

# Black Flag

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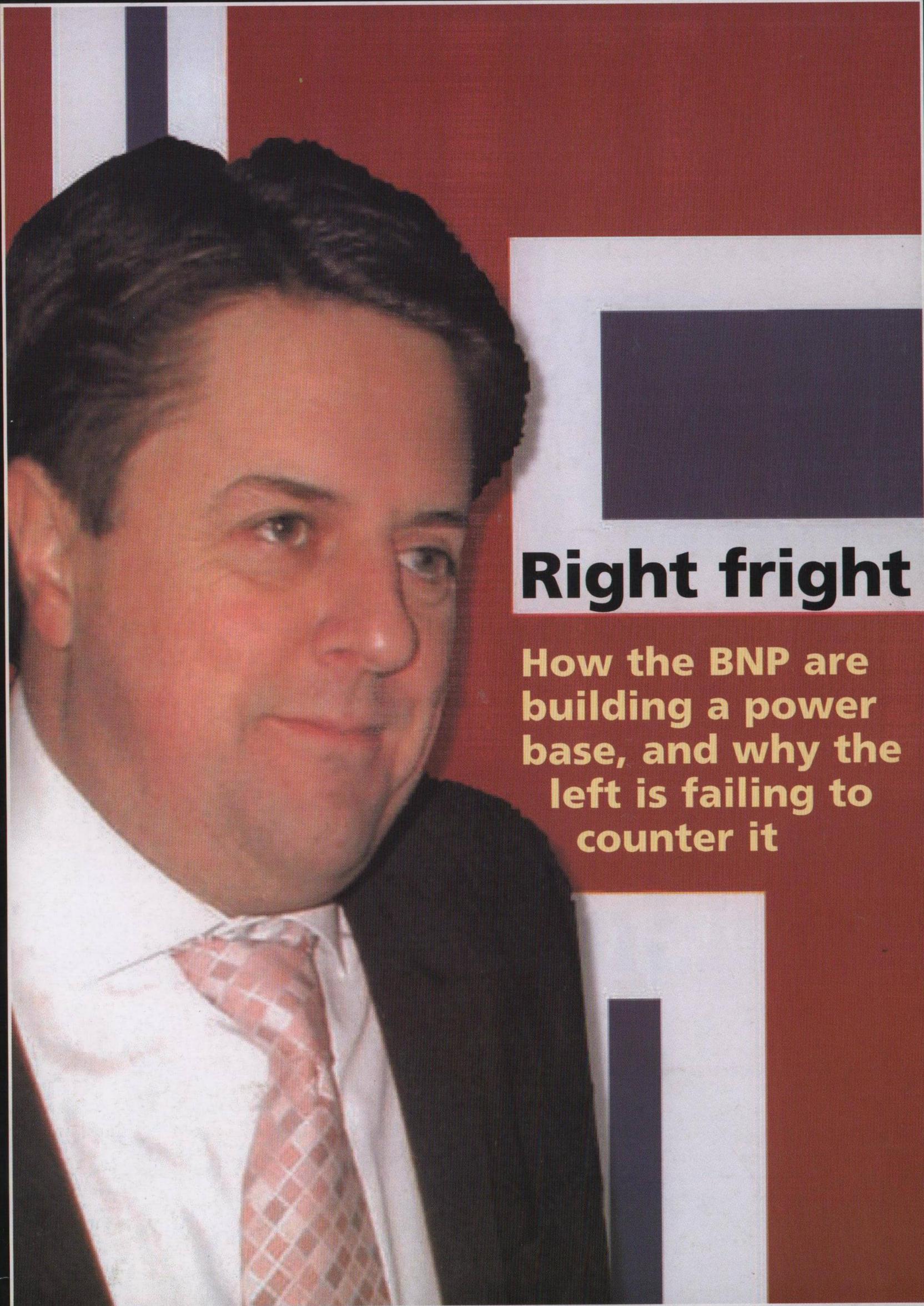
**In Focus:**  
A look at  
anarchist  
feminism



**Crunch:**  
No more  
money to  
burn



**Also inside  
this issue...**



## Right fright

How the BNP are building a power base, and why the left is failing to counter it

# Editorial

As Black Flag goes to print, it appears capitalism is on the verge of a major economic crisis due to the "credit crunch." While programmes and articles on this crisis have appeared, the social context has been downplayed or ignored. It is as if crisis occurs without any links to the wider economy.

On page 12, Iain McKay explains how this crisis arose and how the chickens have come home to roost.

Such class analysis of the crunch is vital to counter a phoney shifting of blame onto scapegoats created to dilute any mass response to the crisis.

Unless they are countered, it is possible that the far-right will take advantage and push their own 'solution' to the problems we all face. In our lead article, Paul Marsh and Kac look at how liberal abandonment has let the far right into communities which suffered even during the boom times from an economic plan which enriched the wealthy and beat down the poor.

Jack Ray illustrates this tendency for "boom economics, bust social support" in his case study of Manchester on page 9, looking at a city where Labour have placed a veneer of luxury over the city's rotting core while calling it progress.

This issue also takes an in-depth look at anarcha-feminism past and future. Anarcha-feminism has been a tendency within the movement since almost the start, as can be seen from our account of the first known group formed in Argentina in the 1890s (page 24). We also reproduce a rare Emma Goldman article on Mary Wollstonecraft and present an interview with the two members of the Dublin based RAG.

As the example of the French strikes last year show, we have enormous power in our hands – if we know how to use it! Hopefully Black Flag can contribute to creating awareness, to clarifying and supporting anarchist activity. Our back page has a picture of the Haymarket Martyrs. Executed because of their key role in the unions of Chicago and the eight hour day movement, their legacy should be remembered.

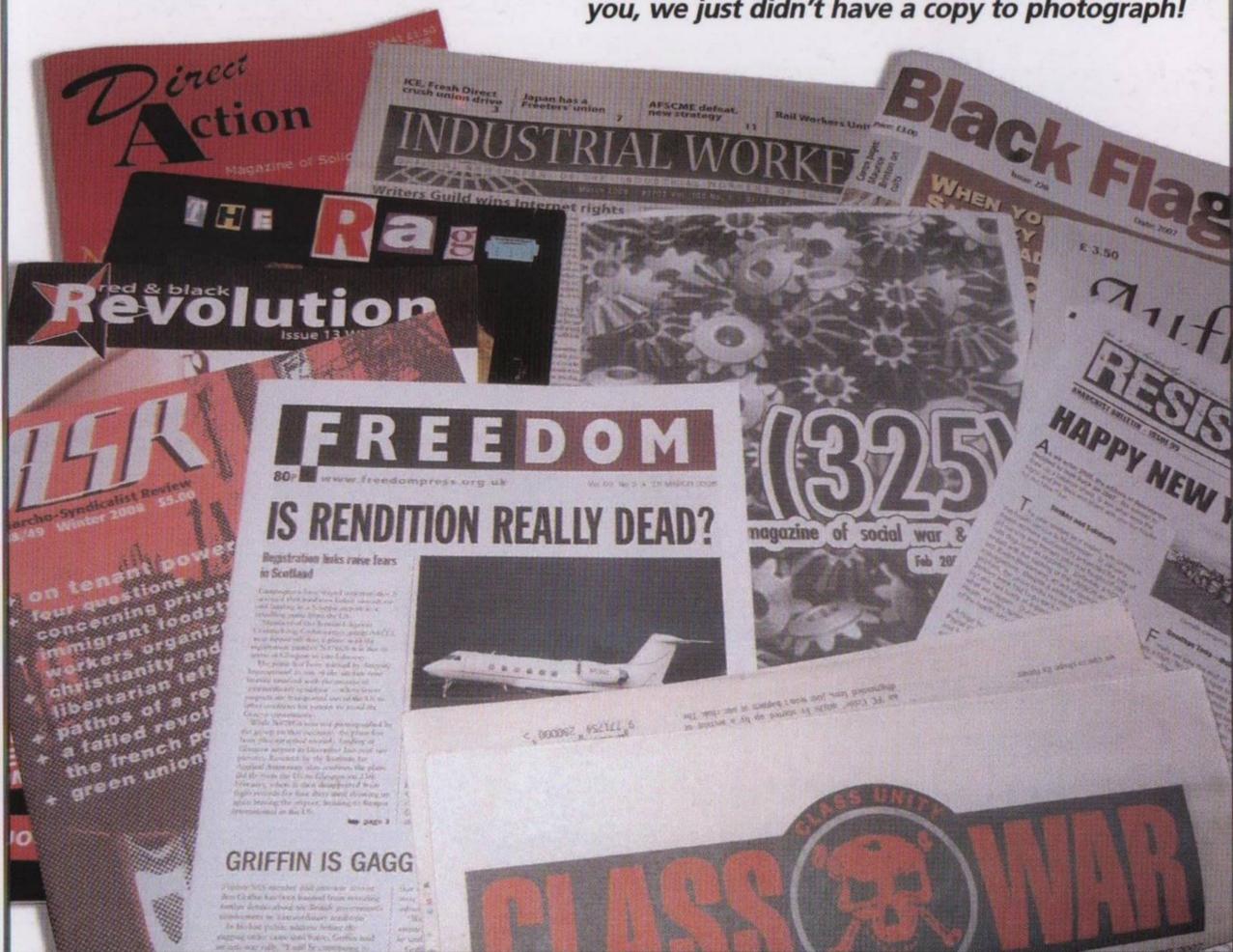
The good news is Black Flag is on schedule to be bi-annual this year. Sales have noticeably improved. However our collective is still small. Please do not assume that we will muddle through – get in touch. Finally, the footnotes to part one of our series on the Russian Revolution somehow got messed up. Go to [anarchism.ws/writers/anarcho/revlost\\_critique.html](http://anarchism.ws/writers/anarcho/revlost_critique.html) for the correct version. It is now a three-part work.



