The Accidental Making of an Anarchist

A memoir by

Laurens Otter

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Table of Contents

Editorial Preface

I have known Laurens Otter since the early 1970s. He had not long moved to Wellington, Shropshire with his wife and daughter. I lived in Wolverhampton and was grappling with my political direction after leaving the Communist Party and Young Communist League in 1968. I had found my way to anarchism, with which I have had an on-off, love-hate relation ever since. We both attended an evening course being run by Nigel Harris, an academic and member of the International Socialists researching the development of the New Left and its current direction. Since then, as I moved around the country, we kept in touch by letter and met occasionally.

It is entirely my fault for persuading Laurens Otter to put together his memoirs, as a result of seeing a copy of the letter that forms the first chapter. Laurens was reluctant. He was aware that, unless he was commenting 'off the top of his head', his prose had a tendency to infinite parenthesis and constant digression. He also suggested that he had never read a biography or autobiography that did not leave him less enamoured of the subject.

While re-typing what he wrote, I chose to edit Laurens's style only lightly, in order to preserve the idiosyncrasies of his grammar and expression. The style is part of the man. The content is as Laurens presented it, subject to my own checks and footnotes.

To begin with Laurens recalled what he had been told of his genealogical background. What Laurens was led to believe to be the truth, or what he felt it important to remember of it, influenced his outlook. Laurens came from a relatively prosperous, though occasionally cash-strapped, minor landed family that sometimes tended to espouse Liberal causes or attitudes. It was not exactly 'Bloomsbury' but had some of that character and an occasional direct association.

As a keen family historian I could not help but do some of my own investigation of the stories Laurens was told and discovered information that suggests some of these have crept into the realm of myth and mystery. Family history and memory are like that and long may it remain so, as it is part of humanity's complex understanding of itself. My researches appear in an appendix at the end of the book along with family trees.

It might well be asked as to why the memoirs of Laurens Otter should have any wider interest than his close family and friends. Laurens belongs to a generation who, though they did not know it at the time, laid the foundations for the New Left in the 1960s and beyond. Laurens was very much one of the activists from that generation - people who gave the movement its practical impetus. They created organisations, movements, and publications to which those of us

born after WW2 could turn as we worked out our response to the world around us. In particular, during the late 50s and early 60s their use of non-violent civil disobedience was an inspiration, even for those of us too timid to adopt these tactics.

The letter that begins this memoir corrects some published but erroneous information. In October 2011, former Royal Navy Commander Robert Green published a book about the murder of his aunt, Hilda Murrell in Shropshire on 21 March 1984[1]. Laurens Otter played a small role on the edge of these mysterious events, having had direct contact with Hilda shortly before her death, regarding evidence she was due to present to the Sizewell nuclear plant enquiry. He shared information about these contacts with Robert Green. The letter corrects misinterpretations of his background that Robert outlined in the book.

Chapter 2 covers the family background before moving into Chapter 3 and Laurens' early life, upbringing and emergence as a young man politicised by the clash between his own emerging system of values and events in the wider world. For Laurens, as for all of us, what follows can be attributed to the accidents of relationships and events we encounter in our lives and which shape our beliefs, our ideas and our own actions.

Occasionally in between chapters I have inserted 'Interludes' which attempt to deal with any complex issues of theory or fact that might otherwise interfere with the general narrative. These all derive from letters Laurens has sent to me.

The memoir finishes, apart from a postscript, in the early 1960s. During the time Laurens was writing he suffered from a number of serious health issues, but more tragically, his wife Celia had a relapse from a brain tumour towards the end of 2013 and died on 1 January 2014. Laurens was unable to continue the work, but it seems appropriate that the memoir ends when it does. He and Celia were embarking on their new life together and he was fully formed in his particular anarchism. Political circumstances would change dramatically in the mid-1960s in ways no-one could have predicted at the time. The memoir as it stands admirably sums up the culture on the Left that had been created since 1945 and that deserves to be revisited by today's networked dissident generation. They need to honour their forebears and learn from them.

Martin Bashforth, Norwich 2016

[1] Robert Green with Kate Dewes, *A Thorn in Their Side: The Hilda Murrell Murder*, Rata Books, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2011

Chapter 1: 'Another lot of pedantry!'

Letter to Rob Green, dated Friday, 7 October 2011, and copied to the editors of Peace News and to Tam Dalyell, MP:

Dear Rob

I am afraid another lot of pedantry! Where you've said things about my past (not things directly concerning Hilda) you have four major mistakes, all complimentary to me. These may allow critics to rubbish the book, saying that either I am a fantasist, or you haven't checked.

No doubt the corrections were in those labyrinthine pedantic digressions (whether verbal or written). I plead guilty to them and perhaps boring you to lack of concentration. No doubt the surveillance conditions you were working under prevented you from re-checking.

The order I take them may not be the critics' order of priority, it is mine, and I think it is the order they occur in the book. As I am only writing the day before the book release date (I've only had my copy four days, though I saw one on a Manchester Victoria station bookstall about a fortnight ago, September 16th). I will send copies to PN [*Peace News*] and Tam Dalyell in the hope that they will be able to answer any state apologists rubbishing the book.

1. I was never an editor of PN. I never even applied for a job there. I said when I met you I worked on PN. I was a voluntary worker, from Whit '58 to Whit '61, full time when not engaged on Direct Action Committee projects, or in prison following those projects. My work was mainly on the selling side, helping Harry Mister[2], when there was a particular activity going on round the country. I would be sent wherever it was, partly to sell, partly to talk (promote) and the editorial staff frequently would then ask for a report; I no doubt did a little occasional sub-editing, but not enough to qualify.

I had met Allen Skinner[3], then editor of PN, in '53, through Common Wealth and worked with him in the Third Camp Movement; *originally advocated by GDH Cole, but he dropped it and CW had taken over pushing it; Third Camp was an attempt to bring together libertarian socialists, dissident Marxists and pacifists in opposition to both NATO and the Warsaw Pact*; (when I had earlier seen PN, in the '40s,

[2] Harry Mister (1914-2006), early member of the Peace Pledge Union, helped found Peace News in 1936 and set up Housman's Bookshop in Caledonian Road, London, in 1945. He was business manager of Peace News and Housman's for many years.
[3] Allen Skinner stood as an ILP candidate in Clapham May 1929, was Peace News editor 1951-55, and wrote *No More War* in 1935.

Middleton Murry had abandoned pacifism[4] and was using PN to advocate pre-emptive war against Russia; so I didn't subscribe until I met Allen). Though a war-resister from the time of Hiroshima, I didn't regard myself as pacifist until 1959.

However

I had edited other papers (starting with a Guildford Young Liberal one, and then going on with much smaller ones I ran out of my own pocket, all of which were anti-militarist, before I worked with PN)

While there I worked with PYAG (pacifist youth action group, to which most of the editorial staff belonged) and we produced our own publications - mainly, but not exclusively, leaflets, which were able to say things which might have been thought too sectarian for the paper.

Since, I have edited or co-edited numerous war-resister papers, local or sectional.

2. I wasn't a founder member of the Committee of 100

However

My parents knew Gandhi in India - mother had first contacted him when she was in South Africa, she used to fast whenever he did and my elder brother and I (in my case from the age of 4) used to fast for a day or two whenever he began to fast.

I opposed Hiroshima. At the time my father was terminally ill, undergoing cancer surgery, but while he was convalescing and for the brief rest of his life (he died in '46) we formed the Guildford Committee against Nuclear Weapons, and campaigned on the issue. It was I believe the first specifically anti-nuclear body in the world. Dad resigned from the Tory Party over the issue, and many years after he died I found out that he'd been in Common Wealth, long before I joined. Mother, who had until then been the socialist and Gandhian influence on me, did not oppose Hiroshima; so there was political realignment in the family. Robin was at the time in command of a small minesweeper in the Pacific; indeed briefly he commanded a mini-flotilla, two minesweepers[5].

I didn't register as a Conscientious Objector in '48 (I'd been told inaccurately, I could only do so if I accepted the state's right to make war, and only pleaded that I personally should be exempt

[4] John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) was an unorthodox left wing thinker and writer who edited Peace News from 1940-46 but renounced pacifism in 1948 advocating a pre-emptive nuclear strike against Russia. He then became a Conservative.
[5] Robin was Laurens's older brother.

on conscientious grounds - the exact opposite of my position). I considered going to prison but didn't, at that age, have the courage to go through with that. I wasn't then fully a pacifist, when I so became I agreed with those pacifists who refused to register, on the grounds that that in a way concedes the state's right to make war.

I took part in civil disobedience, working with the organizers, in Dublin in 1952.

I joined the London-based Non-Violent Resistance Group (then called the Operation Gandhi) in 1953, though as I was living in Dublin at the time I was not active with it. I had then wanted to go with Mike Randle when he did his non-violent protest on the Hungary Border (against Soviet intervention) but unfortunately at the meeting that sent him, Allen and others I knew were not present; and those who were, not knowing me, weren't convinced I was sufficiently committed to NVDA[6].

When the NVRG became the Direct Action Committee - it organized the first Aldermaston March (for which I was a steward) and then pickets and sit-downs at Aldermaston and Pickenham (Swaffham). I took in all its actions in '58, a lot of us were imprisoned over Christmas. I took part in further DAC demos in '59 (only imprisoned on remand) then after Sharpeville there was spontaneous civil disobedience in Trafalgar Square. I was sentenced to ten weeks but Harry Mister paid the fine as he needed me that Easter. On May the 2nd, '60 I was part of a group imprisoned for six months (the first civil disobedients to get more than a fortnight in Britain) for sitting at Foulness AWRE[7]. The organizing Committee of the DAC thought we'd been too persistent in doing this, and while we were in prison sacked Will Warren who had organized the demo.

The day we came out of prison, the Government announced the establishment of the Polaris Base at Holy Loch, so some of us formed ourselves into Polaris Action, a new group, independent of both the DAC and the nascent C of 100.

So I was already in prison when the C of 100 was being formed and was up on Holy Loch when the news of its formation was released to the Press.

When in '62 the C of 100 grew beyond the initial committee, and local and sectional committees were formed, I was active for a time in the London industrial sub-committee, and also when Will Warren[8] launched an Oxford C of 100, I joined it, (I moved to the Witney area and worked at

[6] Non Violent Direct Action
[7] Atomic Weapons Research Establishment
[8] Will Warren was a friend of Laurens and worked at Oxfam at this time. See also page 46 for more about him.

OXFAM, soon after, and took over as Vice-Chair, and when Will was sent by Oxfam to East Anglia, I took over as Chair).

I moved back to London as Doug Kepper[9] was resigning as secretary of the London Committee (August '67). It was already falling apart and bankrupt, because of the disruption caused by people who wanted us to abandon a neutralist position and give unconditional support to the Vietcong. Perhaps unwisely I took on the secretaryship for its last three months.

Three Christian groups were by then involved in civil disobedience. The original Christian C of 100 had left it to become Christian Non-Violent Action; then Christians not involved in CNVA formed CHURCH as a new Christian C of 100 grouping, they published *Roadrunner*; and independently Carl Pinnel - tired of being told you cannot be a Christian and an anarchist - had contacted people who were both to form the Christian Anarchists, and when he moved out of London I took over as secretary and edited *Logos* its paper [the title of the journal used Greek orthography to distinguish it a more famous journal of the same name - ed.]. We collectively carried on the work that had been done by the C of 100.

3. I was not at Oxford; I was at Trinity College, Dublin, though I left this without a degree, and my degree is a London External. By then, as I explain below, Professor Walton had persuaded me to switch from chemistry to history.

As I say, I did not get to Oxford (I used sometimes - in '48 - to cycle from Guildford to see my elder brother and act as his lab assistant, and while there so-doing, I met Professor Bowen, his Tutor, then a few years before he got his Nobel Prize, who published some of my work; in order to distinguish me from Robin (I was criticizing Robin's thesis in the first) they were published as by Jean François, which are my first two Christian names.

I tried at the time of the post-war bulge, applying before and after my National Service (Oct '48 - May '50). University, my family college, refused me because they thought I was too conformist! Giles Allingham, the Junior Dean, told my brother that I lacked that element of anarchy which ought to characterize the University undergraduate. Since I was probably the only candidate who was also a subscriber to *Freedom* (the anarchist weekly) that hurt.

I spent a fortnight (late May or early June '50) going round the other colleges, even though I had a letter from Bowen asking for me to be let in, the best I got was an offer of a place in 1957.

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[9] Douglas Kepper was a Conscientious Objector during WW2 and writer of *Liberty, Equality and Radio-Activity* (1963). See *You, You and You! The People Out of Step with World War II*, by Pete Grafton.

However

A fortnight before that, while I was still on release leave from national service, I went with a friend to sit for a national scholarship to work at Harwell. He entered me, really to keep himself company while he took it; he was one of a large family called Milner. Henry the eldest was Chair of the Guildford Liberal Party, John and Mary were Secretary and Treasurer of the Young Liberals, Geoff (whom I first met) and I were on the YL committee; we were at Guildford Tech doing London Intermediate Science. Geoff went to Assam to plant tea in '48 and this younger brother joined the class after Geoff had gone, just before I was called up. I think his name was Edward.

He expected there to be a hard Physics paper and easier Maths and Chemistry ones, ideal for him (a too easy paper in a strong subject can lead to carelessness) and bad for me. I didn't know until we were on the train, on the way there, that he hadn't a hope of getting through, he'd entered us for an exam at a level way above our level. When we arrived we found that most of the candidates (there were I would think nearly 100 of us) were graduates; that there were two candidates who everyone assumed would win (now both household names) one of whom, an Oxford starred First, more or less paraded round we lesser mortals, *like a monarch going before courtiers* before the start. His rival a child genius 8 years old was even then in a wheelchair; and as I had just been an army medic and wasn't considered a serious candidate, I pushed him for the first three exams[10].

We were in one big room sitting the exams and from the second paper - though I (alone of the contestants) didn't [know] this - in another there were a battery of Oxford dons marking the papers; so after the end of the second paper, the results went up on a notice board, my patient asked to be wheeled to see these, then soon "we can go", I said "Hang on, I haven't found my results yet". I'd started from the bottom, he pointed to my name in the top group. I assume the examiners thought I was cheating, cribbing from him, because they separated me from him after the third paper, and for the fourth I had my own special invigilator standing just behind me; he stood so close it put me off and I had to tear up the first sheet of my paper and start again; that was the second Maths paper and it was then that I pulled ahead of the field; when the final results were scaled the two favourites were given 99% and I 99%+. *There is often in a Maths paper a*

[10] I have tried to confirm whether or not this child was in fact Hawking as Laurens adamantly believes, without success. I have made unsuccessful requests with one of the more recent official biographers. The closest I can come to is a reference in one biography to periodic childhood bouts of what was thought to be some form of glandular fever. This particular one must have been immediately before the Hawking family went to stay with the Graves family in Majorca.

trick question where there are two possible correct answers, in the papers there, there were two such, none of us saw it the first time round, but I did a double-take and realized I had dropped a mark, it was obvious the others hadn't seen it and so I avoided dropping any more.

However they then told me that the job would entail working at Aldermaston and Robin had told me that that was where they were making nuclear weapons; so I had to refuse the scholarship, and the two favourites went through after all. I went to TCD[11], where I met Prof Walton, a pacifist whose work intended for nuclear power had been used for nuclear weapons and he persuaded me to give up being a scientist and so I switched to History, about which I then knew nothing. Just over a year later I had to come back from Dublin to pick something up in Oxford and briefly and accidentally ran into 'my patient'. An official from the Nuclear Police visited me in Dublin to tell me that unless I was prepared to go back to work for them, I must never meet - however accidentally - 'my patient' again. If I did he would be considered a security risk and killed.

4. You say that I worked in Military Intelligence during the war: I was never in Intelligence and in fact I was only 15 when war ended. My brother after leaving Oxford (1949) trained for MI6 and the official story is that he was considered unsuitable and transferred to the Colonial Service, but they pulled considerable strings to get him into the latter, breaking Colonial Service rules in so doing, and then during the Mau Mau outbreak gave him a job well above his official rank, so I suspect he still had MI6 connections[12].

I did try for I Corps when I was in the Army, a squad of about 20 of us put in for it, which meant a week's diversion in our training. One of the squad already had his doctorate and he spoke two languages, another spoke five languages - including Russian and Turkish - there were several other graduates; academically I was bottom but one, I'd just got back from an extended stay in France so I had relearned my first language, French (at which I had been singularly bad at school) and had Matric., and there was one bod with no School Cert. (with Matric or otherwise) and no foreign languages; needless to say the only person accepted was the one at the bottom.

However

After training I was sent to Germany, got myself down-graded to become an unit Medic. *Army rules were that filling in the same form all day and every day was a 'skilled' job, being in charge of a Medical centre for 8,000 troops, their wives and families and responsible for an ambulance run extending thirteen miles*

[11] Trinity College, Dublin
[12] See additional note at the end of this chapter.

into Hamburg and the same distance to the Russian sector border was supposedly unskilled. Certainly I was never given any training and had to learn on the job.

There was a room at the Medical Inspection Room that was always kept locked & eventually when I took over, I was told that when the war ended all the morphine supplies for the BAOR[13] had been deposited there, and that, in a sense, I was in charge of these. I used to go down to the Opera in Hamburg a couple of times a week, and I was somewhat surprised the next time and thereafter when I was approached by people asking if I had drugs for sale. It took me about three times before it clicked and then when I went back to base I checked the lock and saw it had been picked.

I called in the SIB[14] and learned that a number of SAS, former 8th Army men had contacted German criminals and they were known to be dealing in drugs. If you start thinking of Graham Greene's *Third Man*, it was a lot more violent than the film of that. The SIB wanted me to carry a gun which would have been contrary to the Geneva Convention (and I'd already had a battle with the army over my refusal to allow guns in the MI Room). All quite apart from the fact that my eyes are wonky and I'm a lousy shot. They compromised and I was given an intensive unarmed combat course, at which more to my surprise than anyone else's I turned out to be rather good. Don't ask the obvious question: to answer 'yes' would be a breach of official secrets, and 'no' would be an arrant lie: if we say 'no comment' three times…

I don't know that it is relevant to anything, but as people are going to be asking all sorts of questions, it may be worth adding. While I was there - both before and after taking over - periodically an Eighth Army veteran suffering what would now be called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, in those days shellshock, would break down in the NAAFI, often he would shoot or bayonet someone, usually his best friend, then stand over his victim, defying anyone else to intervene.

As I was successful the first time I tried, it used generally to be my job to go and sort it out and rescue the victim. When the Guard Duty officer had nothing else to report, I'd get a mention, when the Adjutant making his report to Hamburg ditto ditto, when Hamburg ditto, I was mentioned in despatches and so every so often I got a gong. Once the victim had been an SSM - they didn't normally use the NAAFI, they had a separate sergeants' mess, but he was seeing someone - the SSM[15] was a friend of the Brig's, so I was recommended for a VC, didn't of

[13] British Army on the Rhine
[14] Special Investigation Branch
[15] Staff Sergeant Major

course get it, the army in those days didn't recognize 'friendly fire', the Adjutant was quite upset. Naturally - as I was only in the army because I hadn't the courage to go to prison - I never collected the gongs. I would have been tempted if I'd got the VC; it would have been very useful when speaking on pacifist platforms.

Best, Laurens

P.S. The most important minor error is the account of the 'phone call you made to me when you first heard of me, and the typewritten account of my record of your aunt's phone call that I gave you after we met; in fact the typewritten account was written for the police when they came. I then sent Tam Dalyell[16] a copy and a third for Tam to forward to Judith Cook. She sent it (or a photocopy) on to you, and you first rang me having read it. I later - having sent all my copies out and not therefore being able to refer to it - wrote (as a test of my memory) a rather longer (original 3 pages foolscap, the latter one four pages A4) version which you and Don checked against the original. L. O.

[16] Sir Thomas Dalyell of Binns, born 1832, was a prominent back bench Labour MP from 1862-2005.

Interlude: Laurens and MI6

A week after I sat the Harwell exam, my brother Robin had to go on a weekend course, (I think in Oxford, but can't be certain). It was part of his MI6 training, so his bosses there must have known he was not at home. It seemed strange, even at the time, but more so in retrospect, therefore, that Sir Roger Hollis[17] (Robin was on the Central Asian desk and therefore was a trainee under Sir Roger) suddenly arrived at our house looking for him. West Horsley was six miles from Guildford and a mile and a half from Horsley Station; petrol was then still rationed and people didn't normally turn up by car from London. Equally, heads of department don't normally make such efforts to see their trainees at weekends.

After Mother had said Robin was away, I interjected 'You must have sent him' and he replied 'How did I forget that?' or it may have been 'How did my secretary forget that?' He then said he wanted to talk to me. When Mother had left us, he said he'd heard I was a bit of a socialist, which he said was fair enough, and he was sure that that wouldn't stop me from doing some work for them'. I could think of it, if I liked, as helping my brother, he suggested, adding that he didn't want me to do too much, just let him know occasionally of meetings I had been to and who had been there.

When I refused, the tone changed. "I wasn't to imagine that socialism would ever succeed. I had better know that they already had contacts in all the groups I was likely to come across." He didn't explain why, in that light, they'd need my input. He also suggested that these contacts would put the word out that I was an informer, and so on. Though this was the first time I'd met that from a secret state official, I'd been through private education and the army and was used to bullies. However, it didn't end there. When, a year and a bit later, Mother summoned me back from France to say I'd got a place at Trinity College, Dublin, I was intercepted by a messenger to say they could ensure that Trinity didn't give me a degree.

Four times while in Ireland I identified MI6 people who came to ask me if I'd changed my mind. This was aggravated by the Nuclear Police, a body of which I had not previously heard. In my first term in Dublin, I'd had to come back to England to visit Oxford and purely by chance I briefly met 'Étienne' (whose wheel chair I had pushed around at the Harwell exam). A week later an enormous policeman arrived at my digs in Dublin, saying he was from the Nuclear Police and that, as I wasn't prepared to work for the nuclear industry I was listed as subversive and a danger to the State.

[17] Sir Roger Hollis (1905-1973) joined MI5 around 1938 for counter-subversion work and was deputy director general 1953-56 and director general 1956-1965.

I was then told that, if there was any association in future, however accidental and brief, between me and Étienne, he would also be so regarded. I should consider the fact that, while I was an adult who'd been in the Army and had training in unarmed combat and therefore might be able to survive if they tried to eliminate me, Étienne was (however brilliant) in contrast a child, and one with medical problems that already confined him to a wheelchair. It would only need the withdrawal of care to dispose of him. He reappeared twice to threaten me while I was at TCD and then, when I was actually fasting in Norwich prison as a result of the first Pickenham sit-down, he visited me in my cell saying, 'Well, we've let you make your protest and live, you've eased your conscience, we're going to get tough if you don't come back to us now.'

Just in case this wasn't enough, there were two visits in Dublin by people saying they'd been sent by Tom Driberg. One started by ostensibly trying to recruit me for Russian Intelligence and then said it was really for the British. The other reversed the order. When I told someone once about this he asked which was it really, to which the only reply I could give was 'How the hell should I know?'

It wasn't only threats. In my first term at TCD, Professor Moody, the head of department, was heard by a large number of my contemporaries saying that, as a Marxist, I would not be allowed to get a History degree from TCD. Curiously, or perhaps not, no such statement was made about Communist Party members doing the same course (Rachel Bush was in my year and Paul O'Aregras (?) whom she later married was in the year above us). A year later, Freddy Lyons, who was later to become Provost (Trinity's equivalent of Chancellor in other universities), warned me that my tutor had declared in the Senior Common Room that he would prevent me getting my degree.

This happened in a University in a country that had no great love for the British State or British Intelligence, and I didn't have a grant. It would probably be rather worse for someone such as the child of immigrants at a college in London today[18]. There were other indications for me of hostile interference. I know when I left college and came back to England that potential employers were informed I was subversive. I am sure things would have been magnified for someone in a more vulnerable position. If you push people to the limit, the odds are that they will eventually crack.

[18] Laurens was referring to the case of Michael Adebalajo, who was convicted of murdering soldier Lee Rigby in May 2013, and who had allegedly been approached by spooks while in Kenya trying to get to Somalia for jihadi training.

Not to be out-persisted by the Nuclear Police, the last time someone from MI6 visited and tried to recruit me was in 1963 or 1964 at a time when I had succeeded Will as Chair of the Oxford C100[19].

[From a letter to the editor dated 28 May 2013]

[19] Committee of 100

Chapter 2: The Otter Descendancy[20]

Paternal Ancestry

Father's Father's father : Francis Otter. The family home was a village beginning with C, more or less where Notts and Lincoln counties meet Yorkshire. I've never been there (and don't even remember the name. It could have been Clayworth[21], whose position on the map seems to fit Jinx's report) and I am pretty sure Robin hasn't; but my cousin Jinx (Jennifer) travelled there about six years ago to look at the family origins. Besides being a North-East Midlands land owner (with coal under the land), he manufactured brass or bronze, I think in Leicestershire, but am not certain.

Father's Father's Mother - came from an Highland Scots family, far more aristocratic than the Otters, I think she was a South, but as she was closely related to a North, I get confused. Somewhere on that side we are related to Quinns and Grahams. We have a silhouette picture of her in the same style used for an image of one of the Abraham Darby wives in the Coalbrookdale Museum.

Grandfather [Robert Henry Otter] was born about 1832/3, died in 1912. He was the sixth son. Two of his elder brothers were Indian Army generals, one an admiral, usually stationed in India. The other was John, but I am not clear which of two John Otters known in family history. One was a priest (I've got his copy of the apocrypha). The other was for some time an MP for Louth and was succeeded by a Wintringham, whose son Tom was quite a well-known socialist in the Thirties, I'll return to him. I am not certain but think the Otters and Wintringhams were somehow related. In those days the eldest son was expected to inherit half, the next a quarter … so grandfather was due for ½ to the power of 6, and had expectations as a comparative pauper. I presume this was why he went to Brazenose rather than University College. Family tradition had it that there had been an Otter at University College in every generation since the 14th Century. Neither of my nephews or niece went so it's probably now broken.

He must have been in youth on the radical edge of Liberalism, as he later followed Joe Chamberlain out of the Liberals. He was a solicitor in Bristol until his fifties, when various aunts died and left him money. He gave up the firm in Bristol and took some part - possibly as a consultant - in a firm Tatham, Otter and Tatham (which later merged into Church, Adams and

[20] See Editor's Appendix p 169ff. This chapter is as Laurens wrote it. The appendix reviews the details and assesses the stories Laurens was told.
[21] It was Clayworth.

Tatham) in London. He bought Potter's Park in Ottershaw and renamed it Queenwood, not wishing to be 'Otter of Potter's Park, Ottershaw'. In fact the area he bought covered much of what is now Woking, the Horticultural Centre at Wisley (strictly speaking, at least in Dad's day, Wisley Pool still belonged to the family, though we made no claims to it), the 'New Zealand' Golf Club (Dad was an honorary member though he didn't play and didn't use it), what became Braziers Park Hospital and Ottershaw Park School. Most of this had once been common land and had been enclosed. In order to give some in Ottershaw back to the community it was registered as parish land. When I was a child in nearby Horsley in the 1940s, I remember next door to each other in Ottershaw was a Liberal and Tory Working Men's Club, both endowed by him, one before Joe Chamberlain left the Liberals, and the other after.

Father's Mother's Father - Sir James Gamble, he was the Royal Doctor (the one who boobed spectacularly in the Lady Flora Hastings affair[22]). He cut my grandmother [Isabella] off from the family without the proverbial shilling. She was one of the first six girls wanting to go to Girton. He decided that the only possible reason for taking young women to an University (though at that stage the college was to be at Hitchin anyway) was as a brothel. She had to raise the money elsewhere - in fact, a loan from her elder brother, Sykes Gamble. Sykes Gamble was a naval Commodore who retired early to become Curator at Kew and also built up large show gardens at Liss. I believe Mark Sykes (he of Sykes-Picot, whose work caused so much subsequent trouble) was some sort of cousin.

When Isabella finished Girton she became a governess working for Edward Lear, which is how she met my grandfather (the Otters and Lears were related). She went up a term late but was allowed to miss the term and keep the year, so she doesn't figure in the picture of the five founding students, though Girton has other records of her.

I only learnt that her father James Gamble was the Royal Doctor after Celia and I moved to Shropshire. We were told this in 1971 by an Official IRA contact who, like the Gambles, came from Derry. Indeed, a commander of the Derry UDA, called Gamble, was a distant cousin of mine and they had been exchanging fire earlier that week.

[22] Lady Flora Hastings (1806-1839) was at the court of Queen Victoria when she came to the throne, but was involved in a liaison with the Duke of Kent and one John Conroy. The Queen kept her well separated and, when it was suspected that Lady Flora was pregnant, had her examined by the royal doctor, the principal of whom was then Sir James Clark. At first she refused examination, but given the constant rumours finally assented and was discovered to have an advanced tumour from which she subsequently died. Conroy tried to stir up hostility to the Queen. Dr Gamble was one of the medical team at the Palace. Note that, although referred to in the family as 'Sir James Gamble' he is listed in official sources as Harpur Gamble. [ed.]

Gwen Otter, my grandfather's eldest brother's daughter (always incorrectly referred to as great aunt Gwen) was on the fringes of the Bloomsbury Group, though I think her only published work was a now long forgotten essay on Helen Macfarlane[23]. She knew Emma Goldman and Ethel Mannin, and from 1936 to 1939 gave the latter £10,000 a month (recte £30,000 a quarter) for SIA[24] the money for the Syndicalists trust; and a similar amount to fund Emma's sponsored schemes in Britain. (In the Sixties Spanish CNT friends were fairly certain that most of the money never arrived.) I only once ever met her and she was then far too drunk to talk to, so I never had a chat with my related comrade.

Father's mother's mother - Isabella Gamble (née Sykes) was a southern Irish poet and painter on the fringe of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Grandmother - Isabella Otter (née Gamble) also painted and having been part of the Lear household was known in literary circles, even though her father was able - as long as he lived - to have her banned from 'polite company'. Rather shockingly neither of my aunts went to university, so her youthful pioneering insistence on women's right to education didn't last, though the fact that she was about twenty years younger than my grandfather may have had something to do with this. Alternatively, maybe my grandmother's insistence on going to university applied only to herself and not to her daughters or the female sex in general. Both my aunts, Janet and Margaret were taught at home by a governess who was paid less than the chef (it was a household renowned for the food). Both aunts were members of the generation that saw fiancés killed in the Great War and were left spinsters as a result; Margaret was a nurse through the war.

As Dad worked in South Africa and India in the 1920s and his brother was a Judge in Rangoon in the 1930s, both aunts came and went on extended visits, (what was derisively known as the fishing fleet - middle class English women, whose potential husbands had been killed, looking to meet unmarried ditto men). Janet had quite a brain and had she gone to university would probably have had a career. As it was she won bee-keeping and horticultural awards, lived in a nice little Surrey woodland, but I think regretted that her talents had never been used. Margaret did marry in Burma: her husband Thomas was a timber-buying agent for the Bibby shipping line.

[23] The information about this item of writing comes from Laurens's father, who seems to have held the view that Helen Macfarlane was somehow related. The most obvious link would have been to Helen Fisher, the second wife of Francis Otter, whose date of birth coincides. Research into Macfarlane's life renders this conclusion most unlikely, though Laurens's father enjoyed the works of a Christian Socialist writer in the 1930s who used the name Henry Morton, which was Macfarlane's pseudonym. Gwen Otter was definitely involved with the Bloomsburyites, holding court in Chelsea for the likes of Katherine Mansfield and Aleister Crowley. Laurens's uncle told him that visiting her home involved encountering people constantly trying to borrow money.

[24] Syndicalist International Aid was a somewhat secretive enterprise to get aid to the CNT in Spain.

His father had been a well-known Fabian and he'd reacted against him to be Tory. He ran away from school as a child and painted backdrops for the Folies Bergères. When he was 16 (giving his age as 18) he was one of the founders of the Flying Corps, as the air force was then known.

Grandmother's cousin was married to St Loe Strachey, so John Strachey the soi-disant Marxist Labour MP was a second cousin of my father's, as (more significantly) was the architect William Clough-Ellis. The latter was in the Independent Labour Party, and if you went to Portmeirion as late as the 1970s, there were leaflets saying that the original idea for Portmeirion was to provide a job that would have justified Bordiga coming to Britain to escape fascism[25] (4).

There were two sons and two daughters. There was a considerable gap between my uncle and my father and then the two girls followed at two year intervals. Whether this meant there was a still born child between or whether the difference was that grandfather had inherited the extra money in between Robert (Bobby) and Dad, I don't know.

Bobby was the Judge Advocate responsible for drawing up the Treaty that partitioned Ireland. Because of the Gamble connections he had originally tried to refuse the job, thinking it unethical to take it. He did insist on a clause which got forgotten after he died, that the partition should only last for fifty years and that then there should either be a county-by-county poll or a national referendum, to decide whether it should continue.

Dad, Francis Lewis (born 1886) was, until half-way through Harrow, chiefly remarkable for success in Classics. He already had his Oxford entrance fixed, was ill for a time and was sent by doctors to Lausanne for a year. He came back more interested in Maths, so, though for form's sake he took a Classics year and final exams at Oxford as well as Maths ones, he didn't regard the Classics qualifications as important. He then took Law, Physics and Engineering degrees in London (I am not certain whether he'd finished these before going into the army in 1912) and joined Messrs Merz and McLellan who were consultant engineers.

By 1912, war was in the offing and my grandfather asked both Bobby and Dad to sign up as reserve officers in the London Rifle Brigade. Dad was invalided out during the war, then joined one of the Light Infantry battalions under the name Lewis Gamble (I don't know which. He told me but I was only 11 at the time. It wasn't either the Durham or the Yorkshire ones, in both of which he had cousins who'd have known he shouldn't be re-joining). He was invalided out again

[25] Bordiga, the founder of the Italian Communist Party, was a left Luxemburgist who, though he didn't side with the KAPD, was nevertheless deemed too leftist by Lenin and Trotsky and so excluded from the party leadership in 1921, finally breaking away to form the Italian International Communist Party in 1929.

and joined the Royal Engineers, using the name of a family property in the Yorkshire Moors, so he rose to be a Major three times, got three MCs (not an MC and two bars) and was invalided out three times.

He then trained with Merz and went to South Africa to assist C. H. Liddell in electrifying the Natal Railways. On the ship going out he was travelling with another engineer (a civil one not a fellow electrical one) and also on the ship were Doris Trevelyan (who was going to be a Matron at Roedean, South Africa) and my mother (who had a contract to be head of French). The Otters and the Trevelyans knew each other and there was some expectation that Dad and Doris might get engaged on the ship. Sometime later the Trevelyans rang to say that Francis had popped the question and were somewhat put out to hear that it was not Francis who'd so done but his friend. Dad and mother got together playing gooseberry for the rest of the journey. Dad considered taking South African nationality and my brother was registered as South African. However, though he was a Tory, he opposed racism and had assumed that segregation would be lessened. When a law came in banning blacks from driving trains, he saw it was going the other way and left.

He began the electrification of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, inter alia building Delhi End Power Station, which was at the time the largest in the world. Battersea is an exact copy of the Delhi power station, its designer having asked Dad if he might use his design plans and did. Due to the difference in climate, Dad advised him that he'd need to make it very slightly larger, which he did. When his contract with the GIPR ended, the Ramsay MacDonald Labour government was in power and (until the May Report) it was assumed that the British Railways would be nationalised and electrified. Dad was head-hunted for the job and supplied a plan to build a square-mile marine hydro-electric scheme at Southampton, which has four tides a day and would have provided enough electricity to run the pre-Beeching railway system. The plans presumably went into government files.

When the Slump came, Merz and McLellan retired and the firm was taken over by a new generation, including C. H. Liddell's younger brother, who made all their elders (who had lost time serving through the war) redundant. Dad eventually took a job as head of the Central Electricity Board's Legal department, and eventually, during the War, Secretary to the Board, but he always missed being an hands-on engineer. He did design a nuclear power station but, seeing the link to nuclear weaponry, burned his plans. There were in his diaries sufficient details that the plans could have been resurrected. I only had a glimpse of these before Robin came back from the Pacific and, insisting that Dad's diaries were private, destroyed them.

There is a very unpleasant famous legal case (Otter v Tatham) in which the Judge in an obiter dictum alleged that my father, in league with the family solicitor (who had been grandfather's junior partner), abused his trust as Executor of my Uncle Robert's will so as to misappropriate money, after my cousin Michael had died. If the misappropriation had happened it would have been eighteen months after my father died, so presumably the Judge was talking about a ghost. Michael's age was altered [in the case]. He had been shot down just after his 20th birthday. He was posthumously transferred from the air force to the navy and my brother's war record accredited to him. To understand the case, it is necessary to know more about Uncle Robert's back story.

Bobby, while still in the army, married (a little before my parents did) an actress called Joan Swinstead (one of Noel Coward's group). She had been the first person to act Mrs Warren in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, though as the Lord Chamberlain had banned it, that was in a theatre club. She also acted opposite Paul Robeson in C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins*.

After the First World War, Bobby stayed in the army as a judge advocate. When he finally came out years later, he was no longer remembered as a barrister. It's common for barristers to say they don't earn enough to pay their essential laundry bills. In Bobby's case it was true, though he'd had a fair amount of money inherited from his uncles and so had had more money than his father when the latter died. Grandfather had been something of an authority on brewery law, so Bobby rewrote grandfather's book, and on the strength of that got a number of briefs where breweries had to defend their rights against council closures. Tatham passed him as many cases as he could, but Bobby, who was by then going deaf, was in some short term difficulty.

Grandmother had been left the family home at Queenwood while she lived, and this was costing £20,000 a year to maintain (which then was a lot of money). Bobby, since the family had a large house within easy reach of London, was entertaining lavishly in the hope that this would get him briefs. My father and both aunts contributed to the upkeep of Queenwood, but as in the 1920s my father was earning and Bobby and the sisters weren't, Dad paid much more than his share and Bobby felt a need to repay. Some money was put in trust for Robin's and my Marlborough fees and there was a codicil to Bobby's will passing money from a distant aunt to Dad.

Bobby eventually became a judge in Rangoon and died in a riding accident in the late 1930s. His son Michael was the residual heir, though not until he was 21, and Aunt Joan had a life interest in half and, until Michael was 21, complete interest. At about the same time my father had the first of a series of cancer operations and a colostomy. Then, in the 1940s, when Michael went

into the air force (and he and Robin were both sent to Oxford for six months on service officers' short courses), Aunt Joan was not prepared to let him have an allowance to supplement his officer cadet pay. About this time Tatham came across the codicil to Bobby's will, which said that some of the money which had been paid to Joan shouldn't have been and should have gone to Dad. Tatham and Dad arranged it that it should be paid over to Michael, until he was 21.

Michael was shot down and listed as missing late in 1944. He'd been in South Africa for his birthday and must have had his posting just before, as the news of his death came before his thank you letter for his birthday presents. He was still listed as missing in July 1947 when I left Marlborough and for some months thereafter. Dad had died in June 1946.

Dad was a Tory until Hiroshima, though perhaps an unusual Tory. He had left South Africa when he found out that the racial situation was actually getting worse, he had until then assumed it would gradually improve. He had been interested in the foundation of Common Wealth [CW], no doubt partly because of Tom Wintringham, with whom he had remained in contact while Tom was launching the Local Defence Volunteers, but also because he was an admirer of Bishop Bell and had been in touch with Father Donald Manners who, with Mervyn Stockwood, had formed one of the groups that merged into CW. Also he had been told to retire temporarily in 1941 and to convalesce on a farm, and he rented a cottage on Exmoor from Acland, working on one of his farms. Then, after he died, when I joined the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party, I found out that for years the chap who managed his office for him was an RCP member, and, regularly, when the RCP needed to publish something and couldn't afford the printing, Dad had paid. He was having the last of his cancer operations when Hiroshima happened, so I didn't see him until I came back from school the following Christmas, by which time he'd resigned from the Tories and we formed the Guildford Committee against Nuclear Weapons, which I believe to have been the first specifically anti-nuclear weapons grouping anywhere. It wasn't until the mid-1960s that I learned that he had joined the remnant of Common Wealth, after the Wintringham, Acland and Stockwood factions had left and at a time when the remnant was exploring the possibility of merger with the remnants of the ILP and the Anarchist Federation.

Maternal Ancestry

[It needs to be said that my mother, from whom most of this information derives, was never a reliable witness, and much of the information would benefit from corroboration.]

Mother's Father's Father: John Stephens, born 1786, was the son of a farm labourer. He, his twin brother and five younger siblings were left orphaned at a very young age[26] (5). He had a pony and would take packages for local farmers, from which he built up a carting business. They came from Imber, south west of Devizes, between West Lavington and Warminster. His twin brother, James, was transported to Australia. I don't know why, possibly just poaching, possibly some of the packages were smuggled and he took the rap, but possibly involvement in the Captain Swing movement. He came back after completing his sentence and became involved with other leftism, though whether with the English Jacobins or the Chartists, I don't know. He went to Ireland, presumably to follow his namesake, as he is reputed to have been hanged as a rebel in Wicklow. All this was told to me by a Tory aunt, who thought it disgraceful and passed over it as quickly as possible.

The most important commodity to be carried was coal from the Mendip pits round Radstock and Midsomer Norton and Stephens would have taken this to Warminster for sale. In the process he met with the woman who was to be his wife. Notwithstanding this legitimate trade, the Stephens, like many Wiltshire families, claimed to be the original 'moonrakers'. The story, for the most part translated out of moonraker dialect, goes something to the effect that:

> *Great-grandfather and his brothers had landed a barrel or two of brandy, some wine and a few other things at Weymouth. They had successfully got it up as far as the Zeals/Mere area when they were warned that the excisemen were out in the Deverills, the road through the villages being in those days a major road. They decided to swing east away from the Deverill Road and cross Salisbury Plain by the old Roman Road that had been used by King Alfred to attack the Danes in early medieval times. This would have added several miles to their journey over rough ground. They were up the top when they saw the excisemen, so they dropped the stuff into a dew pond. A couple of nights later they went back to fetch their contraband when the excisemen caught them by surprise. When asked what they were doing they pointed to the reflection of the moon in the dew pond: "E'm be fishing for thiccy-thar cheese, zno". The excisemen departed laughing their heads off at the foolish simplicity of these yokels, while the 'yokels' had a similar laugh at the idiocy of the gentry.*

[26] The 'he' in this sentence refers to the father of John Stephens, namely Tom Stephens, referred to later.

Mother's Father's Mother was thirty years younger than her husband. She had twenty-five children, of whom grandfather was the eighteenth. He was always known as 'young George' even by people who were younger than him, so I presume there was an older brother called George who had died in infancy. She was tiny - less than 5 feet tall. Far from being an example of an oppressed woman, she was the one who had proposed. Neither great-grandfather nor any of her sons ever sat down in her presence without being told by her to do so. Her maiden name was Collett. I've no idea what her Christian name was and I wouldn't be surprised if even her children didn't know. Certainly no-one would have ever used it, I presume with the exception of her husband. Her father was a miner in the Mendips (they found coal fairly late there and recruited from elsewhere) but came originally from the Forest of Dean. There, as in the Wrekin, miners had been squatters during the Wars of the Roses, when feudal authority broke down to allow squatting, and in the Forest of Dean, like the Cornish stanneries, they even had the status of free foresters and a minimal democratic structure. By the time she and Stephens married, he had built from being a sort of horseback postman to having a small carting business and had moved from Imber to Warminster.

The business flourished, passing to the child of a divorced wife of one of my grandfather's elder brothers called Will Pickford. The story is complex. Tom Stephens's wife was a Pickford and had a lover. Tom caught them and was about to hit him with a poker, when it got caught in something (mother said a lampshade, but I don't think they existed at that time). Tom turned up on grandfather's door saying, 'but for the grace of God I stand before you a murderer'. He left Warminster and went to California on the Gold Rush, didn't make it there and moved to Australia in pursuit of more gold discoveries. By then he knew enough to start a chain of food stores to provide for the prospectors, made money and gambled it away. He is believed to have died in the West Indies and mother, when in the Scottish Women's Hospitals in Salonika during the First World War, met another Helen Stephens from the West Indies, half-black, who looked remarkably like her. Tom's wife's child (known to the family as Will Pickford but possibly legally a Stephens) was adopted by James Stephens, grandfather's eldest brother, from whom he inherited the business.

I'll take **Mother's Mother's Mother** out of name order. A woman, presumably her mother, unable to speak neither English nor any language the local people understood, arrived in Warminster with two little girls, presumably sisters and died almost immediately thereafter. (According to another, less likely, version of the story, she knew enough Latin to converse with the local vicar and told him she was a nurse and had been told by the parents to come to

Warminster and wait. Presumably in that version Warminster was mistaken for Westminster, but that conflicts with the judgement of the Vicar's wife). When she died (by the then rules, 'on the parish') the Vicar's wife decided she was an Austrian Jewess (which may well tell more about the Vicar's wife's knowledge of political geography than it does about the woman and her two children). The little girls were split up, never saw each other again, foster mothers who had lost their own babies being found. My great grandmother's was with a family called Carter, who had links with Stroud as well as Warminster.

Though I doubt if my grandmother ever entered a 'shul', and she certainly didn't keep the Jewish diet, she used to say she was Jewish - probably as an useful excuse for never going to Church. Mother on the other hand never accepted the Jewish origin. She claimed that there had been expensive linen with a crest and that her grandmother was the child of a family that had been on the wrong side in the Italian Risorgimento. Curiously, despite her insistence that she was not Jewish, and her militant atheism, she was very insistent on the Leviticus diet, but on the grounds that it was the most healthy diet. Also since God was a 'mere male' and therefore must have got things wrong, she added a few prohibitions of her own.

There were elder Carter children, crops failed and the Carter parents went broke. The children would have gone to the workhouse, so the father agreed that he should sell great-grandmother to a friend, for enough money that they could give to the children for them to survive. The father went to sea (the normal route out for bankrupt Wessex peasants). Because great-grandmother was not actually related to the boys in the family, her living there without the parents was thought scandalous and the only way round it was for her to marry her foster brother. Neither of them knew the facts of life and the oldest child was drowned by being born into the loo.

Grandfather (George Stephens) had run away from Wiltshire and made a little money in the hotel trade. He originally worked in Leicester, moved to Norwich briefly, then Derby and perhaps Sheffield before ending up in Manchester. The manager there was an elderly man who more or less adopted grandfather who, though nominally chief porter, was de facto manager. It was in those days normal for a chief porter to refer customers to bookies (an illegal practice), on occasions take their bets to them and bring back any winnings. Found out, grandfather had to leave the business, though he later owned a hotel in Frome among other property he bought. While in Manchester he was a Young Liberal at the same time as Lloyd George. He was much influenced by Richard Pankhurst and so was on the left of the Liberals and always viewed Lloyd George as a Tory. After building up his finances he went back to Warminster to marry Kit Carter.

Grandfather's oldest sister was Great Aunt Mary Ann. She went to Australia (I suspect partly because her uncle had earlier been transported there) and married an alcoholic remittance man called White who, like Séan White the founder of the Irish Citizens' Army (though presumably some twenty years earlier), was the son of the Chief Constable of Lancashire. She had a grandson called Séan who went to Ireland and then joined the Irish Citizen's Army just before WW1. I don't know what happened to him thereafter. So a second cousin, while not *the* Séan White of the ICA was *a* Séan White of the ICA, with a somewhat similar background to his namesake. Great Aunt Mary Ann took to voyaging round the world in old age. I remember her visiting us in Bognor when I was eight with my grandmother (I think Mary Ann would have been 96 at the time and Granny would have been 78 or 79). She still walked very rapidly and always called grandmother 'young Kate' - 'come along young Kate' - which somewhat threw me. Anyway grandmother then went with her round the world and was about to go a second time when war was declared. I think she subsequently regarded the fact that she was prevented from going round twice as one of Hitler's gravest crimes.

The family moved in and around Warminster to different addresses. First they were at the Malt House Farm, Bugley, moved to Portway for a year or two and then returned to Malt House Farm. The two farms had 300 acres on the lower-lying clay and a larger area of grazing on Salisbury Plain and Warminster Down. Portway was normally used by the farm's cattleman and was closer to the Plain than Malt House Farm. Amongst various ways of earning a living, Grandfather bred shire horses, which was no doubt ancillary to the basic business of carting. Grandmother had some illness (I was never told what) when Mother was 11 and for a year she had to combine school work with running a farm house, which would have involved providing a daily meal for the farm workers, while in those days poultry were regarded as the farmer's wife's concern. When my grandmother got better there seems to have been rivalry between them, so mother left and became a pupil teacher at West Kennet and Overton, near Marlborough. From there she moved to Oxford and taught there before going back to Warminster and switching to work in what was then the Capital and Counties Bank, interspersing this with a time teaching in France.

Mother [Helen Stephens] always claimed to be the oldest suffragette who never went to prison nor risked it; a claim also made by Sybil Morrison (National Chair of the Peace Pledge Union). The suffragettes had a rule that none of their supporters should take part in illegal activities until they were 21. Mother's 21st birthday was the day WW1 was declared and the Suffragettes called off all illegal activities; Sybil must have been about the same age.

I am not bragging about her (she and I never liked each other) but she was remarkably successful during the war. She had volunteered to drive ambulances in London. Women were allowed to do this six months on and six months off, so in the off-periods she worked in the Bank of England and was the first woman ever to be in charge of a department. She ended the war driving an ambulance in Serbia (in the Scottish Women's Hospitals, a body drawn from ex-suffragettes, mainly aristocratic, mother being the only member of her detachment without a title). The Germans were advancing on the Serbian Front when the war ended, so mother found herself fifty miles behind German lines and was duly captured. She was taken to German General HQ just at the time that the General received a command from Berlin that he should surrender to the first Allied officer he met. So he duly handed mother his sword and she drove him south in the ambulance to the Allied HQ, escorted by German motor-cycle out-riders to ensure that no other detachments impeded her.

Then, after the war, she went back to Chinon to teach, until the French Government brought in a law banning foreign teachers. She borrowed some money from a fellow teacher - Yvonne Anouilh, later Michon - and hitched to Paris intending to apply for a job as a clerk in the organisation drawing up the Versailles Treaty. She soon found herself a senior translator there. When that finished she went as PA to Ann Morgan (Pierrepoint Morgan's daughter) at the Reparations Commission. After two years at the cushiest and safest job she ever could have imagined having, the Americans gave her the Congressional Medal 'for gallantry in the field'. She was then head-hunted to be Head of Languages at Roedean in South Africa (though Miss Lawrence broke contract when she got there and put a friend in above her). She travelled to South Africa with Doris Trevelyan. On the voyage out they met up with my father and his colleague Walker. Though there was a family expectation that my father might propose to Doris Trevelyan, it was Walker who did so, leaving mother and my father playing gooseberry to the newly engaged couple. Of course, this ensured that my father and mother got together, ending up also marrying.

Doris Walker and Yvonne Michon were god-mothers to Robin and I (though as mother and Yvonne were militantly atheist that word was inappropriate). I've never quite known which was to which, but Robin and I each referred to both of them as our god mothers. Robin was born in South Africa, while I was born in Switzerland.

Chapter 3: Young Laurens

Just over a month after my birth, the event was registered on 19 May 1930 at the Montreux Vice-Consulate, when the family were living at 9 Villas Dubochet, Clarens, Montreux, Switzerland[27]. The place of birth has some significance in anarchist terms.

I was approached on more than one occasion at the London Anarchist Bookfairs in recent years by representatives of the International Centre for Anarchist Research (CIRA). Hearing that I was born in Clarens, where Elisée Reclus[28] lived and Peter Kropotkin[29] stayed after release from the St Peter & St Paul prison in St Petersburg, they remarked: "Oh, it was inevitable that you would be an anarchist. You couldn't have avoided it". Moreover, the Suisse Romande traditional self image, which is characterised in successive cartoon images, is of an invading general giving a Romande peasant a letter to deliver to other troops and the peasant, being reluctant, takes it so slowly that he is overtaken by a snail. This tradition seems a reasonable form of civil disobedience and is alleged to date back to the time of Hannibal invading Rome, continuing through wars between Savoyards and Burgundians, wars between Catholics and Protestants, rivalries between the Cantons of Geneva and Berne, the Napoleonic Wars and eventually the impact of the Italian Risorgimento. I confess that, when, at the end of the war (1945), Mother dug out one such cartoon, saying "That's your birthright", I didn't understand and was quite hurt and annoyed. I had forgotten the incident until a few years ago my wife Celia took me back to Lac Leman for a holiday in Vèvey, where I saw in the museum a selection of these cartoons and an explanation of them. Perhaps that too was in my blood, making my peace activity inevitable.

I don't remember anything much from before we came to England and not a lot (other than my time in St John and Elizabeth's Hospital, St John's Wood) from before I was sent out of London. I had my first birthday in Chateau D'Oex, also in Switzerland. It was perhaps around this time that Gandhi stayed with my parents. My second birthday was in Lyons. We came to England - or so my parents said, Robin claims it was earlier - when I was 2½.

I can just about remember sitting on some stairs down from the nursery in a Queen's Road house. Both houses in which we lived were in St John's Wood, one was in Queen's Road and the

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[27] By coincidence, Clarens has at times entertained some interesting characters such as the composers Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky. More interesting in relation to Laurens Otter was the one time presence in exile of the French anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus from 1872 until 1894, when he departed for Brussels. They have also shared the characteristic of a fine beard and mop of hair.

