept that democracy is a five-yearly visit to the polling booth that changes little but the men at the top. We are working for an active democracy, in which men and women as responsible citizens consciously assist in shaping the surroundings in which they live, and take part in deciding how the community's wealth is to be shared among all its members.

Who other than the anarchists could have made enough people self-conscious of the humiliation of the 'five-yearly visit' to provoke a denial from Labour that it treats it as such? Equally revealing, and for the same reasons, are the assurances that Labour will seek to 'humanise the whole administration of the State' and ensure that 'the growth of government activity does not infringe the liberties of the individual' as well as 'seeking to establish a true partnership between the people and their parliament'. A lot of flannel to get the votes of 'thinking' people? Agreed! But we can surely learn something of the political climate and trends from the vote-catching techniques of the parties which we would suggest are less blatant, less cock-sure, less demagogical than they were, say, even less than a generation ago.

To dub all believers in government as authoritarians, power maniacs

or sheep, as some anarchists do, is in our opinion bad for our propaganda, which after all depends for its success on the good faith of those to whom we direct it. We do not find it surprising that most people use their vote (even when they do so with no more illusions than that they are opting for the lesser of two evils) if they can see no alternative to government for the organisation of the day to day existence of the community. Anarchists on the whole have not, unfortunately, been very effective in presenting the alternative, for a whole number of reasons. In the first place anarchists tend to be reluctant propagandists. Secondly, because they have rumbled the political and capitalist rackets, they can, as individuals, more or less live their lives free from both, and they generalise from their own situation into believing that what they can do everybody else could do *if they wished*. They, just as at the other extreme, the capitalist tycoon, can 'live their lives' only because they are a small minority. They are a privileged minority – the millionaire with the power he derives from his control over wealth, the individualist anarchist by the power that comes from knowledge plus philosophy of life – and therefore a world of millionaires or of individualist anarchists would be a physical impossibility.

We are opposed to government because all centralised authority cannot but reduce the individual to a cipher, a statistic. We equally oppose the arrogance of the individualist who declares his self-sufficiency (while enjoying the many services others provide) and who lacks the humility to appreciate that all mankind is not as enlightened as himself.

We anarchists, whether we like it or not, live in a world in which 3,000,000,000 other people have daily material needs just as ourselves and if we believed that if each one of these three thousand million humans thought as we did everybody would have a square meal every day and the other basic necessities of life, we would deserve to be accused of being 'dreamers', 'idealists', 'utopians'.

Whatever socialists and anarchists may have thought in the nineteenth century about the 'idea' of growing the food we consume and uniting us all in brotherhood, anarchist opposition to government is opposition to imposed authority and not to the need for organisation in society. We oppose the Labour Party's 'New Britain' election manifesto not because they argue that there must be organisation and planning, but because they fondly imagine that one can achieve 'an expanding community where social justice is seen to prevail' by a number of reforms none of which threatens the principles of the capitalist society: that is the privileged society. By legislation the Labour Party proposes to improve the lot of the poor and give every youngster the chance of rising to the top.

It is true that in the manifesto one sights an odd moral homily floating in an ocean of financial reforms none of which are even intended to threaten the privileged class. After 'thirteen years of Tory rule' and centuries during which a limited few have been sharing out the wealth of the nation among themselves, when the Clores have made their millions and Rachman's heirs have consolidated their rackets, the promise that a Labour government will be firm about the leftovers after the feast will hardly inspire the bluest-eyed Labour fan. To promise a tightening up of legislation against the monopolists and take-over bidders now, when they have already swallowed each other up is to close the stable door when the horse has bolted. Obviously the Labour Party cannot be blamed for this state of affairs, but if they meant business they would be seeking their support on the streets and not at the hustings.

In spite of the fact that the Manifesto actually states the Party's 'belief in the socialist axiom 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs', time and again it is made quite clear that it is by material incentives that 'enterprise' will be 'stimulated'; just as nowhere does one discover any proposals to deprive the rich of their ill-gotten gains however many plans there are to prevent them from adding to them quite as quickly and easily as in the past (capital gains tax; public acquisition of land).

Essentially the Manifesto offers tit-bits to the poor, but no way out of their under-privileged economic and social situation. The Labour Party's proposal to abolish the 11-plus gives more people a chance to get to the top, but so long as there is a top there will be a bottom; so at best it will mean that in future the privileged class will emerge from all strata of society instead of from a hereditary ruling class.

