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“‘But I thought you were an anarchist,’ interrupts your friend. ‘I’ve heard that anarchists don’t believe in organisation.’”

I imagine you have, but that’s an old argument. Anyone who tells you that anarchists don’t believe in organisation is talking nonsense. Organisation is everything, and everything is organisation. The whole of life is organisation, conscious or unconscious. Every nation, every family, why, even every individual is an organisation or organism. Every part of every living thing is organised in such a manner that the whole works in harmony. Otherwise the different organs could not function properly and life could not exist.

But there is organisation and organisation. . . . An organisation is ill or evil when it neglects or suppresses any of its organs or members. In the healthy organism all parts are equally valuable and none is discriminated against. The organisation built on compulsion, which coerces and forces, is bad and unhealthy. The libertarian organisation, formed voluntarily and in which every member is free and equal, is a sound body and can work well. Such an organisation is a free union of equal parts. It is the kind of organisation the anarchists believe in.”

ALEXANDER BERKMAN: *A.B.C. of Anarchism*

# Anarchism as a theory of organisation

COLIN WARD

YOU MAY THINK THAT IN DESCRIBING ANARCHISM as a theory of organisation I am propounding a deliberate paradox: “anarchy” you may consider to be, by definition, the *opposite* of organisation. In fact, however, “anarchy” means the absence of government, the absence of authority. Can there be social organisation without authority, without government? The anarchists claim that there can be, and they also claim that it is desirable that there should be. They claim that, at the basis of our social problems is the principle of government. It is, after all, governments which prepare for war and wage war, even though you are obliged to fight in them and pay for them; the bombs you are worried about are not the bombs which cartoonists attribute to the anarchists, but the bombs which governments have perfected,

at your expense. It is, after all, governments which make and enforce the laws which enable the "haves" to retain control over social assets rather than share them with the "have-nots". It is, after all, the principle of authority which ensures that people will work for someone else for the greater part of their lives, not because they enjoy it or have any control over their work, but because they see it as their only means of livelihood.

I said that it is governments which make wars and war preparations, but obviously it is not government alone—the power of a government, even the most absolute dictatorship, depends on the tacit assent of the governed. Why do people consent to be governed? It isn't only fear: what have millions of people to fear from a small group of politicians? It is because they subscribe to the same values as their governors. Rulers and ruled alike believe in the principle of authority, of hierarchy, of power. At most they offer their support to an alternative set of rulers—Labour instead of Conservative, Republican instead of Democratic, Communist, Fascist, or what you will, instead of liberal.

People have been conditioned from infancy to the idea of accepting an external authority—Mummy says, Daddy says, Teacher says, the Church says, the Boss says, the Prime Minister says, the experts say, the Archbishop says, God says—they have heard the voice of authority for so long that they cannot conceive an alternative. Society must be organised, they say, how can this possibly be done without authority? After all, without authority we would have anarchy!

And the anarchists agree with them. "Anarchism [I am quoting the definition written for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* by Peter Kropotkin] is 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 conducted 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 . . ." and so on. Elsewhere he observes that: "It seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest degree of voluntary association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all imaginable purposes; ever modified associations which carry in themselves the elements of their durability and constantly assume new forms which answer best the multiple aspirations of all."

You might conclude that this is a kind of idealised view of democracy. If it is, it is very far from the kind of democracy we actually know about, since the notion of democracy as popular self-government has long since been replaced by the concept of democracy as a competition between rival, and similar elites, for the people's votes. Over fifty years ago Robert Michels wrote a book *Political*

*Parties* on oligarchical tendencies inherent in every allegedly democratic organisation. Nothing that we have learnt from the experience of trade union or socialist movements has belied his thesis; it has in fact invariably been re-affirmed by experience. The same tendencies are, of course, observable in political parties of the right, industrial and commercial firms, public corporations, nationalised industries and so on. The difference is simply that they at least do not set out to be "democratic" or to be answerable to, or controlled by, their members. Nor, in some senses, do the organisations of the Left. Dr. Victor Allen, for instance, points out in his book *Power in Trade Unions* that "the end of trade union activity is to protect and improve the general standards of its members and not to provide workers with an exercise in self-government". Similarly, after the majority vote in the Labour Party's Scarborough Conference in favour of unilateral disarmament, Hugh Gaitskell, in refusing to be bound by the vote, declared that the purpose of the Parliamentary Labour Party was to provide an alternative government (and not, he implied, to be swayed by the fact that Frank Cousins was able to manipulate the trade union block vote to the "left" in the same way as his predecessors had always been able to manipulate it in favour of the leadership).

We could very well claim that the nineteenth century anarchist thinkers like Proudhon or Bakunin were forerunners of Michels in their criticism of democratic and socialist theory. Michels himself devotes a chapter each to syndicalism and anarchism as "prophylactics" in his section on attempts to restrict the influence of leaders. Each tendency gets its modicum of praise, but his conclusions are not optimistic.

In fact it would be hard to find any writer on the theory of organisation who is optimistic about organisations from the bottom up. Organisation and its problems have developed a vast and expanding literature because of its importance for those concerned with industrial management and governmental administration. Very little of this vast literature provides anything of value for the anarchist, except in his role of destructive critic. Nor has any very convincing anarchist theory of organisation grown up, even though whether we regard anarchism as a *method*, or as a destination, the question of organisation is important for us. The fact is that while there are thousands of students of government, there are hardly any of non-government; there is an immense amount of research into methods of administration, but hardly any into self-regulation. There are whole libraries on, and management courses in, industrial management, and big fees for management consultants, but there is scarcely any literature, no course of study and certainly no fees for those who want to do away with management and substitute workers' autonomy. The only industrial consultant who advocated anything approaching this was James J. Gillespie, the author of *Free Expression in Industry* and of *ANARCHY 47 (Towards Freedom in Work)*. The brains are sold to the big battalions, and we

have to build up a theory on what little actual experience has been gained and assessed. For instance the work which has been done on the borders of social psychology and sociology on the nature of small groups, autonomous groups and leaderless groups.

Now all of us, except the most isolated of people, belong to a whole network of groups, based on common interests and common tasks. Anyone can see that there are at least two kinds of organisation. There is the kind which is forced on you, the kind which is run from above, and there is the kind of organisation which is run from below, which can't force you to do anything, and which you are free to join or free to leave alone. Most people have the experience of starting some club or some branch of a voluntary organisation or simply a group of friends who drink together on Fridays and listen to records. We could say that the anarchists are people who want to transform all forms of human organisation into that kind of purely voluntary association where people can pull out and start one of their own if they don't like it. This doesn't mean committees, votes, membership cards. For the formalised kind of voluntary organisation, as you all know, only really works because of some internal gang of people who are *really* concerned with the function of the organisation and are prepared to do its work. If this is democracy, it is what the dissident Freudian, Wilhelm Reich, called *work-democracy*, and his description of his own experience of this mode of organisation mirrors exactly my experience of anarchist groups. He asks

"... On what principle then, was our organisation based, if there were no votes, no directives and commands, no secretaries, presidents, vice-presidents, etc.?"

What kept us together was our *work*, our mutual inter-dependencies in this work, our factual interest in one gigantic problem with its many specialist ramifications. I had not solicited co-workers. They had come of themselves. They remained, or they left when the work no longer held them. We had not formed a political group or worked out a programme of action. . . . Each one made his contribution according to his interest in the work. . . . There are then, objective biological work interests and work functions capable of regulating human co-operation. Exemplary work organises its forms of functioning organically and spontaneously, even though only gradually, gropingly and often making mistakes. In contradistinction, the political organisations with their 'campaigns' and 'platforms' proceed without any connection with the tasks and problems of daily life."

Elsewhere in his paper he notes that

"If personal enmities, intrigues and political manoeuvres make their appearance in an organisation, one can be sure that its members no longer have a factual meeting ground in common, that they are no longer held together by a common work-interest. . . . Just as organisational ties result from common

work-interests, so they dissolve when the work-interests dissolve or begin to conflict with each other."

We can deduce from these astute observations certain principles of organisation. I once, in reviewing that frivolous but useful little book *Parkinson's Law*, attempted to enunciate four principles behind an anarchist theory of organisations; that they should be (1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) temporary and (4) small. They should be voluntary for obvious reasons. There is no point in our advocating individual freedom and responsibility if we are going to advocate organisations for which membership is mandatory. They should be functional for reasons which are equally obvious but are not always observed. There is a tendency for organisations to exist without a genuine function, or which have outlived their functions. They should be temporary precisely because permanence is one of those factors which hardens the arteries of an organisation, giving it a vested interest in its own survival, in serving the interests of its office holders rather than in serving its ostensible functions. They should be small precisely because in small face-to-face groups, the bureaucratising and hierarchical tendencies inherent in organisation have least opportunity to develop.

