

Eric Harrison 1922-1993

Eric Harrison died on the 19th December 1993 after a short illness. In his later years he suffered from arthritis which affected his walking ability. He leaves a daughter, Deborah, and six grand-children.

Eric was a natural Pacifist and one of the most gentle men I have known. He left school at 14 and trained as a tool-maker with the Daimler motor company. He became a shop steward active in the Trade Union movement. I first met him in Coventry when I was there with the Film Van in 1963; he became a very keen supporter and in his later life became a Trustee with us here at the Brotherhood. During the sixties he was active with the Committee of 100 and the "Spies for Peace" with the CND. He spent some of his time working for the Factory for Peace as a representative and sales rep, the idea of worker participation in the running of a factory being something he believed in.

As a younger man, he had been a keen cyclist and walker, having walked the Lyke Wake Walk and across the Pennines supporting the Ramblers with access to the countryside. He was a keen photographer, developing his own films.

In his later years he spent much of his time with us, coming on a motorcycle, or we would collect him from the end of the road when he travelled by train or bus. We shall miss Eric very much, particularly his knowledge of the 'Peace Movement' and his many campaign trips to the Continent with Coventry CND carrying the Coventry banner.

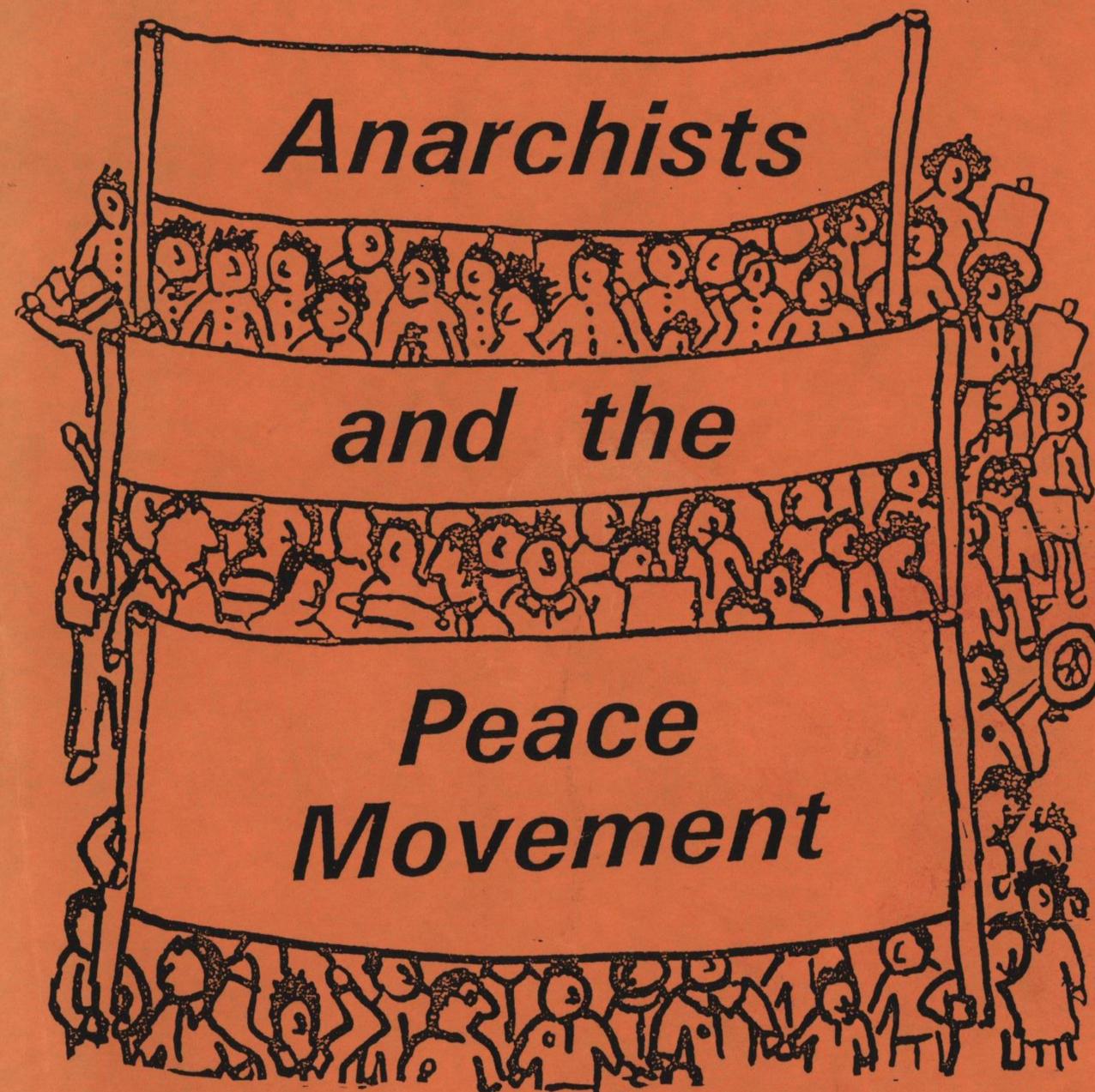
A memorial service will be held at the Brotherhood Church in early May; a date will be publicised later.

