

# Black Flag

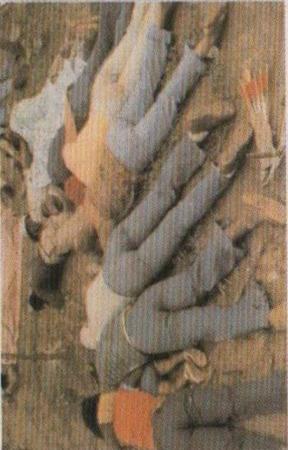
18

Price: £3.00

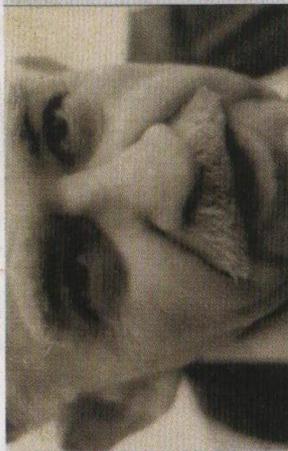
Issue: 226

Date: 2007

Centre pages:  
Maurice  
Brinton on  
cults

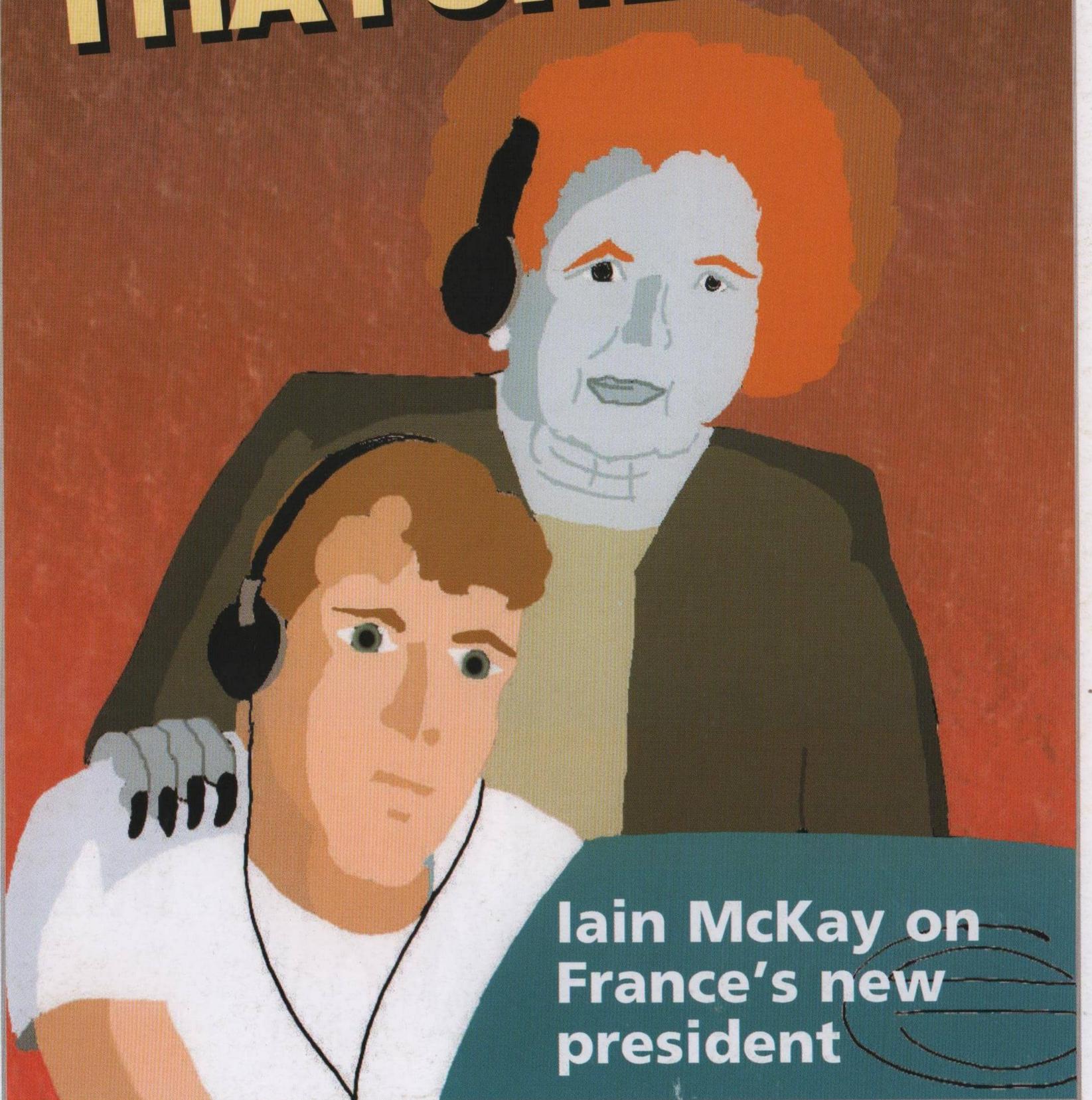


Obituary:  
The life of  
Murray  
Bookchin



Also inside  
this issue...

WHEN YOU DOWNLOAD  
SARKOZY YOU'RE  
DOWNLOADING  
THATCHERISM



Iain McKay on  
France's new  
president

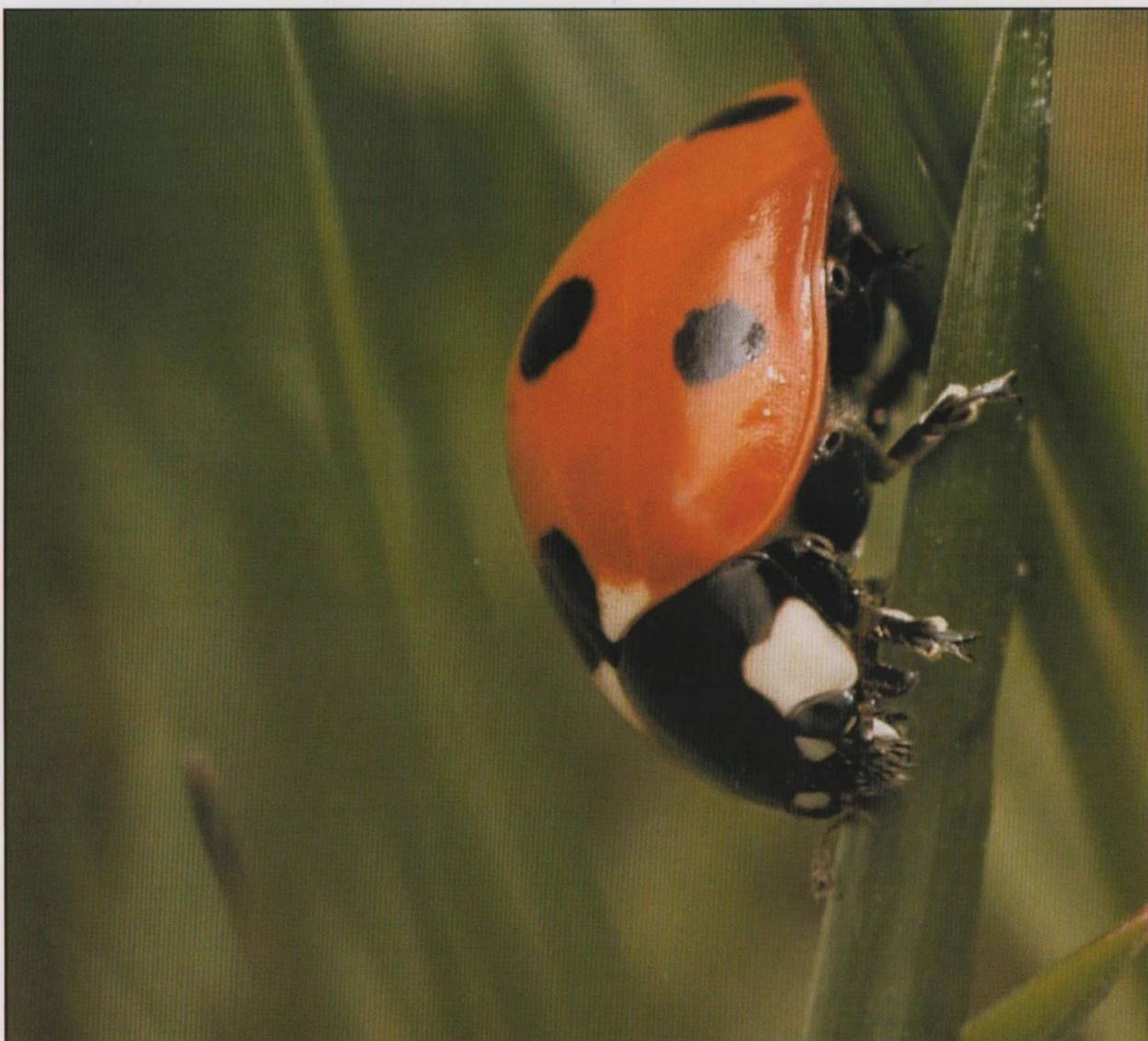
## Editorial

After a year off, Black Flag has returned! The good news is that we have a new collective, even if it is on the small side. Even better, we are working closely with the editors of Freedom (who we can thank for the new layout!). Now we are sure that is something Albert Meltzer would never have expected to see in Black Flag – which shows how much things have improved in the anarchist movement over the last ten years or so.

So, what is in this issue? Lots of articles about dead people and the past! We have articles on the 1936 French factory occupations and a lengthy review of the new Durruti biography (which makes up for missing the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution). Then there are the obituaries for three important libertarians who have recently passed away – Murray Bookchin, Chris Pallis (better known as Maurice Brinton) and stalwart of the Glaswegian anarchist movement since the 1930s, John Taylor Caldwell.

While there is an analysis of the recent French Presidential elections, there is a lack of articles on current events. This is to be expected from a magazine which has sadly been annual for the last few years. We are also dependent on people contributing articles, so if you want Black Flag to cover more recent events then please contact us and write something! We aim to increase the regularity of the magazine, hoping to have two issues out next year, then three the following one before going back to quarterly (but we have said this before, and failed). If you want to see this happen, then get involved – we are dependent on help of our comrades. If this is not forthcoming, neither will be Black Flag! It really is as simple as that.

Finally, some may question whether the UK anarchist scene needs another anarchist magazine. We have "Direct Action", "Organise!" and "A Touch of Class" – is there a need for Black Flag? We think so but we would be more than happy to merge with other journals to produce one good quality quarterly magazine rather than four adequate ones. Whether this will happen depends on numerous factors, but the benefits of so doing should sense on numerous levels. Perhaps if we concentrate on what unites us rather than the ultimately minor issues in which we differ, then perhaps the British anarchism could build on its many strengths and produce a media which people outside the movement will find of interest and so help our movement grow.



**WHY LADYBIRDS?** Well, because they help rid the world of parasites, and they have a great colour scheme.

*Photograph: Anya Brennan*

# FREE DOM

## Black Flag



### WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT ONE?

# Contents

---

■ **Cover story:** Nicolas Sarkozy has the attitude, but does he have the strength? Page 4

■ **Analysis:** How the French Popular Front of 1936 had the potential to be so much more. Page 7

■ **Obituary:** Looking over the remarkable life of Murray Bookchin, a founding father of social ecology Page 13

■ **Review:** Andrew Flood lauds a long overdue recognition of the contribution of revolutionary Lucy Parsons Page 18

■ **Centre spread:** Maurice Brinton explains the pitfalls and parallels of sects and socialism, followed by a review of the last book he wrote before his death in 2004 Page 20

■ **Review/History:** Richard Alexander takes an extensive look at the life and times of Buenaventura Durruti, as told by Abel Paz Page 26

■ **Analysis:** In the first of a two-part series, Iain McKay delves into the Russian Revolution. Page 35

## Ethos

Black Flag is for a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation – against state control and all forms of government and economic repression.

To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

## About

### Contributors/excerpts:

Richard Alexander  
David Berry  
Murray Bookchin  
Maurice Brinton  
Andrew Flood  
Iain McKay  
Alan Woodward

### Layout/design

Rob Ray  
(Freedom Press)

### Printing

Clydeside Press,  
Scotland  
☎ 0141-552 5519

### Contact

✉ black\_flag@lycos.co.uk  
Black Flag  
BM Hurricane,  
London,  
WC1N 3XX,  
United Kingdom,

### Bulk Orders from AK Press

✉ AK Press (UK)  
PO Box 12766  
Edinburgh  
EH8  
☎ 0131 555 5165

✉ AK Press (USA)  
PO Box 40862  
San Francisco CA  
94140-0682

✉ ak@akpress.org

# Mandated for

## Analysis: He's the darling of the right but can Sarko beat France's workers?

**C**ONSERVATIVE politician Nicolas Sarkozy has won the French Presidential election. He managed to convince 53% of the population that he represents change and this message has dutifully been repeated in the media over here.

Yet he is basically the chosen successor to the incumbent party so, surely, it makes far more sense to say the French were looking for "more of the same" rather than the Royal victory would have been the mandate for "change."

Failing to note that he had been a politician for 20 years, he played the right-wing populist card of portraying himself as an outsider and attacking politicians (and trade unions, immigrants and other usual suspects) for stealing the wealth of hard working French people.

That this was reported seriously shows the "objectivity" of the media and the fact some people bought it shows the gullibility of many on the right. What can you expect, when you have a worldview based on authority-worship?

What was significant in the reporting was how a 3% majority was turned into a strong mandate for his agenda rather than what it was, a relatively small majority which showed that a sizeable section of the French people reject it.

It is doubtful that a Royal victory of 3% would have been reported in quite the same way. But, then, Bush's 2004 "victory" of 1% was dutifully reported as a landslide for conservatism.

So what to make of this demand for "change"? MEDEF, the French bosses association, was solidly behind Sarkozy.

This is unsurprising, as he promised to "reform" the tax on large fortunes and give tax breaks to big business and the rich while making more cuts in the state-run national health system.

In other words, to help the already-privileged classes retain and extend their socio-economic position.

"Reform" used to be associated with making things better. These days it is usually an "economically correct" code word for imposing a neo-liberal agenda (ie, "freeing" the labour market, weakening union power and state regulation of business, and reducing taxes).

The assumption is that worsening the situation for the bulk of a population by making workers cheaper will lead to greater competitiveness, higher profits and, therefore, more jobs.

A clear case of making the economy (profits) better at the expense of people. The

sad thing is that this programme is based economics which are at deeply flawed and which have little or no bearing to reality.

At best, it is impartial and incomplete, at worse it has been debunked for decades and reflects a fantasy world of whatever unreal assumptions are required to make the theory come to the conclusion the economist seeks.

So the only group that needs Sarkozy's "reform" of the French economy is its very rich.

Do the French people really want to become like the UK and USA? Countries where the bosses are in the saddle and workers do what they are told?

Sure, the French bosses would love such a regime but they do not make up 53% of the population.

Part of the problem is that many people accept the image of France as one inflicted with economic stagnation, a new "sick man" of Europe.

The source of the "decline" of France is usually linked to lower GDP growth over the past few years compared to countries like Britain and the USA (both of which are constantly touted as models for France to follow).

Yet this perspective fails to take into account internal income distribution. Both the USA and UK are marked by large (and increasing) inequality. This means that GDP growth is not equally distributed.

In America, for example, most of GDP growth has been captured by the top 5% of the population while median wages have been flat for decades.

Ignoring the elite would mean that GDP growth would be rough-

ly similar in both countries, at least for the bulk of the population.

This means that while France may grow more slowly, it benefits more than just the ruling class. Then there are such factors as poverty and social mobility.

Child poverty is around 7% in France, but at 16% in Britain (double the rate for 1979) and at 20% in the USA. While poverty has risen, social mobility has fallen in the US and UK since the 1980s neo-liberal revolutions.

Moreover, comparing France's income or GDP per person to the U.S. fails to take into account the fact that French people work far less than Americans.

So while France may lag America (\$30,693 to \$43,144), it cannot be said that working class people are automatically worse off.

Less hours at work and longer holidays may impact on GDP but only an idiot would say that this means the economy is worse.

Economists cannot say that one person is worse off than another if she has less income simply due to working fewer hours. So GDP per capita may be higher in the US, but only because American workers work more hours and not because they are more productive.

Like



# class warfare

other Europeans, the French have decided to work less and enjoy it more.

So it is important to remember that GDP is not synonymous with well-being.

A far better indicator of economic welfare is, in fact, productivity. It is understandable that this is not used as a measure as it is as high, or higher, in France as it is in the US (and much higher than in the UK).

And it should be remembered that rising productivity in the US has not been reflecting in rising wages over the last three decades.

The gains of productivity, like those in growth, have been accumulated by the boss class and not by the hard working American people (whose working week has steadily increased during that period).

France also has created more private sector jobs (+10% between 1996 and 2002, according to the OECD) than the UK (+6%) or the US (+5%).

Ironically, the UK economy has barely created any net employment in the private sector in the past five years but unemployment has dropped due to increased public spending which has seen a large rise in public sector jobs.

What about the notoriously high unemployment? This is based on measuring techniques more than anything else. The standard measure of unemployment divides the unemployed by the unemployed plus employed.

By this measure, French males age 15-24 have an unemployment rate of 20.8%, as compared to 11.8% in America. Yet this difference is mainly because, in France, there are many more young males not in the labour force (more are in school and fewer work part time while studying).

As those who are not in the labour market are not counted in the standard measure, this gives an inflated value for youth unemployment.

A far better comparison would be to compare the number of unemployed divided by the population of those in the same age group. This results in the USA having a rate of 8.3% and France 8.6%.



**REBELLION:** Sarkozy's plans look set to provoke a firestorm of controversy, with some commentators warning of a return to the riots of 2006 against the CPE employment contract.

As for general unemployment, the role of the EU central bank maintaining high interest rates over fears of inflation is far more likely to be the culprit than worker militancy, state regulations or the welfare state.

So the whole "France/Europe is in a state of decline" narrative is better understood as a corporate media's clever ploy to push it into the hands of the self-destructing neo-liberalism that is slowly taking its toll on Britain and America rather than a serious analysis of the real situation there.

Perhaps the French economy comes in for such consistent bashing precisely because it shows that overall good standards of living are possible without the rich getting richer and the workers being turned into serfs.

By showing that there is more to life than

work and by refuting one of the key justifications for unbridled capitalism and class war the rich are carrying out – and winning – in the UK and USA, France (and Europe in general) must be demonised.

The notion that ordinary people are enjoying themselves rather than serving the economic machine is one that cannot be tolerated – as is the notion of working class people fighting for their rights.

In response to the CPE protests in 2006, American journalist Elaine Sciolino complained that "the government seems to fear its people; the people seem to fear change." (March 17 2006 New York Times).

Such are the contradictions of neo-liberalism. While proclaiming the need to reduce state intervention, it requires increased state power to impose its agenda.

It needs to make people fear their government and fear for their jobs. Once that has been achieved, then people who accept "change" (i.e. the decisions of their bosses, economic, social and political) without question.

That the French people do not want a British or American style labour market, full of low-wage toilers who serve at the boss's pleasure should not come as a surprise.

Nor should the notion that elected officials in a supposed democracy are meant to reflect the feelings of the sovereign people be considered as unusual or irrational.

Can Sarkozy force the French people down the road to (private) serfdom? He wants to be France's Thatcher and "reform" the economy (which is "economically correct" speak for breaking working class militancy).

As such, it would be useful to remember Thatcher's actual economic performance rather than the "economically correct" narrative we have inherited from the media and

## Factfile: Sarkozy

**Sarkozy, popularly known as 'Sarko', has been in power since winning the presidential election on May 6.**

- His base is in the right-wing political party UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), which has an absolute majority in the French national Assembly and Senate.
- His political platform is based on a law and order ticket, along with painting himself as the tough leader who can carry out 'modernising' reform on behalf of business and the right.
- His background is that of an extremely well-connected career politician, a media manipulator who has been able to keep embarrassing stories off the front pages of the press. Chirac has chosen him as his successor.
- His previous positions saw him at the treasury and minister of the interior, where he infamously called for the clearance of anti-CPE rioters by high-pressure hose.



economic "experts."

When Thatcher came to office she did so promising to end the mass unemployment experienced under Labour (it had doubled during between 1974 and 1979).

Unemployment then tripled in her first term rising to over 3 million in 1982 (for the first time since the 1930s, representing 1 in 8 people), in large part due to the application of Monetarist dogma making the recession far worse than it had to be.

Faced with unemployment rising to well over 10%, Thatcher's regime did which any right-wing government would – it changed how unemployment was recorded.

Yet even knocking hundreds of thousands off the official unemployment records did not stop the steady rise in people looking for work.

It remained above the 1979 Labour numbers until the Conservatives left office in 1997. Needless to say, a very deep recession, double-figure unemployment for most of the decade, defeats for key strikes and unions plus continued high unemployment for nearly two decades had an impact on the labour movement.

It made people willing to put up with anything in order to remain in work. Hence Thatcher's "economic miracle" – the working class finally knew its place in the social hierarchy.

Sarkozy does have some disadvantages compared to Thatcher. It is unlikely that France will discover substantial deposits of oil and so he will not have the boost of North Sea oil which mitigated some of the destruction inflicted by Thatcher onto the economy.

Nor does France have a financial centre of the same international clout of the City of London whose influence ensured it profited from the flawed policies it helped inflict on the country.

Monetarism is utterly discredited and so he lacks the security of economic ideology which Milton Friedman provided the Thatcher politicians. France is also in the Euro and so lacks significant means of changing central bank policy as Thatcher has.

He cannot, like Thatcher, command the Bank of England to attempt the impossible task of "controlling" the money supply and so France should not be subjected to the massive increases in interest rates she inflicted on Britain.

Can Sarkozy really "do a Thatcher" and triple unemployment in under three years? Can he provoke the deepest recession in French history since the 1930s?

Is he willing to oversee the destruction of French manufacturing sector?

Will he be willing to use the powers of the state to break the mass protests and strikes his policies will, inevitably, provoke?

That depends on the willingness of the French people to stand up for their liberties and rights and so impose, from the streets, the reforms really needed for the French people – reforms that politicians will not or cannot achieve.

Sarkozy claims to seek to alter the psychology of France and bring back the conservative values of merit, work and authority.

He wants to turn France back to pre-May 1968 values and change the so-called slacker mentality it produced. Would that be the "conservative" French values of the 1936

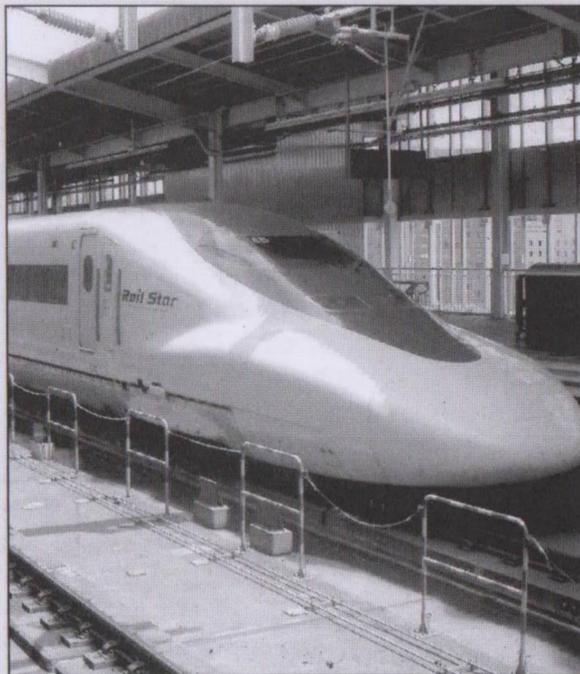
## What's going on now

Since his election in May, Sarkozy has not moved particularly quickly to attack the working class, concentrating to start with on fulfilling his promises to the middle class base.

In July, the UMP majority, seconded by the Nouveau Centre, approved one of Sarkozy's these electoral offers, by quasi-suppressing inheritance tax. The inheritance tax used to bring eight billion euros into state coffers.

The UMP majority also decreased other taxes, in particular for upper middle-class people, allegedly in a effort to boost GDP growth, during the summer holiday months when union activity is usually lower.