But it is from this final point that our difficulties arise. If we take it for granted that a small group can function anarchically, we are still faced with the problem of all those social functions for which organisation is necessary, but which require it on a much bigger scale. Well, we might say in response to this point, "If big organisations are necessary, count us out. We will get by as well as we can without them." We can say this all right, but if we are propagating anarchism as a social philosophy, we must take into account, and not evade, social facts. Better to say, "Let us find ways in which the large-scale functions can be broken down into functions capable of being organised by small functional groups and then link these groups in a federal manner. This leads us to consider an anarchist theory of federalism.

Now the classical anarchists, in considering how they envisaged the organisation of a future society, thought in terms of two kinds of social institution: as the territorial unit the *commune*, a French word which you might consider as the equivalent of the word parish, or of the Russian word soviet in its original meaning, but which also has overtones of the ancient village institutions for cultivating the land in common; and the *syndicate*, another French word from trade union terminology, the syndicate or workers' council as the unit of industrial organisation. These were envisaged as small local units which would federate with each other for the larger affairs of life, each commune and each syndicate retaining its own autonomy, the one federating territorially and the other industrially. Proudhon and Kropotkin devoted a lot of attention to the federative principle and we do know something about the factors which make for successful and unsuccessful federations.

“By federation,” George Woodcock notes in his biography of Proudhon, “by federation Proudhon does not mean a world government or a federation of states. For him the principle of confederation begins from the simplest level of society. The organs of administration are local and lie as near the direct control of the people as possible. Above that primary level the confederal organisation becomes progressively less an organ of administration than of co-ordination among local units. Thus the nation itself will be a confederation of regions, and Europe a confederation of confederations in which the interest of the smallest province will have as much expression as that of the largest, since all affairs will be settled by mutual agreement, contract and arbitration.”

Now without wishing to sing a song of praise for the Swiss political system, we can see that, in territorial terms, the 22 sovereign cantons of Switzerland are an outstanding example of a successful federation. It is a federation of like units, of small cells, and the cantonal boundaries cut across the linguistic and ethnic boundaries, so that unlike the many examples of unsuccessful federation, the confederation is not dominated by one or a few powerful units. The problem of federation, as Leopold Kohr puts it, is one of division, not of union. We may consider the Swiss a rather stodgy and provincial lot, but they have something in their national life which we certainly haven't. I was talking to a Swiss citizen (or rather a citizen of Zurich, for there is strictly speaking no such thing as a Swiss citizen) about the Beeching Report, and he remarked that it would be inconceivable in a Swiss that a chairman in London could decide to write off the railway system of the north of Scotland. This led me to Herbert Luethy's study of his country in which he remarked that

“Every Sunday the inhabitants of scores of communes go to the polling booths to elect their civil servants, ratify such and such an item of expenditure, or decide whether a road or a school should be built; after settling the business of the commune, they deal with cantonal elections and voting on cantonal issues; lastly, . . . come the decisions on federal issues. In some cantons, the sovereign people still meet in Rousseau-like fashion to discuss questions of common interest. It may be thought that this ancient form of assembly is no more than a pious tradition with a certain value as a tourist attraction. If so, it is worth looking at the results of local democracy.

The simplest example is the Swiss railway system, which is the densest network in the world. At great cost and with great trouble, it has been made to serve the needs of the smallest localities and most remote valleys, not as a paying proposition but because such was the will of the people. It is the outcome of fierce political struggles. In the 19th century, the ‘democratic railway movement’ brought the small Swiss communities into conflict with the big towns, which had plans for centralisation.

. . . And if we compare the Swiss system with the French which, with admirable geometrical regularity, is entirely centred on Paris so that the prosperity or the decline, the life or death of whole regions has depended on the quality of the link with the capital, we see the difference between a centralised state and a federal alliance. The railway map is the easiest to read at a glance, but let us now superimpose on it another showing economic activity and the movement of population. The distribution of industrial activity all over Switzerland, even in the outlying areas, accounts for the strength and stability of the social structure of the country and prevented those horrible 19th century concentrations of industry, with their slums and rootless proletariat.”

I quote all this, as I said, not to praise Swiss democracy, but to indicate that the federal principle which is in the centre of anarchist social theory, is worth much more attention than it is given in textbooks on political science. Even in the context of ordinary political institutions its adoption has a far-reaching effect.

Another attractive anarchist theory of organisation is what we might call the theory of spontaneous order: that given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of chaos—this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed order. Kropotkin derived this theory from his observations of the history of human society and of social biology which led to his book *Mutual Aid*, as well as from the study of the events of the French Revolution in its early stages and from the Paris Commune of 1871, and it has been observed in most revolutionary situations, in the *ad hoc* organisations which spring up after natural catastrophes, or in any activity where there is no existing organisational form or hierarchical authority. You could watch it at work in, for instance, the first Aldermaston March, or in the widespread occupation of army camps by squatters in the summer of 1946. Between June and October of that year, 40,000 homeless people in England and Wales, acting on their own initiative, occupied over 1,000 army camps. They organised every kind of communal service in the attempt to make these bleak huts more like home—communal cooking, laundering and nursery facilities for instance. They also federated into a Squatters Protection Society. One remarkable feature of these squatter communities was that they were formed from people who had very little in common beside their homelessness—they included tinkers and university dons. In the following winter, a correspondent of the *News Chronicle* reported on one of these camps in Lancashire as follows (see ANARCHY 23):

“. . . There are two camps within the camp—the official squatters (that is, people who have been placed in the huts after the first invasion) and the unofficial squatters (the veterans, who have been allowed to remain on sufferance).

Both pay the same rent of 10s. a week—but there the similarity ends. Although one would have imagined that the acceptance of rent from both should accord them identical privileges, in fact, it does not. Workmen have put up partitions in the huts of the official squatters—and have put in sinks and numerous other conveniences. These are the sheep; the goats have perforce to fend for themselves.

An interesting commentary on the situation was made by one of the young welfare officers attached to the housing department. On her visit of inspection she found that the goats had set to work with a will, improvising partitions, running up curtains, distemping, painting and using initiative.

The official squatters, on the other hand, sat about glumly without using initiative or lifting a hand to help themselves and bemoaning their fate, even though they might have been removed from the most appalling slum property. Until the overworked corporation workers got around to them they would not attempt to improve affairs themselves."

To my mind this is a very revealing story, not only about the squatters, but about the difference between the state of mind that induces free independent action, and that of dependence and inertia: the difference between people who initiate things and act for themselves, and people to whom things just happen.

Another example of the theory of spontaneous organisation in operation was the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham discussed in ANARCHY 60. This was started in the decade before the war by a group of physicians and biologists who wanted to study the nature of health and of healthy behaviour instead of studying ill-health like the rest of their profession. They decided that the way to do this was to start a social club whose members joined as families and could use a variety of facilities in return for a family membership subscription and for agreeing to periodic medical examinations. In order to be able to draw valid conclusions the Peckham biologists thought it necessary that they should be able to observe human beings who were free—free to act as they wished and to give expression to their desires. There were consequently no rules, no regulations, no leaders. "I was the only person with authority," said Dr. Scott Williamson, the founder, "and I used it to stop anyone exerting any authority." For the first eight months there was chaos. "With the first member-families," says one observer, "there arrived a horde of undisciplined children who used the whole building as they might have used one vast London street. Screaming and running like hooligans through all the rooms, breaking equipment and furniture," they made life intolerable for everyone. Scott Williamson however, "insisted that peace should be restored only by the response of the children to the variety of stimulus that was placed in their way." "In less than a year the chaos was reduced to an order in which groups of children could daily be seen

swimming, skating, riding bicycles, using the gymnasium or playing some game, occasionally reading a book in the library . . . the running and screaming were things of the past."

In his book *Health the Unknown* about the Peckham experiment, John Comerford concluded, "A society, therefore, if left to itself in suitable circumstances to express itself spontaneously works out its own salvation and achieves a harmony of action which superimposed leadership cannot emulate."

More dramatic examples of the same kind of phenomenon are reported by those people who have been brave enough, or confident enough, to institute self-governing non-punitive communities of delinquent youngsters—August Aichhorn, Homer Lane and David Wills are examples. Homer Lane was the man who, years in advance of his time, started a community of juvenile delinquents, boys and girls, called the Little Commonwealth. (His work was discussed in ANARCHY 39, and that of David Wills in ANARCHY 15.) Lane used to declare that "Freedom cannot be given. It is taken by the child in discovery and invention". True to this principle, says Howard Jones, "he refused to impose upon the children a system of government copied from the institutions of the adult world. The self-governing structure of the Little Commonwealth was evolved by the children themselves, slowly and painfully to satisfy their own needs". Aichhorn was an equally brave man of the same generation as Lane who ran an institution for maladjusted children in Vienna. In his book *Wayward Youth* he gives this description of one particularly aggressive group:

"Their aggressive acts became more frequent and more violent until practically all the furniture in the building was destroyed, the window panes broken, the doors nearly kicked to pieces. It happened once that a boy sprang through a double window ignoring his injuries from the broken glass. The dinner table was finally deserted because each one sought out a corner in the play-room where he crouched to devour his food. Screams and howls could be heard from afar!"