Len Gibson, Brotherhood Church,
West Yorkshire, England

Peace News February 1994

P&P Syndicalist Bulletin,
College Farm House,
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A view of the Anarchist contribution to the Peace Movement of the 1960's

Laurens Otter

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Tribute to Eric Harrison

Syndicalist Bulletin learns, with regret, of the death of Eric Harrison, from a letter from Len Gibson, published in Peace News, & reproduced at the end of this pamphlet.

Older comrades who were active in and round the Committee of 100 will not need to be told that he was a Coventry (Standards) shop steward (subsequently convenor) who joined the Committee's support, serving on the Industrial Sub-Committee of the original Central Committee & helping form the West Midlands' Committee.

He was part-author of the leaflet that the Industrial sub-committee wrote & had translated to reach Russian workers, & he was one of those who went to Leningrad in an attempt to distribute it; though the Soviet police had evidently been tipped off about him, & he was prevented from landing. (He & others sat down on the ship's gang planks.)

Naturally the establishment & the Media, (always so anxious to say to opponents of British weaponry, "why don't you go & demonstrate against Russian Bombs,") did not choose to publish this.

But it is not only the Establishment & its hireling press that chooses to misrepresent the history of that time.

Peace Activists & the Anarchist Movement -

Recently, in Freedom, Nick Heath (who may fairly be described as the major theorist of the Anarchist Communist Federation,) approvingly quoted Albert Meltzer (sometime editor of Black Flag, & influential in the DAM,) to the effect that in the early Sixties the anarchist movement had been hi-jacked by Non-Violent Resisters & similar Peace Movement activists.

It might be thought a curious form of words. An hi-jack

implies that a body which is moving, on a pre-determined course, from one place to another, has been forcibly taken over & diverted to an entirely different destination. It is hard to imagine how this is supposed to have happened.

It could be argued that, in the later Sixties, various groups tried to divert, (for a time successfully,) large sections of both the anarchist & the Peace Movements into support for Vietnamese Stalinists; (* 1) & presumably by some analogy, it could have been possible to divert sections, of a similarly unstructured anarchist movement into an illibertarian peace movement.

I don't know if that is what Nick Heath meant happened, & I haven't read the original allegation by Albert Meltzer; so I have no idea if he meant anything or whether this was a normal piece of meaningless name-calling from that quarter.

It must be stressed that neither Heath nor Meltzer were around the anarchist movement at the time. *[N.H. was too young, he became an anarchist later in the Sixties, when this hi-jacking had allegedly already happened; A.M., though he had previously been an anarchist was not then politically active, - he did at this period publish a small humanist journal, but it had no political content, (for instance the main article in issue no. 2, was on the problems of Latin America, it made no mention whatsoever of either capitalism or U.S. Imperialism, when reproached for this lack, all three of Mr Meltzer's co-editors (* 2) insisted that he vetoed any discussion of these two topics.)]* Neither then write from personal observation, & Nick did not cite any other sources who may have claimed to have witnessed the hi-jacking.

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What really happened in the Sixties

The C of 100 arose, at the beginning of the Sixties, out of discontent within CND & the New Left with the policies of the leadership of the former, (which was supported by what appeared as the New Left leadership, the then editor of New Left Review,) which was totally oriented to the Labour Party's Tribuneite Left, & rigidly constitutionalist in approach.