[28] Elisée Reclus (1830-1905): French geographer and anarchist.

[29] Prince Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921): Russian geographer and anarchist, writer of such works as *The Conquest of Bread*, *Fields, Factories and Workshops* and *Mutual Aid*. He was known popularly as the anarchist Prince.

other at 1a Cavendish Road. I think it was the latter that had an enormous pear tree. I used to be sent out to get one and would lie down to wait for one to fall on me and then take it in. Cavendish Road was very near Lord's Cricket Ground - Dad was keen on cricket and was very disappointed that neither Robin nor I were. I remember meeting him as he was coming home from matches and I particularly remember him after he'd seen Len Hutton score a triple century[30].

The most significant early memory - embarrassingly - comes from my nursery days. There must have been a children's party as a large room was teeming with children. I was standing with my nurse and another woman (most likely my aunt Ena, who was my mother's younger sister, but perhaps the nanny of one of the other children). The door sprang open and in stormed a third woman, who clouted my brother, knocking over a couple of children on the way and then stormed out again[31].

I asked, "Who's the one who's always in a bait?" There was a noise which I now suppose must have been a suppressed giggle and the other woman in po-faced tones replied, 'You mustn't talk of your mother like that'. As I hadn't a clue what a mother was, let alone why I shouldn't ask a reasonable question as to her identity, I was left puzzling about the matter for some time.

Uncle Bobby, along with his wife Joan, her mother Nancy Swinstead, and their children Mike and Jinx (Jennifer), lived at the other end of Cavendish Road, until he got his judgeship in Burma. Though I can just about remember what Jinx and Mike looked like at that time, and remember running up the road to see them, I have no memory at all of my uncle. I had always assumed, until Jinx told me differently in the 1980s, that his death had been before we came back to England. He died in a riding accident, in Burma, taking part in a point-to-point race meeting. Uncle Thomas (who had not then married my aunt Margaret) was present at the race.

Fairly soon after we came to England, Robin was given a dachshund called Max, that had previously been hit and nearly killed by a motorcycle. Not surprisingly it didn't trust people after that and used to take the occasional nip out of people. It did, however, appear to be protective of me and my parents kept it for that reason. After a time, it savaged me, dragging me out of my cot, leaving me frightened of dogs for some time afterwards.

Dad was a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society and in those days on Sundays the Regent's Park Zoo was reserved to Fellows and their families. Fairly regularly Robin and I were taken

[30] Sir Leonard Hutton (1916-1990): Test cricketer for England. He scored a triple century against Australia in 1938.
[31] 'Ena' is short for Georgina. See editorial appendix.

there by Edna for the bulk of the Sunday afternoon. Rides and camels and elephants were a regular feature of the zoo and on Sundays zoo staff would escort people into some of the cages. At that age I was not concerned either by the morality of zoos or the special privileges accorded to Fellows and their families.

I was a sickly child (mainly bronchial - I was twice pronounced dead) and after a time doctors said I must be taken away from London, to the coast. My parents decided that Robin should go with me, much to his disgust, so my nanny (Edna Pooley) was transformed into a governess/guardian and we moved to Bognor, my parents coming down for weekends once a fortnight. As Robin and I had been in the nursery at the top of the house in London, brought down once every so often to be presented to guests, I probably saw more of them at Bognor than in London. Robin would have been more presentable and more often presented.

When the doctors sent me out of London, my parents intended to take a house for us on a new estate on the north side of Bognor in North Berstead. After they'd paid the deposit, there were considerable delays and such was the economic climate of the time (1935), that three consecutive builders went bankrupt during construction. So we moved at first to Felpham, then still a separate village just to the east of Bognor. It was noted for a lovely old church of which Father Donald Manners was vicar (he was later one of the founder members of Common Wealth). At the time he was a chaplain to Bishop Bell of Chichester. Blake's Cottage, which had been loaned to the poet by a patron, was then a museum, much being made of its view of the South Downs, which we mistakenly believed he was looking at when he wrote *Jerusalem*. The patron's house was also in the village, though hidden by an high wall. It later became an extension of Chichester Theological College. Because our home in Felpham was meant to be temporary until we moved into the new house, they rented for us three successive houses, the middle one of which had a garden going down to the beach, the others being in a parallel and adjacent road.

I remained a sickly child. Once, recovering from bronchitis, the kindergarten proprietor was warned that even if I caught a common cold it was likely to be fatal. One day I arrived a few minutes early, when it was raining, and was kept outside. After sitting through the day in wet clothes, I had to be taken away. By then however I had met the children's novelist, Vera Barclay[32]. I had been terrified of walking past her Old English Sheepdog and would go right round the block to avoid it. I can't remember why anyone noticed, but I was then introduced to both dog and owner. When I was taken away from the kindergarten, she and her Swiss

[32] Vera Barclay (1893-1989) was prominent in the Scout movement and wrote children's books as well as books on Christianity and Scouting. She lived for some time in Felpham.

companion (whom I think was called Mlle. Sempé) offered to teach me and for a year or two they did.

Though I got better, the bronchitis persisted and X-ray pictures still show some shadow on my lungs. I have never been any good at running any distance, an activity not helped by having displaced three vertebrae. Even after that was corrected by a chiropractor after the war, I still had the occasional slipped disc. Naturally, I was limited at sports, but otherwise this didn't matter, as I spent as much time as I could as a child on horseback. My family were fast walkers and I was soon able to walk much faster than I could run for any distance. That was to earn me one of many beatings later at Marlborough. We had to go for cross-country runs two or three times a week. Once, after it had snowed, we were told to walk it and I, who normally came last, this time came first. It was thought that I had either been showing off or at other times skiving, one way or another obviously deserving a good caning!

Eventually the Berstead houses became available and we moved in. At about the same time, Bognor designated an area on its north-east as its recreation ground. As this provided a play area for children and a walk across it, we used to go that way to Felpham, so retaining a connection with the village. The garden of the new house shared an hedge with Northcliffe's playing field. There being a convenient hole in the hedge, this provided another play area. The school itself was about 150 yards further south, in Bognor rather than Berstead.

I remember a friend of my Dad's visiting frequently, and not just when my parents were there. It wasn't until many years later that I knew that Edna had briefly been engaged at this point to a friend of Dad's and that mother had made trouble, causing the relationship to break down. Many more years later, after a picture of him had appeared with an article in History Workshop Journal, I realised that Dad's friend was Tom Wintringham, though whether or not he had been Edna's friend or it was someone else, I can't be sure[33].

As a child and to this day, my eyes have played me up. The left lens is uneven and I get several images from it, none of which quite coincides with that from the right eye. It has its plus factor: if I look at a full moon I don't just see one, I see a dozen looking like a bracelet. With time and concentration I can get two images into focus, though it is guess work as to whether the image from the left eye is the right one. When I had eye tests the difficulty did not show up, especially

[33] Thomas Henry Wintringham (1898-1949) was an early member of the Communist Party of Great Britain from its foundation, was involved in setting up *The Daily Worker* newspaper of the CP, led the British Battalion of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, was a prime instigator in the foundation of the Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard) in WW2 and was a founding member of the new socialist party, Common Wealth in 1942.

as I then had very long sight and could usually read the printer's name on the chart. My eyes being such, I've never been able to see the ball when playing ball games and I was 16 before I learned that others could. It seemed to me then that they were cheating. This problem too earned me many a beating - generally for not keeping my eyes on the ball in cricket, which, as on at least two occasions, the ball had actually hit an eye seemed a bit unfair. I'd been, after all, the only one with my eye literally 'on the ball'.

My hand-writing has always been terrible, which I suspect has something to do with the defective vision. The same applies to drawing - tragic, as I am always getting ideas for cartoons and have never been able to draw them. I had to spend day after day at school copying out lettering in the forlorn hope that this would improve my writing. Years later, art lessons would consist of laboured copying. I think all this did was further strain my eyes. My spelling of common words has also been lousy, though longer, more complex ones which I learned later never caused such difficulty. I now suspect that the problem was due to mis-seeing and don't know if this counts as partial dyslexia. Years later the problem would cause further ructions when I was doing National Service.

Beatings seem to have been the most regular aspect of my schooldays, particularly at Northcliffe Preparatory School, where Mr Brown was somewhat generous in dispensing 'six of the best'. I would be caned at least twice a term. In retrospect I think Brown had a sadistic streak, particularly because he frequently beat children in front of the class. Because he couldn't make me cry, I was always called to his study. Although I could not see it that way at the time, I attribute the fact that I could never bring myself to do Latin properly to that fact that it was his subject. Others in the school were similarly put off Maths, where 'Grunts' Cooper used to beat people on the hand with a ruler. Fortunately I'd come to like Maths early enough to avoid this particular treatment.

Beatings at public schools are (or were) somewhat more curious than is generally supposed, largely because of two opposed codes of rules - those imposed by prefects (presumably with the knowledge of the staff, but deniably so) and the official school rules. Thus, for instance at Marlborough, prefects imposed a rule that everyone, at least once in their school career, should break out at mid-summer and cycle to Stonehenge. Failure to do so could lead to a beating from the prefects, whereas doing so breached school rules and could mean a beating imposed by an house-master (but which in my House, would have been administered by the prefect!). Fortunately, as many years before I had gone with my aunt for one solstice, that was considered adequate and I didn't in that regard have to choose which set of rules to break. On the other

hand, school rules forbade any climbing on Merlin's Mound, even stipulating that it was an expellable offence. Unofficial junior House rules laid down that all new boys should climb the said mound in their first term. Junior House captains didn't have licence to beat, so other penalties were imposed: generally what amounted to water-boarding.

The inability to do Latin always held me back through school. One would have thought that with a Classical scholar father I should have been alright, but Dad literally could not understand that anyone should find Latin difficult. He never told me about his switch to Maths in his last year at Harrow, when he'd already got his Classics entry to Oxford (he took scholarship exams but refused the scholarship), but I presume that he didn't find Latin in the least bit intellectually challenging, unlike Maths. It meant that throughout my childhood, when we were set work to do in the holidays, he always wanted to do my Maths (which was almost invariably so easy I would have preferred something harder) and never once helped me with that Latin.

Consequently, year after year I was kept down, made to repeat everything else to no good purpose, because of my bad Latin. Fortunately I haven't quite the same difficulty nowadays with Dog Latin - that would be a problem for someone who had worked in Medieval Studies. It meant that I had to teach myself Maths and Chemistry, particularly as Marlborough had dug out one retired teacher to take Maths who was by then too gaga to find the right page when he wanted to look up the answers. Marks were distributed strictly in accordance with the amount of sycophantic laughter one could drum up that day to greet his three very unfunny and endlessly repeated jokes. I took to buying books of reprinted Maths exam papers and doing them for pleasure. Somehow I wasn't able to tell Dad when he next wanted to do my holiday Maths that earlier that day I had done the first paper of his old Oxford Finals and found it easy.

Ridiculously, I was also bad at French. Thing is, I thought in colloquial French and had to translate all my schoolwork backwards and forwards between the French and English. This had worked when Mlle Sempé was teaching me written French, but there was too little resemblance between the French my Northcliffe and Marlborough teachers knew and French as it is actually spoken for it work in a school context. I had to translate from spoken French to English to school French and in reverse - and it didn't come out well.

War was declared in 1939, and in 1940, after the fall of France, Northcliffe School was evacuated to Cornwall. We had the servants' quarters at Lord Falmouth's house at Tregothnan and, excluding the deer park, the run of its very beautiful grounds. This was a saving grace, as was the surrounding countryside at Marlborough, Wiltshire downland, helping me survive the experience

of prep and public school. I spent as much time as I could in the Avebury area and I usually spent the first part of my summer holidays at my grandmother's home in Warminster, which was a pleasant cycle-ride away - curiously the Imber road was not blocked to traffic during the war[34]. Not surprisingly, in 1947, a year after my Dad died, Marlborough chucked me out. They objected to the fact that, having been until his death a rather repressed and very quiet child (forgivable that I wasn't in their eyes any good at anything), I became somewhat noisier.

The lady who had moved in next door to us in Berstead was a Jewish refugee, who had similarly had to wait four years to get the house on which she had put a deposit in 1934. Mother went [to Europe] with her a month or so before the war broke out to bring her relatives out. They were to have gone back and would have been caught had they done so. No-one was brought out and our neighbour was sent to the Isle of Man as a German alien. She was released but not allowed to return to her house. She had taken in lodgers in the form of some younger teaching staff from Northcliffe, who didn't join the rest of the school in Tregothnan, but ran a skeleton school in Bognor, having free run of both her house and the school for the duration of the war.

Dad had had his first series of cancer operations in the mid 1930s, was to have another in 1941 and a third in July-August 1945. Each interrupted his work at the Central Electricity Generating Board, but he remained head of the legal department and for the last year of his life took over the organisation of the Board. The CEGB Whitehall offices were evacuated out of London and it fell to Dad to find new premises. He'd been stationed at 'The Towers' in East Horsley at the start of the First World War, before embarking for France, and he took a lease on the property. My parents sold their London house (1a Cavendish Road) and took a tiny flat, which, given that Dad had also had a colostomy that required fairly extensive self-treatment every day, wasn't enough to house us during the school holidays. Ironically, the former house was bombed immediately after the sale, though most of the furniture was in store. They bought a house in West Horsley, which the Government seized as necessary for the war effort, on the actual day of the exchange of contracts. At the end of the war, when it was released it was immediately squatted - twice in succession.

My parents took a small flat in East Horsley, until the house became available again, but also kept the house in Bognor, as there simply was not enough room to store clothes or have schoolboys stay while on holiday. Just after we moved into the flat in Horsley, the War Office decided that the Horsley Home Guard needed to be put on a more formal basis. They sent a

[34] Imber is a deserted village, taken over by the military in 1943 and the population cleared out for wartime purposes in the run-up to D-Day. It has never been returned to the former occupants.

veteran staff sergeant and he turned out to have been my father's batman when in the London Rifle Brigade. My Dad had risen to the rank of Major, but in the Home Guard was just a private, and the staff sergeant found it embarrassing as he kept on referring to Dad as 'Major Otter'. They had saved each other's lives in WW1, both being hit by a shell. Dad had been pinned down by debris and the batman, though wounded, managed to pull Dad free. Dad had then dragged the batman back to the British lines.

As nursing children was not considered essential work under the introduction of a sort of semi-conscription of civilian labour, Edna had to go. She became matron at a girls' school which was originally near Slindon on the South Downs, but was moved to Simonsbath on Exmoor. At the end of the war a colleague of hers turned her father's farm into a residential riding school and Edna ran the farm house as the residence part.

It had been the family tradition, for Dad and Uncle Bobby, to go to Harrow. Between Munich (1938) and the end of WW2 (1945) six Otters were sent instead to Marlborough. Already in my father's day it had been commonplace for boys to swan off to London from Eton and Harrow to indulge in the night club scene and drugs. Transport for us would have been even easier, so we were sent further afield to Marlborough. Three of the Otters were from the King's Lynn side of the family, the sons of Robert Otter under the guardianship (after his death) of Tony Otter, the Suffragan Bishop of Grantham and one of his eldest sons. My brother, Robin and my cousin Michael and myself made up the six. The two eldest were killed on service in the subsequent war, Michael being one. Robin survived, though had a close shave in Singapore harbour when his sister ship alongside was sunk with all hands. John from the King's Lynn side of the family, despite being a rugby captain for the school, was deemed unfit and after the war was called up as a Bevin boy to work in the mines - he later became a mine manager.

My schooling can be said to have been a total waste of time and money. What I learned came from my own reading, so any library would have sufficed equally. Perhaps, if I had been left in such a library, I might not have been put off Latin. I moved to Marlborough soon after D-Day, June 1944. Around Christmas 1943/44, Robin left Marlborough - Dad didn't approve of two brothers being at the same school when one was a prefect and the other a new boy. Robin joined the Navy and went on a short course to Oxford before training at Portsmouth, Greenock and Gourock. He and another midshipman achieved notoriety, falling from the top of a Ferris Wheel and surviving, miraculously uninjured. Meanwhile, our cousin Michael Otter, had already joined the Air Force, did a short course at Oxford, trained in the USA and spent time in the UK and South Africa.

At Bognor the Jewish neighbour was allowed back to her home. Robin, after a short course at Oxford and training at various Scottish ports, was off to sweep mines in the Pacific. He had the first command of a ship before he was 19 and of a mini-flotilla before he was 20. Mme Michon had led the Loire Valley sectors of the Resistance and, besides the Légion d'Honneur, was offered awards by the UK and US governments, which as a Republican she refused. She successfully stood for election as Mayor of Tours - I think unopposed.

After the second set of cancer operations in 1941, Dad took six months convalescence on a farm. We took a cottage at Withypool on Exmoor and he worked on a farm there. It would have been a tenant of Sir Richard Acland's[35] and the tenant's son was active in Wintringham's Local Defence Volunteers. Until Robin went off into the forces, he and I would spend our holidays there. The first time I missed the first two weeks with an attack of measles. We were joined by Michael Coles, one of Robin's friends from Bognor, though he also was delayed by measles. Michael and his sister Liz were close to us, he aged about mid-way between us and Liz almost the same age as myself. They were the children of a former tea-planter from Ceylon, who had died shortly after taking the house in Bognor, and his wife re-married to a wartime lodger, Harold Fosberry. Michael was also at Northcliffe school.

In January 1944, I went to Marlborough, where I remained until July 1947. In July 1945, Dad was hospitalised at University College Hospital in London for his third and final set of cancer operations. My aunt Janet still lived at Ottershaw after grandmother had died and Queenwood was sold, first until 1936 at Ottershaw Cottage. She and my aunt Joan (Bobby's wife) together inherited 30 acres of land and Janet had 'The Rough' built there, between the village and Queenwood. Dad spent his convalescence there after his operations. When I was staying at Horsley, it was within easy cycling distance on the other side of the North Downs. It was then that he pointed out the two working men's clubs mentioned before.

Following his third set of operations in 1945 Dad was unconscious, unaware of the bombing of Hiroshima. I had seen him the week before and did not see him again until the following Christmas. I had noticed that Japan had been trying to surrender since February and that the last attempt had been just before the bombing, so my instinct was to oppose it. As no one else seemed to do so, I didn't oppose very loudly.

[35] Sir Richard Acland was a baronet and landowner (1906-1990). He was a founder member of Common Wealth, became Labour MP for Gravesend 1947-55 but resigned over the party's support for nuclear weapons. He later helped set up the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

When I finally met Dad, he was furious about the matter, so I became encouraged. Whereas before I had turned to mother for political support (her views were a mixture of admiration for Gandhi and Stalin), there was now a total realignment. Dad resigned from the Tories and, since both Labour and Liberals supported nuclear weapons, didn't turn to them. He had had an interest in Common Wealth, having been in touch with Father Donald Manners, but by then Tom Wintringham[36] and Richard Acland had left Common Wealth to go into the Labour Party (the split was rather bitter). The fact that Dad joined the rump of Common Wealth, which was at the time engaged in unsuccessful merger talks with the remnants of the ILP and the wartime Anarchist Federation, came as a total surprise when I learned about it twenty years later.

Dad, until that time a convinced Liberal Unionist, had been opposed to the left, informed by what he had seen in South Africa, where both the Communist Party and Labour Party in the 1930s supported the racist campaigns of the Afrikaner Nationalists, the CP using the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa'. It had been left wing pressure that persuaded the South African government to prevent Blacks from being train drivers. Similarly he was aware of the earlier period of socialist interest in eugenics. When I was eleven, and already a leftist, he had argued these points with me and in response I had even vainly tried to come up with an humane justification for racism! Common Wealth and supporters like Father Manners had none of the associations with the pro-eugenicist tradition.

I remember about this time a weeklong visit from my aunt Margaret and her husband, Thomas Williams. He came from Uplyme in Dorset, where his father owned a large rural estate, no doubt with sundry flunkies. Thomas professed to socialist beliefs and had reacted against this before WW1, during which he served in the Royal Flying Corps. He argued with me, thinking it was a clincher argument when he said, "You do realize that you are siding against your own class". He must have felt this about his father and dismissed his father's counter-claims in terms of morality as being hypocritical, because of his father's money.

Margaret and he had I think set out to make a serious attack on my emergent socialist beliefs. Margaret had got a book by Philip Gibbs (probably on someone's recommendation, as she clearly hadn't read it), which was so prejudiced against Labour that it was to my ears hilariously funny. When it set me into howls of laughter, she thought again, read it and then confiscated it, saying it was a vulgar book and I should never again read it. (Fifteen years later, when I

[36] Tom Wintringham (1898-1949) joined the Communist Part in 1923, served in Spain with the British Battalion of the International Brigade and was wounded in 1937. He left the CPGB in 1938 when his wife was denounced as a Trotskyist. He was instrumental in the formation of the Home Guard in WW2, helped found the Common Wealth Party in 1942 and later joined the Labour Party.

introduced my wife Celia to her, she said, “Don't worry about his politics, he'll grow out of them”. To which Celia replied, “I'll leave him when he does”.)

For the 1945 General Election I tried unsuccessfully to persuade Dad to vote Liberal rather than Tory. I don’t know where my parents were registered to vote, so have no idea what practical difference this might have made. The London house had been sold some time before and had in any case been hit by a German mine. We had paid for a house in Horsley, which had been requisitioned and then squatted, so we rented a flat there. We still had the Bognor house and used that during school holidays. We would go there at the end of term, send all our clothes to a Bognor laundry and get trains (three changes) to Horsley. At the end of the holidays we would do the whole journey again in reverse, sending non-school clothes to the laundry, collecting the others to depart back to school.

I was unaware of Dad's new political allegiance when he and I found a couple of other youngsters who were uneasy about nuclear weaponry and launched the Guildford Committee Against Nuclear Weapons - which I believe to have been the first specifically anti-nuclear weapons group anywhere. About twenty other such groups emerged in the 1940s but died out.

The influence of fathers is often felt more in the personal sense than the political. My father was shy and curiously innocent. A lot of women - generally younger than him - found him very attractive, and Mother later said he was always going to ask her what Mrs so-and-so wanted when it was all too clear to Mother that what Mrs so-and-so wanted was an *affaire*. I say innocent, because he missed quite obvious double-entendres. Once he was ticking off Robin and me for not having helped a guest off with her coat when she arrived, and he said quite seriously: 'never leave a woman to undress in front of you without helping them'. He was more surprised than put out when we laughed.

Throughout our childhood - and for a long time later - my brother Robin was obsessed with our cousin Jinx; at first obviously it was brother-sister type relationship, but even then that made Robin jealous of Mike and was why Robin had to be better than Mike at everything, although Mike was a couple of years older than he was. By the time it was possible for the relationship to be something more, Robin was head over heels in love with Jinx. Given a very shy father and a mad mother, there was never any hope that we'd ever be told how to go about approaching a girl, so he did nothing about it. So when he found himself in the Pacific just before the war ended, Robin decided that either he was going to die an hero's death, or he was going to come back with masses of medals to lay at Jinx's feet and win her that way. So his ship, a minesweeper,

more or less swept all the most dangerous places single-handed and he came back with a chest (both senses of the word) full of medals; only to find a letter waiting from Jinx to say she'd got engaged and, as both our fathers were dead, would he give her away. I am sure Jinx never knew how literally Robin did this, until I was tactless about ten years ago. Fiona (my daughter) had asked me to write for her a sketch of the family, in which I had said this, then Jinx's elder son arrived on a visit from Australia wanting answers to most of the same questions and I - forgetting that particular section - showed him it.

So Robin, when he returned in May 1947, when I was just 17 and he was 21, was a war hero, absurdly handsome and secretly heart-broken; any girl or woman within range threw herself at him, but they weren't Jinx, so they were treated politely but not seriously. It was fortunate for me that I intended at the time to take vows of celibacy, as any girl who had taken any interest in me had only to take one look at Robin and I was no longer of the slightest interest.

While Robin was shy with women, he was not so in other regards. At Marlborough and Oxford he was 'hail fellow, well met' and I expect this continued in the Navy, the Colonial Service and his legal career. In my own case, the reverse was true - I am shy in most regards, but not with women. My contemporaries at Trinity College Dublin would find this hard to believe, but were unaware that I deliberately set about overcoming the problem while I was there. In my early years in CND I probably met more activists than anyone else in the campaign as, when I wasn't involved in NVDA, Harry Mister would send me hitching round the country to sell *Peace News* at meetings, anywhere and everywhere.

Easter fell late in 1946, so the Marlborough Easter Holidays did not include that weekend, which was co-opted by the school as a 'Victory Festival' for the end of the war. They booked a particularly famous preacher for the event and no excuses were allowed for anyone not be back in school for Easter Day. On the Palm Sunday during the break, Dad and I had been to Mass and, after emerging and a short chat with Father Manners, Dad said, 'Do you mind if we go for a walk? I've told your mother that we'll be out some time and she can delay lunch', then, as we set off, 'This'll be the last time we have a serious talk'. (By and large it was also the first time.) 'I shall be dead before you come home again. Don's start saying you're sorry. You know it'll be a relief for me'.

There were several things he wanted to discuss, of which four stand out, though I don't remember the precise order. Firstly we discussed nuclear weapons and campaigning against them.

Secondly, he talked about how Robin and our cousin Michael had always been rivals. Robin was always the successful one and in all probability would remain so. Dad was still convinced that Michael had survived and would one day come striding out of the forest[37]. He feared, with a very Victorian regard to the rights of primogeniture, that Robin would treat Michael with contempt. He wanted me to be ready to remind Robin that Michael was head of the family and should be treated as such.

That led him to the third point, concerning Uncle Robert. Bobby had drawn up the Treaty that partitioned Ireland, which had an as yet unpublished clause saying that the Treaty should last fifty years, at the end of which there should either be an all-Ireland referendum (or a county by county one) as to whether partition should be continued. On the basis of such a referendum a new Treaty should be drawn up. Bobby, being half Northern Irish by birth, had felt it improper that he should have drawn up the Treaty and having peen pressurised into doing so, felt his honour was at stake and sought to adhere to this clause. So Dad laid it on me to make a fuss when it came to the point. He obviously thought it would be easier than it turned out to be.

Fourthly, came my relations with mother. He realised that the two of us could not get on. Our local doctor had argued that mother was not a safe person to be left in charge of a child (presumably thinking of what we now call Munchausen's-by-proxy) and had two specialists down, under the guise of being doctors come to see my father's cancer scars. They had signed papers to section mother, but Dad was worried about this happening and had made an alternative possible arrangement that I should be made a ward of court and sent to stay with relatives in Ireland of whom neither I nor my mother had previously heard. I was not told their name and have no idea who they were. He had arranged this as he felt I had the right to that degree of security, accepting Dr Blackburn's belief that mother might well occasionally try to kill me. He would prefer me to take my chance with mother and when I said I would, made me promise that I wouldn't walk out and break with her until I was 21.

When Dad died on 17 July 1946, I was allowed home from Marlborough for a few days to attend the funeral. A nephew of Baron Rothschild arrived with his uncle's apologies for not coming in person (Attlee had called an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the security services, which he had to attend). Dad and the Baron had shared a study at Harrow and a staircase at University. Marlborough insisted that I return for the last week of term and when I came home, Mother was

[37] The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records the death of 144337 Flight Lieutenant Robert Colin Michael Otter, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, 89 Squadron, and son of R.E. Otter and of Joan Otter of St John's Wood, London, on 14 May 1945. He has no known grave and is recorded on the Singapore Memorial, Column 46.

in the process of moving. The house in Horsley had at last been released and she didn't want me around - so I was packed off to Paris. I couldn't go to Yvonne Michon, who was just assuming her mayoral role, and her son was in China. So Mother sent me to another friend (I can't remember who, or how they knew each other). As a result I was in Paris for the 1946 workers' uprising, which proved to be a most seminal experience (dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, so there is an overlap between this chapter and that). While there I was a member of the Communist Party, but was expelled when I got home in the late summer.

While still at Marlborough, I applied to become a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party and was accepted at the end of 1946. To avoid detection I used post office boxes in villages around the college, since the town itself was out of bounds, and would collect mail on the occasionally permitted cycle ride. For two hours every day we were supposed to be out of house and school buildings exercising and, if there were no fixed sports that day, cycling round the country was perfectly acceptable. I similarly avoided using the main Horsley post offices so that they were not able to inform on me to mother. I was 'superannuated' from Marlborough in July 1947. I did a spell as a pupil teacher at a school called Woolpit.

Accompanying this early ferment in political education during 1946-48, I was also considering becoming an Ordinand, was seeing the Diocesan Missioner and thinking about attending theological college. I went for interviews at Kelham and another theological college. Chichester college invited me due to the family connection with Bishop William Otter, but my confessor advised against this as an act of simony. I met with my local Bishop, High Montgomery Campbell, later Bishop of London, while at an ordinand's meeting at Farnhum Castle.

I was very much interested in Christian Socialist writers[38]. At the Roman Catholic bookshop near Westminster Cathedral around either Easter 1946 or 1947, I bought Herbert Read's *Politics of the Unpolitical*. I had already read Eric Gill's *Men and Things and Things of Stone* when visiting aunt Janet's and picking things randomly off her bookshelves.

Soon afterwards I read an early Tom Brown[39] pamphlet on Nationalisation, in which it was argued that this was a means for the State to subsidise old industries that could no longer pay their own way due to the declining rate of profit. Not merely was Nationalisation not 'socialist', but it forced one section of the working class to pay to subsidise another, and this would inevitably create divisions in the working class. At the time I was not quite ready for that

[38] See page 42 Interlude
[39] Tom Brown was a leading exponent of Syndicalism in the UK, a prolific writer of such works as *The Principles of Syndicalism* in the 1940s and 1950s and the founder of the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF).

argument, as my knowledge of sectors of the Left then was that they all wanted more state ownership and were only critical of the piecemeal way in which it was being done and the lack of worker's control. Even the SPGB[40] in those days was not against total nationalisation. I wasn't ready for the argument that nationalisation was a mistake in the first place. It made me think that I was not an anarchist. Nine months later I did not have the same reaction to Freedom, which would have put forward a much less revolutionary version of anarchism. On the other hand, while I was attracted to reading Freedom, I never saw in it why I as a socialist should become an anarchist - not then, not ever.

Perhaps the most crucial of all political 'con-tricks' in my lifetime, was the dissemination, late in the Forties, of the myth that Labour's 1945 victory and the administration that followed constituted a Silent Revolution.

Whereas the Tories from 1945 to 1948 were protesting fairly feebly that, admittedly there had been evils of unrestricted capitalism which had caused immense hunger in the Thirties and had been in large part responsible for Hitler and the War, they went on to plead that they had learned their lesson, they had changed and they now accepted that State planning was necessary. However, they thought it had gone too far and they claimed that it was a gross libel to suggest that they would allow the same to happen again, for they were introducing planning policies. The myth that a Silent Revolution had happened allowed them to stress the claim that it had gone too far and to build on the Fulton speech[41], at the time dismissed as an eccentric foible from an old man. It allowed them in the Forties to build into the basis of Tory policy as an 'anti-communist' crusade that was used primarily not to discredit Stalinists, but all other socialists, alleged to be fellow travellers.

It allowed the Labour Centre and Right to talk as if the job was done, and that the values which had inspired people to work for social change no longer applied. Not a lot had in fact been done. Some government-owned, non-profit making concerns (The Bank of England, Central Electricity Board, Post Office) had been allowed to make a profit. A number of old, unprofitable industries (railways and mines), in line with Marx's concept of the 'falling rate of profit', had been taken over by the State and were now subsidised by the workers in the rest of industry - so eventually, as predicted by the Anarchist Federation in its pamphlet on Nationalisation, putting

[40] Socialist Party of Great Britain: The organisation was founded in 1904 as a breakaway from the Social Democratic Federation, favouring a distinctive, non-reformist, parliamentary approach to the revolutionary creation of a socialist society through persuasion of the majority of all voters, often referred to as 'impossibilism'.
[41] On 5 March 1946, Sir Winston Churchill made a speech at Fulton, Missouri, in which he coined the term 'The Iron Curtain'.

the workers in these industries in conflict with other workers, rather than with their own bosses. It had failed to reverse the campaign by the war-time Government to re-impose fascist regimes in Greece and Iraq. Though it had ceded liberty to the Indian sub-continent, it had only done so when Congress had threatened to relaunch its independence struggles, while in Malaysia, the West Indies, East and West Africa, Egypt and Cyprus, it was pursuing an actively imperialist role. It had taken us into NATO, had secretly spent millions on building British nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and it was soon to sponsor the war in Korea.

It allowed the Stalinists to get away with the claim that they had consistently, and to all intents alone, stood for a more thorough-going social change. This in turn allowed them to launch a vicious campaign against all other leftists, whose criticisms of the Soviet Union were said to be splitting the anti-capitalist camp.

It allowed the Labour Left to kid itself that it had pushed the Labour leadership into a revolution and that all that needed to be done was to protect the gains (real or imaginary) of that 'revolution'. No effort was needed to produce a programme to take the reforms further. But if they believed, as they purported to, that the extension of Lloyd-George's social welfare scheme constituted a welfare state, and if the welfare state's creation was a silent revolution, why did they not extend this belief towards the people of those colonies that their government was striving so hard to retain? Offered similar health and education schemes, it's possible that the people of the colonies might have been less insistent on independence. But to keep them subject, without the same benefits being given in Britain, was inexcusably racist.

Interlude: Anglo-Catholicism and its Socialist Traditions

There is a fairly distinct Anglo-Catholic socialist tradition as well as a strong Roman Catholic socialist tradition in France and this has been a major influence on the development of my political beliefs. A number of particular individuals have influenced me[42].

Fathers Mckonochie and Stanton and were two, not so much for their socialism (though they were socialists), but for their courage for the faith. Of the sixty years they were respectively vicar and curate they spent 50 in gaol for using rituals then banned in the Anglican Church. [Both were incumbents of the church of St Alban the Martyr at Holborn during the 19th century. Arthur Henry Stanton [1839-1913] came to St Alban's as curate in 1862 to join the Reverend Alexander Heriot Mckonochie and stayed for fifty years. Both were among followers of the Oxford Movement that wished to reinstate older Catholic forms of ritual and observance and both suffered for their beliefs and actions.]

Father Stuart Headlam [1847-1924], also much persecuted by bishops for his ritualism, was associated with William Morris and was one of the founders of the Socialist League advocating anarcho-socialism.

Father Conrad Noel [1869-1942], originally one of the followers of Headlam but more centralist, was on the executive of the British Socialist Party which was, in turn, to provide most of the members of the British Communist Party. He was secretary of the Church Socialist League from which he resigned in 1916 to form the Catholic Crusade, which was organised along Bolshevik lines. It, as a whole, joined the Communist Party when it was formed. In 1924 Headlam left in opposition to Stalin's rise to power, with the majority of the Crusade following four years later. The remaining minority emerged later as part of the first British Trotskyist group.

Father Tom Pickering, who founded the Brotherhood of the Way, had been influenced by a small sect called the Brotherhood Church. [Those who are acquainted with the history of Bolshevism may know that the conference where the Russian SDLP split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was held in one of the churches of this body, which was a socialist breakaway from the Quakers.] The Brotherhood of the Way insisted not merely that its members adhere to monastic rules of living but they also engage directly in socialist struggle.

[42] Editor's note: I have added some details in square brackets to what Laurens wrote but leave readers to carry out any more detailed research into the people he mentions rather than overburden the text with footnotes.

An American offshoot from Noel's Catholic Crusade – the Society for the Catholic Commonwealth – was founded by Father Frederic Hastings Smyth [1888-1960]. Where Noel had written a statement of socialist belief argued from the Athanasian Creed, Smyth took that one step further in his book *Manhood into God*. When he met Noel he had been an atheist Communist Party member, though he had been previously influenced by Bishop Bell of Chichester. Bell [1883-1958] was a leading pacifist in Britain but is perhaps best remembered for the work he did to try and get the then Tory Government to relax its draconian barriers to Jewish refugees[43].

The existence of the British Empire led many priests who began by going out as missionaries to become rebels, particularly in India and Africa, and against the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism sharpening racial divisions in South Africa. The rebels included a number of bishops, notably Frank Weston (1871-1924, Bishop of Zanzibar), Carney and Trevor Huddleston [1913-1998, Bishop of Stepney]. It was not only Anglicans who aligned with freedom movements. Archbishop Tom Roberts, SJ [1883-1976, Archbishop of Bombay 1937-1950], also defied colonial rule and as, curiously, the Vatican was more prone to cooperate with colonial rule than Anglican authorities, he was removed by Rome rather than waiting for the Viceroy to demand his removal.

During the Thirties in France, Simone Weil [1909-1943], a mathematics scholar of working class Jewish origin, became a syndicalist and also became convinced of the Catholic case, though she was never actually baptised. Her theological writings became something of a cult at the end of WW2 and right wing Catholic organisations would publish carefully mis-translated and expurgated essays of hers in Britain and Ireland. At one time I though there must have been two women of the same name as there was no apparent agreement between the one whose works I read published in French and the one whose writings were available in Dublin, when I was at TCD[44].

Notable also in the inter-war years were Emmanuel Mounier [1905-1950] and the Esprit group, whose 'Personalism', a Catholic development of Martin Buber's theories, provides an individualist anarchism without the material self-interest of the Stirner tradition[45].

[43] Since Laurens wrote this it has been alleged that Bishop Bell had committed acts of paedophilia.
[44] Simone Weil had to leave France for the USA on the German invasion in 1940. She died of tuberculosis and, arguably, self-starvation.
[45] Mounier was an influence on the Catholic Worker movement in the USA.

Brother Desmond O'Neill Belshawe, who had been successively a member of the Catholic Crusade and The Brotherhood of the Way, had returned to Dublin (from where he originally came) when I was at TCD. We were both part of the St Bartholomew (Ballsbridge) congregation. I had read some of Noel's work, but it was Desmond who really got me involved in the Noel tradition. After the Brotherhood had left England during the War, Desmond lived for a time at Whiteways, a Tolstoian colony. While there Desmond was arrested for subversion, was beaten up in cells, came out with a damaged leg, got back to his cottage to find MI5 searching the place and confiscating all his books. These included, inter alia, complete sets of the then translated works of Marx and Bakunin. They left just a Bible. Desmond hobbled after them to insist they take his Bible as well – 'his only revolutionary book'.

My mother had been a teacher in France, then senior translator for Versailles, after which she had a very cushy job working for Ann Morgan at the American Embassy. So I therefore have French connections through which, at the end of the War, I learned something of the *Anneau D'Or* Mission to Paris. There was a big political scandal when many inspired by this became worker priests, most of whom joined the Communist trade unions since they were the ones to which most workers belonged. Some of these joined the CP and the Archbishop of Paris was compelled by the Vatican, against his will, to disown the worker priest movement. I was involved in consequence with the Nouvelle Gauche, a socialist breakaway from Les Jeunes Ouvrières Catholiques.

I will come back to Father Michael Scott [1907-1983] in the course of discussing the Direct Action Committee and the Committee of 100, but before these the publication of his autobiography[46], *A Time to Speak*, told how between the wars he had worked with Congress in India. He had earlier lived for some time in South Africa for health reasons where, during and after WW2, he led civil disobedience successively against both Smuts' United Party Government and that of the Nationalist Party. This had a wide influence and did much to set the scene for later radical revival. When the DAC came into being, though we had patrons like Archbishop Roberts, he was the only person with renowned experience of civil disobedience who took part in our demonstrations in Britain and came to prison with us.

Two other autobiographies had great preparatory influence for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Trevor Huddleston *Naught for your Comfort* was one such. Huddleston had been a Tory when he went to South Africa. His conversion there and work to oppose Apartheid probably influenced more people than did Father Scott. Then Victor Gollancz produced a three

[46] Published 1958

volume autobiography (*Letter for Timothy*, *More for Timothy* and *Also Much Cattle*). Gollancz, a well-known publisher, had been a leading figure in the pre-war Popular Front politics, founding the Left Book Club. He became disillusioned by the Stalin-Hitler Pact and evolved into a pacifist. His relevance here is that, like Weil, coming from Judaism and never actually being baptised, he nevertheless became something of a Christian theologian.

Gollancz having been asked to speak to the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, but because he was also due to speak to the United Nations Assembly on behalf of the Herero people in what was then South West Africa, he asked me to speak on his behalf. It was there I met Father Gresham Kirby [1916-2006], a very worthy heir to Headlam and Noel, though unfortunately, unlike them he left no corpus of written work[47]. He was a perfectionist who only ever published one essay, though he updated that three times. In *Logos*, I published a number of my approximations to his lectures. Thought they were near enough that he didn't disown them or want me to publish corrigenda, they were never fully his.

Ken Leech was also at that APF meeting, at the time a first year theological student[48]. He became the major Anglican social-theologian with an enormous body of published books to his name. Many of these took Gresham's ideas and developed them, so Gresham's thinking lives on despite his inability to accept that on occasions one should publish even when one is not fully satisfied with what one has written.

Will Warren, like Gresham and Desmond, unfortunately has also left no corpus of writings. He combined Quakerism with having been 25 years in the Communist Party (until Hungary 1956), though he must have been a pretty dissident member of the CP. He was a social worker amongst miner's families in South Wales in the Thirties and had a number of criticisms of Party conduct. Then, after working for Spanish refugees, he came back to Britain saying the anarchists had been right and the CP wrong. When the Stalinists (eventually) supported the War in 1940 he refused to abandon his pacifism. He went onto the committee of the Direct Action Committee in 1958, when I generally worked as his assistant (he was my best man when I married). He was to do a lot of work later on in dangerous circumstances in Northern Ireland. He was a natural anarchist and obviously behaved as such even when he was in the CP, but I am proud to say that he always said that I introduced him to anarchism. [From a letter to Séamas Cain 27 January 2010]

[47] Gresham was an anarchist communist, influenced by Kropotkin and Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement.
[48] Reverend Kenneth Leech (1939-2015): Anglo-Catholic priest and Christian Socialist from Ashton-under-Lyne, founder of the Centrepoint homeless charity and a prolific writer on Christian social justice themes.

Chapter 4: Via Dissident Communism to Anarchism

Banishment to Paris was an intermittent affair. After being dismissed from Marlborough in 1947, for the next fifteen months or so, I was studying at Guildford Tech working towards my 'Intermediate' - the London equivalent of Higher Certificate, later 'A' Levels and a first step towards a degree. I also took private coaching for an extra credit, having failed to get one in Latin.

The workers' uprising in Paris happened in the Summer of 1946 and was along 1917-type soviet lines. The workers rose spontaneously, formed workers' councils, seized their factories and could have taken over the State. They were better armed than de Gaulle's government, having taken guns from the retreating Germans at the end of the war. The French Communist Party (PCF) told them that they should not rise and they should support the State. It was a parallel to what had happened two years earlier in Italy, when the Italian CP was ordered to follow the same line. Togliatti was specially flown from Russia to ensure that there would be no workers' revolution. There were those within the PCF who opposed the official line, among them André Marty and Charles Tillon, even though they loyally obeyed orders in implementing the policy. Their real views became known seven years later when they were expelled.

For my part, having joined the youth wing of the PCF in France, I am ashamed to say that I helped in a small way with the killing off of the rising. My command of French had barely returned at this stage and did not come to any decent level for the best part of another year and a longer stay. So my role was marginal. Younger PCF members were sent round to the councils to collect up the firearms and hand them over to the State authorities. Three weeks later, the party called the same workers out on strike and they were met with police armed with the guns they had handed over.

At first I was no more than puzzled. I merely asked why we had been told to do what we did. Had someone taken the trouble to give me an half logical explanation, I would have no doubt been satisfied, at least for the time. Instead I learned that I was a 'Trotsky-fascist-beast' and was expelled the same summer of 1946. I had also opposed Hiroshima, which the PCF had supported[49].

[49] As subsequently Communist Party members haven't wished to believe that their party supported Hiroshima (indeed the Party subsequently invented the myth that it had been the first act of the NATO-Warsaw Pact hostility), it is perhaps necessary to refer people to the front page of the issue of the *Daily Worker* that came out afterwards, triumphant, with a cartoon with many nuclear bombs raining down on Japan. The Bomb was regarded at the time as a 'glorious proletarian achievement' and those of us who opposed the bombing, since Japan had been previously

I knew I only had two legs; I certainly wasn't a fascist, so I concluded (perhaps illogically) that I must be a Trotskyist and duly wrote to the Revolutionary Communist Party asking to join. In order to distinguish myself from my mother I invented a 'nom-de-guerre'. My initials are JFLO, so Jolf was an obvious anagram. My ultimals are NSSR, which isn't far from being an anagram of Ross. Given that I was at the time reading *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and my aunt's sister's stage-name was Oriel Ross, then Jolf Ross seemed an appropriate choice[50].

There was already a connection to the RCP. Maurice, the man in charge of my father's clerks, was in the RCP and had persuaded my father to pay for their printing costs in the past. He noted that a 'Jolf Ross' from Pilgrim in Horsley had joined and assumed it must be my brother Robin. He used the returning of father's belongings as an excuse to make contact, Mother being out he asked me where Robin was, and was surprised to find he was out in the Pacific. He asked me if Robin ever used the name 'Jolf Ross', so I explained that it was me. As Dad had left some cash around to help in such occasions, I was able to pass on money for the printing.

The time of my joining coincided with the initial resignation of Mme Trotsky[51] from the leadership of the Fourth International. I can't remember whether I actually read her position paper. She wrote it under a pen-name and I wouldn't have known enough to know it was her. The first that I knew of it were the articles in the internal paper debating the merits of her case. Anyway, not knowing who had written the original article and certainly not knowing that she and Grandizo Munis had formed a faction within the Fourth International in opposition to the leadership, I came to agree with her arguments. Equally, had I known that it was she who had written the article and that there was now a group within the Fourth International with those views, I would certainly have remained a Trotskyist longer than I did. Indeed I would probably

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trying to surrender, were accused of being pro-fascist and expelled from CP-front peace groups. When I was expelled I was not personally accused of being pro-fascist with regard to the Paris events, but it soon became clear that this was my major crime.

[50] The author of The Seven Pillars of Wisdom was T. E. Lawrence, who adopted the name of Ross in order to rejoin the armed forces without revealing his true personage.

[51] Trotsky left two widows. At the time of the 1905 Revolution in Russia he was called Leon Sedov. He and his wife, Natalia Sedova, were exiled to Siberia. They started to escape by sleigh, but Natalia fell from the sleigh through the ice. It was natural to believe that she had drowned, if not frozen to death. Trotsky completed his escape and went to Switzerland believing himself to be a widower. Incredibly, Natalia Sedova survived. Fairly soon thereafter, Trotsky (now using this name) met another Natalia, who had worked for Lenin, and they married. When the 1917 Revolution was imminent and Trotsky returned to Russia, he was contacted by Natalia Sedova. The two Natalias met and agreed to share him and both were with him until his death. Both later, with new partners, remained politically active and in touch. Both left the Fourth International in the early 1950s regarding it as having betrayed Trotsky, though Natalia Sedova's criticisms were not as thorough-going as those of Natalia Trotskaya. *I had the privilege of meeting them both together in a Paris café, around 1953-54, at about the time they left the Fourth International.* Unfortunately, I was still not aware that the article that had brought me out of Trotskyism was written by Mme Trotsky or I would not have been so tongue-tied. After one of André Marty's demonstrations I was with a contingent of young anarchists and, as we returned through the Left Bank, my friends spotted the two sitting in the café and I was dragged in to meet them. [See Editorial Note at the end of this chapter reference this footnote]

have remained with her group and followed her out of the Fourth International when she made her 'Open Break' in 1953. Instead, I wrote to, joined and left, about half a dozen even smaller dissident-Trot groupings, finding I disagreed with them more than the official Trots. Then, eighteen months later, while staying in Paris with Lucien Michon and his wife (returned from China), I came across *Étincelle*.

In order to understand my experience of being plunged in at the deep end of Trotskyist debates at this time, some explanation is required, necessarily filtered through my own understanding. During the 1930s, Trotsky's oppositional theory was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union was still at base a workers' State, in transition to socialism, albeit a workers' State that was corrupted ('deformed and degenerate') by the power of a bureaucratic élite. This élite was able to balance on the conflict between the political power of the working class, expressed through soviet control of state power, and the residual power of the capitalist class, which by and large still provided the bulk of industrial managers.

However, many of Trotsky's followers broke with him, arguing either that the Soviet Union had reverted to state capitalism or that the bureaucracy (what was later called the Nomenklatura) had developed into a new class with interests of and for itself. Trotsky countered the first view by insisting that reversion to state capitalism could only have happened if there had been a tangible counter-revolution - and the Purges could not constitute such as they were carried out by and on behalf of the bureaucracy. He argued against the second view on the grounds firstly that a bureaucracy could not be hereditary and therefore bureaucratic power could not last more than one generation and, secondly, that even if it were true, world revolution was going to happen in the near future ('at the end of the war now beginning'), at which point the exact nature of bureaucratic rule would become a purely hypothetical question.

Trotsky conceded, indeed stressed in his Political Testament, *The USSR in War*, that if the developed Western world did not become socialist at the end of WW2, that could only be because the intellectual grip of the Stalinists on the Western proletariat was conscious and sufficient to divert Western workers from socialism. That could only be the case if his critics were right and the bureaucracy was a nascent ruling class. Unfortunately, Trotsky was murdered before these ideas could be tested historically. At the end of WW2, the Fourth International leadership ignored the fact that Trotsky had stressed that he had meant the spontaneous acquisition of power by the working class in the developed world and chose to reinterpret his views to refer to the Red Army's occupation of a large part of Central Europe.

Mme Trotsky demonstrated that no social revolution was taking place in eastern Europe, that by and large the workers were not involved in political change and that this in no way constituted what Trotsky had foreseen. She therefore insisted that the Soviet Union should henceforth be seen as a class-divided society.

It is important to distinguish her views from the much watered down version produced later by Ygael Gluckstein (more familiarly known as Tony Cliff)[52], which became the underlying theory of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Gluckstein ('Mr Honey' as we knew him in 1946, a pun on his wife's first name) came to argue in 1948 that Russia was state capitalist because it had never been strong enough to free itself from the effect of world market forces. In this view, the class nature of the State became purely incremental - if enough countries had become Stalinist, they would have been strong enough to resist market forces and the whole world would have become socialist automatically. This was and is not an advance from Trotsky's belief that Russia only needed a political revolution, not a social one - it is a retreat from that position.

CLR James[53] and Raya Dunayevskaya[54], the then leaders of the Johnson-Forest tendency, in contrast to those who talked of bureaucratic collectivism, insisted that it was not a case of the bureaucracy forming a new class, but a reversion to state capitalism. Their argument was that, under Stalin, communist theory had lost its humanist content and had become a matter of administrative convenience, the Party making no effort to inspire its supporters with any real vision of freedom or of workers deciding their own fate. Their view had much in common with those who opposed the bureaucratic collective, but they were at pains to deny that they thought there was a new class power.

Not only were these debates new to me, I also had to do some quick catching up on the even longer history that lay behind the Étincelle group, with whom I became involved. I will now have to indulge my habit of another lengthy digression, as the history of some of these more marginal groups is less well known to the politically aware reader than that of the, more recent, Trotskyist phenomenon. Their origins go back to the Russian Revolution itself in 1917.

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[52] Tony Cliff (Ygael Gluckstein, (1917-2000): Trotskyist activist born in Palestine, he came to Britain in 1947 and helped form the Socialist Review Group. This was the fore-runner of International Socialism, later the Socialist Workers Party. He was the advocate of one version of the theory that Soviet Russia was a state capitalist society and no longer socialist.

[53] CLR James (1901-1989): journalist, socialist writer and activist as well as a great fan of cricket, he was born in Trinidad. He was the joint founder with Raya Dunayevskaya of the Johnson-Forest Tendency of the Workers Party of the USA using his Johnson pseudonym. They regarded the Soviet Union as state capitalist and also opposed the Leninist concept of the vanguard party.

[54] Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-1987): Russian-born, one time secretary to Trotsky in Mexico, co-founder under her pseudonym of Forest, of the Johnson-Forest Tendency. She later founded *News and Letters* and developed the philosophy and associated organisational forms of Marxist Humanism in the US.

Most people who call the 1917 revolution in Russia 'The Soviet Revolution' or 'The Bolshevik Revolution' probably don't realize that, whereas the Bolshevik Party was an highly centralised body of revolutionary thinkers (people could only join if they were able to satisfy others of their commitment and knowledge of socialist theory), the soviets were open to all and, starting as councils of workers in a factory, they were joined by representatives of all on whose work the factory in part depended, as also by all on whose life the factory's work impinged. They were associated together in town federations of soviets, and so on.

The Revolution could indeed be seen as the product of the inter-action between the two (Bolsheviks and Soviets), but even that needs to be qualified. The 1917 Revolution had been sparked off when an ultra-Right faction round the Tsar's brother had attempted to stage a coup. The Tsar's council - led by its chair Rakovski - mobilised to resist at one level, the mass of the population did so at another. The Tsar was scared and failed to stand with his council, so these were left out on a limb and declared a Republic, based on a limited aristocratic franchise, calling in representatives of other landowners. Then the council got cold feet and Rakovski gave way to a new, wider council led by Prince Lvov, who in turn called in support from major industrial employers, notably one called Miliukov. The majority of the population was unimpressed, had formed soviets to protect their own position, and were unconcerned by the doings of these successive attempts to rebuild central government. In much the same way, Prince Lvov gave way to Miliukov, who in turn called in and was replaced by representatives of the token legal unions, notably Kerenski. The masses organised in soviets remained still unimpressed.