Sarkozy's initial impact on the domestic stage has been overshadowed by his work in Europe, where he has been instrumental in the attempted revival of the European Constitution, and in foreign policy negotiations, where



**FLASHPOINT:** Will the railways be where the big test of Sarkozy's UMP will come?

factory occupations?

Or the militancy of the pre-World War I revolutionary syndicalist movement? Or the rebel values associated with the Paris Commune of 1871?

Or the demands for "Bread or Lead" and "Liberty or Death!" raised in the 1848 revolution?

Or the cry "Live working or die by fighting!" raised alongside the black flag by the artisans of Lyons in 1831?

Or the respect for authority which saw the Bastille seized and the monarchy guillotined during the Great French Revolution of 1789?

As such, the best way for the French people to resist Sarkozy is to apply traditional

he aimed to place Tony Blair into the position of envoy to the Middle East. He also took an extended US holiday.

Sarkozy and the UMP look set to begin their first major assault on public sector pensions in the run-up to Christmas, which has prompted warnings from the unions that street protests and strikes may follow.

The first to be attacked are the 'special retirement schemes' of public transport workers, Bank of France officials, National Opera employees, notary clerks and 125 other roles.

Sarkozy believes the schemes, which were won by strong communist groups operating in those sectors, who no longer wield much influence, are a test point, as the unions have proven able to resist previous attacks, notably in 1995 when transport workers shut down much of the country over the course of a three week strike, and again in 2001 and 2003 when plans to raise retirement ages were introduced.

There are up to 165,500 active workers on the SNCF (national railroad) and 319,000 retirees on the special pension plan. The future pensions of some 500,000 working people could be affected by the measures.

The railways are covered by six major unions, CFDT, CFTC, CGT, CGT-FO, Solidarity, Unity, The SUD and the independent train drivers' union FGAAC, who make up one of the strongest defensive units in the French economy. A showdown would represent a major assault against union power in the country.

French values in respect to authority: rebellion! His neo-liberal agenda can be defeated only by direct action, by strikes and taking to the streets.

The protests against the recent CPE laws show what is possible. The riots and protests which erupted in many cities within hours of the election result shows that this spirit remains!

Only that creativity, militancy, solidarity and direct action can ensure that in France the government continues to fear its people and not the other way round.

By Iain McKay

# A failed revolution?

## History: The French Popular Front of 1936-38

**S**EVENTY years ago, France went through one of the defining moments of its modern history, and one whose anniversary is still regularly celebrated – and not just by the left and labour movement.

In the popular media, it is perhaps celebrated most for introducing paid holidays for all, with photographs of smiling workers setting off for the coastal resorts – hitherto the reserve of the bourgeoisie – in subsidized trains, or cycling through the countryside, or hiking to one of the new socialist youth hostels.

On the left, the Popular Front has become one of the central myths of the republican and revolutionary traditions, and has been held up as a counter to the failure (i.e. violent suppression) of the Paris Commune.

It is still today seen on the left as a strong reminder of what can be achieved by unity. Indeed, the particular constellation of parties involved – Socialist, Communist and Radical (the latter, despite its name, representing the centre-left) – has reappeared every time the left has come to power since (most recently, under Jospin, with the addition of the Greens).

But was the Popular Front such a great success, or was it a failed revolution?

### The Popular Front elections, 1936

Although to do so pre-empts, in a way, our understanding of the meaning of the Popular Front, most accounts focus – perhaps understandably, given the fact that they led to the first constitutionally elected socialist government in France – on the legislative elections of April-May 1936. In those elections, the Communist Party doubled its share of the vote and increased the number of its deputies (MPs) from 10 to 72.

The Socialist Party became the biggest party in the Chamber of Deputies (i.e. the equivalent of the House of Commons) with 146 seats (up from 97).

And the so-called Radicals (a very broad and ideologically heterogeneous party of the centre, and up until then the dominant party of the Third Republic) fell from 159 seats to 116. This gave the 'Rassemblement Populaire' ('People's Rally') 376 seats against 222 for the right.

The evening of the first round of voting saw an explosion of joy in working-class areas across France, with spontaneous demonstrations in the streets. There had been, however, no major swing in public opinion from right to left.

What had changed was 'republican discipline': the agreement by all left candidates not to stand against the best placed candidate of the left in the second round of voting (in order to ensure the defeat of the candidate of the right).

Having said that, although the Radical Party nationally was officially part of the Popular Front, since signing up to the coalition in 1935, in some constituencies the



**TALL TALES:** Workers in Paris stage a factory strike during the upheavals of 1936

local candidate was opposed to the Popular Front.

The Communists made some surprising inroads into rural areas among smallholders, and also made significant gains in major industrial centres, particularly in the 'red belt' (i.e. the working-class suburbs) around Paris, in the coal-mining areas of the north; and in the south-coast ports of Marseille and

Toulon.

Many of these advances by the Communists were made at the expense of the Socialist Party, and represented the beginning of a long-term turnaround in the relation between the two big parties of the left, with the PC (Communist Party) remaining the biggest party (in the country, let



alone of the left) until the late 1970s.

At the famous Tours Congress of the Socialist Party of 1920, a majority of delegates had rejected the stance adopted by the party leadership with regard to both the 'Union Sacrée' (government of national unity and support for the war effort in 1914-18) and the question of support for the October revolution.

This majority had thus created a new party affiliated to the Moscow International.

The rump of the Socialist Party, however, had quickly rebuilt the party, overtaking the Communists as the biggest party of the left by 1924, whilst at the same time the newly launched Communist Party (known from its creation in 1920 until 1934 as the Communist Party, French Section of the Communist International) had rapidly lost support and members and turned itself into an isolated and sectarian Stalinist 'groupuscule'.

What the overall 1936 election results suggested was a rejection of economic liberalism and a weakening of the centrist

recession and political radicalisation on both left and right.

As Kedward has put it, the election campaign of 1936 was launched "as the climax to a long ideological struggle largely fought out on the streets."

The global recession that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929 was felt in France from 1931, and especially from 1933.

Between 1931 and 1936, over a million jobs were cut in France, with textiles and the metalworking industries being particularly hard hit. Small-scale agriculture and small businesses also suffered.

In a climate of economic crisis and ideological extremism, xenophobia increased. The nationalist right warned of the danger of the arrival of what they called 'Jewish Bolsheviks' (namely German Jews fleeing Nazism), and the right of asylum, something which French republicans have always been proud of, came under attack.

A number of high-profile corruption cases linked to Radical Party politicians (the Stavisky affair of 1934 being the most

## Radicalisation, antifascism and trade union unity

One of the upshots of this in an increasingly unstable atmosphere of economic, social and political crisis was the attempted storming of the Chamber of Deputies on 6 February 1934 by tens of thousands of supporters of rightwing 'leagues' and nationalist paramilitary groups. In the most violent scenes in Paris since the Commune of 1871, a policeman and sixteen extreme-right demonstrators were killed.

It was a watershed in the growing polarization between left and right in inter-war France. As the left-wing intellectual Gilles Martinet wrote after the events: "In the grey light of winter 1934, the two Frances which had never renounced their old passions, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, once again confronted each other. I don't think they were unhappy about it."

Most historians now reckon 6 February did not represent a real threat of a right-wing coup. At the time, though, that was certainly how it felt. The effects of the economic depression, street activism and radicalisation meant that both left and right believed they had a chance to achieve their ambitions.

The response to 6 February from the left was immediate. A PC counter-demonstration held on 9 February led to four deaths in clashes with police.

The CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail or General Labour Confederation, by far the biggest national trade union centre) called for a one-day general strike on the 12th in protest at the actions of the right-wing 'leagues', and the CGTU (the 'Unitary' CGT, dominated by the Communist Party), PC and PS (Socialist Party) all eventually called for national action on the same day.

In highly unionised areas, 12 February was very successful: in Le Havre, for instance, 70-80% of workers walked out and nearly all the factories were shut down.

An interesting development in some towns was that the CGT succeeded in bringing out blue-collar and white-collar workers together – indeed, given the role of public sector cuts in successive governments' response to the depression, the 'fonctionnaires' (public sector employees) were seen as playing a central role.

The CGT's strike call had immediately led to the spontaneous creation in some towns of unitary CGT/CGTU organizing committees, including in the naval dockyard and foundries of Saint-Nazaire, which had in the past been seen as a barometer of working-class militancy.

And as a CGT official in Périgueux said: "The working class of our town has understood that, faced with the threat of fascism, internal quarrels should stop." In Paris, on the afternoon of the 12 February one-day strike, the PS had organised a demonstration which the PC had decided to support.

When the two contingents converged at the Place de la Nation, thousands of grass-roots activists began shouting "Unité! Unité!" A joint national congress in March 1936 would eventually formalise the re-unification of the CGT and CGTU, something for which revolutionary syndicalists (such as Pierre Monatte) and a majority of anarchists had been campaigning for many years.

The CGT was split by the conflict between,



NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR: An anti-war demonstration kicks off in Paris in 1936

Republican consensus.

The corollary of this was the desire of the majority – after years of economic recession, taylorisation and a series of liberal reforms which hit the working classes hardest – for social reform.

This represented, in the words of historian Rod Kedward, "a historic swing of the republic away from a purely political definition" (La Vie en bleu. France and the French since 1900).

## Economic recession, racism and the rise of fascism

The Popular Front as an electoral coalition did not appear overnight out of thin air. It was one manifestation of a broad, deep-rooted popular movement, which in turn was the product of a number of factors, notably the growing taylorisation of industry, economic

famous) led to a widespread popular conviction that the whole system was corrupt.

The nationalist right used such perceptions to attack the left (the Radicals) which dominated successive governments of the Third Republic (1871-1940).

The PC and others on the left insisted on the contrary that such cases of corruption were an indictment of bourgeois society.

There was a widespread belief among the working class that the main cause of their hardship was monopolisation, profit and an unregulated market, and this produced a surge of support for trade union action by the early 1930s.

Many on both left and right believed that capitalism itself was on the brink of collapse. On the far left, a common belief was, as the Anarchist Union put it, that "We are faced more and more with the dilemma: fascism or revolution".

broadly speaking, reformists and revolutionaries in 1921.

The growing domination of the CGTU by the PC led a minority of anarchists to create the anarcho-syndicalist CGTSR in 1926, thus weakening the labour movement even further.

The UA had been calling for a 'united front' against fascism ever since Hitler had come to power, and was one of the eight groups invited to join the organising committee for the 12th.

From October 1936, the official UA strategy was a 'revolutionary front' with all non-anarchist revolutionaries (notably the PS's Revolutionary Left faction and a small number of Trotskyists), although so many anarchists were practically allergic to Marxists of any kind by this stage that the front was only patchily effective, with many local groups simply failing to implement the policy decision agreed on at national congress – the Revolutionary Front's main contribution seems to have been to organise solidarity with republican Spain, particularly the CNT-FAI.

(For more detail on this, see Dave Berry, "Fascism or Revolution!" Anarchism and Antifascism in France, 1933-39, on [raforum.info/article.php3?id\\_article=238](http://raforum.info/article.php3?id_article=238) )

### Stalinist strategy: from 'class against class' to the 'outstretched hand'

Apart from socio-economic factors and a growing understanding of the need for unity against fascism, another factor played a rôle: international relations, Stalin's foreign policy and the Comintern's strategic about-turns.

The 'bolshevization' of the newly created national communist parties (ie, the eradication of all factions and internal dissent) had been called for by the 5th Congress of the Comintern (June 1924). The Comintern's 'Third Period' was instigated in 1928 and would last until 1935.

It was based on an aggressive, intransigent and sectarian stance that came to be known as 'class against class'. Socialists were condemned as being in league with the bourgeoisie and thus the working class's worst enemy, and were labelled 'social fascists'.

Anarchist activists' autobiographies of the period are horrifying in their description of the levels of routine sectarian violence provoked largely by this shift in the Comintern's position.

The French PC did not benefit from this new strategy either electorally or in terms of membership: the 1928 elections saw the party's number of deputies (i.e. MPs) reduced from 26 to 12, and by 1932 membership had dropped to 25,000.

But Stalin and the Comintern finally abandoned their sectarianism in June 1934, adopting instead – rather belatedly, many non-Communist militants thought – the policy of a united front against fascism and nazism.

The French PC immediately adopted a policy of left-wing unity, and signed a 'Common Front' with the PS. 1935 also saw the signing of a Franco-Soviet pact between the two governments.

This was a turning-point in the development of 'people's fronts' across Europe, and saw national CPs fall in line behind national defence. This is when the hitherto intransigently internationalist and



**PRIME MINISTER:** Leon Blum was elected head of the Popular front government

antimilitarist 'Communist Party, French Section of the Communist International' became the 'French Communist Party' (PCF), and – in line with Stalin's pact with the French foreign minister Laval – declared its 'understanding' of the French state's preoccupation with national defence.

The PCF also discovered a liking for the French tricolour, and on demonstrations its stewards now began attacking anarchists for singing the International...

The PC slogan had become 'la main tendue', the outstretched hand, but this new policy was aimed not only at Socialists and CGT members, it was also directed at the

“ The PCF... on demonstrations its stewards began attacking anarchists for singing the International ”

middle classes, the Radical Party, and at catholics (who had always been not only socially conservative supporters of the right and extreme right, but actively opposed to the republican democratic tradition).

### The Popular Front electoral programme

For the first time, the 1936 elections saw the publication of a common programme by the parties of the left – albeit one couched in fairly general terms.

There was also, as we have seen, an agreement not to stand against another Popular Front candidate in the second round of voting.

The biggest policy compromises were made by the PS, whose policy of nationalisation was opposed by the Communists and the Radicals, neither of which wished to antagonise the middle classes.

Former Communist demands for collectivisation and the creation of soviets had been dropped. The official slogan of the Popular Front as electoral coalition was 'Pain, Paix, Liberté' ('Bread, Peace and Freedom'). Its programme rejected deflation and cost-cutting. It promised a reduction of the working week without loss of pay, pensions for retired workers, a national unemployment fund and a programme of public works.

Control of the Bank of France was to be taken away from the 'economic oligarchy' of the largest shareholders. The rightwing paramilitary leagues were to be abolished, women's right to work would be guaranteed, trade union rights and secular state education defended and equality of access to state radio was promised.

There was also a commitment to the League of Nations, disarmament and the nationalisation of the arms industry. A parliamentary enquiry was promised into the situation in the colonies.

There was no Popular Front commitment to women's suffrage (there had been universal manhood suffrage since 1848), but a majority of Socialist and Communist candidates supported it. This was a progressive programme, but certainly not a revolutionary one.

### The "Popular Front of the streets"

The trouble was that the narrowness of the electoral victory made it clear that virtually half of France was opposed to the reform programme, so the inevitable resistance had to be pre-empted.

Before Léon Blum, leader of the PS, was even endorsed as Prime minister of the first Popular Front government, a wave of strikes spread across France through May, June and July 1936.

The strikes were novel in two ways: firstly, they involved a very large number of occupations of workplaces (there had been a very few occurrences of workplace occupation in France in the early 1920s and early 1930s, but it was a tactic known primarily through the Italian example from 1918-20); and secondly, numerous commentators and historians have emphasised the cheerful, confident, festive and even carnivalesque nature of these occupations – partly at least because the strikers assumed they could depend on the support of the new government.

When the leftwing philosopher Simone Weil revisited the famous Renault works at Boulogne-Billancourt (on the edge of Paris) where she had worked the previous year, she described it as the moment "when workers dared to take control of and assert their humanity over both the employers and the rationalisation of work".

Women workers played an important role in the strikes, either directly (one of the best-known examples being women sales assistants in the big modern department stores such as the Galeries Lafayette) or indirectly through their solidarity (bringing food and suchlike to the occupied factories). Branches of industry with relatively low unionization rates were often in the vanguard of the movement.

The strike wave of May-July 1936 was the biggest in French history (up till then – it would be surpassed in May-June 1968).



Nearly 2 million workers took part in over 12,000 strikes, three quarters of which also involved occupations.

The strikes were nearly all in the private sector, as public sector employees believed the new government would look after them.

The first occupations occurred in Le Havre and Toulouse, and were defensive strikes in support of workers who had been sacked for taking the day off work on May Day.

Such defensive strikes and occupations rapidly spread, however, and began to involve demands related to pay and working hours.

Metalworkers and mechanics (particularly in the aviation and automobile industries) in the Paris region played a particularly important role.

But the action soon spread to include a range of branches, much smaller workplaces and even white-collar workers such as office and shop workers – in the Seine-et-Marne and Seine-et-Oise departments (just outside the Paris region) 10,000 agricultural labourers occupied farms.

All this time, the prime minister Léon Blum and the reformist general secretary of the



**WOMEN STRIKE BACK:** Comrades sit down for a meal in an occupied factory in 1936.

CGT, Léon Jouhaux, tried to restore 'order' and persuade workers to go back to work, arguing that there was no need for direct action since there was now a Popular Front government.

The impact of the occupations was enormous, and prompted Marceau Pivert, the leader of the 'Revolutionary Left' faction within the PS (to which Daniel Guérin belonged at the time), to declare: "Everything is possible!"

The anarchists likewise emphasised the revolutionary potential of the situation. The reformist leadership of the CGT, however, felt that a major programme of social reforms supported by a majority of the electorate was already enough and was immediately achievable, whereas 'revolution' was a mirage.

Leon Blum and the PS leadership were concerned with the legal exercise of power in a constitutional framework. The employers quickly asked for a meeting with the PM and CGT representatives on 7 June, and the negotiations only took one afternoon, the balance of power had shifted so much thanks to the strength of the strike and occupation movement (and, it must be said, the election results).

The employers conceded the main demands and the Blum government also passed a number of laws during June.

The upshot was:

- The right to form or join a union, and the right to union representation in the workplace (the 'délégué du personnel');
- The legal right to strike;
- The introduction of collective bargaining;
- A blanket 15-17% pay rise for all workers;
- The 40 hour week (with no loss of pay);
- Two weeks' paid holidays for all.

This was undoubtedly a major turning point, for the collective strength of the working class had forced these concessions out of the employers despite relatively high unemployment.

However, even after the legislation, strikers continued their action, wanting to go beyond the concessions their 'representatives' had got for them.

This greatly worried the PS and CGT leaders, and on 11 June, the PCF leader Maurice Thorez, arguing that this was not the time for taking power, uttered the (in)famous words: "Il faut savoir terminer une grève" – "When our demands have been met, we have to know how to end a strike". Within days, the return to work began to accelerate, although around 300 factories were still occupied at the end of July.

The employers' concessions and the changes in the law were nevertheless seen as a great success by most French workers, and the 14 July Bastille Day celebrations made this clear, with a million on the streets in Paris and red flags (then still the symbol of the labour movement in general, not of Communism) hanging from many windows.

A more negative note was sounded by the libertarian and other socialist revolutionaries associated with the group Révision in 1938.

Looking back on the widespread enthusiasm regarding the 1936 agreement with the employers, they wrote: "Not only did the Matignon Agreement, a treaty concluded under the auspices of the Socialist government between the big employers and the leadership of the CGT, fail to limit profits or restrict the power of capital.

"It has actually forced capital to organise itself more seriously than in the past and has reinforced the influence of the most powerful capitalists over the capitalist class as a whole. The working class is deluding itself as to the value of the reforms it won."

### The Popular Front government: problems and disillusion

The Blum government was certainly in trouble within months of coming to power, as financial problems led to a loss of middle class support and even greater hostility than before from business interests. Inflation led to further strikes (mostly unsuccessful).

Along with fear of possible contagion from Spain (were civil war broke out in July), these factors also led to unease among Blum's coalition partners in the Radical Party. Blum's response – and one which would in essence be repeated under François Mitterrand in 1982-4 – was not to radicalise or accelerate the reform programme, but to criticise union 'irresponsibility' and impose legislation requiring workers to go to arbitration before calling a strike.

The following February, Blum announced a 'pause' in the reform programme. The right correctly saw this as a major ideological retreat and the reactionary Senate prevented Blum bringing in the financial reforms he

thought necessary.

March saw the infamous events at Clichy (on the northern edge of Paris), when the government refused to ban a meeting held by the quasi-fascist Parti Social Français, despite the wishes of the local left-wing council: a counter-demonstration by Communists and left-wing Socialists led to a street battle with police, who shot dead six activists.

The subsequent funeral was the scene of a powerful, mass demonstration of the dissatisfaction of many with the Popular Front's leaders.

Algerians who had had high hopes of the Popular Front government, were also to be bitterly disappointed by its failure to make any move towards Algerian independence.

The Etoile Nord-Africaine was even dissolved in January 1937 by the same law which had supposedly been introduced to get rid of the far-right 'leagues'. Its leader, Messali Hadj, launched a new party, the Parti de Peuple Algérien, but he and others were arrested in August 1937.

Blum resigned in June 1937. He and other Socialists became members of the new, more socially conservative, Radical-led government, but the impetus for reform was lost and this was to all intents and purposes the end of the Popular Front as a progressive electoral coalition.

Nevertheless, trade union membership, having grown to around four million, stayed high throughout 1937 and only began to drop off again in the winter of 1937-38. By this point, the economic situation was worsening, the Radicals had shifted back to the right and the employers were launching an offensive on gains won by workers in 1936. The unions were forced to fight a rearguard action which they eventually lost.

A second Blum government in the spring of 1938 lasted only a few weeks when its Keynesian reform proposals were blocked by the Senate.

The Radical government which came to power in April 1938, led by Edouard Daladier, ruled by decree-laws and set about attacking the 40-hour week; it also relaunched arms production and promoted a pro-natalist policy, reinforcing legal restrictions on abortion and contraception.

There was a clampdown on immigration and asylum-seekers fleeing fascism and nazism abroad, and the Daladier government was alone among the so-called democracies not to condemn the nazis' 'Kristallnacht' pogrom. An attempted one-day general strike on 30 November 1938 was a miserable failure and was the last straw in the disillusion of the working-class movement.

### Was a revolution possible in 1936?

It was argued then and it has been argued many times since that 1936 could have given birth to a social revolution.

The conditions certainly seemed to be present: the country was suffering from economic recession; the ruling Radical Party was in disarray as far as economic policy was concerned; the right was divided and confused; popular confidence in the institutions of the Third Republic and in the 'political class' as a whole was low; the social effects of recession, taylorisation and government policy (spending cuts and so on) had led to widespread popular dissatisfaction and growing militancy.



**MARCHING ON:** Demonstrators on the Rue du faubourg Saint-Antoine, Paris on July 14, 1936.

Workers' class consciousness was very strong and resistance to fascism had led to a massive groundswell of support for working-class and left unity.

The Spanish revolution just over the Pyrenees provided a wonderful example of what could be achieved; the French bourgeoisie were completely taken aback by the militancy of strikers in 36/37; the fact that so many strikes also involved occupations in so many parts of France could have provided a solid base for co-ordinated workers' control on a large scale, leading to a situation of dual power.

In the words of one anarchist activist who lived through those events: "Rarely have the circumstances been so completely favourable to social revolution." (UTCL [Union of Libertarian Communist Workers], Il y a 50 ans: le Front populaire).

But the legalism of the PS leadership, the PC's subservience to Stalin and Soviet foreign policy, the reformism of the CGT leadership, the essential statism of the French republican tradition and the attachment of a majority of the working class to parliamentary democracy, the relative strength of the anarchist current and the existence of other, more influential, revolutionary tendencies (the Revolutionary Left in the PS and minorities in the PC and CGT – the Trotskyists were very few and isolated).

All these factors gravitated against revolution, despite the country's revolutionary tradition.

Another negative factor was the lack of grassroots committees. Individual workers tended to remain loyal to their respective parties and trade unions.

There were joint demonstrations, but the Popular Front 'Local Committees' did not play much of a rôle, and this had an impact

on the character of the Popular Front.

On the one hand there was, what Daniel Guérin called the 'Popular Front no.1' – an electoral alliance between social democracy, Stalinism and bourgeois liberalism.