I will revert to this point later in this pamphlet, but it needs to be said now that the Committee was not initially anarchist; but it was open to anarchist influences, & many people who supported it at the beginning were already evolving towards anarchism.

Eric Harrison was one of those; one of those alleged to have hi-jacked the movement; while this author might fairly be supposed to have been one of the hi-jackers in chief, it is perhaps incumbent on me to set the record straight.

What was the vehicle that was hi-jacked?

From the time that Lillian Wolfe & Leah Feldmann stopped selling Freedom at Hyde Park in 1955, until I started in 1957, no one sold any anarchist paper in Britain, on the streets, or at demos. Freedom, ever since the war, has always insisted that as it caters for a wide variety of anarchist currents, it spurns any single blueprint for attaining anarchism; & a brief perusal of Freedom's contents at that time will cast doubt as to whether it was then a paper with a clear goal.

Direct Action had ceased publication in 53. Though remnants of the original Freedom Group survived and insisted that it had nothing to do with Freedom Press they published nothing. Though three British addresses appeared in the Industrial Worker, none of them replied to letters, (unless sent via Chicago, & then only to say "write to us in future," & one of these had actually died.) The Malatesta Club survived, but nearly all of those who still

attended disclaimed the description anarchist. The London Anarchist Group had discontinued its central London meetings, & started off-centre ones; not in a laudable attempt at decentralization, but because none of its established members could be bothered to meet anyone other than old comrades.

There were a number of small (anarchist & pacifist influenced) communities still surviving; a number more of anarchist or anarcho-pacifist life-style activists (e.g. "back to the landers"); there were a few other very small groupings, often revolving round one particular theorist, which overlapped with anarchism; for instance a former Hungarian Communist refugee, who had taken the English name Alfred Reynolds, ran a discussion circle called The Bridge Club, [the inspirer was not embarrassed, that it was described by others as "anarchism for public school boys,] with a journal called the London Letter. Besides these there were quasi-anarchists in both the ILP & CW.

It may surprise younger comrades, used to the fact that a reformist group in the Labour Party, now pretends to be the ILP; that there was until 1973 a party of that name that had a strong syndicalist wing; perhaps they'd be more surprised to learn that the largest organization that supported the Spanish Syndicalists in the late Thirties was the ILP; that the connection went back further, so that many - possibly most - of the activists of the pre-WWI Syndicalist Upsurge (Clyde Workers Council, South Wales Miners' & early Shop Stewards' Movement,) & of the syndicalist resistance to that war, were members of the ILP.

The official "Marxist" historical myth is that these all left the ILP to join the infant Communist Party after the war; some no doubt did, but not by any means as many as the number of Communist industrial activists who after a year or two of bolshevist bureaucracy moved in the opposite direction. Which is why the ILP, after unsuccessful attempts to take it over, by both Stalinists & Trots, went on to support the Spanish CNT. Why, too, in

1948, there were negotiations, - though unfortunately abortive, - to fuse the Anarchist Federation, the ILP & Common Wealth into an united Libertarian League.

Common Wealth had been founded as a left reformist party during the War; basically it had been the remnant of the Popular Front agitators, after the Stalinists had changed their line; but, in three splits successive layers of the founding leadership left at the end of the War. The party had been left in the hands of a group whose first direct experience of political activity had been illegal organization within the armed forces, & who were not in consequence over committed to constitutionalism. These started to evolve in an anarchist direction & though CW only finally adopted the anarchist label in the late 60s; it had been committed to direct action to attain anti-state socialism for twenty years before that.

Who were the alleged hi-jackers?

There have always been anarcho-pacifists; there have indeed been connections between these and Freedom; [the war-time, Freedom co-editor, John Hewetson's family, as also Lillian Wolfe's son & family lived in the early Sixties, at Whiteway's Community, once, though no longer, a Tolstoian commune;] but the majority of these, then as now, have closer links with Peace News than with the organized pacifist movement. Most exceptions were people (e.g. Larry Hislam,) who had been active with Freedom, then for some reason decided to stress their pacifism more & their anarchism less, & so moved away politically while remaining on terms of close personal friendship. Some pacifist communes, like the Brotherhood Church, had a record of resistance to the state which any anarchist ought to be proud to emulate.