**GREEN BUG:** This issue, our intrepid, parasite-killing ladybird with the red and black colour scheme is illustrating the difficulties of living on a dead planet... Photograph: Anya Brennan

## Our kind of people: A few of the many libertarian publications available from radical social centres and bookshops today

*PS: If you're not on here we're not snubbing you, we just didn't have a copy to photograph!*



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## 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 world-wide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s.

It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

## About

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# Why right is

## Analysis: Rise of the Nationalists

**S**IX years ago the BNP were following the well worn footprints of the post-war British far-right – pitifully small votes, a tiny unreliable membership with a very high turnover, and a public profile that either didn't really exist (apart from some limited areas) or was on a par with that of Ian Brady. The whole far-right combined had only managed to win three council seats in total since 1945 and these came as total shocks.

Today they have around 50 elected councillors, a national profile that allows them to operate in areas previously closed to them, a steadily rising and far more reliable membership (around 7,000) and crucially, voting BNP is no longer seen as the action of nutters and misfits – it has become a normalised reaction to social conditions across many parts of the country.

What has happened in those ten years to bring this situation about? Why have the BNP apparently shaken off the various curses of the British far-right – the Hitler worship, the elitism, the overt anti-

Semitism, the inept attempts at paramilitary games, the social pariah status etc and gone on to become the most electorally successful far-right group in this country's history?

Why and how have they managed to consolidate themselves and their politics in these last 10 years? What has changed, and why? These are the questions we'll be looking at in this article.

We'll start with a brief historical introduction to the roots of the far-right following the formation of the National Front in 1967 in order to provide background and context.

### The National Front – united at last

The National Front was born in 1967 out of the merger of The League of Empire Loyalists, a fast fading conservative group based on virulent anti-Semitism led by AK Chesterton, and the British National Party (not the same group as today) headed by John Bean and individual members of immigration pressure groups.

The big hitters of the far-right scene at the time were Colin Jordan, John Tyndall and Martin Webster and all were openly neo-nazi, leading to them being refused membership of the NF for some years. The NF at that time appeared to be an incoherent mix of positions all joined together by the recognition that overt neo-nazism was never going to be a vote-winner in the UK after World War Two.

The public outcry around immigration at this time added weight to the idea that all on the far-right should be brought together in order to make political capital out of the issue. Tyndall accordingly toned down his rhetoric and was allowed to join, along with Webster, and the two quickly set about achieving control of the Party's main bodies and forcing a series of internal challenges until Tyndall emerged victorious as leader in 1973.

This 1973-78 period was the height of the NF's influence – they claimed to have over 17,000 members, helped along by an influx of ex-Tories angry about what they saw as Prime Minister Heath's liberal stance on immigration, particularly on the entrance of thousands of Asian-Ugandans into the country.

These disillusioned Tories brought valuable electoral and organisational experience to the group which helped in achieving some noticeable election results, including a 16.9% in a Parliamentary by-election in West Brom – the only time the far-right had saved an election deposit until that point.

Yet, in a process that seems to be played out time and time again, the newcomers led by John Kingsley Read believed that they were largely behind the current success and so led a challenge to Tyndall, in which they won a brief pyrrhic victory but eventually lost, although not without taking 3,000 members with them.

They then formed the National Party which itself soon disappeared, after winning two council seats in Blackburn in 1976 – the only instances of electoral success the far-right had ever had. The NF, at the very zenith of its size and influence, never won a single council election.

Tyndall then led the NF to a crushing defeat in the 1979 election in which Thatcher stole the populist clothes of the entire far right. Tyndall was ousted and after falling out with his old Lieutenant Webster he formed the New National Front, which in 1982 merged with some elements of the British Movement, the old NF and the British Democratic Party to form today's BNP.

Tyndall kept the BNP on a fairly straight political path throughout the 80s – battling with the NF (and usually losing) for the mantle of being top-dogs on the far right. He mostly maintained traditional Mosley derived protectionist policies allied with the covert neo-nazism and anti-Semitism essential for drawing younger elements of the movement in this period.

But they were merely treading water and Tyndall was finally deposed from the leadership by Nick Griffin, who had joined in 1995 after a period leading the 'political soldiers' wing of the remaining NF – ironically enough via the same approach as Tyndall had utilised against Jordan and others back in the 60s, arguing for an up-to-date presentation and change of emphasis.

### Learning the lessons?

Griffin emerged as Party leader after a vicious battle with Tyndall in September 1999, using the momentum of his victory to introduce a series of constitutional changes



**FAILURE:**  
Ex-leader  
John  
Tyndall

# beating left

which made the Party Leader's position significantly more secure.

This also had the added bonus of keeping a lid on any serious internal dissent, by ensuring that any challenge to his position would almost certainly split the party permanently – a step many of those who would like to challenge Griffin have been unwilling to take. To date only Chris Jackson has challenged Griffin's leadership and he was comprehensively beaten with Griffin receiving over 90% of the vote.

Griffin decided to grasp the nettle and focused his first big changes on the issues that would cause most controversy – race and repatriation. The BNP abandoned one of their, and the far right's historical core commitments – the compulsory repatriation of all non-whites from Britain.

The scale and importance of this change cannot be under-estimated. At a stroke it undermined one of the core arguments against the BNP – the injustice of blanket, compulsory repatriation.

It allowed people to vote BNP who had

black friends, got on well with their local Asian newsagent, or who quite fancied the woman at their local Chinese takeaway, without believing they were sending such people to their deaths.

The whole point of racism is that it is contradictory and hypocritical – by adopting a policy that was partial and would mean different things to different people, Griffin advanced the cause of racism far more successfully than Tyndall's "Send 'Em Back".

This also demonstrated the fast developing political nous of a core of key strategists around Griffin who were learning lessons about political representation and how to appeal to different groups on different issues from the mainstream parties. It allowed the BNP to oppose immigration on what they could claim were non-racial grounds – they were merely defending the indigenous population – and in a country where a substantial proportion of the population report they are opposed to mass immigration but wouldn't necessarily think of themselves as racist, this opened up a very useful new seam

of potential supporters.

Tied to this change was an emphasis of cultural difference, using arguments developed by the top down multi-culturalist approach of the political establishment. If everyone 'belongs' to a particular culture and that culture needs and deserves defending or 'understanding' then surely so did the culture of white people – to deny this was to deny the logic of official multi-culturalists or to give non-whites privileges over and above those the 'white community' could expect.

Different but equal – the far right finally grasped hands with elements of the left. This move allowed the BNP to argue that they were in fact entirely mainstream on the issue and to tie their opponents up in knots, thereby exposing the assumptions behind their approaches – unfortunately, unlike others, this was in order to agree with those separatist assumptions rather than to highlight the anti-working class nature of them.

The floundering of the political establishment when faced with this approach was highlighted perfectly by a Newsnight interview Jeremy Paxman conducted with Griffin in 2001. The liberal left's favourite attack dog was left lost and mumbling after suddenly finding himself out of his depth. Like many of his type, he clearly hadn't been following the evolution of the far right and lazily expected to be tearing apart some bonehead moron.