19th September 1964



Comments on The Raven 12 – On Communication

George Woodcock (Vancouver) writes:

I should really take you up on the matter of *Now*. Here your remarks are quite inaccurate. If you look at the past issues you will find that only No. 1 of the second series was published by FREEDOM PRESS. Tom Brown objected to it — he was still a member of the editorial board, so it was arranged that I should publish it, and FREEDOM PRESS distribute it. All this is made clear on the title page of No. 2. In wartime circumstances FP managed to sell 2,000 copies, and a comfortable arrangement existed, because the returns paid for the printing and no money changed hands. After the war ended, the market for anything out of the ordinary diminished, and FP could not sell 2,000 copies of the last issues; I cannot remember exact figures, but it was more like 800. This killed the journal, not paying contributors, since we paid them very little and some, like Orwell and Read, were still willing to go without payment. But an experience of nearly 60 years in the literary field has shown me that very rarely — and only in exceptional circumstances like those of the war — have small literary magazines succeeded without personal or institutional subsidies.

A much longer contribution from our comrade **Marianne Enckell (Lausanne)** Librarian at the CIRA (International Centre of Anarchist Research). She writes (February 18th 1991):

The last issue of *The Raven*, 'On Communication', is unfair to the CIRA. It is not true that our Centre is not involved in research. The reader should not be misled: basically we are two or three unpaid collaborators, the CIRA is first and foremost a library and archive. It exists through its users, readers and researchers: look at the frequent references to CIRA in the footnotes and bibliographies of scholarly and non scholarly publications, historical or not (we are not guilty if very few queries come from the British Isles). We trace holdings, archives, addresses and researchers throughout the world; we collect and index books, brochures, pamphlets, posters, pictures, manuscripts which are part of the past and present of the anarchist movement, and we offer them to the readers — and to the editors of anarchist journals.

We also did some original research, with much help from outside. In 1984 we realised an exhibition covering the *History and Geography of Anarchism* in 33 countries; in 1985, we published a booklet on *Cinema and anarchism* including a hundred descriptions of films; in 1987 we realised another exhibition and a dossier on *Anarchist Women*, with 25 portraits of women or groups of women

in a dozen countries. We have slowed down recently for reasons of building new premises and moving in, but we are open to proposals.

So, *The Raven* suggests that the CIRA works as 'an international news gathering and research group'. Although we can read many languages, would we be able to evaluate, clear and dispatch valuable information to the whole world? And is the project of an 'international anarchist weekly' useful and feasible? Let's look at the over 200 periodicals arriving here: almost none of them is an information bulletin. They print reports and features sometimes, but mostly ideas and opinions.

In the 'anarchist world', there are three weeklies (*Le Monde libertaire* in France, *Umanita Nova* in Italy, *CeNiT* among the Spanish old-timers; *Arbetaren* in Sweden is a different case), one fortnightly (*Freedom*), several monthlies and many more quarterlies or irregular papers. The anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist federations have their information networks, through their international secretariats. Other informal networks exist, some editorial groups are equipped with light communication technology such as telefaxes or modems.

For the time being information at international level is still irregular and sometimes unreliable. Translations often appear very late, and there is not much follow-up from transmitter and/or receiver. Another problem is the dispatching of information for an international audience: for example, 'union elections' has totally different meanings in North America (a vote accepting or not a union for representing the workers in a given plant) and in Spain (the election of some sort of shop stewards among several unions with different ideological lines). Many of the *Freedom* articles, again for instance, are difficult to understand if one is not familiar with British politics and political class.

I know of two recent attempts at international bulletins: one in Holland (*Alive*), one in Spain/England (*European Anarchism*). Good luck to both. Unfortunately, their first issues printed much outdated material; in order to play their role, they should be more frequent and more up to date. It is obviously a question of audience and collaborators.