Lenin had been in exile and, in his absence, the Bolshevik Party had been led by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Molotov and Stalin. Like the Menshevik Party [the other half of the Russian Social democratic Party - ed.] they were playing the same constitutional game as Miliukov and Kerenski. Had Lenin not returned, no doubt Martov and Zinoviev would have, in their turn, succeeded and been superseded. The anarchists of varying descriptions and a few minuscule factions had already raised the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets', but those calling for this were only a small minority. However when Lenin - and before him Trotsky - returned, they adopted the anarchist slogan, took power and only then let on that rule was not going to be exercised by these soviets but by the Bolshevik Party. That said, it would be wrong to see this as merely a coup to head off the revolution, What made Lenin and Trotsky able to establish firm power when a whole series of Provisional Governments had singularly failed so to do, was that the majority of workers and peasants represented in these soviets were convinced that Lenin and Trotsky were sincere in

their belief in soviet power. Objectively, the Bolsheviks did stage a coup, but this was only possible because their subjective intention to bring about soviet power was clearly manifest.

The key to this paradox lies in Lenin's theories, in the fact that Lenin, assumed by all to be the embodiment of Marx's theories, had in fact (because of the peculiar nature of Russian society) departed in significant ways from Marx and yet retained such respect for Marx's thought that he wished to compel the masses to conform to what he saw as Marxism.

Marx was very much opposed to secretive and conspiratorial parties. He held that these could never be the vehicle of working class self-emancipation. Attempts to build such parties he regarded as throwbacks to Jacobinism, pre-eminently the party of the old revolutionary bourgeoisie [at the time of the French Revolution -ed.].

Lenin, indeed almost all Russian Marxists, arguing that Russia had not fully thrown off feudalism, said that the working class had to push the capitalists into making their own revolution. The debate was around whether that meant a cross-class alliance between the bourgeoisie and the working class, or whether the working class had to make the bourgeoisie's revolution for them. Lenin justified the latter belief by arguing the theory of an Imperialist stage of capitalism, i.e. that economically speaking Russia was a colony of British and/or German industrialists, and that therefore Jacobin style organisation was still appropriate.

Marx had insisted that the dominant class could not be overthrown until it had exhausted its economic potential. When a new system is in a revolutionary phase it creates, quite incidentally, pockets of new social relations, thus 'sowing within itself the seeds of its own destruction'. The exploited and oppressed classes must, with these new social relations build the new society within the framework of the old. Only then could they overthrow the preceding ruling class, which by then would be contributing nothing of economic value to society. So for Marx, the class structure emerges first and then produces the revolution.

Though Lenin did not invert this, nowadays 'Leninists' base their arguments on the claim that, only as a result of revolutions can the economic development that leads to the emergence of new societies take place. The Bolshevik Party in Russia, therefore, had, prior to the Revolution, run on the basis of theories which it knew diverged from Marx's past proposals, but which it argued Marx would have accepted because of Russia's peculiar status. When it came to building a Communist International, by definition, it had to look to socialists who did not in their own countries share the Bolshevik theories. No doubt some of Lenin's ideas had already spread to the colonial world as to other 'economic colonies' such as those of Latin America. But if socialists in

Western, economically-developed countries had previously been advocating Leninist forms of party organisation, Lenin would have been very suspicious of them, suspecting Jacobin influences.

Obviously in Russia there was a fundamental conflict between those who had originally raised the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' and the Leninists. Trotsky led troops to subdue the Vyborg Quarter Soviet (the most militant workers in Petrograd), then its equivalent in Moscow and finally the Kronstadt soviet in which the revolutionary sailors had played a prominent role. These sailors had done the actual fighting during the revolution and, at first, the Bolsheviks had decreed that in order to protect the revolution, none of those who had stormed the Winter Palace were to be posted away from Kronstadt. When the Kronstadt sailors declared that the Bolsheviks were betraying the revolution, Trotsky claimed that these were an entirely new set of sailors. The echoes of these events complicated the formation of the Western parties of the early Communist International.

The parties in the west were initially built more on the basis of their support for workers' council organisation (soviets) than on support for Lenin's secretive and centrally disciplined form of party organisation. It was only after Lenin's death and Trotsky's ousting from power in Russia, that the parties of the newly formed International were 'bolshevised'.

When, as a result of the earlier 1905 Revolution in Russia (in which the soviet first emerged as a workers' organisational form), Lenin saw the importance of the soviets in the revolutionary process, he noted that the one Marxist theorist to have talked in terms of workers' councils (he was not going to give any credit to anarchists for similar ideas) was the American, Daniel De Leon[55]. He proclaimed that De Leon was 'the only post-Marx Marxist to have added anything of value to Marx's theory. So it was natural that the De Leonists were extremely influential in the formation of the Anglophone communist parties.

Also, throughout the emergence of the Russian Social Democrats and their split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Rosa Luxemburg had taken a keen interest in the debates. She was a critic, albeit sympathetic, of Leninism, rejecting much of his basic theory (particularly his 'Imperialist' stage ideas) but nevertheless finding reason to argue for him against his major international critics. (The fact that both De Leon and Luxemburg died before Lenin, as also the great Scots Marxist, John Maclean, meant that Stalin never found it necessary to claim that they

[55] Daniel De Leon (1852-1914): American Marxist and Socialist, founder of the Socialist Labour Party in 1890. He developed a theory of a dual strategy for achieving a bloodless road to socialism combining revolutionary industrial unionism with conventional political party activity.

had been 'tsarist/capitalist' agents all along: which has meant that in Stalinist histories they are given lip-service as fore-runners of 'The Party' and their theories have been ignored rather than demonised.)

That was the context, in the years immediately after the 1917 Russian Revolution, as socialist parties regrouped, from which arose Bordiga, the leader of left-thinking youth in the Italian Socialist Party. Before 1917 he had already caught attention through saying that the workers could win nothing through bourgeois parliaments, which were only formed to serve bourgeois needs. Bordiga advocated abstaining from elections and launched a new paper - The Soviet - immediately after the Revolution and became the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) when socialists and communists split. Coming from southern Italy, he could have seen the South as a colony of the more industrialised North and have adapted Lenin's theoretical system. But as Mussolini - by then founding the fascist movement - was arguing something on equivalent lines, he fairly naturally shunned this concept, turning to Rosa Luxemburg's outlook, though he was not totally uncritical of her.

Fairly soon after the foundation of the Communist (Third) International in 1922, the Bolsheviks found it expedient to make treaties with countries in the West, ones which involved all sorts of compromises with Social Democrat influenced, but nevertheless still pro-capitalist, western parties. Many of the founder members of the Communist International, who had broken with their national Social Democratic parties on precisely such grounds, found this made their position untenable and objected. There was growing knowledge of how Lenin was re-imposing one-man management in place of soviet control of industry. Major industries such as the railways, coal and oil had been taken over completely by the workers, while the Bolsheviks, by taking these into state ownership, were plainly moving away from true socialism and its basis in workers' control. It was also known that, where there had been a multiplicity of parties supporting the idea of soviet power and functioning within the soviets, the Bolsheviks were now banning all other parties from participating. Moreover, while throughout the Party's years under Tsarist autocracy there had been provision for dissident factions within the Party, these were now progressively banned. All of this meant opposition beginning to grow within the western communist movement and the wider movements influenced by them.

In Britain and America a number of groupings influenced by De Leon and/or the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who had until then participated in the talks designed to form the communist parties, now opted out and a number of dissident, extra-leftist parties were formed. Most really militant western trade unions had rallied to support the communists, but in 1922, just

at the time that the Communists decided to formalize this support by creating the Red International of Labour Unions, the majority of the militant unions concerned had become disquieted at the way the Bolshevik regime was developing. They broke away, instead re-forming the International Workers' Association on strictly anarcho-syndicalist lines.

In Germany and throughout central Europe, where there was a series of attempted soviet-style revolutions, the left factions from the Communist Party broke away to form Communist Workers' Parties. There was even a Communist Workers' International which used the name 'Fourth International' long before the Trotskyists, and though this movement did not last long, it was in several countries, for a brief period larger than the official Communist Parties.

Unlike these, Bordiga, despite his leftism was a great believer in working class unity - when, in Northern Italy syndicalists had launched a revolt he had argued against it and forbidden communists to take part. He was not amongst those who broke with the Communist International. Nevertheless Lenin and Trotsky decided he was an impediment to their talks with Social Democrats and arranged for him to be ousted from the leadership of the PCI and replaced by Gramsci. Bordiga remained within the PCI as leader of a left current for eight years, before breaking away to launch the Internationalist Communist Party.

By this time, Bordiga was arguing that Stalin had taken Russia backwards to state capitalism. When Lenin died, 87% of Russian industry was still in private hands, even though the State had political powers over them. Lenin described this system as 'workers' dominated state capitalism, in transition to socialism, but with severe bureaucratic deformations'. These industries were nationalised during what was known by oppositionists as the 'Third Period', at which very time Stalin was suppressing all that remained of the soviets, outlawing all non-state sponsored trade unions and sending enormous numbers of industrial militants and oppositional party members to the Gulag. Bordiga argued that, while private capitalism may have ended, so had workers' domination and that therefore state capitalism remained, even if it took the form of rule by the former petit bourgeoisie rather than the old grand bourgeoisie.

It is hardly surprising that Bordiga was not greatly impressed when Trotsky went into exile and appealed to him to support Trotsky's international Left Opposition. One wonders how Trotsky ever imagined that the comrade he had ousted from the leadership of the PCI would ever trust him enough to rally to his support, after Trotsky had suffered the same fate from Stalin in a more vicious form. Many years later, I was to find that that's rather the habit of Trotskyists, both in the Peace Movement and industrially. They will stab those with whom they work in the back

in order to make unprincipled compromise with Stalinists, then in their turn get stabbed and so go back to their initial comrades to demand 'why weren't you there to defend us when we were betrayed?'

Bordiga argued, as early as 1927, that war between fascism and classical capitalist states would be inevitable and said that, such was the nature of the Stalinist regime it could not be predicted which side it would support in such a war. He was not prepared to advocate taking sides between two forms of capitalism and advocated that the workers stand aside from the struggles between fascism and bourgeois democracy. He was either imprisoned or under house arrest for eighteen years after Mussolini's coup. He personally didn't play a direct role in politics from 1927 until up until the 1950s, though his supporters played a significant role in France and elsewhere in the 1930s and were active both in exile and in Italy after 1945. With their theories they were not prepared to endorse the term 'Liberation' to describe the end of fascist rule in Italy. Not surprisingly, in the intervening years, differences of emphasis had emerged among Bordiga's supporters.

When I met up with *Étincelle* ('sparkle') in France in 1946-7, I did not know of this history of 'Bordigism'. Since the very word Bordigist has changed its meaning, the successors of the largest sector of what were in 1948 'The Bordigists' now call themselves 'The Italian Left'. Those still called 'Bordigist' are a fairly small breakaway from 'The Italian Left'. Back in 1948, as had been the case earlier, this current was headed by someone called Verces, generally known by the pseudonym 'Peronne' (at a time when Peron - without the extra ~ne - was in power in Argentina. I was somewhat surprised to be told by Hélène Michon that my views were 'Peronneiste', and I had to spend some time when back in England assuring myself that a good socialist hadn't sold out to become a quasi-fascist, somehow achieving power on the other side of the Atlantic! *Étincelle* was actually the paper of what even then was a fairly small sub-current, known in the 1930s as Bilan (an accounting) and now as the International Communist Current. I didn't actually join, regularly attended meetings and no doubt would have joined, but within a few months the branch to which I was attached upped sticks and merged with a group of dissident Trotskyists - I joined these instead. A year later this new group launched the paper *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. I was not around at the time of the launch as by then I was doing National Service.

Some years earlier Lucien Michon had introduced me (or rather re-introduced me, as on an earlier visit, while he was still in China, a friend of his had shown me a copy) to 'L'Observateur d'Aujourd'hui', later called 'France Observateur' (Claude Bourdet's paper) and to 'Nouvelle

Gauche', produced by a group of Christian socialists working with Bourdet. Though my Étincelle comrades regarded these as very reformist, I managed to reconcile working with the one with contacts with the other.

All that of course was in France, though I didn't live there permanently, moving back and forth. Nor did I spend all my time in political activity. In the Easter of 1948 I was staying with the Michon family and spent time with them travelling around France, to Montpellier, Monte Carlo and Tours. In the summer of 1948, my last visit, I had a week in Paris (during which I met Bilan), a fortnight in Tours with a friend of the Michon family (a former Resistance man) and a few days in a hostel in Paris, which was when I met up with the prototype 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' group. I also took part in a student swap with a boy from the Nivernais, with a week there and a week in Surrey.

In England I came across and attempted to join the Socialist Party of Great Britain, a body which also viewed the Soviet Union as state capitalist. As they don't accept religious people into membership, I was refused. Its history was unusual in that it had never viewed the Soviet Union as anything other than state capitalist (in a sense agreeing with Lenin in that respect, while rejecting his claim that it was in transition to socialism). With such views it had not taken part in any of the talks that led to the foundation of the Communist Party in Britain, though it was partly involved in attempts to unite the left critics of the body that emerged as the CPGB.

This was at a time, in the mid-1940s, that the Liberal Party started one of its periodic left swings. They brought out the poster (resurrected fifteen years later) saying 'which twin is the Tory'. They were pledged to oppose any attempt to build British nuclear weapons or to join in a military treaty based on such weaponry. They had adopted as an economic policy the principle that every firm with capital of more than £10,000 should distribute to its workers one third of its value - a policy that was a considerable advance on Labour. I had few illusions that the party leadership would feel itself bound to adhere to such policies if they became inconvenient, but thought it worthwhile to join the Young Liberals for the time being. We were mainly active in the peace movement and in the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism (which I found out later had been founded by Common Wealth). Then outside the founding meeting of the United Nations' Association I heard a voice shouting 'Not UNO Government, but NO government' and bought my first copy of *Freedom* from Matt Kavanagh.

I found *Freedom* to be wishy-washy, but this was my first contact with anarchism. I saw it on sale at the Librairie Française in Old Compton Street and subscribed through them. Soon after, I

wrote to the Freedom bookshop in Red Lion Street, enclosing a donation, which was interpreted as a subscription.

Interlude: Trotsky's Wives (editorial note)

Laurens was not aware of Trotsky's previous wife, Aleksandra Bronstein, and remains insistent that there were two 'Natalyas', only one of whom was Sedova, who was involved in the formation of *Voix Ouvrière*, which later became *Lutte Ouvrière*, but who would have died shortly after Laurens met her. Laurens believes this Natalia Sedova took Raymond Molinier as a lover before Trotsky died, and Molinier was in dispute with Naville and wasn't trusted by the working-class contacts because he was a business man - hence the formation of *Voix Ouvrière*. Laurens believes that the other, Mme Trotskaya, died around 1960 at which time she was fairly complimentary towards Raya Dunayevskaya, a former secretary of Trotsky who later founded the movement of Marxist-Humanism around *News and Letters* in the USA.

Trotsky's first was Aleksandra L'vovna Sokolovskaia, whom he married as LD Bronstein in 1902. He had two children with her: Zinaida (who committed suicide in 1933) and Nina (who died of TB in 1928). She herself was shot in 1938. The second wife was Natalia Ivanovna Sedova, whom he married after separating from his first wife and with whom he had two sons, Lev (assassinated 1938) and Sergei (shot 1937). These details are from Isaac Deutscher: *The Prophet Armed* (London, 2003, p 59). No other life partner is mentioned, though Trotsky had affairs. Details of Natalia Sedova's life with Trotsky make no reference to a second Natalia and they were separated in 1907 when Trotsky was exiled to Siberia, but escaped to Finland, where they were re-united (article in *History Today*). The detail in relation to Dunayevskaya relates to Sedova. They had been in correspondence together since at least 1947. Sedova did not move from Mexico to live in Paris until 1960, but may well have been in Paris on a visit at the time Laurens met her – she was friends with Grandizo Munis who broke with the Fourth International in 1948. She resigned from the International and the US Socialist Workers Party by letter dated 9 May 1951.

I have established that there is a connection between a Sedova and a Molinier at the time around which Laurens believes he met 'two wives of Trotsky'. The former wife of Raymond Molinier, Jeanne Martin had been the partner of Leon Sedov when the latter was allegedly murdered by Stalin's agents in 1938 and had looked after Leon's child. Natalia and Jeanne both lived in Paris at various times. Laurens only had a brief introduction to the two women and had no time to engage in conversation – hence the apparent confusion of names and precise relationships. They were indeed both 'wives' of Trotsky, just Trotsky senior and 'Trotsky' junior. That is the best explanation I can find.

Chapter 5: The Accidental Soldier 22071407

During the War, *Freedom* had been called *War Commentary* and was just reverting to the old name when I started subscribing (though I later learned that the heritage was debateable and that another group claimed the rights to that name). Naturally I read a few back copies and so came across cartoons by John Olday, which I found conveyed a clear message. It's possible that someone with more art-sense than I would have dismissed them as being in a 1930s Social-Realist style and said that their message was crude, but they were right for me at that time. *Freedom* reprinted a lot of these as a book and, knowing I was going to be in the army I bought this. When reading them in barracks I found that, if I left them about to go to the loo, there would be bound to be one of the other members of the squad chuckling over it when I came back. It was a good start.

I had already experienced that carrying a mixed block of wood and iron, over one shoulder, at a snail's pace, backward and forward, was a pastime singularly lacking in intellectual stimulation. The army cadet corps at Marlborough had been compulsory for anyone whose parents hadn't specified one or other had conscientious objections to such service. The form the parents were sent was of course written in such a way as to suggest that the pupil would then be asked if he had such objection. In fact a notice went up saying, 'the following have volunteered', though none had so done. I later heard that one boy's parents did state a conscientious objection and his housemaster wrote 'hoping they would reconsider this *authoritarian* decision which did not allow him to participate' - naturally he'd never been asked by the housemaster if he had wanted such participation.

So I did not have high expectations of National Service, when I was called up in October 1948[56]. The forms sent beforehand did allow people to choose whether they wanted to go into the Navy, Army or Air Force; but, as I and the majority of my intake squad had asked to go into the Navy or Air Force, and as we soon after met Navy and Air Force conscripts who had opted for the Army, I could only assume that no weight was given to such preferences. Indeed they may well have said - 'he wants to go into the Navy, so we'll put him in the Army, ah now, he wants to go in the Army, so the Navy will be good for him'.

[56] When I was called up for National Service, we'd all gone before designated medics and been pronounced fit for service. When I arrived at Aldershot one of the same intake arrived, having travelled from somewhere like Aberdeen or Inverness. He had only one leg and was totally blind. He arrived after what must have been an hellish journey, was told he was not fit for service and told to go home - so repeating the journey in reverse. It has shades of the experience of those taken before ATOS medics and being declared fit for work, despite major disabilities and illness in 2012.

The aversion to parades was particularly the case for me as, given my bad eyes, I could never be certain when preparing for them that I wasn't getting blanco on my brass or brasso on my webbing. Every parade involved a nightmare of trouble.

After a fortnight in reception, a squad of us who had applied for the Intelligence Corps were separated out. (It meant we started and then finished the rest of our basic training a week late.) By any rational judgement some of that squad were admirably qualified. Anyone who was, was to be disappointed. The Army made it clear that they didn't want those able to speak other languages nor people with academic qualifications. Indeed on our first day in the squad when we were being asked our educational qualifications, the first of us began: "I have got a doctorate in Economics and a degree in Law, I speak Russian and Turkish…" only to be cut short by: "I am only interested in whether you've got School Cert".

Half a dozen of my friends did get sent at the end of our training to work at the War Office, through their service getting very quick promotion. I was told, before I left Aldershot, I was to be sent as Secretary to the Head of the BAOR. Surprise, surprise, there was a mix-up; I heard that 22071406 got that. No doubt, ending up as a medic (even unqualified and held to be downgraded in skill) I had a more worthwhile time than I would have done at HQ.

During training at Aldershot, I'd had an accident with an iron girder and so still needed medical treatment when I found myself at Glinde early in 1949. The cut leg was probably worthwhile as it excused me parades and the dangers connected with them. So, having learned that in my first job - as a due's-out clerk - I'd be filling in the same figure, in answer to one question, on forms all day long, that the best I could hope from promotion would be that, first I'd supervise someone else doing it, then get to work out the figure once a day, then supervise the person working out the figure, I got the idea of changing to be a medic. Such were the Army's order of priorities, that meant that I got myself down-graded.. Fortunately again, medical staff very frequently have reason to be excused parades.

So I went to live in the Depot Medical Inspection Room. This was in fact an whole building, containing a large waiting room, a doctor's surgery, a fairly large treatment room, a pharmacy-storeroom where it was possible to mix up medicines if complete supplies ran out, and one corner of which (having a kettle) was grandly designated the kitchen. There was a single bedroom and a three-bed communal one, two shower rooms and, permanently locked up, a room which I much later learned was full of the Rhine Army's supply of morphine (see Chapter 1).

There were then, one Scots Medical Officer who come in nine-to-five, three English orderlies who slept there and the MO had an English driver who also slept there (he was due for demobilisation, being replaced after a while). There were two German medical orderlies. Unlike us, they were qualified. One, Walther, a pre-war physiotherapist, had been a sergeant in the German Medical Corps. The other, Bruno, had done half his medical student course when, at the end of the war, the Nazi régime had cancelled his exemption and called him up for army service. These two came in during the day, though later Walther came in for twice-weekly 24-hour shifts. There were also two German ambulance drivers, Kurt and 'Kleine Walther', who used to do two days on and two days off, and a cleaner.

There were in early 1949 still some die-hard German Nazis, their resistance known as the 'Werewolves'. Then, and even a bit later, one heard that someone might emerge from rubble, generally armed with a bayonet they would try to stick in you. The first time I saw this was on an occasion when my lack of any prior medical training, even basic First Aid, might have proved embarrassing. On my second day I'd accompanied the ambulance and a patient down to the hospital in Hamburg. On the way back, through a more than normally bomb-damaged area, we were stopped by a German policeman and directed into a side road, where military police were standing over someone who had just been knocked down in a car accident. They had phoned for an ambulance, but none had yet come. I just had time to wonder how I was going to say that I hadn't a clue what to do, when a very emaciated man armed with a bayonet emerged, obviously intending to stick it into the military policeman. I knocked him down and the policeman was so effusively grateful that I couldn't have got on with treating the patient, even if I had been capable of doing so. By the time he'd finished thanking me, the hospital ambulance arrived and my services were not needed. I had to live all this down since, such was the hatred ordinary squaddies had for the military police, that saving the life of one was a heinous crime. It was some months before I lived down the nickname of 'the rooky police aide'.

Also on my second day there, I had noticed a German leaflet. Since I'd never learned German I couldn't read it, but on the back of it there was a cartoon, signed XXX, which looked remarkably like one of John Olday's[57]. Naturally I assumed someone had just copied it without acknowledging the borrowing. A month or so later, just after my copy of *Freedom* had arrived with a reprint of the cartoon in question and I was reading it, I became aware that Kleine Walther was looking over my shoulder. "You've pinched our cartoon", he said, producing another copy of the leaflet I had already seen. Naturally I retorted that they'd pinched ours, and

[57] John Olday (1905-1977), born Hamburg Arthur William Oldag, artist, cartoonist, anarchist and anti-war campaigner during WW2.

produced Olday's book, which had the date on which the cartoon had first appeared. I thought that would be the end of it, but the next time he came on duty, after a quick search of the MI Room to make sure that his namesake (who would have shopped him) was not around, he went back to the ambulance and a little bit later came back with a larger man, who turned out to be John Olday (or, more correctly, Oldag).

Half-German, half-Scots, John Olday/Oldag had been brought up in Germany, had escaped to Britain before the war and anglicised his name. After the war he returned to Germany. Later (in the early 1950s when I was in Ireland), he returned to Britain, where he fell out with *Freedom*, leading a faction of the London Anarchist Group away to launch a journal called *Prometheus*. This in turn folded, the majority of the members going on to join the remnant of the Anarchist Federation (of which more later).

I learned that both drivers were members of Olday's anarchist group. I am not quite certain why, presumably Olday didn't trust an Englishman with a middle class accent, but they invented for my benefit a fronting group called the Bakuninische Bund, which I joined.

The Cold War had been started on the international stage a couple of years earlier and had only just begun to reach the Army of the Rhine, where there was a large contingent of people who had served through the latter half of the War. They had followed the news of the Russian campaigns, noting how the German strength they were fighting was affected by the war on the Russian Front, and noting too the heavy military losses of the Soviet forces. They were not as easily persuaded by authority that the allies of yesteryear were now their enemies.

Consequently, until three weeks before I reached Glinde, the border had not been closed. It was perfectly normal for Russian Army lorry drivers to stop off at Glinde and use our NAAFI canteen. It had equally been normal for British drivers to stop at Soviet bases across what was to become the East German border. The Army authorities, and the occupation administration generally, had begun a political/educational campaign to change thinking. There was a wider change in political policy and it meant that, on both sides of the border, there were people who had felt their views had been tolerated (if not welcomed, since they had plainly opposed the Nazis) but who were now beginning to feel that persecution was in the offing and had sufficient experience of this to be scared. On both sides of what was already being called the Iron Curtain, there were people wanting to take refuge on the other side.

Obviously an ambulance is not often searched so, even before the German anarchists had the luck to find an English comrade, Kurt and Kleine Walther had on occasions asked the medical

orderlies on duty if they would mind picking up some bod standing by the road, who was an old friend, to give him a lift, as it wouldn't take them far out of their way. Indeed they had done this to me, though it was obviously easier when I was in the know.

About the end of my first week, the call came through from the guardroom, that there had been a fight at the NAAFI and they'd need an ambulance. The Corporal said he'd get the MI Room ready for the patient and that I should go down with Kurt, which seemed logical. I had at first assumed the guard would be there ahead of us, but when Kurt on the way said that wasn't the normal experience, I asked him how the situation was usually dealt with. I was told they had not had much success, but he'd seen in a similar situation in the German Army the orderly talk to the aggressor to try to distract him, while the driver went round behind and knocked him out. This seemed fair enough and I said we'd try it that way.

It worked, not merely then but (as mentioned in Chapter 1) regularly for the fifteen months I was there. Normally there was someone standing over the victim, swearing he would shoot or bayonet anyone who intervened, and though, over time that someone must have seen us deal with other cases, there was never a time that the aggressor took precautions against Kurt or Kleine Walther knocking him out from behind. Unlike the later attacks from the drugs mafia, I never once felt in any real danger.

Also, perhaps interestingly, we only ever heard of the fights from the guardroom, which was much nearer the NAAFI than we were. Only once did the guard manage to get there before us, so it would have made more sense if the NAAFI had been allowed to notify us directly in the first place.

Fairly soon after I started at the MI Room, the resident MO finished his service and a new Scots doctor, Willy McKerrill, arrived and was there until after I left.

Drinking interlude!

A number of years before, Dad had warned me that, as a family, we lack a warning sign. Members of the family can't binge drink, get drunk and then be alright the next day. Those that drink heavily never get drunk until they are verging on delirium tremens. Gwen Otter's two elder brothers had both become alcoholics[58] (as had some more distant relatives). Like a child that

[58] Francis Otter, my grandfather's elder brother, had three children: Frank, Harry and Gwen. Frank gambled and later drank, Harry just drank and by the end Gwen drank.

cannot feel pain this carries the danger of major harm and, lacking the normal warning signs, I was aware I had to be cautious with drink. I had not by then developed a taste for bitter anyway. I knew my way round Somerset cask ciders and Loire Valley wines, but no more. So those who knew me at all in the camp assumed I was teetotal. I suppose some saw this as a challenge. One day, Taffy was ragging me about this, and when I replied that I just didn't like beer and didn't know enough about German wines, he took the opportunity to test me, or so he thought. Would I be interested in trying a German wine if he brought me one down?

A couple of evenings later he came round to the MI Room with what I understood to be two bottles of wine. I'd never even heard of Kümmel and, if I'd known what it was, wouldn't have realised that it was more than fortified wine. The duty orderly, the duty ambulance driver and doctor's driver each had one glass apiece. Perhaps I should have been forewarned by this abstinence, but I wasn't, so Taff and I continued with a bottle and a half. After a while, Taff was so drunk I carried him back to his hut, came back and finished the wine. Next day he looked a little sheepish, said I must have a strong head, I said 'not particularly' and he had presumably drunk quite a lot before he came round, and a bottle of wine wasn't, after all, all that much.

As I still hadn't caught on, he thought he'd repeat it. A week later, when there was no-one else in the MI Room, he came back again - this time not having drunk beforehand at all - with another couple of bottles. After I'd carried him back to his hut, I had rather more to finish this time. After that he didn't feel it necessary to repeat the trial again and I, still believing it was only wine, was quite disappointed! Though I was gratified that, when someone else was laughing at me as a teetotaller, Taffy would intervene to say: "he could drink you under the table any time".

It wasn't until eight months later, when on my Christmas leave, that I learned that it hadn't just been wine. Robin had dragged me down to the local pub and was saying, "I suppose you'll have your usual half of bottled cider", when I replied, "No, I'll have a Kümmel". Robin looked astonished when I said that I had previously drunk it in a tumbler, that I didn't know what I was talking about, but did advise me that my favourite tipple was a fairly strong liqueur. All new to me.

We were thirteen miles out of Hamburg, where the officers had a club - I can't remember whether they also had one in Glinde, but Dr McKerrill preferred to go to the Hamburg Club anyhow, where he was probably more likely to meet his fellow doctors. Naturally he would, on getting there, tell his driver how long he intended to stay and give him the time off until then.

That was alright unless he was needed back in the base, as he had no idea where his driver would be. The proper procedure, when we'd contacted him, was for us to send the ambulance to Hamburg to collect him, bring him back, then send him back to drop him back to the Club, the ambulance only being ready to take a patient to hospital after it had taken the doctor back to his night out, and once again come back to us.

Taffy, my erstwhile drinking partner, had been in SAS[59] during the war. SAS was originally recruited from prison inmates, long term convicts were told they'd be let off the rest of their sentence and the State would intervene to persuade Judges to be lenient in any future conviction, if they volunteered for dangerous operations in the North African desert. Taff, once a maths teacher who found that cracking safe combinations was better rewarded economically than teaching, had taken the chance and survived. He did have trouble with drink and had bouts of real problems with peptic ulcers. A year later, just after I'd been made up to Lance Corporal, he had a particularly bad bout. I had seen his case history but didn't have the key to his file. I was unable to contact the MO and so took him down to the hospital without a doctor's reference and on my own responsibility.

The doctor in Reception was not one I knew and peptic ulcers were nowhere near his speciality. The fact that Taffy was drunk was for him reason to refuse treatment or a bed and I was ordered to take him away and lodge him in the Base guardhouse. Naturally I refused and was arrested for disobeying an order. The nurse-sergeant was a friend of mine and backed me up when I said there would be no-one else to take my place until the morning. I insisted on taking Taffy to the relevant ward - unfortunately none of the regular sisters was on duty and their replacement was equally ignorant of peptic ulcers, so I had to have a row with her as well. So next morning, when Willie McKerrill came in, having found a jacket without NCO tape, I duly told him that he was to put me under arrest, handing over tape, belt and cap. Almost as I was saying this, the phone went with the caller asking whether I was under arrest. They requested I be released since the ward sister and surgeon had come in, found Taff and were about to operate immediately. They were raging that they should have been called the previous night.

The result was that Willy told me to forge his signature whenever I needed it in future, providing me with a slip saying 'Corporal Otter has my orders to forge my signature, whenever there is medical need and I am not available'. Curiously I was able to make a pretty good copy, so much so that neither of us could tell which was his signature and which was my version. Equally, for obvious reasons, the doctor decided that if he were at the Club and someone in the base needed

[59] Special Air Service -ed.

a stitch after a cut, it was often more sense to tell Walther or I to do the stitching. This was partly because he knew he was too frightened of hurting someone, so was slow and did hurt them. Generally people who needed a stitch hoped that he'd be detained and that we'd do it. The Hospital was also short-staffed and frequently, if I took someone down for an operation, I'd be co-opted as an extra theatre orderly - all of which meant that I came to do more than I'd expected and it made life somewhat more interesting.

The two orderlies who were there before me were not replaced when they were demobbed, so I ran the Centre five nights a week and Walther the other two. There were a couple of Education Corps sergeants in camp (or perhaps one of them was Army Bureau of Current Affairs) and they came over to the MI Room fairly frequently in the evenings, which provided a more interesting social life than the NAAFI. They turned up one day with an Education Corps officer just posted to the camp. He'd been transferred to the Education Corps from one of the smarter cavalry regiments, was an Hooray Henry, who every time any one of us touched on a topic that might have taxed the brain of a two-year old, hit the ground with his swagger stick and said, "Jolly, jolly".

The Glinde and Berghedorf Camps were quite peculiar in their way. The Ordnance Corps, being responsible for stores depended on a large number of warrant officers for each store. At Glinde there were a number of former German secret mini-factories, including some that produced nerve gases, micro-biological weaponry and so forth, (so there were a lot of secretive parts to the camp), and as there were far more German and/or Polish workers in the camp than there were British squaddies, it meant that the ratio of warrant officers to other ranks was unusually large.

While out in Germany I won a BAOR chess championship. The next day, when I took an out-patient down to the hospital and was waiting outside the ward, there was a German sitting with a chess board in front of him, who said, "I hear you are good at chess". Well, I wasn't good enough for him and the experience put me off playing for life. He didn't quite get me fool's mate, but it felt as if it was that quick. He turned out to be Field Marshal von Manstein. Kurt had pointed him out before and Kleine Walther told me more about him on the way back. Soon afterwards I heard from a number of Eighth Army veterans who all said that Von Manstein had been the only German General in the war who kept strictly to the Geneva Convention. Time and time again I was told, "Well we've all broken the rules, we could all be tried for war crimes. You get an order and you obey it, we all have". He however ended the war in a concentration camp because he stuck rigidly to the rules.

Incidentally, the media generally go into panegyrics as to how his men loved Montgomery. That was not the impression I picked up. Obviously those at Glinde may not have been a representative cross-section, but by and large the majority of them hated him. One told me he had, on orders that had initially been issued by Montgomery and filtered down (and several others told of other such cases), driven a tank over wounded bodies, both British and German. "What else could I do", he said, "I'd have been shot if I refused". Many said that if he (von Manstein) can be tried for war-crimes, there's not one of us can't suffer the same.

The Army didn't at that time recognize any academic qualification above School Cert (the then equivalent of a half a dozen 'O' Levels or GCSEs). If you'd got that fairly basic qualification you were, as far as the Army was concerned, already at the top of the learning tree. But they also had a rule that all conscripts were supposed to be given an hour or so of education a week. Given that they didn't recognize higher qualifications, they could not organize to provide this for anyone who'd got the Cert. It meant that you were called in by the Adjutant every so often and asked to suggest an educational course (in Glinde he preferred the idea of correspondence courses, where the lack of anyone to supervise wouldn't have been a problem). I had the idea of suggesting that, if I was allowed to go and watch the war crime trials, this would be of educational value. The Adjutant leaped at the idea and the next week a car was sent to collect me and take me down. I then found out that the hospital provided a medical orderly (a friend of mine was on duty) to go down with the Field Marshall von Manstein. As my friend was not that interested in the job I suggested that, to kill two birds with one stone, I might take over the medical orderly duties.

The fact that I was doing the job meant more, and more senior, veterans (a surprising number of whom seemed to know John Olday) came to talk to me about it. Once I'd been sounded out sufficiently, I learned that there was enormous dissatisfaction amongst the camp's warrant officers and that they were engaged in secret meetings. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, I would judge that these meetings could never have taken place unless commissioned officers were complicit in some way. There were problems of communication as most of these warrant officers worked in the more secret parts of the camp, each having security clearance for their own parts but not for others. It had occurred to them that an ambulance crew had the right to go everywhere. They'd heard that Dr McKerrill had given me orders to forge his signature when I needed to take the ambulance anywhere. So I became the messenger boy.

Obviously a room full of warrant officers were not going to ask the views of a mere Lance Corporal, not that I had any relevant ideas. People often talked of the Cairo Mutiny. In 1944 the

impact of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, which had been created by Major Nathan, a former International Brigader, had caused the setting up of Forces' Parliaments. The one in Cairo was particularly active and, when the Eighth Army was ordered to send contingents to restore the monarchs of Greece and Iraq, monarchs who had been pro-fascist during the war and had been ousted by anti-fascist republicans, a lot of troops, radicalised by their experience of the Parliaments, refused to get on the transports to go. When the 1945 General Election came round, it was rumoured that, because the Army was overwhelmingly leftist, the ballot boxes issued for them were not be sent back to Britain, but were to be dumped into the Mediterranean.

From what I have learned since, there was a fairly inflated view of the Cairo events. I was told of a Sergeant-Major Taylor who led it. I later knew Buck Taylor fairly well; he had in fact only been a Flight Corporal, but had been the moving spirit of the Cairo Parliament, the leader of the Common Wealth group in it, which was strangely the dominant group[60]. Hearing the rumours about the ballot boxes, they talked of taking tanks down to surround Cairo HQ. Buck later denied that such a movement of tanks had ever occurred, not that he would have opposed such an act, it simply never happened. Nevertheless, among the warrant officers at Glinde, the planning for what they wished to do about Von Manstein was based on what they believed had happened and how Buck had allegedly planned it, and there were long arguments about how 'Sergeant-Major' Taylor would have tackled a problem like this.

Tanks, however, were a bit more than they could mobilize. They did decide to take several lorry-loads of troops to surround the HQ at Altona, to demand an assurance that Von Manstein should not hang. They also decided that 'Muggins' - with my middle-class accent - would be a good person to send in to talk to the officers. No doubt they thought that it wouldn't matter particularly if I was shot afterwards! That didn't happen, but the rest did, though it doesn't I believe appear in any of the histories of mutinies in the British Army. It's also unusual as a mutiny with no subsequent punishments.

The warrant officers who had been involved in the events were mostly clerical. I don't know if they had the same view of going on parade as I did, but they were certainly no more often seen on them than I was. The Brigade Sergeant-Major didn't unfortunately share the same view, so when I went on local leave, having carefully arranged for temporary staff to take my place, he arranged for them to do a longer stint, met me at the guard house when I got back and sent me

[60] Buck Taylor, after release from the forces, returned to Britain when Common Wealth split, the founding leadership going over to Labour. He came to be the dominant personality in the remnant of the party until he died, just after the fiftieth anniversary of the party's founding.

on a three-week commando course at Bielefeld. It was quite difficult to avoid parades there, but I learned that if you got an instructor's certificate in swimming and had a party wanting to use the swimming baths, you could be excused parades so to do. I had never previously swum more than a length, but given the incentive …! The last three days they decided to shut the pool down for cleaning and we were sent for a tediously slow route-march.

On the return march there was a relief from the tedium. When we got to the mid-day stop and a couple of non-walkers were moaning about blisters, a subaltern appeared (Durham Light Infantry) to tell them they were complaining about nothing as 'he had found the walk easy'. I don't know why I dared intervene, but anyway I said, "Well, it's easy if you're not walking column and don't have to worry about treading on someone's heels, or having your own trodden on". A little bit later, the Bielefeld Sergeant-Major came up and asked if I could beat the officer in a walking race. Obviously I didn't know how good he was, but the Sergeant-Major replied, "You'd better be able to, as I've got five quid on you. I'll have you running on the spot all day tomorrow if you can't". So we had a race, the subaltern gave up a quarter of a mile from Base though he'd had a start. About twenty of us passed him.

Our BSM, when he heard from his colleague that I'd only been on three parades in the three weeks, decided to take further measures. I was told that I'd been too long in the MI Room and that I'd have to apply for a different job. This was about four or five months before I was due for release. As it happened, they were trying to find recruits for explosives experts (armaments artificers). The job was fairly dangerous and the turnover was high. There was also a longish selection procedure and as, provided I applied for something else, I would be left in the medical post during these procedures, I applied. There were a few exchanges of letters and some two months later I was told to report to a place near Keell for examination. A driver was detailed to take me and we got there about nine in the morning. It was a large country house, French windows onto a pleasant garden, a largish table with the equipment for an experiment on it just inside. There was a Major in charge who said that the officer who was supposed to be examining me had been called away, so I had better go in the garden and wait. Every so often I was called in to be told that the examiner had been further delayed. I was given tea or food and so I got enough chances to look at the experiment to work out what would be involved. So I spoke to the Major (who said he knew nothing about the experiment) and said that I thought I knew what was required and, if he cared to watch me do it, he could report that to the examiner. When it got to four in the afternoon, the examiner came on the phone yet again and it was agreed that

the Major should watch me and tell the examiner over the phone what I was doing and with what results. The examiner said he was satisfied, so I went back to Glinde.

A couple of months later I got a letter saying that I had passed the entry exam to be an armaments artificer and that I should report on 6 May 1950, I forget where. Fortunately, I was due for release from the Army on 5 May. They expressed surprise that I wasn't eager to sign up for another four years as an explosives expert.

Chapter 6: After Demob

A little before I left the army, having had a bout of piles, I had seen army surgeons, who had told me I had cancer of the colon and they wanted to operate immediately. That operation being how Dad's cancer had started I was frightened and decided that I'd sooner die of the cancer than go through what I had seen Dad suffer - so I refused. I was told that if I didn't have the operation, I'd be dead by 35, so I'd left the army expecting that I only had fifteen years left to live. Anything I needed to do, I wanted to do in a hurry. I've no idea how it was that the cancer cleared itself and only reappeared when I was aged 81, some 46 years of 'extra time'. The belief that my life was to be short obviously shaped things. Even ten and half years after demob, when I met and got engaged to Celia, I proposed saying that she'd be a young widow.

When I was demobbed, I was due for three weeks' release leave, so I arrived home in May 1950 technically still in the army, but mercifully out of it (though, under rules that had just been brought in, released national servicemen remained subject to recall and, when Suez came up, I would have a time to refuse). The years immediately following demobilisation from National Service are difficult to relate chronologically, shared as they were between England, Dublin, France and even Kenya. They were, however, a fruitful and formative period in the development of my political ideas.

I have described (Chapter 1) how young Milner had booked me in for the Harwell exam, that (since Mother, as a matter of course, would have forbidden me to go for anything that she hadn't suggested in the first place) I had lied and said that the weekend was part of my demob process. The exam was at Culham and we went there by train, but I cannot remember whether we went through London or cross-country from Guildford to Didcot. I can't fully remember whether it was a one-day affair or the whole weekend, though I think we slept there the Friday and Saturday nights. Unusually that weekend, presumably because initially I only intended to keep Milner company, I did not suffer from exam nerves, which would normally have been an immense problem for the duration of the exams.

Having arrived with no expectations of being in the first hundred in the exam (so that I had been given the job of pushing the invalid chair of the child genius[61] who was expected to be first) it turned out that after the third paper I was one of about five who were equal first. It was, in retrospect, fairly logical that they assumed I was cheating and therefore separated the two of us.

[61] The illness had not been diagnosed at this time. When I met him and was asked to mind him, I asked what it was he suffered from. He said no-one was quite sure.

At the time, as it was an exam for a government-sponsored industry, I thought someone had worked out my politics and that was the reason for separating us. I was not so paranoid, as they were aware of my politics when they interviewed me at the end. It was only because, for the next exam (the second Maths paper), I had one Don-invigilator standing permanently behind me, constantly looking over my shoulder and standing so close that I could feel the pressure of his knees through the back of my chair and his chest on my shoulder, that I realised that I was thought to be cheating.

It was nearly self-fulfilling. Having the invigilator so close put me off to begin with and I had to tear up and re-do the first page. It was irritating, as I had realised by then that, as long as I didn't get exam nerves, and providing that the Chemistry and Physics papers remained on the same level, I was capable of winning. I had realised after the first Maths paper that I had dropped a mark, and was inwardly cursing myself. When we had a coffee break none of the others, including those who I later saw were all equal first, appeared to be dissatisfied in the same way. So, when I learned that we'd all got the same mark, I realised I would be the only one looking out for a similar catch.

Presumably, after that fourth paper, they were satisfied that I wasn't cheating, as the invigilator contact was not repeated. After the fifth or sixth paper the Don who separated us came back, saying they hadn't asked at the beginning for details about me and that he'd better do so. When it emerged that my brother was just taking his degree (his thesis had already been published and, because he had taken his Naval short-course, the six months of which counted as eighteen months, Robin was allowed to do his four year Chemistry course in 2 ½ years) and that Professor Bowen had been his tutor, the Don became suddenly interested. Bowen would normally have been in attendance at the exam, but had been detained in Oxford. When I added that I was the Jean François who had an article tangential to part of my brother's thesis and printed just after it, it turned out that he had apparently read it and knew that Bowen was going to have a follow-up of mine printed, he commented, "Fine sort of dark horse you turned out to be."

I had got home from the army to find Robin had had an accident playing rugger, had had an operation and was having to wear a protective mask during his finals. Very soon after starting at the Foreign Office, necessitating the adoption of unwontedly formal clothing, the mask didn't suit him. His department was called 'Service Liaisons' and it was a little while before I appreciated that that meant it was MI6. Obviously it was not a career that I applauded. I knew (or thought I did) that MI6 only dealt with matters outside the UK, so I was less frightened of

personal conflicts than perhaps I ought to have been. It was equally not something he talked about in detail, though the fact that he was in a section concerned with Chinese and Eastern Asian events was not secret.

Just under a year later, Robin came home one day saying that he'd been called in for an interview and told he was not psychologically suited to being a spy and that he'd been recommended to go for the Colonial Service. There were problems. He hadn't got a First in his degree from Oxford, though he did have a letter from Professor Bowen saying the only reason for that was that some of Bowen's colleagues were too stupid to set a proper exam. Also, the date for that year's Colonial Service recruitment had passed. Someone must have pulled strings, for about a fortnight later he was accepted and went back to Oxford for a Colonial Service course. The following January he was off to Kenya. One day in the summer, when there was a heat wave and it was uncomfortable, we were consoling ourselves that he would be having even hotter weather, when the postman arrived with a letter from him, starting, "I am so cold I think I will die'. He was up in the Aberdare mountains, east of the Rift Valley.

In the period before I went to Dublin, I went to a few lectures at Conway Hall, may even have done an exam and an interview there, but it occasioned me to spend time in and around Red Lion Square. I had not by and large, in my Trotskyist days in the mid-1940s, gained any close acquaintance with other British Leftists, so it was a new experience for me, at the beginning of the 1950s, to gradually do so. Going to Freedom Bookshop in 1948, I had of course met Lilian Wolfe[62] there, having probably been redirected there by Charlie Lahr[63] from his bookshop in Red Lion Square. Though, regrettably, I didn't get to know Charlie Lahr at that point, I did get to know Lillian Wolfe. On my first visit Lillian drew my attention to pamphlets and other papers that she thought, quite rightly, would interest me. I didn't really get to know her properly until after I came out of the army. Even then, it was a couple of years before an article in *Freedom*, commenting on a negative report in an American journal, drew my attention to the fact that the manager of the Bookshop was called Lillian Wolfe, was an octogenarian and had known Kropotkin. The article either didn't mention, or I failed to take on board, the fact that she had been companion to Tom Keele, who had ousted Kropotkin when he failed to oppose WW1. It was not until her grandson, Richard Keele Wolfe, turned up on the nine-week Aldermaston Picket through the summer of 1958, that I fully appreciated the connection. I didn't even get to know Charlie Lahr's name for another eight years!

[62] Lilian Wolfe (1875-1974), anarchist, pacifist and feminist who worked at Freedom Press until aged 95.
[63] Charles Lahr (1885-1971), German born, member of IWW and CPGB (1920-21), founder of Blue Moon Press.

Nevertheless, in those early years, Lillian's welcoming manner at the Bookshop meant a lot. I met others there but, until I started going to the Malatesta Club in 1954, I didn't get to know anyone else by name and I can't recall who else I'd earlier met. I was to get used to the fact that most anarchists I met, as soon as they heard I was catholic, immediately denounced me and were only prepared to talk of how reactionary all Catholics were. For years, only Lillian mentioned the names of Ammon Hennacy, Dorothy Day, Michael Davitt or Father Hegarty. Not that I think the general hostility to Catholicism would have driven me out - I'm too pig-head for that. But I know that a lot of other people - not all Christians - were put off anarchism by the general hostile attitude of "you are not one of us, you must therefore be statist and can never be one of us". I also met people from the Independent Labour Party at this stage, notably Wolfred Wigham and his later wife, Kathy, and from the Summer Camp of 1954, I began meeting people from Common Wealth and the Malatesta Club.

Before going to college in Ireland, my political experiences and ideas were evolving. In 1950 I still regarded the anarchist paper *Freedom* as wishy-washy. It appeared more interested in sexual revolution than social, and its concept of sexual revolution was - in the terms of a generation later - considerably nearer the vision of Hugh Heffner[64], than that of the women's liberation movement, which was hardly likely to appeal to a somewhat Jansenist Ordinand like myself. I didn't know of the existence of other anarchist groupings to contact. My experience with Olday in Germany did cause me to read biographical notes on Bakunin and what I could obtain of his writings, and I rather reacted against the conspiratorial theories generally attributed to him. Bakunin's views changed and many of the views thought to be characteristic of his anarchism are statements made when he was a slavophile and he would probably not have held them when he became an anarchist. Much that was attributed to him was in fact written by Nechaev, and though Bakunin may have been imprudent in trusting Nechaev too long, it's unclear if he ever shared the latter's views. Bakunin's later writings are open to more than one interpretation, so that it is hard to say, even in retrospect, whether the attributions were just. I was not myself sufficiently confident to say that *Freedom*'s position did not give the full anarchist case, and not then knowing the writings of either syndicalists or councillists, I concluded I was a 'near anarchist', perhaps also an 'ex-anarchist' or even a 'neo-anarchist'.

Before call-up, I had joined the Young Liberals, so *faut de mieux* I stayed within them on the same basis after demob. They were still opposed to the British development of nuclear weapons, still called for one third of the ownership of all industries of over £10000 in value to be given over to

[64] Laurens is referring to the founder of the Bunny Club.

the workforce in co-partnership schemes, and as a first step to industrial democracy. That, and the slogan 'which twin is the Tory?' had been the basis for the Liberal Party campaign in the election just past and was to be again in the autumn of 1951 (after I'd gone to Dublin). Then, Clement Davies, with no mandate whatsoever, announced in the aftermath of the 1951 General Election, that he would give conditional support to the Churchill government. There were nine of us on the Guildford Liberal Committee and, without consulting each other, and not knowing who would take what position, we each wrote and in due time received, eight letters of resignation to and from each other.

There was at the time an 'International' or 'All Nations' Club in Guildford, with which the Young Liberals had a fairly large overlap in membership. Through that organisation in turn we were in contact with groups advocating Scots and Welsh Home Rule as well as the Congress of People's Against Imperialism. At the time (and indeed until 1953-4) I didn't know that the latter had originated after the Stalinists had wound up the Third International and the League Against Imperialism. During the latter part of the War, in order to placate Western allies, this was part of the policy line that was to cause the Stalinists to block the Italian rising of 1944 and the French one of 1946. The early Common Wealth group had taken the initiative in gathering the minority that had not accepted this liquidation in order to reform as the Congress Against Imperialism (CAI).

It was I assume in a bulletin of the CAI, or certainly something I bought at a CAI meeting, that I saw an advert for the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) - the De Leonist organisation of that name, which existed long before Scargill adopted the same name. That was my introduction to De Leonism, though the SLP must have put that advert in when in a very low state, for while they were ready to send pre-selected packages of old material for anyone enquiring, by the time I received this, and having written back within the week to ask specific questions on details, the address of the office in Bridge Street, Edinburgh had closed down, and all enquiries were being re-directed to the parent party in New York. It was only then that I learned that the SPGB, with which I had previously been in contact, was originally a breakaway from the SLP.

De Leon, whom Lenin in 1908, if I remember correctly, called the only post-Marx Marxist to have added anything of value to Marxism, had started from Marx's dictum that the new social order rises within the womb of the old, emerging whole and potentially functioning. He had argued for socialist industrial unionism, recognising that the working class spontaneously creates unions and, at more revolutionary times, these are not craft unions but organisations uniting workers across industry.

For a time his proposals seemed to be on the same lines as European Syndicalism, which stemmed from an alliance of dissident Marxists with various anarchist groups, while De Leon himself was a co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'Wobblies'). However, de Leon fell out spectacularly with the bulk of the IWW. He believed (or purported to believe) that his opponents were anarchists, though in fact the anarchist fraction within the IWW only stood at about 4% and played no part in the split. One has the somewhat curious account that the IWW split into a section led by 'anarchists' (who in fact were members of the Debsian Socialist Party's left wing and later became prominent amongst the founders of the American Communist Party and so were not opposed to taking State power) and another led by 'orthodox Marxists' (from the SLP, which was opposed to taking such State power and to any concept of a Workers' State).