Nor were these the only traditional links between war resist-

ers & anarchists; the anarchist movement has always rightly been proud of its involvement in war resistance; its members have always been personal conscientious objectors. [It should be recalled that the group round Vera Richards, which launched "War Commentary" - the ancestor of the present "Freedom," at the beginning of the war, were active within the "Forward Movement of the PPU," an activist anti-war grouping.]

Certainly during the Sixties a new generation of peace activists came into the movement, but in no sense was this a new departure. Certainly many anarcho-pacifists who had previously only moved in Peace News & general peace movement circles, in the early Sixties became members of the mushrooming local anarchist groups; just as equally most active members of both the London Anarchist Group and the Syndicalist Workers' Federation became involved in the Committee of 100. In what way was this unprecedented? In what way did it differ from earlier anarchist relations with previous peace movements? The peace movement has always been a fruitful area of anarchist recruitment, & a major area of anarchist activity.

It would appear that the sole grounds for Messers Heath & Meltzer's complaint is that on this occasion a large section of the anarchist movement (& not just of its anarcho-pacifist sub-sections,) adopted from the peace movement the tactic of NVDA; but since this is a tactic that the peace movement initially derived from people - such as Tolstoi & Thoreau - whom anarchists generally claim as ours; since moreover Gandhi consciously tried to fuse "Civil Disobedience with tactics that he derived from the IWW; this is hardly an importation of alien manufactured goods.

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The Politics of the time

Throughout history radical movements have tended to come in waves. (This is not the place to try & explain why.) In the middle of the Fifties, following the McCarthy era, not just the anarchists but the Left generally reached a very low ebb. At the depths of this there was enormous pressure on all of the Left either to drop criticisms of stalinism, & "to defend the socialist camp," or to align behind the NATO-socialists of the Labour Party. A small minority of widely differing (& frequently reformist) dissident groupings, (many of which only at first dissented from one or other bloc on small matters, but were hysterically denounced by one or other side for their deviation,) described themselves as neutralist.

A small minority of this small minority (whose members, for the most part, were drawn from anarchist, pacifist-socialist or dissident Marxist traditions,) argued that both sides in the Cold War were essentially class divided societies, were militarist, were authoritarian, & therefore opposed both & called themselves the Third Camp; (or some variation of this, there was Dierdre Weg in Holland, both Troisieme Front & Troisieme Bloc in France;) organizing a number of international meetings, but having little impact. They tried to draw up a common statement of aims & means to attain these aims.

It was out of this attempt that the small Non-Violent Resistance Group, a sub-section of the PPU which had joined Third Camp, was joined by a number of non-pacifists, [of whom I was then one,] seeking to find areas where it was possible for both to work together. This body sent Michael Randle to protest when Russian tanks overran the Hungarian workers' rising of 1956, & after a couple of changes of name, was to become the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons.

Whether the 1956 bus-boycott in Montgomery, (Alabama,) the Petofi Club (dissident stalinist youth in Hungary & Poland whose suppression sparked off the risings of that year,) & Nasser's

boldness in face of French, British & Israeli Imperialism, where the cause of the re-awakening of radicalism or were symptoms of the fact that it had already started; it's impossible to say. But one way or the other, the end of 1956 saw a watershed in political thinking in Britain.

Such lively, activist, thinking & humane, younger members of the C.P., (as of a number of C.P.-front organisations,) as there were, flocked out of their party, (organisations) at the same time, a number of Labour Leftists dissatisfied with Bevan's failure to oppose the Suez venture effectively, started to look for something more than the constituency Left afforded them; the two streams mingled, launching the groups that evolved into the New Left; absorbing on the way the bulk of the old neutralist groups. (Obviously there were also careerists - mainly amongst T.U. bureaucrats - who started on a long trairpse to the Right.)

Their influence transformed a number of socialist struggles; not least the peace movement & the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Most of the supporters of such movements were in some sense or other also voters for or otherwise supporters of the Labour Party or Communists, - though frequently critical of the reformism of the one & the authoritarianism of the other, - the New Left, and subsequently CND, while it never broke decisively from the Labour Party, did provide a semi-independent focus for organization, which permitted anarchist ideas to spread in the emergent New Left.