These two policy changes combined to allow a crucial organisational change to be put in place – the removal of the bonehead element and the silencing (in public at least) of the Hitler-worship society who still remained in the party in substantial numbers. Those who wanted to continue down that road were either forced out or put on notice that they should be except to be disciplined if they stepped out of line.

These measures were key first steps to repositioning the BNP as a respectable, non-extremist common sense party speaking up for those the mainstream parties had abandoned – an approach which was then applied via a new electoral strategy.

The first run out for the new approach was the 2001 General Election which saw a targeted campaign with fewer candidates, identifying areas and key issues which would then be returned to after the national election. The results were encouraging. Despite standing half the number of candidates as the previous election they raised their vote by around 300% and increased the average votes per candidate from 640 to 1,428. Griffin had passed the first test.

Griffin had been very impressed by the performance of Le Pen's Front Nationale in the 1980s and 1990s and had taken much of his inspiration from them, particularly their use of local elections to build up power bases and national legitimacy. This was now the BNP's tactic – identify an outstanding local issue, set up a front campaign around it, talk to locals and uncover what other issues were worrying them, and adopt them as your own.

## Factfile: BNP in elections

### Local elections:

Year	Candidates	Total Votes	Seats Won	Total Seats	BNP 2 <sup>nd</sup> places	Average % in wards stood in	Average % in top 100 wards
2000	17	3022	0	0	0	0	n/a
2002	67	30998	3	3	3	16%	n/a
2003	217	101 221	13	16	48	17%	25%
2004	312	190 200	14	21	51	16%	24%
2006	363	229 389	33	48	89	18%	30%
2007	744	292 919	10	50	103	13%	29%

Nationally the picture is not quite so rosy but still shows a clear upward trend in every important area.

### General Elections:

Year	Candidates	Total Votes	Average vote per candidate
1983	53	14621	276
1987	2	553	277
1992	13	7631	587
1997	56	35382	640
2001	33	47631	1428
2005	119	192746	1620

The European elections of 2004 also saw the BNP score 808,200 votes nationally – 4.9% of the total vote. At the same time in the London elections they achieved 4.8% with 90,365 votes in the Assembly election and 3.04% with 58,405 votes in the mayoral election – plus 70,736 (3.68%) 2nd preference votes.



The fact that the mainstream parties have no intention of sorting out these issues means that they're actually acting in combination with the BNP and providing the conditions for their future growth.

The BNP then racialises these and other social issues and colonises the non-mainstream space.

So how has the local approach worked? The BNP in the 2007 local elections achieved the highest ever vote for a far-right party in this country and have achieved a 97-fold increase in total vote since 2000, and now have around 50 seats with at least 100 others in which they've come a close second.

This localised approach has been very effective despite the limitations imposed on what elected BNP councillors can practically achieve – this isn't the point of the tactic though, as the main aim is to normalise a BNP vote and bump the BNP into political respectability in the eyes of the electorate.

Yorkshire.

Today those areas still retain their importance but have been joined by a raft of other areas – the east Midlands, east England and the north west have all had councillors elected and seen the formation of numerous active local branches. Even previously impregnable areas like Wales have seen rises in BNP votes and activity. In the last round of national elections the BNP missed out on gaining Assembly members in North Wales, South Wales East and South Wales West by 0.6%, 0.9% and 1.3% respectively.

### Why This Success?

There is no single over-riding factor that has allowed the changes mentioned above to meet with success, rather, it's a coming together of a series of ingredients to create a toxic mix, some of the most important include:

The BNP have been able to articulate feelings of a general unease about Islam in

means that their needs are those at the top of the political agenda.

Social housing, well funded non-segregated education, a functioning health service and the whole range of social services that most of the working class rely on in one way or another is rarely what these key voters are concerned about, and consequently they're no longer what the mainstream parties are concerned with either.

This abandonment leaves the BNP room to move in and claim that people's communities are being run down, not because of Labour's obsession with the rich, but because Muslims or some other group have been allocated all the locally available resources. A class issue is once more racialised.

No credible left challenge to Labour has emerged. The Socialist Alliance came and went. Respect has only really flourished in two cities, and then has been largely dependent on Muslim voters. When queries were raised about selecting slates entirely consisting of males of Pakistani origin in Birmingham, the party began a process leading to a split.

The Greens' successes have been partial and largely dependent on middle class votes in cities like Oxford and Brighton. The IWCA, despite remarkable success in one working class area of Oxford, has not spread as a model, and indeed remains smaller now than its creator, Anti-Fascist Action, was when it slowly imploded.

Anarchist groups have remained at broadly the same level over the past 10 years, or arguably progressed slightly. None have the prominence now that Class War did 15 years ago. The BNP has swept up protest votes.

No credible right challenge to the BNP has emerged either. The implosion of the National Front and the continuing obsession of the remnants with racial purity and Hitler has meant that for serious far-right activists the BNP is today the only show in town.

The BNP has also profited from the Tories shifting to the left, and Labour shifting to the right. On economic issues, the protectionist BNP can say it is more left wing than New Labour.

The Conservative party traditionally mopped up votes on certain issues – capital punishment, anti-European Union, opposition to gay rights etc, without actually implementing the views of many of its voters.

Cameron's Conservative Party no longer even pretend that they wish to bring back hanging, reinstate Clause 28, or lead Britain out of the EU. Voters who wish to choose those policies are left with either UKIP, the BNP or parties further to the right.

Success breeds success. Once the BNP started winning seats, and getting strong votes in previously uncontested areas, it became clear they were a party worth joining, and worth voting for.

Fascists who had largely dropped out of politics – such as Martin and Tina Wingfield, or John Bean have returned to the fray. NF splinter The Third Way began to forget the efforts they had made to distance themselves from fascism, with Patrick Harrington heading the BNP's Solidarity 'union'.

The BNP vote has proved brittle. Despite a strong base, the BNP has failed to win council elections in Oldham and Sunderland. In places like Bradford and Burnley, electoral successes have not been maintained, and seats have been lost. Three explanations emerge here:



**FEWER JACKBOOTS:** The BNP have been careful not to conjure up the image of skinhead violence and fascist imagery in their campaigning.

### Who's Voting BNP? Where?

The image of the BNP voter amongst the left is often that of a tattooed yob – infamously characterized as 'scum off the estates' by Julie Waterson some years back. This is by no means the case though.

Research has established that the BNP does better the higher up the social scale in the area they're contesting and that the poorer the ward the worse they do, with 'a significant positive correlation only for group C1' (traditionally the lower middle class).

The BNP seem aware of this fact as well – after years of targeting wards at the lower end of the social scale, they are now targeting previously ignored middle class areas. This fits in well with the long-term aims of the modernisers to make voting BNP 'respectable' – and importantly, having support in well off areas can bring in much needed financial support.

The BNP were trapped in a few regional strongholds for much of the 1980s and 1990s. Traditionally the far right had been able to rely on residual levels of support in areas of east London, the west midlands and

Britain to outright opposition to it.

It is worth noting that these feelings pre-date both 9/11 and 7/7, e.g. the conflict over schooling in Dewsbury in the late 1980s, that led to a major riot in the town in 1989, or the racial violence between whites and Muslims in various northern towns in the summer of 2001.

It might not be something that people from Anarchist or Socialist traditions are comfortable with, but the fact is huge numbers of people (of all colours) are deeply uncomfortable with the development of Islam in Britain.

Allowing those views to be largely articulated by the tabloid press and the far-right has benefited no one – save the BNP and those British Muslims who wish to live as separate an existence as possible.

Only certain voters count – mainstream politics now revolve around what is euphemistically called 'middle England' – that is, a core of swing voters in a handful of well off seats whose vote is crucial to the winning of a General Election.

The need to appeal to these voters above all



**LET'S PRETEND:** BNP supporters attend the Russian ultra-right's annual big day out, when thousands of neo-nazis and ultra-nationalists march through Moscow on "National Unity Day".

Firstly the prospect of a BNP councillor can harden local opposition, bringing out the Labour and ethnic minority vote that might otherwise stay at home. Secondly many BNP councillors have either proven to be poor in office, or when elected have clearly had little idea as to what their agenda actually was.

Ramon Johns, of Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, epitomised this confusion when he voted against free bus passes for the elderly after being elected on the promise to... campaign for free bus passes for the elderly. Others have resigned under allegations of spousal abuse, neo-nazism, and in the case of Terry Farr from Epping, a line in writing abusive letters to minority constituents.