Many years ago, Louis Mercier and André Prudhommeaux wrote every month, in turn, a *Letter from France* that they mailed to a dozen foreign anarchist periodicals. Those letters were often printed, some of them were not, but some kind of information and comment circulated. The tiny Finnish SAL regularly sends around a page in English with their latest activities and political comments, knowing that nobody abroad reads Finnish. Last year Will Firth wrote several sensible and accurate reports on what he was experiencing in Yugoslavia and Moscow. A recent issue of *Umanita Nova* published a long report by David Koven on the anti-war activities in San Francisco; I have not seen it elsewhere, but it should not be difficult to have David send it to other journals. All these examples are relatively cheap ways of communicating.

There is another category, the 'theoretical' journals: *The Raven*, *Our Generation*, *Trafik* (in German), *Volonta* (in Italian). With the exception of *Our Generation*, every issue centres around one theme. I have proposed that the publications try and co-ordinate part of their efforts and exchange articles, but with little success so far. On another hand, the 1984 gathering in Venice did not produce only a 'coffee-table album' but also more than fifty com-

munications, many of which were published in several languages in many different periodicals. *The Raven* could also make use of such material. (Not to mention my own texts . . .)

Reports and features are often very interesting and I regret that anarchist editors seem to read very little of what others publish. To mention a few recent articles worth translating in my view: the regular reports on theatre by Cristina Valenti (*Rivista A*), the articles on China in the same magazine (on China also, the contributions by Jean-Jacques Gandini in *Le Monde libertaire*), the debate on nationalism in Germany (*Direkte Aktion, Schwarzer Faden, Graswurzelrevolution*) and in Italy (*Anarres*), and so on. (Not to mention my own texts . . .)

My advice is: read the anarchist and libertarian press. Do ask the contributors to send their papers to several magazines. Write, fax or call the editors to ask for more information, to check and update information. Make use of the horizontal communication, multiply the networks. It should be more effective than running a central clearing house.

We at the CIRA would be quite happy to have more collaborators; we have room for readers or researchers, especially for those who give a hand to the work and the development of the library. There are treasures in our collections — and nothing ends up in the dustbin.

Of course the CIRA is involved in research. Our argument is that it is not the kind of research needed for an anarchist weekly paper nor even for an anarchist quarterly: the former aiming at an anarchist interpretation of current events, the latter at an anarchist approach *in depth* to the day to day human needs which will have to have their solutions in a socialist or anarchist society.

If we are to persuade people of the anarchist alternative we have to deal with the basic questions: food, shelter, clothing, education, public transport, the media, money etc. And we also have to deal with these problems not in the context of the 19th century but in that of the 21st century. The principles, the means and ends, are the same that inspired thinkers not just in the 19th, rich as it was, but over centuries. With modern communications humankind is one if only because we can no longer close our eyes to what is happening in every corner of our planet. Earthquakes, famines and other disasters are flashed across the world. Indeed 'man's inhumanity to man' receives more publicity than examples of mutual aid. But also, as we pointed out in the 'Discussion Notes', we feel that research can help us learn the lessons from the past 'but above all it is to provide the anarchist answers to the basic problems of society today and in the future'.

Since comrade Enckell's contribution, in our opinion, is essentially a statement of the role of CIRA (which we suggest confirms in detail what we suggested in broad outline) but does not deal with our main

thesis, we feel we are not wasting space in repeating what we as propagandists mean by *anarchist research*:

This can only be done by a ruthless analysis of contemporary material which, with all its faults and bias and lies, is provided by the media every day, world wide, and in our opinion is a vindication of the anarchist arguments. It is the day to day material provided by the media (and not to forget some excellent TV programmes) which needs to be classified and analysed to produce the material for an International Anarchist Press if we are seriously intending to make more than a dent in the mass media and the Establishment.

We are sad that our 'Discussion Notes' only produced contributions dealing with details obviously concerning the writers personally, but not with the daunting problem of how we can most effectively seek to break down everywhere the 'Berlin Walls' of prejudice and political control of the media whether by state or capitalist monopoly.