It is an history that made De Leon for generations an hate figure amongst anarchists, responding to attacks from De Leon on anarchists, whose views he consistently misrepresented. It is a great pity, for not only did De Leon come independently to a theory that closely resembled anarcho-syndicalism (however much he might have disowned the resemblance), but he incorporated into it a theory derived from anthropological studies that resembled the Mutual Aid of Kropotkin and Reclus. He claimed that their theories, unlike his own, were Social Darwinian, ignoring the fact that Kropotkin - like Russell Wallace - had specifically written to deny that the Huxley-Darwin 'social-darwinian' theories were a valid deduction from Darwin. De Leon's theories, however much he disclaimed the anarchist resemblance, do in fact synthesize the two major streams of anarchist theory and in so doing they in part laid a theoretical basis for Gandhian civil disobedience as applied in an industrialised context.

The Guildford Liberal Party had something over 180 members and so it was necessary, when the nine of us resigned, to call a membership meeting to offer it our resignation. We announced this, expecting to leave the committee table and make room while a new committee was elected. But someone intervened, proposed a motion over which the meeting was unanimous, supporting us and asking us to carry on. For six months the Guildford Liberal Party branch, probably the largest constituency Liberal party in the country, certainly containing the last surviving member of a Liberal cabinet, had a committee consisting entirely of ex-members of the Party. We'd been asked to carry on to fight the new leadership policy. It turned out that the party rank and file did not have the powers it had always assumed it had, so the resignations became absolute. In retrospect, I am ashamed of the fact that, as I'd left England, I lost contact and don’t know what the others eventually did. I ought to have kept in touch.

Interlude: A Communist Purge?

During 1953, there occurred a major purge in the ranks of the Communist Party, both in Britain and in France. In so far as this involved two people with whom I had some contact, there is something of a lacuna in historical research. Both André Marty[65] and Harry McShane[66] were elderly comrades, with large sectors of personal support in the wider working class, and too old to be candidates for higher leadership and therefore be a threat to those in positions of power.

It is fairly well known amongst writers of the history of the Left that in 1953, André Marty and Charles Tillon[67], with their leading supporters, were expelled from the French Communist Party. Those who are bothered also know that the ostensible reason was that they opposed Thorez[68] when he moved to prevent a workers' rising in France in 1946. They may remark on the fact that the two, though they argued against Thorez within the Party, were prepared to accept the majority decision and were in charge of that rightist, post-WW2 Communist policy and were the Party officials most directly responsible for persuading workers not to revolt. They were naturally criticised for that, both at the time and when, after their expulsion, they tried to create a new current of dissident Leftists.

It is of course a fairly common bureaucratic ploy in Leninist parties to give the leading left dissident the job of talking his potential supporters amongst the wider working class out of engaging spontaneously in actions the party regards as too leftist. That has the 'useful' additional result of damaging the dissident's credentials in that wider milieu. Though some historians may have noted that André Marty - the hero of a mutiny in the French Navy that crippled Western Imperialist intervention against the Bolsheviks at the end of WW1 - was probably the only leading member of the PCF who had gained a reputation as a leading working-class agitator and organiser independently of the Communist Party, the importance of the expulsion, though perhaps understood at the time, was soon forgotten and the event does not figure all that largely in histories of the Left.

Though noted in Scotland and, chiefly because of his part in organising the unemployed marches, to a lesser extent in England, the fact that Harry McShane was similarly expelled from the leadership of the CPGB and eased out of the Party in 1953, was not given anything like the

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[65] Andre Marty (1886-1956) leading French Communist who served in the Spanish Civil War.
[66] Harry McShane (1891-1988), Scottish Socialist active in the Communist Party, the National Unemployed Workers Movement, the Spanish Civil War, he became disillusioned with the CP and joined up with Raya Dunayevskaya in 1958.
[67] Charles Tillon (1897-1993), was a French communist and trade unionist and leader of the Resistance in WW2.
[68] Maurice Thorez (1900-1964), leader of the French CP from 19309 until his death.

attention it deserved. Harry had been closely linked with John Maclean[69]. For those unacquainted with the history of the early Communists, Maclean had been the leading theorist linked to the Revolt on the Clyde during WW1, had been in close touch with Lenin, and, when the Soviet Revolution happened and Maclean was in prison at the time, was made Soviet Ambassador to Britain. He refused to join the budding CPGB, as he considered it was coming together without a sufficiently thought-out programme, and made several attempts to unite various strands of left critics of the CP in a rival communist party - an effort that was thwarted by his death in 1923. So Harry, too, had a record of working-class agitation and organisation that went back to before the party was founded, had maintained this in his work amongst the unemployed and, though in the CPGB he was not unique in this, he was to outlive his contemporaries.

The fact that the two expulsions happened at approximately the same time suggests a connection which would mean an international policy shift. It was, after all, just before Stalin's death, when leading Russian contenders for the succession were jockeying for position. So the question needs to be asked: 'Were Marty and McShane seen as potential kingmakers within the international communist movement, opposed to the then dominant faction?' In asking it, it is worth stipulating that it wouldn't have been necessary that either of them knew or suspected that that was the reason for their expulsion.

Once the question is asked, one sees that we have not begun to examine the significant resemblances. André Marty was in charge of the international section of the OGPU (Russian secret police) in Spain, and Harry McShane was similarly involved. So, though both had been working class organisers independently of the Party, both in the time of the Popular Front were aligned with the most orthodox of supporters of the Stalin purges. Both too, in the latter part of WW2, supported the total liquidation of party militancy in order to gain Western support; both supported the anti-Trotskyist campaigns of that time, Harry McShane certainly going along with the pamphlet 'Clear out Hitler's agents' (which alleged a Nazi-Trotsky alliance). Both, though they must have worked closely with Tito in Spain, where Tito had overall control of the non-Spanish Communists in Spain, remained in the party when Tito was expelled. Five years later, Tito, in order that Yugoslavia might be able to survive, had adapted considerably, going from being more critical of the West than Stalin in 1948 to neutralist by 1953, and Marty and McShane were then very definitely not Titoist and regarded him as a renegade. Perhaps they were both ordered to pronounce against Tito. I had this from McShane's own mouth in Glasgow in 1955 en route with the transport of props for the TCD Players on route to the Edinburgh Festival. He

[69] John Maclean (1879-1923), Scottish socialist, active in opposition to WW1 and in the subsequent Red Clydeside activities.

stated that he had to disown him, though that was possible because he didn't agree with Tito's position after his expulsion, but he was also criticised for not denouncing him adequately or early enough.

The trouble is that the official case against Tito changed between 1948 when he was expelled and 1952 when the process of isolating McShane and Marty and their followers got under way. In 1948 Tito was able to claim there was nothing in his revolt materially different from Poland or Romania that conflicted with Stalin's dogma of 'Socialism in One Country'. There was the view that revolution should only happen in countries contiguous to the Soviet Union - which would have meant excluding Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Hoxha and the Greek and Bulgarian CPs. There was an esoteric debate between Tito and EOKA in Greece about communist guerrilla tactics, but they were still calling Tito ultra-left at that stage. By 1950-52, when Tito had made compromises with the West in order to survive and when a lot of those East European Communists who had stayed in their countries through the war and been part of the Resistance were being purged, Titoism was being redefined as a Rightist deviation, alleging wanting nationalist autonomy and elements of bourgeois constitutionalism.

This might suggest a connection within the Communist International with supporters of Beria, who had ousted Yezhov as head of the OGPU at just about the time of the Spanish Civil War and thus would have liaised fairly closely with André Marty, and who was the first leading Russian Stalinist to be ousted after Stalin died. They, like Beria, had made no protest when Tito was denounced by Stalin in 1948. Whether these expulsions were connected to Tito or Beria, or whatever was the reason, will require some detailed research in the CP archives.

When Marty was expelled[70], there were Paris elections due and his immediate following in Paris put out a leaflet advocating that voters substitute Marty's name for that of the communist who came first on the party slate and then vote for the rest of the slate. Fairly soon after, a broad alliance of revolutionary groups put out an alternative leaflet agreeing with the suggestion of putting Marty's name first, but suggesting an whole alternative slate drawn from the revolutionary Left. Following this there was a short-lived attempt to make a permanent alliance including the Martyites and the various groups of the revolutionary left, one of which was the platformist-anarchist Libertarian Communist Federation, in whose youth action I was active when in France during vacations from Trinity College Dublin.

[70] Marty was publicly indicted from September 1952 and expelled in early 1953. He published his own account as *L'Affaire Marty* in 1955 and died in November 1956. McShane wrote his autobiography *No Mean Fighter* in 1978, and died 12 April 1988 aged almost 97.

Harry McShane came out with a group of Glasgow followers, this faction linking up with the earlier left-Stalinist group around Eric Heffer (which still had some strength on the Liverpool Docks and small groups of sympathisers in Nottingham and elsewhere), with the Grant and Kendal Trotskyist factions (Grant had groups in Surrey and Liverpool, Kendal in Surrey and Kent), the Cowan faction of the Oehlerites (mainly also in Surrey, but some in North London) as the Revolutionary Socialist Party, with Harry editing *Revolt*. Though I then had little connection with England (it was somewhere through which I had inconveniently to travel between Ireland and France), I was in touch with Scots leftists. Though I had little to do with the rest of the RSP, I did start a correspondence with Harry and visited him when next on the way to Edinburgh.

The idea that Marty and McShane, both of whom moved sharply leftwards after 1953, in the process leap-frogging the Trotskyists to reach the Libertarian Left, may have been expelled as associates of the butcher Beria, will no doubt be thought shocking to most. But I can assure that no-one has more reason to be shocked than I. I worked with both. I was a member of the Libertarian Communist Youth in Paris and we worked in alliance with Marty. I was partly instrumental in bringing out some 300 Martyites from the PCF in the Nevers region, by temporarily re-joining the PCF there for three weeks and working from within. I was an early subscriber to McShane's *Revolt*, joined the Revolutionary Socialist Party as an associate member, and when *Revolt* foundered and the RSP broke up, subscribed to McShane's *Commune*. I persuaded him, in 1959, after he had initially refused, to meet Raya Dunayevskaya and, a few months later, he became the Convenor of the British Section of *News and Letters*, the group founded around Raya's theories. In 1961 he chaired the support group for Polaris Action.

More or less alongside these events were several mysterious deaths among French leftists: Trotskyists, anarchists and other socialists to the left of the Stalinists. As this is a theme to which I will return later, I approach this conscious of the fact that I may be seen as paranoid. In Paris, in 1952-53, there were something over 100 cases a year of dissident leftists being found dead in the Seine. The right-wing Press did in fact suggest that these weren't suicides, but that the Stalinists had done them. Though we thought that they were right, we couldn't confirm this without giving ammunition to the Cold Warriors. Leftists certainly needed to take care in Paris, especially when they were on demos where the Stalinists were in the majority. Having more reason to be wary of Stalinists than anyone else, that we were also under attack, not only from the right-wing media, but also from casual acquaintances as if we were uncritical of the Stalinists, was especially irksome.

Chapter 7: Trinity College Dublin

During 1950-51, having failed to get a place at an Oxford college, I tried an host of other places, while carrying on with an external London General Science B. Sc. at Guildford Tech. France seemed the best bet. Yvonne Michon, besides being Mayor of Tours, was a Senior Lecturer in Maths at Poitiers and lectured in Tours. Her son, Lucien, and his wife, Renée, were young doctors in Paris. Her daughter, Hélène, had just graduated from Montpellier. So I tried those. I got a provisional acceptance from each but there were problems about getting money out of Britain to France to pay fees. Just when we thought we had resolved these problems, that I could take out enough for fees and family contacts would feed me and supply books etc (which we could repay later), the rules were made even tighter. People were only allowed to take £5 per year, so paying fees, let alone anything else, was made impossible. I was nevertheless, having been provisionally accepted, allowed to attend lectures while trying to fix ways of making it permanent. So I was in France when I first heard that I'd got a place at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), to which I couldn't even recall having applied. TCD had apparently said that I must go up nominally as an historian but that I would be able to transfer as soon as I arrived.

It was only after I arrived at TCD that I met with Professor Walton, a pacifist who had been tricked by the government, which had used his research intended for nuclear power for making nuclear weapons. He had left England in order to ensure that it didn't happen again and all his work was done on the basis that it wouldn't be published until 50 years after his death - soul-destroying for a scientist! He persuaded me to give up training as a scientist.

So, having enrolled in the History Department purely as an administrative fiction, I found myself there in reality. I went to my initial lecture for the Year Tutor, whose first words were that we'd all need to forget all the History we'd ever learned. As Northcliffe and Marlborough had never taught me any, I foolishly thought that might give me a start. I ought to have been warned by the fact that she also said that History was a science. Having come from a background where we were taught that Maths was the true essence of science and that only where an observer could study something in vacuum conditions could it truly be so (so that Physics and Chemistry after Maths and not even Biology were the only true sciences), this was completely disorienting for me.

I went to Dublin in 1951. Mother took the opportunity of ensuring I was always in digs where I'd be thoroughly controlled, and though she had always said, as a result of her own experience in post-WW1 Paris, never to take digs in an aristocratic or academic household, I was duly

booked as a lodger of a retired college Don and his wife, where the rent was high and the food badly cooked. Perhaps the worst thing was that at each meal, after being given a grease-slopped and vomit-worthy meal, the cook came in and good manners decreed that we all congratulate her. The only thing that was adequate was the programme of regulations for students. Fortunately, at the end of the term, my landlady's brother was due to come to stay and they wanted the room in a hurry. A friend was in a room in the same road and his landlady had a spare room. I ought to have been more impressed with my first digs, if I had really been an historian rather than a scientist pushed sideways - being in digs in an house owned by Stephen Gwynn[71] would have been inspiration enough. But it wasn't.

There had just been something of a political crisis in Ireland. The differences within the Cameron-Clegg Coalition from 2010 are in some ways reminiscent of what had then happened in Ireland. Three years before, Fianna Fail (the major party of constitutional republicanism) had been ousted from power for a time, by a Grand Coalition uniting those who were less republican than Fianna Fail with those who were more so[72]. In coalition were those who were most responsive to the demands of comprador capitalism, along with the two small Labour Parties and two parties associated with small farmers and peasants. This Coalition had, almost by accident, abolished the last remaining connection with Britain that had stopped Ireland being fully a republic. Gossip differed as to whether it was done to steal a march on Fianna Fail, to prevent Clann na Poblachta (ultra-Fianna Fail republicans) from leaving the coalition, or whether the leader of the major Coalition Party had just got drunk one night and woke up next morning not knowing what he had done.

The Coalition had broken up when one of the Ministers, Dr Noel Browne (a Clann na Poblachta deputy) [73], had brought in a Health Bill - a very much watered down version of the British Labour one[74]. Such an health proposal had figured prominently in the Clann na Poblachta election manifesto and, when the Coalition was formed, it professed to support that sort of reform. However, thought Noel Browne had sought Vatican advice and had been assured it was totally consistent with Roman Catholic social doctrine, he perhaps neglected to publish the Vatican's reply widely enough. The Irish Bishops, led by John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, claimed to have scented 'Godless socialism' and denounced the Bill. When Brown appealed to the Vatican and McQuaid was directed to withdraw the claim that his opposition

[71] Stephen Gwynn (1864-1950) was an Irish journalist, MP and Protestant Irish Nationalist.
[72] This had been in 1948, when Browne became Minister of Health
[73] Dr Noel C Browne was Independent member of the Dáil for Dublin South-East, 1951-54 and for Clann na Poblachta in the previous administration when he served as Minister of Health.
[74] Known as 'The Mother and Child Bill'.

represented church policy, the story was put abroad that pressure had been put upon the bishops, without it being explained as to who had exerted the pressure. The implication was that it was these same 'godless socialists' had somehow been in a position to put on the pressure. In the face of this, Seán McBride[75], the leader of Clann na Poblachta, collapsed, denying that he himself had proposed an Health Bill and had proposed Noel Browne as a Minister, though he had delegated him the task of drawing up such a Bill.

I learned that David Thornley, who was like me a History 'Junior Freshman', was a friend and supporter of Dr Browne, who was in the process of forming a small Christian-socialist party. David persuaded me to go along to the founding meeting and introduced me, but as Browne's then ideas of socialism were Gaitskellite, I made my excuses and left. Browne was nevertheless subjected to incessant red-baiting abuse and gradually he moved a little leftwards. Three years later, after he'd wound up his small group, he entered Fianna Fail to try to push it leftwards, subsequently left Fianna Fail in disgust and then launched a new , more secular and socialist party called 'New Democracy'. I did find myself working with his supporters in that group, though never directly with him.

Looking elsewhere to be able to become politically involved, I came across the Dublin Unemployed Association. Out of a population of 2 ½ million, this association was reputed to have 150,000 members! Given that Ireland was still predominantly a peasant economy it may be, as government spokesmen claimed, that many of its members were small farmers, partly cushioned against the full horrors of unemployment by what they could grow on their few acres. However, many holdings were insufficient to feed a family and, if it's true that not all were totally destitute, that probably made them no less dissatisfied and perhaps more militant. The truly destitute are seldom sufficiently self-confident to be very militant.

I started doing some voluntary office work, went to France on vacation and came back to find most of the committee had suddenly found jobs in England. The word was that governmental sources had been able to fix these jobs. There was a new secretary who couldn't handle the office work and, as I was now the most regular volunteer, I found myself more or less doing his job for him, organising demonstrations. The organisation was organising mass marches and started mass sit-downs. I hasten to add that these were suggested before I took on a planning and organisational role and had nothing to do with the fact that I had an admirer of Gandhi as my mother. Indeed, I still had residual Bakuninist and/or Leninist conceptions and wasn't entirely

[75] Séan McBride (1904-1988) was the leader of the Clann na Poblachta group during 1948-51 and the party was reduced to two seats in the 1951 election.

supportive of the tactic. Nevertheless, it gave me experience of organising NVDA quite a long time before my experience of the Committee of 100.

This was the time of McCarthyism in the United States, indeed a time when two of McCarthy's emissaries had been sent to Europe to report on 'communist infiltration' in Western Europe. My supposed 'communism' and connection with Noel Browne was used to smear him. The Irish Times carried a whole column, front page report of a Senate attack on Browne made by Senator O'Higgins[76], naming me as a Communist and saying that I dictated the policies of the Unemployed Association and, though David Thornley, Noel Browne's following.

This was followed by a somewhat curious event, which involved someone posing as some he wasn't, or maybe someone who had partially lost knowledge of his own identity and, sharing a name with another, posed as him. Those who are widely read on the history of the British Left and have read either Bob Barltrop's *The Monument* or Ray Challinor's book on the Socialist Labour Party, will have come across Con Lehane[77], the founding national secretary of the SPGB and before that James Connolly's lieutenant in Waterford. Obviously neither of these books had been written when I was in college, but copies of the books which provided Ray with his sources were in the Lecky Library, for which as assistant secretary of the History Society, I was that year responsible[78].

One evening, about the same time as Senator O'Higgins's speech, when I was speaking in 'The Hist', three distinguished guests came in and sat through a couple of speeches. Rumour was going round that they were members of one house or other of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), in deference to which they were allowed to intervene when they left, when they apologised for disturbing the debate by leaving, but they had to go for a parliamentary division. I had moved into college rooms by this time and my room-mate had cut out Senator O'Higgins's speech and stuck it up on the wall, largely because his cousin, who had been to the USA during the war, had two American friends coming to stay in Dublin. Len had decided that they would be in the McCarthyite mould. Anyway, I was surprised the day after the debate, when answering a knock on the door, I found one of these three on the doorstep asking if he might come in. He handed

[76] There were three representatives called O'Higgins during 1951-54, of whom Michael Joseph O'Higgins was a Senator on the Administrative Panel. All three were members of Fine Gael, the other two father and son both called Thomas Francis were in the Dáil. MJO had been a TD 1948-51 for Dublin South West.
[77] Cornelius 'Con' Lehane (1877-1919) was a member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party with Connolly, but fell out with the latter over Connolly's concessions towards Catholics in the IRSP forbidding debate about religion.
[78] The DU History Society was not the same as the TCD Historical Society ('The Hist'), which in TCD was the main debating society, the equivalent of the Oxford or Cambridge Union.

me a business card with his name and Senate affiliation on it, which I slipped into a pocket as then unread.

Complimentary at first, he said he'd been interested in my speech, which he thought was 'unusual for a communist'. Still at something of a loss as to why he was there, I naturally commented that if by communist he meant Stalinist, I wasn't one. "Oh, Trotskyist?", he asked. "Well, Stalinists would call me that, but Trotskyist would not. I'm not actually a member of any organisation. If I were in a party it would be one you've probably not heard of - the SPGB, Socialist Party of Great Britain", I replied, "though I was actually refused membership because I'm a catholic, Anglican not Roman". "Not heard of it!", he retorted, " I founded it." I then pulled out his card and saw his name was Con Lehane, and commented , "so you did!" Then, somewhat discourteously recalled Connolly's words about him, he repeating the reply. Readers of this will understand why for most of my life I thought I had met the founding secretary of the SPGB, though a few years back Adam Buick gave me conclusive evidence that the original Con Lehane was dead long before my encounter, and that this Senator Con Lehane was someone quite different who, for unexplained reasons, was pretending to be his namesake[79].

Not long after, there was a second front page, full column report in the Irish Times, which recorded that Senator Con Lehane had spoken supporting the position taken by his good friend Senator O'Higgins, that he must correct his friend. He had ascertained that the Englishman, Laurens Otter, who as Senator O'Higgins rightly said was the evil influence behind Senator Browne, was not a communist but a member of a much smaller and more sinister Marxist party, one of which he had made a particular study. O'Higgins and he managed to portray a weird imperialist plot whereby British governmental sources were alleged to have sent a Marxist to subvert Ireland.

While it was an obvious bit of McCarthyism designed to damage Noel Browne and the Unemployed Association rather than me, it became obvious that it was counter-productive for me to continue to try to be involved in the Irish Left. So, for the rest of my time in Dublin, I more or less confined myself to French politics - in the vacations there were a lot of demonstrations against the colonial wars in the Maghreb. The only links I could have without

[79] It is possible that this was in fact the son of the SPGB Con Lehane, who was a Dáil representative for Clann na Poblachta in the 1948-51 session, losing his seat in 7 May 1951. He had also been a member of the IRA army council in the 1930s. He died in 1983. There was also a Patrick Desmond Lehane who represented Clann na Talmhúain 1948-51 and was an Independent TD 1951-54 for the Cork South constituency.

doing more damage than good, were with Professor Sheehy Skeffington[80], a libertarian socialist who campaigned against the use of the tawse in church schools and against cases of child abuse (remember, this was the early 1950s) and who, in consequence, was even more isolated and universally reviled than I. As I got involved with Common Wealth, which was pushing the Third Camp as an attempt to bring together pacifists, libertarians and dissident Marxists, 'Skeff' and his immediate followers became the Irish section of Third Camp and I their representative on Third Camp's international committee.

The McCarthyism infected the college as well. One family - there were four brothers (two of them twins) all there at the time circulated a petition to have me expelled as a Communist. Amongst those they sent it to was my flatmate, who showed it to me. It was quite interesting to note that at least one of those who had signed it was, unlike me, a member of the Communist Party. Years later, David (one of the four brothers and the only one who knew me, he was in the same year history class as I) met me when I was selling *Freedom* at Hyde Park and alleged to a fellow journal seller that I'd been a member of a small right-wing grouping when I was at college. I couldn't be bothered to ask why, if he believed that, he had tried to get me expelled as a communist.

The only socialist society allowed in college was the Fabians, which was split between a Stalinist faction and a Roman Catholic, militantly anti-Stalinist one. Eventually David Thornley and I were elected Treasurer and Secretary, but both factions, when they realised that we were not going to dance to their music, boycotted committee meetings, so we were never quorate and were not able to organise anything!

I suppose that, having done well in the Harwell exams, I was lulled into a false sense of security as regards higher education. My 'Tutor' at Trinity was the son of the Vice Provost (tutors were involved in the moral behaviours of their students, not the educational aspects, and were more likely to be involved in bailing out of the cells students who had been arrested for being drunk and disorderly). The father, A. A. Luce, was a most interesting man. I did not so find his son, J. V. Luce. JV was notoriously ultra-Tory and a Classics lecturer so we did not get on and I wasn't greatly surprised when Freddie Lyons (Economics Lecturer and later Provost) came and told me that my Tutor had been heard in the Senior Common Room saying, in front of several witnesses, that he was going to prevent me sitting my degree, and that I should therefore change tutors. I

[80] Dr Owen Lancelot Sheehy-Skeffington (1909-1970) was a Senator, 1954-57, 1957-61 and was elected again in 1965 and 1969, despite (or perhaps because of) his reputation campaigning against corporal punishment, conditions in the Industrial Schools and libertarian causes generally.

could hardly approach the Vice-Provost to say I didn't want his son as tutor and, as I'd only met JV once I didn't foresee that he could fulfil his boast. Not that he was one offended by my politics: the Senior History Lecturer, Professor Moody, declaimed loudly after a lecture early in my first term, so that all my year could hear, that he wasn't going to allow a Marxist to get an History degree from TCD. Evidently his recognition of Marxists differed from his declared reasons, for one of my contemporaries and the man she married from the year above, both got degrees and were active Communist Party members. I don't think Professor Moody can have been sufficiently perceptive to understand that the CP was not Marxist - perhaps not the attention to detail expected of an History professor.

Though I had been involved in organisations supporting Scots and Welsh Nationalists and, through them, had joined (as an associate member) Saor Uladh[81] when it was formed a few months before I moved to Dublin, I had not really thought about Irish Partition. I knew that there was discrimination against the minority population in the North, hence my joining Saor Uladh, but that didn't necessarily mean I was opposed to Partition as such. Indeed, the fact that I felt that the Scots and Welsh should have the right to secede from the UK if they so desired, meant that I also believed (as I still do) that while States exist as such, a minority in the north-east of Ireland should have the same option, even though this might mean that some of the majority population, made in turn a minority, might be forced to accept the secession. I didn't then realise the extent to which the Six County statelet was artificial, where two of the counties and one of the two cities had Catholic majorities and were contiguous to the border, so there was no justifiable reason for making them secede from the rest of Ireland against their will.

I remained in touch with Saor Uladh while in Dublin and occasionally went up to the North where I met victims (or on two occasions the widows of victims) lynched by Orange mobs (generally off-duty B-Specials). In 'The Hist' I heard Jim Kilfedder (later to be Stormont Speaker) boasting of his role in such lynching. Because of my Gamble blood he assumed I approved. He used to get Unionist politicians down to speak at 'The Hist' and they were surprisingly frank in the social room before debates about their role. So I have heard three people who were subsequently Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland boast of having taken part in lynching - the so-called 'moderate' O'Neill, Chichester Clark and Faulkner. Though when I went to Ireland I was more or less uncommitted on the matter of the Border, I became increasingly sympathetic to the anti-partitionist position. My friend Len and I had jointly bought an old car, an open-top

[81] Saor Uladh (Free Ulster) was a short-lived paramilitary offshoot of the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1950s.

1934 Hillman, and I used this as a makeshift ambulance on two occasions when Saor Uladh was going to get into trouble on the Border.

When Saor Uladh wanted to engage in talks with a student group in Dublin, Len and the others being away, I moved out of the flat for a weekend to provide space. There appears not have been all that much love lost between the two groups: subsequently, accounts have been written which all said that Saor Uladh felt it needed to take the precaution of bringing guns to the conference, which can't have helped the atmosphere. Soon afterwards, the IRA made its raid on the Arborfield Barracks. A couple of IRA men called on my flat, saying they knew that I was a socialist and so was connected only with non-IRA republican groups, but would I be prepared to drive over to London and pick up some of the captured ammunition and bring it back. I agreed, got to London, met a contact and was told that the plan was changed. Would I take back an escaped prisoner?

I agreed, not knowing who he was at the time, not that I would have known anything about him if I had known his name, but later recognised photographs. It was Mac Stiofain[82]. I don't know if he didn't trust me because I was English (though I gather, so was he) or whether he thought I might be in touch with rivals in the Republican movement.

I moved into College rooms the second year and then out to a flat in the fourth. I was more interested in 'The Hist' debating society than the academic side. Though I am useless when it comes to speaking on a platform advocating deeply held views, I was quite good at arguing for things that didn't really concern me, better still if I was arguing for a position directly opposed to my beliefs. I was relying on the kudos to be gained from being Auditor of 'The Hist' (equivalent to President of the Oxford Union). I didn't get it. There was a tied vote, giving the departing Auditor, who happened to be the twin brother of my rival, the deciding vote.

One event still makes me shiver with shame. Len, my college room-mate, and I teamed up with Roger Rolph and David Toogood to take a flat. Len was a serious historian, while Roger, although not a historian, for some reason had to write one history essay a month. Generally Len wrote it for him, but occasionally they went outside the BA curriculum, for which he was a stickler. Most such times, it was fortunately one of my interests and so I wrote it. Roger relied on us and, if it was on the curriculum, Len would have an old essay ready to recycle, while I had to write anything in my usual hurry. Roger would generally not tell us the topic until the last minute. Eventually there came a time when one evening there was an essay to write, due in the next

[82] Sean Mac Stiofain (1928-2001) was an Irish republican paramilitary later prominent in the Provisional IRA. He was English, using an anglicised version of Stephenson as his name.

morning, about which neither of us knew anything. The Library was shut and neither of us had any relevant books. Of three contemporaries who might have known something or could do us favour, none was in when we phoned. So all four of us shot out to explore as many relevant student haunts as we could think of looking for these three. We charged in, ignoring everyone else we knew, declaring when we'd searched the place 'no one there'. It wasn't intended as the arrogant behaviour it must have seemed, but it was insensitive, and as I was the best known of the four it was assumed to be my arrogance.

David died in a sailing accident off Holyhead. At first the body was lost before being washed up. There was to be a service there the day after we heard. His father was to come up for that and take the body back home for a funeral. Len and Roger were both in the middle of Finals and couldn't go. I had a minor exam, but under the rules could take it three months later, so it became my job to represent the three of us. My Tutor was on holiday, so I couldn't see him to get him to change the date of the exam, but I assumed that it was just a formality, left a letter for him and went off to the funeral. Three months later I found that the change hadn't been made. When I went to protest, I was told 'the only funeral to which you are obliged to go is your own'. I replied that that was the sort of remark I would have expected from a sixteen-year old. When he objected, I agreed that a sixteen-year old would have risen above it. Thus ended my chances of getting a degree at TCD.

Interlude: A Colonial Visit

My brother, Robin, had suggested, soon after he went to Kenya, that I join him for a month or so. I went out in the summer of 1952, though by then the Mau Mau rising had started. There were emergency conditions for visitors, one of which was that British visitors carry a gun at all times. Fortunately, I still hadn't completed the transition from war resister to pacifist so I had no conscientious objection to so doing. Robin had said he had a spare pistol, but omitted to tell me until the day I left that it had two safety catches - so I wouldn't have been able to fire it, even if I had desired. Robin believed anyway that asking people not used to carrying a gun to carry one at all times was almost an invitation to the Mau Mau to kill them and take the gun. While I was out there, I was convinced he was right when I saw settlers' children as young as 10 with point 48 revolvers strapped on to them. Even if such children were more likely to shoot straight than I was, they couldn't have managed such a heavy weapon.

Colonial officers in Kenya like Robin served four year tours, each tour being divided into three or four postings. Robin, as a beginner, served as an assistant district officer, though he rose to DO later in his service. He began at Fort Hall, then moved up to Marsabit, a volcanic mountain (crater, now a lake) in the Northern Frontier District. This was a posting he loved and where he was most often during the twelve years he spent in Kenya as a DO, including a couple of years after Kenya achieved independence. When the Mau Mau revolt started, he was recalled to Fort Hall, which was in the centre of the revolt. Although he had invited me to stay, it seemed impossible, as visitors were not generally allowed into the Frontier. Curiously, despite the Mau Mau, regulations were less tight for Fort Hall, so it was alright for me to spend a month there.

Robin met me at Nairobi airport and, as he drove us back to Fort Hall, he told me that another assistant district officer called Kihori was staying that night and I'd have to sleep on the sofa. I learned later, before he suffered his horrifying death[83], that Kihori had been General Secretary of the Kikuyu Association, the pre-Mao Mao independence movement. When I queried his role as ADO, he commented that "We don't like you (the British), but we like the Mau Mau even less". The Kikuyu Association had been within the general tradition of socialist anti-imperialism and had argued that the Kikuyu had been historically egalitarian and libertarian, while the Mau Mau harked back to a more individualist and tribalist tradition that he believed was alien to Kikuyu traditions. He was bitter that Jomo Kenyatta, whose anthropological studies had earlier portrayed

[83] See below

the Kikuyu tradition as fundamentally socialistic, had then changed his views to provide authority for the Mau Mau conceptions.

When we met, Kihori decided I must be the elder brother come to visit young Robin. Though Robin is slightly taller than me, I am bigger boned. He thought we were trying to pull his leg and that Robin's new car was mine, so most of that first evening was spent trying to convince him that I was indeed the younger brother. There was enough time however for me to learn how things were organised. Fort Hall, just two years before, had had one DO and one ADO, but now had a Senior DO, and was divided under him into four districts, three with DOs, while Robin as ADO serving to Frank Lloyd the Senior DO, had charge of a sub-district round the actual town. There was also an Executive Officer, who as it happened was the cousin of a contemporary at Trinity College, with whom I was occasionally to go on patrols. There were two trainees, one of whom was Kihori, drafted in as assistant DOs.

Robin's bungalow was about two to three hundred yards from the centre of Fort Hall, where his office was. The official area was a sort of mini-ribbon-development, with one road and a number of officials' bungalows strung along it. Half way between the office and the bungalow on the other side of the road was a police encampment, in fact really army, as the 'other ranks' were askari. They included a very large Ugandan sergeant-major (years later I wondered if he was the one who we came to know as Idi Amin). Most of their officers were recruited from the Palestine police and were viciously right-wing. It was quite common to hear them saying, "we ought to have enlisted the SS prisoners at the end of the war, they'd have shown how to sort this lot out".

It was within the week, a week in which I had scarcely time to grasp the basic geography of the Fort Hall area, that Kihori was ambushed. I should have been with him. Robin was going to be at a conference. Kihori was due to set off in a truck that Robin usually used, pick up a chief and do a tour of the chief's area. He was setting off at a quarter to five in the morning and, though Robin doubted that I was capable of getting up early enough, I said I'd be at the office to go with him. In fact, he left three minutes early and I arrived in time to see him disappearing. I went back to Robin's house to read up some papers Robin had left me describing the area. A couple of hours later, Tony Soutar, another ADO arrived to pick up Robin's car, saying the Mau Mau had ambushed the truck. Naturally, I went with him and we got to a police cordon, beyond which were the remains of the truck and, in the road, the remains of the chief and Kihori, cut with pangas into foot-length segments.

Two parties were assembled, each with six or seven white policeman and a much larger contingent of askaris. I joined one of them, I think that we were in all over 150, but though I can still conjure up, in my mind's eye, the scene of the ambush, I can't remember the party in such exact detail. We set off to follow one trail, no attempt to fan out, nor even to divide our party so as to cover diverging paths. Then when, after about a mile, three small boys were seen running, it was decided that this was a trap - decoys to lure us to destruction. The whole party hunkered down and stayed still for about quarter of an hour. When I suggested that this was rather pointless, one of the police chose to think that I was frightened and offered an escort to take me back to the cordon, and was quite annoyed when I refused. They then, having argued that the chief's ambushers were undoubtedly ahead of us, using the boys as bait for another ambush, turned sharply left. About a mile and three quarters later, they came across a church with a large number of people waiting outside. There was an evangelical revival going on throughout East Africa at the time and large numbers used to go to frequent Bible study meetings.

The police asked these what they knew of the ambush and decided, when they said they had not heard it nor heard of it, that that was suspicious. Why, I don't know, since they and the church were in a valley with quite a large hill between there and the site of the ambush. Given that, while the initial ambush must have involved someone shooting through the windscreen, most of the killing was done with pangas (large choppers used for tree cutting), it would have been amazing if they had heard anything.

Anyway, the police were not satisfied and ordered the askaris to beat 'the truth' out of them. Men, women (some of them pregnant) and children were beaten and were screaming in agony. I was in no position to do more than say that I couldn’t see what the police thought they were doing. Several times again I was offered a police escort back, but my leaving was hardly going to solve anything. When the DO for the area arrived, Frank Lloyd's next in command, I hoped he would intervene on seeing the beatings. He did not and was not prepared to listen to me when I tried to raise the question. The beatings went on and the screams got more intense: the only 'merciful act' was when a white officer shot one of the victims to put him out of his pain.

I was to visit the Mission station and church later that week, where I met some of the survivors of the beatings. Naturally, since I was known to be the brother of one of the DOs, they assumed I had some authority and could have intervened. It was painful being forgiven - forgiven for not having succeeded in making my opposition tell. Before I left Kenya, I was to hear that

intelligence had revealed that the ambush was not Mau Mau led. There had been a family feud within Chief James's family: and the ambush was a family affair[84].

When I got back to England I tried to publicise it all. I wrote a report and sent copies to *Tribune*, the *New Statesman* and *Freedom*. Since I'd only come across *Peace News* when Middleton Murray was still editing it and advocating the use of nuclear weapons against Russia, I didn't think of sending them a copy. This was about a year before Eileen Fletcher came back and revealed what was going on in Kenya, so what I had to say would have been entirely new. No doubt editors wanted the authority of better known writers before publishing allegations such as I was making. *Tribune* had published articles of mine four years before, but had long lost touch. I was hardly literary enough for Kingsley Martin, while Vero at *Freedom* wouldn't have known who I was. He was in any case not much given to sticking his neck out and if he'd asked Lilian Wolfe, who did know me, she knew I was a catholic anarchist, which for Vero would have been a red rag to a bull.

When the three failed to publish, I had no idea how to publicise it. College friends introduced me to Pronchais McGuinness, who wrote for a small Gaelic paper, *Comhair* (pronounced 'core'). I gave him a copy, thinking he would translate it, but he wanted the credit as author and insisted on doing an interview. With hindsight I should have refused. Only part of my revelations came over and, as *Comhair's* basic line was that all Englishmen were imperialists, what was published was twisted. Still, it caused a little stink at the time. The DO who had failed to intervene came from Dublin and his parents were sent a copy of the paper, which prompted official denials. Pressure must have been put on Robin, who announced that I had seen nothing of the sort. Fortunately, while I had still been in Kenya, I had met Tommy Thompson, one of the extra ADOs who had been drafted in. He'd been an agricultural officer and years later, one of his former colleagues, Keith Lye was the first national secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I heard that Tommy had written that he'd met me very soon after the event, that I had told him what I'd seen, that he was quite certain I was sincere, and indeed that he told me he had witnessed a similar atrocity and had had to report the police.

Relations with pro-British Anglo-Irish were made rather more fraught when, only a few months after *Comhair* had published the interview, the DO whom I had blamed was himself ambushed - this time it was by the Mau Mau.

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[84] After Kihori's death, his deputy in the Kikuyu Association, who was also a trainee assistant DO came and stayed, ousting me from the spare room to the sofa again. The deputy was Tom Mboya, subsequently Kenyan Vice-President.

Chapter 8: Common Wealth and the Anarchists

Though, after the Irish Senate denunciations, by and large I had confined my political activity to France in the vacations, I still tried to contact Common Wealth. Consequently, in February 1952, I wrote to the ILP and to Common Wealth applying for associate membership. Quite by accident the Common Wealth letter reached their office on a day that John Banks[85] was there (which I later found out was a rare occasion), so I got a reply by return of post and a few months later became a full member. By contrast, the ILP letter, despite the fact that they had paid staff unlike Common Wealth, didn't get a response for a couple of months. The two parties worked closely together and I was for a few years an associate member of ILP and continued to be regarded as such even after I let that lapse. Though CW responded more quickly to the letter, it was easier to keep physical contact with the ILP. I visited their offices dozens of times before I managed to meet John Banks at the CW office - the office had as a caretaker a comrade who was profoundly deaf and did not like wearing his hearing-aid, so he never heard the door bell. Even when I saw him going out (to buy a loaf) and was standing by the door when he came back, I couldn't get his attention. So it was over two years later, the summer of 1954, when one of my attempts to gain access coincided with one of John's visits to the office.

Earlier that year, G. D. H. Cole[86] had called for a Third Camp Movement to unite all Libertarian, Pacifist or dissident Marxists opposed to both sides in the Cold War. After a launch meeting, no doubt fearing that this would involve him in a breach with Labour leftists and/or liberal-minded Fellow Travellers, who wouldn't want to go so far, he left the budding campaign he was creating. Perhaps too many of his admirers were critical supporters of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact and he wasn't prepared to confront them. Enough of those he had involved remained committed and John Banks found himself the Secretary of the new body. When the movement managed to attract a three figure membership and it came to elections, Common Wealth agreed a self-denying ordinance that, out of the seven-seat committee, we would only stand for two positions. The membership thought we were trying to manipulate things and tried to draft five more CW members, so we had to explain that we were trying to avoid making it a CW front.

I spent a large part of that year's long vacation working as John Banks's assistant. Mary McCarthy, in one of her novels, said that any organisation depending on the work of a number of eccentrics needed one seemingly conformist, not so much as an organiser, but just to hold the

[85] John Banks was the secretary of Common Wealth at the time.
[86] GDH Cole (1889-1958) was a political theorist and historian. He was a conscientious objector in WW1, a Fabian socialist and became Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford.

eccentrics together. John Banks did that. As a former army major and an always neatly-dressed polytechnic lecturer, he always seemed a conformist out of place. Those who knew him well, knew that he'd been a major in the Education Corps, having been hurriedly transferred there after driving the army's latest tank into a ditch, and that he was perhaps not so out of place in a war resisters' organisation as he seemed. Basically it was a federal movement, a lot of previously existing groups affiliated, though a small Third Camp Group was formed for anyone not a member of an affiliated group, for which Dave Wicks became secretary.

For the international meetings I became the French-English translator. John contacted a Chinese group who had been expelled from the Communist Party a little before Mao took power, and now had the distinction of having members imprisoned both in mainland China and by the Taiwan regime (as also in Hong Kong). None of us spoke or understood Chinese, while Lo Meng Tse, its founder, only wrote in French and his deputy in English, so we maintained a four-way correspondence. John received letters from the deputy, I from Lo Meng Tse. Years later, Andy, another member of CW (actually the deaf caretaker mentioned above), heard that the deputy had died in an Hong Kong prison and that his widow and daughter were believed to be still there. John, who was then lecturing in Fiji, was able to go there, married the widow Grace and adopted the daughter Clare.

I suppose few people now know much about Common Wealth and feel I ought to provide an explanatory history. With the Stalin-Hitler Pact of August 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War, the Popular Front, more specifically the Left Book Club, fell to pieces. A number of CP members resigned and many non-CP activists found differing ways of continuing the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle it had embodied. Several communists who had already been expelled for one deviation or another, notably Tom Wintringham, a former International Brigader, who perhaps expected larger sectors of the armed forces to come out as openly pro-fascist than turned out to be the case, founded the Home Guard (originally the London or Local Defence Force) as the basis for an anti-fascist militia. Others, such as Major Nathan (another former International Brigader who was less persona non grata with the military establishment than Wintringham) persuaded the War Office to let him found the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), so that the rank and file of the Army would know what they were fighting about. At the same time, though Gollancz took the core activists from the Left Book Club into the Labour Party, and the Coalition and the Stalinist remnant renounced the anti-fascist struggle for two years, new movements emerged from the Popular Front milieu. People from various political strands, who had previously come together in the Left Book Club to explore common

ground in the opposition to fascism, went back to their origins, taking with them what insights they had gained.

More or less at the same time that J.B. Priestley emerged, as the most popular radio political broadcaster putting a broadly Popular Front line, admirers of his launched the 1942 Committee. Earlier in the War, a group of egalitarian Liberals had formed around Richard Acland as Unser Kampf ('Our Struggle' in contrast to Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'). UK contacted, or was contacted by, Wintringham, Nathan and other former International Brigaders and launched the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. Arising from the Popular Front, many ABCA founders believed that it was more than possible that the Military High Command was sympathetic to the Nazi philosophy and might be anxious to change sides, and even those who were less cynical believed that Tory officers were likely to stage a military coup at the end of the war rather than allow a Labour government to be elected.

Over-lapping with Unser Kampf, a group of christian socialists who had been involved in pre-war efforts to help Jewish refugees but who had parted company with the pacifists on the grounds that the war simply had to be fought, who nevertheless acknowledged that British militarism must take its share of the blame for Hitler's rise and the War, formed round Fathers Donald Manners and Mervyn Stockwood[87], with the encouragement of Bishop Bell of Chichester. The two groups merged to form Forward March.

They in turn joined the 1942 Committee, which frightened off some of Priestley's admirers and to an extent Priestley himself. Many left the Committee and the remnant merged with Forward March to form Common Wealth. They were joined by some Trotskyists and by those, similar to Orwell, who left the ILP, the anarchists or the SPGB on the grounds that the War was not an imperialist war, but one for democracy and as such should be supported. The socialist-Zionist group Hashomer Hatzair also affiliated.

The army high command at first tolerated the discussion of politics initiated by ABCA, but when this discussion gave rise to Forces' Parliaments in various sectors, and these were dominated by the left, there was resistance. When, at the end of the war, the army was used to reinstate right wing regimes in Greece, Iraq and elsewhere, there were mutinies with many troops refusing to board ships or trains for the purpose. When the General Election came and votes were collected abroad to be sent back to Britain for counting, it was widely believed in the Eighth Army that the generals intended to destroy the votes of other ranks in order to reduce the Labour vote. A few

[87] Mervyn Stockwood (1913-1995) was Bishop of Southwark 1959-1980, an Anglo-Catholic and prominent left wing activist.

ballot boxes, in transit to Britain, were seen to fall into the Nile Delta: so there was probably at least a kernel of truth in the belief.

At the end of the war, the majority of the founding members of Common Wealth proposed winding up so as to enter the Labour Party, but the majority of the rank and file argued that the Labour Party was plainly not socialist. A new leadership emerged dominated by inter-war members of the ILP, prominent among whom was Professor C. S. Smith, who had been an ultra-Trotskyist, but who regrettably had become such an embittered anti-Stalinist that (and much of the new leadership) soon left to form a red-baiting group 'Common Cause'. By this time Common Wealth had approached the remnants of the ILP and the Anarchist Federation for a merger. It didn't happen, but it presaged later co-operation, firstly in the League for Workers' Control and later in a variety of other campaigns.

By 1948, not merely the original leadership, but also the leaders of the opposition to the 1945 liquidation, had all left Common Wealth and had been replaced for the most part by people who had been active within the Eighth Army, and by people whose first experience of politics had been the Left Book Club and who had gained their practical experience in what was generally subversive work. This perhaps makes explicable Common Wealth's rapid transition from being a Popular Front-style movement into a semi-anarchist one.

When I joined in 1952, I was entirely unaware that three months before he died, my father had joined. I had known that he had been interested in CW and there were leaflets and pamphlets among his papers, along with two or three of Acland's books. I knew Tom Wintringham was an old friend, Father Donald Manners was our vicar in Felpham, and he'd rented a house from the Acland estate while convalescing five years before he died. But Acland and Wintringham had left CW in December 1945. No-one I met in CW when I joined knew that my father had been a member, and since none of those I met active in CW had known Dad I remained ignorant.

That was until I was working for Oxfam in the mid-Sixties and was visiting a group of collectors, when one of the organisers, Irene Langmead, introduced me to her husband. It was rather cloak and dagger as he worked at Harwell and could hardly meet the Vice-chair of the local Committee of 100 openly. Fairly soon after meeting me, he asked: 'I've always wanted to know, what party do you people support?' - a question normally put by people expecting to get the answer 'Communist'. Something in the way he asked made me realise that he was not implying this, so I didn't bristle as usual, but replied, 'Well it would vary obviously. In my case I belong to a party that I don't suppose you've heard of, Common Wealth'. He looked at me hard and said, 'Otter,

your father was in it, I signed him up'. I thought at first, as Langmead was the name of a farming family of whom one was a churchwarden to Donald Manners, that he was going to say he had been secretary of the Bognor branch of CW, but he added (reminiscent of Con Lehane in Dublin), 'Heard of it? Of course I've heard of it, I was General Secretary'. In fact, when I consulted John Banks who was first elected General Secretary in 1946, I discovered that he had only been temporary General Secretary briefly before he took the job at Harwell and when Banks's predecessor had resigned.

As late as 1992, when CW celebrated its 50th anniversary, a survivor from the founding conference was present at the event (if I remember right, Fred Walker). Hearing my name he came over towards the end and commented, 'Mr Otter, you are looking young, glad to see you after so long'. He'd met my father in 1946, three months before Dad died. Unbeknown to me, when Dad gave me the long talk in 1946, when I was home from Marlborough, and I was thinking about the Revolutionary Communist Party, he would have been preparing to attend the Common Wealth conference the following weekend.

While it was John Banks who kept Common Wealth together, the drive that pervaded the party came from Buck Taylor, who was the Political Secretary. He was the Leading Aircraftsman who had so impressed people at the Cairo Forces Parliament, that the organisers of the mutiny over Von Manstein all remembered him as Sergeant-Major Taylor. Between the wars he had signed on at 13 years old as an Air Force cadet, and despite the military conditioning worked his way first to the Left Book Club and then to a role as a founder member of CW. He was posted out to Cairo the week after John Banks, after a row with the Brigadier, had been posted away from the area - so they didn't meet until after demobilisation.

When the two of them took on the running of CW it was at a time when the Left generally was declining catastrophically. Some former CW leaders had turned to reformism or careerism in the Labour Party, some had turned far Right, others had just given hope considering quite rightly that the climate of opinion was moving against the Left and that they were too old to hold on for a revival. Buck Taylor's first theoretical contribution therefore was to work out how and why the nature of capitalism had changed since the time of Marx and, from there, assess what forces within society would eventually lead to a revival of the Left[88]. He produced an analysis which in most ways was an earlier version of that produced later by Paul Cardan (Cornelius Castoriadis) in

[88] Taylor came up with his variant of the Managerialist analysis two or three years before a similar book in the US from James Burnham, 'The Managerial Revolution'. Taylor unfortunately did not publish his analysis beyond Common Wealth circles.

'Socialisme ou Barbarie'. While doing this he launched the League for Workers' Control. Since the Stalinists had wound up the League Against Imperialism during the latter part of the war, he contacted as many as possible of the colonial freedom movements that had been affiliated, and relaunched as the Congress of People's Against Imperialism. This, in the 1950s, transformed itself into the Movement for Colonial Freedom, from which Common Wealth was then expelled on the grounds that it figures on the Labour Party's banned list. The move to expel it came from the Communist Party, as usual eager to use an anti-communist witch-hunting rule against its own Left critics.

Taylor predicted (and here he differed from and was much in advance of Cardan) that resistance within the Soviet Satellites would come to parallel anti-imperialism within the Western colonies and neo-colonies. He predicted that convergence of resistance East and West would occur in the mid-1950s and that the impact of this convergence would make the struggle flow over into anti-war mobilisation, leading to a general revival of the Left, in which feminist, anti-racist and environmental struggles would feature more importantly than they had ever done before. After this analysis was published internally, Common Wealth adopted it as a perspective in 1948. Regrettably, by the time the predictions were being fulfilled, with Suez-Hungary and Montgomery, Alabama proving very much the convergence expected, and with the impact also inspiring the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, there were very few members left. Buck and his immediate associates had worn themselves out and were not mentally prepared for the work that they themselves had said would need to be done.

I joined Common Wealth with a muddled mixture of differing revolutionary theories, which could not have been put together as a viable single political strategy, but CW was very conducive to sorting out that sort of thinking. Buck Taylor had already worked out his synthesis and, though mine was more Syndicalist and his more councillist, there was a clear continuity. Added to this, Allen Skinner had started from De Leonism and become a theorist of pacifism (much as AJ Muste had done in the States). Norman Glaister, Dorothy and Bonnie had wedded Tolstoian pacifism with a near-Reichian psychological position. Olwen Battersby turned War on Want into a viable movement while Crystal Gates (nominally just the almoner at the Mile End Hospital) was doing magnificent work in the East End. John Banks was able to keep this bunch of differing ideologues speaking together and working together from 1946 to CW's demise in 1992. Hence, by the time I came back to England to live, I managed to put the sundry theories into a coherent whole.

By the time I actually met any of the members, Common Wealth had only a skeleton membership, only a couple of hundred as I recall, though it was still active in organizing the Third Camp. Even of that skeleton, living as I did in Dublin, I only met a small proportion. The Chair when I joined was Freda Ehlers. She was one of the few founder members still active. Freda had been Tory until the War, had met and been influenced by Mervyn Stockwood in the late Thirties, as I remember, converting to Anglicanism from Presbyterianism. She had been part of Stockwood's congregation in Bristol Docks. It must have been quite a wrench for her to break with both Richard Acland and Mervyn Stockwood to stay in Common Wealth at the end of the War, perhaps especially because the latter was still the priest at the church she attended (he didn't move to Taunton until 1955). Bob Ehlers was an aircraft engineer who, in the Twenties, had done his training in the USA, where he had joined the Wobblies - so for the first few years of their marriage he was syndicalist and she a Tory. By the time I joined CW, she claimed he had become reactionary. They had bought a large house, an old Grange outside Bristol, using it occasionally as a conference and adult learning centre. Richard, their eldest son, was to play a major part in the West of England Committee of 100.