A startling success in Barking and Dagenham resulted in 13 councillors, many of whom appeared to be astonished by their own election.

Thirdly, having been elected, the question of "What Now?" has loomed large, and it appears to be one the BNP has been unable to answer.

Whilst local authorities arguably have less power than ever before, the BNP has not been able to manipulate the levers of power that remain to achieve anything. The whole point of a protest vote is once the protest has been made, people move on. At least some of the BNP's voters appear to have moved on and whether they return or not remains to be seen.

Worryingly though, there have been recent cases of the BNP actually increasing their vote in wards where they were expected to lose support following the poor performance of their councillors - most notably in

Gooshays in March.

The BNP has failed to impress the establishment. In the 1970s a certain section of the British ruling class actively considered that a military coup may be necessary to stop the country's decline. Individuals like Peter Wright of MI5 and George Kennedy Young of MI6 considered acting against the Labour



**'ARTIST':** Richard Banbrook is the BNP's prospective candidate for London Mayor

government, producing a sense of fear in Harold Wilson that never left him (we should not call it paranoia, because they really were out to get him).

There was however no party for them to attach their wagon to, and they were to decline in influence even before Margaret Thatcher arguably met one of their main objectives - defeating the unions.

A reliable far-right party, with serious support at all levels of society, was lacking then, and it is thankfully still lacking now. In France, the Front Nationale has serious support in sections of the police and military.

In the UK, no matter how unpleasant some of our cops may be, it is hard to imagine there are thousands of BNP card carrying members in uniform.

At leadership level, the Police, like much of the establishment, prefers to court 'community leaders' rather than antagonise them. Business and City leaders know full well how much they have benefited from the cheap labour of migrants. Fascism may well be a threat held back by the ruling class to attack the working class, but Mr Griffin should not expect a call from the CBI any day soon.

The BNP has been prone to arguments, and an air of sleaze hangs around Griffin. Rumours of his financial untrustworthiness have been circulating for years and have proven fertile ground for those inside and outside the BNP who would like to see him toppled.

This generally is hinted at rather than substantiated, but the range of areas in which it's claimed he's had his fingers in the pie must surely make some of those involved with the BNP



think twice – from setting up ‘print farming’ operations where the party rips off its own groups for printing that they’ve had done cheaper commercially, to party money being spent on improvements to Griffin’s farm.

The BNP annual accounts are unfailingly late in being supplied to the electoral commission and appear to leave out substantial donations. It will probably not dent their electoral hopes at this point, but it could provide internal and external opponents have a ready made issue on which to base their attacks, extending the infighting into the foreseeable future – but unless some real dirt appears in public, these are unlikely to have the potential to do terminal damage.

## The Winter War

In December Of 2007, Sadie Graham and Kenny Smith, two of the brightest young star of the party, were expelled for setting up a ‘treasonous’ blog, which among other things, featured a vicious profiling of leading member Mark Collett.

Their expulsions triggered a purge of



**EXPULSED:** Ex-BNP councillor Sadie Graham’s abrupt exit has not severely weakened the BNP

malcontents within in the party, and several resignations as a fight broke out within the party.

The winter 2007/8 divisions in the BNP have to be seen in the context of two factors. Firstly the contradictions inherent any far-right organisation, and secondly the sustained attack upon the BNP by the secret state/Searchlight.

Griffin’s BNP has been under sustained attack from Searchlight and its associates. Indeed before Griffin was even appointed The Cook Report got together a scam, in association with Searchlight, to attempt to lure Griffin into creating a series of Kickboxing gyms across Britain for nationalists’.

It is tempting to conclude that having made a huge mess with the Secret Agent fiasco, the state/Searchlight/Labour nexus got it right next time round with the winter 2007 ‘split’.

Either way, genuine anti-fascists should take note that the BNP has not been seriously weakened by an attack by progressive forces, but by its own divisions, contradictions and quite possibly secret state shenanigans.

The material conditions that led to the

BNP’s relative success remain in place. Indeed if we are dependent on the likes of Searchlight and Mi5 to ‘protect’ us from fascism, those conditions are arguably stronger, not weaker. ]

## Where now?

Griffin remains the BNP’s best bet and the more serious members of the far right know this. Whilst the internal faction fighting might well rumble on (though the expulsion of the main rebels earlier this year has undermined the structural basis for a real damaging internal fight) Griffin’s position is secure.

Past far-right breakthroughs have invariably been undone (in part) by the existence of a handful of ‘stars’ all fighting each other for the credit. Griffin can credibly claim that he and his team have single-handedly dragged the BNP into the political mainstream and at the minute very few of his disgruntled members want to undo this despite their personal dislike of Griffin and key members of his team (yes Collett, we do mean you).

If they do, Griffin has already introduced a system of ideological training and two tier voting in order to harden the centre around him and ensure continuity of approach.

Demographic factors might help the BNP vote in the future. Thus far their most successful area has been Barking and Dagenham, a classic ‘white flight’ area of the type that is now springing up around many towns and cities – middle and upper-working class areas.

This is important as it’s been established that it is in exactly these areas with this type of social mix (Social groups C1 and C2 in the government’s own classifications) in which the BNP votes are highest.

There is also significant evidence of a hardening of popular opinion on race and immigration. In a period in which the Tories are emphasising their liberal credentials and moving away from old school, conservative social authoritarianism, those people who might traditionally have been expected to vote Tory on a covertly racist basis have nowhere else to go than the BNP, a wasted vote or inactivity.

Demographics – non-white majorities are emerging in certain cities. This is a change that has occurred even though many mainstream politicians in the 1960s and 1970s ridiculed such a possibility as nonsense – there is potential there for the BNP to make hay around social fears.

The May elections (London Mayor and Assembly and one third of local council seats) is going to be crucial testing ground for the BNP’s new approach.

The local elections are the 2004 cycle of seats being fought again – that time they stood 312 candidates, this time they’ve managed to double that to 625. The 2004 elections was where the BNP vote really took off, so these seats are ones where they’ve done well in before and would have been trying to put down real local roots in.

This time we’ll see if they can move onto the second stage of their local strategy. The splits discussed above seem not to have negatively impacted on their ability to stand candidates too much – the only area in which there appears to have been any disruption in Yorkshire which has effectively lost its status as the most important area to Eastern region and the East Midlands.

In London, they are very confident of

gaining at least one seat on the London assembly.

They only require 5% for one member and came very close to that with little effort last time around – the momentum they’ve picked up in the intervening years should see them over the threshold easily enough. The real question is whether they can pick up a second or even a third member – 8% and 11% being targets.

## Learning lessons

It is ironic that the ‘nationalists’ of the BNP arguably have far more advanced international links with like-minded organisations than the ‘internationalist’ anarchist organisations do.

Given the dramatic rise in importance of English – to the status of being the world’s second language – UK based anarchist organisations and websites should really have far more influence internationally than they currently have.

The Libcom website could have been a valuable resource here, but within the UK at least has all too often proved to be controversial at best, divisive at worst. Whilst dozens of Anarchists travel to Britain for the annual London Anarchist Bookfair, only a handful of Britons make the journey to bookfairs in continental Europe.

The above factors can only lead us to the conclusion that there is great potential within the existing social situation for the BNP to expand upon their current social success.

Mainstream parties are not suddenly going to start representing working class needs. The danger is not that of the BNP forming a government but of establishing themselves in precisely those areas that anarchists recognise as being key to social change.

Once this happens it will take years to remove them and even longer to deal with the effect of their racialisation of social issues – this is where the real danger lies, not in hyperbole about death camps, but in acting as a block on effective independent working class political organisation.

The method to combat this is pretty straightforward but requires actual real life on-the-ground application.

The traditional negative methods of disruption of far-right activities, of physical no-platform, of making it unsafe or counter-productive for the far right to operate openly must be allied to positive methods of political activity, of methods of directly intervening in working class struggles in ways that cut the ground out from the BNP and occupy the political space that they’ve made already inroads on.

This requires dedicated work in our communities and workplaces around working class needs and encouraging working class communities to act for themselves in pursuit of those needs.

And that means taking on small activities to win – confidence building measures as well as spectacular ones.

It means being concerned with local issues as well as what’s happening in the middle east, and it means serious long term political commitment to those working class communities. As things stand there is no other option – this is where we are today.