Aichhorn and his colleagues maintained what one can only call a superhuman restraint and faith in their method, protecting their charges from the wrath of the neighbours, the police and the city authorities, and "Eventually patience brought its reward. Not only did the children settle down, but they developed a strong attachment to those who were working with them. . . . This attachment was now to be used as the foundation of a process of re-education. The children were at last to be brought up against the limitations imposed upon them by the real world."

Time and time again those rare people who have had sufficient moral strength and the endless patience and forbearance that this method requires, have been similarly rewarded. But in daily life situations it is, or at least it appears to me, very difficult to apply.

The fact that one is not dealing with such deeply disturbed characters should make the experience less drastic, but in ordinary life, outside the deliberately protected environment, we interact with others with the aim of getting some task done, and the apparent aimlessness and time-consuming tedium of the period of waiting for spontaneous order to appear would, it seems to me, bring a great danger of some strong-man type intervening with an attempt to impose order and method, just to get something accomplished.

This is the point at which to mention an experiment which you may be thinking of. In 1939 and 1940 three social psychologists, Lewin, Lippitt and White, conducted experiments on the effect of different leadership techniques on behaviour in groups of 11-year-old boys. These groups were led by adults using three different methods or styles of leadership. In one method, the adult determined the policy, procedures and activities in the group; this technique was called "authoritarian". In another the adult encouraged participation by members in deciding these matters and behaved in a friendly, helpful manner to the members, giving technical assistance and suggesting alternative procedures as they were needed; this technique was called "democratic". In the third, the adult leader allowed complete freedom for decisions and activity, keeping his own initiative and suggestions to a minimum; this technique was called "laissez-faire". The autocratic method was found to lead to a submissive attitude on the part of the children towards the leader, and some apathy towards the tasks before them, but little co-operation among themselves and a lack of self-control in the absence of the leader. The laissez-faire group seemed overwhelmed by the number and complexity of their problems and were able to achieve little. The democratic group were helped by their leader to find constructive channels for their efforts and so avoided the impotence to which the laissez-faire group seemed doomed. At the same time, because their efforts were largely self-directed, and they had been enabled to establish a degree of group solidarity, they were also more creative, peaceful and self-disciplined than the autocratic group. In comparing the same group under different adult leadership it was noted that reaction to a particular leadership style was also affected by the group's previous experience with other techniques. Thus one group was fairly passive under an "authoritarian" leader but after it had a leader using a "democratic" technique, a second leader using authoritarian methods was reacted to with discontent.

Now in the context of our present preoccupations we could make a number of comments about this experiment. The laissez-faire technique presumably is the one which should result in the spontaneous order phenomenon. Perhaps not enough time was allowed in the experiment for order to grow out of chaos. The "democratic" technique wasn't really democratic in that the leader was not selected by or from the group. His role in fact seems to have been the helpful but self-effacing one of the good teacher. Of course, as Muzafer Sherif

points out in his commentary on Lewin, Lippitt and White's experiments, a given technique may not have the same significance when exercised by an external leader and by an informal leader who is also a member of the group.

But the role of the leader does make us enquire about the nature of leadership and how it fits into an anarchist theory of organisation. Anarchists believe in *leaderless groups*. If this phrase is familiar to you it is because of the paradox that what was known as the leaderless group technique was adopted in the British and Australian armies during the war, as a means of selecting leaders. The military psychiatrists learned that leader or follower traits are not exhibited in isolation. They are, as Major Gibb said, "relative to a specific social situation—leadership varied from situation to situation and from group to group". Or as the anarchist Michael Bakunin put it a hundred years ago, "I receive and I give—such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination." This point about leadership was also made in the reports on the Peckham Experiment which we cited as an example of the spontaneous organisation theory.

Don't be deceived by the sweet reasonableness of all this. The anarchist concept of leadership is quite revolutionary in its implications as you can see if you look around, for you see everywhere in operation the opposite concept: that of hierarchical, authoritarian, privileged and permanent leadership. There are very few comparative studies available of the effects of these two opposite approaches to the organisation of work. Two of them I will mention later, another, about architects offices, was produced a couple of years ago for the RIBA under the title *The Architect and His Office*. The team which prepared this report found two different approaches to the design process, which gave rise to different ways of working and methods of organisation. One they categorised as *centralised*, which was characterised by autocratic form of control, and the other they called *dispersed* which promoted what they called "an informal atmosphere of free-flowing ideas". This is a very live issue amongst architects. Mr. W. D. Pile, joint head of the Architects and Buildings Branch of the Ministry of Education (in which capacity he has helped to sponsor the most important and striking successes in post-war British architecture, the school-building programme) specifies among the things he looks for in a member of the building team that: "He must have a belief in what I call the non-hierarchical organisation of the work. The work has got to be organised not on the star system, but on the repertory system. The team leader may often be junior to a team member. That will only be accepted if it is commonly accepted that primacy lies with the best idea and not with the senior man." And one of our greatest architects, Walter Gropius, proclaims what he calls the technique of "collaboration among men, which would release the

creative instincts of the individual instead of smothering them. The essence of such technique," Gropius declares, "should be to emphasise individual freedom of initiative, instead of authoritarian direction by a boss . . . synchronizing individual efforts by a continuous give and take of its members. . . ."

This leads us of course, to another corner-stone of anarchist theory, the idea of workers' control in industry. I don't want to dwell on this here, as the modern comparative studies of comparative industrial organisation which provide evidence for the anarchist argument have been discussed in ANARCHY 2, 8, 10, and 40. The books referred to are *Decision-Making and Productivity* by Seymour Melman, *Autonomous Group Functioning* by P. G. Herbst, and *Organisational Choice* by Trist, Higgin, Murray and Pollock.

When we are faced with the objection to the idea of workers' control on the ground of the complexity and scale of modern industry, we resort once again to the federative principle. There is nothing outlandish about the idea that large numbers of autonomous industrial units can federate and co-ordinate their activities. If you travel across Europe you go over the lines of a dozen railway systems—capitalist and communist—co-ordinated by freely arrived at agreement between the various undertakings, with no central authority. You can post a letter to anywhere in the world, but there is no world postal authority—representatives of different postal authorities simply have a congress every five years or so.

Now, if any of you are familiar with cybernetic thinking, you will find relevant here some of the ideas of Gordon Pask and Stafford Beer on self-organising systems. Beer, in his book *Cybernetics and Management*, remarks that the fact is "that our whole concept of control is naive, primitive and ridden with an almost retributive idea of causality. Control to most people (and what a reflection this is upon a sophisticated society!) is a crude process of coercion." He also tells a story about the visitor from Mars who examines the activities at the lower levels of some large undertaking, the brains of the workers concerned, and the organisational chart which purports to show how the undertaking is controlled. He deduces that the creatures at the top of the hierarchy must have heads yards wide.

I asked the neurologist Grey Walter to write an account for ANARCHY of the relevance of cybernetics for anarchists. He wrote a good account of the development of cybernetics (in ANARCHY 25) but apart from his conclusion that the central nervous system was a model of an anarcho-syndicalist community, he did not stress the significance of the idea of self-organising systems. However, his article inspired a computer programmer, John MacEwan, to write for us an article which made just those connections which the writings of Pask and Beer led us to believe existed. I cannot summarise his article—you will find it in ANARCHY 31. But his conclusions are relevant for our consideration of anarchism as an organisational theory. He seeks to

contrast two models of decision-making and control:

"First we have the model current among management theorists in industry, with its counterpart in conventional thinking about government in society as a whole. This is the model of a rigid pyramidal hierarchy, with lines of 'communication and command' running from the top to the bottom of the pyramid. There is fixed delineation of responsibility, each element has a specified role, and the procedures to be followed at any level are determined within fairly narrow limits, and may only be changed by decisions of elements higher in the hierarchy. The role of the top group of the hierarchy is sometimes supposed to be comparable to the 'brain' of the system.

The other model is from the cybernetics of evolving self-organising systems. Here we have a system of large variety, sufficient to cope with a complex, unpredictable environment. Its characteristics are changing structure, modifying itself under continual feedback from the environment, exhibiting redundancy of potential command, and involving complex interlocking control structures. Learning and decision-making are distributed throughout the system, denser perhaps in some areas than in others.