The birth of the NVDA movement

The changed climate of opinion that this created meant that the DAC, which would otherwise have been miniscule, gained considerable influence, and it in turn led to the formation of the Committee of 100. [I have discussed this at some length in "Serious Politics begin with the Bomb," & there is no need to

elaborate on it again.]

On a very small level, before the Committee was fully launched, there was the beginnings of an anarchist re-awakening; about half a dozen people joined the London Anarchist Group, at about the time of the Suez demos; one of whom - Peter Turner - started selling Freedom at Hyde Park, a couple of years later, & others occasionally sold at demos. Two of the younger LAG members who had been members before the time of Suez - Dave Bell & Bernard Miles - also became active in PYAG. Central London anarchist meetings had been resumed.

The off-centre anarchist meetings began to take on a more significant role, in particular Colin Ward's became a centre for propaganda; & after a time, he with the contacts so made launched the magazine "Anarchy". While in 59 PYAG, (the anarchist wing of the DAC,) (* 3) started to work with the SWF, jointly producing "How Labour Governed" (a critique of Labour which sold well with- in CND,) &, independently - though introduced by PYAG, - Tony Smythe & Bryan Bamford joined the SWF; while Joan & Bill Christopher, then in the ILP, but closely in contact with the Behan Left of the SLL, with other socialists, not previously linked to any group, such as Mike Callinan & John Gravelle also began joint work with syndicalists. On the strength of a number of new contacts, the SWF launched a small bi-monthly World Labour News, in 59.

Rows within the Trot SLL, which led four or five factions to leave between November 59 & June 60; brought into short-lived existence the Industrial Rank & File Movement, (more or less a rebirth of the League for Workers' Control, which had existed in the late 40s & very early 50s,) in which syndicalists, (LAG, SWF, PYAG & Common Wealth,) dissident Leninists, Solidarity & the Left of the ILP, were able to work together reasonably amicably. (The IR&FM adopted a black & red banner which was carried on the 1961 Aldermaston March, the first time that any contingent on

the March, other than PYAG, had identified itself as anarchist or anarchist-inclined.) Though the IR&FM didn't last, more or less the same groups reformed as the Industrial Sub-Committee of the Committee of 100.

The early Sixties - the alleged hi-jacking

We had then - in 1961 - a new larger direct actionist nuclear disarming group; a peace movement that owed its origins, in terms of its non-alignment, in terms of its insistence on unilateralism as against multilateralism, & in terms of its dependence on direct action to anarchist influence within the old Third Camp; but which, along the way, had picked up support as more & more radicals broke with one or other of the power blocks (NATO & the Warsaw Pact.)

That is not to say the C of 100 was, initially, anarchist; indeed its most influential founder, Ralph Schoenman, was Trotskyist, & had the wierdly vanguardist belief that it would be possible to bring the state to collapse by filling its gaols. [Though *Freedom* let it be known that thirty of the original 100 founders were in fact *Freedom* subscribers; they weren't necessarily the most radical thirty; *Freedom* itself decided that the Committee was too radical, publishing an editorial at the time of the 62 Aldermarch, saying that if the campaign & committee progressed as they were going this would split the Labour, & this would be no gain.]

We also had then a very small reborn anarchist movement which was already recruiting fairly rapidly but was only just beginning to become active, whether independently or as part of other movements. Most of the new recruits had been influenced by the same events that had brought people successively to the New Left, CND & the C of 100; had similarly reacted against the two power

blocks; (though perhaps at one remove, - people like Jack & Mary Stevenson, who then ran the LAG, had left the Bevanite Left of the Labour Party because it had failed to stand up to British imperialism; those like the founders of Solidarity had left the Trots because of their failure to make a real challenge to Stalinism; others like Bryan Behan, left the Trots out of a mixture of these reasons.) Anarchist activity was made more difficult because of the division between the SWF & Freedom, since this had emanated from a split in 1944, i.e. long before the younger 1960s generation of anarchists had heard of anarchism, we were mostly unwilling to take retrospective sides in the split; but as the organizations were divided we were forced to align with one or other.