SHINING EXAMPLE: A satellite photograph of East Manchester, with the new games stadium at the centre

# Manchester!

## New Labour's favourite city

Under normal circumstances, any city with Manchester's levels of child poverty and social inequality might be considered a problem in urgent need of attention. In fact, since the 1996 IRA bombing the city has been at the forefront of this government's urban agenda, earning high praise from the party hierarchy and business groups. Jack Ray asks what business-led regeneration has done for Manchester's working class...

**I**N September 2006 Manchester held its first Labour Party Conference since 1917. Whilst around 40,000 protesters marched outside, speaker after high-profile speaker rose to the platform to herald what the party had done for the city.

Ten years after the IRA bombed the heart out of the commercial centre, they pointed to the redevelopment of the bomb site as just one of many triumphs in the transformation from a decaying post-industrial wasteland into an internationally acclaimed modern city.

As then Prime Minister Tony Blair told local newspaper the MEN, "the reason we chose Manchester is because it's very much a symbol of a regenerating city," continuing "I think if you take Manchester and look at the way business has grown over the past few years, it's been a huge success story."

He concluded that "what is happening around Manchester is remarkable, and it is a tribute frankly, to local government and the public sector and private sector working together. We can be very proud of it."<sup>(1)</sup>

For Blair, with his ideological commitment

to the notion that social development derived from economic growth, Manchester was the archetype, a city devastated by Thatcherism, physically destroyed by the IRA, coming back to life in the shiny new "Millennium Quarter" with its Manchester Eye and high-class shops.

His successor Gordon Brown went further in praising the city's development, opening his keynote address by saying, "If anyone is in any doubt the difference almost 10 years of Labour government has made, let



them come here to Manchester. And let us congratulate business, commerce and local government.

"From the tragedy of the bombing of the city centre Manchester's renewal has created thousands of new jobs, new businesses and new confidence.

"And I am proud, this is not just an achievement of Manchester this is an achievement of Labour Manchester."<sup>(2)</sup>

The local Labour Party's website boasts of the wealthiest city in the region and 100,000 new jobs created by what they describe as 'the best performing council in the country'.

This kind of triumphalism about the Manchester miracle is not restricted to those who might be expected to praise their own work.

The idea of the city as a success story is mirrored in praise from the business community. Global real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield in its 2007 survey promoted Manchester to the second best place in the country to do business, just behind the capital.

development of a shiny new commercial centre to provide retail therapy for an urban professional elite moving into the new-build apartments springing-up in the city centre and across residential areas affected by the development agencies.

The flip side is that Manchester, held up as a model for other decaying cities to follow, now has some of the worst social problems in the country, ranging from low educational attainment to teen pregnancy, all derived from some of the worst child poverty in the country.

The statistics on post-miracle Manchester, the richest city in the region, are damning. The government's own Office of National Statistics placed the area third in its "Index of Multiple Deprivation,"<sup>(4)</sup> which measures problems including unemployment, health and housing.

Manchester could be found below the national average on most of their measures, people were less likely to own their own homes (only 41.1%), more likely to give birth to underweight children (a sign of poor

only the ninth biggest population in the country, Manchester boasted three of the twenty worst council wards for child poverty. Moss Side led the way with 62% of children suffering (the 7th poorest in the country), with Hulme (site of a multitude of new housing developments) and Harpurhey also featuring (Blackfriars, in neighbouring Salford, was also high on the list).<sup>(6)</sup>

The government responded to these revelations with a mixture of blame-shifting and complacency, MP Tony Lloyd declaring "Manchester Central has long been one of the poorest parts of Britain. In the Seventies and Eighties, the area was devastated by unemployment and child poverty has come out of this." He went on to cite the billions the government had already spent trying to tackle child poverty.

Later in the year another report delved deeper into the other side of Manchester, far away from the new developments in Castlefield and the centre.

The Tory think-tank the Centre for Social Justice found that social breakdown in the city outstripped any other city in the country, talking of "a disturbing picture of educational failure, high levels of youth crime and unemployment, widespread family breakdown and severe alcohol abuse."<sup>(7)</sup>

Manchester was near the bottom of tables on school achievement, truancy, university admission, kids were more likely to pick up an ASBO, become pregnant at a young age or be admitted to hospital due to alcohol abuse. Nearly a quarter of the city's working age population was out of work.

There are all the signs of major urban decay and mass poverty here, even after years of investment that the political and business classes, both local and national, regarded as productive.

The sheer extent of the poverty in Manchester, in amongst its oft-boasted prosperity, is in itself remarkable. What's most astonishing though is the determination of national politicians to use it as a model for successful regeneration projects.

The reality of the city's poverty escapes the policy-makers who continue to argue, against all the evidence, that the council, the government and business leaders have combined to create something to be admired and replicated.

Central to this very active self-delusion is the sheer quantity of wealth pouring into the city, with the local party boasting of £5bn inward investment over the last five years and the papers constantly full of gushing praise for local business successes.

The area has now become a massive hub for financial services, with the sector accounting for 28% of employment in the city.<sup>(8)</sup> The building boom has seen new apartment blocks go up around the city, heavily concentrated in the commercial centre.

In 1991, just 1,000 people lived there, a figure that is expected to reach 20,000 by 2010.<sup>(9)</sup>

These developments, converted Victorian factories and warehouses turned into stylish apartments populated by young professionals, lawyers, bankers, give the city centre a feeling of massive affluence that disappears as soon as you venture out into the more densely populated parts of the city.

Elsewhere Manchester's new wealth flows out of the city, to commuters living in leafy Cheshire, or the more affluent parts of



**REBUILDING:** Investment is turning old industrial centres in Manchester into new luxurious apartments. But but poverty is ever present behind the gloss. Right of page, the 1996 explosion in central Manchester proved a catalyst for change.

The survey noted that Manchester was now the best city for new headquarters and back offices, as well as having the best availability of office space and car parking.

Crucially it was dubbed the "City doing the most to improve itself."<sup>(3)</sup>

New East Manchester, the urban regeneration company charged with improving one of the most run-down parts of the city, even received the first "regeneration agency of the year" at the industry's first annual awards evening, credited with providing a massive increase in jobs, housing, business development and transport infrastructure.

Yet however much Manchester's rapidly expanding new rich, the local press and the Labour Party may try to talk up the regeneration miracle, all this wealth does not seem to have pulled many people out of poverty.

In fact, when looked at in terms of social development rather than business growth the city's recovery from de-industrialisation and terrorism becomes a mirage, the

nutrition and ultimately poverty) and suffered from lower life expectancy. All of which are common problems in urban areas in modern Britain.

In another survey, conducted in January 2007 by the charities Save the Children and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Manchester's extensive child poverty was exposed; more than half the city's children lived in poverty (a figure slightly down on earlier in the year), being dependent on state benefits.<sup>(5)</sup>

Broken down the figures made even grimmer reading. When the more affluent parts of South Manchester (Didsbury, Chorlton) were taken out of the reckoning, the poorest parliamentary constituency in the country was right at the heart of the regeneration; Manchester Central.

This poverty encompassed massively different areas, from the racially diverse Moss Side, to the predominantly white Bradford and Miles Platting.

In terms of council wards, despite having

Lancashire.

The new money is flowing to the new rich and not to the working class majority, and appropriately for New Labour's favourite city, this is reflected in Greater Manchester being the most unequal region in the country, with massive disparities between the wage and employment levels in different local authorities (Stockport Council being the strongest with Manchester City the weakest).<sup>(11)</sup>

With the city's very core on the up and the wealthy living outside the city, the plight of the rest of the population can be factored out of the success story, with the people writing it experiencing a very different Manchester from the rest of us.

Beyond this self-congratulation of the city's boosters, the broader point about Manchester is that it epitomises New Labour logic.

The council isn't Tory, it isn't comprised of people who don't care about poverty, it's just made-up of people who are ideologically committed to the idea that poverty is best combated not through investing directly in better services for people, actually giving people more resources to have better lives, but instead through encouraging socially responsible economic growth.

Everything that constitutes "development" in Manchester involves creating projects primarily aimed at making profits with the hope that poverty reduction will be a side affect.

New East Manchester, the award-winning regeneration agency, is a case in point. Within its remit of creating jobs, building new housing and securing new investment, it is very successful agency.

Six years into the ten to fifteen year project it could claim to have built over 3,000 homes and improved 2,000 social housing units (largely through a stock transfer to Eastland Homes), as well as providing more than 3,000 jobs, an increase of 7.8%.<sup>(12)</sup>

But the regeneration effort originated from a truly massive investment, the Commonwealth Games Stadium, which led to a £570m regeneration grant and £18m annual tourist revenue.