Has any social thinker thought of social organisation, actual or possible in terms comparable with this model? I think so. Compare Kropotkin on that society which 'seeks the fullest development of free association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all conceivable purposes: an ever-changing association bearing in itself the elements of its own duration, and taking on the forms which at any moment best correspond to the manifold endeavours of all. . . . A society in which pre-established forms crystallised by law, are repugnant, which looks for harmony in an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium between a multitude of varied forces, and influences of every kind, following their own course . . . ."

We once quoted a remark by Richard Titmuss that social ideas may well be as important in Britain in the next half-century as technical innovation. I believe that the social ideas of anarchism: autonomous groups, workers' control, the federal principle, add up to a coherent theory of social organisation which is a valid and realistic alternative to the authoritarian, hierarchical institutional philosophy which we see in application all around us. Man will be compelled, Kropotkin declared, "to find new forms of organisation for the social functions which the State fulfils through the bureaucracy" and that "as long as this is not done nothing will be done". I think we have discovered what these new forms of organisation should be, we have now to make the opportunities of putting them into practice.

# Anarchists and nuclear disarmers

JOHN RETY

FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE (first given as a talk to London anarchists) I consulted the files of FREEDOM. My reasoning was that anarchist thinking and especially anarchist reactions to events will be found basically constant. The pin unerringly fixes the butterfly on the paper. Here, I realise, I was postulating a heresy, some kind of anarchist orthodoxy. To me an anarchist is defined by an attitude. This, incidentally, explains why the anarchist image is sharper from without than from within. In my researches I was not disappointed. As I anticipated, the anarchists were correct and sane in their reaction to the atomic bomb. This was at a time when "informed opinion" of all parties, of all nations, was satisfied that the A-bomb was a deliverance. "The war will soon be over! This will finish off the Japs. Pity they didn't use it on the Germans"—thus spake informed opinion.

The military, and their press, of course paved the way. Only a few months before Hiroshima, General Slim said in his message to the troops in Burma: "The Japs—kill them like flies, treat them like insects. Kill—kill—kill them." Possibly he already knew of the existence of the bomb—which would make Lord Attlee a scoundrel and a liar. But this is by the way. On the 11th of August, 1945, FREEDOM carried the following banner headline: ABOLISH WAR!—*The Only Answer to the Atomic Bomb*. In an article that has not been equalled for its lucidity, and should be reprinted, the editors said: "The recent complacent announcement by the Allied leaders of the atomic bomb, explodes once and for all the myth of the moral superiority of the American and British ruling classes over the Nazis or the 'dirty Japs'!" I wish I had space for the full article. But this sentence is worth quoting: "While we are fully aware of the terrible possibilities implicit in this new invention, in a free and co-operative society atomic energy could be turned to the lasting benefit of society.

Kropotkin's and Godwin's ideas could now be realized by the use of this new source of power. Disagreeable occupations like coal-mining could be eliminated. It is the crime of society dominated by authority and property that it should in fact offer us little more than a new era of fear and destruction."

The same year the Union of Anarchist Groups meeting in Glasgow declared "that the application of atomic energy to everyday needs lends even greater emphasis to the realization of the economic theories of anarchism, whilst the abolition of its use for destructive purposes can only be assured by the application of the fundamental teachings of anarchism, namely the abolition of Government and frontiers and the building up of international workers' organisation".

How could anarchists be so correct in their analysis? They had opposed the war as part of their orthodoxy. They openly campaigned against the war. They said workers should not be engaged in fighting each other. Their parliamentary friends supported the war. It was for freedom and democracy against the fascist hordes. The anarchist just said *War is the Health of the State*. They said all governments were equally to blame for the war. That without the machinery of government war would be impossible.

The horror of the Jews killed in Auschwitz was the work of the same authoritarian spirit that allowed the devastation of Hiroshima. When the Nuremberg trial came did anybody except the anarchists protest against the hypocrisy of one set of murderers pontificating over another set?

The joke is sometimes told against the Russian anarchists that they once captured a couple of petty tyrants, took them for a car ride in the country to kill them but could not go through with it and let the men loose, and that they were not at all grateful and continued murdering the anarchists.

The failure of anarchists to compromise is also their strength.

They said during the last war openly: "International solidarity means the refusal of workers in one country to shoot down their brothers in another country." They told the scientists: "It is time that scientists faced up to their responsibilities. Let them refuse to lay their brains in the service of power groups." They printed the facts while informed opinion was silent. From FREEDOM of 1947: "The two bombs dropped on Japan killed 120,000 people by blast, burning or radio-active action. Four square miles of Hiroshima was destroyed by the blast. Collapse of buildings caused most of the deaths. It produced severe burns within 1,500 yards and less severe burns up to 2½ miles. The effect of heat and blast were instantaneous. The radio-activity often left no immediate marks, but it nevertheless killed nearly everyone, who was exposed within a radius of half a mile. Pregnant women who were within 1¼ miles of the centre of explosion either miscarried or have given birth prematurely. Men

exposed to gamma-rays had reduced sperm counts."

Informed opinion took years to catch up with the anarchist. First only the Americans possessed the bomb. Half the letters in the national press were to the effect that we should not have allowed the Yanks to steal a march over us. Governments spent vast sums of money on spying. They all wanted the secret and the use of the bomb. The cry for "international control" taken up by some pacifists was as reactionary as the governments themselves. Again to quote from FREEDOM in 1947: "To believe that plans for international disarmament will stop war is pure nonsense. Armaments are not the cause of war—they are merely the symptom of a society that cannot live at peace." Anarchists were attacked for being pessimists. Well, has there been a disarmament? They are still meeting in Geneva and this is 1966. Governments will only give up armaments if they can find something equally repressive to take their place. India is rumoured to have spent millions on research into mass hypnosis.

There was a conference of scientists and intellectuals in London in 1947 to discuss the bomb. FREEDOM commented: "Our scientists excelled in their precision on the scientific aspects—with a corresponding imprecision on the social problems resulting." Professor Oliphant said at this conference: "It is the fear of every man of science that security restrictions will surround his work for ever more. One of the most terrifying facts to emerge about the atom bomb has been that many people who took part in its construction were actually ignorant of the object of their endeavours". To continue the parallel with Auschwitz, this is exactly the point of a play by Peter Weiss, *The Investigation*, that neither victim nor executioner was fully aware of what was happening. . . .

At this same conference Bertrand Russell, the eminent philosopher, advocated the setting up of an international police force possessing all the atomic bombs.

This is what FREEDOM said: "There is something very sad in the decline of the intellectual powers of great thinkers in their old age. Our movement can provide examples like the support given by Kropotkin to the first world war and that given by Rudolph Rocker to the second. Now here is the case of Bertrand Russell—when he said 'if you wish for peace, prepare for war'—and advocated an American dominated crusade against Russia, with the threat of bombing."

It was in 1951 that Stalin announced that Russia also had the bomb. And of course *Pravda* simply dropped the line dished out as propaganda hitherto that "Russia's atomic endeavour was peaceful and for moving mountains and for changing the course of rivers". There were now 2½ in the atomic club. Warily, for the hundredth time, FREEDOM said: "It should not be beyond the capacity of the people as a whole to handle the problem of nuclear physics." Then in 1954 they were testing the hydrogen bomb on Bikini. FREEDOM's

reaction is instantaneous and to the point. They pick out a sentence in the announcement that the shock which was felt 176 miles from the test site was *far more powerful than was anticipated*. It was this, I think, more than international agitation, that stopped the testing. By this time there had emerged a school of thought that peddled the balance of terror. FREEDOM has to explain patiently to these new apologists "that the methods with which they seek to ensure peace, may lead to the annihilation of mankind".

According to the *New York Herald Tribune* (22.3.54), the miscalculation of the politicians and scientists resulted in people who were supposed to have been in a safe area being exposed to radiation. White ashes fell like rain. The faces, arms, legs of ships' crews began to burn. The skin turned black, their cargo of tuna was radioactive.

The Americans were now faced with world-wide indignation. Yet they exploded another bomb, this time in secret. They just told the world after the event.

A nuclear disarmament movement was taking shape. It must have been a great disappointment to the editors of FREEDOM that right from the beginning their job was again from the outside looking in. As if to children the editors explained: "The news of the explosion of hydrogen bombs and more particularly, the publication of facts about their powers, have led to a new spate of petitions appealing for a ban on atomic weapons. 'There ought to be a law against it' say those who turn to authority to do something about it. That is natural today when people are deprived of their responsibility. But it is essentially a servile attitude and a repressive one, for those who express it show that they are concerned with repression rather than understanding, with effects rather than with causes.