While I was at Trinity College, I knew Clifford Mélotte briefly, so I was somewhat surprised when he turned up at my lodgings in Lewisham. I had just been told by my then landlady that a cousin of hers was coming to stay and she needed my room, so soon after he invited me to stay at his grandmother's house in Catford. It was only when I was there that I learned that his grandfather had been Belgian, a Sorbonne Professor, and a Communard, and that Professor Mélotte had had an extensive correspondence with Karl Marx, all of which he had preserved. Cliff was sufficiently a socialist that he would have wished to publish his grandfather's correspondence, and was aware that it might well have added to the understanding of Marx at a time when interest in the Economic and Philosophical Theses (and the consequent understanding of Marx) was increasing. He had gone to his aunt after his grandfather died to recover the correspondence from Marx, only to discover that the aunt had 'burned all that communist rubbish'. When Cliff explained how much the 'communist rubbish' might be worth, the aunt's desire for cash conflicted with her anti-socialism - but it was too late.

Allen Skinner was then editor of Peace News, having previously edited the NUR journal. When the Maxton ILP left the Labour Party he was chair of the London federation of ILP branches. The Stalinists started a move to expel the Trotskyists (I don't know which faction, but possibly the Harber faction before Denzil Harber adopted the French Turn). Allen went out on a limb to defend the Trotskyists and, of course, the Trots patched up a modus vivendi with the Stalinists,

knifing Allen in the back. He subsequently left the ILP. He joined the League for Workers' Control when it was founded, and Common Wealth in 1948. Working with Allen at Peace News was Tom Wardle, an Australian, with whom I went to a couple of conferences in Europe. He was then also in the IWW and so I was shocked to learn when I came down from college, after he'd returned to Australia, that he had then moved sharply to the Right.

The Ehlers family was not the only one in Common Wealth to use a large house as a centre. I think the Glaisters must have so adapted Braziers' Park earlier, though I can't be certain. Braziers' Park had been a small Tolstoian commune since before the foundation of Common Wealth, presided over by Norman Glaister, an eminent psychiatrist, and his two wives, also both eminent psychiatrists. They had been his pupils, he got engaged to one, married the other and the first insisted it should be a ménage à trois. They had been the centre of a network of pacifist-socialists on the Berkshire-Oxfordshire border. They'd had some hairy visits from police and MI5 at the beginning of the War. Dorothy Glaister still played a major part in peace movement activities and was to be active in the Direct Action Committee and Committee of 100. By the time I knew them, they were chiefly an educational centre and expected people to come to them to be influenced. I wasn't really in that loop and can only refer anyone who wants to know more about Braziers' Park to Marianne Faithful' description. She grew up there, has spoken on radio about it and written about it in autobiographical work. I think I must be the only person who ever visited the place without meeting her.

Common Wealth had rather an attraction for psychiatrists and psychologists, as Don Bannister was also on the Executive Committee and had joined when a Bevin Boy at the end of the War. Another ex-Bevin Boy Executive Committee member was Rikki Dalton, a Leeds solicitor. His main activism was with housing co-operatives in Leeds, to whom he was to propose squatting and the use of Gandhian methods some years before the Committee of 100 revival of squatting. He was also active in the Committee of 100.

Though I don't know to what extent they remained in CW, because of the proximity of Braziers, nor indeed in every case if there was any direct connection, but three more of CW's remaining activists lived in or near the Thames Valley in Berkshire. Doug Stuckey from Bracknell edited a rather scrappy 'Common Wealth Commentary'. Ernie Hartley was the Treasurer, not that there was ever any money. John Stockbridge was the third: he was an engineer for Thames Valley sewage disposal, which meant that those of us who were amongst the demonstrators at Aldermaston four or five years later had quite some need of his services.

Crystal Gates was also notable for campaigning on housing, managing to have an impact while remaining sufficiently independent of the constraints of her job as almoner of Mile End Hospital. When I joined CW, Olwen Battersby was Allen Skinner's secretary at Peace News, but a year or two later she left to take over as Director of War on Want. WoW had not until then been a success and since her retirement has had to be revived three or four times, not always successfully. Francis Deutsch, later to be one of the lawyers for the National Council of Civil Liberties, was serving his articles in Hull, in a firm headed by a prominent member of the Peace Pledge Union. The 'deaf comrade', who gave me lifts on the back of his motor-cycle to get to Braziers, was 'Andy' Anderson, who played an important part in Green politics on Merseyside much later, when he had got serviceable hearing aids. There was a surviving Portsmouth group of CW, among whom I spoke to Ron Moir, without really getting to know him. I understand he was one of the remaining members from the anglo-catholic socialist tradition, but by the time I had summoned up enough courage to approach him on the subject, he had left. At about the same time, Adrian Robertson joined CW. In the inter-war years he had been on the edge of Conrad Noel's Catholic Crusade and later joined the Christian Anarchists. He taught at a girls' school near Rotherham. John Lloyd, presumably about the same age as myself, was then at Ruskin and is now a major figure in the Green Party in South Shropshire.

When, just after the end of the war, the original Common Wealth leadership proposed that the movement wind up to enter the Labour Party and was defeated, Peggy Duff had been the office manager and had supported the liquidation. 'Andy' Anderson became the new office manager and arrived to find Peggy in the process of burning the address cards. As a result, those CW members from around that time were very suspicious of her when she turned up later at Third Camp meetings. I knew nothing about the earlier split and had no interest in continuing the feud, until John Banks warned me that she was not to be trusted in the office. So in Third Camp days I knew Peggy fairly well and years later, when the CND generally saw her as a bureaucratic weight on the movement, we were to retain friendly personal relations. When the first Aldermaston March was being planned and there was a liaison committee to which only representatives of organisations that had endorsed the march were invited, and the CND had not endorsed the march, Peggy, as one of the minority of the CND Executive who wanted to support the march, used to attend as my guest. I was representing the Universities & Left Review Club.

I first came across the London Anarchist Group (LAG) platform in Hyde Park that same summer. Philip Sansom[89] and Rita Milton were very accomplished speakers. Syd Parker, Philip Holgate and John Bishop also occasionally spoke and, though not in the same league as speakers, they did the warm-up act, setting up the platform and gathering a small crowd, Selling the *Freedom* paper was however almost entirely left to Lillian, who would be helped by Leah Feldmann, a Russian anarchist who in her youth had played a major part in the October Revolution. It was she who persuaded the crew of the *Aurora* to lead the attack on the Winter Palace. A year later (1955) even Lillian and Leah gave up selling and for a couple of years until 1957 I started selling the paper there, followed a month or so later by Pete Turner.

I later learned that Leah Feldmann had remained sympathetic to the Soviet Regime longer than most Russian anarchists, until 1923, and was therefore treated with some suspicion by other exiled Russian anarchists. It would have been useful if I had known this at the time as, in the Malatesta Club, she appeared to be quite hysterical whenever one tried to talk about what had happened in Russia. She would start a screaming intervention "but they did this, they did that, they couldn't have believed what they were saying", even when the person she was interrupting had already made just such a point. Mind you, all her interventions tended to be shouted. Axel Hoff, in order to wind her up, would say, "I haven't yet mentioned Jabotinski". She had seen Jabotinski's legionnaires standing next to SS thugs in Vienna, joining in attacks on Jewish socialists, and any mention of him would spark off at least quarter of an hour of shouted intervention.

Nevertheless Leah was good at selling the paper at Hyde Park. She'd get any passer-by who made even the most casual (or hostile) remark to start a discussion and almost invariably she'd make a sale. Soon after she stopped selling, she also stopped coming to the Malatesta Club. I remember after I came over from Dublin one time, remarking that I hadn't seen her for a long time, and was told that she no longer associated with anarchists. I was told (I never knew how reliably) that her husband - a Professor Smith - told her that she was endangering his career by associating with us. That was perhaps borne out by the fact that years later when she saw me on CND demos, she would come over and, in a way that made her evasions of Tsarist police seem incredible, talk in a loud stage whisper, asking me, "Laurens, how are the A's".

Kitty Lamb was much quieter than Leah and I got the very mistaken impression that she was an inactive sympathiser. I knew she was a member of the campaign against capital punishment and

[89] Philip Sansom (1916-1999) was an artist, writer and anarchist who was tried in WW2 for encouraging disaffection with the Army.

similar bodies, but not until Sydney Silverman[90] gave up and was in the process of closing down that campaign, and she went in and twisted his arm to restart, joining with Peggy Duff in the actual work, did I realise how wrong the impression had been. Then, in the early days of CND, when the national office was in Amen Court, I was somewhat surprised to find Kitty working there, in a building which was after all church property. She must have kept her light under a bushel, as one day when I went in and one of her fellow workers was told I was an anarchist and asked me what that meant, I referred her to Kitty who sitting next to her as someone who had been active for longer than I. Kitty was quite embarrassed.

No-one sold *Freedom* anywhere on the streets in London. There was a little more activity in the Malatesta Club, which at that time seemed to be a thriving centre, but people were even leaving that. So, by the time I left college, though the Club still allowed members to go in and make themselves a cup of coffee or whatever, performing a social role, those who actually knew anything about anarchism tended to hold their meetings off-centre. There were four of these, once a month, where selected friends attended, the meetings at the Club being purely a matter of chance as to whether any anarchists turned up. Even its social function was under threat. Max Patrick, who didn't call himself an anarchist and deplored anarchist informality, had arranged to become the key holder and by 1958 insisted that the Club should close when he was not present. There would have been no continuing meetings had not a new generation of the LAG around Jack and Mary Stevens, along with Pete Turner, started meetings in the next door pub.

That first year when I joined the Malatesta Club, it was meeting in High Holborn. This was fairly soon after Herbert Read had taken his knighthood. As I was unaware then of the 1944 split, I was also unaware that a breakaway grouping (some of whom later went over to join the Anarchist Federation) had left the LAG arguing that *Freedom*'s critique of Read had been insufficient. They met in the Garibaldi Café in Theobald's Road, from which they became known as the Garibaldi Faction, and published a paper called *Prometheus*.

One of the first meetings I attended did have a row on the subject and reference was made to the fact that people had left them on the issue. Then the week after the meeting was given over to putting the official *Freedom* version of the 1944 split, about which I had previously not heard. The week after that it was Donald Rooum[91] who told me in the Malatesta Club to take a very large pinch of salt with the story, although he has since recounted the same story in Freedom in 2012 in a series of articles.

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[90] Sydney Silverman (1895-1968) was a Labour politician who campaigned for the abolition of capital punishment.
[91] Donald Rooum is best known as a cartoonist for Freedom Press publishing *Wildcat* cartoons.

Despite Donald's warning I nevertheless swallowed the Freedom version, believed that the people who had 'broken away' as the AF were a bunch of thugs and in turn nearly resigned from CW when I heard that they were working with the AF. It was only when, a year later, I was waiting for a friend and sitting in the Malatesta Club, which by then had moved to Percy Street, Soho, a couple of people came in separately who both had obviously known the older members, even if their greetings to members other than each other were less than fully cordial, and started reminiscing about old times. After a time, one said to the other, "Do you remember when Vero [Vernon Richards] gave us £5 each to go and beat up old Tom Brown's missus and she miscarried after it?" I didn't know then and still don't if that was true, or if the two were deliberately spreading a lie. But I was forced to think that there might at least be two sides to the 1944 story. For the record, Lilly Brown who was active with her husband during 1944, was mugged, did have a miscarriage and was so upset by it that she dropped out of active politics.

Chapter 9: Suez, Hungary, CND and the New Left

Whereas other universities have their exams near the end of the Summer Term (May or June), Trinity chose to hold them at the end of the vacation - after all, the Victorian concept of the University was one where terms were for living a cultural life and actual study was done in the vacation. So, when I finally found in the early autumn of 1956 that my tutor had prevented me from sitting my degree, I moved to London just in time for the Suez and Hungary crises.

A month or so before, after a short time away, I got back to Dublin to be introduced by a medical student friend to an Australian visitor, Roma White. She told me a little of her father's involvement in events leading to the Irish Uprising of 1916 and even she thought that he might have once been an anarchist. She didn't tell me enough, however, to realise that she was the daughter of Séan White, the founder of the Irish Citizens' Army - something I didn't work out until after I had met and got to know her half-sister, Fran White, who was active in the Direct Action Committee. Roma had told me that her father was a widower when he married her mother, but neither sister was aware of the other's existence: Roma had returned to Australia before I met Fran and I didn't put two and two together until after Fran had died.

The Suez crisis was in two parts. First, Nasser nationalised the Canal, over which Britain and France breathed fire and brimstone and there was a United Nations call to back down. Then it blew up again. In the summer, at the time of the first crisis, I received my Army Reserve recall papers.

I replied that (a) I was in Ireland, (b) I now regarded myself as a semi-pacifist, (c) in order not to shelter behind the immunity being in Ireland conferred I would come over to Britain and hand myself in, and (d) I was not prepared to go before a tribunal to judge my conscience unless it was made up of anglo-catholic priests, so I would accept a gaol sentence. I said I would travel over on such and such a day on the Dublin-Liverpool ferry and hand myself in to the first policeman I saw.

Naturally the poor policeman hadn't been informed, so I had to get him to ring the army and he still got no orders and couldn't arrest me, but he did duly note that I had tried to hand myself in. Somehow the army informed my mother that I was serving in Egypt "with distinction" - which gave her the opportunity to send me a very contemptuous letter to an address in Egypt. This was returned to London, sent on to Dublin, returned again to London (where I had been staying with John Boland) and then on to Catford, where it finally reached me. I don't think she believed

my denial. I later learned that I had not been the only 'recruit' to which something like this had happened.

When I left Dublin, John Boland from Trinity College put me up for a few weeks in his father's flat. He was shocked by Suez. While I was there, his father rang up, equally shocked. John resigned from the Tories and was eager to go with me to a demonstration. I had intended to go directly to the united front demo at Trafalgar Square, but John argued that the smaller Hyde Park demos would be more radical - no doubt in the long term they were, but less concerned with the immediate issue. So we went to Hyde Park first. Rita Milton was speaking well, but the crowds she should have been addressing were elsewhere; consequently we were late arriving at Trafalgar Square.

As the demonstration moved off towards Downing Street it met a response from mounted police, reinforced by dogs. Though compared to modern day kettling this was probably moderate, it was sufficient for *The Times* to publish an editorial rebuke to the Government. However, at the stage we arrived the most notable thing was the presence of a number of Young Tories running round with copies of the *Daily Worker*, which praised Eden with faint damns and argued against the demo, showing these to demonstrators. No doubt they thought that this would persuade them that they were wrong to be there. It persuaded no-one to leave the demo, but it may have contributed to the disillusion being felt by members of the CP and YCL. I don't know if the Young Tories concerned learned anything from the experience. It would probably be too much to expect that they shed their prejudices and discovered how little influence the CP had on the Left.

The dissident upsurge in Hungary was preceded by a similar movement in Poland, more rooted in the trade unions, though at a less discontented level than the later *Solidarnosc*. It should have been obvious to anyone who knew anything about Eastern European history that Russia would not risk a show-down in Poland, and that the situation in Hungary was different. However, it wasn't.

At the time I was supply teaching in Hither Green. I wasn't any good and to this day have never been paid, which was probably fair enough. I specifically told a school colleague that there wouldn't be Russian tanks in Warsaw, but there would be in Budapest. He chose to interpret this as sympathy for Stalinism, even arguing, when it happened exactly as I had predicted, that the invasion of Hungary proved the evil of Stalinism and that he had been right, even though there had been no tanks in Warsaw. He was supposed to be an History expert. I may not have been

any good at teaching, but at least I knew enough history to know that Russia couldn't have trusted her troops - even the ones she eventually sent to Hungary - to invade Poland.

On the Sunday immediately after the Russian tanks went into Budapest, two people turned up at the Malatesta Club, introducing themselves as Communist officials of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), who had just left the Party and who said they were going to build a left opposition to the CP within the union. They were anxious for the addresses of any anarchist electricians whom they could enlist. As it happened, I was the only anarchist in the Club that night, and, having just arrived from Dublin, knew no-one to recommend and could only refer them to the bookshop. It was not long after that I heard that, far from forming a left opposition, they had teamed up with Woodrow Wyatt in a witch-hunting exercise. They soon seized control of the union, which under their tutelage remained every bit as authoritarian as it had been in Stalinist days. I learned, eleven years later, that one of them (while in the YCL) had published a pamphlet attacking the reformism of the party leadership, so perhaps he had really intended initially to form a left opposition - either way, his volte face was quick enough.

G. D. H. Cole, after he had pulled out of the Third Camp Movement, must have had a second re-think, as the year after, he launched with an almost identical policy, the World Socialist Movement, which by the time of Suez-Hungary, had changed its name to the International Society for Socialist Studies. For over a year it had been in touch with the Petöfi Club, socialist students in Budapest whose actions sparked off the uprising. Unlike Third Camp, the WSM/ISSS was mainly restricted to Labour Party members, but I managed to join it. Though I was living in South London at the time, I attended meetings at Kurt Weisskopf's flat in North London[92]. When the invasion came, though Cole viewed the invasion as a mistake, he nevertheless argued that the Left ought to give Russia critical support, as anything else would be objectively support for NATO. The majority of the members felt that to suggest that there was no alternative to Western capitalism except a regime that was ready to slaughter striking workers, would be to endorse NATO arguments. Kurt played a leading role in the debate.

My first reaction to the events in Hungary was that we needed to raise an ambulance brigade. There wasn't time to raise sufficient cash for one on the lines of the Quaker one that went to Spain in the Thirties, so I phoned through to the International Red Cross office to ask whether,

[92] He normally used his wife's maiden name and so was known at Reuter's and in the mainstream media as Kurt Dowson. Perhaps his residence in Britain was not entirely legal. Just after WW1 he had been a member of the Czech Communist Workers' Party, the Czech section of the Communist Workers' International, and had worked throughout WW2 in the anti-Nazi resistance. By this time, however, he had had his fill of small group politics and so was to be, by New Left and CND standards, something of a right-winger.

if I could raise the crews, they would be used. I had previously suggested to the ILP, London Anarchist Group (LAG), Common Wealth, the Progressive League, the Peace Pledge Union, and a few other such, that each should raise and sponsor one crew. I explained to the IRC that I would aim to recruit the crews only from groups that had condemned the British, French and Israeli actions in Egypt. The IRC refused, as they didn't want anyone from countries involved in the Suez adventure. There was irony in this. A close friend from Trinity College, who initially supported the British action on Suez, applied from Dublin and was of course welcomed. Fortunately, while working in Hungary, she met so many Hungarians who blamed the British-French action for providing Russia with an excuse, that she was convinced by them.

Just after that failed, I was at the anarchist platform in Hyde Park when there was an announcement that a meeting there would try and recruit International Brigade-type volunteers. Philip Sansom and I went along, but discovered a very right-wing meeting, large numbers of what appeared to be former Waffen SS, addressed by C. S. Smith, among others. Although he had espoused right-wing views, he appeared leftist in that milieu, as he had retained a Marxist method of analysis. This was useless to us.

I then heard that Mike Randle[93] had proposed to the Non-Violent Resistance Group (the former Operation Gandhi), that he go to Hungary as a Gandhian resister. Hugh Brock[94] called a meeting to discuss this, and I wanted to go to Hungary with Mike. But when the meeting came around, other than Mike, none of the Non-Violence Action Group (NVAG) members I knew were present. Allen Skinner was retiring as editor of *Peace News*, succeeded by Hugh Brock; Tom Wardle had gone to Australia; John Banks's father was terminally ill so John had had to drop out; and none of the Braziers' Park contingent was present. There were only five or six, of whom Werner actually supported Russian tanks, while Hugh Brock and Gene Sharp[95] purported to be unable to see a moral distinction between the violence of a kid who threw a stone at a Russian tank and those who commanded the tank to spew out machine gun fire at the unarmed. They reluctantly consented that Mike should go at his own expense, in the group's name, but to salve their feelings they decided that the group should be restricted to pacifists, rather than, as had previously been the case, welcoming those who believed that, for pragmatic reasons, NVDA could and should be used in political action. I was adjudged to be not 'non-violent' under this

[93] Michael Randle, b 1933, peace activist with War Resisters International and researcher, was a pioneer of NVDA in Britain and was notorious for assisting in the escape of the spy George Blake whom he had met in Wormwood Scrubs in 1966.
[94] Hugh Brock (1914-85) was a life-long pacifist and edited *Peace News* 1953-64. He was a co-founder of the Direct Action Committee.
[95] Gene Sharp was an American pacifist, founder of the Albert Einstein Institution. He was an advocate of non-violence about which he wrote copiously and was assistant editor of *Peace News* 1955-58.

definition and was expelled from the group, though Werner, despite his outright support for the Russian Army, remained a member. As a result, I was not in the group when, a year later, it became the Direct Action Committee.

Before these events, I had begun to have quite definite disagreements with articles on NVDA by Gene Sharp and Hugh Brock in *Peace News*. Many traditional pacifists, I was soon to find, never having experienced the army, had an inflated idea of the army's efficiency. Gene and Hugh regularly argued in PN for "Civilian Defence", mass NVDA to resist an invader, which they believed would have to be organised by the army "as only the army would have the right sort of discipline". Stephen King Hall took up this idea and curiously, despite his knowledge of the military, had the same misconception, presumably in his case because he had failed to give sufficient thought to the nature of NVDA[96]. Gene and Hugh appeared unaware that all army discipline is designed to desensitize the recruit so that, contrary to all human instincts, [s]he would be prepared to kill when so ordered. Francis Jude, who was then Peace Secretary of the Society of Friends, gave an hilarious verbal portrait of a drill sergeant bawling, " Squad will 'present unto him the other cheek also' by numbers, by numbers …" It was to prove, when we got round to doing NVDA, the basis of the first of many disagreements on what Gandhi had advocated.

Soon after, despite such differences, I started selling both *Freedom* and *Peace News* at Hyde Park, where I was sometimes joined by another recent arrival from Ireland, called Ernie Bates. I would collect the bundles of the papers, but we would take it turn and turn about to sell or go listen to the speakers.

The Malatesta Club meetings were declining in numbers, though one sticks in the mind for non-political reasons. Arthur Uloth[97] was speaking, with Jack Robinson in the Chair, when, fairly early in the Arthur's talk, a very drunk taxi driver walked in saying he was looking for Sammy Cash. (Sammy had left the SPGB in 1953 when Tony Turner was forced to resign and was at the time trying to organise a taxi-drivers' union. Though he was never happy with the description 'anarchist', he was a regular at anarchist meetings). When told that Sammy wasn't there but would probably drop in later, he lay down on three of the chairs at the back and was soon snoring loudly. When Arthur had finished, Jack asked if there were any questions. The taxi driver

[96] Stephen King-Hall (1893-1966) was a naval officer and writer who advocated unilateral nuclear disarmament in *Defence in the Nuclear Age* (1958) and promoted the idea of conventional defence alongside mass civil resistance.
[97] Arthur Uloth was one of the more intellectual members of the London Anarchist Group who acted as International Secretary and represented them on the Anarchist International (FAI). He wrote for *Freedom* as John Smith.

woke up and asked, "How can I make a million pounds?" It would be hard to think of an audience less qualified to answer, but soon the subject of Arthur's talk was forgotten and the meeting speculated on the money-making idea. Arthur suggested founding a phoney religion, while I suggested he get into the flying-saucer racket. The taxi driver, George King by name, subsequently found the Aetherius Society and made his million or more, synthesizing the meeting's ideas[98].

Anarchist meetings in Hyde Park began to start later and later, as fewer of the nominal members of the LAG took any part. Philip Sansom, who would never in the past have missed a Sunday speaking there, tended only to remember when the weather was fine, but at the time a distinct and interesting pacifist-anarchist platform was emerging. Carol Taylor, a young pacifist who in the years just before had spent a lot of time listening to anarchist speakers, had now decided to launch her own platform. She was a moving speaker and a number of us gravitated towards her pitch.

Some months later she proposed a meeting to launch a new group. I had earlier attended the Pacifist Youth Action Group (PYAG), though as a non-pacifist didn't consider myself a full member, despite paying a subscription. PYAG over-lapped with the NVRG and, not knowing that PYAG had broken up when its Treasurer ran off with the funds, Ernie and I went to Carol's meeting suggesting that we reform PYAG. Though Carol opposed this, Mike Randle, Terry Chivers and other ex-PYAG members by then working for PN, approved, as did the majority of those whom she had radicalised who liked the idea of pacifist action, also regarding themselves as anarchist, but were dubious about committing themselves personally and individually to pacifism.

However, Carol must herself have felt rejected. She took umbrage, half dropping out and leaving soon afterwards for America, where a year or so later she married and remained. Terry, Mike and I took over her platform. Once the DAC got going (founded to send Harold Steele, Dave Grahame and Ian Dixon to the nuclear-testing site at Christmas Island for Christmas 1957), Mike was too busy. From the Summer of 1958, I was also generally involved in direct action linked campaigning and frequently unable to make it. Terry, by then joined by Harry Marsh, kept the group and the platform going. We had decided, in principle, by the Summer of 1958, that like the earlier PYAG, we ought to be part of the PPU, but there was no way we could affiliate as a

[98] Check out the website of the Aetherius Society to see how 'Dr. George King' describes his conversion as the emissary of the Interplanetary Parliament on 8 May 1954. He died 12 July 1997, but the Society he founded still continues.[Editor]

group without individually signing the Peace Pledge. Individually signing to 'renounce war' seemed to some of us fairly meaningless (in a nuclear age) without a positive commitment as to what we were to do about it. So at the time of the nine-week picket at Aldermaston and the first DAC sit-in, we hadn't actually got round to doing it.

Meanwhile, in the period after Suez and Hungary, the political re-alignments continued. Though the first rifts in the Communist Party were the departure of the Fife Socialist League and one of the two Oxford County branches, these had in fact begun to break earlier, when the revelations of Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU had leaked out. They had demanded that the British party examine its history in the light of what Khrushchev had said and had been suspended for their pains. They had appealed and were expecting their expulsions to be reviewed, but when the Russian tanks rolled into Budapest, they wrote to the Appeals Committee telling them not to bother. That alone would not have made much difference: Lawrence Daly[99] and the Fife Socialist League were later to be well-known in the New Left and CND, while Will Warren and Fran Edwardes (née White[100]) from the Oxford branch became major DAC activists[101].

There was a rash of Marxist fora formed up and down the country by dissidents. The proximity of one such depended purely on the make-up of local parties, and each such forum was likely to fall apart rapidly. So making contact at a local level could prove difficult. There were reports of *The Reasoner* being published as an opposition paper within the CP. It was then expelled and would re-appear as *The New Reasoner*, but still no announcement as to where it could be bought[102]. Then there was an advert for a new paper, a three times a year one launched by departing party members. This was the first time there was an address of dissident communists easily available for those of us who had been outside the Party since the 1940s or earlier and thus were anathema to party members.

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[99] Lawrence Daly (1924-2009) was a coal miner and left wing activist, prominent in the National Union of Mineworkers. He followed his father into the Communist Party in 1940 but left in 1956 and helped found the Fife Socialist League in 1957. He joined the Labour Party in 1964.

[100] Fran White had grown up in London Anarchist Group circles. When her father, Séan White, went to Australia, he left her with Matt Kavanagh who was unable to manage and passed her on to Lilian Wolfe. Her first husband, Geoffrey Payne was a LAG member, but she joined the CP when she married John Edwardes. They both left the CP together. Fran became involved in the PYAG in 1958, though John dropped out of politics after a while and Fran left him, briefly for me and then for Simon Schama, the now well-known historian. Schama was on the fringes of the PYAG by dint of sharing accommodation in a commune in South London.

[101] An illustration of how such influences become isolated can be gained from the story of a Scot who, in 1969, moved south to Ironbridge in Shropshire and was a good militant there until he died. Eddie Boyd was a carpenter who, with his parents at the time of the Hungarian invasion was moving back to East Fife after some twenty years in Glasgow. He opposed the invasion, but got to Fife to find that the miners within the Fife CP branch had all left and, as he was not a miner, he remained in the CP branch in a minority of one opposing the invasion.

[102] *The Reasoner* was launched by E. P. Thompson and John Saville in July 1956 and *The New Reasoner* followed in 1957 with more support.

In the rather smaller milieu of the anglo-catholic left, there came news that the majority of the seven-strong Society of Clergy and Ministers for Common Ownership had resigned from the CP on the issue. This was a grouping that had formed independently of the Socialist Christian League, initially on the suggestion of Richard Acland, whom they had excluded by the simple expedient of deciding that membership should only be open to clergy. Stanley Evans gave a well-publicised series of christian socialist lectures at about this time, but there was no immediate consequence of his and his friends' resignations - 'the Papers of the Lamb' were only published a couple of years later, the Christian Socialist Movement[103] being founded after that. Oddly, Father Bryn Thomas, until then only a fellow-traveller, took the occasion to join the Party, an action also followed by the well-known Scots writer and nationalist, Hugh MacDiarmid.

The Nottingham Marxist Group (ancestor of the 1960s International Marxist Group) began making contacts, as far as I remember in the February. It had been a YCL branch in contact with the Healy Trotskyist group before Russian tanks had entered Hungary. They had decided to leave the CP but were ordered by Gerry Healy to stay in - they refused and left anyway and were expelled by Healy[104]. I later heard of two other such YCL branches being expelled (as it happened I was at the time working with an ex-CP group secretary from Nottingham who had recruited most of the NMG members in the first place). Ellis Hillman, then on the Executive of the Healy group, claimed that Healy personally supported the Russian invasion and was outvoted on the issue, the eventual Fourth International-International Committee position of condemning the invasion, but advocating that FI-IC members where possible remain within the affected CP branches was a compromise concession to him.

In early spring 1957, there was an advert for a paper to be called *The Universities and Left Review*, stemming from recent ex-CP members. As amongst the contributors to the first issue was G. D. H. Cole, it seemed that it would be produced by a group of dissident CP university lecturers, a larger and more prestigious block than it was. This meant that a larger number of previous dissidents made contact than might otherwise have been the case. It was, in editorial composition, a reborn 'Oxford Left' (the CP-front undergraduate paper of the early 1950s). Another advert was for subscribers to *Socialist Forum*, which naturally people assumed would be the national journal of the various fora. I have never known whether this was just a scam, as the

[103] Now called Christians on the Left, it is a group of clergy and other religious minded people and is affiliated to the Labour Party with many representatives in Parliament.
[104] Gerry Healy (1913-1989) was a co-founder of the International Committee of the Fourth International (one of several similar Trotskyist groupings). His UK organisation, The Club, became the Socialist Labour League in 1959 and then the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1973. He was known as very dictatorial and exposed as a serial abuser of women party members.

business secretary was one of the officials of the Healy group, with the paper never appearing, or whether it did appear and was just not dispatched to non-Healy leftists. I don't think Mike Segal, the nominal editor, who had grown up in the Arbeite Frant, ever knew either.

The appeal for U&LR subscribers was repeated with different price versions each time, so that those who responded first time round received the paper for less than half the eventual cost, before it finally appeared. When it did appear, there as an appeal for people to help run a political club, something rather more than the existing Marxist fora, the club holding its first meeting in the autumn of 1957[105]. While this was happening, *The New Reasoner* also emerged but at that stage seemed confined to Yorkshire and its neighbours, where Eric Preston had also launched a Leeds Young Socialist Group, semi-linked to the ILP. The various for a did at this stage come together in a national federation, run by the Nottingham Socialist Group[106]. The shape of the non-Stalinist left was changing rapidly. Before it had been very small and somewhat moribund, because there were too few of us to do anything constructive. There was no emphasis in the non-Stalinist left on activity - for instance, one would have got from *Freedom* or the Malatesta Club the impression that refraining from voting was the be-all and end-all of anarchism, rather than a mere adjunct of social change. Slowly, what was to become the New Left emerged, and though, as an organisation, it confined itself to 'exploring the limits of reform', it provided a context within which there could be revival of revolutionary thought.

One of the people from this milieu, with whom I had some small dealings, though perhaps influential, was Raphael Samuel[107]. He had been a very orthodox CP member up to and perhaps after the Twentieth Congress – there were members of the U&LR who had been expelled from the University CP by Raphael. I knew that the CP had, for whatever reason, not only dissociated itself from the opposition to the Suez invasion, but the *Daily Worker* carried an article condemning the spontaneous demonstration, ordering Party members not to take part. Perhaps for that reason some early members of the group including Raphael who had published 'Oxford Left', when reminiscing about the Suez demo said that they had gone as a group, joined the impromptu march down Whitehall at its end and then had been amazed to see Raphael already there at the junction between Whitehall and Downing Street.

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[105] I remember taking Raphael Samuel from the U&LR Club to visit the Malatesta Club, from where he got the idea to start the Partisan Coffee Bar later in 1958.

[106] Also known as the Nottingham Marxist Group, fore-runner of the International Marxist Group, formed by Pat Jordan (1928-2001) and Ken Coates (1930-2010).

[107] Raphael Samuel (1934-1996) was a Marxist historian, co-founder of the journal *Past & Present* and perhaps most famous for his creation of the History Workshop Movement at Ruskin College, Oxford.

Unlike EP Thompson, who had been something of a rebel since 1948, building up a synthesis of ideas from Luxemburg, Lukacs, Gramsci, Tagore, Morris, Blake and Muggleton and thus had a firm standing when he left the CP, Raphael Samuel had really no non-party ideas when he left. He retained something of a Popular Front perspective, probably seeing this as constituting a better way to power than the Labour Party entryism being pedalled by Trotskyites such as Gerry Healy and others in the Socialist Forum groupings. For Raphael Samuel there was a massive shift in thinking in 1957 as he moved closer to EP Thompson while developing his own unique ideas. Perhaps I can lay some claim for part of this shift as I had introduced him to the anarchist Malatesta Club and some of its associates – from which he got the idea for the Partisan Club.

Meanwhile, Bevan, after five years when he epitomised the Labour Left, had made his peace with the Labour Right on economic issues in 1956 and on Suez was actually to the Right of Gaitskell. The U&LR made a pamphlet restating the case for common ownership as its first venture into the world beyond the ex-Stalinist milieu. I was at the time briefly engaged to Marion Merritt (daughter of 1930s Brandlerites) and, as she was elected to the U&LR committee, I used to deputise for her. We went together to the Labour Party Conference that year in Brighton. The pamphlet sold well but more to the point, that was the year when Bevan adopted the slogan, "Don't send me naked into the conference chamber".

Only the night before, he had assured delegates that he was still opposed to the Bomb. He implied to a meeting which included three U&LR members that only his rapprochement with Gaitskell would prevent him from speaking against it and that he still had not made up his mind whether to speak. When he got up to speak there was a frisson of relief in the upper galleries that the motion would go through - it was a minute or two before we understood that he was speaking against us. The motion against the Bomb, in consequence, only got a couple of hundred thousand votes. The U&LR wasn't alone in being caught with illusions. *Labour Review* (the Healyite paper) had an editorial calling for all the Left to unite behind Bevan, demanding that all divisive issues (such as workers' control) be dropped, so as not to damage the all-important current struggle.

The re-birth of the non-Labour Party, non-CP Left soon came up against the fact that, even after the departure of Eden, the militarism of the Tories (as of the Labour leadership also) persisted. The Government announced plans for British nuclear weapons tests at Christmas Island that Christmas. Harold Steele, an Unitarian pacifist from the Wrekin, announced that he planned to go by yacht to the Pacific testing grounds, to test the legality of the country appropriating a large expanse of open sea for such a purpose.

The Non-violent Resistance Group (NVRG) met to sponsor him, changing its name in the process to the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons Tests. From the very beginning, the DAC took and proclaimed the view, earlier expressed by Einstein, that nuclear weapons were the moral equivalent of gas chambers and that they made the sort of debates that had previously been waged over total pacifism irrelevant. Just as there could be nothing that could justify a gas chamber, so there could be nothing that could justify nuclear weapons. The argument that 'we' must have them because someone else has them and we must deter them from using them, has no validity.

David Graham and Ian Dixon, already working in India with Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement, volunteered to meet up with Steele in Singapore and sail with him, though in the event they never got to meet him there. Once the immediate sponsoring was completed, at a meeting just before Christmas 1957, the proposal was made to hold another march to Aldermaston that coming Easter - "we might be able to get as many people as in 1952 or 1953", that is, 20 or 30. A collection was taken for the initial costs of organising the march, netting £0-6s-8d[108].

The plan snowballed. As the NVRG wrote out to its former contacts and had a small announcement in PN, a number of pacifist groups not previously interested in NVDA (indeed, in so far as a march hardly of itself constitutes non-violent resistance, perhaps never interested in NVDA), decided to endorse the march. By the time the NVRG got round to setting up a liaison committee so as to involve a wider section of the pacifist movement, non-pacifists were also interested, necessitating yet another re-think and a wider liaison committee to liaise between the existing committee and groups such as the U&LR and *The New Reasoner*. The original intention to use the badge of the War Resisters' International[109] had to be discarded and a sub-committee of the wider liaison committee (Hugh Brock, Gerald Holtom and one other) was chosen to come up with a new badge.

Contrary to later myth, the badge produced was not (initially) the combination of the semaphore for N and D. CND did not exist when the sub-committee first started, was not founded until 18 February 1958 and did not endorse the demonstration until 24 March. Gerald Holtom, though a Quaker, was very much interested in Medieval Catholic symbolism. He decided, for obvious reasons to work from the Cross. He tried it with arms up, but that suggested inappropriate triumphalism and so put them down. He then consulted a book on symbolism and discovered

[108] About 34p in modern figures, though worth a bit more than that in those days [Editor]
[109] The broken rifle symbol

that the monastic symbol for a dead monk was such a cross with arms sloping down, while the still-birth of a monastic tenant's child was symbolised by a circle. So a cross with lowered arms surrounded by a circle symbolised a death and a still-birth - very appropriate to the results of radiation. It was only when the sub-committee reported back to the Liaison Committee in early March, by which time CND had been founded but had still not endorsed the Aldermaston march, that someone came up with the semaphore meaning[110].

CND's foundation and the re-organisation of Victory for Socialism (VfS) both came in February 1958. Both were, by and large, responses to Bevan's abandonment of the Left. In the case of Victory for Socialism, the remnant of the 1944 group of that name took part in the U&LR Club, and its members talked of a re-organisation which they said would embrace the U&LR. At Christmas time there were reports of dissatisfied former Bevanite MPs and some speculation as to exactly which ones would sign up. It was a bit surprising when an advocate of 'hunting, shooting and fishing' emerged as Chair. As it turned out, the Transport House bureaucracy only had to wave a figurative sword for 'victory; to turn to defeat and VfS collapsed. The fact that CND lasted a little longer and made a far greater contribution to the Left, however, owes nothing to its founders.

Years before, when GDH Cole founded the World Socialist Movement, he had had an article published in the *New Statesman* setting out the aims: the NS, in a somewhat patronising editorial, wished it well. In 1956, after Bevan's volte-face, a similar article analysed Bevan's compromise with Gaitskell, stated that it was a bad compromise, and that armed with it Gaitskell would be unlikely to inspire anyone to vote Labour. To get people to vote for the Left, a more radical and inspirational policy was necessary, to get which a better compromise between the Left and Gaitskell was also necessary. This in turn meant rebuilding the Left, for which purpose it was necessary to 'harness the radicalism of youth'. To do that it was necessary to pose an impossible demand, and unilateral disarmament was such a demand. So it was suggested that they found a campaign referring to unilateral nuclear disarmament, but not tied to it. On this basis they would build a wider Left movement, which in turn would get a better compromise with Gaitskell, and the hope that Gaitskell would be elected (by which time the nuclear demand would have been conveniently forgotten).

Once again, the NS had a patronising editorial, in this case it referred back to the launch of the WSM (which was by then defunct) and said that, in the case of Cole, they wished it well,

[110] Other accounts suggest that the dropped arms were evolved from the Cross and represented despair and that later Eric Austen discovered the representations described here by LO. [Editor]

suggested people join and gave it their full blessing. They now published an article which in a different but related field made a similar analysis, similar suggestions and gave it their blessing.

Over the next few weeks, announcements began appearing that there would be a meeting at Caxton Hall on 18 February, to launch a campaign which would be for unilateralists but not unilateralist in itself. The Campaign at that stage consisted of just seven well known people who had appointed the campaign executive and who for three years were to insist that they and they only had the right to decide CND policy[111]. *Peace News* came out with an editorial saying that unless the campaign was to be unilateralist, it would be worthless. This was followed by a declaration in similar terms from Oxbridge student bodies. Since the demand for seats at the founding meeting massively exceeded capacity, at first people were refused, then other halls were booked with tannoy systems to relay the discussion. By 18 February, the unilateralists had booked a separate hall in case the leadership should succeed in stifling debate. However, when the mass of attendees would have walked out, Canon John Collins[112] backed down and allowed a motion to commit the campaign to unilateralism.

That said, the Executive still retained the right to decide on all tactical matters, which was why, for instance, the 'Aldermarch' was not at that stage endorsed. It later turned out that JB Priestley had regarded marches as unconstitutional and therefore treasonable. It was only after the 1959 march that he changed his mind, though he did consent to remain on the Executive when, in late 1958, the rest of the Executive voted to endorse the march then being planned. The U&LR Club had by then taken over the job of publicising the march in London. For some weeks, we had a constant stream of loud-speaker cars circling London with Raphael Samuel and Ernie Rodker sleeping in the office as a constant contact. The Club had also taken over stewarding the march, though when it came to it, an elderly Stalinist, thinking that we weren't imposing discipline, appointed himself chief marshal and all the New Left stewards refused to work with him and resigned.

Subsequent media writers have said the 'first' march was a failure, only redeemed later, as thousands had been expected and hadn't arrived. That is nonsense. Our expectations had in fact been low. I'd been delegated to do the count, rang PN and the committee of the DAC on the Maundy Thursday, at which time there was hope that there might be an hard core of 300 with

[111] The combined group of founders and EC comprised Canon John Collins, Kingsley Martin, Bertrand Russell, Peggy Duff, Ritchie Calder, James Cameron, Howard Davies, Michael Foot, Arthur Goss, JB Priestley and Joseph Rotblat.
[112] Canon John Collins (1905-1982) was an Anglican priest who helped found War on Want in 1951, campaigned against apartheid and helped found CND, of which he was its first chairman.

something over 1,000 at the beginning and perhaps 5,000 at the end. There were 10,000 at the beginning, still 2,000 when we reached Turnham Green, and the only time we were less than 1,000 was when we set off from Turnham Green, in the snow, on the Saturday, and that was only because the buses bringing those who had slept overnight at Hounslow hadn't arrived. They joined us as the rear of the rest of the March left, so when we had gone a quarter of a mile the numbers had reached the 1,000 mark. We grew rapidly from there, as many people who had intended to miss the Saturday of the March to do their Easter shopping felt compelled, when they saw it was snowing, to come and join us in solidarity for that stint. I met at least one person who had never previously been an unilateralist who had assumed when we started that it was all just a farce, then heard we marching through snow, came down to find out why and was converted. So from lunchtime on the Saturday we were never less than 2,000. On the Monday, there were 15,000 in the Falcon Field. That year Easter Monday fell on my birthday and I remember, just as we were reaching sight of the base, realising that it was so. It was the most exciting birthday I have ever had.

Interlude: The Left and Nuclear Weapons

Attitudes of the Traditional Left to nuclear weapons need outlining. I hope I don't need to say that I don't consider Stalinism part of the Left, traditional or otherwise.

Given that most of the Left had been resisters for a long time, the reaction that 'though this was a particularly nasty weapon, it was after all just that, one weapon, only worse than others as a matter of degree, not one of kind', was understandable.

A minority, however, had decided in the past that a war might be the lesser of two evils, particularly an anti-imperialist war or a war to stop the spread of a tyranny like fascism, and were now confronted with a new evil an evil that seemed to be the moral equivalent of the gas chambers. By its nature nuclear weaponry could not be selective to use it to counter tyranny. Inevitably the victims of the tyranny as well as the tyrant would be made the targets - indeed the tyrant might be able to build him/herself an adequate shelter, while the victim never could.

But it was not merely a question of the nature of the Bomb itself. It may have been understandable, for those who felt war against Hitler was a lesser evil that the American uranium bombs were made in secret. The buildings where the designs were wrought unknown, the costs not mentioned in national budgets. But when this similarly happened in Britain after the war, when Shinwell (who had been Secretary of State for War) showed that he had not known that the Bomb was being made under his authority and he was made to look a fool in Parliament for not knowing; when no one had a chance to vote on the matter, when it became apparent that Government must have spent many millions on building research facilities, on buying and processing uranium and manufacturing bombs, at all times hiding the costs. (Did some of the money said to have been spent on the Health Service or on education, go to make nuclear weapons? Certainly since the then major world source of uranium was in Rwanda and Burundi, the then Soviet allegation that the East African ground nut scheme was just a cover for transporting the ore had verisimilitude.)

This was why, right back in 1950, Common Wealth argued that the Bomb symbolised new class divisions, what Rosmer[113] and Monatte[114] had christened the permanent arms economy (a term taken up by, vulgarised and then hurriedly discarded by the International Socialists), that it was essential to the neo-Colonialism exercised by both Moscow and Washington, as also the

[113] Alfred Rosmer (1877-1964), French syndicalist, joined the French CP but expelled 1924 for opposition to Stalin, he later helped Trotsky form the Fourth International.
[114] Pierre Monatte (1881-1960), French revolutionary syndicalist, joined French CP in 1923 and was expelled the following year along with Rosmer.

remnants of traditional Imperialism. It was a weapon held exclusively by Whites, though uranium was primarily mined in Africa. It was thus not merely just another new weapon, not merely a symptom of new class society, but the symbol of it. Obviously such an analysis gave rise to divisions as to just how important the issue was in everyday politics.

The Bomb was not only a major manifestation of violence, it symbolized the lack of democracy; not even the supposedly relevant member of the Cabinet knew it was being made, so Parliament (let alone the country) was never consulted; therefore nothing appeared in the budgets - none of the costs of the enormous factory-complexes (Aldermaston, Foulness) ever figured in government building costs. Some may have gone in under a cover-all of Defence, but not in itemized Defence Ministry accounts. Huge housing estates were built for workers and this would have appeared in Budgets as normal housing, Many workers who didn't want to work at Aldermaston told us that they'd lived in London and asked to go on the housing lists and been refused, and then they had been told that there were houses at Aldermaston for workers there. The Groundnut Scheme in Tanzania paid for two major harbours and two major railway lines from the coast to the Ruanda-Burundi border (Ruanda-Burundi was then the largest source of uranium), so probably a large part of what was meant to be Colonial Development and Third World Aid was spent as part of the hidden nuclear weaponry budget.

There was an enormous body of horrifying facts to be learnt that would only be revealed to people who asked questions and they only asked them when alerted by the 'symptoms' connected to the Bomb.

There were similar gradations in the Left when it came to attitudes on civil disobedience. Tolstoy and Thoreau had of course talked of civil disobedience and there had been notable examples (Quakers, Non-Jurors etc) of its use in the past, but by and large these were dismissed as irrelevant to the modern left. The bulk of the Left, as anti-imperialists, had applauded Gandhi's campaigns, without fully taking on board his insistence on non-violence. This was perhaps partly due to the fact that Gandhi advocated two different sorts of civil disobedience:

Duragraha - which meant mass obstruction without outright resort to violence, and since this was generally used as some form of consumer boycott, was generally known in the West as a reverse strike.

Satyagraha - the deliberate attempt to take on one's own body the violence which was the inevitable consequence of the pursuit of unjust policies, making patent what was latently there, as a means to convert not the decision-maker, but the implementers of these policies.

What people meant by non-violence depended on which book (and in the West which translations) one read; obviously pure pacifists seized on books where Gandhi advocated satyagraha, which was basically a strategy for small groups who needed to convert in order to obstruct. They insisted that such actions were spiritual rather than physical. A far larger Left clung on to that 'reverse strike' concept and turned to the mass demos where a much less stringent definition of non-violence applied, the majority was plainly protesting, asserting its democratic rights and wasn't particularly concerned to convert anyone.

This obviously caused many divisions within the ranks of Western anti-imperialists, many of whom, with Trotsky, thought that Gandhi was a petit-bourgeois reformer, avoiding revolutionary action. There were still people calling NVDA 'the contraceptive of the revolution' in the 1960s. Though there were Indian Trotskyites who appreciated that Gandhi's appeal was to workers and peasants and it was in fact mainly the petit-bourgeois nationalists who advocated insurrection.

It was no doubt the importance that Common Wealth had put on the anti-democratic way the Bomb was made that in 1954 caused John Banks to put so much work into Third Camp. GDH Cole had called a meeting in Oxford where he advocated unity of those who from libertarian, ethical or dissident-Marxist socialist grounds were opposed to both sides in the Cold War. Unfortunately having issued the call, he then refused to say anything further about it. Presumably he had decided that pursuing the matter would alienate the large number of his admirers who still retained illusions that the Communists or the Labour Left would bring about socialism. John was able to call more or less the same people together through the campaign. Unfortunately by 1958, when the formation of CND made it likely that the Third Camp would be obtained, John's father was terminally ill and John had to take a sabbatical from politics. The various Third Camp groupings joined CND separately, not as a united force, given that most of the subsequent developments of the Left were on issues that had been central to Third Camp discussion, it's possible that nothing was in fact lost, but it may have been that the Left might have developed faster and achieved more had Third Camp lasted.

Only a minority of the Traditional Left thought civil disobedience to be a possible strategy for Western socialists, until Dolci's campaign in Sicily[115], when it began to dawn on us that when, in Marxist terms, we talk of the boss exploiting the workers, there were many unemployed who

[115] Danilo Dolci (1914-97) was an Italian social activist who fought poverty and the Mafia in Sicily from the 1950s using non-violence and hunger strikes.

were only too anxious to be exploited[116]. Women, racial minorities, the physically and mentally disabled were all excluded even from being exploited and there was a need for socialists to take note of this. [Present conditions are such that this is far more relevant now than it was then.]

[116] It is interesting that, while EP Thompson did not actually join the Committee of 100, it is a little known fact that he did on one occasion take part in civil disobedience. He was a close friend of Will Warren and visited Will and Laurens at Watton. On one such occasion the two of us had decided to do a spontaneous act of civil disobedience and EPT decided to join them, engaging in a sit-down demonstration. It is only a pity that EPT did not explore the possible links between non-violent resistance and the wider Left ideas.

Chapter 10: Non-Violent Direct Action

Before the Aldermaston March, the McWhirters (sons of a Press baron)[117], who, like Pat Arrowsmith's elder brothers, had been contemporaries of my elder brother at Marlborough, had joined C. S. Smith's 'Common Cause' and arranged a black propaganda stunt. Two hours before our march reached Aldermaston, a group of people - none of whom curiously were facing the camera and could be identified - were photographed trying to overturn a car. The photos were published in the Press as CND marchers attacking an opponent. They were to attempt similar black propaganda at a march to Brize Norton the following Whit. They drove a car straight at, and through, the March, injuring a girl's leg. Two of their supporters, who were later seen sharing tea with the police posing as CND marchers, called for the marchers to attack the car. That Brize Norton demo was organised by a separate Oxford DAC, in fact formed from the Oxfordshire County branch of the CP that had resigned over Hungary. Since Will and Nellie Warren had been active in the branch and were also members of the Oxford Quaker meeting, they then merged with the London DAC.

The nine-week picket at Aldermaston followed on from the Easter March and Vigil. Frank Allaun[118] had insisted when the March was being endorsed that the original plan be dropped to end with giving leaflets to the workers asking them to boycott the base. To some extent this compromise was circumvented by a vigil outside the base, which the DAC organised at the same time as the March. The March was still not complete without distributing that leaflet, so there was a nine-week picket accompanied by an extensive canvass of the area, everything within ten miles. That was finished off by a sit-in at the forecourt outside the front gate. For nine weeks, as we canvassed, workers would say, "It's unfair to come to us. Why don't you talk to the Director?" and wouldn't believe us when we said we had tried. So when we had sat in for a week and went in with banners saying "We've come to talk to the Director" and it was all too obvious that he was refusing to talk to us, people who had been very hostile to us, some who had actually spat at us when we tried to leaflet them, became positively friendly. We heard later from the Shop Steward's Committee that a dozen workers did actually resign their jobs.

Having missed PYAG meetings for some time, those of us who had been part of the picket and sit-down had a surprise when we got back. Three of the old PYAG (Dave Lane, Roy Frye and Mary Clark) turned up saying that we had usurped the name PYAG and, arguing that because

[117] Ross McWhirter (1925-75) and Norris McWhirter (1925-2004) were twins who co-founded the right wing organisation, the Freedom Association.
[118] Frank Allaun (1913-2002) was Labour MP for Salford East 1955-83 and then became vice-president of CND.

some of us hadn't signed up to the PPU, we weren't pacifists, picking on Ernie[119] as an example. No amount of argument from us would satisfy them that we had agreed as a collective PYAG statement: "PYAG exists to oppose war and work for a non-violent society, we renounce war and will never support or sanction another". At their demand we fixed an extra meeting the next evening (they seemed pleased that Ernie wouldn't be able to make it). The Peace News office where we met was then in Finsbury Park. Ernie, Ollie Mahler and I were dossing on Jake and Bobby Waters's floor in Fitzrovia, so Mike Randle and the three of us composed an elaboration as we walked from Finsbury Park to Tottenham Court Road station[120]. When we produced this the next evening, the others said it was far too complete, quite sectarian and too much to expect anyone to accept. How did we think our member Ernie would take it? Utter disbelief when we insisted that he was part author.