In addition to the stadium, the area now boasted the Sportcity complex, as well as a giant Asda-Walmart. Of course this kind of cash provided jobs, of course it led to new homes being built.

Yet the project didn't evaluate what sort of jobs were being created, if they were of similar quality to engineering work that the area had been built on.

Residents, although the project gave them the feeling that the area was doing well, expressed concern from the outset that new build housing would be too expensive for locals, precisely the pattern that had led to the gentrification of Hulme.

You can't help but feel that the side effects of all this investment get felt as a drop in the ocean, that of the 100,000 jobs created in the

last ten years (replacing the 50,000 lost over the 1980s), a small proportion are very highly paid and the remainder are not nearly so lucrative as the skilled manual work they replaced, particularly with retail being the third biggest employer and construction not far behind.

Round the corner from Eastlands Stadium you can still find plenty of grim looking streets. Recently the Manchester boosters were outraged when the government cancelled the planned supercasino, apparently on the grounds that the area still needed yet more cash throwing at it, yet more business investment being thrown in to finally sort the area.

The worrying thing about Manchester's regeneration is that when New Labour argues that it's been a success, they might be right.

Within their limited concept of urban development, Manchester is a successful council – it encourages inward investment, it gets private and public sectors working effectively in harmony.

It has on occasion even made developers deliberately target some of the poorest people in the worst affected communities for special help, through their hiring policies and through building affordable housing.

The limits to what this process can achieve derive from the ideas underpinning it, the vary nature of it, not from the malevolence or the skill of those implementing it.

This obsession of urban development as being primarily about economic growth, and only tangentially about poverty reduction, will ultimately lead to a lot of wasted money and a lot of impatient, impoverished, decaying communities.

If business is allowed to lead regeneration, only pausing to "consult" local residents, it will ultimately do so in their own interests (a recent developer boasted that thorough consultation had concluded that residents wanted "traditional materials and design",<sup>(12)</sup> presumably that was the kind of scope the consultation took in) and not in the interests of the rest of the population.

The ideological preoccupations have created a situation where massive, government-subsidised investment pours down the drain, making a minority rich, expanding social inequality, providing not the high-skill, high-paid jobs promised in their 'knowledge economy' but low-paid retail jobs.

New flats spring up across the city, whilst the waiting lists for council housing continues to rise to alarming levels, with open spaces turned over to private developers and existing stock transferred to housing associations.

Old Manchester is left to rot until large portions of it are turned over to the developers, ready to reap a profit from the new rich.

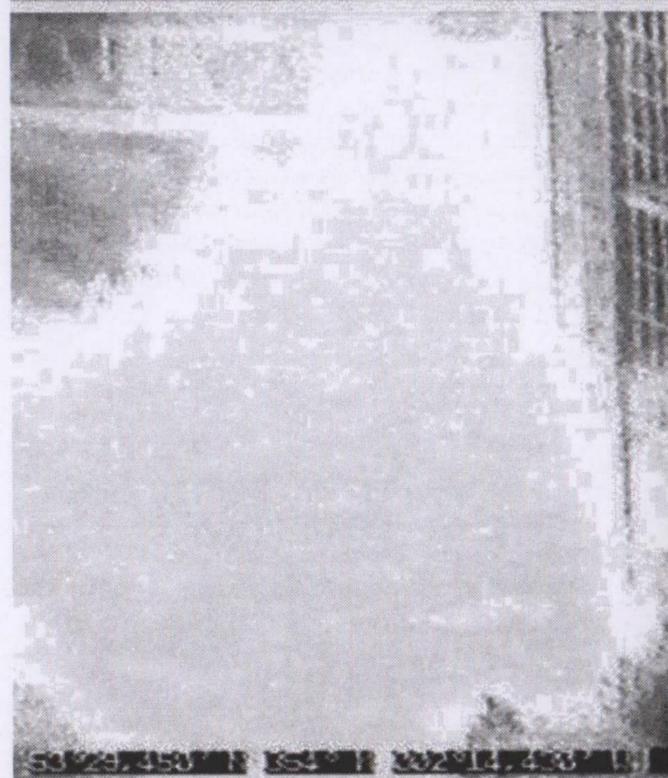
By Jack Ray



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# Back to days of

## Analysis: Looking at the underlying

**B**ROWN is now discovering that proclaiming the end of "Boom and Bust" does not mean much. The amazing thing about the current economic panicking is not that it is happening but that some people seem surprised by it. While on the way up many "experts" seem to forget it, capitalism has always been marked by a business cycle.

During the good times, it is regularly proclaimed with that this upswing will be permanent and the business cycle has come to an end. As bad times approach, it is proclaimed with that the "fundamentals" are "good" and the economy is "strong." Then the crisis happens.

The response of our political rulers to the looming financial crisis is to be expected – bailouts aplenty for the few whose actions got themselves (and us) into this mess. Compare this instant intervention for the elite with the response for those at the bottom.

For example, while visiting tornado-ravaged Tennessee after the credit crunch became part of the general language Bush had these helpful words for those affected: "You know, life sometimes is, uh, you know, is unfair, and you don't get to play the hand that you wanted to play." Meanwhile, after this year's "Black Monday" saw drastic emergency cuts in interest rates, "stimulation" packages and bailouts.

When working class people have their lives thrown into turmoil due to rising unemployment we are sagely informed that capitalism is functioning as it should. If the commentator wants to appear knowledgeable then such expressions as Schumpeter's "creative destruction" will be used to show that such turmoil is for the best as it allows "the economy" to respond quickly to changing conditions.

To have a welfare state to make unemployment more bearable would only hinder the "efficiency" of the markets and so should be opposed by all right-thinking people. It may be hard for the workers and their families, but it is necessary.

Strangely, when it is part of the ruling elite (executives, stock dealers, rentiers) facing the same "creative destruction" and their income falls, global capitalism is broken and needs to be fixed.

Thatcher and Reagan managed to convince many people that if you shovel enough cash into the pockets of the wealthy, what trickles out of their overflowing pockets will enrich them as well.

That has not happened, in fact the results of making "actually existing" capitalism more like the impossible models of the economic textbooks have been less than wonderful.

Neo-liberal capitalism has been given the



appearance of success by the various bubbles the "liberation" of the finance markets has produced. The 1990s "boom" was, for example, premised on the dot com bubble, quickly followed by the housing bubble. In fact, the US state has intervened to rescue the American financial system from four crises during the neo-liberal period: the debt and "savings and loan" crises of the 1980s, the dot com bubble of the 1990s; and now the subprime and credit crisis.

### The origins of the crisis

The need for capitalists to make a profit from the workers they employ is the underlying cause. If the capitalist class cannot make enough surplus value (profit, interest, rent) then it will stop production, sack people, ruining lives and communities until such

time as enough can once again be extracted from working class people.