Only one thing can remove the threat of H Bombs—and the threat of war. That is the abolition of the crazy political and economic systems that produce these horrors. To do this, petitions, voting, begging to governments with constitutional cap in hand, are all equally futile, servile and ridiculous."

On April 11th, 1954, the Japanese Anarchist Congress passed a resolution against the testing of bombs. There is something touching about anarchist manifestoes. Twelve old men with long wispy beards sit in a room, and they write: "We appeal out of our pain as the first victim of atomic weapons to the masses of the entire world and we protest especially against Eisenhower, President of US, and Malenkov, Premier of the Soviet Union. Should we fail to accomplish this, all social ideals, philosophy, belief and art will disappear".

I have no intention whatsoever of discussing the various personalities that became the spokesmen from time to time in the nuclear disarmament movement. There are two articles in ANARCHY that are worth reading, one by Charles Radcliffe and the other by Diana Shelley. I am concerned with essentials; the reason why the

movement failed. But before I reach the present day I wish to mention the account of the first organised Aldermaston march as it appeared in *FREEDOM* as it contains again the orthodox anarchist attitude. On this march there were about 2,000 people. The press's hostility was tempered by grudging admiration. As it was the first time, people's reactions to the marchers were spontaneous. Some derided them, some gave them food and shelter. There is a long list in *FREEDOM* of various kindnesses offered the marchers, from free soup, to buns and cakes. A confectioner in Slough distributed sweets to them, a country club opened its doors to them, the list is endless. The marchers were the people and the people recognised them. *FREEDOM* once again puts its finger on the stupidity of the organisers. Did they know that they had the elements of a great revolutionary movement, where nothing needs explaining? The barriers were broken and had they acted resolutely and from basic anarchist principles they would have achieved their purpose. Said *FREEDOM*: "In a hundred different ways the bonds of human oneness were kindled by the march and obviously meant as much to the givers as to the receivers. . . ."

What a pity the Committee did not leave it at that! Instead they sent a resolution to 10 Downing Street and the United States and the Russian embassies calling on the respective governments to cease "the testing, manufacture and storing of nuclear weapons immediately." "As if governments which conduct their affairs in secret at a summit level and impose their policies on the people by the threat of force against whoever dares to disobey, will suddenly change their ways because some, a few, people protest!" said *FREEDOM*.

But there were protests after protests after protests. By the end of the year even *FREEDOM* weakened. An anonymous writer offered his congratulations to organisers and demonstrators. Protest became part of one's life. Basic principles, what it was all about, was slowly forgotten. Then came the influence of Bertrand Russell who added philosophical meaning to being arrested for a cause.

In 1958, when the idea of mass civil disobedience was mooted, I was already a reader of *FREEDOM*, and interested in anarchism. But my basic reaction to H-bomb marchers and sitters was that here were people who devalued their personal liberty by offering themselves to be arrested. I am glad that at least 'G', writing in *FREEDOM*, shared this opinion. An anarchist does not court arrest.

In the past two years, taking part in Committee of 100 demonstrations, I noticed a certain tendency, akin to fanaticism, among demonstrators, vying with each other to get arrested. This, I hope, will be the last year that we shall march at Easter with CND. Not that they are actually protesting about the bomb. I think they get a little peeved if somebody asks them, "Are you ban the bombers?"

A bomb is lost in the sea at Palomares. One American commentator said: Here is an accident ready made for agitation. Surprisingly, the only agitation—except for diplomatic thrusts—was

a small anti-American demonstration in Madrid. Actually the United States was more than fortunate. What would have happened if Palomares were not a remote fishing village but a city? They may send all the earth to the Nevada desert, but what would they have done with bricks and cobblestones of a contaminated foreign city? What would have happened if Palomares was a town in a more unstable nation? Would it have panicked the population? The information was not released in this country that not only Spain had banned the overflights: the Philippines have since sought and received a similar assurance. (Summarised from an article by Howard Simons in the *Washington Post*.)

Why was there no demonstration? Is it because Spain has a fascist government? Or is it because the Americans threatened the Soviet Union that if they dared to organise a world-wide demonstration, then the US would simply tell the world how many similar incidents involved Soviet planes?

There is a literary magazine which has the strange title P.O.T.H.—Poor Old Tired Horse. This would well do as new initials for the nuclear disarmers. For our part, we must return to the spirit of the resolution passed at the Glasgow Conference in 1945 and set about the task of recreating international solidarity.

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## Reflections on the anarchist principle

PAUL GOODMAN

ANARCHISM IS GROUNDED IN A RATHER DEFINITE proposition: that valuable behaviour occurs only by the free and direct response of individuals or voluntary groups to the conditions presented by the historical environment. It claims that in most human affairs, whether political, economic, military, religious, moral, pedagogic, or cultural, more harm than good results from coercion, top-down direction, central authority, bureaucracy, jails, conscription, states, pre-ordained standardisation, excessive planning, etc. Anarchists want to increase

intrinsic functioning and diminish extrinsic power. This is a social-psychological hypothesis with obvious political implications.

Depending on varying historical conditions that present various threats to the anarchist principle, anarchists have laid their emphasis in varying places: sometimes agrarian, sometimes free-city and guild-oriented; sometimes technological, sometimes anti-technological; sometimes Communist, sometimes affirming property; sometimes individualist, sometimes collective; sometimes speaking of Liberty as almost an absolute good, sometimes relying on custom and "nature". Nevertheless, despite these differences, anarchists seldom fail to recognize one another, and they do not consider the differences to be incompatibilities. Consider a crucial modern problem, violence. Guerilla fighting has been a classical anarchist technique; yet where, especially in modern conditions, any violent means tends to reinforce centralism and authoritarianism, anarchists have tended to see the beauty of non-violence.

Now the anarchist principle is by and large true.\* And far from being "utopian" or a "glorious failure", it has proved itself and won out in many spectacular historical crises. In the period of mercantilism and patents royal, free enterprise by joint stock companies was anarchist. The Jeffersonian bill of rights and independent judiciary were anarchist. Congregational churches were anarchist. Progressive education was anarchist. The free cities and corporate law in the feudal system were anarchist. At present, the civil rights movement in the United States has been almost classically decentralist and anarchist. And so forth, down to details like free access in public libraries. Of course, to later historians these things do not seem to be anarchist, but in their own time they were all regarded as such and often literally called such, with the usual dire threats of chaos. But this relativity of the anarchist principle to the actual situation is of the essence of anarchism. There *cannot* be a history of anarchism in the sense of establishing a permanent state of things called "anarchist". It is always a continual coping with the next situation, and a vigilance to make sure that past freedoms are not lost and do not turn into the opposite, as free enterprise turned into wage-slavery and monopoly capitalism, or the independent judiciary turned into a monopoly of courts, cops, and lawyers, or free education turned into School Systems.

\*I, and other anarchists, would except certain states of temporary emergency, if we can be confident that the emergency is *temporary*. We might except certain simple logistic arrangements, like ticketing or metric standards or tax-collection, if we can be confident that the administration, the "secretariat", will not begin to run the show. And we might except certain "natural monopolies", like epidemic-control, water-supply, etc.

## Background to the Rhodesian situation

JEREMY WESTALL

**CRISIS IN RHODESIA** by Nathan Shamuyarira. (30s. Andre Deutsch.)

THIS BOOK IS A BOOK WORTH READING if one wishes to understand something of the present situation in Rhodesia. The author is a leading African nationalist in the smaller of the two African nationalist movements in the country and he presents an absorbing and vivid picture. He describes the history of the African nationalist movement, writes with compassion for his own people and gives much useful factual information about Rhodesia to-day. He describes his own life in the educational field and in journalism and gives an insight into the real temper of African thinking to-day.

Nathan Shamuyarira concludes his book by writing that "This is a moral crisis Rhodesia faces in 1965. It is no ordinary political crisis; it is a deep personal and human tragedy to every Rhodesian like myself, and the last real challenge to British statesmanship in Africa." My dictionary defines the word crisis as "a turning point or decisive moment, especially in illness; time of acute danger or suspense". It is fair to consider that Rhodesia is in a state of crisis—it is a decisive moment in its illness—and there is a moral question inherent in the whole situation. It is the question which asks us if it is right for black people to be treated as inferior to white.

In the sphere of British statesmanship with relation to Rhodesia one must agree with John Grigg that Mr. Wilson's performance has shone by comparison with Mr. Heath's. "The Leader of the Opposition," Grigg writes, "has been so niggling and vacillating that he has made even the Prime Minister seem a tower of moral strength." All one needs to emphasise is that Wilson only *seems* a tower of moral strength, indeed pressures of a less elevated character could be at the basis of the actions performed by the British Prime Minister.