On the other hand was, the 'Popular Front no.2' – a powerful, extra-parliamentary movement, the initiative for which came from the working class – "the true popular front, the popular front of the streets and not of the politicians" as the Anarchist Union insisted in July 1936.

However powerful this popular movement

“ The working class is deluding itself as to the value of the reforms it has won.

– Révision, 1938 ”

was, the lack of democratic, grassroots organisation meant there was little or no resistance (outside a few small minorities) to the movement's being controlled by the party and trade union hierarchies.

Guérin made a similar point in his semi-autobiographical account of the Popular Front, which was for him a 'failed revolution' (see Rob Hall, Daniel Guérin's "Popular Front in France: A Lost Revolution" – Modern Parallels which is online at [staff.lboro.ac.uk/~eudgb/DG\\_conference\\_speakers.htm](http://staff.lboro.ac.uk/~eudgb/DG_conference_speakers.htm) ).

Engaging both with the failures of his own group, the Revolutionary Left, and the criticisms made by Trotsky and his French

supporters, Guérin wrote: "The revolutionary organisation which was lacking in June 1936 was not, in my opinion, an authoritarian leadership emanating from a small group or sect, but an organ for the co-ordination of the workers' councils, growing directly out of the occupied workplaces.

The mistake of the Revolutionary Left was not so much that it was unable, because of its lack of preparation, to transform itself into a revolutionary party on the Leninist or Trotskyist model, but that it was unable [...] to help the working class to find for itself its own form of power structure to confront the fraud that was the Popular Front no. 1."

The libertarian communist tendency within the UA had pushed for the creation of factory committees after the reunification of March 1936. These factory committees had three objectives: to disseminate anarchist ideas; to encourage direct action; to work in and foster the revolutionary militias some socialists were setting up.

Factory committees were established in various of the bigger companies in the Paris region, although estimates of how successful they were vary.

But when their representation at the UA congress of October-November 1937 was discussed, it was rejected for fear that the organisation might be "diverted into the domain of workplace affairs", as one UA member put it. The 'policy' was eventually abandoned by the UA.

Similarly, with regard to the workplace occupations, anarchist and other critics have pointed out negative as well as positive aspects.

Firstly, revolutionary socialists, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, then as now, have emphasised the significance of the occupations,



not just because they were spontaneous, widespread, had mass support and were carried out against the wishes of the PS, PCF and CGT leadership (who did everything they could to control and limit the strikes), but also because of their great symbolic importance.

They demonstrated once again that the working class has only ever made real gains when they have taken them by force, and more often than not by going outside the law.

The act of occupying their workplaces suggested a widespread questioning by workers of the very principle of private ownership of the means of production.

As *Le Combat Syndicaliste* (weekly paper of the anarcho-syndicalist CGTSR) put it: "Attacking both the right to property and the principle of authority, the workers have taken control of the means of production, which are their means of work; for a moment, they have stopped the source of profit and exerted their right of occupation, proving in the process their capacity for organisation and self-management. They have proved the value of direct action."

Having said that, the available evidence seems to show that the 1936 occupations in fact tended to be defensive and based on the assumption that they were temporary: in most cases, the occupiers' main concern seems to have been to prevent lock-outs, and to protect the plant or shop contents from damage so that work could be started again once the strike was over.

The workers remained unarmed, and their main purpose was to protect plant and premises from attack by police or fascists, not least so as to make it possible for production to be restarted once strikers' demands were met.

There was rarely any talk of expropriation or of the organisation of production by workers.

Secondly, there were strike committees which stayed in close contact with the strikers. General assemblies were held each day, and these also put proposed agreements with employers to the vote of all strikers.

Often, the assemblies rejected the recommendations of their delegates on the committee. On the other hand, the strike committees were in many cases unelected and consisted just of well-known union or party activists who acted more or less as spokespersons for their union or party.

One contemporary libertarian communist activist would write 50 years later: "There can be no doubt that in June 36, we can see expressed in the proclamations, but also perfectly clear in their actions, the revolutionary will of the working class.

"What the workers wanted was a radical change in the system and in their everyday lives."

The reasons the movement failed (beyond achieving anything other than a few social reforms which it would prove easy for the ruling class to claw back once the strike movement subsided and the working class put its faith in their political representatives) were that the workers' struggles were contained in such a way that their demands never went beyond relatively superficial economic and social issues, and because the vast majority never lost their faith in their traditional leaders or their illusions about the liberatory potential of a reformist government.

Anarchists and other revolutionaries had proved unequal to the task in that they were

## Factfile: The Popular Front

The Popular front was born out of a long buildup of the left as people turned away from the free market, blaming it as the main cause of their hardships. Massive spontaneous strikes took place, which had widespread support, particularly against the fascist threat, but this cohesion broke down in the face of the conflict between reformists and revolutionaries.

■ 1936 saw a round of factory occupations and strikes, but these are generally regarded as having been defensive measures against the threat of fascism and not pro-active revolutionary ones.

■ The Union Anarchiste (UA) was also born from the re-unification of the hitherto split anarchist movement under the anti-fascist banner.

■ The anarchists were able to set up a number of factory committees running independently of the state, however these committees were dropped for fear that the organisation would become 'diverted into workplace affairs'

■ The Radicals, Socialists and Communists collaborated in the creation of the Popular Front government. The communist PC dropped demands for collectivisation and the creation of soviets was dropped, while the Socialist PS dropped nationalisation.

■ President Leon Blum, with the help of the 'Radicals' in the government, was able to block military aid to the Spanish during the civil war, effectively killing hopes for international intervention against Franco's fascists.

■ A Fédération anarchiste de langue française (FAF) developed from a split in the UA, and denounced the collusion between the French anarchists and the Popular Front, as well as criticising the CNT-FAI's participation with the Republican government in Spain.

■ As was predicted by the anarchists, while the election of the popular front provided a salve for the working classes and an initial improvement to their conditions, it was a temporary measure. In the face of business hostility, the leftist government quickly brought in legislation to curtail union power.

unable effectively to counter the arguments of the reformists in the PS and CGT leadership, or to counter the lies and manipulations of the Stalinists.

### The anarchists and popular frontism

The French anarchists had from the very beginning attacked what they saw as the fundamental deceptiveness of the Popular Front policy, the naïvety of believing that anything significant could be achieved by electing a Popular Front government: 'make the rich pay' was a seductive but misleading slogan.

This was, of course, a matter of very basic anarchist principle, as the UA's manifesto (adopted at its Paris congress of April 1936) made clear: parliamentarism was the gravest danger to the working class, being no more than an anaesthetic.

An electoral alliance with the bourgeoisie was a trick, because it had the working class believe that their interests were the same as their rulers', and a century's experience showed that it was "always the working class that pays the cost of such alliances".

It was therefore foolish to believe that a Popular Front government would or could achieve what the working class needed: "Will it expropriate the industrialists and the financiers?"

"No. That is not its aim – our nice republican Radicals could never subscribe to such a thing." Popular Front governments in France or Spain would not be able to achieve what the working class wanted without going beyond the legal framework of a bourgeois parliament, and they would not be able to do that without destroying themselves as coalition governments.

Anarchists wondered what would happen then: "Parliamentary resistance? Capitalism has shown in several countries that it is quite capable of overcoming such opposition without lifting a finger.

The Popular Front, if it wishes to hold on to power, will have to protect itself by adopting a 'neutrality' which will be greatly appreciated by capital.

Otherwise, it will be forced to step down. There is no other possible solution." As the UA had predicted even before Blum et al were elected: "The Popular Front experiment will be the greatest confirmation of our ideas on the incapacity of political parties to lead the proletariat to its complete emancipation."

They were right, and their analysis has been repeatedly demonstrated to be correct by every subsequent Popular Front-type government.

By David Berry



# Remember his best

**Obituary:** Bookchin's later years should be forgotten. In his prime, he left a great and lasting legacy.

## Murray Bookchin (1921-2006)

MURRAY Bookchin died at home on the 30th of July last year at the age of 85, surrounded by his family. From the 1960s onwards, Bookchin was, rightly, considered one of the world's leading anarchist thinkers. His death, while not unexpected, is still a sad day for our movement.

It is hard to know where to start. Bookchin contributed so much to the development of anarchism over since the 1960s that to summarise his work is difficult, if not impossible. I still remember how thrilled I was to read "Post-Scarcity Anarchism" – this was an author who knew what anarchism was about. Reading "Toward an Ecological Society" and "The Spanish Anarchists" confirmed this.

Bookchin placed ecological thought and concerns at the heart of anarchism and vice versa.

His account of the Spanish Anarchist movement is unsurpassed and his critique of Marxism and Leninism is still essential reading. His argument that only a free and open society (i.e. libertarian socialism) can resolve the problems confronting the environment remains as true today as first formulated in the 1960s.

The negative effects of hierarchy, statism and capitalism on the ecosystem have reached such proportions that even key sections of the ruling elite cannot ignore them – although, of course, their solutions will be technological fixes (what Bookchin termed environmentalism) rather than genuine solutions which tackle the root causes rather mere symptoms (ecology). A clear and thoughtful writer on many subjects, Bookchin's works have enriched anarchist thought and he will be solely missed.

Saying that, his legacy is not unproblematic. His ideas on social ecology, while essential for any modern anarchist, were tied to a strategy (libertarian municipalism) which was inherently reformist.

The idea of anarchists standing in local elections to provide a legal base for creating popular assemblies was always doomed to failure, for reasons anarchists had explained to Marxists since the 1860s. We are direct actionists for good reasons!

Then there is his critique of the working class as a force of social change. Here, I think, he most showed that his initial political experience was with Marxism (he joined the Communist youth organisation at age nine, expelled a few years later he became a Trotskyist for a short period before becoming an anarchist).

Sadly, this early experience seemed to have shaped his notion of what "proletarian" and "worker" meant, limiting it to those wage

slaves in mass production industries rather than all people who sell their labour to a boss.

Such a definition of "worker" always seemed to me to be narrow and a handicap to political analysis. As confirmed when his ideas were used by those who would later turn against him to attack class struggle anarchists as "workerists" (indeed, those who attack "workerist" anarchists always seem to me to have an understanding of class far more in common with "vulgar" Marxists than the people they are attacking).

That said, Bookchin correctly placed hierarchy back at the heart of contemporary



**ONE TO REMEMBER:** Bookchin was a US libertarian socialist

anarchism after some (particularly syndicalists) focused it more on to (economic) class.

I think that few, if any, class struggle anarchists today have such a narrow focus – even if some of our opponents claim we do – and that is thanks, in large part, to Bookchin's work (even if, at times, he appeared to throw the baby out with the bath water!).

Similarly, few, if any, anarcho-syndicalists or other class struggle anarchists today would be as uncritical of existing technologies and the division of labour they imply as they appeared to be before Bookchin's work on the subject.

The last five years of his life saw him distance himself from, then vigorously attack, the anarchism he had done so much to enrich and develop.

For example, his account of Spanish Anarchism in volume four of his "The Third Revolution" utterly contradicts his early praise and analysis, coming across as a bitter tirade by someone ignorant of his subject and his introduction to the last edition of "Post-Scarcity Anarchism" mars a classic book. Equally, his new found appreciation for syndicalism seems ironic given that he criticised it so before his rejection of anarchism.

This flowed from the polemics produced by his "Social Anarchism versus Lifestyle Anarchism" and conducted (by both sides) with increasing personal abuse and venom.

Having recently reread that book, I still find his critique valid, if flawed in parts. By concentrating on minor mistakes as well as Bookchin's own reformist strategy, his critics managed to ignore the very valid critique of technophobia, primitivism and related nonsense it contained.

Sadly, rather than dismiss his critics as being not his kind of anarchist and moving on, he ended up agreeing with them that anarchism was inherently individualistic!

However, his later (frankly, pathetic) attempts to deny that social ecology was a form of eco-anarchism can, and will, be forgotten in favour of his early works. So while Bookchin may have tried to trash his own legacy in the last years of his life, anarchists (I hope) will be more generous and remember, apply and develop the contributions of a great, if flawed, comrade.

With that in mind, we reproduce here an essay written to mark the 150th anniversary of the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1997 while he still considered himself an anarchist.

It shows both his strengths and weaknesses. He is far too kind to Marxism, while failing to note that many of the features praised by Marx in the Paris Commune (such as mandates) had been supported by the likes of Proudhon and Bakunin long before hand.

Then there is the identification of working class with industrial proletariat and the strategy of stating in municipal elections as means of creating popular assemblies, all of which are dubious to say the least. However, his strengths are also clear with insightful comments made about the limitations on Marxist ideology and its ambiguous and vague notions on a revolutionary state.

We hope you it and remember a comrade who, for all his faults, enriched anarchism immensely during his time in the movement.

By Iain McKay

# Second look at

## Critique: Bookchin trains his insight on a tome which helped change the world – The Communist Manifesto

**The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems**

**Murray Bookchin**  
from *New Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4  
(new series), Winter 1998

IT is politically restorative to look with a fresh eye at *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (to use its original title), written before Marxism was overlaid by reformist, postmodernist, spiritual, and psychological commentaries.

From an examination of this work on its own terms, what emerges is that it is not a "text" intended to be served up for academic deconstruction and convoluted exegesis but rather the manifesto of a party that challenged the existence of capitalist social relations and their underlying class base.

The Manifesto directly faced the exploitative social order of its time and intended to move a class – the proletariat – to revolutionary action against it.

Bringing theory to the service of building a movement, as Marx and Engels did – indeed, they perceptively interwove basic analytical ideas with programmatic and organisational issues – is becoming alien in the present era, which is sharply dichotomising the two.

To be sure, the existence of "Marxology" as a university discipline today, with its own professoriat and journals, as distinguished from a living practice, is not an entirely unprecedented phenomenon.

Kautsky, among others, already began to make this dichotomy as editor of *Die Neue Zeit* in the 1890s. But *Die Neue Zeit*, at least, was the theoretical organ of a mass movement that mobilised hundreds of thousands of people on the German political scene.

It was not until recent decades that strictly scholarly Marxian journals appeared that exhibited few or no political intentions and hence provided no basis for a practice engaged in transforming society.

The divorce between theory and practice – and the failure of avowed leftists to build a revolutionary public sphere in the past few decades – has led to the debilitation of theory itself, as witness the current acceptance of postmodernist nihilism, Situationist aestheticism, and quite recently, even Eastern spiritualism among a number of self-professed Marxists.

By contrast, the most refreshing feature of *The Manifesto* as a theoretical document is that it candidly and unabashedly addresses

lived social relations, not simply their cultural offshoots.

Its stylistic magnetism, which made it the inimitable model for so many later programmatic statements by revolutionary movements, lies precisely in its bold candor about the material factors that guide human behavior. Far more than Nietzsche, Marx (who seems to have penned most of *The Manifesto*) wrote with a hammer about the realities of the capitalist system that were emerging in his time.

John Ball in the English Peasant War of the 14th century.

Having no direct impact upon the events that made up the stormy year of 1848, *The Manifesto* nonetheless left a lasting imprint upon subsequent working-class movements, providing a definitive standard by which their revolutionary intentions were to be judged.

And it placed upon every subsequent revolutionary movement the obligation to make the oppressed conscious of their status – that is to say, to inculcate among the exploited a deep sense of class consciousness and to urge them to abolish class society as such.

Pounded out as it was, the opening line of *The Manifesto* – unadorned and unequivocal – immediately fixed the Communist League (for which it was written) as an overtly revolutionary movement.

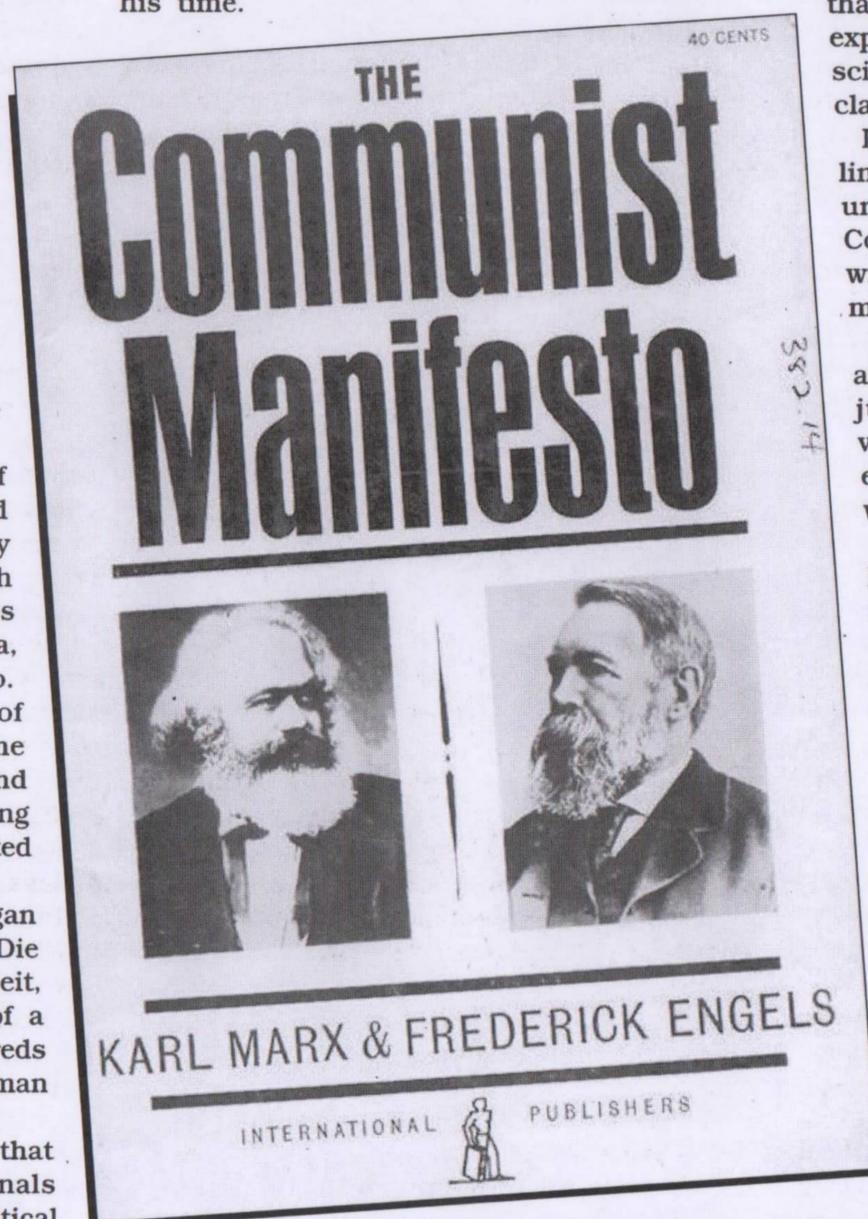
Thereafter, socialist organisations and movements that professed to seek justice for the oppressed had to validate their standing with the emerging working class in its conflict with the bourgeoisie.

After the publication of *The Manifesto*, class struggle was taken for granted among such movements, even if they sought to achieve socialism in peaceful and piecemeal ways by making compromises between workers and capitalists.

Moreover, Marx's opening line announced that *The Manifesto* would not obfuscate the real social relations that make up capitalism. Capitalism, *The Manifesto* went on to emphasise, is an unrelentingly exploitative economy that is driven by its competitive relations to colonise the entire world and to bring social life as such face to face with the question of its very ability to survive in the absence of a communist society.

Today, when reformism permeates most of the political thinking that goes under the name of leftism, we would do well to recall that Marx and Engels warned, a century and a half ago, that "the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law," indeed, that "its existence is no longer compatible with society" (pp. 495, 497).

Parts I ("Bourgeois and Proletarians") and II ("Proletarians and Communists") of *The Manifesto* lay out the main argument of volume one of *Capital*, in vivid, clear prose that is as excitingly programmatic as it is



The famous opening line – "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" – is arrestingly declarative, allowing for no equivocation.<sup>(1)</sup>

Published in a limited German edition of 800 on the eve of the 1848 February Revolution in France, *The Manifesto* synthesised generations of reflection on the root causes of social injustice and conflict. As Marx himself freely acknowledged, the importance that it attaches to class struggles was not new to revolutionary thought. It can be traced back to the Levellers of the English Revolution and even to Lollards such as

# the classic text

brilliantly theoretical.

The pithy formulations are impossible to summarise without doing them injustice, while the brilliance with which Marx and Engels demonstrated that capitalism creates the conditions for its inevitable destruction is impossible to capture. The culminating passage of part I contains ideas that are provocative and prescient even for the coming century:

"The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society...

"Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.

"All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

"The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere...

"Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells". (pp. 487, 489)

These lines were written a century and a half ago, when capitalism was hardly the prevalent social order on the European continent, although it had made great inroads into Britain and its ultimate ascendance in France and Germany was foreseeable.

Industrial capitalism on the European continent was still embedded in a mixed economy – partly bourgeois, partly feudal, and largely peasant. Nearly all cities were still compact entities, crowded with winding medieval streets and surrounded by walls, and everyday commodities were still fashioned by the hands of skilled artisans.

The winter of 1847-48 was still the inception of the bourgeois epoch, not its high point, let alone its end, and the words globalisation and multinationalism were unheard of, even as The Manifesto described similar phenomena. The predictions in this passage might have been dismissed as fanciful visions, had they not been placed in the context of The Manifesto, which gave them an historical as well as an educative meaning that previous accounts of capitalism (a word that was still new) had lacked.

These lines demonstrate the power of theory to project itself beyond given

conditions into the future – and the theoretical projections of Marx and Engels here became glaring realities many generations later, although remaining unfulfilled even into the new millennium.

Paramount is the salient reality that capitalism is the uncontrollable work of historical "sorcery" – a system of production for its own sake – that, while it exists, must eat away at the natural world and drastically remake the planet, probably to the detriment of all life-forms, including human beings.

Without a revolutionary change, its drive as a transformative system – a society that runs on its own, beyond even the control of the bourgeoisie itself – may be modified but cannot be arrested.

No "discourse" on the theoretical or programmatic issues of The Manifesto can be meaningful unless it addresses the need for the formation a "revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things" (p. 519).

"The theory of the Communists," as The Manifesto declares, "may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property" (p. 498) – or equivalently, abolition of capitalism, without any reservations. For a communist movement to fall short of this goal, as Marx and Engels understood, would

“ Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. ”

be, not to "approximate" it or to "realistically" modify it, but to abandon it altogether.

As the authors of The Manifesto were to write in their address to the Communist League after the events of 1848-49, reforms could validly be demanded, but only as a means to ratchet up greater demands that would be impossible for the existing social order to satisfy and that thus would lead to an armed confrontation with the bourgeoisie over the very structure of society.

Nor were the readers of The Manifesto in those years – and not even for a generation later – members of the industrial proletariat, to whom the document was addressed. By far the great majority of workers who could understand its message were artisans who aspired to the right to "associate" (in craftlike mutualistic brotherhoods or industrial trade unions) and, among the most advanced workers, to the right to "organise work" cooperatively.

This artisanal or associative socialism, as historians have called it, was more cooperative than communistic, rewarding the members of associations according to their work rather than according to their needs.

By contrast, The Manifesto of the Communist Party made a dramatic leap,

unequaled by any contemporary socialistic document. It showed that communism was not merely an ethical desideratum for social justice but a compelling historical necessity, flowing out of the very development of capitalism itself.

This leap was reined in by its ten-point minimum program, largely the work of Engels. With its moderate demands, it seems to have been designed for the German workers' movement, which was still allied with the middle classes against the aristocracy. Hence even the most socialistic of the ten demands, the seventh, prudently called for the "extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state" rather than the collectivisation of the economy (p. 505).

In a long-range perspective, part II of The Manifesto projected the concentration of all productive facilities, including the land, in the "hands of a vast association of the whole nation" (p. 505).

Actually, this last phrase, "a vast association of the whole nation," was specific to the English translation; the original German spoke of "associated individuals," a somewhat Proudhonist formulation that would have made the document more acceptable in Germany at the time.

After classes disappear and property has become socialised, The Manifesto says, the "public power will lose its political character," that is, its statist form:

"Political power [the state], properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat in its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away the old conditions of production by force, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of class generally and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

"In place of the old bourgeois society with its class and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." (pp. 505-6)

The Communists who try to achieve these aims, says the document, have no interests "apart from those of the proletariat as a whole" (p. 496).