To our anarchist friends,

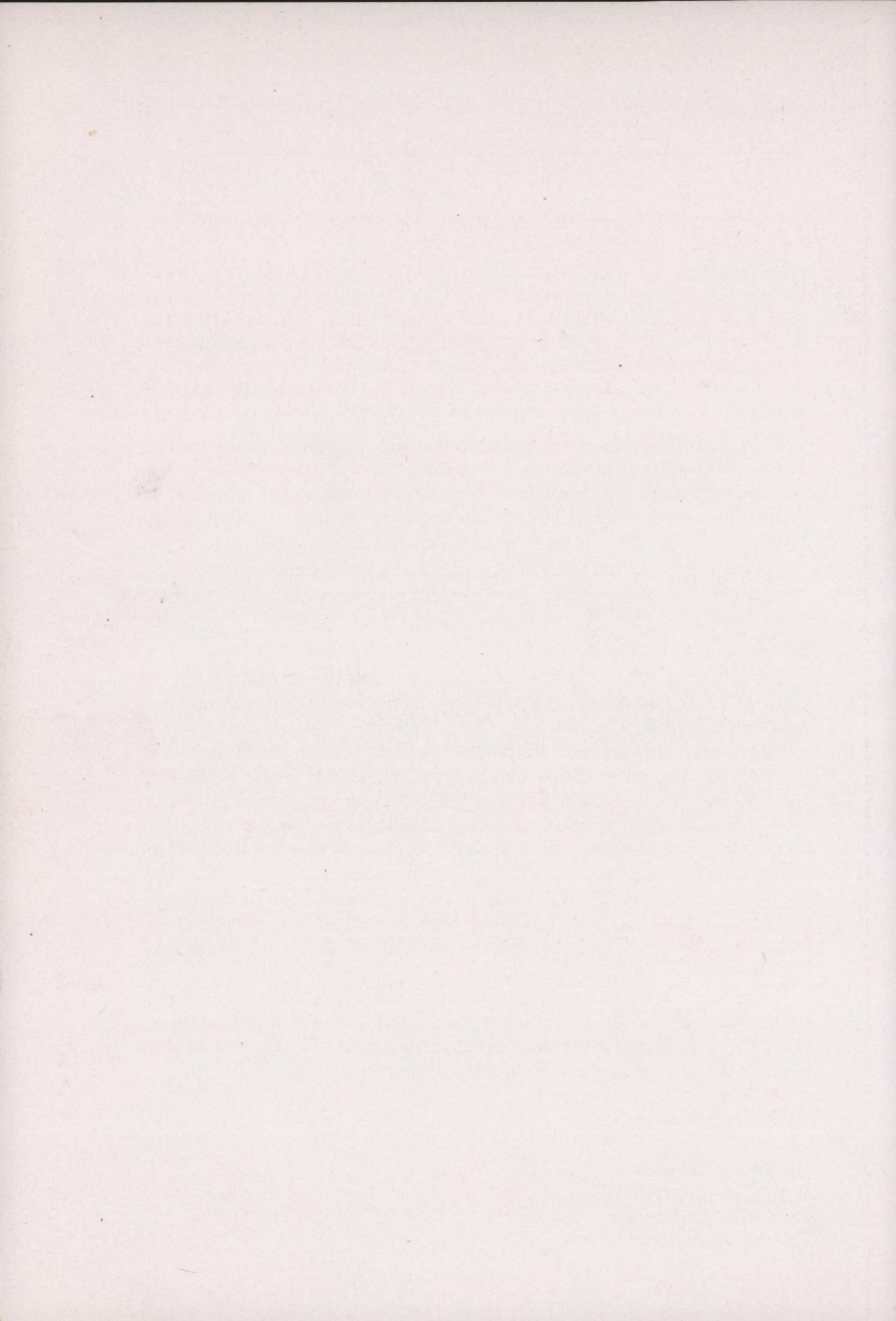
Here in the Netherlands, we're setting up an International Anarchist Newsletter called Alive.

The basic idea behind the newsletter is to create a platform for exchanging anarchist news from all over the world. This entails the creation of a worldwide network of anarchist groups and individuals who will send us their magazines and information about what's going on in their part of the world. Another idea behind the newsletter is to gather material and information for a small archive. Whenever (if!) the paper will cease to exist, the archive will be handed over to the International Institute for Social History here in Amsterdam (which has a large anarchist section including the archives of Bakunin, Goldman, Berkman, etc.).

If you are interested in such a newsletter and are willing to cooperate, please contact us at the address below and send us as much information, pamphlets, magazines, addresses, etc. as possible. Please pass on this broadsheet to anyone you think will be interested.

With libertarian greetings,

André and Yvonne
J. van Lennepkade 122
1053 MT Amsterdam
The Netherlands



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