The sort of morality required in Rhodesia has nothing to do with statesmanship. It is portrayed by an Anglican missionary described by Shamuyarira. The author is discussing the generally weak way in

which the Church is combating racialism in Rhodesia, when he remembers an exception, Arthur Cripps, who refused to be carried in a car anywhere. "He said it was bad to throw dust in the faces of his followers by driving a car past them." (In Rhodesia many roads are "dust" roads and Africans walk beside them being showered by dust from passing cars.) "When there were meetings to attend," Shamuyarira continues, "he—Arthur Cripps—would walk the ninety miles to attend them. This was the manner in which Africans lived, he would explain and anyone who wanted to minister to Africans must live in the same manner. Cripps wrote poems and verse on any subject that concerned him. Some poems were written to record the kindness and sympathy he found in the African way of life; others were stern attacks on the government. When he died in 1955, Africans who knew he had refused to be buried in a coffin draped his body in cloth; thousands came from miles to mourn him, and his grave is carefully tended by Africans to-day."

Unfortunately the Rhodesian whites are not of the same calibre as Arthur Cripps. They might therefore be dealt with in a way which may lead them to having their graves tended by Africans also! Shamuyarira tells of an interesting series of events which occurred when he was at the United Nations in 1962 representing the African nationalists with Josiah Chinamano and Enoch Dumbutshena. The Algerian delegate at the UN contacted them with the colonialist struggle against France fresh in his mind. After some attempts by the Africans not to see the Algerian delegate for a meeting, they were contacted.

"'You are wasting your time,' he told us. 'Fight the white settlers as we did. Fight them until they are unable to stay. Ben Bella himself spent eight years in jail or exile; Nkomo will have to do the same.'

"Then he asked us: 'How many settlers are there in Southern Rhodesia?'

"I told him: 220,000.

"'Well then, you will have to kill 40,000 or so; and another 30,000 will have to flee the country, before the rest will let you govern them. That is the serious truth, and Algeria is prepared to help you. I want one of you to return through Algiers. I will give you a letter for a colleague of mine, and he will take you to Ben Bella.'

"We nodded, but said we could not take such a momentous step without the permission of our party officials at home. We exchanged addresses, shook hands vigorously and said goodbye, promising to keep in touch. 'Keep in touch' was the operative phrase: we were grappling for peaceful ways out of our dilemma. We felt we had not yet exhausted all channels."

Since those days the African position in Rhodesia has worsened and it would be mistaken to assume that Algeria has changed sympathies since the fall of Ben Bella. The Africans of Rhodesia have now exhausted all channels as a way to a peaceful settlement in Rhodesia. Those who have been close to the African nationalists in Rhodesia cannot doubt that the use of force on the Algerian model and with

Algerian aid is on the agenda. An international force would, one can say quite definitely, receive aid from Algeria if intervention in Rhodesian affairs were contemplated.

My own acquaintance with Nathan Shamuyarira was a rather sad one. It was after the Rhodesian Front had settled Ian Smith into power as their leader with the ousting of Winston Field in 1964. Smith had, as the author notes, restricted the Principal of Highfield Community School, Josiah Chinamano, as one of his first acts as Prime Minister. Following the Principal's arrest, Shamuyarira notes: "The quarrelling between the two political movements—Nkomo's People's Caretaker Council and Sithole's Zimbabwe African National Union—began to split the student body and then the staff." This quarrelling led some boys to boycott certain teachers at the school for political reasons. Further it led to some children being unable to go to school at all because they were labelled "ZANU children".

At the time I was teaching at the school, and because the School Committee replaced the boycotted teachers without supporting them, I resigned. I wanted to teach the "ZANU children" simply because they had been victimised as had the "ZANU teachers". I went to see Nathan Shamuyarira at the University in Salisbury to see if he could help with accommodating the children whilst they were taught. He was a major figure in ZANU but he told me that anywhere we went we would be stoned by the PCC supporters.

We tried several places to find accommodation for lessons. The YMCA agreed to our request for somewhere to go but later refused us because they feared intimidation or worse if they gave us a place to carry on the children's education. Eventually the children were taught in a flat in the centre of Salisbury which I shared with two friends.

We were warned after a while that such activity would lead to our eviction from the flat and that other residents in the flats had complained. We continued teaching nevertheless, uncertain whether the PCC, our landlord or the Government would act to remove us first. Africans and Europeans advised us to discontinue and told me to leave Rhodesia. As money ran out I had to leave Rhodesia anyway and the children were left to their own devices. The Highfield Community School was closed shortly afterwards.

This is the Rhodesia of which Shamuyarira writes and he joins Ndabaningi Sithole as the author of an excellent book on Rhodesia. Sithole's book "African Nationalism" (OUP) could well be read along with "Crisis in Rhodesia". The only criticism of Shamuyarira's book is the lack of an index. Otherwise it is a credit to his ability as a writer and as a man of feeling—never once does one feel that he has lost sight of his humanity in the midst of the Rhodesian struggle, something which cannot be said of all of us who wish to liberate Zimbabwe.

## Some libertarian aspects of English poetry

JEFF ROBINSON

PROBABLY THE BEST KNOWN ENGLISH POETIC REBEL is Lord Byron, romantic revolutionary, hater of conventional social mores and of whom it was said that he had three interests in life—poetry, adultery and insurrection. The depth of Byron's revolutionary ideas can be summed up from this extract from his "The Isles of Greece".

"—He served—but served Polycrates—  
A tyrant; but our masters then  
Were still, at least, our countrymen.  
The tyrant of the Chersonese  
Was freedom's best and bravest friend;  
That tyrant was Miltiades!  
Oh, that the present hour would lend  
Another despot of the kind!  
Such chains as his were sure to bind.—"

In other words Byron believed that home-grown tyrants like Polycrates, the fratricide and pirate, and the warmaker, Miltiades, are in some way preferable to the imported variety. Byron never said what the difference was to their victims.

But just as the most celebrated poetic rebel never broke through the thought barriers and arrived at anarchism, so the declared anarchists among poets—John Henry Mackay, Oscar Wilde, Herbert Read—have never produced detailed expositions, in poetry, of their libertarian beliefs. For anarchism is a social theory and any attempt to explain it, as a theory, through the medium of poetry would result in muddled verse of a pronounced dullness and badness. But if the actual philosophy of anarchism cannot be expressed through poetry, the form has three aspects of a decidedly libertarian nature; it can be an assertion of individuality, a vehicle for the disgust with and opposition to the society in which the poet finds himself; it can serve as a mirror of reality, not just the passing social scene but the whole backcloth against which human life is lived; and, lastly, the very act of writing poetry is libertarian because it is spontaneous. The act of poetic creation is one of the most anarchic things imaginable. Never self-consciously, usually at some quite unexpected moment, ideas and images, sometimes phrases and whole lines, well into the mind of the poet. All poetry worthy of the name is such a spontaneous product.

It may be that the poet has deliberately sought a mood, perhaps a place or a memory hoping to kindle his poetic fire but the actual act of creation, when it does occur, is completely spontaneous. Some contemporary poets simply write it down as it comes and publish it to the world in that form. While such work is doubtless of great meaning and significance to the poet, it rarely means much to others. Only especially gifted poets can communicate by simply writing down their thoughts without later polishing them, perhaps into some formal pattern of metre, rhyme, etc.

One sometimes reads that Shelley and Blake outlined anarchism as a philosophy in their poems. In his *Modern Symposium* which includes what remains, after fifty years, one of the best ever expositions of anarchism as a philosophy for the heart rather than the head, G. Lowes Dickinson puts into the mouth of the anarchist revolutionary Angus MacCarthy the words "There are anarchists who never made a speech and never carried a rifle whom we know as our brothers, though perhaps they know not us. Two I will name who live for ever, Shelley, the first of poets, were it not that there is one greater than he, the mystic William Blake". Blake's poetry is largely obscure and apocalyptic, the product of a singular subconscious mind and there is no clear indication that the kind of world he was driving at was an anarchist one. Shelley, on the other hand, often described that beautiful world where "moonlight and music and feeling are one", dreamy and idealistic, and such a world is anarchy as seen by a great romantic. Yet because he described a type of anarchy does not mean that he regarded it as a practical proposition. He admitted in his prose writing that he set up his flowery, beautiful ideal not because he believed it to be attainable but to instil in the better educated, more sensitive of his readers a desire for something better than a country with its "old, mad, blind, despised and dying king" and its "people starved and stabbed in the untilled field". In other words Shelley described anarchy only as a spur to liberal reform. He didn't seriously believe that a Godwinian garden of reason and justice could be brought about either as a result of his poetry or anything else.