They constitute the most resolute party in the struggle for promoting the welfare of the proletariat, but always viewing the contours of the struggle as a whole, they "everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things." Indeed, they always bring to the front "as the leading question in each [struggle], the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time" (p. 519).

Given its analysis of capitalism as a doomed social order, within which reforms must always be placed in the service of revolution; its resolute



commitment to (generally violent) revolution; its view of communism as an associative rather than a state system "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all," it is only fair to ask what Marx and Engels meant by "political power" in 1847-48.

The answer – idiosyncratic in the light of what the two men were to write in later years – is surprisingly libertarian.

In *The Manifesto*, the proletarian "state" that will replace the bourgeois "political power" and initially make the most "despotic inroads on the right of property" will consist of the proletariat raised to "the position of ruling class." More specifically:

"The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class, and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible." (emphasis added, p. 504)

This can hardly be called a state in either the usual Marxian or the social anarchist

Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of a nationalised economy, a "workers' republic" might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin's more favorite terms) of unparalleled oppression.

Marx and Engels had no effective response to make to this criticism, as we can tell from their correspondence with their German supporters. Nothing in their writings shows that they gave any serious regard to the "assemblyist" tradition established by the Parisian sections during the Great French Revolution, in which the poorest and most dispossessed in the French capital actually exercised collective power in their neighborhood assemblies during the stormy period between the August journée of 1792, which eliminated the monarchy, and the June journée of 1793, which nearly replaced the Convention with a communalist system of administration under sectional control.

This tradition, which lingered in France through most of the 19th century, found no echo in the Marxist literature.

But the Paris Commune of 1871 came as a

confederation of communes. It essentially challenged the existence of the French nation-state, calling upon the thousands of communes that dotted France to unite in a Proudhonist contractual network of autonomous communes rather than subject themselves to a centralised state.

Marx embraced this municipalist Commune, and in substance its call for a confederation of communes (without using the compromising word confederation, which his anarchist opponents employed), as a political structure in which "the old centralised government in the provinces" would, following Paris as a model, "have to give way to the self-government of the producers" – presumably a proletarian dictatorship.

Each delegate from the various communes would be bound "by the mandat impératif (formal instructions) of his constituents," a strictly anarchist concept that reduced a delegate from a parliamentary representative or deputy to a mere agent of the people, in whose voice he was expected to speak and vote.<sup>(4)</sup>

Marx's assertion that the central government would retain "few but important functions" was brave but hardly credible – and even James Guillaume, one of Bakunin's closest associates, regarded Marx's favorable appraisal of the Commune's libertarian features as the basis for a reconciliation between Marxists and anarchists in the First International.

Engels, in an 1875 letter to August Bebel criticising the Gotha Program (which had just been adopted by the German Social Democrats), even urged that instead of "People's State," the program use a "good old German word," *Gemeinwesen*, "which can very well do service for the French 'Commune,'" although he said little about its substance.<sup>(5)</sup>

In time, and not without vacillation, Marx went back on his favorable account of the Commune.<sup>(6)</sup> There is little doubt that he returned to the support for republican institutions that had marked his political views in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848. In the last years of his life, without saying much on the subject of the Commune, he clearly still favored incorporating into the republic many of the features – the pay scale for deputies, the right to recall, the need to arm the working class, and the mandat impératif – that he had praised in *The Civil War in France*. But the extent to which he thought a worker's state should be centralised and how much authority he thought it should enjoy remained unanswered questions upon his death.

Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a "proletariat organised as a ruling class."

If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally coordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty.

Some anarchists will always find fault with any form of institutional social organisation, but if the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must estab-



**PARIS COMMUNE:** Marx initially praised the Communards

sense of the word. In fact, the implications of this extraordinary formulation have vexed even the ablest of socialist theorists, anarchist as well as Marxist – and they dogged Marx and Engels themselves as a problem up to the last years of their lives.

How could an entire class, the proletariat organised as a "movement" that would eventually speak for society as a whole, institutionalise itself into a "political" (or state) power? By what concrete institutional forms would this class, whose revolution in contrast to all previous ones would represent "the interest of the immense majority" (p. 495), exercise its economic and political sovereignty?

Until the Paris Commune of 1871, Marx and Engels probably intended for the "political power" that the proletariat would establish to be nothing more than a republic, that is, a representative form of government, albeit one rooted in political rights such as recall.

Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines.

breath of fresh air to Marx and Engels, who, a generation after *The Manifesto* was published, embraced the Commune as the institutional structure that the proletariat would produce between a capitalist and a communist society, or as Marx put it in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>(2)</sup>

Marx praised the Commune for introducing the right to recall deputies to the Communal Council (the equivalent of the city council of Paris), the adoption of a skilled worker's wage as reimbursement for participating in the Council, the arming of the people, and very significantly, a "working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time."<sup>(3)</sup>

The economic achievements of the Commune were very limited; not only did it fail to socialise the economy, it brought much-needed reforms to the working class only because the more radical Internationalists, who formed a minority of the Communal Council, had to overcome the obstruction of the neo-Jacobins, who supported bourgeois legalities.

In its political institutions the Commune was much more of a municipalist entity, with strong affinities to anarchist notions of a

lish--and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established--well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society.

Apart from their writings in erstwhile support of the Paris Commune, neither Marx nor Engels ever resolved the problem of the political institutions for proletarian rule that they set for themselves in *The Manifesto*: the problem of how a class, still less the mass of the people in bourgeois society, will take over the reins of power as a class or a people.

In 1905 the Russian workers came up with their own solution to the question of a political institution for class power: the Petrograd Soviet.

This citywide soviet, which emerged in the Russian capital in the 1905 Revolution, was an approximation of the assemblies that had appeared in the Great French Revolution. Had it remained merely a municipal council, it would have differed little from the Paris Commune, although it was much more working class in character.

But the Petrograd Soviet also sank deep roots in the city's factories and was guided, through strike committees and shop committees, directly by the workers themselves.

More than Lenin, it was Leon Trotsky, one of its last and certainly its most prominent chairmen, who saw in the soviet not only the institution that could mobilise the proletariat as a class but provide the transitional political and economic bridge from a capitalist to a socialist society. Lenin's view of the soviet was more instrumental: he regarded it merely as a means for educating the working class and enlisting it in the service of the Bolshevik party.

Not until 1917 did Lenin decisively change his view about the soviets and come to regard them as institutions of working-class power.

Even so, he wavered during the July events, when the Bolshevik leaders were imprisoned as a result of a premature spontaneous insurrection, but by the autumn of 1917 he had returned to the goal of a soviet government.

For a time he suggested that a soviet government might include all the soviet parties -- Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries of all kinds as well as Bolsheviks -- but by the end of 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled the newly established soviet state entirely alone and eventually turned the soviets into docile instruments of

their party apparatus.

The question of the institutions of political and social management by a class as a whole -- and eventually by citizens in a classless society -- has no easy resolution. Plainly it is not answered adequately by Proudhon's system of federalism, which is too incoherent and vague and retains too many bourgeois features, such as contract and individual proprietorship, to provide a truly revolutionary solution. The solutions that later anarchists, more collectivist than the Proudhonists, offered are pregnant with possibilities, but they too suffer from a lack of definition and articulation.

For their part, anarchosyndicalists have offered workers' control of industry as the most viable revolutionary alternative to the state, adducing the takeover of factories and agricultural land as evidence of its feasibility. An adequate account of its possibilities and limitations would require another article.<sup>(7)</sup>

But as social elements for a liberatory society, workers' control has basic problems

1937, forcibly demolishing the powerful anarchist enclaves in Catalonia and Aragon.

What seems necessary are the institutions of a democratic politics -- to use the word politics in its Hellenic sense, not as a euphemism for modern-day Republican statecraft. I refer to a politics that would create local assemblies of the people and confederate them in purely administrative councils, in order to constitute a counterpower to the nation-state.

How such a counterpower could be established and could function falls outside the province of this article; far too many important details, both historical and logistical, would be lost in a brief summary of this "assemblyist" position.<sup>(8)</sup>

That the issue of the institutions of class rule was even raised in *The Manifesto* of the Communist Party is one aspect of the document that makes it as living in 1998 as it was in 1848.

That Marx and Engels, with their theoretical depth, foresaw the trajectory of capitalist



**RUSSIAN SOLUTION:** A meeting of the 1905 Petrograd Soviet

-- not only their parochialism and the highly visible decline in numbers of the manufacturing working class but most especially their tendency to turn into competitive collectively owned capitalistic enterprises.

Mere economic control of plants and factories is only one side of the coin of a revolutionary transformation, a lesson the Spanish anarchosyndicalists learned only too dramatically in 1936-37, when, despite the greatest collectivisation experiment in history, they failed to eliminate the bourgeois state -- only to find that it returned in May

development, in terms that are even more relevant today than in their own day, would be enough to make the work a tour de force in the realm of political thought. Both its great insights and its vexing problems live on with us to this day. The tragedy of Marxism is that it was blind to the insights of social anarchism and that later revolutionaries failed to incorporate the insights of both and go beyond them.

By Murray Bookchin

**NOTES:**

THE *Manifesto's* case for the bourgeoisie's ultimate inability to take custody of social life rested on its "pauperisation" of the proletariat -- the famous "immiseration" thesis on which volume 1 of *Capital* was to conclude.

With the later emergence of welfare states and their ability to manage crises, capitalism seemed able to prevent itself from sinking into a deep-seated economic crisis, causing this notion of "immiseration" to seem questionable. But the volatility of modern, "neo-liberal" capitalism and the erosion of its methods for crisis management have brought into question the ability of capitalism to be a self-correcting system.

It is far from clear that, in the years ahead, economic collapse (as well as ecological disasters) will

be avoided. Capitalism is still very much in flux, and *The Manifesto's* warnings about "anarchy in production" can by no means be ruled out as a source of massive social unrest

- (1) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 482. All citations from *The Manifesto* herein are drawn from this translation, giving page numbers.
- (2) Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 95; emphasis in the original.
- (3) Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, 331.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 332.
- (5) Engels, "Letter to August Bebel, March 18-28, 1875," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 71.
- (6) See Marx's letter to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis,

February 22, 1881, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 46, pp. 65-66.

(7) My full assessment appears in "The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism," *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 1 (1993), pp. 3-24.

(8) For a revolutionary politics by which people can manage their affairs through direct-democratic popular assemblies in confederations -- or what I have called libertarian municipalism--the reader may care to consult my book *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; London and New York: Cassell, 1996) as well as Janet Biehl's *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997).

Recent theories of "strong democracy" and the like presuppose the existence of the state and tend to defer to the notion that present-day society is too "complex" to permit a direct democracy, thereby offering no serious challenge to the existing social order.

# Rescuing Lucy Parsons for

**Review:** Collection shows how much organiser and writer Lucy Parsons contributed, not just up until the Haymarket riots, but for 50 years afterwards

Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality and Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937.

Edited by Gale Ahrens

Pub. Charles H. Kerr

ISBN: 9780882863009

Paperback 184 pp

Price £15.80 incld. postage from US (AK press)

GALE Ahrens has done the anarchist movement a real service in putting together this collection, which should rescue Lucy Parsons from the dark corner she has existed in.

In it she emerges from the shadow of her martyred husband as a central if neglected figure in the development of anarchism in the USA.

Lucy has unfortunately been remembered mostly as the widow of the Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons, executed in Chicago in 1887.

But this book reveals her activism to have started nearly a decade earlier and to have ended nearly fifty years later.

For much of this period she was at the core of the revolutionary anarchist movement in the USA and many of her writings retain a real relevancy today.

Lucy and Albert arrived in Chicago in the 1870's and together threw themselves into the revolutionary socialist movement that was growing there.

The first letter in this collection was one sent by Lucy to 'The socialists' almost eight years before Haymarket.

It uses the example of a glass workers lockout to argue against the idea that there can be any partnership between bosses and workers.

This was a theme she was to return to again and again in her writings over the decades to come.

## Organiser

By 1879 Lucy was one of the main organisers of the Working Women's Union and in 1883 Lucy and Albert took part in the founding of the Chicago section of the anarchist International Working Peoples Association.

She was a frequent contributor to the anarchist paper 'The Alarm' and a co-leader of important working class demonstrations in 1884 and 1885.

The anarchists of Chicago were no fringe movement but rather the main leadership of the Chicago unions and in particular the struggle for the eight-hour day.

Following the general strike of May 1st

1886 the state used the excuse of a police riot during which seven policemen died (mostly after being shot in the crossfire from other police guns) to crush this movement.

A rigged trial was used to smash the anarchists' influence and jail or execute eight of the most prominent anarchists.

These events which led to Mayday becoming an international day of working class solidarity are covered in great

## Communist?

Towards the end of her life when the US anarchist movement had largely collapsed she was active in the Communist Party dominated 'International Labour Defense'.

Unfortunately this allowed some to claim she had joined the Communist Party – a claim that is too often repeated by many anarchists today.

In fact there is no evidence for this. The CP did publish an obituary when she died it but did not claim she was ever a member – surely a major oversight if she had been.

Her own attitude to working with the ILD is probably best expressed in her 1930 May Day speech, which was delivered at the age of 77.

In it she appeals for support for the "hundreds and hundreds" of CP members in prison cells but she also declares "I am an anarchist: I have no apology to make to a single man woman or child, because I am an anarchist, because anarchism carries the very germ of liberty in its womb".

At the age of 81 she replies to an anarchist who had written to her about the state of the US movement at that time.

She says "Anarchism has not produced any organised ability in the present generation, only a few loose struggling groups scattered over this vast country, that come together in conferences occasionally, talk to each other, then go home... Do you call this a movement?"

"I went to work for the International Labour Defense (ILD) because I wanted to do a little something to help defend the victims of capitalism who got into trouble, and not always be talking, talking, talking".

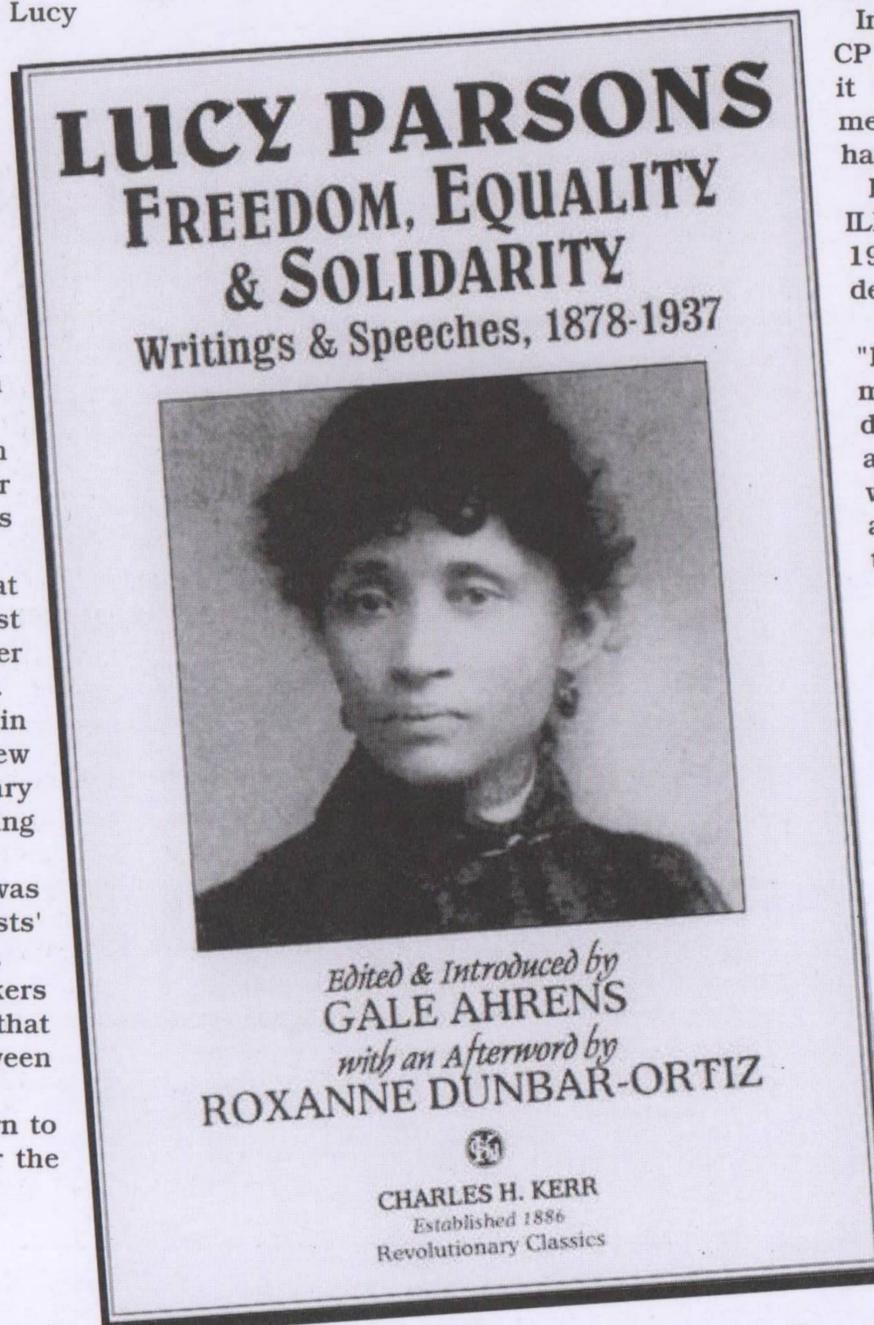
## Lucy on organisation

One of the striking things about reading Lucy's writing is how relevant many of her comments are to the US anarchist movement today.

As a frequent contributor to the anarchist press and the editor of the anarchist and pro IWW paper 'The Liberator' she understood how important a serious commitment to organisation and large-scale publication was.

"There is no way of building up a movement, strengthening it, and keeping it intact except by a press, at least weeklies if dailies are impossible..."

"The Liberator is the only English-language anarchist propaganda paper in America; for



detail elsewhere – relevant to this review is that Albert, Lucy's husband was one of those executed.

Quite naturally these events threw a shadow across the rest of her life but contrary to what is often implied they did not form the sole focus of her future activity.

On a speaking tour of Britain in 1888 it was observed that "she came as a propagandist to whom tragedy had given a stronger voice". Later in 1909 she was also to tour Canada – this time as an IWW agitator.

For the next 50 years she would be active in many anarchist and campaign groups as well.

# the anarchist movements

this reason, comrades and sympathizers in all parts of the country should feel duty bound to support this paper, write for it, contribute to its support financially, and make its success their personal concern".

Writing in 1907 she observed, "The Anarchistic cause (there has been no movement in recent years) has lacked a plan of procedure or organisation."

The existing groups "were composed, for the most part, of young, inexperienced people who had about as many conceptions of the real aims of Anarchism as there were members of the group... I, personally, have always held to the idea of organisation, together with an assumption of responsibility by the members, such as paying monthly dues and collecting funds for propaganda purposes.

For holding these views I have been called an 'old school' anarchist, etc".

This is an example of her serious approach towards organisation. She was involved in the Syndicalist League which argued for involvement in the mass unions as well as building the IWW.

This along with her willingness to generally argue for involvement in mass working class organisations suggests she is one of the few 20th century US anarchists making arguments similar to the organizational and interventionist currents of anarchist-communism.

However there is no hint in this collection that she was even aware of the similar debates around 'the platform' happening within the European anarchist movement in the mid 1920's.

## Sex, race and class

Apart from being known as the widow of Albert Parsons Lucy has also received some coverage because she was a woman of colour in a movement whose leadership was nearly always white and male.

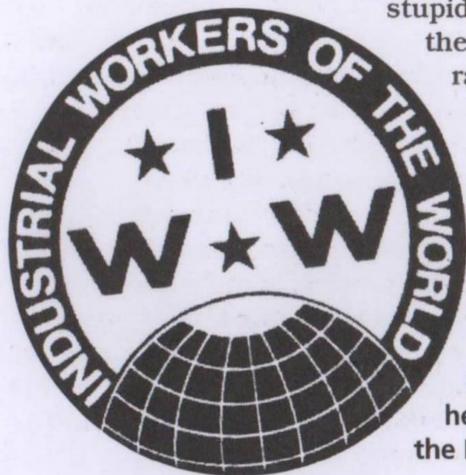
This collection carries a number of her articles on women and racism and from these it is easy to see why Lucy has not received a lot more publicity from modern US anarchists.

In summary Lucy may have argued for armed self-defense as the right response to racist lynchings some 80 years before Malcolm X but her approach to the question of racism would quickly lead today to her being labeled today as a 'class reductionist'.

In 1886 in response to lynchings in the south she asked

"Are there any so stupid to believe these outrages have been, are being and will be heaped

**RADICAL:**  
Lucy Parsons helped found the IWW union



## Factfile: Lucy Parsons (1853-1942)

**"Strike not for a few cents more an hour, because the price of living will be raised faster still, but strike for all you earn, be content with nothing less."**

■ Born in Texas to mixed-race parents, Lucy Parsons fell in love with Albert Parsons at the age of 18, and was forced to flee to the north by the racists reaction to their marriage.

■ She helped found the International Working People's Association in 1883, and was a writer for famed anarchist newspaper The Alarm.

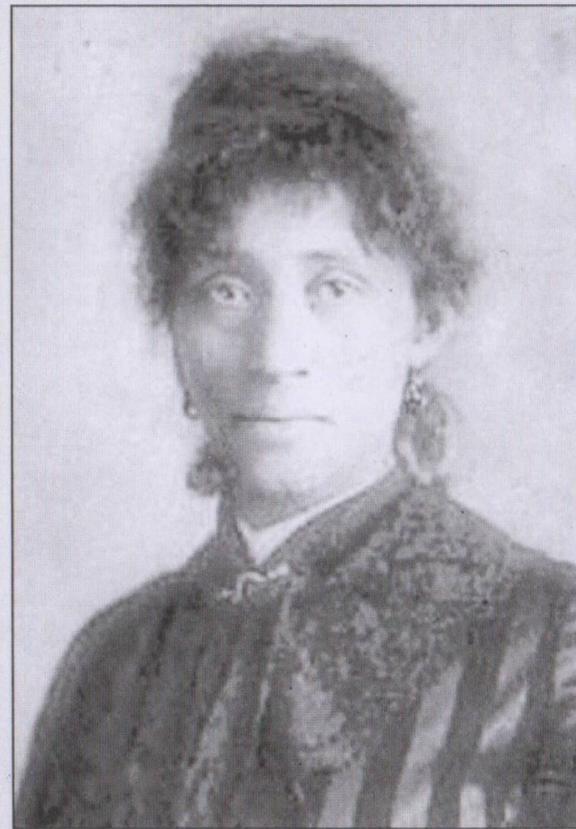
■ Her husband was one of the eight Haymarket Martyrs in 1886, and was hanged by the state of Illinois.

■ In 1905 she helped found the Industrial Workers of the World.

■ She organized the Chicago Hunger Demonstrations in January 1915.

■ She was described by the Chicago Police Department as "more dangerous than a thousand rioters" in the 1920s.

■ In 1925 she began working with the National Committee of the International Labor Defense, a



**AGITATOR:** Lucy Parsons was one of the most influential figures of US anarchism

communist-led organisation, which led to accusations that she had joined them. This was never proven and she remained a self-declared anarchist in 1930.

■ She continued agitating until shortly before her death in a housefire at the age of 89.

■ She was still seen as such a threat by the state that, after her death, police seized her personal library and papers.

upon the Negro because he is black?

"Not at all. It is because he is poor. It is because he is dependent. Because he is poorer as a class than his white wage-slave brother of the North".

Her attitude on women's struggles was similar.

While speaking at the founding convention of the IWW in 1905 she said "I have taken the floor because no other women has responded" but continued:

"Wherever wages are to reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them, and if there is anything that you men should do in the future it is to organise the women".

In this context it is easy to understand the obscurity Lucy Parsons was allowed to fall into by the US anarchist movement.