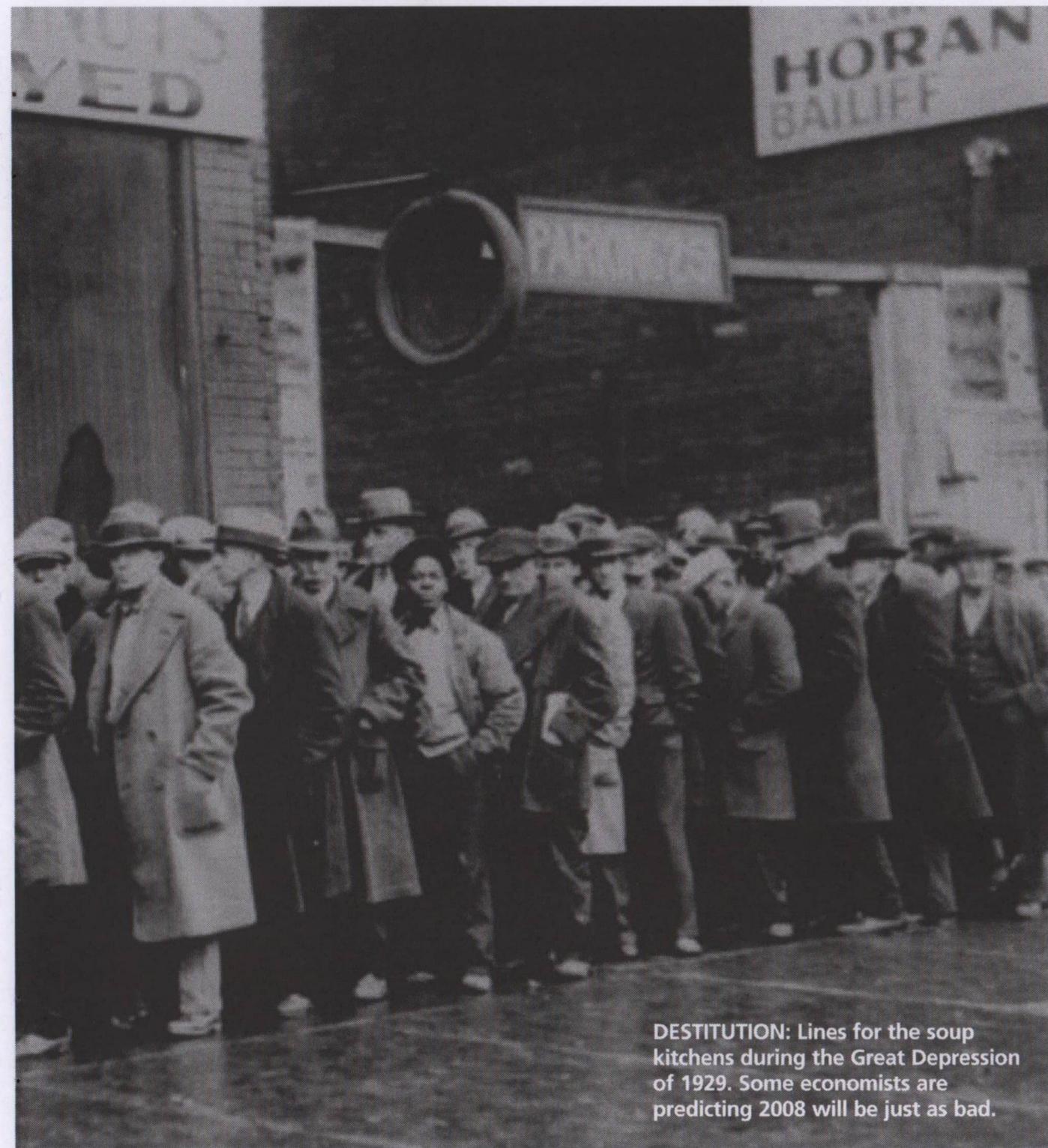
So what influences the level of surplus value? There are two main classes of pressure on surplus value production, what we will call the "subjective" and "objective." The "subjective" pressures are to do with the nature of the social relationships created by capitalism, the relations of domination and subjection which are the root of exploitation and the resistance to them.

In other words the subjective pressures are the result of the fact that "property is despotism" (to use Proudhon's expression) and are a product of the class struggle.

The objective pressures are related to how capitalism works and fall into two processes. The first is the way in which markets do not provide enough information to producers avoid disproportionalities within the market.

# the depression?

## weaknesses causing the credit crisis



DESTITUTION: Lines for the soup kitchens during the Great Depression of 1929. Some economists are predicting 2008 will be just as bad.

The market regularly produces situations where there is too much produced for specific markets leading to slumps. The other objective factor is over-investment, when it is capital goods which are over produced.

All these factors operate together in a real economy and we have divided them purely to help show the issues involved in each one. The class struggle, market "communication" creating disproportionalities and over-investment all interact. Due to the needs of the internal (class struggle) and external (inter-company) competition, capitalists have to invest in new means of production.

As workers' power increases during a boom, capitalists innovate and invest in order to try and counter it. Similarly, to get market advantage (and so increased profits) over their competitors, a company invests in

new machinery.

While this helps increase profits for individual companies in the short term, it leads to collective over-investment and falling profits in the long term.

Moreover, due to lack of effective communication within the market caused by the price mechanism firms rush to produce more goods and services in specific boom markets, so leading to over-production and the resulting gluts result in slumps due to investment becoming concentrated in certain parts of the economy. Relative over-investment can occur, increasing and compounding any existing tendencies for over-production and so creating the possibility of crisis.

Meanwhile, as unemployment falls workers' power, confidence and willingness to stand up for their rights increases, causing profit margins to be eroded at the point of

production. This has the impact of reducing tendencies to over-invest as workers resist the introduction of new technology and techniques.

The higher wages also maintain and even increase demand for the finished goods and services produced, allowing firms to realise the potential profits their workers have created. Rising wages, therefore, harms the potential for producing profits by increasing costs yet it increases the possibility for realising profits on the market as firms cannot make profits if there is no demand for their goods and their inventories of unsold goods pile up. In other words, wages are costs for any specific firm but the wages other companies pay are a key factor in the demand for what it produces.

This contradictory effect of class struggle matches the contradictory effect of investment.

Just as investment causes crisis because it is useful, the class struggle both hinders over-accumulation of capital and maintains aggregate demand (so postponing the crisis) while at the same time eroding capitalist power and so profit margins at the point of production (so accelerating it).

And we should note that these factors work in reverse during a slump, creating the potential for a new boom. So, eventually the slump will end (capitalism will not self-destruct due to internal economic processes). The increased surplus value production made possible by high unemployment is enough relative to the (reduced) fixed capital stock to increase the rate of profit.

This encourages capitalists to start investing again and a boom begins (a boom which contains the seeds of its own end). How long this process takes cannot be predicted in advance.

It depends on objective circumstances, how excessive the preceding boom was, government policy and how willing working class people are to pay the costs for the capitalist crisis. Ultimately, a crisis is caused because capitalism is production for profit and when the capitalist class does not (collectively) get a sufficient rate of profit for whatever reason then a slump is the result.

One way to look at it is that slumps can be caused when working class people are "too strong" or "too weak." The former means that we are able to reduce the rate of exploitation, squeezing the profit rate by keeping an increased share of the surplus value we produce.

The latter means we are too weak to stop income distribution being shifted in favour of the capitalist class, which results in over-accumulation and rendering the economy prone to a failure in aggregate demand. The 1960s and 1970s are the classic example of



what happens when "subjective" pressures predominate while the 1920s and 1930s show the "objective" ones at work.

It is fair to say, this crisis (like all the post 1980s ones) is a product of "objective" factors. The detachment of wages from productivity growth since the 1980s shows this, as does the fact that the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows a radical decline in strikes and work stoppages.

There is virtually no work time lost to industrial conflict in the USA and as workers have increasingly lost their capacity for collective industrial action, the share of national income going to wages and salaries has fallen. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities "the share of national income going to wages and salaries in 2006 was at its lowest level on record, with data going back to 1929.

The share of national income captured by corporate profits, in contrast, was at its highest level on record." (Aviva Aron-Dine and Isaac Shapiro, Share of National Income Going To Wages And Salaries At Record Low In 2006: Share of Income Going to Corporate Profits at Record High, 29 March 2007) The share of wages and salaries in US National income was at its lowest level on record, lower than in 1929 when records began (51.6% vs. 53.6%).

This is even worse than it looks, as "wages and salaries" includes CEO pay (which has exploded since the 1980s). Corporate profits are at 13.8% (11.5% in 1929).

In spite of this fall in class struggle and the corresponding bolstering of profits, capitalism is facing a crisis. This is where finance capital comes in.

## The credit crunch

While surplus value is ultimately created in production, this does not mean that finance capital has no impact on the cycle. Its role is important and can heighten a boom and deepen a slump. While finance capital is dependent on industrial capital, it shapes how that develops. In good times, it can add to investment. In bad times, it can stop it as credit dries up – the so-called "credit crunch."

But why does the credit crunch happen? To understand why, we need to turn to the ideas of the noted Post-Keynesian economist Hyman Minsky. He created an analysis of the finance and credit markets which gives an insight into why banks create credit money (i.e. loaning more money than available savings) and why it becomes unstuck. This model is usually called "The Financial Instability Hypothesis."

Let us assume that the economy is going into the recovery period after a crash. Initially firms would be conservative in their investment while banks would lend within their savings limit and to low-risk investments. In this way the banks do ensure that the amount of credit available reflects the amount of savings.