Gandhian NVDA, which is of two sorts - satyagraha and duragraha - involves obstructing the commission of an evil. In the case of duragraha, which is the practice of a majority movement when opposing the undemocratic decretals of a minority, is a 'reverse strike': obstruction for obstruction's sake and without effort to necessarily convert those obstructed. Satyagraha, on the other hand, deliberately takes on the resister: the until then only inherent violence, implicit in the actions of the resisted, becoming explicit in order to challenge the resisted to examine their own actions. Building or manning a rocket base does not explicitly in itself involve violence and the worker 'just doing their job' does not see that job as violent. Nor indeed would someone delivering canisters of Zyklon B gas to Auschwitz, nor the waiter in a South African restaurant telling a potential customer, "We don't serve Blacks here". That 'just doing my job' is/ was - even in these post-Nuremberg days - normally coupled with 'it can't' be immoral, it isn't illegal'. Having seen the trial of Von Manstein, I am not going to give uncritical endorsement to the Nuremberg Trials, but their statement that what is legal is not necessarily moral or justifiable stands and must stand.

I had always been suspicious of Gene Sharp's and Hugh Brock's great emphasis on discipline in NVDA. My reading of Gandhi had led me to believe that the discipline of which he talked was entirely self-discipline, leaving ample room for spontaneity, which was clearly essential to any real satyagraha. The sit-in at the Aldermaston forecourt illustrated the problem totally. April Carter conveyed the committee of the DAC's decisions to the volunteers, allowing at that stage no

[119] Ernie Bates was an Irish anarchist Laurens knew when in Ireland previously (see page 110).
[120] In helping to develop this statement, Mike Randle was in a difficult position, as he was chairman of both PYAG and the DAC. He was not alone in that respect, as Fran Edwardes was also a member of both organisations.

room even for discussion[121]. We were briefed on everything down to the tiniest detail. We approached the forecourt and were met at the gates by some of the guards led by a Sergeant-Major. Donald Soper, Mike Randle, Pat Arrowsmith and April Carter engaged in conversation with them, but after a short while the rest of us started to drift around and walked on to the guard house at the other side of the forecourt. The door was open and it would have been the easiest thing in the world for us to have walked through it, which would have been the logical way 'to go to see the director', our declared objective. Unfortunately, we had been over-briefed, with the belief that our initial aim was to move into the space immediately in front of the guard house and we were so intent on doing this that we ignored the greater opportunity.

Throughout the week of the Aldermaston sit-in, a number of supporters from Reading, Newbury and surrounding areas, some from further afield, turned up to encourage us and we were engulfed in presents of food-gifts. This was to happen again in a different way with the Pickenham demo where, while we were in Norwich prison over Christmas, we were sent far more food by supporters. It was sufficiently excessive that we felt embarrassed, that we didn't deserve it and that we thought it shouldn't happen. Peter "Copper" Brown[122] raised this when we had our report-back discussions after the forecourt sit-in. It made me think back to my childhood when my mother had fasted in solidarity with Gandhi (mother had after all corresponded with him and translated some of his work). Indeed, I had - in my teens - read enough of the Mahatma's writings to know that he considered fasting a fundamental part of NVDA. Though I didn't feel a need to re-read his work, I began to note the total absence of this aspect of Gandhi's thinking from the 'official' English interpretations.

Following Copper Brown's discussion of concerns after the Aldermaston forecourt sit-in, I raised the matter of fasting for demos. At first I was brushed off with "that can be discussed later", but eventually I was astounded by just how much hostility this engendered. I was authoritatively (however wrongly) assured that Gandhi only fasted on exceptional occasions and that fasting was totally extraneous to his conception of satyagraha. When I quoted something from Gandhi's autobiography on the subject, I was told by someone who made no claim to speak Hindi that this was a mistranslation, and my reply that we should refer the matter to an Indian working in the PN bookshop was deemed frivolous. (Though, unlike Robin, I had never been an Hindi speaker, I had nevertheless been born on the way home from India and had

[121] April Carter is a peace activist and writer, author of books such as *Authority and Democracy* and *Peace Movements: International Protest and World Politics since 1945*.
[122] Peter Brown was active in the peace movement at this time and was always known as 'Copper'. He was interested in the idea of rural communal living and remained active in anti-nuclear activity for many years afterwards.

grown up in a family where all the other members had lived in India and spoken the language - not just my parents and Robin, three uncles had been forestry officers, three aunts had travelled round the country for a year or more - and which was frequently visited by Hindi-speaking friends. I could hardly have avoided some very slight acquaintance with the language.)

It was not just one meeting of seven or eight people; it was a recurring issue raised at meetings involving dozens of others. When I did eventually fast in prison, Olwen Battersby (by then Director of War on Want, but whom I had known in Common Wealth for some time, and of whom I otherwise had a very high opinion) wrote in *Peace News* asking why I had used such an extreme tactic, by implication unnecessary to NVDA. Years later when it and other issues had compelled Polaris Action[123] to act independently, April Carter in a published disassociation, alleged that fasting was extremist, equated extremism with violence and argued that this showed we were violent. Her argument was a re-use or adaptation of the Stalinist 'amalgam' form of argument, and was used by the constitutional CND against the DAC, claiming that by her own admission April had shown the DAC to be violent.

I did not understand it, but British Gandhians drew the line at that part of Gandhi's thought and had a complete block against any consideration of fasting. A couple of years later, Will Warren, when we were in prison, partially explained this in his own case. When he was angry about something, he tended not to eat and so subconsciously associated fasting with a suppressed violent feeling. However, this could hardly have been true for most of the people who reacted so strongly against the idea of fasting, even to the extent of denying what they had read with their own eyes in the works of Gandhi.

Years later, in retrospect, I came to the conclusion that pacifism in England was historically, overwhelmingly a Protestant movement, its watchword "Here stand I, I can none other". Having carried with it an ancestral distrust of Catholicism, fasting was thought an exclusively catholic practice. This is not good history, since national fasts were imposed by Cromwell's puritans, but that was a long time ago. I, as an anglo-catholic[124] and with links to RC practices in both France and Ireland, where non-violence was almost always in the form of fasting, was no doubt biased in a different direction.

[123] Polaris Action began in the USA in 1960 using non-violence and leafleting to make its case. The movement spread to the UK and elsewhere.
[124] It is apt, when thinking of non-violent resistance to remember Fathers Stanton and Machonocie and then back to the Non-Jurors.

It was to be a constant battle. I was expelled from the DAC three times. I don't think the occasion for each expulsion was necessarily the debate about fasting, though I cannot now remember for sure. My belief that spontaneity was intrinsic to NVDA was perhaps equally an underlying cause, and there were battles about internal democracy. The committee wanted to reserve all decisions about tactics to themselves, while most people who took part regularly felt that such decisions should be made at rank and file level by the people who actually took part[125].

Mind you, I once (Harrington, December 1959) found myself on the side of the committee against my fellow activists. We had agreed, in advance, when we volunteered to take part in the civil disobedience that, as the police were prone to charge us with purely token offences and let the courts give us similar punishments that would not count seriously, if we were given less than a week in prison, we would immediately go back and repeat the offence. Then the Committee members had been imprisoned for two months on a charge of conspiracy, before we took part. We were held four days on remand, then our barrister argued 'our' case as if we were too stupid to understand that what we were doing was illegal, with no reference to the evils of nuclear weapons. So, by our original agreement, we should have gone straight back.

Unfortunately, the replacement committee, though chosen from people who were big names in the wider peace movement and Left, contained no-one with experience of non-violent resistance. They were certainly good pacifists, nice people, no doubt (as the old prayer books had it) 'living in love and charity with their neighbours'. Indeed some of them later played significant roles in the Committee of 100. But, totally devoid of knowledge or understanding of, or interest in, what we were doing, they were intent only on watering down the action. We had, even for the actual demo, been told not to obstruct, merely to pitch tents out-side the base and anyone suggesting going back again as we'd agreed, was accused of disloyalty ' to those who lay in gaol for conspiracy', even when those same gaoled committee members sent a telegram saying we should go back - a wire whose contents were not passed on to the rank and file.

One other major cause of friction arose within the body of DAC supporters and came to a head in 1959. Because of a belief in openness with the authorities, DAC strategy was, as part of the preparation, to picket and canvass an area round the base for some time, with street meetings, meetings in halls and door to door canvassing. There was no one place the workers lived, so it

[125] In retrospect one sees the paradox that while we were right to resist centralisation and to insist that rules, NV training and planning prevent spontaneity and limited the degree to which activists really thought about non-violence, the committee was equally right under the circumstances in insisting on that discipline. The job of enforcement (a difficult job since the most regular demonstrators were anarchists) fell on Pat Arrowsmith, with whom we had almost constant battles.

had to cover a fairly extensive area. Then, and only then, would the base authorities be advised that on such and such a date, at a specified time, there would be an attempt to obstruct.

This openness was fairly good, in that it frustrated the actions of police infiltrators; but, in so far as it ignored the fact that in law to prepare for an illegal action is itself illegal, it made a false distinction. Worse still, in practice, it could mean that on a Friday picketers stood aside and watched a nuclear rocket delivered to the base, while the next day those same picketers, with reinforcements for the occasion, sat down in front of a milk float trying to deliver its load to the same place.

When in 1959 four of us came out of a café in Watton to find that one of our fellow customers had been the driver of a truck delivering such a rocket, and had parked it outside the café, we naturally felt we ought to obstruct it. If we'd climbed under its wheels it would have been difficult to remove us. However, Will Warren was on the committee and the committee had decided that there should be no action without due notice. Out of loyalty to Will, the others of us didn't act, but only on condition that we raise the issue and find a way round it. We proposed at a DAC supporters' meeting that there be a blanket warning to the authorities that we would, if such circumstances re-occurred, act spontaneously. In order to counter our proposal, the absurd claim was made that we were suggesting infiltrating the War Office to find out about the movement of missiles so as to ambush them. It was the final straw, making a split inevitable.

It could be argued that these were all purely tactical differences, that a deeper difference was bound up in the fact that, though we shared a common heritage in and through the Non-Violent Resistance Group and its involvement in Third Camp, the DAC (Against Nuclear Weapons Tests) by changing its name to a purely limited objective, had bound itself to the myth that the evil of the Bomb could be cured outside any context of wider social change. Even though all the DAC committee members were drawn active on a whole variety of social issues, even though the Committee was clearly linked to *Peace News* which was never so limited, the DAC's collective statements were all designed to give the impression that all other issues should be dropped or played down to allow a concentration on the Bomb, whose abolition could so be achieved in isolation from other social change.

Michael Randle has since told me that, though the DAC publicity may have given this impression, it was never the committee's intention to say it. Be that as it may, whenever we in PYAG tried to organise demos on other issues, e.g. against Capital Punishment or colonialism, or to take part in other demos, organised or spontaneous, such as after the murder of Kelso

Cochrane[126] or the massacre at Sharpeville[127], as we were trying to rustle up support, Pat Arrowsmith (as DAC Organiser) would ring us and endlessly repeat arguments against our involvement. She would even repeat her case when she knew we rejected it, deliberately keeping us pinned to the phone so that we'd not be able to contact others.

PYAG on the other hand, because we had had the disagreement with the members of the previous PYAG, had been forced to spell out in detail how we thought Non-Violent resisters should act on the whole spectrum of current political issues. To make it clear that we saw the achievement of a just society as intrinsic to pacifism, those of us who wrote the PYAG statement had not clearly spelled out that PYAG was an anarchist group - partly because Ollie Mahler's father had abandoned pacifism to go and fight for the syndicalists in Spain, and Ollie, having returned to pacifism, thought he'd abandoned anarchism. But the PYAG's libertarian socialism and its commitment to activity on a whole host of issues was clear. We argued that no government had ever willingly abandoned its major weapons of coercion and that the only reason a government would ever disarm unilaterally, however partially, would be that it feared resistance unless it disarmed. We therefore put emphasis on broadening the struggle and on the idea of applying NVDA in Western politics into as many social spheres as possible.

What are generally regarded as the first acts of DAC civil disobedience, the two sit-downs at Pickenham (referred to in the media as Swaffham, because of a D-Notice regarding the name of the actual rocket base), followed the Aldermaston events in December 1958.

At the first of the two actions at Pickenham, the wire that time had not been fully fixed, indeed had been partially pulled down where it had earlier been fixed. Whether this was carelessness, or whether the government wanted us to get through and be beaten up, we never knew. We later learned from workers that they had been told that we were being sent by the Communist Party and were a bunch of picked, young, physically fit cadres ready for a big fight. They piled into us with a will, at first, then noticed that our numbers included women old enough to be their grandmothers; that they were dragging unresisting people through concrete mud; or were about to drive lorries over them. Not long after, they refused to carry on. Managers and military police were brought in to order them to continue and they refused. Finally, after we'd been carried off the base, the shop stewards came to us to say that they had never discussed the matter before,

[126] Kelso Cochrane was born in Antigua in 1926 and migrated to the UK in 1954, settling in Notting Hill. He was stabbed by a gang of white youth in 1959. The murder remains unsolved as the police at the time refused to attach a racial motive to the killing.
[127] The Sharpeville Massacre occurred on 21 March 1960 in the Transvaal. South African police opened fire on a peaceful protest against the apartheid Pass Laws, The event led to the outlawing of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress, which also sparked international outrage.

but they'd called an emergency meeting at which the majority had expressed the wish to apologise and they would be writing to their employing contractors asking to be switched to other work.

Before that, after the first few of us had been carried out, we were all standing as the rest came, when one supposed demonstrator came into view, walking rather than being carried. As he came in sight of the gate, he started rather ineffectually hitting the military policeman who was accompanying him. Fran Edwardes drew this to Pat Arrowsmith's attention and she approached him when he arrived, saying he obviously didn't share our belief in NVDA. She asked his name and he said he was Arthur Bryant (whether he was claiming to be the noted writer we never knew) and Pat asked him to leave. We saw him again a fortnight later in court, when he went under the name of Chief Superintendent Simpson of the London Metropolitan Police - he was soon to be Commissioner. He was the chief witness for the prosecution. Photos of him hitting the police were later used as black propaganda against us. The replacement committee for the Harrington demo was to allege on the basis of these photos, that they'd seen evidence that we weren't non-violent at Pickenham and that only because the police had consented to hush up the incident were we able to get away with saying we were non-violent.

The second time at Pickenham the wire was up, we were arrested fairly expeditiously, sent to court and remanded to Norwich gaol. While waiting to be dealt with there I said, "I suppose we ought to be obstructing here". We'd gone to obstruct missiles and police had prevented us so doing (whatever our views of the police, we weren't at that time protesting against them), we had sat down in front of them because they were acting as effectively an extension of the base, so the prison and the courts were extension of the police in their turn. David Brittain snapped, "We're here to protest against rockets, not prisons". So I replied, just as the warder came to take me off, "If there were no prisons, there could be no rockets". It seemed obvious to me, but he apparently thought it so outrageous that, with me gone, he launched into a big debate. Phil Cooke, who I had never previously met, a YCL member with a pacifist mother, in my absence saw the logic in my statement - that only when the power to imprison exists can there be conditions where nuclear weapons are made. He argued my case, realised that his arguments had a wider application than just for Britain, and in the process converted himself to anarchism.

We spent Christmas on remand in gaol. Once more we were snowed under with food parcels. When I had raised the matter of fasting before the first Pickenham event, it was ruled out as a matter for discussion, and that it was a matter of private conscience only for the individual to decide, and it should only be done in prison. So when we were sentenced, I announced that I

would fast and was astounded to be told, "No, you mustn't, the committee has decided against it". As the committee had not told us of their change of policy, I didn't feel the decision was binding. Phil Cooke joined me in the fasting and, as he hadn't done it before, it was far harder for him. We were both kept isolated for 23½ hours out of every 24 and forcibly fed in the other half hour. When it came to our release, the screw said "You've got some influential support". I assumed at the time he was talking of Bertrand Russell, but later I heard from Sybil Morrison (the PPU National Chair) that a group of former suffragettes (of which she and Lady Clare Annesley, the Peace News Honorary Treasurer, were members) had gone to Downing Street, saying to Macmillan:

> "We were promised that there would be no forcible feeding. It's not that we're anti-Bomb (only two of us are and they have queries about this action) but we're telling you young man that if you go on forcibly feeding, you'll have us to contend with. We'll go and sit at the base and you can forcibly feed, and probably kill, us".

Dr Soper had been with us at Aldermaston and in the May before had published a criticism of the DAC and called a meeting, which I had attended with Kate and Bobby Waters and a few from PYAG including Ernie. Soper said that the DAC was being dilatory in organising civil disobedience. So everyone assumed that he'd be with us at Pickenham - indeed he had assured Pat Arrowsmith beforehand that he would be. Shades of Nye Bevan in Brighton! On the Thursday before the sit-down, *Tribune* carried an article from him disassociating himself from us. This had been why Father Michael Scott (who was in the middle of arguing the case for the Herrero before the United Nations) had flown back to Britain to take part in the second Pickenham event. As soon as he finished his remand custody, something he had found difficult as he suffered from dysentery, he flew back to the UN.

However, while he was in prison he received a letter from the governing body of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship asking him to speak at a meeting in the Friends' Meeting House, Euston. Four of us in the prison were Anglicans: myself, Mike Scott, Tom Willis (a deacon who was needed in his Yorkshire parish) and Liam, who was due to be inducted into a new parish in Ireland. So only I was able to speak. Father Gresham Kirkby (Chair of the Christian Socialist League) was on the APF governing body and, since I was an inactive member of both APF and CSL, knew of me but had not met me and wanted to do so. Also at the meeting were Kenneth Leech and Alan Edwardes, then a first year theological students brought there by the King's College Chaplain. Ken had read an article on the 'Kingdom of God' by Gresham and wanted to meet him. So it happened that Gresham had just got out the words, "I've been waiting to meet

you", to me when Ken said the same to him. Gresham was an original thinker, but not really able to communicate his ideas. Ken was soon to become one of the foremost Anglican theologians of the day and developed Gresham's ideas.

Gresham asked where I was staying, guessing correctly that I was dossing on a friend's floor. For a year or so had bed and board at his vicarage, St Paul's Lodge, Bow Green, for when I was in London. As I spent nine months in gaol for civil disobedience over the next three years and about half the remainder on campaigns at bases preparing for civil disobedience, I only spent a limited time in London. Even then I would be working at PN most days from 7 am to 9 pm. I'd be at Gresham's for Mass and lunch on Sunday, though if there was a weekend march anywhere in England and Wales (and once in Glasgow), I'd work until the delivery of the second PN printing (which would arrive between 3 and 6 on Friday afternoon). Having collected perhaps six dozen as supplies for local sellers, I got the tube to a place on the relevant road to hitch to wherever in time for the march, would attend, perhaps speak at an evening meeting, and then hitch back.

Although I was only really there on Sundays, living at Gresham's was exhilarating. For all that the congregation was then very small, all its members were involved in opposing racism. A little before I went there a fascist group had painted up a slogan. On a previous occasion the police had told Gresham that if he painted out such a slogan, he would be arrested for defacing property, so on this occasion Gresham, his curate, servers (all still in vestments and carrying crosas and candles) and the whole congregation went straight from Mass and the congregation watched as Gresham painted out the slogan.

John Rowe, the curate (who is still alive), was a worker priest, a member of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, an American order founded by Hastings Smyth, who had inspired Conrad Noel. John had left the CP over Hungary, but unlike other priests in the CP, John had been a member of the Socialist Christian League rather than the Society of Clergy and Ministers (a body more or less affiliated to the CP). Both Gresham and John were later to be active in the Committee of 100 and, after I left, both were arrested as such. Even while I was there both were arrested protesting against fascists (the police in those days always found reasons to support fascists). So it was not unknown for one or other to come to the altar before Mass to apologise for the absence of the other, saying, "I'm afraid Father Gresham/Father John can't be with us today, he's in police custody".

Gresham had the remains of two parish churches in Burdett Road, St Paul's and St Luke's. There was very little of the old St Paul's when he was inducted, so at first he used St Luke's, but when a coping stone fell on the altar just in front of him as he was saying Mass, he had to make other provision. There was a small Mission chapel, St Bartholomew's, just east of St Paul's, and when I was there that served as the parish church, while the parish waited for money in compensation for the bombed churches[128]. The plans were already in existence for the present St Paul's (widely now recognised as a magnificent advance in church architecture for the 21st century) and I was still there when the building started. Gresham was to be disappointed that I was to take part in civil disobedience the day it was consecrated.

A few years before I moved there, there had been a campaign against Gresham, actually started by members of the an American Baptist-descended church, which wanted to get rid of 'our Roman Catholic/Communist vicar' (a combination that in the days when Pius was still Pope must have seemed a little strange, and anyway none of the signatories was Anglican, so how appropriate the 'our' was, remained dubious). Bishop Wand[129], however, whether because he disliked socialists or anglo-catholics was uncertain, took it as an opportunity to try and oust Gresham. By the time I went there, Hugh Montgomery Campbell (who had been my bishop in Guildford and so had sponsored me for CaCTM) had been translated to London. In his first fortnight in the See he had come to see Gresham for a long interview. High Tory though the Bishop was, he was convinced that Gresham's views were sincere, that he saw his leftist politics as intrinsic to his Catholicism, and the proved enough for the Bishop.

Not that that meant he was to approve, the present Bishop of London, having seen a photo of Campbell when he saw the new church, assumed that Campbell rather than Wand had tried to oust Gresham. He didn't, although Gresham in no doubt of the Bishop's disagreement, he, the Bishop, came to see regularly, so as to make clear that Gresham was acting with the bishop's knowledge and under his protection, though not agreement. I arrived from Watton once just as they were both coming out of Gresham's study and was amazed that the Bishop remembered me as one of his former ordinands. He asked Gresham if he could borrow the study, and so we had a talk. So there was no room for doubt, Bishop Campbell, while in no way supporting unilateralism or approving of civil disobedience, accepted that Christians might hold such

[128] Such was the relation of East End children to Mass in those days, that it was at least a weekly occurrence for a child's ball to come in the door during the service, the child follow, genuflect, pick up the ball, genuflect again, and leave. This really was the house of their heavenly father and that heavenly father was due respect, but could be assumed to view children with indulgence.
[129] Bishop William Wand (1885-1977) was Anglican bishop of Brisbane (1934-43), Bath and Wells (1943-45) and London (1945-56), before retiring to become canon and treasurer of St Paul's Cathedral.

positions in conscience and, in that case, they must act accordingly, and it was part of his job to guarantee the right to do so.

I had been unpleasantly surprised by the reaction of *Peace News* and other pacifists to fasting, but I was totally shocked by that of *Freedom*. Phil Cooke had written seeking advice from comrades as to what extent anarchists in prison should take non-cooperation. He was thinking some years before the IRA's dirty blanket protests, saying he assumed comrades would not advocate excreting in situ, but if one cooperated that far, how far also? Vero, in an editorial, announced that police and prison officers did a useful job and ought not to be obstructed in this way. Vero was totally unsympathetic to CND and the New Left and wrote a number of editorials arguing that the Bomb and other New Left concerns were irrelevant[130]. We were told that the hope of revolution in the mid-twentieth century was Fidel Castro - a position he maintained even as news of Castro's massacre of the Havana syndicates came through. Two years later, after an appeal for aid from the Latin American Section of the AIT, we set up a solidarity, but Philip Sansom had to warn us to do secretly, as we couldn't be sure that Vero would not inform agents of the regime what we were doing. It was only when Castro offered to let some people go into exile if he would be permitted to buy buses, that Vero accepted that Castro was just another politician and should be opposed.

Not that that made him any more favourable to CND as late as 1961, nor the Committee of 100 when it was founded. There was an editorial, backed up by a longish article from Nicolas Walter[131], saying that if the Committee of 100 grew too strong and too active it would damage the Labour Party and that would be no gain. PYAG attended and sold at as many meetings as we could. Frequently this would bring us into disputes as people argued against us that anarchism and pacifism were incompatible. Then, after a Danilo Dolci meeting, someone really hoping to stir up trouble wrote almost identical letters to both *Peace News* and *Freedom* objecting to the group of scruffs that were selling both papers. Vero once more decreed that we should not be given *Freedom* to sell, though Jack Robinson and Mary Canipa happily ignored him. Harry Mister showed me a copy of his reply, which said that Harry was not an anarchist himself, but if all anarchists were excluded from the pacifist movement it would be far less active and that, if the objector could supply in our place a dozen neatly dressed people ready to work their guts out six

[130] 'Vero' was Vernon Richards (1915-2001), originally Italian, was an anarchist prominent in maintaining Freedom Press, and friend of George Orwell and Colin Ward. He was known for his dogmatic management.
[131] Nicolas Walter (1934-2000) was a prominent anarchist and atheist writer and activist. He was editor of *New Humanist* for ten years, helped form the Committee of 100 and Spies for Peace and write prolifically for *Freedom* and *New Society*.

and half days a week for no pay, then Harry would consider replacing us. Otherwise he didn't see how he could.

The marches were always good places to sell. They would attract a fair degree of partial support from people who were undecided whether to join CND and just wanted a chance to meet us and discuss the issues. Though *Peace News* was never the official paper of the campaign, its role in its creation was clear, and so it was the natural paper for inquirers to read. This was particularly true for the 'Aldermarches' and the print run for these would be vastly larger than usual. I don't know if this was always the case, as I was only working at PN in 1959 and 1960, but in those cases it was something like ten times the normal. The PN van would follow the march closely and a friend of Harry's with a large car would go in front, with other cars ferrying supplies to them from London. In most areas and therefore in most CND branches there would be a PN seller. Meanwhile, we from PYAG, each with a haversack, would race up and down the column passing out new supplies of the paper to the various sellers. It was thrilling, if tiring.

The Press was always anxious to portray marches - particularly those to Aldermaston - as sexual orgies. Partly because of Fleet Street attempts to blacken the march, and also because a number of school kids used to come down to Aldermaston marches just for the sake of doing the trendy thing, and partly because the dilettante children of well-known leftists were anxious to enjoy themselves while on the marches, the myth exists that most people didn't come because they were interested in the cause, but in the hope of sexual encounters. We marched through snow, through torrential downpours, through baking sun, through high winds, and we slept in sodden sleeping bags on hard wooden floors. Frankly there are easier ways of finding partners.

Such was the determination of the Press to paint us this way that it would be a common sight in schools where we were spending the night to see press photographers going round offering kids money to get into sleeping bags together. Years later, in 1962, Celia and I appeared, the Easter after we married, in a photograph (for which no one had offered us any money) which showed nine couples in a bed. Each of the other eight couples had been married for more than five years. Celia and I were the only couple without children, though Fiona was on her way. In all a total of eighteen children and their sleeping bags were air-brushed out of the picture. Similarly, the preparation canvasses for civil disobedience would not be the easy rural idyll sometimes portrayed. At Watton, where Will was a bit of a perfectionist, we canvassed every house within fifteen miles. For at least two of these, the only way I could reach them entailed swimming across a river. So, more than usually, I was dripping wet as I canvassed the occupants.

Interlude: Non-Violence and Revolution.

Sometimes I may be asked how I relate my attitude to non-violence with the syndicalist idea of revolution. Until Suez-Hungary (1956) I put my faith in a levee en masse (something like the May Days of Barcelona) though I was already beginning to realize that, in terms of fighting, libertarians could never hope to compete with the state.

I was forced by Budapest 56 to realize that Barcelona 36 could never be repeated in a nuclear age: there is a sense in which 'deterrence' works. I have no doubt that the politicians at the top have sufficient intelligence to see through their own lies. They know that the 'Commie/Capitalist enemy over there' isn't about to attack. Both sides used the fear of the other as a way of maintaining their power over their own people: the 'enemy at the gates' is the oldest weapon in government hands for maintaining power.

But while the people at the top won't believe their own lies, they depend for their power on their subordinates so doing; so while they may not be standing over the nuclear trigger with trembling fingers, people at colonel level have to be given enough power that they can in an emergency. We know for instance that commanders of the first nuclear submarines were entirely independent of any contact with their bases and had orders to use their judgement.

In a very real sense, pace the SPGB and even, a fortiori, Buck Taylor, nuclear war could have happened 'by accident', that is because someone at colonel level did not understand (indeed couldn't be allowed to understand for if s/he did, s/he would be no use in the job) that the anti-communist/anti-capitalist propaganda was all bollocks and would therefore react as if the threat of being over-run by the Commie/reactionary hordes was real.

So a levee en masse couldn't have worked and might have caused a world destroying nuclear war. The only alternative lies through winning over the rank and file of the armed forces, and that's not going to be done if we have guns in our hands – it could only be done by Gandhian methods.

[Letter to MB dated 3 May 2012]

Chapter 11: PYAG, Peace News and CND

PYAG was in a contradictory position. On the one hand, we were the most committed supporters of the DAC's NVDA campaigns and we spent more time selling *Peace News* than anyone else did. On the other hand, we profoundly disagreed with the DAC and *Peace News* when they wanted to confine activity to opposing only the Bomb.

There was an active old guard of the Peace Pledge Union which argued that *Peace News*, by concentrating on nuclear wars, had abandoned campaigning against all wars. Indeed there was a growing rift between *Peace News* and the PPU organisationally, which led eventually to Peace News breaking its link. It had existed before the PPU and had affiliated as both campaigned in the late Thirties, but there was no immutable reason why they had to be linked. In so far as we argued that any war in the nuclear age at least carried the threat of nuclear war, we disagreed with the PPU position, while they, for the most part, opposed the use of NVDA. However, for instance when troops were sent to the Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere, or when forces were despatched for instance to Malawi and CND was hesitant about getting involved (since there was no immediate likelihood of nuclear involvement), the Dick Sheppard House staff would be eager to rally people, jointly with us, for a picket. We attempted to create some other links, made certain we took part in weekly poster parades and a few meetings: we even got a friend to make a PPU-CND banner, using it to try to rally people together. But eventually relations got so strained that even people who had initially taken the PPU office holders' side against *Peace News* became so alienated that they were not prepared to join us under the PPU-CND banner, as they would not have anything to do with the dominant PPU position. Harry Marsh and one or two others withdrew from supporting any DAC activity because it was only on the Bomb, while they remained theoretically committed to NVDA on other issues, and for instance took part when we defied an Home Office ban in order to picket opposing hanging. I don't know how much they became involved when the Committee of 100 acted on other issues.

Voluntary work at *Peace News* revolved around the fact that any leftist paper is run at a loss, that if there is no wealthy sponsor then money has to be raised. *Peace News*, from its inception in 1934 for well over fifty years depended on schemes engendered by Harry Mister. He took one year off in the 1930s to run Kingsley House and perhaps another year or so in the 1970s, when a much younger editorial staff fell out with him and promoted someone else over his head. I don't recall any editor staying more than five years, so Harry was to see an awful lot come and go. Sales, distribution and fund-raising were Harry's job, as was recruiting and supervising the fairly large

force of voluntary workers that he needed to run this. That he kept the paper going was an enormous achievement. His central post-war creation, Endsleigh Cards, was the pioneer in charity cards. In days before War on Want was launched, Oxfam and Christian Aid (Inter-Church Aid as it then was) and most charities sold over-printed Endsleigh Cards. From there he branched out into what is now called Third World and Fair Trade lines, all sold only through charities. Though printers, Third World suppliers and the postal services were all paid, all the British handling was done by volunteers. That so many people were prepared to come and work very long hours at repetitive manual jobs, rewarded only by the good company and conversation available, and that people with very different views were content to coexist, was largely down to Harry's good temper. He managed to loyally support a series of widely differing editors. At first, until one became privy to internal discussions within PN staff, one tended to assume he had no very deep views of his own on pacifist tactics, as he made certain no outsider knew when he disagreed with the current editorial team.

Among the volunteers, it was a curious fact that two elderly ladies who regularly sold *Peace News* on the streets in London, in all weathers, were Tories. As such they were very much opposed to PN's views on anti-colonialism and social welfare, which they considered a diversion from the real job of the paper, whereas the rest of us insisted that one could not oppose war without having radical views on such matters, as did an editorial secretary at the time (after Olwen Battersby and before Eileen Brock). It seemed at the time hard to understand how they carried on. With time, as it became more and more evident just how at variance the Peace Movement was with the Labour Party (and at least two PN editors were LP activists), it became equally hard to understand how the members of staff who were in the LP reconciled their position.

Peace News, though nominally published on the Friday, actually went to print on Wednesday, at about noon. Barring glitches in the printing process, the first batch of printed copies came through in the middle of the afternoon, a second (and perhaps third) that evening and then one or two batches on Thursday morning. Wednesday afternoon and evening were therefore the times for maximum volunteer input, while a lot of hard work would be done on Thursday morning when only unemployed volunteers would be available. The Post Office would want all the multiple copy packages for sellers and all the subscribers' copies delivered to the sorting office, while all the bulk orders for commercial outlets were despatched to the London termini and Fleet Street papers each had a copy hand delivered. *Peace News* had, when I was there, one elderly van that was probably fit for use two weeks in three. I did Fleet Street on foot, but we

wouldn't have managed without George Plume, who always seemed to be able to get hold of a relief van, as well as bringing his own car.

George Plume was a curious mixture. At this time he was a Tory councillor, though he had been a member of the Young Communist League in the 1930s, had gone to Spain early in the Civil War, had equally been disillusioned early and returned to Britain, where he became Fenner Brockway's secretary in the ILP. He again became disillusioned and left the ILP to become a Councillist. He edited *Solidarity* during the war and was one of two from the paper to be tried for treason at the end of the war. He was hurt that his *Solidarity* comrades did little by way of demonstrations while he was on trial and in prison. Then, as the Cold War began, large sections of the Left accommodated to one side or the other - for instance the bulk of the Trotskyist movement ignored Trotsky's Testament to become merely a left cover for Stalinism. George reacted so strongly against Stalinism that he moved to join the Tories. Even though he was a Tory councillor, he worked his guts out one afternoon and one morning a week for *Peace News*. He also sold at least a dozen copies of the ILP's *Socialist Leader* every week - only Wilfred Wigham and one other ILP member sold more.

In 1959, George Plume, 'Alex' Alexander of the ILP, Joe Thomas of the Oehlerite Workers' League[132] and a (then) former anarchist also in the Tory Party called Albert Meltzer, broke with Frank Ridley's National Secular Society to launch a separate secularist paper. I was with Wilfred Wigham one day on a London demo when 'Alex' came over and sold me the second issue of this paper, which I had read by the next time I saw George, who duly came into PN with a copy intending to sell it to me - I was a known sucker, ready to buy any dissident paper. It had no socialist political content whatsoever. There was even a full page article on the problems of Latin America which made no mention of either capitalism or imperialism. No doubt the Church, as the paper alleged, was responsible for many such problems, but largely in that it cooperated with capitalism and imperialism.

So I was intending to have a go at George, as I assumed (he being a Tory councillor) that the absence of socialism was his doing. His reply was that "No, I'm in the Tory Party but not of it. I would have been perfectly happy to publish a proper socialist critique. It was Meltzer, you know what ex-anarchists are like, he really is a Tory". I didn't then know Joe Thomas (except by repute, there had been an uneasy relationship between him and Common Wealth), but I knew

[132] The Revolutionary Workers League (Oehlerite) was an American radical left group formed in 1934 by Alfred Oehler. They broke from Trotsky in 1938 and had more or less wound up by 1940, but continued in smaller elements until the 1950s. The group Laurens mentions must be an offshoot.

Alex well enough to check with him and was able to confirm George's story. Years later Joe was to work in the same office at The Guardian and to be my deputy as Father of the Chapel. As by then Meltzer had supposedly rejoined the anarchists, I again took the opportunity to check George's story. Like Alex, he confirmed that George would have been perfectly happy to join in editing a socialist-secularist paper, which they would have been happy continue publishing with him, but Meltzer was not and that's why the paper only lasted four issues.

I had my thirtieth birthday in April 1960 and became too old to remain in PYAG after that, insisting on my own expulsion. We organised a party - whether to celebrate my birthday or my expulsion, I forget. I wasn't able to stay for it as Will Warren arrived at the beginning of the event saying he needed my help. I had been his assistant organiser at Watton until racists in Notting Hill murdered Kelso Cochrane. I had hitched back to London, persuaded various leftists in the area who hadn't spoken to each other for years to cooperate on a committee. We organised the mass funeral and other joint activities. A few months later the New Left took it over from me and from there George Clarke[133] organised a series of schemes that became quite famous.

I first met George at the U&LR Club (6 Carlyle Street, Soho) in the Spring of 1958, just after the first Aldermarch. As far as I know he hadn't belonged long, but being George he was already taking on a large role in running the Club. There was at the time some gossip about it being curious that he had emerged with apparently no history, though I remember being reassured when Will Warren said that he had known George some years before in Oxfordshire, that George had been a very active Methodist youth worker and as such had taken part in joint campaigns with Leftists. (One of the ex-communist 'repentant' works the Right published in the early '50s - perhaps that by Bob Darke - has a vivid picture of communist attempts to win over such a Methodist youth leader.) CND did not have a regional organisation at that stage, later in the year it was just forming, while the London Region had both a Regional Chair and Chair of the Executive - I forget which post was held by Mike Craft and which by George, but it should

[133] George Clarke was given a fairly vitriolic obituary in The Guardian by Nicolas Walter, and other obituaries weren't much kinder, at least one fixating one what his name was. The answer to that I wouldn't pretend to know, though it may be relevant that when I first met George he introduced himself saying that he had served on a minesweeper under my brother in the Pacific. When I wrote to Robin saying that George had sent his wishes, Robin replied that he didn't know a George Clark fitting the description, and did I mean George Priest? It may be relevant that George was gay at a time when homosexuality was illegal and perhaps something associated with this had caused a change of name. George was capable of enormous amounts of work, would slave his guts out for a few months, then as likely as not abscond with the petty cash and go work for some other campaign. As someone else would always be responsible for cleaning up the mess, that left him with a lot of unforgiving ex-colleagues, who perhaps didn't recall how much work he'd put in before absconding.

be said that the phenomenal success of the '59 and '60 Aldermarches (of which the London contingent constituted roughly two thirds) owed an enormous amount to George's work.

While I had been away from Watton, the DAC had ordered to wind up the project and soon after a local group of Christian Pacifists in Essex asked Will Warren to come and organise activity at the Foulness nuclear weapons factory (AWRE). The DAC had agreed to loan Will provided that PYAG (me in particular) were not involved. But following the failure of the Harrington Demo, Will had asked all potential sitters-in to pledge to go back if given less than a week in prison, and this pledge had been communicated to both the base authorities and the media. However, when the action came, the local pacifists said they couldn't see the case for going back and the DAC didn't feel like disagreeing with them publicly. Will, however, had given his word and so was immovable on the issue, and since the DAC was no longer backing him the proscription in relation to PYAG no longer applied and he needed me as an assistant. We did organise a second demo, thirteen of us being sentenced to six months for refusing to pledge not to do it again. Two took only one month, one because he was due to act in the Sahara against the French nuclear tests and could promise not to do it again in Britain, and one because she was terminally ill and didn't expect to live long enough to do it again. It was the first time that direct actionists had been given more than a fortnight's sentence. We later heard that the police had advised the magistrates that we would back down and agree to pledge not to do it again if threatened with a longish sentence and that they should call our bluff. Certainly one of the magistrates did start crying when one after another we all refused. The DAC then expelled Will while we were in prison.

Whenever we (PYAG) had heard of hangings we'd organised pickets at the Home Office, and similarly we arranged pickets at the Colonial Office over events in what were then Nysasaland and the Rhodesias. We acted at the Foreign Office over various events in the Middle East. We were part of the spontaneous demos at South Africa House that followed Sharpeville - I had twelve police kicking me in Bow Street police station for an hour and then was sentenced to ten weeks in prison. But Harry Mister needed me to organise sales on the next Aldermarch and insisted on paying my fine. Phil Cook and I, in order to push the DAC into having more sit-ins, did entry actions at Porton Down, Greenham Common, Burghfield and Watton. As this all conflicted with DAC desires, whether to concentrate on the one issue or to act more slowly, Pat Arrowsmith would phone me while I was trying to contact people for an activity so as to prevent me getting on with the planning. Then regularly I would have repeated back to me by other pacifists that she had said at this or that meeting that if there were people who were critical of

the details of DAC sit-downs, why didn't they organise separate ones themselves? When finally at Holy Loch we were doing this all too publicly for the DAC, she arrived there when we had all been arrested and told the assembled Press that, contrary to all our previous statements, we would not be doing any further actions.

PYAG's desire to broaden the struggles involved us in a lot of work besides pickets and looking at bases. At that time, the London Left (all that is, that was non-Stalinist or left of Labour) in some way or another related to the New Left which was being formed by the U&LR and the *New Reasoner*, as well as the Trots, did not, generally speaking, like NVDA (though the Behan faction of the Socialist Labour League were highly impressed by Pat Arrowsmith). We spent a lot of time arguing in meetings of various Trot groups the case that, in a modern age any hope of a successful violent insurrection was sheer utopianism and that only by the use of NVDA to subvert the forces of the State was it possible to still envisage revolution. The group made much of my old contacts with the ILP, the Syndicalist Workers' Federation and Common Wealth - we discussed reviving *Direct Action*, which hadn't appeared since 1953, as a joint journal, and then the SWF decided to do a critical pamphlet on the history of the 1945-50 Labour Government ("How Labour Governed"). We wrote two of the sections, but the bulk of the pamphlet was the SWF's. However, when it came to printing, the SWF was timidly talking of whether 500 would be too ambitious and we said we needed 10,000. In fact the initial run was 5,000 and the SWF reprinted twice within the year. The mood within CND was such that the Committee of 100 was about to be founded and a large part of the impetus for the committee was the growing understanding that Labour was not the party of disarmament as *Tribune* or the *New Statesman* tried to paint it.

The climate of ethical opinion from which CND had grown had been shaped in large part by Trevor Huddlestone's *Naught for your Comfort* and Mike Scott's *A Time to Speak* (as also Gollancz's *Letter to Timothy*). Amongst those in their late twenties or older, who had had no previous experience of political action when they joined CND, it was rare to find people who had not read two or more of these. So it was inevitable, long before Sharpeville, that opposition to apartheid would rank alongside opposition to weapons of mass destruction. However there wasn't any real organisational basis before then. When *Naught for your Comfort* was published, there was a small boycott movement launched, but it was largely a matter for personal commitment. No doubt several thousand did start a personal boycott, then or earlier, but until Sharpeville there was nothing done that really made the headlines.

The South African Embassy (or some secretive body) must have kept an eye on the letters columns of leftists papers, or perhaps the odd spy had been planted. In late 1958 there was a

spate of reports of people getting letters from the SA Embassy, out of the blue, saying they were banned from travelling to South Africa. I was, at first, insulted not to have received one, but mine had been forwarded to Dublin and only arrived some months later when I'd moved to Gresham's vicarage in Mile End. It was intriguing for, at the time, the South African Government was advertising in Britain for settlers and saying that anyone with any connection with South Africa could apply for nationality and assisted passage - presumably they were desperate to win over more white supporters. Since my parents had married in South Africa, at a time before independence when the policy was Baaskapf rather than Apartheid, and had both taken nationality, I was presumably more than eligible for the scheme. Naturally I never got round to writing and pointing this out, for they might have been able to extradite me as a deserter from the South African army for all I knew.

The day Sharpeville happened, things were fairly quiet. I got to the Embassy at the same time as a couple of others, so we formed a spontaneous picket. Later we learned that an earlier picket had formed and been arrested. When we were joined by a fourth picketer, so were we arrested. But on that day the police were being relatively reasonable, excusing the fact that we were being arrested under the Public Order Act, which was passed to control Mosley and forbade groups of more than fifty people in uniform going within a mile of Parliament. We were not in uniform and there were less than fifty of us. South Africa House had not been without allies. The National Labour Party, an ancestor of the present-day BNP, had been alerted before we were and had been able to mobilise a march of more than fifty, wore uniform and therefore were in breach of the Public Order Act. The police did nothing about them. We spent some time detained in police cells and then were gathered before release. We heard that Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan were coming to greet us out and then a minor Labour Party official arrived, presumably so he could take credit on our behalf - he hadn't been arrested but appeared next day in the papers with Jagan and Burnham[134] under the headline that they were greeting a protestor out of custody.

It was a pity, as I had met Burnham and Jagan in Dublin when they came over a few years before and I'd quite hoped to say hullo. That time, they had come to address *The Hist* at TCD. We always had a reception before the debate to give members a chance to meet the speakers, but I'd been delayed that week and had been annoyed, fearing that they would be surrounded by

[134] Cheddi Jagan (1918-1997) and Forbes Burnham (1923-1985) were joint leaders of the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana (now Guyana) active in the campaign for independence. They parted company later, Burnham favouring a more moderate line than Jagan, who was a committed Marxist-Leninist at that time. Each would eventually lead the independent state at different times.

crowds. I found in the club room that the two were standing alone with no one talking to them. No one, not the committee of The Hist, nor someone from TCD, nor from the Embassy, had bothered even to book them an hotel. They hadn't a clue where they would stay that night and were glad of the offer of a couple of sofas, necessary bedclothes, hastily prepared omelettes and breakfast next morning.

The next day at South Africa House the police were much more hostile. As I arrived I was told by a policeman to 'go and stand over there', three yards away. Like a fool I did so, to be told by another policeman to go and stand another three yards away. Having just walked down from King's Cross I couldn't see the point of going back there in three yard stints, so I sat down. I was kicked by the police, a couple of others and then the Inspector, thrown in a van to Bow Street to be kicked by several more. The magistrates arrived to sentence us and I got ten weeks. However, Harry Mister needed me for the coming Aldermarch and paid the fine. In the days after this the Anti-Apartheid movement got going. Keith Lye (who it turned out had worked with Tommy Thompson a little before I met Tommy) was the secretary of a fast growing group. No doubt a mass of people had been meaning to get round to joining the earlier boycott movement, had just not got round to putting their names on the mailing list, and were now given the extra spur to act.

It carried its own danger, transference, worry about the mote in someone else's eye rather than the beam in one's own, but because the same sort of people who had earlier joined CND were now rallying to Anti-Apartheid, there were many who suggested that CND should liquidate itself into the new movement. They had an obvious case, as getting people to boycott South African goods was a far easier task than getting people to act effectively against nuclear weapons. There might well have been the possibility of short term gain, which might have brought forward the end of apartheid, thus freeing a lot of people from much evil. But against that, the ending of the most effective peace movement since 1945 would have meant governments got away with even more militarism than they did, with who knows what results in terms of general misery. There was another danger. By talking so much about apartheid, Western liberals equated racism with something that happened in South Africa and many turned a blind eye to the 'No Blacks' notices then festooning the property-to-let advertisements in local papers.

That said, the foundation of Anti-Apartheid did much to put CND in context. Right back in 1958, three or four months after CND's foundation, a conference of London CND supporters (at that time the Executive kept the name for themselves, so there was no CND membership as such and such conferences were therefore informal and had no authority), voted overwhelmingly

that CND aims would only be achieved in the context of a similar achievement for Colonial Freedom and War on Want. This too was, for campaigners, part of the context which we saw surrounding the campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The New Left was similarly evolving. Right back in 1957 the U&LR Club and the *New Reasoner* started placing reciprocal adverts in each other's papers, then the U&LR started referring to itself as 'the other paper of socialist humanism' and it was only a matter of time before there was a merger - as *The New Left Review*. In fact, because the old Bevanites had collapsed so completely, too many people (many of whom did not share the socialist humanist analysis) were turning to them and urging the merger - particularly after the newly reborn Victory for Socialism collapsed when threatened with a ban from Transport House. So when the merger came those policies which NR and U&LR had stressed in the aftermath of Suez-Hungary were to a large extent played down. The New Left Review took the place vacated by Victory for Socialism as a link between the Parliamentary Left and the Stalinist fronts in industry and the Peace Movement. This probably opened the way that allowed post-Stalinist currents to organise within the New Left, creating a 'New, New Left' that derided socialist humanism.

There was a parallel movement, which in a way was closer to Bourdet's original 'Nouvelle Gauche' than was the British New Left, and so could have perhaps made a more authentic claim to the name. Stanley Evans, on emerging from the Communist Party, tried to launch a new strand of christian (anglo-catholic) socialism. The weight of past struggles distorted this. Prior to 1956, anglo-catholics within the CP were, by and large, a breakaway faction from the Catholic crusade, which had been predominantly Trotskyist. The activists of the pre-1956 Socialist Christian League were for the most part former Catholic Crusade members, which meant that they tended to be elderly and to a large extent isolated. For instance, Reg Groves[135], who had been national secretary of the Kinematograph Union, had been the target of a co-ordinated Stalinist attack alleging falsely that he was pro-NATO. He was removed as secretary of the union while at the same time Gaitskell, alleging he was a fellow traveller, had removed him from the list of Labour Party prospective parliamentary candidates. So Stanley Evans had a case when he said that the SCL was not doing anything worthwhile and for this reason made no attempt to work with them. He convened a group to produce a new set of christian socialist theories - *The Papers from the Lamb*.

[135] Reg Groves (1908-1998) was a Christian socialist who became an early member of the CPGB in 1927 but was expelled in 1932 along with his comrades in the Balham Group, which then allied itself with Trotsky. Reg Groves left to become active in the Labour Party as a candidate in Aylesbury and Eastbourne and later returned to the Socialist Christian League, remaining active in the trade union movement.

Stanley had in the past, despite his Stalinism, written some interesting stuff, notably a self-examination sheet for revolutionaries. So, despite the fact that there was quite a lot of bad blood, making the prospect of cooperation difficult, the SCL (of which I was a member) did write to him suggesting joint talks, and when it heard that he was convening talks from which we were excluded, was prepared to say: "Well, there's a lot of history that we'll have to forget, he presumably needs to rethink his case before he comes to talk to us". Even when the *Papers from the Lamb* were published, we had hopes and the *Socialist Christian* gave them a favourable review (though Stu Purkiss as editor suppressed his own less favourable opinion).

Unfortunately, Stanley then decided to broaden his support base. Most of the big names he brought in probably could have gone along with the analysis and proposals in his *Papers from the Lamb*, but they in turn wanted to broaden their base. So, though they were all prominent in CND, they called for a christian socialist organisation based on a programme which made no mention of either the Bomb or unilateralism. Their short definition of socialism claimed that it existed in the Soviet Union and naturally, as a socialist call, it wanted socialism to be extended elsewhere. In a post-Suez/Hungary world, to say in effect that we were a body wanting to extend the social system existing in the Soviet Union to the rest of the world, without inserting any suggestion that there might be something wrong with the Soviet Union's view of socialism, was plainly to advocate something alien to real socialists. Then they set forward a set of positions and proposed actions that were so lacking in socialist content that both a CP official (who intervened to ask whether we couldn't drop the word 'Christian' as it might put people off) and Dr David Owen (who latched on to Gresham) both approved highly. So while the majority of members of the Socialist Christian League were happy to transfer to the new Christian Socialist Movement, a minority of us (including the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Editor) were not.

CND did not at first have any organisational structure. The campaign had been called by a seven-person executive who had registered the name, while the rest of us were supporters, not members. Though conferences would be allowed, they could only pass advisory motions, and Canon Collins had the right as Chair to veto any motion he wished. Through the Spring of 1958, local groups formed, and in the Summer, someone took the initiative of calling a London conference. Then, in the late Summer and early Autumn, CND students formed the Combined Universities and Colleges CND. As it was initially entirely independent, it had the power to decide its own policy. This forced the CND Executive to relent to the extent that they conceded the right of local groups to exist as branches - they already did this, so it was a fait accompli - and for regional organisations to form. Throughout 1959 such conferences would regularly see votes

opposing NATO as the logical concomitant of opposing nuclear weapons, despite making opposition to the Warsaw Pact equally clear, ruled out of order.

The lack of a national conference provided the Stalinists with an opportunity. The British Peace Committee (a CP front) transformed itself into a National Disarmament Campaign and announced it would hold a conference in the Summer of 1959, leafleting CND meetings and marches with leaflets bearing the CND badge and with National Disarmament Campaign in big letters. There was no mention of unilateral nuclear disarmament, as they opposed that. They must have got hold of CND address lists, as all branch secretaries got invitation leaflets. George Clark and Mike Craft circulated all London Region CND branches with a note saying that they'd heard some branches had agreed to send delegates, possibly under the misconception that this was a CND conference, and pointing out that there was no mention of unilateral nuclear disarmament. They suggested that it would be a good idea if as many branches of CND as possible accepted the invitation and went proposing that the conference adopt unilateralism. The Conference duly happened, the motion for unilateralism was proposed and immediately disallowed by the platform. Half the delegates got up to walk out and the Chair announced that those leaving were just scum and no one should take any notice of them, which caused the majority of the remainder (including some BPC and CP people) to get up to walk out. The platform realised that the only ones remaining were the usual Stalinist hacks. The Chair backed down with remarkable rapidity. Though this was not a conference of the BPC, and obviously none was held, the BPC adopted unilateralism instantaneously - at least in theory, as it never actually published anything advocating it.