At it became increasingly hostile to organisation and organisational discipline, as identity politics was pushed to the fore over class politics, Lucy Parsons cut an

increasingly awkward historical figure precisely because she was a woman of colour.

Perhaps her arguments are overly reductionist but at a stage when some who call themselves anarchists seemed to have altogether lost sight of the importance of class struggle they are a useful encouragement to look again.

This collection goes some considerable way to putting Lucy Parsons back at the centre of the development of the anarchist movement in the USA.

It is not necessary to agree with everything she wrote to see that she adds a very valuable perspective to the debates that have come to dominate that movement today.

■ Written for Anarkismo.net

■ You'll find more on Lucy Parsons online at [lucyparsonsproject.org](http://lucyparsonsproject.org)

By Andrew Flood





**START TO FINISH:** Left to right, Jim Jones poses as a prophet surrounded by smiling children, his followers building Jonestown, the colony as it was in 1978-9, and the fallout from the massacre.  
Photographs: Promotional literature/The Jonestown report/unknown



# Socialists of all stripes have been accused of cultish behaviour. Maurice Brinton asks: **What is it that sects provide for us?**

*JONESTOWN* was colonised by the followers of Jim Jones, a charismatic leader who had founded the Peoples Temple religion in California in 1955. The religion's original principals were staunchly socialist, and the church built up a formidable reputation for helping the less fortunate in its early incarnation.

The sect built Jonestown in Northwest Guayana in the mid-1970s, and over 1,000 of Jones' followers moved there for the promise of a better life.

In the notorious 1978 incident which was to bring worldwide attention, the entire population of the town was wiped out following a mass murder-suicide, after people tried to leave following the visit of a US senator.

In part two of his work *Suicide For Socialism*, Maurice Brinton looks at the phenomenon of religious sects and the relation to socialism, concentrating on the tragedy of Jonestown.

**T**HROUGHOUT history religious or political faiths have exercised great influence. They have moved armies and motivated people to build both cathedrals and concentration camps.

Their success had had very little to do with whether they were true or not. The fact that thousands (or millions) believed in them made of them real historical and social forces.

Religious or political faiths (and the Jonestown events show that the boundaries may be hard to define) have several things in common.

They can provide, for the emotionally or materially deprived, the lonely, the rejected (or

— less often — the culturally alienated or intellectually confused) the security of human contact, the satisfaction of an activity that seems socially useful, and the self-generating warmth of knowing all the answers, i.e. of a closed system of beliefs.

These beliefs diminish, in those who hold them, the awareness of 'failure' or of rejection — or the feeling of being useless.

They are potent analgesics. And they offer positive objectives, either through instant

“These beliefs diminish, in those who hold them, the awareness of 'failure' or rejection — or the feeling of being useless.”

political solutions in this world, or through solutions in the hereafter (pie in the sky).

In a society which either callously disregards (or just bureaucratically forgets) the very existence of thousands of its citizens, claims to make existence meaningful evoke an echo. Sects (i.e. groups based on cults) may come to fill an enormous vacuum in people's lives.

Most people are much happier in a situation where they are needed, wanted and accepted for what they are, not condemned and looked down upon for not being what they are not.

We all like to act in a manner that is rational

and that fulfils both one's own needs and those of others.

The tragedy is that political and religious sects may convert these positive human attributes into their opposites: manipulation and authoritarian dogmatism on the part of the leaders, submission and the abdication of critical faculties on the part of the led.

## Sects in history

Historically, cults and sects have usually flourished at times of social crisis, when old value systems were collapsing and new ones had not yet asserted themselves.

They usually start as small groups which break off from the conventional consensus and espouse very different views of the real, the possible and the moral. They have attracted very diverse followings and achieved very variable results. Christianity started as a religion of slaves.

In *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Norman Cohn shows how, many centuries later, 'the people for whom (the Medieval Millennium) had most appeal were neither peasants, firmly integrated into the life of the village, nor artisans integrated into their guilds.

The belief in the Millennium drew its strength from a population living on the margin of society'. The New England Puritans conformed at one time to the norms of a harsh age by imprisoning and torturing their own dissidents.

They later became respectable. So did the Mormon followers of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

Marxism arose as a theory that would liberate a proletariat that had 'nothing to lose but its chains', and has ended up imposing chains on the proletariat.

The followers of the Peoples Temple (mainly poor blacks and alienated young whites) have made history by inaugurating the 'mass revolutionary suicide'. Cults can clearly mature into mainstream institutions. Or disintegrate into jungle horror stories.

A detailed analysis of cults would require an analysis of their rhetoric and ideology, and of the culture matrices in which they are embedded.

The present appeal of cults is related to the major upheaval of our times. This is not primarily economic. Referring to the Jonestown events an American sociologist has written: 'The US consensus of values has broken down.

There is, in some respects, an undermined authority in philosophy and theology. There is the demise of metaphysics... there is no 'rock in a weary land' that gives people something certain to hold onto. So people reach out and grab at anything: an idea or an organisation.

"When traditional answers seem inadequate people are ripe for cults that promise prescriptions for a better life. Most cults offer three benefits: ultimate meaning, a strong sense of community and rewards either in this world or the next.

"When those prescriptions are linked to the authoritarian style of a charismatic leader you have an extremely powerful antidote to the cultural malaise of what sociologists call anomie (rootlessness, aimlessness). (Los Angeles Times, December 1, 1978.)"

Specific ingredients to disaffection from established society had welled up in the 1960's and early 1970's.

There had been the expansion of an unpopular war in South East Asia, massive upheavals over civil rights and a profound crisis of values in response to the unusual combination of unprecedented affluence on the one hand, and potential thermonuclear holocaust on the other.

Revolutionary socialists — the whole axis of

“When traditional answers seem inadequate people are ripe for cults that promise prescriptions for a better life.”

their propaganda vitiated by their erroneous analyses of capitalism and their distorted vision of socialism — had proved quite unable to make any lasting impact.

## Black separatism

Predominantly black organisations such as the Peoples Temple have, moreover, deep roots in the very fabric of American society and of American history.

Before the Civil War there had already been three separate attempts by US blacks to flee

racial persecution.

The first was initiated by a black seaman, Paul Cuffee, in 1815; the second by a black physician, Martin Delaney, in 1850; and the third by a black minister, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, in 1855.

All were designed to lead blacks to a world of peace and freedom by inciting them to make a mass exodus either to Africa or to the West Indies. The appeals proved most attractive to the most exploited and dispossessed.

This separatism was often cloaked in religious cloth. But it was the bitter racism and socio-economic oppression experienced by the black masses in the post-Reconstruction South, rather than religious exhortation, that led so many blacks to support the cause of emigration.

This was also true of the largest mass black separation movement of this century, Marcus Garvey's 'Back to Africa' movement of the 1920's.

Calling his movement 'Black Zionism', Garvey skillfully used symbols (flags, uniforms and other regalia) and highly emotional rhetoric to fire his followers.

In the end thousands of enthusiasts lost money, suffered broken promises and became victims of outright fraud. Father Divine had been inspired by Garvey. And Jim Jones was inspired by Father Divine.

As Earl Ofari points out in an article in the *International Herald Tribune* (Dec. 9, 1978) 'the willingness of a sizeable segment of blacks to embrace movements that have run the gamut from 'Back to Africa' to Peoples Temple stands as a reflection of their



utter desperation.

The lesson, surely, is not that cults hold a particular fascination for blacks but that the most deprived members of US society – those who see the least hope of making it within the system are the easiest prey for charlatans preaching that Paradise lies just over some falsely technicolored rainbow'.

This is clearly true: oppressed whites have also sought refuge in 'solutions' of this kind.

And it is a powerful rebuke to those trendy radicals (usually guilt-laden middle class individuals) who seem to think that oppression is good for you, that it somehow guarantees revolutionary purity.

claimed he had been visited on Mt. Shasta by a vision of the legendary Count of St. Germain, an 18th century mystic.

The Count gave Ballard a sip of 'pure electronic essence' and a wafer of 'concentrated energy' (the religious symbolism, in modern garb, is here very clear) and told him to get rich.

It worked. By the time the dust settled in the 1940's Ballard claimed 350,000 followers and the Internal Revenue claimed he'd bilked his disciples of some \$4 million.

Joe Bell, a post-depression dandy, founded Mankind United by preaching that a race of little men with metal heads who lived in the

Cults Collective Mania', Los Angeles Times, Nov. 26, 1978.)

### Fulfilment and rationality

The key thing to grasp about cults is that they offer a 'fulfilment' of unmet needs.

Biologically speaking such needs (to be loved and protected, understood and valued) are something much older and deeper than the need to think, argue or act autonomously. They play a far deeper role than 'rationality' in the moulding of behaviour.

People who haven't grasped this will never understand the tenacity with which the beliefs of certain cults are clung to, the way otherwise intelligent people get caught up in them, their imperviousness to rational disproof, or the organisational loyalties of various sect members. The surrender of individual judgment is one of the hallmarks of a 'well integrated' sect member.

Jim Jones was called 'Father' or 'Dad' by his devotees. The poor blacks of the Jonestown commune hadn't just 'given up their self' to their charismatic father. Such were the physical, emotional and social deprivations they had grown up in that they had very little 'self' to surrender.

And that 'self', such as it was, seemed to them of little relevance in changing their circumstances or the world they lived in.

Some young middle class whites in the commune were prepared to surrender their 'self' in exchange for an emotional feedback they had lacked in earlier life.

Others had already surrendered their 'self' to their parents. In joining the Temple they had merely found a new repository for it.

But the twisted and manipulatory demagogues who lead various fascist and leninist cults are also – at least to begin with – pathetic individuals.

They too are often the products of distorted backgrounds. They seek to blot out the intolerable parts of their life, first through the manipulation and later through the control of the lives of others. The needs of follower and leader feed insatiably upon one another.

The relationship is symbiotic: each needs the other. Both seek instant, effortless, ready made solutions, rather than the achievement of understanding, which is a pre-condition for real action for change.

Human beings often feel vaguely guilty about not knowing **The Truth**. When a gifted, persuasive leader comes along who says he has it – and who presents it in a simple and easy manner (even if it is a delusional system) people will listen. They will accept some things about which they have reservations, because they perceive that the Leader has 'good' answers about other things.

Arthur Janov, author of 'The New Consciousness' and of 'Primal Man', points out that 'the surrender of the self, of judgment, of feeling, has taken place long before the outward appearances of a cult become bizarre'.

In an otherwise excellent article on Cults and the Surrender of Judgment' (International Herald Tribune, Dec. 2, 1978) he fails however to stress the specificity of the Jonestown events.

This wasn't a rational decision like the mass suicide at Masada.<sup>(3)</sup> It was not culturally motivated like Saipan.<sup>(4)</sup> It didn't even resemble the fate of the Old Believers.<sup>(5)</sup>



**SCIENTOLOGY:** The most famous example of a 'cultish' religious sect is the group founded by L. Ron Hubbard, a charismatic science fiction writer.

### The Californian background

The state of California was also part of the cultural matrix of the Peoples Temple. It has established a questionable claim to fame as the cult centre of the world.

Richard Mathison (author of 'Faiths, Cults and Sects of America') points out that 'as the tide of seers, prophets, mystics and gurus came to this natural haven for the disenfranchised and the uprooted, they grew to be accepted as no less a part of the landscape than eucalyptus or foot-long hotdogs'.

Over the years California has spawned nearly every variant of cultic fraud. Between the wars it produced the 'Mighty I am' movement.

Guy Ballard (an unemployed paper hanger)

centre of the earth would tell cultists what to do through his revelations. Bell ended up claiming a quarter of a million gullible followers who mortgaged homes and sold other belongings before he was grounded in a maze of legal problems.

In more recent times there have been the (not specifically Californian) examples of Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology, of the Unification Church of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, of Chuck Dederich's Synanon, of the Divine Light Mission, of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness... to mention only some of the 'religious' cults.

Recent estimates claim that more than two million Americans – mostly between the ages of 18 and 25 – are affiliated to cults.

And this doesn't include those affiliated to various 'political' cults. ('Psyching Out the

What happened during those last grizzly hours in the Guyana commune was something historically new, a typical product of our time: the era of propaganda and of the loudspeaker, of brainwashing and of totalitarian ideologies.

### On temples: religious or revolutionary

Sects like the Peoples Temple – or certain revolutionary groups – offer more immediate solutions than the more abstract religions, or than the more rational and self-managed forms of political radicalism.

They don't only offer a new super-family, a new group of people to hold onto, to support one.

The main attraction is that the cult leader is real, visible, tangible. He may promote you – or shout at you, abuse you, even spit at you.

His sanctity or political omniscience (and I say 'his' deliberately, for popes or general secretaries have almost universally been male) provide a spurious antidote to the malaise of rootlessness.

'Join me' the Leader says (for most sects are actively proselytising agencies) 'for I am the one who knows'. 'Come to my Church (or become a member of my revolutionary organisation). For I am the one and only interpreter of the word of God (or of the course of history). Find with us a purpose for your useless life. Become one of the Chosen People (or a Cadre of the Revolution)'.

We are not saying that all revolutionary groups (or not even that all those we disagree with most strongly) are like the Peoples Temple. But who – in all honesty – can fail to see occasional disturbing similarities?

Who does not know of marxist sects which resemble the Temple – in terms of the psychological atmosphere pervading them?<sup>(6)</sup>

Surviving members of the Japanese Red Army Fraction or ex-members of the Socialist Labour League (now WRP) who got out in time need not answer these questions.

"The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready he is to claim it for his Nation, his Race or his Holy Cause"

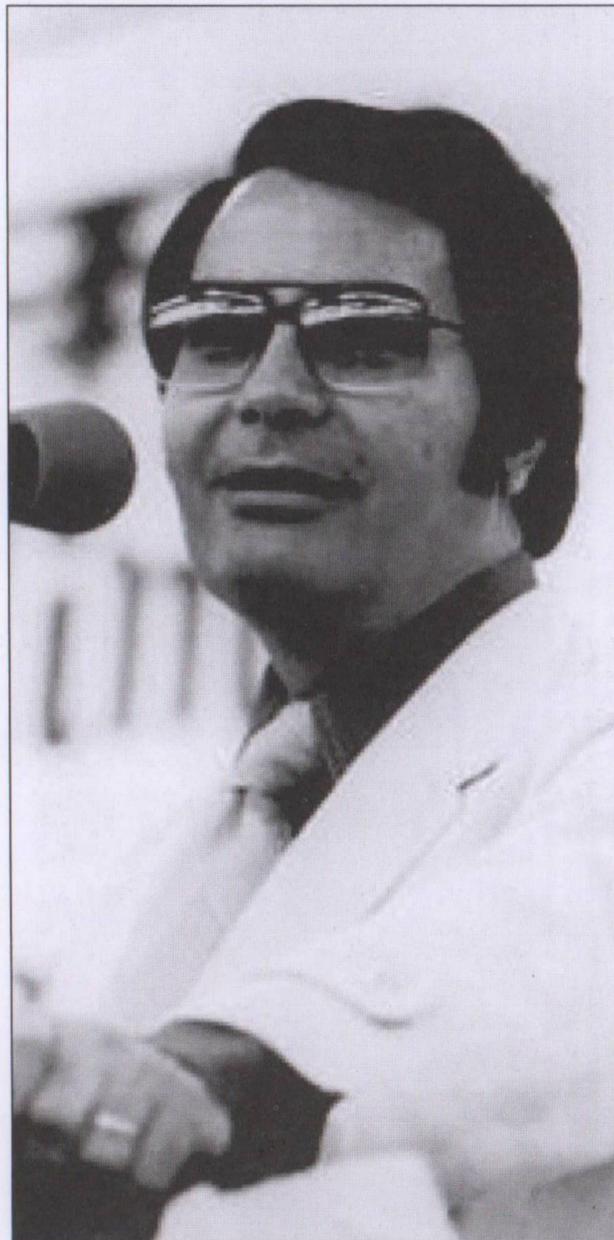
- Eric Hoffer in 'The True Believer'.

(P.S. Same, no doubt, applies to women.)

In such organisations – the Leader may become more and more authoritarian and paranoid. If he has achieved institutional power he may kill, torture or excommunicate (Stalin, Torquemada) increasing numbers of his co-thinkers. Or he may order them 'shot

like partridges'.

If he is a 'leftist' authoritarian devoid – as yet – of the state power he is seeking, he will merely expel large numbers of his deviant followers. Deviance – above all – cannot be tolerated. Such men would rather live in a world peopled with heretics and renegades,



**SLICK:** Jim Jones makes a speech.

*Photograph: The Jonestown Institute*

and keep the total allegiance of those who remain.

One even wonders whether (unlike most of their supporters) they still believe in what they preach – or whether the maintenance of their power has not become their prime concern.

Jim Jones' rantings about defectors and 'traitors' is not unique. It is encountered in a whole stratum of the political left. Many radical 'leaderships' boast of how they have coped with previous deviations. But however 'unreal' the world they live in, the core of

followers will remain loyal. The Leader is still the shield.

Even in Jonestown anything seemed better than the other reality: the painful alternative of deprivation, material, emotional or intellectual.

Why didn't more people leave Jonestown? It was because they would again be left without hope.

This was at least as potent a motive for staying as were the stories spread by Jones and his inner clique that there would be no point in seeking help in Georgetown, for the Peoples Temple had its agents there too... who would 'get them'.

Even when Ryan and his team visited the commune, only 14 out of over 900 members said they wanted to leave. To many, the figure seems trivial. To Jones it spelt catastrophe.

Many sects live in political isolation. This is a further mechanism for ensuring the control of the leaders.

The members are not only 'rescued' from their past, they are 'protected' from their own present. Such sects refrain from anything that would bring their members into too close a proximity with the outside world.

Recruitment is encouraged, but closely monitored. Members are urged to give up their hobbies and their previous friends. Such external relationships are constantly scrutinised, questioned, frowned upon, deemed suspect.

United action with other groups – of a kind that may involve discussion or argument – is avoided, or only allowed to 'trustworthy' leaders. The simplest course is to move, lock, stock and barrel, to the jungles of Guyana. In such an environment, after surrendering their passports and all their worldly possessions, the members would be totally dependent on the leaders for their news, their day-to-day needs, for the very content of their thoughts.

Open, non-authoritarian organisations encourage individuality and differences of opinion. But criticism impairs the pain-killing effect of cults – and the cohesion of sects. When a cult is threatened both Leader and followers may go berserk.

The best analogy to this is the withdrawal reaction from a drug on which someone has become hooked.

Criticism impairs the efficacy of such drugs. So does any suggestion that the Leader doesn't know, or that perhaps there is no hard and fast answer to certain questions.

By Maurice Brinton

### NOTES:

(1) According to the Los Angeles Times (Dec. 14, 1978) 'Burnham described himself five years ago as a socialist but not a marxist. Today he calls himself a marxist who does not yet lead a marxist administration'.

According to a veteran member of Georgetown's diplomatic corps 'Jones professed to believe in a socialism based on a multiracial kind of communal life. That's what Mr Burnham is aiming for.

That's what may have drawn the Peoples Temple to the 'Cooperative Republic of Guyana'. (Whether Forbes Burnham was a 'marxist' or not, it did not prevent him speaking on an SLL - now WRP - platform in Trafalgar Square in 1958.)

(2) Despite these differences of emphasis, agreement proved possible among these 'fellow socialists'. When important visitors later visited the commune (such as California's Lt. Governor Mervyn Dymally), they and

Jones were often greeted by Guyana's Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and his Deputy Prime Minister Ptolemy Reid.

And it was Viola Burnham (the President's wife) and Ptolemy Reid who transported the Jonestown treasure (amounting to more than \$1 million in currency, gold and jewelry) 'back to government headquarters in Georgetown' as early as November 20. (International Herald Tribune, Dec. 26, 1978.)

(3) In 73A.D., after a prolonged siege, 960 Jewish men and women besieged by the Romans for over a year decided, after full discussion, that mass suicide was preferable to surrender.

This decision was taken despite the fact that it constituted a transgression of the Jewish religious code. Another Jewish leader (Yoseph ben Matatyahw, later known as Flavius Josephus) had been trapped on another hill, some years earlier.

He took the opposite decision ... and lived to record the Masada events.

(4) During the US invasion of the South Seas Island of Saipan during World War II, Japanese officers used their Samurai swords to behead dozens, if not hundreds of their compliant troops.

Other soldiers obeyed orders to jump off cliffs into the sea. This event was an integral part of a culture where dishonour was deemed worse than death.

(5) During the second half of the 17th century the Old Believers broke from the Russian Orthodox Church and were later threatened by the official Church with reconversion by decree.

Thousands burned themselves alive. They assembled in log huts, churches and other buildings, mostly in the northern regions of European Russia. 'They would ignite the buildings and perish.

They felt it was far better to die in flames than to burn eternally in Hell by accepting what they perceived as an heretical church.' (see Frazer's 'The Golden Bough')

(6) All they lacked was the dedication to mass suicide.

# Going through the works

Review: Maurice Brinton represented one of the most encouraging strands of socialism of recent times

For Workers Power – the selected writings of Maurice Brinton  
 Edited by David Goodway  
 AK Press  
 ISBN: 1904859070  
 Paperback 379pp

THIS very welcome book has by an unkind twist of fate become the final publication of Maurice Brinton, whose death was announced recently.

It is a selection of the works of the leading writer and activist in the old Solidarity For Workers Power, 1961-92.

This group emerged from the wreck of the Communist Party of Great Britain after the Hungarian revolution, and the collapse of the trotskyist publication, The Newsletter.

For more than thirty years, Solidarity published regular journals, and irregular but equally informative booklets, on workers power – or anything else related to it. The literature is still sought after today.

Maurice Brinton was of course the pen name of the fairly well known and popular activist Chris Pallis [1923-2005], from what was known as "the marxist-anarchists", though surviving group members would almost certainly deny this title.

Brinton was a hospital consultant and wished to remain private. But his anonymity was rudely broken in 1961 when a right wing press campaign exposed this, as Goodway says.

My recollection is slightly different, with the actual cover being blown by the libertarian Peter Cadogan when both were on the editorial board of the old series International Socialism journal. He was ejected from this post for this irrational and foolish act. Regardless, Brinton kept his identify hidden either as stated, or as "Martin Grainger".

Modelled on the French Socialisme ou Barbarie and the writer Cornelius Castadoriadis, Solidarity began with probably the strongest industrial base in the UK, as ken Weller has pointed out.

The old International Socialists, soon to move from its federalist, non centralised group structure into a bolshevik style Socialist Workers Party, was small and student based.

Both communists and trotskyists clung to their declining industrial membership, the

Labour Party to the myth of constitutional "power".

Solidarity members in their monthly journal wrote about their experiences, poked fun at the devious tricks of respectable rivals and provided resources for a growing movement

going, into further abstractions.

Brinton's accounts of popular insurrections like Paris '68, also include reports about the 1961 Belgian General Strike, the Portuguese Diary of 1974 -76, and the Polish Solidarnosc, Suddenly Last Summer in 1980-81. Today perhaps he would be writing of Argentina and Venezuela.

Seven articles look explicitly at Castadoriadis – or Paul Cardan, Jean-Marc Coudray or Pierre Chaulieu, as he also called himself.

I have never been very sure about Castadoriadis despite his general commitment to the ideas of what used to be called "workers council communism", if not the specific form.

It is specifically his thoughts on what was acceptable about marxist theory that has been unclear to me.

After re reading the Brinton's introductory articles, I looked again at the originals, and at the numerous letters Castadoriadis wrote into Solidarity Two, the third major series to come from the group.

I emerged even more confused. Perhaps I should buckle down and read the three volume collection of his work, Social and Political Writings.

Still, to emphasis the positive points, it is remarkable that in all the re-thinking that followed the Hungarian revolution, Castadoriadis had a hand in two of the most perceptive publications.

These were his Workers Councils and the Economics of the Self Managed Society (1957, 58pp) and as Pierre Chaulieu, with CLR James, as JR Johnson, and Grace C Lee in Facing Reality, (1958 USA – listed under Lee, 174pp).