1961 saw "Anarchy" launched & the IR&FM form the C of 100 Industrial Sub-Committee; it also saw the failure of Schoenman's "fill the gaols" policy, (many of the Committee's supporters were not prepared to risk more than one spell in gaol, others, hardly surprisingly, took it amiss when they emerged from prison only to find a letter from Schoenman, attacking them for failing to participate in the last few 100 actions, and asking if they had grown cowardly.) The numbers on Committee demos reached their peak in September 61, and then a large percentage of the support moved back to constitutional politics.

It was only then that those who remained in the Committee examined the political basis of their activity. The Committee (or committees, for at this time local committees were being set up,) declared, in a public statement, that though not all its members or supporters were anarchists, all agreed that anarchism was an essential component of committee thinking. Naturally many of those who had already left claimed, in effect, that the Committee had been hi-jacked by the anarchists; [indeed this claim was also made by one *Freedom*'s thirty subscribers, Herbert Read, who dropped out at this stage & publicly resigned a year or so later.]

There was pressure for anarchist unity in '62. Anarchists like Ken Hawkes & Tom Brown, who had initially been chary about work within the C of 100 became convinced, (largely by the number of people wanting to buy anarchist litt. at any 100 supporters' meeting.) The SWF brought out two pamphlets aimed at C of 100 audiences that year; (* 4) and anarchists who had not been around for years were beginning to reappear; probably first of these was Brian Hart, who had been active in the seamen's union struggles, but though in these he had encountered IR&FM leaflets had only contacted anarchists after the IR&FM had moved into the 100.

Brian & his wife, Margaret Hinde, for a year, more or less took on, (from Ken Hawkes, who until then had for years handled all the organizational work alone,) the running of the SWF, while they were also members of the LAG, so both organizations were able to grow, and to avoid too open conflict. Others who came back; Dave Pude, in 62, who wanted syndicalists to support immigration controls; Sean Gannon, in 63, only for a short time before joining an ultra-Paisley Ulster Unionist grouping; & Albert Meltzer in 64 (* 5) did not however contribute to unity.

If all this constituted a peace movement hi-jack of the anarchists, then I am afraid hi-jacks do not mean what I thought they meant.

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1. It is perhaps no accident that of the two people making the allegation: one, Nick Heath was in the late 60s a member of the ASA, a group which split away from the SWF in order to support the Vietnamese Stalinists; while the other, though so anti-stalinist, that in the Fifties he moved over to the Right, nevertheless, when he returned to anarchism, insisted (in a polemic, against the current author,) that though the Soviet Union was a despotism, "there was no class division" there "based on economic

differentials."

2. The three other editors were George Plume (Harper), "Alex" Alexander, & Joe Thomas. It was natural to assume at first, as George was at the time a Tory Party councillor for the Paddington area, that it had been his influence which caused the journal to eschew politics; *though it must be stressed that George was a very curious sort of Tory, he sold 12 copies of the ILP's paper, the "Socialist Leader" every week, (only 2 ILP members sold more,) & devoted one day a week to working voluntarily for Peace News.* However, at different times, all three denied that it had been George's influence that accounted for the lack of class theory or radicalism in the paper; & insisted that he, George, would have agreed, but that Albert was adamant.

This lack of political content in the paper was all the more remarkable as George had been, during the war, a member of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation; "Alex" was an active member of the ILP & Joe was from the 40s to the mid-60s an Oehlerite, (left-of-Trot Leninist,) becoming a Councillist in the late 60s.

3. Since the dreaded word "Pacifist" features in the name PYAG, - obviously the hi-jackers' organization - it is perhaps necessary to say that PYAG's commitment was to pacifist-action, i.e. war resistance & NVDA for social change, not necessarily a personal commitment to pacifism, amongst its activists were: Fran Edwards, née White, daughter of Capt. Sean White of Irish Citizen's Army fame, (Fran, like Ernie Bates, Jim Merry, Dave Bell & me, was not a personal pacifist;) Ollie Mahler, whose father Hillel had fought in the CNT Militias in Spain; & Liz Cores, of whose grandfather, George, Mr Meltzer has recently written a short biography.