Noticeable, too, in Shelley's poetry, is the fact that he produced much better work in his more personal poems than in his "world changing" epics. Compare the introspective and beautiful "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills" of 1818 with the inflated "Ode to Liberty" of 1820. In his quieter, more melancholy poems, which always coincided with periods of domestic stress, he saw the world and men more as they really are. Thus in "Julian and Maddalo" he lets the pessimistic Maddalo (based on Byron) get the better of the argument and in the "Euganean Hills" he writes thus of the landlords of Lombardy who exploit their peasants:—

"—Sheaves of whom are ripe to come  
To destruction's harvest-home:  
Men must reap the things they sow,  
Force from force must ever flow,  
Or worse; but 'tis a bitter woe

That love or reason cannot change  
The despot's rage, the slave's revenge."

The "force from force must ever flow" seems to mean that class and group conflict will go on for ever which is the view of modern permanent protesters; certainly Shelley denies in the above lines that a better world can come about through reason which is the heart of the Godwinian thesis.

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Although there have been no actual statements of anarchism in English poetry, the medium abounds with poems of protest and assertions of individuality. Pamphleteering and lampooning in verse form were much used forms of protest and ridicule in past centuries. Anti-nuclear and Civil Rights movements have recently brought about a large scale revival of protest songs and verse. Whether he be "left", "right" or completely a-political, as many of them are, the poet, being above all a person of sensitivity, can never be happy with the times he lives in for all times are, at least to some extent, bad. Thus, on what can be described as the "right", we find Tennyson, a staunch believer in Victorian progress, suddenly taking fright when he sees the gathering impetus of democracy and industrialism threatening the England he loves and warning against them in verse. Yeats hated the modern world and yearned for a society of enlightened aristocrats and happy peasants and even flirted sentimentally with Irish fascism which he thought shared similar ends as himself. John Betjeman's poetry consists mainly of nostalgia for rural quietness and Edwardian security, things completely outside the experience of most of the suburbanites who form his main audience. Poets who have been clergymen have usually been bad ones and even jingo poets (proportionally minute compared with the extent of jingo feeling among society at large) have had reservations. Kipling's well-known "Recessional", the content of which at first sight seems a typical outpouring of the heyday of empire, contains a warning against power and a subtle note of irony not found in imperialist prose.

Poets of what can be described as the left have not been too successful when writing on "left" themes and, like Shelley, many of them have produced their best work on more personal subjects. "Left" themes, like out and out "right" themes, are in some sense propaganda which is best suited to the medium of prose because of its air of earnestness and contrivance. The Marxist intellectuals of the thirties, Auden, Spender and Co., produced many semi-political tracts which are almost wholly without poetic merit and have had no lasting effect as propaganda either. When Auden went to America he gradually found his metier which is for light verse. Marx makes a poor muse. In ANARCHY 16, Harold Drasdo discusses some contemporary poems written from a generally "left" protest point of view. It will be seen that their standard is higher than that of the thirties although the poets are not so well-known as Auden and Co. were in their day—this is because leftism is not fashionable among snob literary magazines, as it was thirty years ago.

It is as a medium for assertions of individuality and disgust with specific evils often totally unconnected with the left-right axis that poetry is well suited. Housman's "The Laws of God the Laws of Man" (Let him keep who will and can) is a fine statement of individualist anarchism while Clare's "I Am" and Arnold's "The Scholar Gipsy", which combines sensuous descriptions of the Oxford countryside with an outline of the life and philosophy of a real life seventeenth century "beat", are statements of individuality. Here is Thomas Hardy's "In Time of the Breaking of Nations" written in 1915 when the world was at war. It is a lucid and beautiful statement of the continuity of human life and endeavour in spite of governments and war.

"Only a man harrowing clods  
In a slow silent walk  
With an old horse that stumbles and nods  
Half asleep as they stalk.  
Only thin smoke without flame  
From the heaps of couch-grass;  
Yet this will go onward the same  
Though Dynasties pass.  
Yonder a maid and her wight  
Come whispering by;  
War's annals will fade into night  
Ere their story die."

In his *Inside the Whale* George Orwell deplors what he calls the "irresponsibility" of the literary attitude of rebellion and escape which he considers very prevalent in the last hundred years. He writes "As a rule, writers who do not wish to identify themselves with the historical process at the moment either ignore it or fight against it. If they can ignore it, they are probably fools. If they can understand it well enough to want to fight against it, they probably have enough vision to realize that they cannot win". What then DO you do if, like Orwell, you don't like the historical process, i.e. the way the world's going? Orwell for all his shrewdness has no real answer. He advocates socialism as a solution yet his writings contain some of the most damning indictments of socialism in all its various shapes and forms ever written. Elsewhere he praises the "ordinary man" but are not they the people who, in their tens of millions, make possible the capitalism and pseudo-socialism that Orwell hated so much?

Elsewhere Orwell wrote that the quickest way of clearing a gathering of English people, quicker than shouting "Fire" or talking about God, is to start reading poetry aloud. The situation is supposed to be worse in some foreign lands although in Wales and Ireland, where faint lingerings of the Celtic heritage survive, there is still a fair amount of interest in poetry. Quite apart from poems of rebellion the very act of writing poetry, on whatever subject, is in a sense an act of rebellion against the materialistic world, which anarchism is too. Probably the writing of poetry, as distinct from mere academic interest

in its mechanics, will survive as long as anarchism survives. Robert Graves has declared himself amused at the paradox of poetry's "obstinate continuance in the present phase of civilisation". Graves partly explains the paradox by pointing out that there is a feeling that poetry, since it defies scientific analysis (in spite of many attempts to do so) must be rooted in some sort of magic and magic is disreputable. Here again is the idea of an esoteric undercurrent in society, its "membership" based on temperament rather than class or upbringing and attracting sensitive and rebellious individuals from all walks of life—as anarchism does. It is no coincidence that poetry is so popular among anarchists while the Marxist East contents itself with "socialist realism" and the capitalist West produces advertising jingles. Contrary views to all this are possible, verse of a certain technical competence yet poetically dead can be, and is, written by machines, similarly there are anarchists whose idea of anarchy is the opposite of poetry, a smug super consumer, spindly limbed and big bottomed, sitting in a skyscraper city before a row of push buttons that cater for every whim.

\* \* \* \*

There is more than one way in which poetry can be a mirror of reality. It can be used to describe events in the public world, not usually good subjects for poetry, which can result in Yeats's sublime poems of Irish rebellion or the bathos of William McGonagall's stirring chronicles of Victorian progress. But it is reality in the sense of the nature of human life and the background against which it is lived that is so often reflected by poets. Nowadays due to the almost mystical belief that science has or is about to "come up with all the answers" and the torrent of rubbish that pours from press and television, a climate has been created which has caused serious reflections on human life to wane, the very vulgarity and irrationality of this climate has made extremist cults like Jehovah's Witnesses popular to the minority that are still interested. Death is now the big taboo subject as sex was in the past. Where is the Krafft-Ebing of death or the novelist who will write on the theme of Emily Dickinson's:—

"One dignity delays for all,  
One mitred afternoon.  
None can avoid this purple,  
None evade this crown.—"

The crowds flocking to James Bond films where homicides happen by the score show that death is only interesting when it is frivolous and with sado-masochistic overtones. Death is an aspect of reality, as the CND and Committee of 100 have discovered, that the great mass of people just don't want to know about.

The Erewhonian named city of Diaspar occurs in Arthur C. Clarke's science fiction novel *The City and the Stars*. Cocooned Diaspar glows like a jewel in a desert waste, a self-contained, self-perpetuating marvel of technology. Its temperature is constant, venti-

lation perfect, transportation faultless, architecture and layout aesthetic triumphs. Its myriad citizens are superbly fed, clothed and housed by the foolproof machinery installed by the city's founders. Yet in what sense are the citizens of Diaspar free when they merely live within the framework permitted by the automatic machinery which, in turn, was planned by the city's long dead designers to eternally protect the citizens from the outside world? The citizens of Diaspar are perfect in beauty and physical and mental health so presumably they have perfect orgasms (the planners allowed sex for non-procreative purposes) yet to people who have never experienced the inferior, who are used to a constant standard however high in today's terms, would not familiarity simply breed contempt? Living as others want you to live is slavery, and if they are humanistic scientists with only your welfare and comfort at heart it is paternalism which is a subtle form of slavery. Freedom consists of personal choice which is usually coupled with some degree of effort. In the Middle Ages the sheer drudgery of life left no room for choice of anything but drudgery, the fine flavour called freedom was unattainable; in Diaspar, by contrast, the habit of perfection causes mental and spiritual constipation and there would be no consciousness at all of the idea of choice, and concepts like freedom would be meaningless. Yet the whole unstated aim of modern science is to conquer nature completely, to reduce the world to one gray, featureless, conformist suburb where, under the benevolent guidance of psychologists and sociologists, everyone will be happy (their definition of happy that is). Later still, possibly, Diaspar will arise. The dream of generations of progressives that once man had unlimited power he would return to the land to live there in simplicity and dignity is nowhere being realised. When modern man returns to the country he takes part of the town with him. He doesn't, as Herbert Read advocated in his *Poetry and Anarchism*, with electric power at his finger tips to take the drudgery from life, return to the land "not as a peasant but as a lord". Instead he commutes daily back to the town or works in one of the new factories that the planners have established in the country.