Solidarity's own Hungary '56 by Anderson, Andy [1964, 120p] completes the triumvirate. This last still provides the most inspiring single account. Expect renewed interest next year with the anniversary.

Apart from the forty selected articles, there are reprints of his main publications: an eyewitness account of Paris : May 1968, still in print, The Irrational in Politics, sexual repression and ideology, The Bolsheviks and Workers Control.

This is his major work, still unparalleled and without challenge.

Leninists still have no reply to Brinton over his third book above, and they chart the decline from a 'workers society' in Russia into state capitalist stalinism – or worse – to



of real revolutionary opposition.

Brinton contributed to the journal of libertarian socialism and its supplementary booklets, with a sharp intelligence born of wide experience and 110% commitment.

It would be true to say that with Ken Weller he was the centre of a unique organisation.

This volume looks at the movements for workers power around the world, especially workers councils, and introduces the writings of Cornelius Castadoriadis, Daniel Cohn Bendit, Wilhelm Reich, Ida Mett, Phil Mailer and Murray Bookchin.

The last of these had made a similar journey to himself, through the communists and trotskyists, but unfortunately has kept

# of a brilliant socialist voice

1928, ignoring the instant repression of the workers council movement directly after the 1917 revolution.

The article on Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is an excellent demolition job on Chris Goodey's criticism of the book in Critique 4, 1975.

He did the same to Chris Harman in the old series International Socialism Journal, numbers 49 & 52, on the occasion of his similar ill founded attack.

I have always considered The Irrational in Politics to be a reasonable introduction to political socialisation.

Regrettably there appears to be no follow up or further volume on the subject, unless you leap to Gramsci on hegemony.

Some mention must be made of the other contributions of Solidarity which could not be included in this volume.

Among these are strong support for the Committee of 100 in sharpening up the anti war/weapons CND movement in the 1960s, practical and political assistance to the squatting and militant tenants, and the promotion of specific rank and file union opposition in the motor industry from many car factories.

The special series of publications devoted to this are particularly useful,

but I suppose you could say that about quite a lot of the texts.

Another useful service was the translations of Solidarity publications to other languages.

These were listed in the journal in the On the Solidarity Wavelength column.

Coming now to the "critical" section, and here I think the strongest point concerns the books assessment of his attitude to anarchism.

Editor David Goodway bravely states that "Brinton's politics are fully anarchist", on page 14, but in reality they weren't, and neither, incidentally are those of this reviewer.

Any assessment of anarchism as a body of ideas, and guide to action, must include the strengths and weaknesses.

Such an assessment is not in the book, and given David Goodway's politics we can assume this is due to the material in hand, not editorial neglect.

Apart from numerous tangential articles, two extracts are directly relevant.

There is a comprehensive and perceptive review of Paul Avrich's The Russian Anarchists, with a protesting letter and a further response, and a comment on Murray Bookchin's Spontaneity and Organisation, on the occasion of the reprint of the article.

As Goodway points out, Brinton has no time for either Michael Bakunin or Peter Kropotkin.

He regards the former an authoritarian, muddle-headed conspirator and the latter as a romantic visionary, too abstract for reality.

These sentiments however strongly held are not a substitute for a comprehensive judgement and ignore the role that Bakunin played for example in counterposing the anarchist emphasis on workers control to the State based politics of Karl Marx in the

## Factfile: Chris Pallis, a.k.a Maurice Brinton (1923-2005)

**"As the old society crumbles both the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy will have to be buried under its ruins. The real roots from which they grew will have to be understood. In this gigantic task the revolution to come will find its strength and its inspiration in the real experience of millions."**

■ Chris Pallis was born in India in 1923 to a wealthy Anglo-Greek family. He was educated in Switzerland and later at Oxford university.

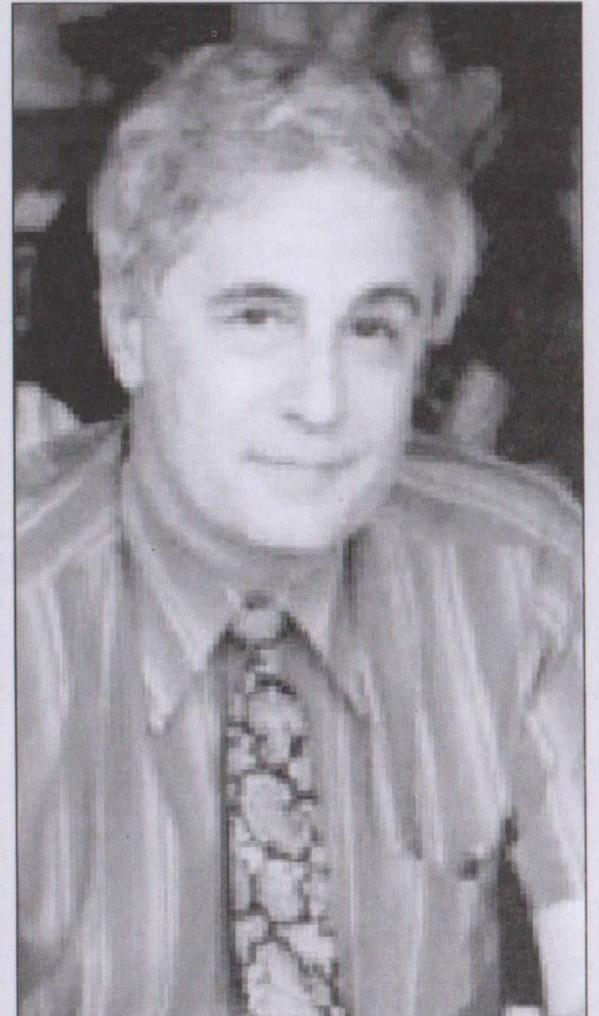
■ He joined the Communist Party of Great Britain after leaving university but, was expelled for his criticism of the Soviets and joined the Trotskyists.

■ After a period in which he concentrated on his studies, Pallis joined what was to become the Socialist Labour League.

■ Expelled in 1960, he went on to help found Solidarity, a highly influential grouping of libertarian socialists.

■ In 1961 his livelihood was thrown into jeopardy when his real name was exposed in the press. After this he kept his name hidden.

■ Maurice Brinton was the pen name under which Chris Pallis wrote and translated for Solidarity



**TOP THEORIST:** Chris Pallis, aka Maurice Brinton

from 1960 until the early 1980s.

■ He combined his political writings with a distinguished career in neurology, publishing the well-known ABC of Brainstem Death.

■ Key works include: "The Bolsheviks and workers control" and "The irrational in politics", along with numerous excellent pamphlets

First Workingmen's International, 1868-7.

His assessment of Kropotkin is to say the least, open to question. Readers will be pleased to learn that Brinton approved of Ida Mett and G.P. Maximoff.

On Bookchin, continuing his criticism of anarchism's "organisational phobia", he agrees with the American's definition which equates spontaneity with autonomy.

Of course, it has often been pointed out that almost any statement made about "anarchism" can be contradicted by another definition.

Broadly my own ideas about workers' socialism are based on some of the economic and historical perspectives from marxism

but federalism, decentralism and local control from anarchism. Don't get me started on organisation...

The biographies of that generation so far produced seem quite inadequate. This book which goes some way to preparing a full Brinton biography is fortunately a departure from that trend.

It also whets the appetite for a full history of Solidarity, I wrote a short account some time ago but the full authorised version and ongoing membership survey will be eagerly awaited.

# Red dreams

## Review: Durruti and the anarchists

Durruti in the Spanish Revolution

By Abel Paz (trans: Chuck Morse)

Pub. AK Press

ISBN 978-1904859505

Pbk. 795pp.

Price: £20.00

FIRST up, this is one big book, albeit slightly misleading in its title, as the section detailing Durruti's involvement in the Revolution proper (from July 1936) takes up less than half the book – although one could equally argue that he spent his entire adult life fighting for the revolution.

The story of the various editions of this book is covered in detail in the book, but in summary it is based on the second Spanish edition of 1996.

In it Paz, not an academic but both a self-taught historian and participant in some of the struggles described in the book, takes a straightforward chronological approach to Durruti's life, assembling, as he goes, all the available documentation and personal testimonies into a single narrative.

As Molina's afterword explains, the book is not a work of hagiography, the desire is not to make Durruti into a superman or saint, rather his life is taken as exemplary of a whole generation (or two) of Spanish anarchists who lived their lives in the service of an ideal they felt was both realisable and realistic, and one which they were determined to make happen.

The first section of the book details Durruti's early life, the first 35 years or so, starting with his family background in Leon, his involvement in the industrial struggles during the First World War which led to his first period of exile in France and his conscious adoption of anarchism.

The period after the war saw Durruti in the thick of the struggle of the Spanish working class and in particular the CNT, fighting both intransigent employers and a succession of repressive governments.

They struggled to deal with the chronic problems caused by recession, structural inadequacy, inequitable land-ownership, together with the struggles between the various political cliques, the monarchy, the military and the Catholic church, meant the class struggle was carried on at an intensity much greater than most of Europe.

The class struggle had to be equally intense to stop the working class being made the victims of economic mismanagement, political infighting, colonialist and economic deprivation and social misery.

On the streets this struggle took many forms besides the usual strikes and lock-outs, demonstrations and so forth. In particular the employers (aided and abetted by the police and the Church) used gangs of gunmen to shoot down union militants.



TO WAR: CNT Fighters crossing the Ebro river on the way to Zaragoza

In return the CNT organised defence squads. And the right planned its seizure of power which saw Primo de Rivera impose his dictatorship in 1923.

The socialists and their union, the UGT, decided to sit this one out. The CNT would not have the luxury and Durruti quickly made his way to France (again) where he was involved in more revolutionary activity.

November 1924 saw an unsuccessful uprising against the dictatorship in Spain and the next month Durruti and Francisco Ascaso were on the move again, this time to Latin America, via New York and Cuba.

In Cuba they contacted local anarchists, became port workers and were soon in the thick of things again. A move to the interior saw them working as cane-cutters, and again they were active organising workers and causing trouble.

Rather too much trouble as they were wanted for the murder of their sadistic employer and had to make their excuses and hopped on a boat to Mexico (not that it

was originally intending to go to Mexico, but Durruti could be very persuasive).

In spring 1925 they were being as enterprising as ever, obtaining much needed financing for various local anarchist projects, including a Rationalist School. However due to the unconventional methods used to obtain the cash, the pair were soon on the move again, together with Gregorio Jover and Alejandro Ascaso, arriving in Chile in June 1925.

One bank robbery later and the group were off to Buenos Aires and later in the year Durruti had secured work as a port worker and was in touch with the local Argentinian anarchists.

Following several bank and other robberies, which were blamed on a group of Spanish revolutionaries, Durruti and the others left Argentina and sailed for France in February 1926.

Having arrived in the country Durruti and 200 other Spaniards were rounded up on suspicion of being involved in a plot to kill

# of freedom

## fought the world for their vision



the beloved King of Spain Alfonso XIII in July 1926, who happened to be making a visit to Paris at the time.

Durruti would not be going anywhere fast for a while as not only were the French holding him, but he was wanted by the Spanish and Argentine authorities as well. After a year and much agitation on his behalf, Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Gregorio Jover were finally released in July 1927. Ready to recommence the struggle.

But the authorities were soon on the tail again, this time imprisoning Durruti and Ascaso in Lyon for having false papers. This time they weren't released until October 1928, without papers and with nowhere to go.

Using their contacts they made their way to Berlin and thence to Belgium where they stayed for while, always at the centre of intrigue, working with Catalanist subversives in their failed January 1929 plot against Primo de Rivera's dictatorship.

However, within a year de Rivera had outstayed his welcome even amongst the

ruling class in Spain and he fled into exile in France. The new government, still a dictatorship, but under General Berenguer instead, attempted a liberalisation of the law, which soon had unintended consequences.

The CNT took the opportunity to re-emerge from underground where the repression of the previous incumbent had driven them, and launched a weekly newspaper and held a national meeting with the aim of reorganising the union, which proved to be a success.

Indeed so much so that it re-awakened the dread of the ruling class for a resurgent proletariat, and before 1930 was out the government had instituted a crack-down on the CNT and FAI.

This did nothing to calm matters as a strike in Madrid saw Barcelona come in out in solidarity in November 1930, which resulted in further repression, but it also saw the CNT contacted by Republican "revolutionaries" to see whether they would support the overthrow of the dictatorship.

The political and military revolt failed and

the CNT was forced underground again. Yet by April 1931 Spain had become a Republic and the door was open to Durruti and the other exiles to resume their activities in Spain.

And one of the first things that Durruti noticed was that all the conspiring with Republicans had compromised the anarchists' traditional opposition to all forms of party politics.

He was not impressed, and neither were many members of the FAI. There was a general recognition that a successful social democracy would sap the revolutionary potential of the current crisis, itself the product of the intrinsic socio-economic contradictions of Spain, exacerbated by the reactionary policies of the Catholic church.

Playing political games in Madrid would do nothing to solve the problems caused by the monopolistic control of the land in large areas of the country by a few, often absent landowners, who saw little need to modernise agricultural production and were certainly not interested in any redistribution of the land or popular control of it.

The Republican take-over had had some benefits, with some prisoners being released, but many CNT and FAI militants were still behind bars. It also allowed the formation of a Catalan regional government but that threatened to divide the CNT.

That the new governments were no friends to the CNT was soon seen in attacks on the May 1st rally in Barcelona, but that didn't stop some CNT people wanting to do deals with the Catalan government.

Indeed certain elements in the CNT were pushing for some form of accommodation with the new regimes to allow the union to operate legally and without hindrance – oblivious to the fact that such a policy would break down as soon as the CNT proved itself capable of organising sustained resistance to any government – or if it kept its activities purely legal, then the anarcho-syndicalism at the heart of the union would be destroyed by compromise and co-option.

Durruti and other FAIstas clearly saw this danger and organised within the CNT to oppose the reformists.

The class struggle continued anyway, and early 1932 saw an attempt to institute libertarian communism by the workers in Alto Llobregat coal fields and surrounding villages.

Which was promptly put down by the authorities, and leading FAI militants, including Durruti were promptly rounded up and deported with many ending up in Spanish Guinea (in Equatorial Africa) or, in Durruti's case to the Canaries, but this did nothing to quell social and economic unrest or the splits in the CNT which led to the formation of a few small syndicalist



unions which declared themselves free of the "tyranny of the FAI" !

On release Durruti and other FAIistas were soon deep in conspiracy mode, planning insurrection, for January 1933, with Barcelona as the epicentre and significant uprisings in Levante and Andalusia.

However, it failed to catch alight and was soon put down, with great brutality in places such as Casas Viejas. The failure of the uprising not only brought down repression on the participants, it deepened the splits in the CNT between the revolutionaries and the reformists, with Durruti eventually being arrested in Sevilla in April 1933, staying incarcerated until October that year.

Meanwhile the Spanish government was

areas where they were weaker than the UGT (Madrid and Asturias) but less favourably where the CNT was much stronger.

Another change in the make-up of the national government and continuing pressure from both rural and urban workers saw the eventual release of the insurrectionaries in April 1934.

Durruti had arrived in Barcelona by May 1934 where he was reunited with his family, to the point of undertaking child care for his daughter Mimi, whilst his partner Emilienne Morin was out earning money for them all.

The class struggle continued unabated throughout this period with strikes and boycotts amongst both urban and rural workers, even though the CNT remained a

everyone that the endemic and chronic problems of Spain could not be settled by playing Parliamentary games.

The organised section of the Spanish working class – despite being hampered by legal repression – was still a potent force, whilst the military and right-wing plotters also remained well-organised and equally determined.

Sooner or later the matter of Spain would have to be decided one way or another – social revolution or fascism. Durruti and his affinity group Los Nosotros were at the heart of debates within the CNT and FAI as to how best to organise the workers for the forthcoming battle.

However, his freedom lasted only a couple of months, by June 1935 he had been imprisoned again.

Whilst he, and many other CNT and FAI militants languished in prison, the politicians continued with their plans and intrigues. The Communists cemented their place inside the Socialist Party, and started winning the left of the socialists towards more CP oriented policies; whilst amongst the non-Stalinist marxists there was a coming together to form the POUM.

The right too was cementing alliances, with the figures of Hitler and Mussolini beginning to loom on the horizon, their support being vital to the success of any right-wing take-over of the country.

Even amongst the Syndicalists there were moves to re-unite those unions that had split from the CNT. War clouds were gathering and being isolated was the surest way to be defeated. Yet solidarity had to be on the basis of firm and meaningful proposals and none of the political parties would or could offer the working class anything that would significantly improve their situation, whilst a victory for the right would mean even greater repression.

Being underground was taking its toll on the CNT both in terms of being able to organise, but also because the CNT could only function properly when the members could meet openly and regularly and have free access to ideas and information, and when mandated delegates to regional and national committees could be directly told what the members wanted and removed if they stepped outside that mandate.

Consequently the "leadership" had a tendency to develop ideas of its own and to conduct discussions with political forces outside the remit of the CNT's actual policy and objectives.

And primary amongst their ideas was that to get to the stage of being "legal" again, to get their militants out of jail and being able to conduct their business correctly they would have to make some sort of deal with the left-wing politicians (who had in the previous years been more than happy to jail, deport and persecute them) which would result in the left-wing parties getting parliamentary power.

The matter became acute in February 1936 with the downfall of yet another government and the holding of a General Election.

The CNT held a meeting to discuss their position on the election (although because of the unions' illegal status none of the people attending could be properly mandated to make any particular decision) and the outcome was a re-iteration of the standard anarchist line on abstention and a commitment to make the workers



1935: Durruti addresses a mass rally of anarchist supporters in the bullring at Leon

itself in a continual state of crisis and fell at the same time.

The ensuing elections proved a disaster for the left, whilst the CNT advocated social revolution as being the only valid response to the threat of fascism, and the resulting abstentionsism can be clearly seen in the low turnout in places where the CNT was strong.

With the election of a right-wing government, the only logical response was to organise a general strike and revolutionary uprising against the new government, with Durruti playing a prominent part in the new Revolutionary Committee based in Zaragoza.

Early December saw the plans put into action, with early successes in places such as Aragon, Valencia and Leon. But it failed to become generalised and the government forces were able to break the strike and cracked down heavily on the CNT and the FAI, with the CNT being outlawed, union halls closed and papers banned.

Durruti, like many prominent participants was jailed, and transferred to Burgos to reduce the likelihood of local revolutionaries freeing him.

Meanwhile events had pushed the UGT and the Socialist party further to the left and there was talk of a workers alliance, which was viewed favourably by CNT activists in

banned organisation.

There was, however, in certain parts of Spain, a move towards a more explicit alliance with elements in the UGT. This was seen by many as an attempt to bring the anarchists under the wing of the Socialist party.

At the same time the insignificant Spanish Communist Party (acting under orders from Moscow, in-line with the new "Popular Front" policy) merged itself into the Socialist Party.

Political intrigues also continued both in Madrid and Catalonia, with an attempted uprising by the Socialists and the Catalanists against a right-wing government in October 1934 – immediately preceded by the arrest of numerous CNT and FAI militants including Durruti, even though the CNT had not participated in the planning of the uprising.

Indeed the Catalan authorities did everything they could to prevent the CNT from generalising the revolt – but ended up handing the streets over to the right and the militants to the military. Elsewhere, primarily in the Asturias, a region where the UGT was the dominant force, the uprising was initially successful, but was put down with great ferocity within two weeks. Durruti remained in prison until April 1935.

On his release he was once more actively engaged, as it was apparent to just about

understand that electing a left-wing government wasn't going to solve their problems and that a right-wing/military coup could be expected soon after.

Indeed General Franco tried to initiate a coup before the left could form a government, but it failed to materialise – he was punished by being made the military commander of the Canary Islands.

The voting shows that abstention took second place to expediency in most workers minds, with the left getting a very narrow majority of the votes cast and a sufficient Parliamentary majority to govern, provided the coalition of forces held together.

The new government did amnesty many of the prisoners in February 1936, although some prisons had already been opened by popular demand immediately prior to this, whilst other CNT members were still detained behind bars as their offences were deemed to be social and criminal and not political.

As predicted the election solved nothing, as during the next six months the class struggle intensified, with land seizures by peasants, church burnings, over 200 partial and over 100 general strikes, bombings and shootings.

The government tried to repress the direct action of the workers whilst using the threat from the right to hang onto power.

Everywhere people were organising for the final showdown, with approximately 1.5 million workers organised in both the CNT and UGT (out of a total of eight million workers) and with right-wing organisations with over half a million in them (including priests, former soldiers and right-wing and fascist activists.)

It is important to note that membership of a union did not necessarily mean whole-heartedly agreeing with the politics of the organisation.

With no unemployment benefit a a union card meant access to the mutual aid of one's fellow workers.

Equally in well-unionised areas employers would approach the unions when they were hiring people, so possession of a union card could mean the difference between having a job and not.

And it made sense to join the biggest union locally or in your particular trade. This may well explain why both the CNT and UGT had areas where they were dominant – success bred success. Thus a union card was, for many workers, a practical necessity, rather than a statement of allegiance to a particular ideology.

The only benefit of the left's election win was that it gave the CNT a much-needed opportunity to emerge into the open and re-organise itself, resume publication of its national papers and so forth, and not least hold its Fourth National Congress in Zaragoza on May 1st 1936.

The pressing issues of the day were obvious to all: to re-admit the errant syndicalists, provided they respected national decisions and to invite the UGT to join with the CNT in an alliance to overthrow capitalism and institute a society based on workers' democracy (an invitation that fell on deaf ears).

The CNT also discussed what form a

libertarian communist society would take – with syndicalists arguing that the CNT was the model, whilst anarchists argued that an organisation designed for fighting the class struggle was ill-equipped to take on the role.

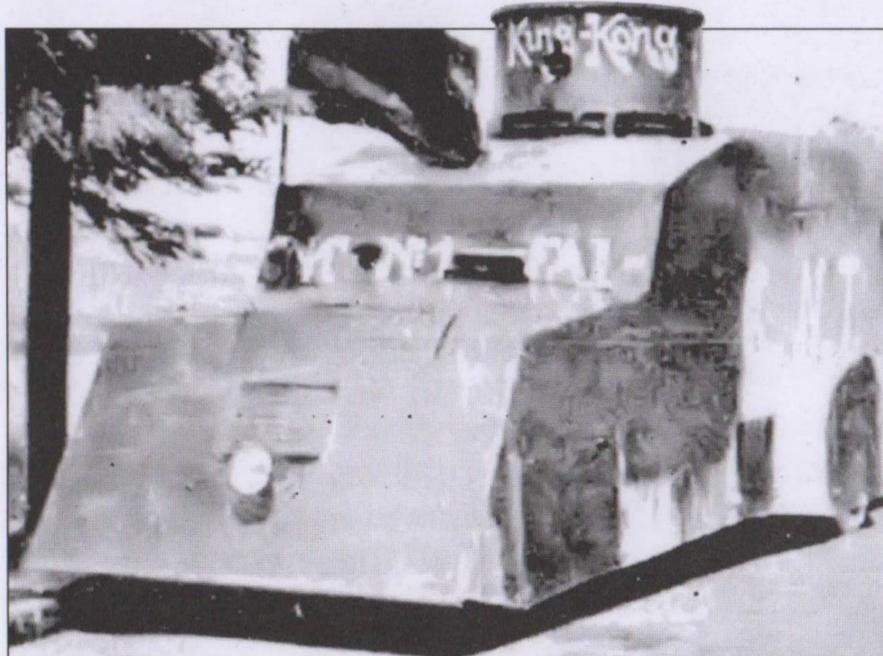
They wouldn't have long to wait before testing their ideas in practice as the long-expected (except by the Socialist government ministers) military and right-wing coup was eventually launched in July 1936.

Durruti and the rest of Los Nosotros group had prepared themselves for the coup, as had the CNT in Barcelona and surrounding area.

After much disagreement the CNT had adopted Garcia Oliver's proposals to immediately set up workers militias in the event of a military uprising, something Durruti had initially opposed, arguing for a guerilla approach, that the creation of militias would inevitably end up creating an army run on traditional lines, which would be contradiction with anarchist principles.