In a way, CND followed on from the 1954-56 attempt to build a Third Camp movement, if only in the sense of Third Camp having been an earlier united front of groups advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament. It seemed logical that CND (being opposed to all military blocs based on weapons of mass destruction) should adopt other Third Camp positions. It therefore was important for those working within CND to relate to all the groups that had either belonged to Third Camp, or been approached to join. Prominent among these were the various Trotskyist groups, but it became increasingly apparent that, while they were not actually Stalinist, they were all anxious to accommodate to Stalinism and had more in common with the BPC than they did with CND. This was particularly true of the *Socialist Review* Group (ancestor of the Socialist Workers' Party), which was surprising. I had known Ray Challinor of the SR Group since Third Camp days and I knew their position was that the Soviet Union was state capitalist - so logically one would have expected them to be more critical of Stalinist actions than were more orthodox

Trotskyists. But, in the event, SR members by and large - and Ray was one of the exceptions here - were always ready to side with Stalinists whenever the latter wanted to water down unilateralist policies so as not to embarrass the Soviet Union.

In 1960 their theoretical paper carried a new definition of their case, which explained that the Soviet Union was state capitalist because it had not been able to free itself from the pressure of world market forces. Most of those, in the Trotskyist tradition, who held state capitalist views, argued from Lenin's definition of the Soviet Union as "a workers' dominated (through the soviets) state capitalism in transition to socialism, but with severe bureaucratic deformations", and then said that the bureaucracy had grown so powerful that any transition to socialism was blocked and that the system had relapsed into state capitalism. The *Socialist Review* position meant that they believed that, if enough countries became Stalinist, world market forces would no longer be dominant and so state capitalism would inevitably evolve into socialism. Other earlier state capitalist tendencies argued on the contrary that socialism could only come in Russia - as in the West - if there was a social revolution.

It seemed important therefore to be able to combat Tony Cliff's (Ygael Gluckstein, the founder of *Socialist Review*) theories on the basis of an older state capitalist position. I should have known that CLR James, whose books had earlier influenced me considerably, was back in Britain and writing regularly on cricket in the *Guardian*. Not being sporty, I wasn't aware of this. I knew that the Johnson-Forrest group had split, but had no idea why - even now, 54 years after first meeting Raya Dunayevskaya, I still cannot see any valid reason for the split. So I was very interested when I heard that Raya was coming to Britain in the Autumn of 1959. Frank, her agent in London, invited a number of people active in a variety of leftist groups onto a committee to arrange her tour. We thought we were there as representatives of sympathetic groups, though he intended us to leave these groups and form one around her, so it became a bit of a farce. But it meant that, while she was in Britain, I spent as much time as Harry Mister could spare me accompanying her to meetings.

Raya was due to speak in Glasgow. Harry McShane (former editor of *Revolt*) and George Stone (editor of *Socialist Leader*) both at first thought she was merely a liberal and that she'd have nothing they would want to hear. So they decided that it was more important to attend a shop stewards' conference that was going on in Glasgow at the same time. I had known Harry McShane for several years, so, while Wilfred Wigham telephoned George and talked to him for an hour to persuade him that Raya had something important to say, I telephoned Harry with the same intent. Harry's group subsequently became Raya's contacts in Britain.

Chapter 12: Direct Action on the Clyde

Though not officially engaged, as soon as it became apparent that the police cases were being presented to the Procurator Fiscal, and that there was no sign that this official was going to take us to court immediately, I started to commute once a month or more (hitching of course) back and forth from the Loch to Celia's flat in Shepherd's Bush. After three or four weeks in a tent, relying on visits to the Youth Hostel for the occasional shower, and then perhaps twelve hours on the road, I'd regularly fall asleep in the bath on arrival. Since the bath was common to a couple of other tenants, this caused a little tension.

At the camp the others spent most of their time practising their canoe control. It meant that they were astonishingly successful, frequently boarding either submarines or the mother ship, and were able to be photographed raising CND flags thereon. I still thought that the most important work for us was canvassing or leafleting homes on the Loch side. So to the annoyance of the others, I never had their sort of success - except, to aggravate their annoyance, when I had gone out on my first time in a canoe, not having a clue what I was doing, I got favourable reportage! I only ever went out in a canoe when a sub was coming into the Loch though, given that the police were doing their best to keep us informed when subs were coming up the Clyde, this was fairly frequent.

I have said before that things were difficult with the DAC and *Peace News*. We had been expelled from DAC and when we went up on the Loch *Peace News* refused to mention our action, even to the extent that when I got a friend to pay for an advert where we could state our case, this was refused. At a time when we were regularly on the front page of *The Times* and being rung by New York and Moscow papers, there was not one word about us in *Peace News*, for which we had all worked as volunteers. Even *Freedom* had relaxed its boycott of us. In an attempt to split us the DAC co-opted Copper Brown and Colin Smart onto the committee on condition that they sever contacts with us.

All this was aggravated by the fact that when we had first formed our group (when we came out of Stafford prison), we had written to George McLeod, Oliver Browne, Lawrence Daly, the ILP, Harry McShane and others, and these had sponsored us. Meanwhile the DAC tended to rely on the Scottish Council of CND, which was still controlled by Stalinists. We had chosen our sponsors deliberately. With the exception of Lawrence (who, like Will Warren, had led his branch of the CP out of the Party after the Twentieth Congress, before Suez-Hungary), I had known all of them since the Third Camp conferences in 1954-5. Since we were acting at an

American base, we felt it important to ensure that we were clearly seen to be anti-nuclear weapons, not anti-American. When there was a call from a press agency in Moscow asking questions about us, I alienated the caller by insisting that he say he would be doing the same if we were in Russia - "What do you mean? There are no American bases in Russia." To which I would reply, "the fact that it's American is immaterial, all our group have been imprisoned or risked the same for acting at British bases, we are against all nuclear weapons, not just American nuclear weapons."

After the Press had come out to the camp just after the tents were slashed yet again[136], and publicised this, the National Union of Mineworkers (which was holding a conference in Dunoon) sent a couple of young miners to visit us with an offer to supply us with a miners' bodyguard. They grew a bit doubtful when we explained that our non-violent principles wouldn't allow this. Despite our curious prejudices, we were still invited to speak at a meeting. After this a top union official (one of either Abe or Alex Moffat) came to visit. When we said we were not interested in proposals for multilateral disarmament, arguing that every war-monger always claims to believe in multi-lateralism and always wants more weapons to force the other side to the bargaining table, interest in us was lost - even more so when he heard that Lawrence Daly was one of our sponsors.

In Scotland the division between disarmers who took a broadly Third Camp position and the Stalinists still mattered a lot. Glasgow Trades' Council, of which Harry McShane was still Chair, resolved to come down to the Loch. Harry agreed to lead the march provided that no aggressively pro-Russian banners were carried. The promises were broken, so Harry refused to lead the march and joined our contingent, which made it plain that we opposed all nuclear weapons, not just Western ones. [Unfortunately the ghost-writer of Harry's 'autobiography', Joan Smith, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, altered the history to suggest that he marched with the International Socialists contingent, claiming that they were carrying Third Camp posters. They weren't, they were indistinguishable from the Stalinists, despite their purported belief in 'Neither Washington nor Moscow'. Harry McShane marched with us.]

The only time in our first few months on the Loch that *Peace News* mentioned us was at the time when Eichmann was picked up and taken for trial and when I got our sponsors to publish a leaflet for American troops making the point from Nuremberg that governmental orders may be illegal in international law. *Peace News* managed to find another Scots pacifist to slate the leaflet as

[136] On one occasion a marlin spike was thrown through the tent and landed point down into the ground between two of the group, John Whiteley and Melita Burrell.

obscure. When we were in police custody after the *Proteus* (the mother ship) came in, Pat Arrowsmith appeared on the Loch giving a press conference allegedly on our behalf, saying we would not be repeating the action. Since Terry Chandler, Mike Nolan and Harry Smith went out again within twenty-four hours of our release, we were made to look as if we couldn't make up our minds - although the harm done by the press conference was effectively countered. Other than to get the ILP to duplicate a couple of Thoreau's essays and one of Tolstoy's to counter a new-minted DAC theory (strictly, in reply to a statement by Gene Sharpe that it was inconsistent with NVDA to persist and repeat the same action) and circulate these with copies of the American "New England Peacemakers" statements on the matter, we made no reply[137].

While we had gone straight up to the Loch, the DAC organised a march modelled on Gandhi's Salt March to start from the end of the Aldermarch (which had by then been taken over by CND). Whereas the DAC aimed to end at the base, so that the marchers would thereby try to influence the workers at the base, the CND orientation was to MPs at Westminster, so the march ended in London. The DAC carried a canoe on the Aldermarch in preparation for their 'salt march', which was planned to arrive at the Loch at Whit. The Committee of 100 also had its first two sit-downs. We hitched down to take part in the latter. As there was an American march from San Francisco intending to try to go to Moscow, on which there was a contingent which had been involved in the New England actions which had inspired us and used the same tactics we did, we also came down for part of the Aldermarch and attended a meeting in Friends' House where the American pacifists were being introduced.

We had written to the American canoe activists saying we hoped we would see them, thinking they might make time to come up and visit us, but stupidly we hadn't foreseen that they would demand to see us in London. So we were astounded when, in the meeting, Hugh Brock (who by then we knew had imposed the embargo on us) suddenly announced that the Americans, and everyone else in the room, "would like to meet those who had been climbing on and off submarines on the Loch." From then on the boycott ended: Colin and Copper were despatched up to our camp to rebuild bridges. It was just in time as Pat Arrowsmith and the 'Salt March' fell out spectacularly with their sponsors when the march reached Edinburgh. Police wanted to divert it so that no-one would see it and Pat was sufficiently used to that tactic to refuse, so the marchers sat down blocking traffic. Naturally the Stalinists panicked and disowned her. The Chair of the Scottish CND Council and some others then arrived on the Loch to see me, asking me to join with them in denouncing her as irresponsible - this while a demonstration was taking

[137] Interestingly, although I could not find anything about this group at the time Laurens mentioned, a group with this name has been active in recent years, so there is some continuity (editor).

place where they had brought down several thousand Russian patriots to yell abuse at the sub-mariners and citizens of Dunoon. As a result the 'salt march' arrived a week later on the Loch led by a grateful Pat, anxious to mend any remaining broken fences and more than happy to depend on our experience and accept our guidance as to tactics. And she didn't take offence when Terry and Mike, the day after the salt march demo, ostentatiously went out and boarded a sub.

It came time for me to finish this particular period of activity. Back at Whit 1958 I had resolved to spend three years working full time for the peace movement and confining myself to it. I had reckoned that, by the end of three years, I would have become useless, unable to talk about anything else and sounding like an automaton. Indeed I had. I needed to take a break and intersperse peace movement activity with something else. I left, hitched to London, and Celia and I announced our engagement to friends and close family. We were married in June. As we both had overdrafts, it was not a lavish affair. Celia's parents and a few of her colleagues attended the Mass. I married in gym shoes, which shocked the colleagues.

We couldn't consider a honeymoon on a double overdraft and we thought we'd save it for the following Christmas. We would have gone to Dublin, got the train and boat tickets and paid for a room in a hotel near where my flat had been. Then Will insisted he couldn't organize a sit-down at Brize Norton without me. He had been assured by the Oxford Chief Constable that there would be no arrests and, since it was Will, he believed him. So we spent our delayed fortnight, honeymoon and an extra week, in separate prisons in England: Celia in a special annexe at Holloway, I in Oxford. I fasted.

However, we had two lucky breaks. When I came down from Holy Loch there was an invitation to speak to the London Pax group (Roman Catholic pacifists). Though I had known one or two of its members, since they subscribed to the *Catholic Worker*, I hadn't met the group as such. So just over a week before Celia and I married, when we still had no idea where we were going to live when we were married, I spoke to them. The day after there was an advert for a flat to let in the *New Statesman*, which turned out to be the house of the Secretary of Pax, Barbara Wall (who wrote in the *Catholic Herald* as Barbara Lucas and whose husband was a well-known writer and daughter would become so). So more or less by accident we found ourselves renting a flat in a very congenial household, with a landlady who actually supported us when we took part in civil disobedience. Bernadine Wall was then married to an already famous pianist, so we had more or less continuous, free concert music coming through the wall.

A week or so later there was a much-forwarded letter telling me that a couple of my father's cousins had died. They had been potters in Stroud. I had once met one of them when she was visiting my aunt Janet and I, by chance, had cycled over. It appeared that I would inherit something from them. It later turned out to be sufficient for us to buy a cottage when Celia gave birth to Fiona and had to take a break from teaching, and I went to work for OXFAM.

1961, the year the Committee of 100 was launched in public, was a thrilling year for leftists. The hard work of the previous years suddenly seemed to be bearing fruit. People who had turned to civil disobedience purely as a symbolic gesture began to think about what they were doing. They learned that non-violence was not merely a lack of violence and saw that NVDA involved a challenge to the whole ethos of militarist society. So they moved on to look far deeper at the various forms of libertarian socialism. It was not for a year or so that the anarchist revival really got under way, but things were moving sufficiently that we were able to see it coming. Being in the house of leftist Roman Catholics at the time when Vatican II was unfolding was also worthwhile.

Celia came from Portsmouth. Her father, Ernie, was a submariner (Chief Petty Officer Technician, Chief Engineer), which hadn't stopped Celia from becoming a founder member of CND and indeed co-founding the Portsmouth branch. Her co-founder used to speak down by the harbour and, in the early days, Celia's mother used to go with Celia to listen. Later, Celia's younger sister, Pam, founded the Portsmouth Youth CND. However, someone must have taken offence. Celia heard just after we were married that naval security had visited her father and thereafter her mother Phyllis used to deny ever having listened to a CND speaker. It is perhaps not surprising that security was involved. When he finally left the Navy, Ern went to work at Bath designing submarines. Pam married early in 1962 (she and her husband stayed with us briefly in London) and her daughter Nikki was born in December, 2 ½ months after Fiona.

I mentioned earlier that, during the years before Suez-Hungary, interest in anarchism and attendance at anarchist organised meetings had sunk so low that most of the remaining members of the London Anarchist Group could not be bothered to come down to the Malatesta Club for meetings. Presumably they thought that only a few people looking aimlessly for a philosophy and drifting from group to group were attending. So the LAG would have more or less stopped organising central meetings had not Jack and Mary Robinson, with the help of Jack and Mary Stevenson (who had just joined LAG), started meetings in a local pub. The older LAG members instead organised a series of 'off-centre' meetings held at LAG members' homes, rotating around once a month. So, when Celia and I had our own bedsitter, we also started an off-centre group.

Later, when we left the 'Wallery', Margaret and Bryan Hart, who took over our room, built this into a distinct Notting Hill Anarchist Group.

During the period before Celia and I married, the Committee of 100 had been evolving. The idea had been first mentioned in December 1959 by Ralph Schoenman[138] after the Harrington demo, as a purely sponsorship group for NVDA. It had been assembled on a more involved way, while the Foulness demonstrators were in prison, during the Summer and Autumn of 1960. There had been a plan to have a sit-down during a CND-organised March south from Scotland that summer in support of the prisoners. We were consulted and said it wouldn't be fair to non-civil disobedient CND marchers and so it was called off. Just before we were released at the beginning of November, the news of the existence of C100 was leaked to the press. I never knew whether this was done deliberately or not. It certainly got more publicity with the right wing press thinking they had discovered a secret and were able to have an exposé.

The majority of those who were active members of CND before the Committee's formation (by which I mean those who canvassed, attended meetings, turned up for more than the last half-mile of marches without expecting to be treated as saviours), rallied to it. But for the most part they only saw sit-downs as a way of getting publicity for the campaign. They did not see that NVDA is meant as a means to demonstrate to the military and other functionaries of the State the essential nature of what they do - that is, that it is by making patent the latent violence of the State and its acts, and taking that violence on one's self, that NVDA works as a means of conversion. Not through the publicity it may or not get in the media, but in convincing those who do the State's work, that it shouldn't be done.

There was a spate of demos at Embassies, not just when nuclear weapons were tested, but more often over civil liberty or anti-imperialist issues, east or west. So, when we were in court after Brize Norton, we each had previous unpressed charges to be added: that was no doubt the norm. One of my charges was sitting down in Battersea. I had no knowledge of any nuclear base or other place requiring protest in Battersea and was protesting that this must be mistaken identity when it turned out that the police courts had peculiar ideas about geography. For them Battersea included the Russian Embassy, where C100 had indeed organised several sit-ins, in three or four of which we'd been arrested.

[138] Ralph Schoenman (b 1935) was an American and personal secretary to Bertrand Russell until 1970. He was also general secretary of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and active in CND and the Committee of 100. After returning to the US he continued to campaign around alleged US war crimes in Vietnam.

Most of those who took on C100 demos in those early days were ready to be arrested once, perhaps imprisoned once, though many paid fines or were prepared to accept court orders to refrain from acting again. After all, Ralph Schoenmann was arguing that the state couldn't imprison us all and jeered when we predicted concentration camps - a prediction later fulfilled at Long Kesh. It was inevitable that only a minority could continue for long, so for the latter half of 1961 and the first of 1962, there was a notable process of sorting. Those who understood what they were doing formed local C100s, or working groups or sub-committees of these. The majority of those who wanted a less demanding, albeit ineffective, activity, either went back to the constitutional campaign or turned to various forms of Trotskyism.

The Industrial Rank and File movement became the Industrial sub-Committee of C100, setting the pattern whereby groupings of the older left could work within the newer. There were still people who claimed (despite the fact that we pointed out that you don't fight tanks with pea-shooters, nor nuclear weapons with tanks, and that therefore a commitment to give up nuclear weapons unilaterally involved far more than that) that CND and C100 were only concerned with one weapon and therefore accused us of having betrayed a more fully pacifist position. I have previously commented on how this divided the Peace Pledge Union. There were similar divisions among anarchists, within Common Wealth, and there were Marxist groups (notably the Socialist Part of Great Britain) who accused us of campaigning only against symptoms rather than the cause of evil. Their argument ignored the fact that most people only know they are ill when they see the symptoms, while doctors can only diagnose the underlying cause from the symptoms presented and do so by recognising and isolating those most significant. Nuclear weapons are particularly clear evidence of what is rotten at the heart of capitalist society and the State.

It was at about this time that the *Appeal for Amnesty* was launched[139]. We went to the first meeting and when we heard that there to be local groups (then called Threes), wrote to volunteer to form one. Someone who lived round the corner from us must have written by the same post. He hadn't a suitable room but became secretary, using our room for meetings. We were the third 'Three' to be formed, the first one also mainly comprising C100 was in Westminster formed by Peter Moule and Brenda Jordan.

It was a time when the widespread conservatism induced by the Cold War was beginning to break down. Grimond[140] was trying to change the nature of the Liberal Party (though, arguably,

[139] 1961: through an article of this name in the *Observer* by Peter Benenson.
[140] Jo Grimond (1913-1993) was a unilateralist and leader of the Liberal Party from 1956-67.

since Clement Davies[141] had, ten years before, overnight moved the party from one which condemned Labour for being indistinguishable from the Tories to one that supported a Churchill Government, Grimond was merely restoring the status quo ante[142]). The effects of Vatican II were beginning to be felt. There was a leftward shift within trade union leaderships, with the Transport and General Workers Union moving leftwards four years before and the Municipal and General Workers Union forcing its right wing leadership to stage a recall conference. The Establishment press started to want to appear unbiased and began to carry occasional articles from leading unilateralists. No doubt these slight shifts caused us to be over-optimistic.

The Chair of our local CND was Dr Richard Doll. We'd met him before he got the international prize for his research on smoking and we had no idea that this was his speciality, nor indeed that he was a researcher rather than a local GP. So we made rather a boob when in the spring of 1962 we were invited round for coffee one evening. We'd married in June 1961, had had our honeymoon interrupted by spells in prisons, so by the time we were invited round Celia knew she was pregnant. It was early days and we weren't telling people, but she had stopped smoking. Not wanting to give the real reason, when offered a cigarette she generally declined, saying it was in view of what we'd heard about the research into the dangers. When offered by the Dolls, in declining we asked if they'd heard of the research. They shot significant glances at each other but didn't tell us why. Next morning the award to Dr Doll was all over the front of the Guardian.

During that year's Aldermarch (Easter, 1962), we had what in retrospect was an amusing example of Press misrepresentation, but which was annoying at the time. On the Saturday there was a photo of a Reading schoolroom with nine double sleeping bags occupied by nine couples and the suggestion that there was an orgy going on, a total of eighteen children and their sleeping bags having been airbrushed out of the picture. We were one of the couples shown and, as it happens, all of the couples were married, mostly for several years. It was a standard Press stunt. We had heard on previous years that cameramen had gone round offering to pay youngsters if they'd get into double sleeping bags and be photographed. It used to annoy somewhat, the idea that they could find the odd couple to comply, but perhaps those pictures too had been faked. It was a recurring obsession of the Press that all anyone ever went for was the chance of an easy lay, a myth that has since been kept alive as allegedly leftist journalists and celebrities reminisce

[141] Clement Davies (1884-1962) preceded Grimond as leader of the Liberal Party during the post-war years at its lowest ebb.
[142] Of course, at the time of writing the Liberal Democratic Party is in active coalition with a much more stridently right-wing Tory government.

about their days turning up on the marches. Notably those who stayed political were not themselves committed unilateralists, though perhaps related to CND big names who didn't actually march and generally slept in hotels rather than in sleeping bags on school floors. It never perhaps occurred to them that there are easier and more comfortable ways to find partners than walking several miles on paved roads through the rain and then to sleep in sodden sleeping bags, in draughts, on hard floors.

With a daughter coming, we had to think of Celia taking a break from teaching, so I had to find a job which I could square with my conscience. Will had co-opted me onto the Oxford C100 before the Brize Norton demo (the fall-out from disagreements in and around the DAC kept me off the London one) and he was working at OXFAM. We decided to move to a cottage in the area so that I could work there. We tried, given Celia's pregnant state, to limit the number of demos in which we took part, but there was a lot going on that Spring. [Years later, when the CND 'second wave' came while Fiona was at school, a Trot contemporary upbraided her for not going on many demos. Fiona replied that she had been on more demos while in the womb than the school friend was ever likely to experience, so she reckoned she'd already done her share.] Will's younger son, Emlyn, who'd been very active in the DAC, was about to qualify as a surveyor and with his help we found a 400-year old cottage a couple of miles from Witney, actually in the next village to my brother's god-mother. In those days, and indeed nine years later when we moved up to Wellington in Shropshire, a small cottage could be had for a couple of thousand.

We bought furniture and baby goods, arranging for these to be delivered the day we were to move into the cottage, in the happy delusion that deliveries would be made when promised. We moved to Oxford with only the possessions needed in furnished London rooms: there were three weeks between the time we handed over the Notting Hill flat and the North Leigh completion date, so we'd taken a three week letting on rooms in North Oxford without seeing them. Celia had been given a date in October for Fiona's birth (just after we'd moved to Witney) and we hadn't given sufficient thought to her coming early. So, though the John Radcliffe hospital knew we were moving up and that Celia would want a bed, it all happened as a bit of a surprise with Celia left completely unattended during the birth and for several hours afterwards.

Naturally it was the first house I'd bought and I wrongly assumed that the agent would be waiting at it, at the agreed time, with a key, wanting a cheque, likewise the furniture van and another delivering baby things. All we were met with was a next door neighbour demanding that a hedge be pulled down, because clothes on her washing line could blow against it. I feared that,

when I'd walked to Witney and back to get the key, the furniture would have arrived. I needn't have worried - it came three or four hours later and, since the driver was running late, he said he hadn't time to do more than dump it all just outside the front door. When I'd finally got the stuff under cover (the cot etcetera having been sent to Liverpool for some reason and wasn't expected for three and a half weeks) and got back to Oxford to see Celia, the hospital was expecting me to take mother and baby away with me, with everything already packed. The nurse asked why I blanched. I explained that all the furniture was in the kitchen and I had to take it wherever and that Celia wouldn't be capable of leaving me to do it by myself. She took pity on us and ordered Celia back to bed. She came out a couple of days later, but as the baby things were being driven around Liverpool (presumably the driver was looking for a New Yatt Road there), Fiona had to spend her first three weeks out of hospital living in one of the bedroom dressing table drawers. Celia's parents then arrived unexpectedly and so it was Ern and I who carried the beds, chests of drawers, etcetera upstairs. And so, eventually, all was done before Celia and Fiona arrived from the hospital.

Before we moved we had got from *Freedom* the address of a couple of subscribers in Witney. He taught, she worked in the OXFAM shop (and is now a famous lecturer in Philosophy). Both were members of the Oxford C100 and there was a YCND group in Witney whose members had already decided they were anarchist/C100. So, by the time we moved up, they were rebranding themselves as the Witney Anarchist Group, which doubled as the West Oxfordshire C100.

When Pam had Nikki, there was an Igbo Nigerian nurse married to a Fulani Nigerian medical student in the next bed. Their daughter Lia was born the day before Nikki. Henrietta was working to put her husband through medical school and couldn't look after the child. She had something fixed with a friend, but not immediately, so we agreed to look after the child for a month or two. Later, when the medical student announced he was taking a second wife and Henrietta objected, he left her. So then Lia lived with Pam for several years. Then a friend from London arrived saying he knew a girl, a stripper, who'd been deserted by her husband and would we look after her son. Eventually Pam adopted him.

The cottage had originally been on three floors, the top one being an attic with a skylight window. There was one room on each floor, a single floored kitchen had been built on about fifty years before and, ten years before, a makeshift bathroom onto that. That winter was very cold and the snow came through the kitchen roof. We came down to find the snow two inches deep in the kitchen. Another night we woke up to find an inch deep layer on the bed. The buses

to the village stopped running and, for a couple of months, I had to walk every morning to get one from Witney, and back again in the evening.

I described earlier the different positions members of the traditional left had taken on the Bomb. For many the Bomb was just one weapon, only more evil in degree than any other and to be opposed as part of a general opposition to militarism. They felt it was a mistake to put so much emphasis on this one weapon. Moreover, they rightly said that wars have economic causes and so they believed that the CND leadership, when it argued that war could happen by accident, had failed to understand this. They in turn perhaps confused 'cause' with 'occasion'. The First World War was undoubtedly caused by economic rivalry between capitalist empires and that cause had existed for years before. It was occasioned by a bullet in Sarajevo.

Some traditional left groups had supported CND from the beginning, some right up to the present denounce support for it as being concern with a mere symptom. Most on the other hand came to modify their position as they saw development. I saw this close up with the Syndicalist Workers' Federation. When PYAG approached the SWF in the autumn of 1959 they saw CND as a peripheral issue, though they were somewhat impressed by our involvement in NVDA - but even that for them was a side issue. They had just decided to write a pamphlet retrospectively commenting on the Attlee Government and, more or less as a concession to us, invited us to contribute a section on the Bomb - though we had great difficulty in persuading them that Manny Shinwell hadn't known the Bomb was being made. For some reason Hansard records on the matter couldn't be checked, so Don Pedelty[143] was dispatched to check the *New Statesman's* files to get Shinwell's later testimony on the subject.

They probably only began to see that we could be useful allies when they discussed how many copies to print - whether 200 or 500. We said we could sell twenty times their higher figure within twelve months. They didn't quite believe us but printed 5000 and had to reprint twice that year. Even then I nearly wrecked the agreement when a month or so later there was a conference of London CND. I had a total of seven jobs to do during it and couldn't take on any more and so notified Don that it would be worth their while if one of them could get down to sell SWF literature and I would reserve a space. He was quite put out when I said I couldn't do their selling for them and wasn't prepared to cancel any CND or *Peace News* jobs so to do: "Coming from someone who has professed a readiness to work with us your refusal seems unfriendly". It

[143] Donovan Pedelty was active in the SWF, writing pamphlets with Ken Hawkes and writing for *Freedom* until he and others left when Herbert Read accepted a knighthood.

took some time to explain that the fact that I couldn't drop things and be available was precisely why I could be a helpful ally.

Still, we got over that. Ken Hawkes, whose work had by and large kept the group going during and after its post-war decline, came and joined the PYAG contingent on the next Aldermarch. Still out of his element, he only talked politics with PYAG members, but it meant he met Pete Turner (both thought the other was non-political, at least beyond CND). So they already knew each other when they met again at the first planning meeting for the Industrial Rank and File Conference that summer. I was in prison at the time.

The SWF was in no way peculiar in this. The Behan group of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) had made contacts with the DAC, admiring Pat Arrowsmith's personal commitment. Moreover both they and the PPU London membership had jointly taken part in a PYAG-organised demo protesting when the American Fleet was sent to overawe the Lebanese. Nevertheless it became apparent, when I met them in the Industrial Rank and File Movement, that they considered us fringe eccentrics and weren't aware that we had political views on any non-pacifist matter.

I had occasionally encountered Martin Grainger[144] at New Left meetings over the years, knowing he was a member of the SLL, but not that he was co-leader of the faction that had campaigned within it against work with the DAC. (I didn't at that time meet his wife, Jeanne, and it wasn't until many years later that I realised I had known her in 1948 in Paris, in the early days of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*). Having met him before, I wasn't surprised, four days after coming out of Stafford prison, when he came over to say that they'd come out of the SLL and started their own paper (then called *Agitator*). He asked if I would write for them. He then told me about the Industrial Rank and File Movement and was a bit put out when I said that I'd seen Wilfred as soon as I got back to London and Wilf wanted to hand over the secretarial work to me. It turned out that the article they'd envisaged would see civil disobedience as a humorous sideline and I was to use the nom-de-guerre 'Stick in the Mud'. When I wrote in Marxist terms trying to explain the point of NVDA he was shocked. The article published may have contained a couple of words that I wrote, but no more, so I could hardly complain about the views and reminiscences of 'Stick in the Mud'.

[144] Chris Pallis (1923-2005), also known as Martin Grainger and Maurice Brinton, was initially a member of Healy's faction but broke away with several others in 1960 to form Solidarity, a libertarian socialist organisation that published a regular journal, was associated with the French group around Socialisme ou Barbarie and lasted until the 1980s. He was also a distinguished doctor and neurologist.

The growth in the SWF's acceptance of civil disobedience continued. Soon after Whit the AIT (the syndicalist international) wrote saying that two Spanish comrades had been arrested in France and were liable to be extradited to Franco's Spain - so would we demonstrate the next Saturday at the Embassy. There was also that day a C100 demo in Trafalgar Square (a rally rather than a sit-down as I remember), which Celia and I wouldn't have wanted to miss. So I suggested that the Embassy demo be held after the C100 one and that it be an occupation, that as a group we attend the C100 demo and collect a few sympathisers there. There was very doubtful agreement, but by the time we were leaving the Square, with more C100 supporters than SWF members, attitudes had changed. Jim Radford[145], who was one of the marshals for the C100 demo, came over to say that 'the demo is over and you're going the wrong way'. But when he heard from Ken the reason for our second demo, he immediately enlisted another dozen to join us. Though only a small number of us actually managed to get inside the Embassy to sit in, while most demonstrated outside, it was a marked success, made all the sweeter when the Embassy Chargé d'Affaires complained to the Press that 'the Communists never behave this way'.

It was the first time that people who had belonged to the SWF before CND existed had seen civil disobedience in action. They were sufficiently impressed that Don Pedelty decided that the next time the C100 went out of London to sit at a base, he'd take part. He went with Pete Turner, for whom it was the second time, and wrote it up in *Direct Action*, which had previously treated reports of NVDA activity as eccentricities not relevant to syndicalists.

At about the same time, there was a London Region C100 supporters' meeting and we twisted Ken's arm that he should come along. He wondered whether or not to bring any copies of the SWF pamphlet mentioned earlier ('How Labour Governed'), and we suggested a couple of hundred. He wondered whether we would need that many, as he thought we would have already sold to anyone who might be interested. We pointed out that the Committee was supported by a lot of people PYAG hadn't known. He also thought we intended to sell outside the meeting and found it hard to believe we'd be welcome to sell inside and that we'd get a favourable plug from the platform.

He reluctantly got the copies and helped us lug them down. We arrived early to see someone from *Peace News* setting up a literature stall, so I went over to ask if we could leave a pile of pamphlets there. He was actually intending to leave and hoping someone else would take over the stall and, since I used to do it, asked if I would step in. So we took over the stall and dragged

[145] Jim Radford, born 1928, folk singer, songwriter and peace campaigner active in CND and later the Direct Action Housing campaign of squatting for the homeless.

Ken behind it, where he soon saw the 200 pamphlets sold and took down a list of other names of people who wanted copies. From that meeting on, Ken ran the C100 book stalls.

Even then, Tom Brown, who had inspired the SWF in the early days and remained the major theoretical influence until it wound up in 1969, was not totally convinced. With Pete Turner editing the C100's industrial sub-committee's paper, Tom tackled me suggesting that "it was a pity that Peter couldn't be putting all that work into anarchism". It hadn't occurred to him that what Pete was doing was just that, but when pressed he readily agreed that what Pete's paper was saying was good anarchism.

We were coming up to Easter, so I argued that the SWF should print a pamphlet for sale on the Aldermarch, arguing that, since no government nor ruling élite has ever willingly given up its major weapon of coercion, unilateral nuclear disarmament could only be achieved through direct action, whether NVDA or industrial, and that preventing a subsequent regime from re-acquiring such weaponry would necessitate an anarchist rejection of the State. The earlier members couldn't believe that there was a market for such an argument. The group had by then grown and I suppose we could have out-voted them, but that wouldn't have made for good relations. We duplicated a few hundred copies of a very short pamphlet called *Direct Action*. It sold out within the first couple of hours of the march. That was enough to convince our comrades and I was asked to write the first part of what became *The Bomb, Direct Action and the State*, which Ken and Bryan Hart printed at about the time Celia and I moved to Oxford.

Chapter 13: Anarchists and Non-Violent Direct Action

Freedom had more or less ignored CND for its first two years. Vero, who was an admirer of Castro, lectured us that unilateral nuclear disarmament was of no significance, that Castro was the revolutionary movement of the day. When the DAC did civil disobedience, and more especially when Phil Cooke and I fasted in prison, *Freedom* editorials told us that police and prison officers did a good an useful job and shouldn't be put to inconvenience by our obstruction. Those involved in direct action were alienated by this viewpoint.

We thought, at first, that we were alone in this. However, at about the same time, Colin Ward started advocating a change in the paper that would allow an in depth treatment of issues. The articles were nearly all his, but it later emerged that he spoke for a significant body of anarchist opinion. Colin was, at that time, influenced by the Sydney Libertarians, who were Australian 'Permanent Protestors'[146] or 'Revisionist Anarchists'[147]. They had decided that hope for an anarchist society was ridiculously utopian, that the State and society were coterminous, so all movements based on the thesis that a revolutionary society could arise within the State and the old order and displace it, must be abandoned. However, they argued that, if you took out from anarchism the concept of revolutionary social change, there were a number of valid ways to protest such freedoms as exist. Ward's then desired journal would from its beginning reject any belief in progressive fundamental change. Since for PYAG (and most other direct actionists) unilateral disarmament would involve just such a change, we didn't see Colin as a potential ally.

However, by 1961 Colin's position had mutated. Though he still did not believe in the possibility of an anarchist revolution, he did believe in the possibility of a broadly Marxist one. Whereas he had sympathised with the Sydney Libertarian belief that anarchism's aim should be to limit the

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146 The term 'Permanent Protest' had been historically associated with Proudhon's Mutualism, Proudhon arguing against the determinist thesis and the pseudo-Marxist assumption that victory for the proletariat is inevitable. He argued instead that, even if ever increasing exploitation is bound to happen, then anarchism can serve as a basis of last ditch resistance. However, in the mouths of the Sydney Libertarians it took a completely different meaning. They argued that bureaucracy had so pervaded the system that it was no longer possible to distinguish between the State and the society that under-pinned it. Some of them at least (and I assume Colin never met one of these) added that in the circumstances it was not possible to pick and choose means. All means, even those generally considered anti-social and immoral must be used to oppose the system. My objections were dismissed as catholic prejudice.

147 In the past, reformist versions of anarchism were described as 'Philosophical Anarchism', though strictly speaking that refers to the belief that some people could form an anarchist society without it being necessarily an universal system. More recently, Giovanni Baldelli used the term 'Revisionist Anarchism' (indeed on one occasion in the early 1950s, 'Conservative Anarchism'). The term was then used by Nicolas Walter and Colin Myers when they were editing the *University Libertarian* in 1954/55. Nicolas later had a memory lapse about this period, first saying that only Meyer had used the term and then that he was only introduced to anarchism by Colin Ward in 1957, three years after he and Colin Myers launched the *University Libertarian*. That was perhaps unlikely since his grandfather had been a noted philosophical anarchist. It may be relevant that when the UL started to talk of revisionist anarchism, Sidney Parker commented that "Bernstein at least read Marx before he revised him".

power of the system by injecting small measures of anarchism into it, he had by 1961 come round to the belief that it was possible to inject such small elements of anarchist co-operation into a broadly Leninist movement. This may have been inspired by divisions within the Sydney Libertarians. I don't know the details of these divisions, but in 1959, George Molnar[148], who as far as we had known in Britain had been their main theorist, was expelled as a 'meliorist'. I had been, in 1959, too busy with direct action to inquire what exactly this meant, but four years before I had been told by one of the Sydney Libertarians that, since State and Society were coterminous, all anti-social acts (including rape) were anti-state and therefore revolutionary. I could see that that particular Sydney Libertarian would certainly have a low opinion of making things better, i.e. 'meliorism'.

Whether or not his revised views had antipodean origins, Colin (while retaining the term Revisionist Anarchism) was by 1961 defining his aim as "widening the sphere of freedom". For those sufficiently interested to request elaboration he would praise Ken Coates, then the principal British theorist of a reformist form of Trotskyism. It was on that basis that his wing of the London Anarchist Group was going to launch *Autonomy*, a paper which was to be published once a month instead of an issue of *Freedom*. By the time it actually came out, the name was changed to *Anarchy*.

At that time, Colin had decided that the impact of the New Left and its various heirs meant that there was now a new market amongst leftist academics for anarchist ideas, but not for an over-arching anarchist philosophy. It is fair to mention here that, by the time he handed over the editorship in the 1970s, Colin had moved on from this position. Thereafter, in History Workshop and elsewhere he argued a very different case and laughed off the attempts of others to understand his theoretical evolution[149].

These New Left thinkers, provided they were allowed to cherry-pick, could take aspects of anarchism and incorporate these in a basically Marxist context and were therefore happy to read an anarchist journal. But to allow this lucky dip approach, Colin had to hide the fact that anarchism is essentially an overall critique of the Marxist strategy for achieving socialism. Given the intended market, he naturally did not want anarchism presented as a coherent whole, nor would his aim have been furthered by the existence of an anarchist movement.

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[148] George Molnar (1934-99) was a Hungarian-born philosopher at the University of Sydney and a member of the libertarian society at the university.

[149] I have not yet read David Goodway's book on Colin's thought but, as Dave is a systematic and academic historian, I am sure he will either have discovered a consistency that I have not, or worked out more fully how Colin's thought evolved.

He produced a good journal, carried good and serious articles, all designed to engender attempts to spark off libertarian campaigns within limited fields (psychological, educational, etc), but he was essentially hostile to the concept of a national federation working for a total social change. At the time it seemed as if his was just a more intelligent version of Vero's hostility to the idea of anarchist unity.

Before I came out of prison, Pete Turner had been taking bets that I would marry Celia, speculating mainly on how long after I met her this would take. It is perhaps only fair therefore to mention from 1957, when I met him, until the end of the 1960s, he was married to Gladys and that I had known for some years that they were talking of splitting up, so I didn't meet her more than a couple of times at various socials. It was only many years later, when Pete had died of asbestosis (incurred working on large building sites) that Gladys, who had in the meantime restyled herself as 'Mary', told me at his funeral that she and Pete were cousins, having been brought up together virtually as brother and sister. Though they had married, it had seemed from the start to be almost incestuous and so they decided within a year to split. But after differing alternative relationships, when Pete fell ill he returned to live with her and she nursed him through his last two years.

Celia was a teacher. In those days it was primary school, but she later moved into special education, running an EBD school[150]. In the 1960s she was interested in graphology and found italic writing useful for teaching. It meant her poster-making was excellent and fast. Though sewing was never one of her accomplishments, it was not long before (using staples) she ran up a banner for the Rank and File Movement. That was to be the first of many. It had been some years since the anarchist red and black triangle banners had been carried on British streets. She made the Industrial RFM one for some demo - perhaps a May Day one, I forget which. We got used to carrying that, but it was poster shaped and so not entirely satisfactory. The younger members of the LAG also wanted one and, though their elders deplored this, hearing that we would use one, consented to Gladys Turner making them one. So in the winter of 1961-62 it became normal to see red and black banners on C100 or CND demos.

As I mentioned earlier, when Celia and I left London, Bryan and Margaret Hart took on our flat and also converted our off-centre anarchist sub-group into a full-blown Notting Hill Anarchist Group. Bryan Hart had been an anarchist in the early 1950s, influenced by Bill Lean. Bill had been a member of the war-time Anarchist Federation of Britain at the time of the 1944 split, but

[150] Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

had wanted the remnant to put all its efforts into building a syndicalist confederation which would affiliate to the syndicalist international, the AIT.

Tom Brown regarded that as a vanguardist policy, since one would be creating a movement divided right from the start into a full anarchist minority with a mass sub-anarchist membership. Tom was particularly sensitive to this danger and it pervaded his thinking. Tom's fear of vanguardism within the movement had already led to one departure from the AFB in 1946, and in 1948 it led to a second, with Bill Lean leaving. Years later it even led Tom to suspect his disciple and long-time close ally, Ken Hawkes (who wanted to publish a contact list of SWF members in various industries) of vanguardist aspirations, and (because my name was to have been on the list) I was equally suspect. That led to Tom leaving the SWF in 1969 as it broke up.

Though I think I may have overheard him speaking once, in 1955 when he'd have been visiting the Malatesta Club, and what was said would have fitted Bryan's description, I never knew Bill Lean. He lived in or had moved to Southampton, when Bryan came across him. At first he had thought that friends of his who had fallen out in between the AFB and Freedom might be available for a new syndicalist confederation, but was distressed to find that most of these had moved to the far right and were now fascists. So the potential for he had foreseen for his new grouping didn't exist. He had nevertheless written to the AIT and was recognised as their British contact. As Bryan recounted it, he had no fellow members and so (having broken with the AFB and Freedom) joined the Southampton branch of the SPGB, while at the same time running a minuscule AIT group. The trouble with this account is that Eddie Grant, later to become one of the leading thinkers of the SPGB, was a member of the Southampton SPGB branch in the early 1950s. He said he knew all its members and (when I asked him about ten years ago) he said he was sure no such person belonged to the Branch. Bill could of course have used a different name in the party[151].

After working with Bill for about six months, 1953-54, Bryan decided to join the Merchant Navy. He had been a sailor for seven years or so and come ashore around 1960-61. He had been married for some time to a Margaret Hayes (or Haynes, I fear I forget which), and they must

[151] Unfortunately I was not able to check this with Bryan. Celia and I lost contact with Bryan and Margaret when Stuart Christie was arrested in Spain (details of which are best found in the accounts by Stuart and others). There was an enormous press furore. Since Stuart had probably dossed for a night or two at the 'Wallery', the Press wanted to interview Bryan and Margaret. We made three or four journeys down to London to leave messages to say come and stay with us in North Leigh, but there was a couple staying in what had been our flat who presumably assumed we were Press and professed not have heard of Bryan and Margaret, or even that the house was owned by Bernard and Barbara Wall. We left notes with a number of people who knew them and with whom Bryan had worked when he'd been in London. But many in London had also lost contact and we never got a reply. After a couple of years we gave up trying.

have had a bedsit in the house where the Amnesty group Convenor lodged. We heard from the Convenor at one meeting that the occupant of his next door flat had called, seen a copy of *Direct Action* which we had given or sold him, and had expressed an interest in meeting us.

The Industrial RFM was already involved fairly strongly with dissident members of the National Union of Seamen. George Foulser[152], a contact of the Behan group, had many years earlier organised a seamen's rank and file movement and was expelled from the union as a result. Jim Slater had launched his campaign late in 1960, at the time getting Doug Kepper and the Tyneside ILP to print their leaflets, but as the "No-Use-to-Seamen's" General Secretary had contacts on the ILP Trust, Doug was told to desist. He passed the job down via Wilfred to the IRFM[153]. I had done the printing on the SWF's hand-feed machine just before I went up to the Loch.

There wasn't, in fact, a lot left of the IRFM. All the work had been put into calling the conference and a large span of groups co-operated up to then. After the conference, they'd all gone their separate ways. Then the Behan[154] group broke up, leaving the SWF in the process, because one of its members told the Press that Martin Grainger of the Agitator group was the same person as the celebrated hospital neurologist, Chris Pallis. So when Brian joined, the IRFM consisted of those who'd been in the SWF for years, Bill and Joan Christopher who had joined it from the ILP, Mike Callinan (secretary of the Irish Workers' group, who had not left with the rest of the Behan group), Brian Bamford (who was launching an apprentices' group in the North West), two or three of the LAG and Celia and I. The SWF's press was in Amberley Road, London W2 and, as the easiest way from there to Ladbroke Grove and Ladbroke Road late at night was to walk it, and it was more or less the same route, we saw a lot of each other. Returning from there three or four weeks later, Brian suggested diffidently that he would see us on the Friday. Pete Turner had asked Margaret and he to the LAG and they assumed I was a member and hadn't thought to invite them, and seemed a bit hurt. I said something to the effect of "Oh, you've joined the élite" and then explained both about the 1944 split and that, as a catholic, I was excluded from the LAG, long before I'd come across the SWF.

Their invitation to join the LAG and this conversation were no doubt insignificant events in themselves, but they raised the question of anarchist unity. By then, the majority of those active within the SWF (Don and Inge Pedelty, the Christophers, the Harts, Mike Callinan and Brian

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[152] George Foulser (1920-1975) was an anarchist-syndicalist seaman who produced *Seaman's Voice* during the seamen's strikes of 1960 and 1966 and wrote a book of that name. He was active in the SWF.
[153] Industrial Rank and File Movement
[154] Led by Brian Behan (1926-2002) an Irish writer and anarcho-syndicalist building worker. He joined the CPGB in 1950 but left in 1956, joined Healy's group but was expelled in 1960 and then formed the short-lived Workers' Party. He was active in the 1966 Seamen's Strike.

Bamford, and Celia and I) had all joined it six or more years after the split. Similarly, nearly all those who actually bothered to attend LAG business meetings (at least one long term LAG member, John Bishop, was under the impression that the LAG no longer held business meetings) - Pete Turner, Arthur Moyse, Ian Celnick, Jack and Mary Stevenson, Bernard Miles, Ken Morse and Jack and Mary Robinson, had similarly only joined at least six years after the split. So the majority of the active members of both groups were largely agnostic on the rights and wrongs of the 1944 split. So we were more than anxious to welcome Bryan in to our off-centre group, to the IRFM and to the SWF (especially the latter two), as Jim Slater now needed a third lot of leaflets printed.

We belonged to one or other grouping because of political events that had nothing to do with the split and had happened in the middle or late 1950s. We found it perfectly possible to work together on issues that were arising in the 1960s. Partly independently of, partly connected with both, there were perhaps another eight anarchists who had belonged to one or other group (or the Arbeite Frant) in the past. They might well have been attracted by activity with a united grouping but didn't want to commit themselves to either side in the bickering. There was the Solidarity group (formerly Agitator), the former members of PYAG and/or Polaris Action, and a number of C100 activists more or less floating between these. Besides this, there was at least one survivor, John Lall, from the other earlier Freedom group. There was also a number of groups, perhaps half a dozen, more 'anarchisant' than strictly anarchist, which advocated libertarian and direct-action based socialism.

Hopes for unity had been somewhat enhanced, in a paradoxical way, during the winter of 1961-62, when the IRFM was still active. The new Castro regime in Cuba had arrested a large number of anarchists, some who had been part of the guerrilla force in the Sierra, but more who had taken part in the General Strike in Havana. Readers may not be aware that the Batista army and the Castro guerrillas fought each other to a stalemate. What actually made the revolution was when, behind Batista's lines, there was a General Strike in Havana. The new regime was not prepared to be beholden to revolutionaries it did not control. So Guevara had the industrial militants rounded up, while Raul Castro purged the guerrilla force of all non-Stalinists.

There had been quite a strong Cuban FORA (anarchist revolutionary workers' federation), and it appealed to the AIT for financial aid to help pay for refugees to come into exile. Naturally, the SWF got notice of the appeal, and we told Pete Turner and others, wanting to know whether to contact the LAG officially. They made soundings and Philip Sansom came to one of our meetings, saying that he supported us but that Vero was so pro-Castro he might inform the

Castro regime if he knew anarchists were raising money to help Cuban dissidents. So we had to raise money surreptitiously. The fact that we had been able to co-operate, ignoring *Freedom*, raised hopes.

We suggested, as there was no longer an anarchist federation, that a minimal statement be produced on the basis of which both anarchist publishers (the other *Freedom*, *Solidarity*, PYAG, *Contemporary Issues*, the London letter the *Bridge*) could loosely federate. That caused the shit to hit the fan. It would be painful and unnecessary to open old scars and give a full account of all that happened as we moved towards the creation of an AFB[155] (one theoretically far more restricted than the unity we'd suggested, but, as it turned out. one which was far less committed to direct action, industrial struggle and the free co-operative aim). However, I will need to mention a few stops on the way.

Resistance didn't only come from the LAG. The trouble wasn't the older active members of the SWF, though they warned that they didn't think we could pull it off while nevertheless saying it would be a great achievement. They deliberately abstained from taking part, partly for fear that it might be seen as an attempted SWF takeover, and partly to avoid inciting old hostilities. But when, in 1962, we'd rebuilt sufficiently to hold a conference, Dave Pude (not seen since 1956) turned up to put a spanner in the works (at a subsequent conference he moved a racist motion and so broke with us fully). A year later, Sean Gannon (also soon to move to the far right) held out on the impossibility of groups which lacked a shared history ever combining.

The progress of the movement was affected by a curious development which we came to call the 'Easter Anarchists'. For some reason we'd been joined on the last days of each Aldermarch by a number of youngsters, most of them wearing YCL or YS badges. On later marches, after 1963, they'd come wanting us to give them our banners. Once they'd gained these, they charged to the front of the march and tried to take over its leading positions[156]. We'd tried to explain that anarchists were not vanguardist, we were not an alternative militant leadership, we did not want to order the rank and file of CND around, and this was not an anarchist policy. I have no idea if any of them even knew we had such a thing as an anarchist policy. One year, one of them, seeing me selling Freedom, Direct Action, OXAN and a pamphlet or two, came and asked me why I was selling this selection. At first I thought this was a sectarian objection to selling more than

[155] Anarchist Federation of Britain

[156] Editorial note: I witnessed something like this on the last day of the Easter March in 1967, with a bunch of youngsters with a red and black banner led by some slightly older guy in a black beret emerging out of the main body of the march to charge along the side of the road towards the front. It was my first encounter with anarchists, though I have to say that the Sheffield YCL, LPYS and University CP contingent I was with were more amused than inclined to join in.

one paper and started to explain that they were all anarchist publications. I got the reply, "I thought anarchists rejected theory, propaganda and all that". No doubt, as his badges might have suggested, he'd paid too much attention to Stalinists or Trots, had rebelled against their discipline and believed their calumnies.

In 1963 it started slightly less farcically. We were in a larger C100 contingent and for some reason Canon Collins had decided that the C100 should be excluded from the final day of the march. Police and stewards were instructed to intercept us. As we didn't think the differences with Collins merited a full-scale sit-down, which would have completely disrupted the march, we just attempted to evade them. We were joined, as in later years, by people who clearly had no idea of what anarchism meant, nor of civil disobedience. They wanted a punch-up with stewards and police. Celia set out to explain the point of NVDA, only to have the reply from someone we'd never seen before that 'you are in an anarchist group now'. As Celia and I were behind the Oxford Anarchist banner, next to the Notting Hill one, and in front of the IRFM one (all of which she'd made), we'd been aware of that obvious fact. Celia and I left the contingent and joined up with our former Notting Hill CND branch, though I wouldn't criticise those who chose to remain.

Vero, seeing that he might lose some of his younger support, co-opted people onto the Freedom editorial board. Comrades who had only a year before complained that there was no way that ordinary anarchists could influence what went into the journal suddenly found themselves as co-editors and for a time switched sides. Previously we - in common with them - had proposed what would have been an internal journal, if there had been a federation, in which editorship could have rotated around all the groups (and the off-centre groups amongst these). This would have allowed free discussion of any issues advancing or impeding unity. Our proposal was now dismissed as 'a divisive and authoritarian proposal from the SWF'.

The first four groups due to edit were chosen, but the convenor of the first happened to be one of the newly co-opted *Freedom* editors. Before and after this he was a really good comrade, but, when he'd produced the first issue he ignored the previously agreed rota and ignored all letters and articles for the paper from groups other than those connected to *Freedom*. He denied that he had received cheques - when challenged he admitted that he had received them but hadn't realised what they were for and had handed them over to his wife to use for something else - and he announced that no other group had shown any interest in such a paper.