More likely, as science strives to completely conquer and subdue nature, nature will fight back in zanier and zanier ways. Typhoid and diphtheria are practically beaten in this country yet other applications of the same science that has produced the drugs to beat the germs has made life so hectic and unnatural that cancer and mental illness are much more prevalent.

Robert Graves, as a result of his researches into the origins of poetry, claims it originated in the religious rites surrounding the Goddess worshipped in Europe and the Middle East in prehistoric times and claims that poetry, in the sense of being able to communicate as a result of an almost magical potency (as distinct from mere verse which Graves terms gleemanship), confines poetry to a few great themes and necessitates in poets a degree of sincerity and devotion to their personal muses that causes most of them to be burnt out before they're thirty.

If birth, love, mutability and death are the great themes, to be sincerely described by the poet according to his individual experience, then the scope of poetry must be diminishing because death has recently become unmentionable, sex is becoming clinical, love (in any sense other than clinical sex) is becoming forgotten and test tube births are the thing of the future. As poets can hardly write about what they haven't experienced, and if Graves is right in his estimation of the role of the poet then the poet of the future, if he is to remain true to his calling, must stand aside from the whole trend of the times as anarchists must too if they don't want to be smothered in "progress" and paternalism.

Whether science is successful on its own terms, and Diaspar arises and Blake's Jerusalem becomes forgotten, or whether the solving of old problems simply causes new ones to arise and be thrust into prominence, it means that a new threat is posed to both poet and anarchist alike—staying out of the way of bureaucratic paternalism, the super-welfare state. Communities of anarchists are one way this could be done, they are often proposed but little seems to come of the idea. Yet communities, either economically self-supporting or at least sharing some of the chores and expenses of life while retaining respect for individual privacy, were more numerous sixty years ago when social revolution seemed possible than today when it looks hopeless. A community of poets hardly seems feasible, poets being arch individualists. Some young poets take to the beat life and there is at least one middle-aged poet in Wales who has spent, like W. H. Davies before him, years on the road. Poets who are unable to produce poetry unless they can see at least three meals ahead have to find work compatible with poetry. If one has money a niche can easily be found—as Robert Graves has made in sunny Majorca from the income from his prose writings. Employment in a modern factory or office with its inane chatter and noise spells death to the poetic faculties. Mention of culture, in any shape or form, is taboo while as for social theories, anarcho-syndicalism and the like, I have worked some years in commerce or industry and never detected the slightest whisper of interest in any such thing.

Reality is something that anarchists above all must heed. If, for instance, an anarchist with dreams of a world-wide free society finds a factor such as the population explosion threatening his aims, then there is no earthly point in trying to deny or hide the fact. Probably the only time an anarchist would be justified in hoodwinking others (on the subject of anarchism, that is) would be if telling the truth played into the hands of the police or other authorities. With a political party things are different. The whole aim of politics is the gaining and retention of power and to this end any bamboozling of rank and file supporters is justified. The function of a rank and file party supporter is to vote at elections and therefore it's OK for the party bosses to tell him anything that keeps him loyal. An anarchist movement or milieu, by contrast, requires a high degree of openness between individuals unless, as is highly unlikely, they are all hermit inclined. There are no leaders and no rank and file. Deceit is utterly

pointless. Therefore if the movement or milieu is tiny and shows no signs at all of getting bigger, if the whole trend of the world is against it, if it only exists on sufferance of the state, why not admit it?

One view is summed up in a verse by the 19th century Scots poet James Thomson who, like Shelley, his idol, was at his best when melancholy. His best work is "The City of Dreadful Night", a vision of a nightmare city whose geographical similarities suggest was mirrored on the London through whose streets the terror of insomnia kept him wandering through the darkness. Its length, over 200 stanzas of greatly varying poetic merit, is not to all tastes, although some modern poets with little or nothing to say write as long—see for instance, that immensely trivial catalogue of venial sin "The True Confession of George Barker". Compared to his "City", Thomson's love songs, protest verses and little poems on such things as art and philosophy seem feeble.

It is significant that the name of Marx, Thomson's contemporary, whose Utopian collectivist fantasies show no sign of being realised, should be known to everyone while Thomson, whose pessimistic ("realistic" would be a better word) views are as true now as ever, is largely forgotten. Thomson died in 1882 of the combined effects of drugs, alcohol, insomnia, penury and despair. His grave (he lies on top of a friend being too poor to afford his own) is in Highgate cemetery near Marx's hideous tomb. The resting place of the materialist visionary, its back turned symbolically to the working class streets of Holloway, is covered with wreaths from successful and would-be politicians. One hundred yards away, the grave of Thomson, the poet, is bramble-strewn and unknown.

What strikes one about Thomson's "City" is its truth; take away the element of nightmare and personal lamentation and get at the philosophy underlying it all and it is the authentic background against which human life is lived. There is no difference between the background of the City and the cold pages of a scientific-rationalist view of the universe except that Thomson sees and describes it through the eyes of a poet and one whom bad luck had robbed of the crumbs that make life bearable, love, a degree of comfort, peace of mind.

The last twelve stanzas are mainly a description of Albrecht Durer's famous engraving "MELENCOLIA". Durer never explained the expression of his thoughtful woman, more enigmatic than the Mona Lisa. Thomson sees in her face:—

"The sense that every struggle brings defeat  
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;  
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat  
Because they have no secret to express;  
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain  
Because there is no light behind the curtain;  
That all is vanity and nothingness."

Whether this is what Durer meant or not, try to seriously refute what Thomson says. Of course, the good citizen of the welfare state, crouched before his TV or driving his mini up the M1, would just

turn his back, the fashionable intellectual would snigger, the eager progressive would point to its pessimism as though a quality is a refutation.

Thomson states that all struggles (except presumably for the most immediate and trivial ends), certainly all ideological struggles, end in defeat. For not only do mutability and death end all men's strivings and bring the mightiest empires crashing down, but the very act of struggling has an unfortunate effect on the struggler, means become ends to be enjoyed for their own sake, or else in the words of Ferdinand Lassalle:—

“Show us not the aim without the way  
For ends and means on earth are so entangled  
That changing one, you change the other too;  
Each different path brings other ends in view.”

“All the oracles are dumb or cheat.” Try to name one positive philosophy, religion, ethical system that a person of average intelligence cannot either demolish or pick huge holes in in ten minutes. Any objective, empirical approach always leads to the kind of void described by Thomson. The individual exists in society which is a corner of a universe of “vanity and nothingness”, where all large struggles are in vain, where enquiry leads to the void and death will soon bring oblivion. If an individual wants a share of the good things of life without making them soporifics to deaden feeling, wants to retain individuality and not sink into an anonymous mass, wants to feel as a poet in a prose society in a neutral universe, then there is only one broad way. Individualism, not being an ideological struggle, not being a struggle at all if you are beat or Zen, is possible anywhere, for all it involves is each person thinking and acting as freely as possible according to temperament and circumstances. Doing and thinking what YOU want and not what someone else thinks you ought to want. This might not seem much, yet logically it is the absolute maximum that can be done. It could even be practised in a concentration camp. Indeed one can read of inmates of actual concentration camps who have asserted their individuality in the most minute ways, tiny acts of protest, done behind the guard's back to escape savage punishment, yet giving a feeling of self-respect. To men in such a dreadful place as a concentration camp microscopic acts of rebellion are more relevant and give more hope than the plotting of impossible mass revolts which the other prisoners won't join and which the guards could easily crush anyway.

When in a prison with no chance of escape it is best to modify one's aims and aspirations accordingly. The modern world is not a complete prison but the onward march of “progress” is making freedom seem remoter every day, remoter as a possibility of the past and not a hope for the future. When anarchism faces this aspect of reality, takes off the red and black spectacles, consigns mass revolt and utopianism to the museum, there might be a little flowering of libertarianism so far as it is possible in this day and age.

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## WHY ANARCHISTS ARE ON THE MARCH

A public meeting on Sunday, 10th April, at 8 p.m. at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1 (nearest Underground Station is Holborn on the Piccadilly and Central Lines). Speakers include Philip Sansom and Donald Room.

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