The majority in the CNT had however been persuaded that only militias stood any chance of defeating the uprising militarily.

Meanwhile the Catalan government had done little, except refuse to arm the workers. If the coup was to be defeated it would have to be done by the CNT



**BIG GUN:** 'King Kong', the armoured car of the Durruti column.

on the ground with only the bare minimum of arms and support from loyalist military and police.

Yet after two day's hard fighting, not only had the coup been defeated in Barcelona, but the the CNT and other militants had secured the army barracks and obtained much needed weaponry, but not without much loss of life. In much of Catalonia the story was much the same, but elsewhere in Spain the coup had been successful, in others it was barely contained.

In Madrid, the CNT was weaker and had great difficulty getting hold of the necessary weapons, with the Republican government trying to reassure the people that the coup was under control and therefore arming them was not necessary – at least arming the CNT was not necessary.

A general strike was organised in Zaragoza, but disastrously the CNT workers there allowed themselves to be rounded-up and the military took control.

However, with the defeat of the military in Barcelona by the CNT, the way was open for the revolution to break out. The workers took control of their work places, transport and other services were collectivised and power seemed to be in the hands of the

workers, not the politicians.

It was very soon apparent that if the military coup was to be defeated it would have to be done by the workers themselves – but even with the arms and supplies taken from the barracks in Barcelona they were woefully under-equipped for a prolonged struggle.

Durruti and others therefore organised several columns of workers militias to try and take Zaragoza, whilst, at the same time, hoping to ignite the flames of social revolution as they went.

The columns managed to get within about 20 miles of Zaragoza before being brought to a halt by the better equipped military forces and despite much heroism they were unable to break through to the city.

Durruti was adamant that the column which bore his name be organised on anarchist lines, as for him, the revolution had to be embodied by the forces fighting for it, a hierarchical force obeying military discipline would never make an anarchist revolution.

The shortage of weapons in the column meant that many volunteers were active in the newly organised collectives that had sprung up in its wake in Aragon.

However, once the initial reserves of ammunition had been exhausted the column was unable to undertake further large-scale offensive action, much to its and Durruti's frustration.

Meanwhile in Barcelona itself, the CNT's decision to co-operate with the other anti-fascist forces was beginning to bear unwelcome fruit.

They were not in control of policy making, the continuation of the Generalitat (the Catalonian government) and their collaboration with it meant that whatever they did in some way legitimised it and strengthened it, even to the point where workers control of production and distribution ran the risk of creating a form of state socialism with anarchists in control.

A regional CNT meeting in early August discussed the matter, but on balance decided it was better to continue the collaboration in the name of anti-fascist unity rather than risk civil war within a civil war, one that might be in the CNT's favour in Catalonia, but much less so in the rest of Spain.

There was also the international dimension to consider – now that Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were pouring men and materiel into the rebel held areas and taking an active role in the fighting, it seemed imperative not to jeopardise any chance of aid from friendly governments, in particular France where it was hoped the Popular Front government would, at least, keep up the supply of war materiel (France having been the main supplier of war material to Spain prior to 1936.) – although it was highly unlikely that any government would knowingly supply weapons to revolutionaries.

Furthermore although Catalonia was well-equipped with workshops it lacked certain basic raw materials to enable it to be self-sufficient in war fighting ability, hence the ambitious but abandoned plan to capture the Bank of Spain's gold reserves and use the gold to buy weapons.

The gold eventually ended up in





## **Buenaventura Durruti (1896-1936)**

**"We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a while. For, you must not forget, we also know how to build.**

**It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities, here in Spain and in America, and everywhere.**

**We, the workers, can build others to take their place, and better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth, there is not the slightest doubt about that.**

**The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute"**

■ He started work at the age of 14 in the railway yard in León.

■ At the age of 21 he was forced into exile for the first time following a strike he helped organise.

■ On his return in 1920, he founded a group which tried to blow up King Alfonso XIII, assassinated a cardinal, and attempted to attack the Barcelona barracks.

■ They fled to South America, where they robbed banks, raised strikes and organised anarchist groups.

■ Durruti was imprisoned in France upon his return to Europe, but massive international pressure saw him freed.

■ Back in Spain, as the revolution started Durruti was instrumental in organising the defence of Barcelona.

■ The Durruti column left the city to relieve Zaragoza, but were unable to capture it.

■ Durruti was asked to help defend Madrid as the fascists advanced, and led his column to the battle, where he was killed.

Stalin's grubby blood-stained hands, but at least a flow of arms into the Republican areas was resumed.

Inevitably the arms came at a political as well as financial price. The previously insignificant Communist Party was rewarded with posts in the Madrid government and socialist and communist militias were prioritised for the supply of arms. Elsewhere in Spain, by late September 1936 it was obvious that the military uprising and associated attack on workers organisations had established itself in about half of Spain.

The militias had managed to prevent a complete take-over but equally had failed to roll it back from areas it had captured. The Basque region had fallen and with it the Bilbao armaments factories, and the Asturias were now isolated from the rest of Republican Spain.

Even Durruti's home of Leon was under the control of the military who could also look forward to uninterrupted support coming over the border from Portugal. Even Madrid was vulnerable to a well-organised military assault if Franco had wanted to do capture it.

On the Aragon front at least the revolution proceeded apace – at least in areas not subject to the depredations of the marxist militias who not only stole from the villages but also attempted to dissolve the organs of self-government and control the villages had established, much to the disgust to those in the CNT columns.

To consolidate their position the Aragon Defence Council and the Aragon Federation of Collectives were established in early October 1936.

Mid-October saw the Durruti column in action holding off a nationalist advance in its area, on the north bank of the Ebro facing Zaragoza, only to be immediately faced with a typical piece of back-stabbing from the central government when it, at the urging of the Soviets, issued a militarisation decree, which would have completely changed the status and forms of organisation of the CNT and other militias.

This was swiftly followed by the nationalisation of the war industries and agriculture which would take them from the worker's committees that had been running them.

Faced with the possibility of exclusion from all effective decision-making and access to arms, the CNT then took the final step of over-turning its own anarchist basis by joining, at the beginning of November, the National Government. A government whose first major decision was to abandon its own capital Madrid, now coming under pressure from the forces of the right.

In the streets, however, the ordinary people of Madrid, already alarmed by the terror that was being unleashed by the rebel forces, who were threatening to kill two million reds between Madrid and Barcelona, were constructing barricades.

Soon battle was joined in earnest, with nationalist forces breaking into the city. In response militia units from Barcelona and the Aragon front were rushed to the city to help in the defence.

Among those forces was a force made up from, amongst others, elements of the Durruti Column, and perhaps even more importantly, Durruti himself, which arrived on November 14th.

Almost immediately, and before they had to time to fully prepare themselves, they were thrown into the battle raging around Madrid's

University City. Losses on both sides were terrible but they managed to stabilise the front and prevent the rebels from breaking through.

November 19th saw a slight lull in the fighting and Durruti visited the front-line to inspect his forces' positions and check on the state of the column's fighters – all greatly fatigued and desperate need of relief.

He got out of his staff car to speak to some militiamen and was shot before he could resume his seat in the car. He was rushed to hospital, but the doctors thought this injury too severe for any chance of surviving any operation they could have attempted to remove the bullet from his chest and patch up the massive internal damage.

He died early the next day. The news was a terrible blow to the CNT militias and those working in factories and the fields. His body was returned to Barcelona where a massive funeral was organised (and an investigation begun as to how he had died).

Given the political and military situation in Madrid at this time it is understandable that there has been so much speculation as to how Durruti died, who fired the fatal shot. Matters are not helped by the differences in the contemporary accounts and subsequent "revelations".

The book assesses all the attempts to make sense of his death and the "conspiracy

“ He got out of his staff car to talk to some militiamen and was shot before he could resume his seat. ”

theories" surrounding it. There was much disinformation circulated at the time and ever since the competing accounts have been fueled as much by ideology as evidence.

Indeed Paz is unable to get to the bottom of the mystery and thinks it unlikely it ever will be solved. So whether Durruti was shot by a fascist sniper, a communist shot him in the back, an anarchist angry at the CNT-FAI's betrayal of anarchist principles killed him or, as may have been the case, he shot himself by accident, we shall never know.

The afterword by Jose Molina brings the reader up to date with various stories that have surfaced since the first edition of the book was published, but it is to be regretted that (for whatever reasons) the bibliography that it mentions as being in the second Spanish edition, has been omitted in the English edition.

Fortunately the notes are fairly comprehensive – although I spotted that the numbering of the notes in the text of the afterword follows on from the previous chapter whilst the notes themselves are numbered in a new sequence.

The text is amply complemented by the many well-chosen photographs, and the illustrations also include reproductions of various pages from anarchist and other publications.

The map of Madrid is vital for following the debate about how Durruti died and the other maps help with understanding the detail of the fighting (but you'll need a proper map of

Spain to find all of the places mentioned.)

One major disappointment is the index.

Although we are given three indices – personal names, places and organisations – they only tell you which pages the words indexed appear on. So we get a column of numbers for Durruti and the CNT but no further detail. Also missing are periodicals – so if you want to know what pages *Solidaridad Obrera* appears on, you'll have to make your own index.

Not being a Spanish speaker (or reader) and not having the original text I can't comment on the quality of the translation but I can say that overall the text reads extremely well. Chuck Morse has done an excellent job in making this book readable – it needs to be at nearly 800 pages long – with the only minor gremlins appearing to be those relating military terminology.

The bullet that killed Durruti is described as "9 calibre long" when calibre is a measure of the diameter of a bullet or shell; artillery is a couple of times said to be bombing a position – when shelling is the usual term employed and most bizarrely the nationalist attack on Madrid is said to have been made with the aid of trimotor fighters (nobody ever built a fighter plane with three engines – I presume "bomber" is meant (three-engine bombers were built by both Germany and Italy in this period)) and battleships.

A glance at the map of Spain will show that if there's one place you won't find a battleship, it's in Madrid. (I'm not sure what is intended in the context.)

Physically the book, even though it is an 800 page paperback, has withstood my reading it without any problems and has a good feel to it.

Overall, one has to congratulate the author, translator, AK Press and everyone else associated with the production of this book with producing a book worthy of the subject matter. Paz's treatment of the events in Durruti's life, is aimed at explaining the reasons for them, rather than attempting much by way of critique.

He is, however, critical of the CNT "leadership" especially during the civil war when basic principles were thrown overboard to expedite fighting.

However, the book also goes a long way to explaining the reasons for the positions (governmental and otherwise) taken by leading members of the FAI and the CNT and will prove invaluable for anyone wanting a detailed explanation of the run up to the civil war and the revolution.

Wisely Paz finishes the book with Durruti's funeral with only a brief section on what happened after Durruti died.

Whether the revolution died with Durruti, is another matter. One could equally argue that had he lived he would have had to have compromised as much as fellow FAIstas. Fortunately Paz doesn't get bogged down in such a discussion, leaving that for readers to discuss amongst themselves.

I can't imagine anyone now undertaking the necessary research to write a completely new biography of Durruti, or that there remains much more to discover about him.

Therefore I can say without much fear of contradiction that this will be the definitive biography of Durruti, and as such it is something I can totally recommend.



# Soul of Glasgow's

Obituary: John Taylor Caldwell worked his whole life to keep the flame of anarchism alive

**W**ITH the death of John Taylor Caldwell aged 95 on 12th January 2007 we have lost the last significant link with an anarchist anti-parliamentary form of socialism/communism which flourished in the first few decades of the last century.

Born on 14 July 1911 in Whiteinch, Glasgow, the third child of a family of six, John moved to Belfast at the age of three, but following his mother's death, in 1925 the family moved back to Glasgow, where he and his younger siblings endured semi-starvation and frequent beatings at the hands of their father and stepmother.

Neanderthal Man featured in an instalment of Wells' Outline of History, he went on to read widely in history, literature, poetry, philosophy and political ideas, pursuing knowledge as best he could whilst working in the menial jobs open to a working-class youngster without connections or qualifications in an era of high unemployment.

His first job was that of page-boy in a fashionable Glasgow cinema; then, as bell-boy and subsequently waiter, on the Anchor Line's transAtlantic ships.

When in Glasgow he continued to frequent political meetings, and his first encounter with Guy Aldred at the Glasgow May Day

and direct action rather than in reliance on political parties, whether social democratic or revolutionary.

This kind of anarchism is assumed to have become extinct during the inter-War period, crushed between the pincers of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Communist Party.

But in a few places, notably Glasgow, it continued to flourish, thanks to individuals like John and his mentor, Guy Aldred, who was the main organiser and theoretician of this movement.

Initially John acted as a steward at meetings, chalked the streets to advertise meetings, and sold pamphlets. His trips to New York whilst working as a waiter were pressed into service as an opportunity to try to make contact with the councilist and anarchist groups there.

Some contact was indeed made with the Vanguard group, and John brought back supplies of their paper, together with copies of Mattick's International Council Correspondence.

The USM took an important part in all the political actions of its time, from support of the Spanish revolutionary cause in 1936-8, through the anti-war struggles of 1939-45 (in which John himself was a conscientious objector), and on to the anti-militarist and peace campaigns of the Fifties and Sixties.

All this was achieved against a background of ever-present poverty, with barely enough money to eat, never mind provide meeting rooms or publish its propaganda.

The most intense period of activity was undoubtedly 1936-38 in support of the Spanish revolutionary cause. Meetings were held every night and funds had to be raised to send two comrades (Ethel MacDonald and Jenny Patrick) to Spain.

But the group was in desperate need of a printing press. Amazingly, Aldred persuaded a "Roneo" salesman to let them have a duplicator on approval, which was immediately pressed into service to produce a broadsheet, *Regeneracion*, giving uncensored news from Spain.

In 1938 John finally left his seafaring employment and began to work full time for the USM. Initially he was Dues secretary, but quickly became Minutes secretary for the meetings.

More important, however, was his work in the Strickland Press in getting out the pamphlets and paper for the movement. One of his first experiences with the press was the feverish activity needed to get out the first issue of *The Word* for the May Day march in 1938.

Having just acquired Tom Anderson's old printing press, the USM quickly put it to use to produce the new paper. Jenny Patrick, who had had experience in a print shop, got



**THE GANG:** In this shot, John Taylor Caldwell is stood to the far right of the picture, and Guy Aldred is sixth from the right.

Beyond a knowledge of the three Rs acquired in a Belfast elementary school, John was completely self-educated.

He had the insatiable thirst for knowledge which until fairly recently was a characteristic feature of working class radical movements.

Stimulated by the striking picture of

demonstration in 1934 left such a deep impression on him that later in the year he joined Aldred's United Socialist Movement (USM), part of a tradition of libertarian socialism going back to the days of William Morris and the Socialist League.

It was a socialism based on working-class self-activity manifest in workers' councils

# proudest tradition

the type ready and had to hand-feed the machine. It was an old treadle machine i.e. powered by footpower, largely John's!

A thousand copies of the 16-page issue were required. Since the machine could only produce two pages at a time, 8000 sheets had to be hand-fed and treadled at the rate of 500 sheets per hour.

The job was still not finished after midnight, and neighbours were complaining about the noise of the machine. So work had to resume next morning. By half-past eleven they had finished, just in time for the May Day procession. It is good to record that their efforts were rewarded when *The Word* changed hands "as readily as if it had been a free handbill".

By 1939, with the help of the Strickland bequest, the Strickland Press was set up at 104-106 George Street.

At first printing was farmed out to a commercial printer, although typesetting was still done in-house. However, towards the end of the War, when the Scottish print union discovered that women (Jenny and Ethel) were doing the work, they forced the printer to stop accepting jobs from the Strickland Press.

It then had to acquire its own linotype and printing too was done in-house, under Ethel's close supervision. Initially she wouldn't allow John, or anyone else, anywhere near "Big Bertha" (the largest of the Press's machines).

But when Ethel became incapacitated with multiple sclerosis in 1959, John had to do more and more of the printing work. He mastered the linotype, and did more or less everything in the Press for the next dozen or more years.

*The Word* continued to be published at 104-106 George Street until, in 1962, the Press was forced to remove to Montrose Street.

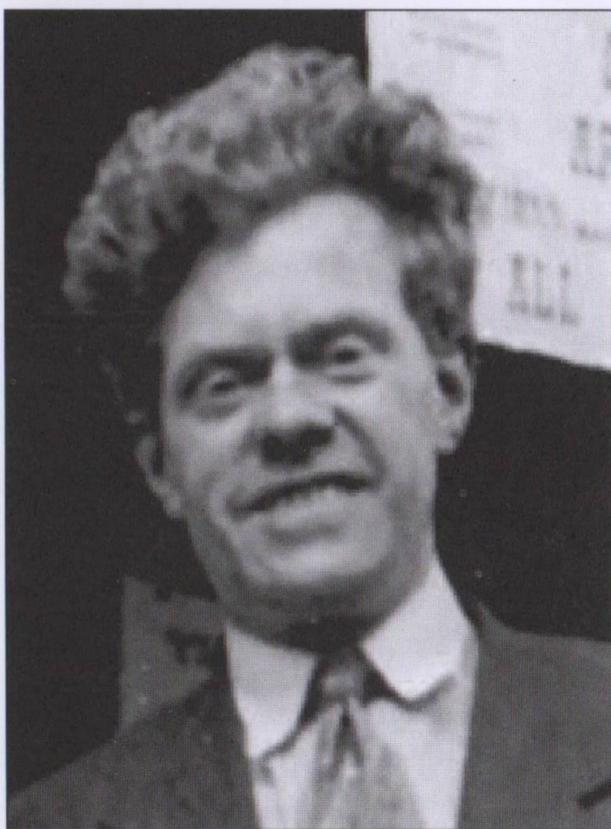
The George Street premises were the heart of this anarchist oasis in Glasgow, as a meeting-place, bookshop, printing press and social centre for a whole generation of Glaswegians. John managed to capture this in an epitaph for the group's old HQ written after it had been bulldozed for a new University of Strathclyde building:

When the meeting was over the chairs were replaced and the audience meandered upstairs where books were bought and fresh arguments broke out amongst small groups. The old man was tired... but he was loth to hurry them away.

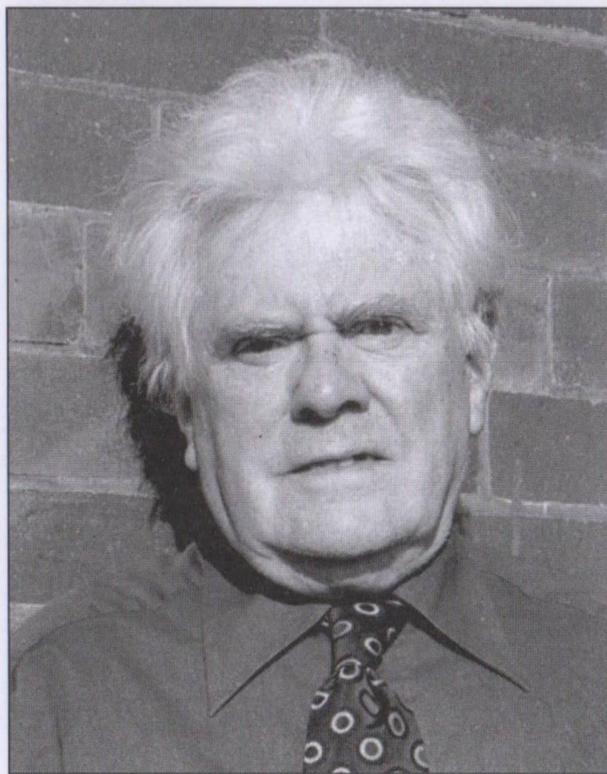
Some, he knew, went home to misery and loneliness. The evening in the old cellar was a rare feast of companionship for them. And for the few young ones it was good too. Not just a case of agreeing with the old master, but a challenge to read and, most importantly, to think for themselves.

Though only a very small group of committed workers, through *The Word* in particular the USM had much influence in the 1940s, particularly in Scotland.

John remembered, for example, the Burnbank miners selling some 600-900 copies each month. And Aldred's pamphlets sold well, the most popular being his study of John Maclean, which sold 15,000 copies in



**STALWART:** Above, Caulwell In July 1958. Below, in 1986.



repeated printings.

The aim was get their literature out to the widest possible audience, and to help achieve this the price of pamphlets was invariably cut from 6d to 1d at the end of meetings.

In the post-war period Aldred was a candidate in a number of General Elections and by-elections - not in the hope or expectation of being elected, but purely as a propaganda exercise, a cost-effective way "to expose the farcical and false nature of parliamentarism," as John put it.

In all of these, John acted as Aldred's election agent, handling key aspects of the campaigns from organising the nocturnal squads of bill-posters and street-chalkers to booking meeting-halls to printing and delivering 10,000 handbills and election addresses.

John never claimed to be much of a speaker. He spoke at the USM Study Circle

and at Willie McDougall's Workers' Open Forum, but complaints were made that he spoke on "highbrow" topics.

A revealing example of this, John recalled, was his talk on "The Value of Poetry" to the USM Study Circle. Prompted by the perennial Marxist debate on whether poetry has intrinsic value or must always be subordinated to the needs of the class struggle, John argued for the former.

In a closely-argued address, which now seems something of a philosophical tour de force, he made the case for the enduring value of poetry and of all art:

"Our Marxism, our pacifism, our anarchism are symptoms of an imperfect society. We gather to discuss them in a mood of solemn seriousness, as a doctor might diagnose a patient. It is not a pleasant occasion... Our deliberations belong to the bedside of a sick society. We want to cure it..."

"In the new society we will lay aside our armoury of "isms" and our perpetual belligerence. In a state of cooperation we will find freedom to live much more fully than before. Our minds, and what may be termed our souls, will grow to a much greater magnitude, and the whole compass of our lives will expand.

"Then we will discover the beauty that has always been there: the beauty that lies around us, and within us, and which offers the greatest compensation for being alive."

"The talk was profusely illustrated; but before long "my audience was in a deep trance, as still as figurines unearthed by archaeologists. Maybe they were afraid to move in case they woke up..."

It was clear to John that there was little sympathy for such ideas - to most of his companions poetry was irredeemably middle-class and largely irrelevant to the class struggle.

This led John to think of himself as a poor speaker, and also to his contributions to the group being generally undervalued. Yet it is questionable whether, without his unselfish and unflagging effort as the USM's workhorse, the group could have kept up the struggle, even before Ethel's untimely death.

After it, there is no doubt of his indispensability. Having helped to nurse Ethel, and served Guy devotedly to the last, after Guy's death he also found himself looking after an increasingly cantankerous Jenny. She had never warmed to John, and her formidable personality did not soften with her increasing dependence on him. Nevertheless, he cared for her as he might have done for his own mother.

In fact John's importance derives from his incredible tenacity in keeping the movement afloat and alive. At the time of the greatest activity of the antiparliamentary movement in the Thirties and Forties and on into the Fifties, John donated his savings and dole money to keep the movement going.

It was largely his savings, in fact, that enabled Ethel MacDonald and Jenny Patrick to finance their trip to Spain in 1936. Later, he even contributed the money he made as a writer of children's stories, for John was a



writer of no mean talent.

Occasionally he would contribute an article for *The Word*, but he also wrote a series of children's stories for the *Daily Mirror* and *The Comet*.

At one stage he was invited to join the staff of Amalgamated Press but characteristically put his unpaid political work first. It was primarily John who from 1959 onwards kept the Strickland Press going and got out *The Word* following Ethel's tragic illness and death.

In Aldred's lifetime John invariably took a background role. After Aldred's death in October 1963, however, he stepped forward to keep the movement going. Virtually single-handedly he continued to publish *The Word* (later transmuted to *The Word Quarterly*). But the USM fell into decline, and by 1968 John was forced to close its printing press and bookshop.

But perhaps of more long term significance were John's efforts in keeping alive the movement's history and its ideas, of antiparlamentarism and self-activity which were its hallmarks.

I first met John, early in the Eighties, through Willie McDougall, another veteran of Glasgow antiparlamentarism. Willie recommended that, if I wanted to find out about the history of the movement, I should speak to John Caldwell.