There was then a conference (more of a slanging match) in the Arnolfini Centre in Bristol. It was here that Stuart Christie[157] first made his presence felt among southern anarchists. He was there with a couple of other members of the Glasgow SWF, neither of whom had attended SWF national conferences nor Glasgow meetings where southerners were present. Whether they were aware that there were southern SWF members present, I don't know, but, whereas we were being at pains not to do anything that could be construed as an attempt to impose SWF ideas on others, Christie suddenly proposed that the united movement accept the SWF statement of aims, unamended. That gave the opponents of unity a field day.

A little later, I had written an answer to the Revisionist Anarchist case. Not really expecting it to be published, I had sent it to Colin Ward, who received it by the same post as two articles from proponents of the case, John Pilgrim and Jeff Robinson. So he decided to devote one issue of *Anarchy* to the three articles. Given that the journal was meant to be a space for debating differing positions, that was a fairly reasonable editorial decision.

However, it provoked a WW2 anarchist [Albert Meltzer] who had not been around for some years. I referred to him in an earlier chapter - he was one of a quartet who brought out a dissident atheist paper and, as he was at that time a right wing Tory, the paper had to be entirely devoid of any critique of capitalism or imperialism, even though two of his co-editors were still active leftists and the third, though no longer so, had made no objection to such critiques. I don't know why he was quite so provoked. It may have been because at some point I had said something about "people who have not been round the anarchist movement for years, now coming back and objecting to what we are doing". I had actually been referring to Dave Pude and Sean Gannon, but of course the person who had taken offence had also just come back. Anyway the offence caused him to engage in a truly Stalinist tactic, what was known in the 1930s as 'The Amalgam', to write using a number of misquotes as if my refutation of revisionism was in fact arguing for it[158].

I had originally written my riposte to the 'Permanent Protest' case as an article for Freedom, but Colin Ward[159] saw it on Vero's desk and asked to use it alongside articles by John Pilgrim[160] and

[157] Stuart Christie (b 1946), Scottish anarchist writer and publisher who was arrested in 1964 in Spain and imprisoned for 20 years for taking explosives to help assassinate General Franco. He was released in 1967 after an international campaign and went on to work with Anarchist Black Cross, *Black Flag* and the Cienfuegos Press.
[158] LO's article in Anarchy 68 and Meltzer's in Anarchy 71.
[159] Colin Ward (1924-2010), anarchist writer and social historian. He advocated a self-managed grassroots approach to social problems, about which he wrote prolifically in *Anarchy*, *New Society* and books and pamphlets.
[160] John Pilgrim was initially a messenger at the Guardian and then got a golden disk out. He launched a mobile book stall outside Foyle's. He was contacted by the London Anarchist Group and, when he was busy with his

Jeff Robinson. Jeff had never written for an anarchist paper before, while John had been active for years and his position was close to that of Nicolas Walter and (to a lesser extent) Colin Ward at the time. I wasn't aware that John had moved over from a syndicalist viewpoint. I think Meltzer was consciously using the amalgam technique, foisting Pilgrim and Robinson's opinions on me.

I took up the Meltzer article with Digger Walsh (who worked in Meltzer's book shop) and he accepted that it had been an amalgam but that Colin Ward was responsible for that. He said that they had gone through my article with a fine tooth comb and couldn't find anything they could object to other than that it was in an issue putting the 'revisionist' case and therefore helped to reinforce it.

By this time, Freedom's hostility over the issue of unity had concentrated its attention on me. I decided that my presence at a conference was perhaps potentially provocative, and that, in the interests of unity, I should stay away from the next one, at which a final decision on an anarchist federation was to be made. In the event, the date chosen clashed with a C100 demo, so I had a good excuse. Albert Meltzer turned up and argued in an ultra-libertarian way that there should be a federation without a committee, agreed policy, nor a secretary - which was duly decided. Then the next day he staged a coup, whereby he appointed himself national secretary and, with no mandate whatsoever, announced that the AFB considered the international body to be bureaucratic. He wrote to them and various other international bodies, denouncing them. He proceeded to brand anyone who had come to anarchism through CND and the C100 as mere liberals and to alienate as many potential anarchists as possible.

I can't say I welcomed this, or regarded his putsch with admiration. My lack of respect for his actions was not modified by the fact that he claimed to have been an active anarchist all along, even though the three people he said had been his closest comrades all insisted that he had been a Tory and that his Tory views had damaged their joint work. I felt that if he had been genuinely reconverted to anarchism, returning after his period as a Cold Warrior, he would have acknowledged the past, explained why he left and why he returned. When he came back deliberately creating unnecessary divisions, this didn't seem to be the action of someone returning to anarchism, but rather of someone determined to wreck the movement he had left twelve years before and which others had resurrected. The disagreements burgeoned into a

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music, he got two unemployed LAG members to run the stall for him. Around 1962 he got a TU sponsored course at Harlech College and later moved into academic life.

major feud. I'm told, though I haven't bothered to check, that I'm the butt of some entirely fictitious stories in the last (and most imaginative) of his three autobiographies[161].

[161] Albert Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels*. Editor's comment: I haven't checked any of this either and leave it to others with better knowledge than me to decide which version of 'Albert Meltzer' is the most accurate of the varied representations that have been made public at different times - notably the obituaries. Personally I never met him and have had no dealings with him.

Chapter 14: Postscript in Northern Ireland

The situation in the Six County Northern Irish statelet emerged at the end of the 60s as a major focus of British Leftist activity. For a time the IRA appeared to have died and its place was temporarily taken by a spontaneous civil rights movement which went in for very courageous marches. They carried on even when threatened by police or Orange thugs, the latter often being the former off-duty. There were solidarity demonstrations in Britain but nothing much more until, in late 1971, Pat Arrowsmith rang round a number of people experienced in the Direct Action Committee or Committee of 100 suggesting "we meet in Belfast on New Year's Day, there's a train leaving London at [such and such time], it'll pass through so and so, we'll have leaflets, see you on it and there."

The group at that stage had no name but was later called the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign (BWNIC). This was before Bloody Sunday but already the British Army in NI was acquiring (perhaps re-acquiring is the proper word) a reputation for being over-quick on the trigger: so Pat had gone for experience rather than numbers. There was a token nod towards secrecy in getting to Belfast, in that we were not supposed to recognize each other on the train, but as no-one had bothered to tell those who were joining the train away from London, we each made the mistake of greeting the first fellow activist we saw and had to be told to pretend we didn't know each other.

There was a hall booked for us when we arrived, about two dozen of us, with a few others such as Howard Clark[162] and Wynford Hicks[163] as reporters for the pacifist press. We had a session planning what we should do and, considering the contrary arguments of one or two long term activists who had been invited and didn't agree with the British withdrawal demand, then divided into groups of four. Each group was to go to a military barracks where – in accordance with the DAC insistence on openness – one of the four (the most experienced in civil disobedience) would go in to tell the commanding officer that we would be leafleting outside. The rest started leafleting as soon as s/he went in.

We were given the telephone numbers of a medic and a solicitor in case of emergence. My group was assigned to go to Hastings Barracks where, as it turned out, the commanding officer was

[162] Howard Clark (1950-2013) was a radical pacifist and peace activist who joined Peace News in 1971 after studying at UEA. He helped launch London Greenpeace and was eventually a full time worker at the War Resisters International office in London from 1985.
[163] Wynford Hicks was a prominent journalist and has written much on the subject of journalism.

apparently more gung-ho than his fellow COs – these latter were quite content to acknowledge that the leafleting was going on and take no more notice.

I was shown into a room and there a 'corporal' came to interview me and then I was left with some sergeants. I soon realised there was something wrong as, when the corporal came, the sergeants called him 'sir' (not something that was ever done when I was a corporal). I didn't know that, while I was in the room, a reporter from the *Guardian*, one from a Belfast newspaper and Wynford Hicks called to get the CO's comments. He apparently stood like a character in a Wild West film, holding a pistol and ordering them out. I had assumed that the corporal was a junior officer in the Army Special Investigation Bureau, but from Wynford's account I had apparently met the CO in disguise. I was left alone in the room several hours and regretted that I hadn't brought a book in with me, so went to sleep.

A few hours later I was transported to the Girdwood Barracks[164]. There was even more melodrama as a young corporal tried to look fierce with a revolver, which however he held limply, not pointing at me – something of a giveaway. Back in 1948, I hadn't had the courage to go to prison rather than doing my National Service and though later I got downgraded to be a medic so as to avoid firearms, I did at first undergo basic training. One thing that I remembered was that you never hold a revolver limply when you have someone you think might be an enemy in the room. Then I looked up. The parts of the ceiling by the walls had been ripped out so that sentries in the room above had me under observation. If they assumed I was IRA I was being tempted to disarm the corporal so that I could be shot from above.

There had been a rather revealing comment from the RUC men (whose job was further evidence of the myth that the Six Counties and the UK were one country) who transported me between barracks. I remarked on the fact that I had not been arrested, I had been held without arrest for several hours and had not been allowed to make contact with others. They replied: "When you come to this State, you forfeit your rights under habeas corpus".

I had some quiet amusement pointing out to the corporal that I hadn't been charged with anything. He then asked plaintively why I was being hostile. I said I didn't think I was, but given that they had brought me to a room with an obvious trap they could hardly be surprised that I was wary. I was then taken into the next room and made to sit with a hood over my head. That was some years before John McGuffin wrote[165] *The Guinea Pigs* and so I didn't know what they were doing. While I was there I experienced white noise, standing in awkward positions with

[164] Long Kesh, later called the Maze, was to be built as an overflow from Girdwood.
[165] John McGuffin (1942-2002) was a political activist and author from Scotland.

arms against the wall and so forth. Fortunately I am all too apt to go to sleep under almost any circumstances and it didn't really bother me – though I was grateful to McGuffin when eventually his book told me what it was all about.

Several hours later they decided to release me and I went back to the hall and rejoined the BWNIC group. One little incident provides some light relief. There was a group of Northern Irish Stalinists at the hall, treating us as if we were a bunch of conquering heroes. A fortnight later there was a demo in London opposing British Government complicity with the racist regime in Southern Rhodesia[166] and one of these Belfast Stalinists who had made a particular of lauding me in Belfast was standing by the roadside yelling abuse at the demonstrators. He alleged they were ignoring Ireland and only interest in 'minor matters'. He didn't recognize me when I went up and tried to argue with him.

[166] Zimbabwe

Editor's Appendix: Laurens Otter's Ancestry

As described in the preface to these memoirs, it has been my editorial decision to allow what Laurens believed to be true about his family background to form the main text, while providing this appendix in order to disentangle mythology, Chinese whispers and other extraneous factors from what is public record. I have used what Laurens has provided in order to explore the families from which he is descended to explore what lies beneath the stories told and the memories passed on. In standard family research process, this is done in reverse order from the present to the past.

Immediate Family [Chart 1]

Laurens himself was born in Switzerland in 1930, the second son of Francis Lewis Otter and Helen (née Stephens), who had married in 1924 in South Africa after an on-board courtship on the journey out to the next step in their respective careers. Francis Otter was working for Merz and Maclellan, civil engineers, and Helen was to take up a post with Roedean in South Africa, teaching French. Laurens has an older brother, Robin, born 25 February 1926 in South Africa.

Both parents had seen service in the Great War, Francis as an officer in the army (rising to the temporary rank of Major) and Helen as a driver for a nursing auxiliary. Francis was commissioned from the rank of Private to 2nd Lieutenant with effect from 14 October 1914 [London Gazette, p 8152, 13 October 1914] and later rose to (at least) the rank of Captain.

The available public records confirm that Francis was awarded the Military Cross, at least once, in 1917 [London Gazette p 11110 27 October 1917 & Edinburgh Gazette p 2272 30 Oct 1917, Captain in the London Regiment]. As other awards mentioned were made under different names, I have not been able to positively confirm the dates. However, there is a citation for the Military Cross (not bar to) published in the London Gazette p 3429, 18 March 1918, which reads:

> 'Capt. Francis Lewis Otter, London R.
>
> For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He was the only company officer left with the battalion in an attack. He collected and re-organised the remnants of four companies, and led them to their final objectives. He showed marked ability in his dispositions for a counter-attack, and inspired all ranks by his high standard of courage and coolness.'

The difference in dates between these two references does suggest the possibility of two separate awards. Searches under the name 'Lewis Gamble' or variants, have failed to turn up a reference, which proves nothing either way. There is no reason to doubt the story Laurens was told about three separate MCs in different names.

Helen Stephens was listed as a driver for the London Unit of the Scottish Women's Hospitals from 7 May 1918 to 3 September 1918. She may very well have then transferred to the Salonika Front in the Balkans. Unfortunately there is no extant history of the Scottish Women's Hospital units which would help to confirm the details of her involvement. The main published history of the Salonika Campaign [Wakefield and Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye*] confirms the advance of French and allied units into Serbia in the days preceding the Armistice, but the only mention of hospitals is the state of abandoned German and Bulgarian ones and the allied soldiers in them, as these were progressively over-run. Unfortunately there is no reference regarding a German surrender to a nurse. There are archives in the public domain which may contain information about overseas units of the SWH. At this point in time, the story of the surrender is therefore perfectly plausible but not confirmed.

Francis Lewis Otter died on 18 July 1946 and a notice appeared in the London Gazette 6 May 1947 p 2047 pertaining to the conveyance of the will, giving the home address as 2 Madeira Avenue, Bognor Regis, Sussex and his occupation as Assistant Secretary, Central Electricity Board. Helen Otter, née Stephens, died in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire in 1988.

Father's Immediate Family [Chart 2]

Francis Lewis Otter was born in 1886 in Ottershaw, Surrey and was the second son of Robert Henry Otter and Isabella Harriet Gamble. The eldest son was Robert Edward, referred to by Laurens as Uncle Bobby, born 1882. He was a barrister by profession, was involved in the drafting of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and served as judge in Rangoon, where he died in the 1930s. His two children, Laurens's cousins, were Michael, who lost his life in the Far East during WW2 and Jennifer, known as Jinx. Francis Lewis Otter, Laurens's father, was an engineer for Merz and Maclellan and then worked in the legal and secretarial function of the Board with the Central Electricity Board until his death in 1946. There were two sisters, Laurens's aunts - Janet Katherine Otter, born 1888, who never married and died in 1965; and Margaret Isabella Otter, born 1892, who married Bernard Thomas Williams while in Burma shortly before the Japanese invasion. They escaped from Burma just in time - she on the last ship, he with the troops by land - and settled in Kashmir for the duration. She died in 1982.

The grandfather, Robert Henry Otter, came from minor landed gentry in the Nottinghamshire/ Lincolnshire area. He was the youngest of the family and made his way in the world through the legal profession, as well as inheriting property from various aunts. He was able to send the two sons to Harrow and on to Oxford University. Older brothers served in the Royal Navy, the Indian Army and the Church of England.

The grandmother, Isabella Harriet Gamble, came from equally well-connected stock, her father being Surgeon to Queen Victoria and several other males serving to high ranks within the Royal Navy. She herself was one of the first group of female students to attend Girton College, albeit at their original establishment in Hertfordshire.

Robert Henry Otter had struggled through the legal profession, working his way up from articled clerk. Between 1881 and 1891 his fortunes vastly improved. From a fairly modest villa house in St Leonards in 1881, he had moved by 1891 to Queenwood in Ottershaw, Chertsey, in Surrey. From three servants, he now employed eight and was able to entertain six relatives as visitors, alongside his wife and, by now, three young children (though he himself was absent at the time of the census). This certainly fits the pattern of having inherited a small fortune from his aunts. In 1901, Francis Lewis Otter was away from home as a pupil at Harrow, but the Queenwood family home still employed eight servants including the governess Alice Lozell, who was allegedly paid less than the cook, Mary Lawrence, for teaching the two girls, Janet and Margaret. The eldest son, Robert Edward was down from Oxford along with a friend, Gilbert Williams.

Mother's Immediate Family [Chart 3]

Helen Stephens was born 1893 in Chorlton, Lancashire, the eldest child of George Stephens and Kate Carter, both from Warminster in Wiltshire. She had two younger brothers, uncles to Laurens, James and Oliver. Her younger sister, Georgina, was known familiarly as Aunt Ena. Both James and Oliver served in the Royal Flying Corps in WW1 and both worked as forestry officers in India. Oliver suffered from malaria and returned to England, where he married Frances Courtauld and eventually committed suicide. James remained in the Indian forestry department after independence.

George Stephens worked his way up through the hotel trade, while Kate went into domestic service. They married in Gloucester in 1892 and carried on in the hotel business in the Manchester area until about 1897, when they moved back to Warminster where George took on the family farming and haulage business.

They are first evident as a couple in Census records in 1901, living at Portway Cottage, Portway, with George described as a coal merchant aged 42. Kate was 38 and they had three children born in Chorlton (Helen 7, James 5 and Oliver 3) with their youngest Georgina born the previous year in Warminster.

George had left his family home sometime in the 1870s. In 1881 he was 'boots' at the St James' Hotel, Derby where the principal guest at the time was Charles Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. In 1891 he was in lodgings at 32 Upper Tamworth Street, Stretford, in Lancashire and worked as a hotel porter.

Kate had also left home in the late 1870s to work in domestic service. In 1881, aged 19, she was servant to Marianne Linnell and family at 51 Kedleston Road in Derby. She is quite likely to have met George in Derby at this time, but by 1891 she was in service as housemaid to the Grey family at 27 Gledhow Gardens, Kensington.

Paternal Grandfather's Family [Chart 4]

Robert Henry Otter was born around 1837-8, the seventh child and sixth son of Francis Otter, landowner from Clayworth, Nottinghamshire - so he was a few years younger than Laurens's version has suggested. Francis Otter married three times, though all the children were born from the first marriage. Of the eldest sons, one rose to high rank in the Royal Navy, while at least two of the others served with the Indian Army on the North West Frontier and in Afghanistan. Francis Otter is last found in the 1871 Census at Ranby Hall with his third wife Rebecca (who moved after his death to live in London) and son Francis, unmarried at age 39.

The Census records illustrate the movements of Robert Henry and his siblings, as well as the parents. In 1841, Francis Otter not traced, but the children were at Edge End, Nether Edge, Sheffield living in the house of Robert Younge, Wine Merchant. Robert was the youngest of four staying there (Francis, Elizabeth, John being the other three). Also staying there was Helen Fisher, then aged 20, who later became the second wife of their father, Francis Otter. In 1851 the two boys, in the company of Helen Fisher again, were at 20 Edward Street, Rugby in Warwickshire. Aged 16 and 14 respectively, John and Robert were at school there.

John Otter became a clergyman in the Church of England and it is probably his copy of the Apocrypha that Laurens now has. In 1861 he was Vicar of Ranby in Lincolnshire and lived at Ranby House with his father Francis and the latter's second wife, Helen (née Fisher).

It is probable that an uncle of Robert Henry Otter was Rear-Admiral Henry Charles Otter, C.B., (1807-1876) who completed the hydrographic survey of the Western Isles, and whose obituary appeared in the publication of the Royal Astronomical Society Vol 37 p 129, 1877.

Robert Henry, being the youngest of six sons, was not the beneficiary of much of the family's landed wealth, other than what came to him from aunts when he had already established himself in the legal profession. His progress can be tracked through the Census records, via Bristol to the Sussex coast and then to Surrey, by which time his dependence on the legal profession for income had substantially diminished. In 1861, Robert Henry Otter was a solicitor's articled clerk, aged 24, lodging at 12 Grove Terrace, Leeds. Still unmarried at the age of 33, he was a qualified Attorney and Solicitor lodging at 4 Harley Place, Clifton, Bristol in 1871. By 1881 he was married, aged 44 with his wife Isabella aged 29 and no children, at St Leonards near Hastings.

Paternal Grandmother's Family [Chart 5]

Isabella Harriet Gamble was the fourth child and only daughter of Harpur Gamble and Isabella Sykes. Harpur Gamble was the Surgeon to Queen Victoria. Both he and his wife were from Northern Irish landed stock. He qualified in medicine at Edinburgh and she had connections to literary and artistic circles.

In 1841 Harper Gamble 50, described as 'physician' and born in Ireland, was living in Marylebone, London with his wife Isabella aged 25, born in London. They lived relatively modestly with one servant, Anne Hopecroft. By 1851, now described as 'Physician Edinburgh Surgeon R.V.', Harper and Isabella had two young children: James S aged 3 and Edward H aged 1. The eldest child, John George, was not living with them and may have been at boarding school aged 9. The family now had three servants and they lived at 47 Charlotte Street, St Pancras. The mother died in 1854 in Worthing, Sussex, and in 1861 the family still lived at Charlotte Street. The household was smaller, Harper being accompanied only by his daughter Isabella aged 9, and his son John George, down from Oxford University. There were two servants. Harper continued to be royal physician surgeon. James and Edward would have both been at boarding school. Harper died in 1865 at which time John would have graduated at 23, James would have been 18 up at Oxford, while Edward was still at school at New Cross. Isabella was only 14.

All three of Isabella's older brothers were educated with the potential of going into the Royal Navy. John George Gamble (1842-1889) was educated at the Royal Naval School, New Cross until 1859 and subsequently at Magdalen College, Oxford. Following work with Sir John

Hawkshaw he became an expert in civil engineering applications involving water - sewage systems, docks and harbours and waterworks on a global scale. He was a prominent member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. Ironically, he died of typhoid fever while working as Chief Hydraulic Engineer on the Shannon drainage scheme in Ireland. James Sykes Gamble followed a similar educational path but went on to the *École Nationale des Eaux et Forêts*, Nancy to specialise in forest botany. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society on the strength of some important publications and his work in forest conservation in India. The third son, Edward Harpur Gamble, was also educated at the Royal Naval School and then did go into the Navy - he was recorded in the 1871 Census on board a ship in Naples at the rank of Sub-Lieutenant. He eventually rose to the rank of Admiral in 1911, though immediately went on to the Retired List. There was a fourth son, Alexander, born 24 June 1853, but he died young in 1860.

Isabella was desirous of higher education like her older brothers and was determined to be one of the first ladies to attend University. In the 1871 Census she appears aged 19 as a student at the College for Women at Benslow Road, Hitchin - the fore-runner of Girton College, Cambridge. However, the story that she was disinherited by her father for wishing to go to the College does not accord with the evidence, nor does the story that he kept her from 'polite society'. Her father had died several years before in 1865, when she was only 14 years old. However, it may have been true that her older brother, James Sykes Gamble, was modern enough to wish to provide her with financial support for this venture, though he sailed to India in 1871. John George Gamble was pursuing his career in engineering with Sir John Hawkshaw and was living in a small apartment at 7 Egbert Street, St Pancras. It may have been that there were provisions in her father's will that might have militated against her attending higher education, and perhaps her brother intervened to bridge the gap.

Precisely what is meant by the story that she went on to work with the family of Edward Lear is not entirely clear. Edward Lear himself never married and was constantly travelling during the 1870s, only ever in Britain for visits and eventually settling in Italy. It can only have been relatives of the famous nonsense poet and artist. Nevertheless, if one were looking for highly educated and accomplished antecedents for Laurens, the Gambles represented a significant family inheritance.

Maternal Grandfather's Family [Chart 6]

George Stephens was born George Stevens in 1859 in Warminster, Wiltshire. He was the eighth child of at least ten surviving children of James Stevens and Eliza S. Collett, who married around

1844. She was some fourteen years younger than he and they potentially had about fifteen children, based on normal birth intervals. This is a long way from the family story, which exaggerates the age gap by a factor of two and the number of children similarly. Nevertheless, Eliza was certainly a vigorous woman, as she has been remembered, and lived to a good age, dying at the age of 76 in 1902.

The growing family can be traced through the census from 1851 onwards. That year they lived at Pound Street, Warminster. Thomas Stevens aged 70, widower with no recorded occupation, was head. The main family consisted of James 38, labourer (from Upton Scudamore), Eliza 28 his wife (from Brotton, Wilts) and four children: Eliza 5, Maria 4, Elizabeth 2 and John just a few months old. They were still in Pound Street in 1861 with James now described as 'carter'. Daughter Eliza 15 was still at home aged 15 and working as a silk winder. Maria had died, while Elizabeth aged 12 was already in service to Henry Batchelor. John aged 10 was working as an errand boy and had been joined by five more siblings: Tom 8, Frank 6, Mary Ann 4, George 2 and another baby Maria. In the 1871 Census the spelling changed to 'Stephens' and James was now a coal merchant. John (French Polisher), Frank (errand boy) and Mary Ann (dress maker) were still at home contributing to the household income, while George and Maria had been joined by little Edith aged 2. [It is not proven, but the likelihood of a further child before Edith having been born and died during the ten year period is high: a Sidney and Harriet Stephens both died in infancy around 1864.] By 1881 James Stephens had died (1875) and Eliza Stephens ran the coal dealing business with her unmarried son John aged 30. Maria was a dressmaker and Edith was at school. John married (Keziah) and continued to run a haulage business, which he was doing in 1891 from 10 West Street, Warminster.

The stories with respect to George's father and his origins are difficult, if not impossible to prove, with the kind of records available to researchers and still surviving. Nevertheless, the father's name can be clearly established as James, not John, and his father in turn was Thomas and the more likely subject of the stories about the emergence of the carrying firm from nothing. James seems to have certainly done well for himself in that tradition, however.

George Stevens (the spelling evolved into the 'ph' version in the late 1860s) left home and worked in the hotel trade, confirmed by references within the census. The birth of his children primarily in the Chorlton area of Manchester indicates that he was fairly settled there before returning to Warminster to set up in business, amongst other things, breeding shire horses. There would be a ready market for these in the family carting business run by his brother John,

though, as both had fiery tempers they would sometimes be seen in Warminster market lashing at each other with horsewhips!

The story about George's older sister, 'Great Aunt Mary Ann', has an air of exaggeration. She was only 3 years older than George and, born in 1856, would have been in her 80s just before WW2, rather than her 90s, and only six years older than George's wife Kate. This is not to say that she was not a dominant force in that relationship.

Maternal Grandmother's Family [Chart 7]

The stories relating to Kate (or Kit) Carter's origins seem to be a mixture of myth and probability. Kate was the fifth and youngest child of William Carter of Warminster and Matilda Irons. It is difficult to be absolutely sure of dates, because of gaps between events and registration, as well as the relative commonality of the name 'Carter'. Certainly Matilda's husband William was very young when they married, possibly 15 or 16 at the most, and this rings true with the family story about their ignorance of the facts of life when they came to be together. In 1851 at the time of the census, William was the eldest of five children at 15, with his widowed mother Anne Carter, who was described as 'domestic' worker. Matilda was not traced in the 1851 census but may have been working for the widowed Anne Carter (in whatever circumstance - I would most naturally assume domestic service). The tale that she was sold makes no sense in relation to the actual records, unless a fee was paid to the Workhouse when she went into service.

Similarly, the story about Matilda's origins as the daughter of a mysterious foreign incomer turns out to be more prosaic. In 1841 she was an inmate of the Warminster Workhouse along with her younger sister Sarah Jane. So there most certainly were two young girls, parentless and housed in the poor house. However, both had been born in Warminster, and the name Irons (though not common) was established in the general area, mainly among itinerant families. Both girls were trained for domestic service, following the workhouse pattern - though only Sarah Jane can be accounted for in the 1851 census, working in London.

It was in 1851 that Matilda and William were married, with their first child being born within the year. William also died young as far as can be ascertained before Kate was born. Matilda was probably only just widowed at the time of the 1861 Census (7/8 April), as her husband's death was registered in the April-June (second) quarter of that year. In 1861 the family lived at Pound Street, Warminster and Matilda was reliant on her earnings as a needlewoman to look after her then four children: Oliver 9, Charles 6, George 4 and Sarah 1. She had with her a married visitor

in the form of Sarah Hatfield, who may have been a lodger or a relative (too young at 23 to be her sister). Kate's birth was registered in the third quarter of 1862, more than a year later. Matilda moved to Bath in Somerset. According to Laurens's mother she was raped more than once, Kate was the product of rape, and this was possibly her reason for escaping Warminster. Laurens does not believe this story and, in any case, simply having a child outside of marriage at that time would in itself have been enough public humiliation. She was living at 6 Millers Court, Bath in 1871, with her son Charles (working as a butcher) and daughter Kate. She made ends meet as a dress maker until her death in Bath in 1875, when Kate would have been only 12. Kate would almost certainly have had to go into service at that young age unless her brother could maintain her for a year or two. It was a hard start in life for Laurens's grandmother.

Conclusions

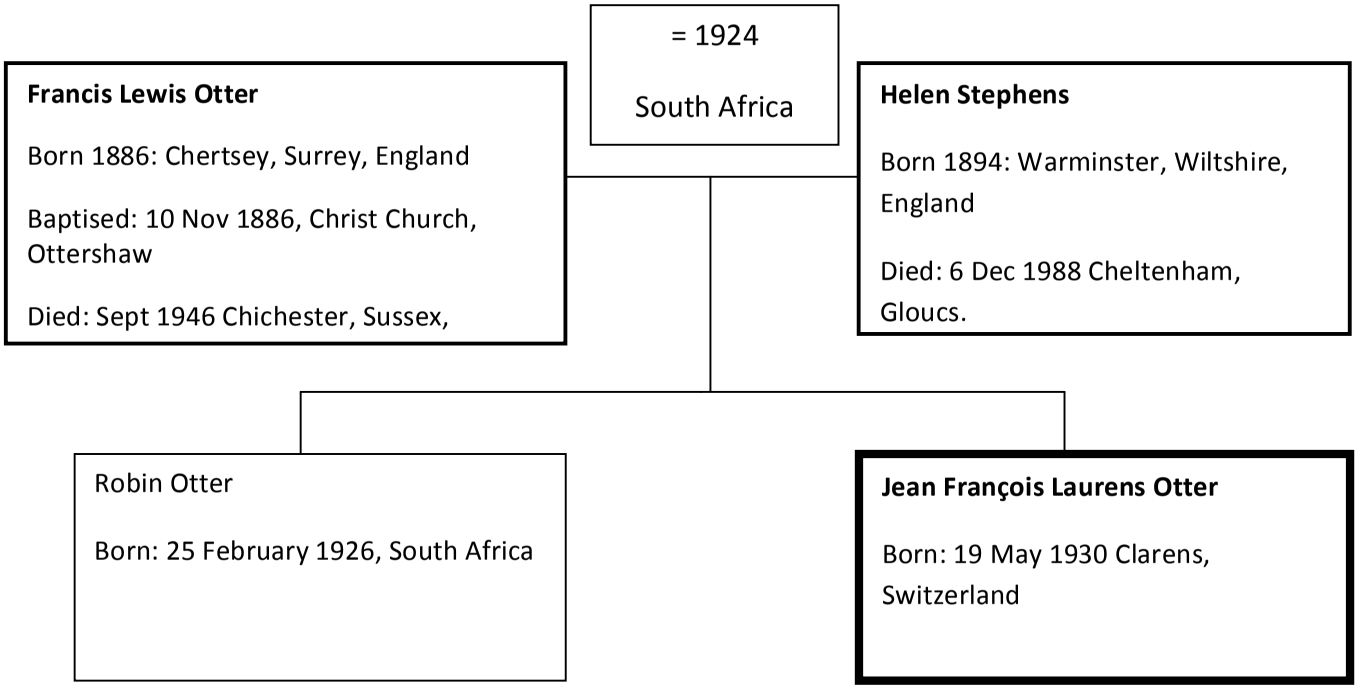
The two parental strands are quite different in many respects. Certainly the paternal side was of much more privileged origins, with landholdings in the north Midlands and northern Ireland. Their network of connections among people of their class, linking the land to the professions, the military and the navy, mark them out as being part of the administrative class of the Empire. The access this also gave them to the cultural élite, which in this instance includes a strong scientific element, as well as literary and artistic, marks them out as part of the generally 'liberal' elements within the class. As Laurens derived from what was always the youngest branch of each generation, his parentage was strongly marked out as having to make its way in the world according to its wits and talents.

The maternal side in all respects represents a development from hardship to a tenuous hold on some degree of landed respectability, much more closely related to basic rural trades - cartage, coal haulage, horse-breeding. They would have suffered somewhat in the 1890s, when British agriculture went through difficult times. Much of what passes for mythology in the way these origins were elaborated by Laurens's mother is quite easily excusable, especially where it relates to the stigma of the workhouse.

The bringing together of these two family strands seems somewhat accidental, having as much to do with circumstance as design. If Francis Lewis Otter was shy and diffident with women, he would have found the feisty Helen Stephens attractive on board ship to South Africa, especially after having failed to do what was anticipated by proposing to Doris Trevelyan, someone from the family's established network. He was himself somewhat of a war hero, while Helen had tales of her own, from Salonika and Versailles. They were both part of a new generation emerging

from the maelstrom of what was hoped to have been 'the war to end all wars', and hoping for better things. Their world did not turn out that way, but between them they provided a rich inheritance for Laurens Otter. Perhaps it was especially fitting, therefore, that as Laurens extended the radical elements of his ancestry that he should meet and marry Celia, who also came from a naval background and shared his radical outlook.

The Otter Descendancy: Laurens Otter



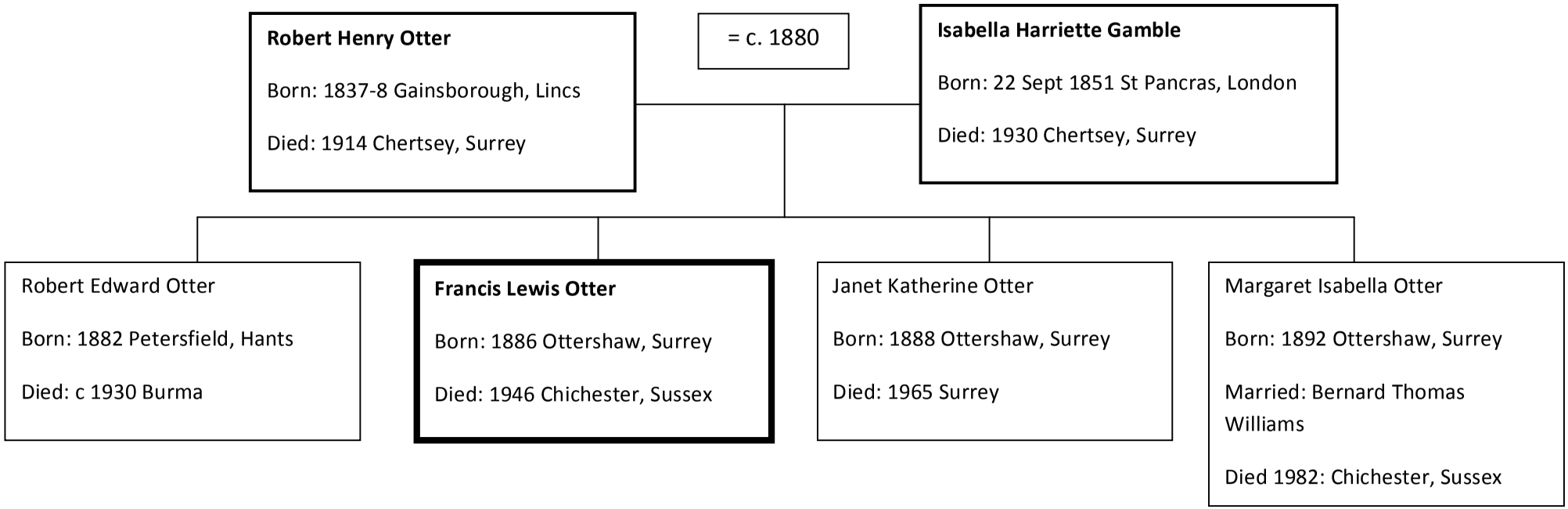
Francis Lewis Otter and Helen Stephens married in South Africa in 1924, living mainly in Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg.

For the father's family see Chart 2

For the mother's family see Chart 3

CHART 1

The Otter Descendancy: Francis Lewis Otter, (Father)



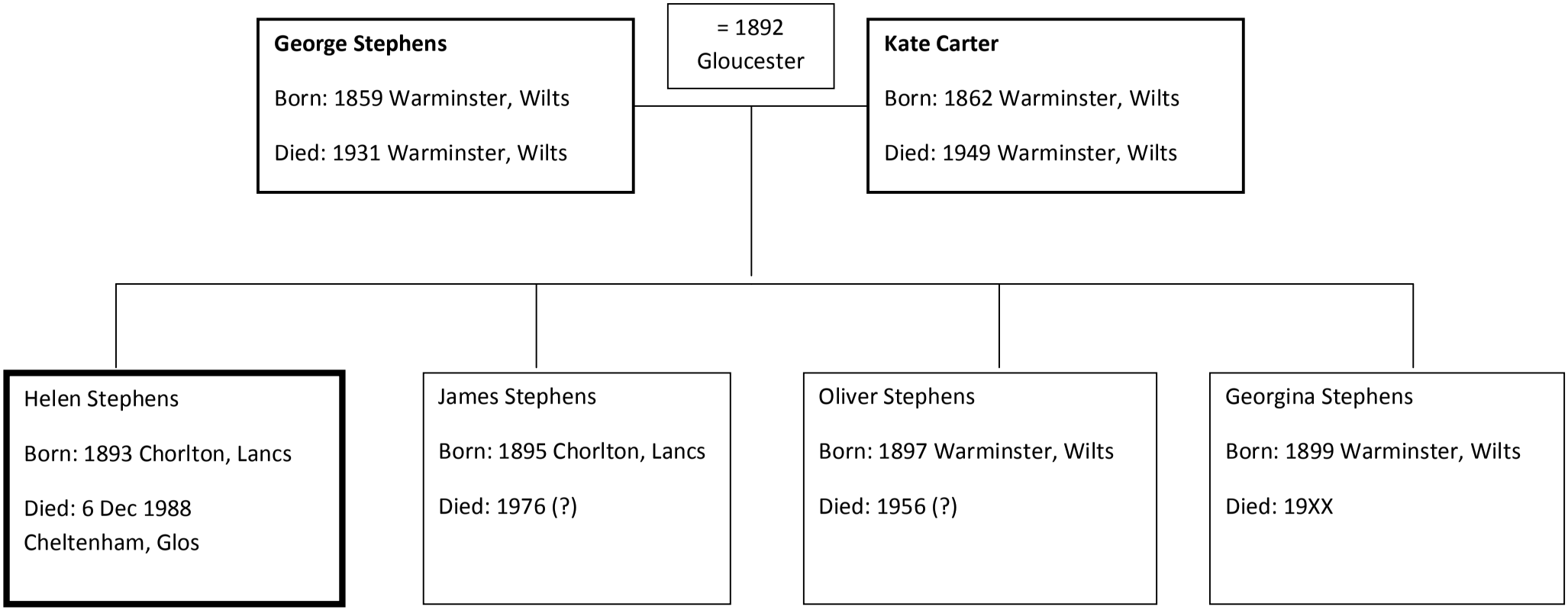
Robert Henry Otter (paternal grandfather) and Isabella Gamble (paternal grandmother) married c 1880

For grandfather's family see Chart 4

For grandmother's family see Chart 5

CHART 2

The Otter Descendancy: Helen Stephens, Mother

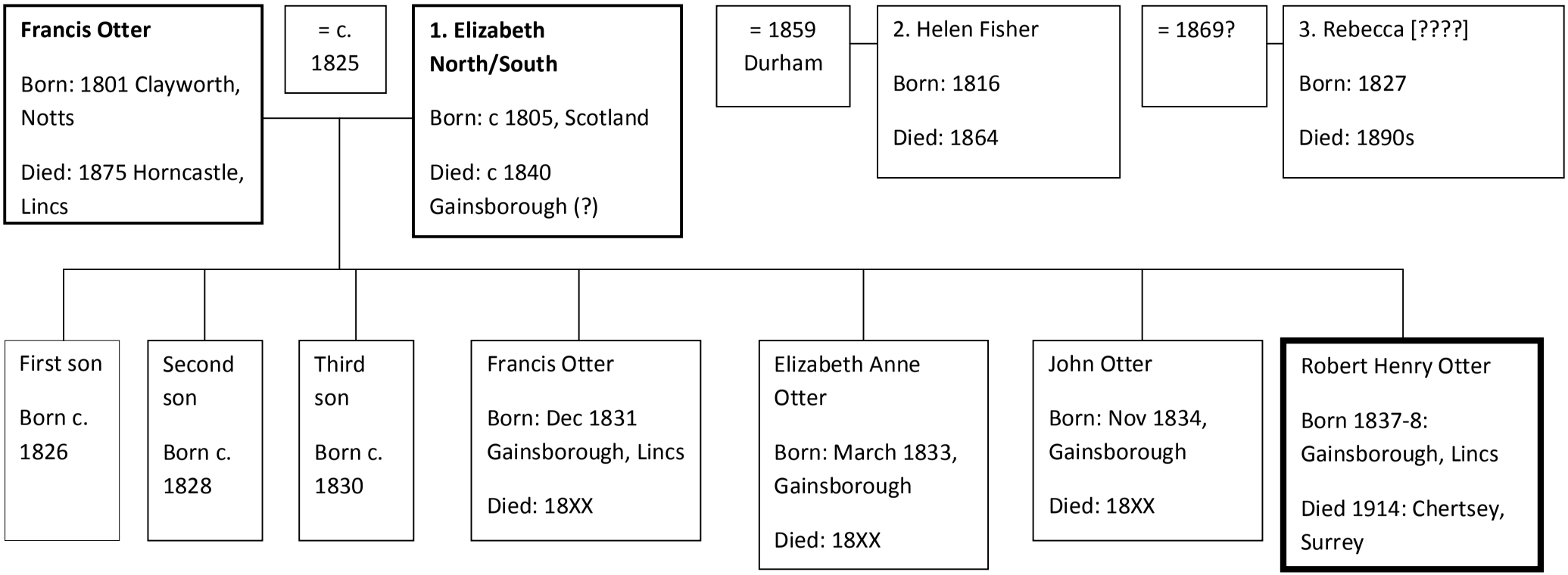


For grandfather's family see Chart 6

For grandmother's family see Chart 7

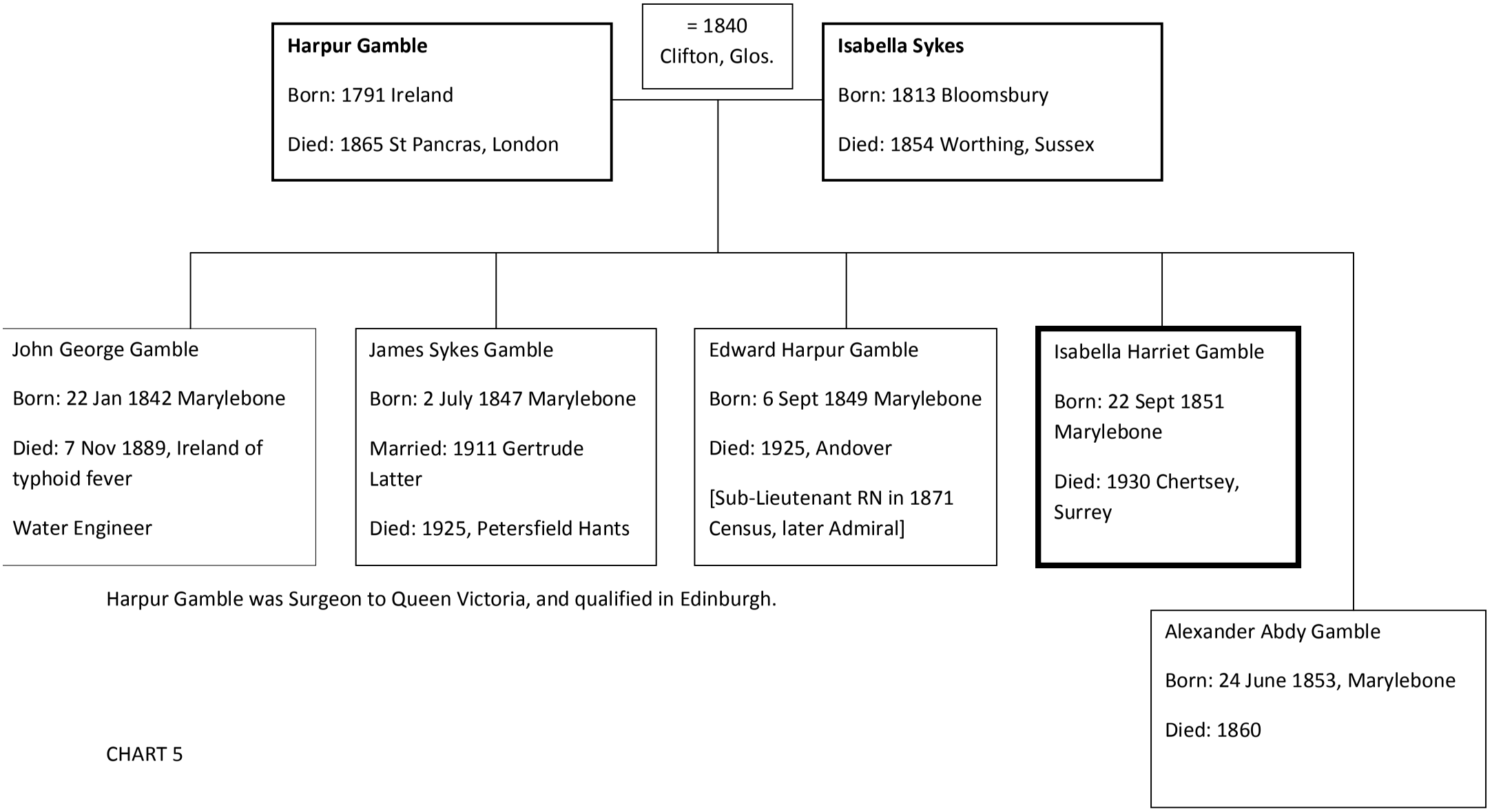
CHART 3

The Otter Descendancy: Robert Henry Otter, grandfather



Note: Francis Otter, great-grandfather, married three times, but all the children were from the first marriage.

The Otter Descendancy: Isabella Gamble, grandmother



Harpur Gamble was Surgeon to Queen Victoria, and qualified in Edinburgh.

CHART 5

The Otter Descendancy: George Stephens/ Stevens, grandfather

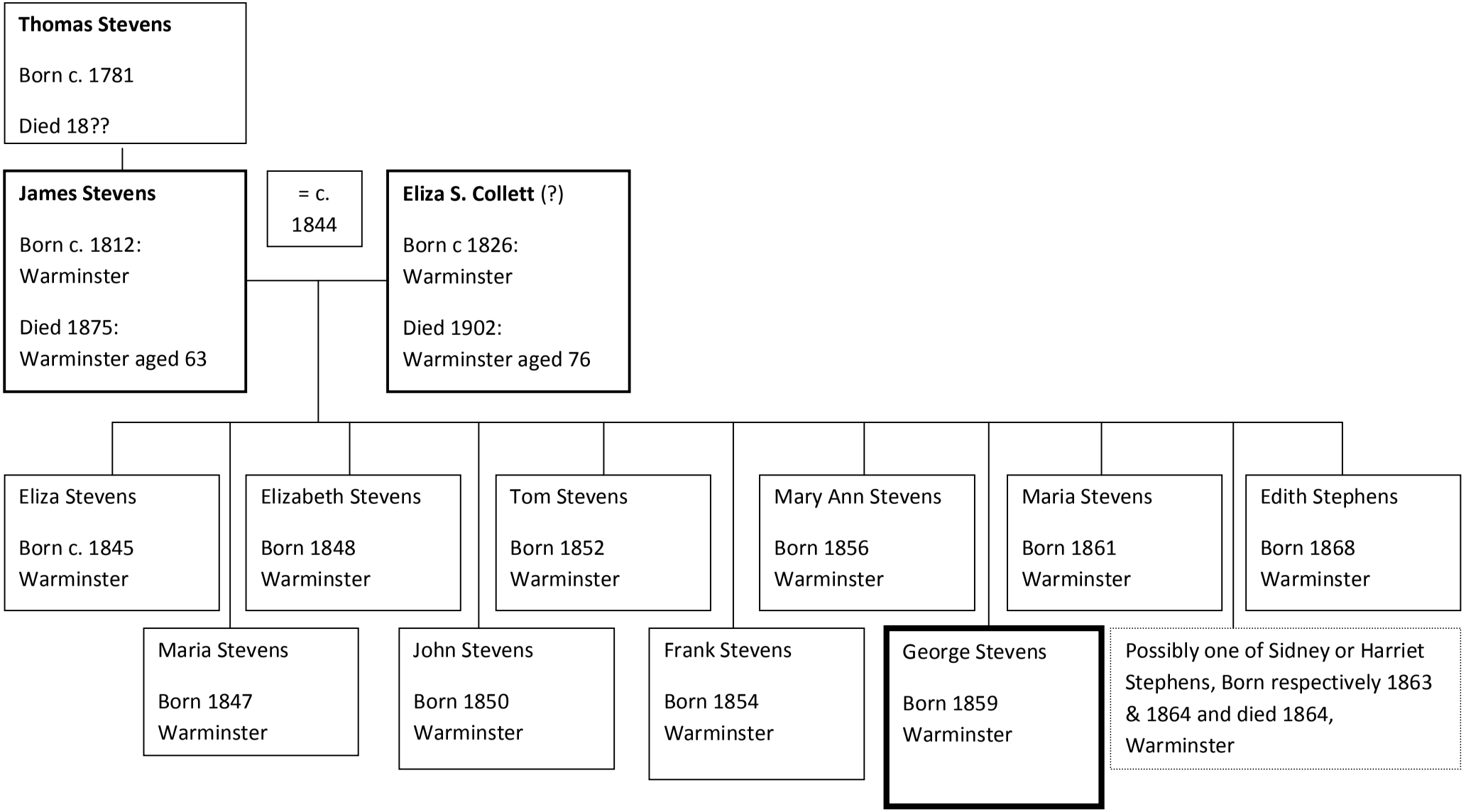
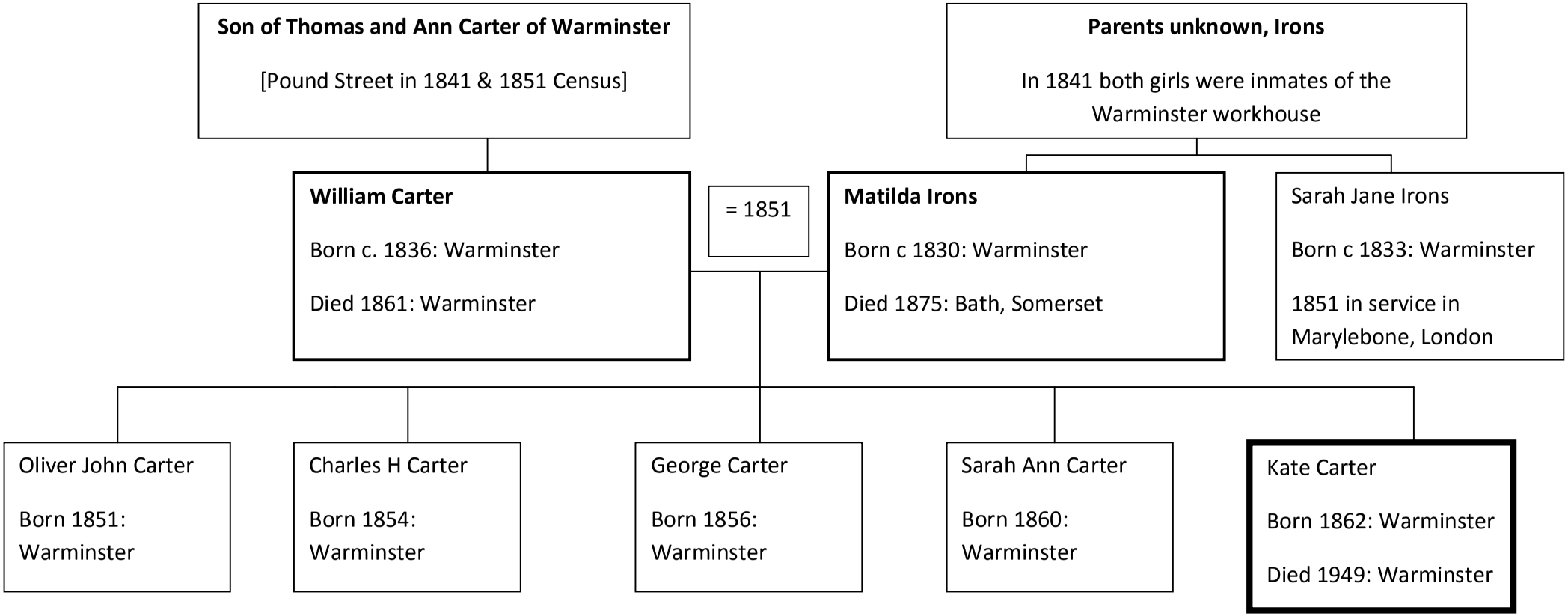


CHART 6

The Otter Descendancy: Kate Carter, grandmother



Matilda Irons is not accounted for in the 1851 Census and it is noticeable that William Carter would have been only 15 at the age of marriage, which accords with the family story that Matilda may have been working in the Carter household supporting the widowed mother, Ann Carter, and that she and William formed a liaison. There is nothing to confirm the story that Matilda and her sister, Sarah Jane, were the daughters of some mysterious foreign incomer, other than perhaps a travelling family.

CHART 7