4. There was not at first general agreement that one of these was worthwhile, so the first was a short duplicated one, called simply "Direct Action", which I wrote & Bill Christopher duplicated (only 200 or so copies,) for the '62 Aldermarch. It sold out, totally, on the first day of publication. Basically it served only to convince the rest of the group of the need for such a pamphlet. The second one "The Bomb, Direct Action & The State," was a cooperative effort, Tom Brown & I wrote the first draft; (I the first half, he the latter;) Brian & Margaret first, & then Maurice Bradley, rewrote these; & on three occasions there was general group discussion of the material.

5. Since this all stems from the allegation of hi-jacking it is perhaps worth recalling that when A.M. returned to anarchism, it was just after the AFB had been refounded, (after considerable resistance from older anarchists, on both sides, who were still bitter about the '44 split,) he attended the '64 Conference & - taking an ultra-libertarian line managed to convince the majority that it was bureaucratic & authoritarian to have a secretary (or a group exercising secretarial functions.)

He succeeded in convincing enough people, so that the federation resolved to dispense with all central organization. Immediately after the conference A.M. appointed himself & his employees the secretariat of the AFB, & wrote - as secretary of the AFB - to various international organizations denouncing them for being bureaucratic! [*They may well have been, but the allegation comes ill from such a source.*]

Though this was only one of the reasons why the 60s AFB was still-born; it is still unfair when those who share his quasi-vanguardist style of politics lay down theoretical criticisms of the AFB's foundation.

Frank Rowe

Frank Rowe died in the early part of March 1994. Though he was only briefly an anarchist, from 1949 to 53, (reverting to the Trotskyism from whence he came,) he took back to Leninism an honesty, (an hatred of political manipulation,) not frequently found amongst vanguardists.

He joined the Anarchist Federation after the collapse of the Revolutionary Community Party, becoming its secretary, which he remained when the AFB became the Syndicalist Workers' Federation. When however this was no longer able to continue publishing "Direct Action" (in the first manifestation of that paper,) he & two other former RCP members launched Socialist Current; known throughout the 50s-60s Left as the "Troika".

It has to be said that though they had been, in 1949, the most determined opponents of entrism, the Troika decided that the only viable tactics in the mid-50s for revolutionaries was to go into the Labour Party, & for half a dozen years they did this more wholeheartedly than any of their rival groups. But they differentiated themselves from these rivals by adopting a far higher degree of honesty in their dealings with people from other traditions with whom they might work, whether in industry, single issue campaigns or what.

The mid-50s, following the McCarthy era, had been a low point in terms of radical activity; the anarchist movement, the non-Leninist Left (ILP etc.,) & the Trots were all only just functioning, just surviving; it was understandable, however wrong, that people thought that the only place that it was possible to do socialist work was inside the Labour Party. However, after a few years, in which the New Left, CND, the Committee of 100, Squatters', the Homeless-Hostel struggles were all launched, & changed the face of British politics. Once again there was a growing revolutionary movement, & so, then, Socialist Current re-emerged from Labour &, while remaining dissident Trotskyist in theory,

in practise moved over to act as a fringe (East London) grouping of the anarchists.

This was totally consistent with their theory, since while they retained a residual belief in the workers' state, their conception of such a state bore no relation whatsoever to the objective of the other Trotskyist groups; while they still retained a residual belief in a party, & indeed argued that such a party was necessary for propaganda purposes, they endorsed the anarchist belief that in mass actions the propagandist groups should never usurp the role/leadership of the mass movements; & for these latter they advocated syndicalist or councillist organizational patterns.

One always knew where they stood, if they changed their minds on something, they immediately informed those with whom they were cooperating of this, and their reasons, so as to ensure that they did not leave others in the lurch.

The group was always more or less confined to the East End of London, had - under anarchist influence - in the late 60s & early 70s oriented itself chiefly to activism within its local area; particularly as this was one with desperate need to combat racialism, and so it was logical that in the late 70s as London's traditional industries declined (& also as Frank & his remaining comrades approached & reached their Sixties,) became more & more oriented to Claimants, (the unemployed, pensioners,) an orientation that blended easily with their former squatter & anti-racist activities.

However both the other original members of the Troika had abandoned the group, one leaving politics altogether, the other insisting on pro-Israel stance; and others who joined it later have all except for Frank's widow, Pauline, dropped out in one way or another.