For Willie the movement's history was secondary – far more important was his propaganda work, especially the production of his many pamphlets and papers on current issues. John, on the other hand, whilst he of course recognised the value of such activity, realised that if the movement and its ideas were to survive in a period of downturn, recording its history as fully as possible was vital.

To this end, in books, articles, TV programmes, plays and speaking wherever possible, he devoted the last decades of his life.

Possibly it was from Aldred that he first appreciated the importance of this. Aldred devoted pamphlet after pamphlet to rescuing heroes of the movement from oblivion, and in the 1950s embarked on his major autobiographical project, *No Traitor's Gait*, which, although unfinished, remains one of the major sources for the libertarian and freethought movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To some this might smack of Aldred's egocentricity, placing himself at the centre of the movement's early history. John's approach was completely the opposite, downplaying his own role to insignificance.

Without being conscious of it he was in many ways an oral historian of the movement: having absorbed comrades' memories and stories, he had a remarkable ability to synthesise the information and produce a compelling narrative in his lucid prose style.

He devoted the rest of his long life to "guarding the movement against oblivion", depositing archival material in libraries such as the Mitchell Library and the libraries of Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian Universities, and editing a collection of Aldred's works for World Microfilms.

In addition, Luath Press published his biography of Guy Aldred, *Come Dungeons Dark* (1988) albeit in abbreviated form, and subsequently Northern Herald Books published his two important volumes of

## Factfile: John Taylor Caldwell (1911-2007)

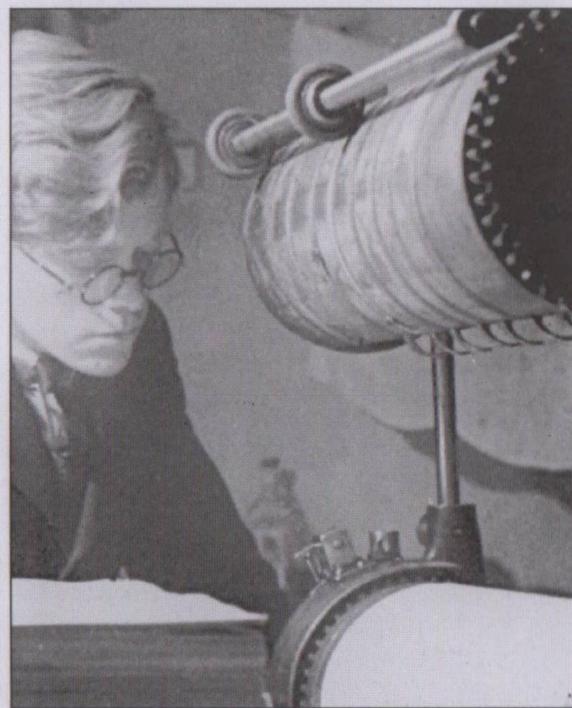
**"In the new society we will lay aside our armoury of "isms" and our perpetual belligerence. In a state of cooperation we will find freedom to live much more fully than before.'**

- An agitator since his teenage years, Caldwell found his political home on meeting Guy Aldred in 1934.

- He was both an untiring physical aide to Glasgow's leading organisers, and an important transatlantic link through his work as a seaman

- His work was vital to the founding of the Strickland Press

- Caldwell was a talented writer of children's books, but in his later years, it was the history of the



movement which occupied him

- He continued speaking, helping researchers and supporting anarchist causes well into his 90s.

autobiography, *Severely Dealt With* (1993) and *With Fate Conspire* (1999). The former, a vivid depiction of his harsh upbringing in Belfast and Glasgow, was well received and was a bestseller for three consecutive months at John Smith's historic bookshop in central Glasgow (now also, alas, defunct).

Most recently, about eighteen months before his death, John had made an important contribution to a film about "The Spanish Pimpernel", Ethel MacDonald.

In addition, John was always willing to speak at events in Glasgow, trying to bring alive the history of the movement for a new generation of anarchists and direct actionists.

This he did well into his nineties, for example speaking at Glasgow's John Maclean Centre three or four years ago. He was always ready to assist fellow workers with their research, especially if it promised to "spread the word" to new audiences and to shed new light on the movement to which he had devoted his life.

Similarly, he was an assiduous correspondent, answering queries with thoughtful and detailed accounts drawn from his capacious memory and his notebooks and diaries.

However, emphasis on his lifetime of service to the cause and on his self-effacing character runs the risk of creating a misleading impression of what it was like to be in John's company.

He was a witty and convivial man. A visit to his flat was always an occasion for lively conversation, laughter and (in a modest way) feasting. Until only a few years before his last illness, we would arrive at his flat to find the table neatly set out and his crowning culinary achievement, stewed steak with carrots and onions, filling the air with its savoury aroma.

In extreme old age some people become almost exclusively preoccupied with their

state of health and declining abilities: not so John. He maintained a lively interest in political and social developments, and made determined efforts, ultimately frustrated by his increasing blindness, to master information technology so that he could continue to communicate with the outside world.

Out of his modest income he subscribed to anarchist and freethought publications; and also contributed to a whole gamut of child and animal welfare charities, a commitment rooted in his childhood experience of cruelty and deprivation rather than easy sentimentality.

He took a humorous and completely rational approach to his own mortality, doing his best despite failing sight to put his papers in order so that nothing of historical value would be lost – and pointing them out to us with words such as "When I kick the bucket..."

In accordance with the practices and values his old comrades had always maintained, he willed his body to medical science.

Aldred's 1961 tribute to Ethel MacDonald is equally applicable to John:

"...it seems rather odd that we should have the desire to struggle forward and to change the world and to put it right. Yet for some strange reason a contradiction arises within us. We do struggle, we do change the world. One generation emerges into another.

"The hopes of yesterday's heroes and martyrs become the inspiring slogans of the martyrs and heroes of today, and by them are passed on to the heroes and martyrs that will be tomorrow..."

"I must be bold in mind and spirit so as to play my part in bringing about the new world in which [John Caldwell] believed, and to create which [he] toiled and struggled."



# How revolution lost its way

## Analysis: Remembering the Russian tragedy

**T**HIS year marks the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. While the Bolshevik Myth appears to be on the decline, some radicals are some infatuated with it and so, unfortunately, anarchists still need to explain why Leninism lead to Stalinism.

An effective way of doing so is to contrast the claims of Leninists with reality. Chris Harman's "How the Revolution was Lost" is an attempt by the British SWP to explain the rise of Stalinism while exonerating the politics of Bolshevism at the same time.<sup>(1)</sup>

First published in 1967 to mark the 50th anniversary of the revolution, this essay is still used by the party and contains all the basic themes they, and other Leninists, use to defend the Bolsheviks. Therefore, it is worth looking at in order to see how its claims have survived recent research and whether the original assertions bear up to analysis.

Harman places the blame on the degeneration of the revolution on the civil war and the isolation of the revolution. In effect, the

exceptional circumstances facing the revolution were the source of the deviations of Bolshevik policies from socialist ideas.

However, as Lenin himself acknowledged in 1917, "revolution... in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances" and "revolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances."<sup>(2)</sup>

As such, it seems difficult to blame the inescapable resistance by the ruling class for the problems of a revolution. If it cannot handle the inevitable, then Bolshevism is clearly to be avoided.

### Got no class?

Harman sees the key as "the dislocation of the working class. It was reduced to 43% of its former numbers. The others were

returned to their villages or dead on the battlefield.

"In purely quantitative terms, the class that had led the revolution, the class whose democratic processes had constituted the living core of Soviet power, was halved in importance...

"What remained was not even half of that class" as what was left was atomised. Thus the "decimation of the working class" meant that "of necessity the Soviet institutions took on a life independently of the class they had arisen from."

The major problem with this assertion is simply that the Russian working class was more than capable of collective action throughout the Civil War period -- against the Bolsheviks.

In the Moscow area, while it is "impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances," following the lull after the defeat of the workers' conference movement in mid-1918 "each wave of unrest was more powerful than



the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."

For example, at the end of June 1919, "a Moscow committee of defence (KOM) was formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances... KOM concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression."

In early 1921, "military units called in" against striking workers "refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments" who did. "The following day several factories went on strike" and troops "disarmed and locked in as a precaution" by the government against possible fraternising.

On February 23rd, "Moscow was placed

Clearly it had and was capable of collective action and organisation – until it was repressed by the Bolsheviks. This implies that a key factor in rise of Stalinism was political – the simple fact that the workers would not vote Bolshevik in free soviet and union elections and so they were not allowed to.

As one Soviet historian put it, "taking the account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets (raised in early 1921) meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists," although there is little evidence that the strikers actually raised that 'infamous' slogan.<sup>(6)</sup>

It should also be noted that Bolshevik orthodoxy at the time stressed that, to quote Lenin, that "the dictatorship of the proletari-

that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920... represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917."<sup>(11)</sup>

So while the "working class had decreased in size and changed in composition... the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power...

"Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force."<sup>(12)</sup>

This explains why working class struggle during this period generally fails to get mentioned by the likes of the SWP. It simply undermines their justifications for Bolshevik dictatorship.

### Divide and Rule?

Harman argues that "to keep alive" many workers "resorted to direct barter of their products – or even parts of their machines – with peasants for food. Not only was the leading class of the revolution decimated, but the ties linking its members together were fast disintegrating." This seems ironic, for two reasons.

Firstly, in 1918 Lenin had argued that "those who believe that socialism will be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistaken: it will everywhere be built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine."<sup>(13)</sup>

Again, if Bolshevism becomes unstuck by the inevitable side effects of revolution, then it should be avoided.<sup>(14)</sup>

Secondly, there is the issue of Bolshevik ideology. For example, Bolshevik policies banning trade helped undermine a collective response to the problems of exchange between city and country. For example, a delegation of workers from the Main Workshops of the Nikolaev Railroad to Moscow reported to a well-attended meeting that "the government had rejected their request (to obtain permission to buy food collectively) arguing that to permit the free purchase of food would destroy its efforts to come to grips with hunger by establishing a 'food dictatorship.'<sup>(15)</sup>

Bolshevik ideology replaced collective working class action with an abstract "collective" response via the state, which turned the workers into isolated and atomised individuals.<sup>(16)</sup>

Other policies undermined working class collectivity. For example, in early 1918 Lenin stated that "we must raise the question of piece-work and apply it... in practice."<sup>(17)</sup> As Tony Cliff notes, "the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th(e) unity (of workers as a class). Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems." He notes that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists "for the same purpose."<sup>(18)</sup> Obviously piece-work has different consequences when Lenin introduces it!

Combine these with the turning of the soviets and unions into rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik party, the undermining of the factory committees, the disbanding of soldier committees and the elimination of freedom of assembly, press and organisation for workers; little wonder the masses ceased to play a



**DEADLY DESTINY:** Stalin and Lenin in their younger days

under martial law with a 24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units."<sup>(3)</sup>

Nor was this collective struggle limited to Moscow. "Strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920" and "in the first six months of 1920 strikes had occurred in 77% of middle-sized and large works."

For the Petrograd province, soviet figures state that in 1919 there were 52 strikes with 65,625 participants and in 1920 73 strikes with 85,645, both high figures as according to one set of figures, which are by no means the lowest, there were 109,100 workers there.

In February and March 1921 "industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent... General strikes, or very widespread unrest, hit Petrograd, Moscow, Saratov and Ekaterinoslav." Only one major industrial region was unaffected. In response to the general strike in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks replied with a "military clamp-down, mass arrests and other coercive measures, such as the closure of enterprises, the purging of the workforce and stopping of rations which accompanied them."<sup>(4)</sup>

Given this collective rebellion all across the industrial centres of Russia throughout the Civil War and after, it's hard to take Harman seriously when he argues that the working class had "ceased to exist in any meaningful sense."<sup>(4)</sup>

at cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class... It can be exercised only by a vanguard."<sup>(7)</sup> Zinoviev clarified what this meant: "the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."<sup>(8)</sup>

Harman presents a somewhat contradictory account of the working class in this period, arguing that many workers fled, "returned to their villages" and that "raw peasants from the countryside, without socialist traditions or aspirations, took their place."<sup>(9)</sup>

Why would peasants come to the starving towns when workers were fleeing them? Looking at the strike wave of early 1921, the strongest reason for accepting that it was established workers who were behind it was "the form and course of protest" which reached "back through the spring of 1917 and beyond [and] were an important factor" in its organisation.<sup>(10)</sup>

Clearly, Harman's argument can be faulted. Nor is it particularly original, as it dates back to Lenin and was first formulated "to justify a political clamp-down" in response to rising working class protest rather than its lack: "As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin... began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated... workers had become 'declassed.'"

However, there "is little evidence to suggest

role in the revolution.

### From soviets to state

This process began before the civil war Harman blames for all the problems of Bolshevism in power; "until the Civil War was well under way" the "democratic dialectic of party and class could continue. The Bolsheviks held power as the majority party in the Soviets. But other parties continued to exist there too. The Mensheviks continued to operate legally and compete with the Bolsheviks for support until June 1918."

Given that the Civil War started on the 25th of May and the Mensheviks were expelled from the Soviets on the 14th of June, it is clear that Harman is being less than honest in his account.

Looking at Getzler's Martov (which Harman quotes to prove Bolshevik popularity in October 1917), we discover that "Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."<sup>(19)</sup>

The Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks in the context of political losers before the Civil War. As Getzler notes the Bolsheviks "drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."<sup>(20)</sup>

Recent research disproves Harman's claim and confirms Getzler. "The Bolsheviks' soviet electoral hegemony began to significantly erode" by the spring of 1918 with "big gains by the SRs and particularly by the Mensheviks."

In all the provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which data exists, the Mensheviks and the SRs won majorities and "Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results" of these elections (as well as the resulting workers' protests).<sup>(21)</sup>

In Petrograd, in the elections of June 1918 the Bolsheviks "lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed" but remained the largest party. However, the results of these elections were irrelevant as a "Bolshevik victory was assured by the numerically quite significant representation now given to trade unions, district soviets, factory-shop committees, district workers conferences, and Red Army and naval units, in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength."<sup>(22)</sup> Similar "packing" of soviets was evident in the Moscow in early 1920.<sup>(23)</sup>

Rather than the Civil War disrupting the "democratic dialectic of party and class," it was in fact the Bolsheviks who did so in face of rising working class dissent and disillusionment in the spring of 1918. In fact, "after the initial weeks of 'triumph'... Bolshevik labour relations after October" changed and "soon lead to open conflict, repression, and the consolidation of Bolshevik dictatorship over the proletariat in place of proletarian dictatorship itself."

on June 20th the Obukhov works appealed to the unofficial (Menshevik influenced) Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives to strike on June 25th against Bolshevik reprisals over the assassi-

nation of a leading Bolshevik.

"The Bolsheviks responded by 'invading' the whole Nevskii district with troops and shutting down Obukhov completely. Meetings everywhere were forbidden." Faced with a general strike called for July 2nd, the Bolsheviks set up "machine guns... at main points throughout the Petrograd and Moscow railroad junctions, and elsewhere in both cities as well. Controls were tightened in factories. Meetings were forcefully dispersed."<sup>(24)</sup>

The early months of Bolshevik rule were marked by "worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule."<sup>(25)</sup>

While Harman argues that "for all its faults,

places in the factories."

The obvious question arises as to why these workers and peasants could not "govern themselves collectively" while in the Red Army. The answer is simple – the Bolsheviks had eliminated soldier democracy in March 1918 (again, before the start of the Civil War). In the words of Trotsky, "the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."<sup>(27)</sup>

An army with appointed commanders is hardly an environment for collective self-government and so it is little wonder he does not mention this.

Unsurprisingly, Samuel Farber notes that "there is no evidence indicating Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of



**INFLUENTIAL:** Leaders of the Menshevik Party at Norra Bantorget in Stockholm, Sweden, May 1917. Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov and Alexander Martinov

it was precisely the Bolshevik party that had alone whole-heartedly supported Soviet power," the facts are that the Bolsheviks only supported "Soviet power" when the soviets were Bolshevik.<sup>(26)</sup>

If the workers voted for others, "soviet power" was quickly replaced by party power. Harman is correct to state that "the Soviets that remained [by the end of the civil war] were increasingly just a front for Bolshevik power" but this had been the situation before its start, not after its end.

As such, his assertion that "the Soviet State of 1917 had been replaced by the single-party State of 1920 onwards" is simply unsupportable. The Bolsheviks had consolidated their position in early 1918, turning the Soviet State into a de facto one party state by gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets before the start of the Civil War.

Thus, when Harman that argues that "of necessity the Soviet institutions took on a life independently of the class they had arisen from," the "necessity" in question was not the Civil War, but rather the necessity to maintain Bolshevik power.

Harman maintains that "those workers and peasants who fought the Civil War could not govern themselves collectively from their

democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."<sup>(28)</sup>

### Top-down democracy is no democracy

Another problem was the Bolshevik vision of (centralised) democracy. Trotsky is typical. In April 1918 he argued that the key factor in democracy was that the central power was elected by the masses, meaning that functional democracy from below could be replaced by decisions and appointments from above as the government was "better able to judge in the matter than" the masses.

The sovereign people were expected to simply obey their public servants until such time as they could "dismiss that government and appoint another." Trotsky raised the question of whether it was possible for the government to act "against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"

He answered no. Yet it is obvious that Trotsky's claim that "there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general



assembly of its members" is nonsense.<sup>(29)</sup>

The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying their membership. The subsequent history of Lenin's government shows that there can be "antagonism" between rulers and ruled and that appointments are always a key way to further elite interests.

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx's arguments of 1850 and Lenin's comments that the "organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy" was "to proceed from the top downward."<sup>(30)</sup>

By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the soviets, factory committees and soldiers committees.

The Bolshevik vision of democracy became the means by which real democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long.

Nor does it come as too great a surprise to discover that a government which considers itself as "better able to judge" things than the people finally decides to annul any election results it dislikes. This perspective is at the heart of vanguardism, for in Bolshevik ideology the party, not the class, is in the final analysis the repository of class consciousness.

This means that once in power it has a built-in tendency to override the decisions of the masses it claimed to represent and justify this in terms of the advanced position

of the party. Combine this with a vision of 'democracy' which is highly centralised and which undermines local participation then we have the necessary foundations for the turning of party power into party dictatorship.

And it must be stressed that in the Bolshevik ideal was that the party should seize power, not the working class as a whole. Lenin in 1917 continually repeating the basic idea that the Bolsheviks "can and must take state power into their own hands."<sup>(31)</sup>

He equated party power with popular power and argued that Russia would be governed by the Bolshevik party. But what happens if the masses turn against the party? The destruction of soviet democracy in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that question. In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter – as would be expected given their ideology and so it is not a great step to party dictatorship given the premises of Bolshevism.

### Centralisation empowers the few, not the many

Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of "the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."<sup>(32)</sup>

Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state. Yet by its very nature centralism places power into a few hands and effectively eliminates the popular participation required for any successful revolution to develop. The

power placed into the hands of the nineteen members of the Bolshevik party's central committee was automatically no longer in the hands of the working class.

As such, when Leninists argue that objective circumstances forced the Bolsheviks to substitute their power for that of the masses, anarchists reply that this substitution had occurred the moment the Bolsheviks placed power in their own hands.

As a result, popular participation and institutions had to wither and die. Moreover, once in power, the Bolsheviks were shaped by their new position and the social relationships it created and, consequently, implemented policies influenced and constrained by the hierarchical and centralised structures they had created.

This was not the only negative impact of Bolshevik centralism. It also spawned a bureaucracy. Instead of the state starting to wither away "a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity... As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy."<sup>(33)</sup>

This was a striking confirmation of the anarchist analysis, which argues that a new bureaucratic class develops around the centralised bodies. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control while, at the same time, exploiting its power to feather its own nest.

■ This is part one of a two-part series. The conclusion will appear in the next issue of Black Flag.

By Iain McKay

### NOTES:

1. Chris Harman, "Russia - How the Revolution was Lost," first published in *International Socialism* 30, Autumn 1967 and subsequently reprinted as a pamphlet and included in *Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism*.

2. Lenin, *Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?* (Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud, 1997), p. 80, p. 81  
Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power: a study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918-21* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987), p. 94, pp. 94-5, p. 245

3. J. Aves, *Workers Against Lenin: Labour Protest and the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 1996), p. 69, p. 109, p. 120

The fact that the Russian working class was capable of collective action was known in 1967. For example, Ida Mett: "And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?" [Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Rebellion* (Solidarity, London, date unknown), p. 81] As such, ideological reasons explain Harman's assertions.

4. quoted by Aves, p. 123

Lenin stressed that this formula was applicable "in all capitalist countries" as "the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts." [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920 (Pathfinder, New York, 1991), vol. 1, p. 152

5. Ironically, the Mensheviks blamed the rise of Bolshevik popularity before the war and in 1917 precisely on its appeal to the "new proletariat," i.e. those new to the cities and still tied to its village origin.

6. Aves, p. 126

7. Aves, p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91

8. Sakwa, p. 261

9. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 27 p. 517

10. It should be noted that the Russian revolution confirmed Kropotkin's argument that any revolution would see economic disruption and dislocation (see *Conquest of Bread and Act for Yourself*). Leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin came to realise this decades later and, unlike their followers, saw it as a "law" of revolutions.

11. David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: from the July days 1917 to July 1918* (Macmillan, London, 1984), p. 392

12. such, the Bolsheviks provided a good example to support Malatesta's argument that "if... one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government... it follows... that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing." [Anarchy (Freedom Press, London, 1974), pp. 36-7]

Can it be surprising, then, that Bolshevik policies aided the atomisation of the working class by replacing collective organisation and action by state bureaucracy?

13. *The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), p. 23

14. *State Capitalism in Russia* (Bookmarks, London, 1988), pp. 18-9

16. Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1967), p. 179

17. While the Bolsheviks "offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions" there was "of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds." [Israel Getzler, *Martov*, p. 181]

18. Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1990), pp.

22-4

19. Alexander Rabinowitch, "The Evolution of Local Soviets in Petrograd", pp. 20-37, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 36f

20. Sakwa, p. 177

21. William Rosenberg, "Russian labour and Bolshevik Power," pp. 98-131, *The Workers' revolution in Russia, 1917*, Daniel H. Kaiser (ed.), (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), p. 117, pp. 126-7 and p. 127

22. Alexander Rabinowitch, "Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule: New Data from the Archives of the Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories", *Politics and Society under the Bolsheviks*, Dermott, Kevin and Morison, John (eds.) (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999), p. 37

23. As recognised by Martov, who argued that the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were "in the hands of the Bolshevik party." [Getzler, p. 174]

24. quoted by Brintin, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control 1917 to 1921: the State and Counter-Revolution*, (Solidarity and Black and Red, London and Detroit, 1975), pp. 37-8.

25. Farber, p. 44

26. *Leon Trotsky Speaks* (Pathfinder, New York, 1972), p. 113

27. For those, like the SWP, who maintain that Leninism is "socialism from below" Lenin explicitly denied this: "Bureaucracy versus democracy is in fact centralism versus autonomism; it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward, and, therefore, wherever possible... upholds autonomism and 'democracy,' carried (by the overzealous) to the point of anarchism. The former strives to proceed from the top downward." [Collected Works, vol. 7, pp. 396-7]

28. *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 329

29. *Collected Works*, vol. 7, p. 367

30. Richard Sakwa, "The Commune State in Moscow in 1918," pp. 429-449, *Slavic Review*, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437-8



**LONG JOURNEY:** Clockwise from above, A mass demonstration in the early days of the revolt against the Tsar's rule, the Kronstadt sailors march with the masses to protest against the Republic which replaced him, crowds scatter when the government orders soldiers to open fire on the demonstrators, a mass demonstration, and members of the Cheka – Lenin's secret police – search suspected dissidents. *Photographs: Archive footage*

## In colour: The Russian revolution



# The **BIG PICTURE:** Bakunin in colour



“ Patriotism imposes injustice and cruelty on all its subjects, as a supreme duty. It restrains, it mutilates, it kills humanity in them, so that, ceasing to be men, they are no longer anything but citizens. — Mikhail Bakunin

”