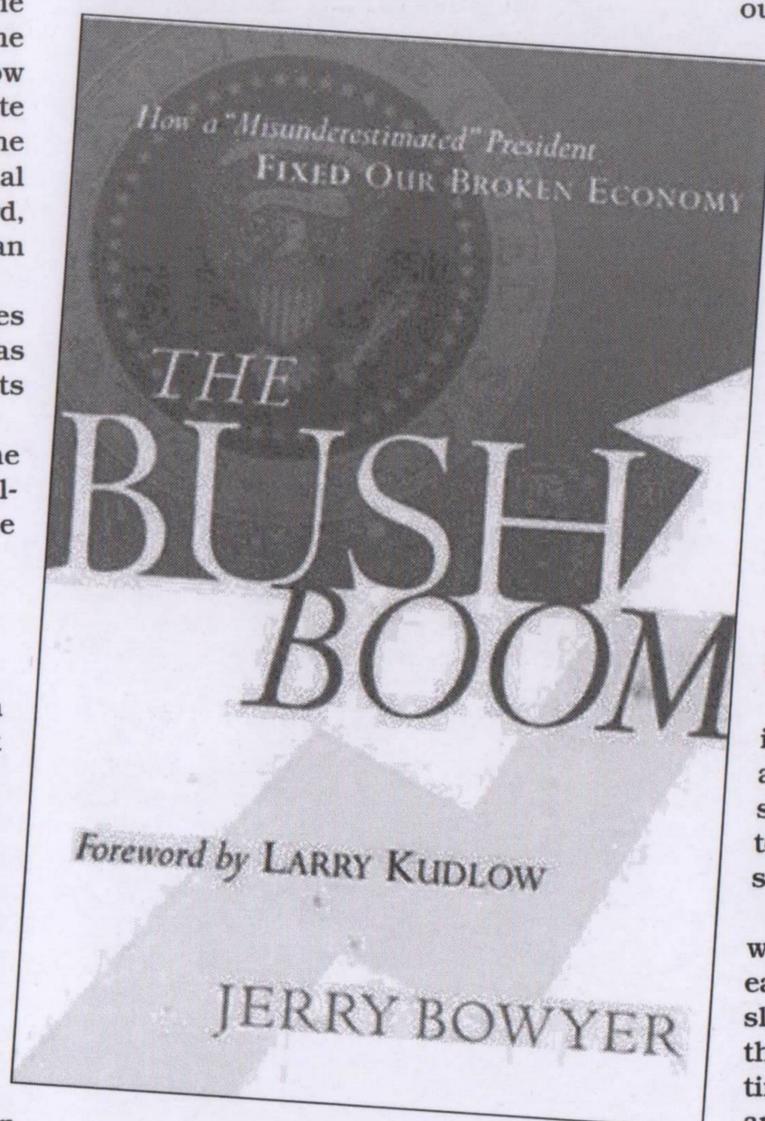
However, this combination of a growing economy and conservatively financed investment means that most projects succeed and this gradually becomes clear to managers/capitalists and bankers. As a result, both managers and bankers come to regard the present risk premium as excessive. New investment projects are evaluated using less conservative estimates of future cash flows. This is the foundation of

the new boom and its eventual bust. In Minsky's words, "stability is destabilising."

As the economy starts to grow, companies increasingly turn to external finance and these funds are forthcoming because the banking sector shares the increased optimism of investors. Let us not forget that banks are private companies too and so seek profits as well. As Minsky argues, "bankers live in the same expectational climate as businessmen" and so "profit-seeking bankers will find ways of accommodating their customers..."

Banks and bankers are not passive managers of money to lend or to invest; they are in business to maximise profits." Providing credit is the key way of doing this and so credit expansion occurs. If they did not, the boom would soon turn into slump as investors would have no funds available for them and interest rates would increase

This forces firms to spend more on debt



### IRONY: Economists lauded the Bush administrations's handling of the economy

repayment, an increase which many firms may not be able to do or find difficult. This in turn would suppress investment and so production, generating unemployment (as companies cannot "fire" investments as easily as they can fire workers), reducing consumption demand along with investment demand, and so deepening the slump.

To avoid this and to take advantage of the rising economy, bankers accommodate their customers and generate credit rather than rise interest rates. In this way they accept liability structures both for themselves and for their customers "that, in a more sober expectational climate, they would have rejected." (Minsky)

The banks innovate their financial products in line with demand. Firms increase their indebtedness and banks are more than willing to allow this due to the few signs of financial strain in the economy.

The individual firms and banks increase their financial liability, and so the whole economy moves up the liability structure. Like other businesses, banks operate in an uncertain environment and have no way of knowing whether their actions will increase the fragility within the economy or push it into crisis.

The central banks, meanwhile, accommodate the banks' activity. They do not and cannot force them to create credit. As long as profits exceed debt servicing requirements, the system will continue to work. Eventually, though, interest rates rise as the existing extension of credit appears too high to the banks or the central bank.

This affects all firms, from the most conservatively financed to the most speculative, and "pushes" them up even higher up the liability structure.

Refinancing existing debts is made at the higher rate of interest, increasing cash outflows and reducing demand for investment as the debt burden increases.

Conservatively financed firms can no longer can repay their debts easily, less conservative ones fail to pay them and so on. The margin of error narrows and firms and banks become more vulnerable to unexpected developments, such a new competitors, strikes, investments which do not generate the expected rate of return, credit becoming hard to get, interest rates (particularly inter-bank ones) increases and so on.

This leads firms to pay more of their profits in interest repayments, cut back in investments, fire employees and so forth. Banks, meanwhile, cannot find resources to meet their creditors' demands and hold on to what money they have, causing the credit markets to freeze up.

It also reduces consumer demand, as individuals can no longer find easy credit and have to use more of their wages to service their debts and/or cannot find credit to bolster demand in the face of declining or stagnating income from wages.

A general decrease in demand is combined with over-investment, mutually reinforcing each other. In the end, the boom turns to slump and firms and banks fail. The state then intervenes to try and stop the slump getting worse, with varying degrees of success and failure.

The generation of credit is a spontaneous process rooted in the nature of capitalism and is fundamentally endogenous in nature.

This means that the business cycle is an inherent part of capitalism even if we assume that it is caused purely by disequilibrium in the credit market. It is more than likely that the credit market will be in disequilibrium like every other market in any real capitalist economy – and for the same reasons.

This explains why so many banks speculated in such an obviously insane market as the sub-prime loans one. As a boom leads to euphoria, Minsky argued, banks and other commercial lenders extend credit to ever more dubious borrowers, often creating new financial instruments to do so (and new instruments are created to avoid what regulation exists as well).

During the 1980s, junk bonds played that role. More recently, it was the securitization of mortgages, which enabled banks to provide home loans without worrying if they would ever be repaid. Then, at the top of the market (in this case, mid-2006), some smart

traders start to cash in their profits while the rest were left with the grim reality of lending money to people who could never afford to pay it back in the long run. Short-termism came home to roost, only to find that it had been repossessed.

Which means that finance markets are not the "efficient" and "rational" allocators of investment funds portrayed in the economic textbooks and finance pages of the newspapers.

Wall Street and its equivalents frequently misallocate capital and credit. The "tech bubble" of the late 1990s was one episode. Now we have subprime mortgages.

### The ownership society

Max Stirner once noted that property "in the civic sense means sacred property, such that I must respect your property... Be it ever so little, if one only has somewhat of his own – to wit, a respected property: The more such owners... the more 'free people and good patriots' has the State."

However, "in practice people respect nothing, and everyday the small possessions are bought up again by greater proprietors, and the 'free people' change into day labourers." Thus the "civic proprietor is in truth nothing but a propertyless man, one who is everywhere shut out. Instead of owning the world, as he might, he does not own even the paltry point on which he turns around."

This has been the basis of neo-liberalism, with Pinochet and Thatcher seeking to create many such "free and good patriots" while, in reality, increasing inequality and squeezing the so-called middle classes.

Bush, likewise, wanted to turn more people into a "civic proprietor" by privatising Social Security and delivering their accounts to Wall Street. Moreover, he urged that his "ownership society" required easy access to the credit needed for homeownership. "Under 50% of African Americans and Hispanic Americans own a home," Bush stated in 2002, "that's just too few" and he called on Fannie Mae and the private sector "to unlock millions of dollars, to make it available for the purchase of a home." Which, of course, they did – it was called a sub-prime loan.

Then there is the social role of credit and debt. Since the 1980s the UK and USA have seen a rising debt burden on households as well as the increased concentration of wealth. The two are linked. Working class people have borrowed to make up stagnating or declining real wages and this has represents a massive upward redistribution of income in the form of interest payments.

There is an added advantage from the perspective of the capitalist class as it not only reduces pressure for higher wages (as borrowing lets people buy otherwise unaffordable commodities) and hides the increasing inequalities, it also makes people less likely to fight back. Large monthly mortgage and/or credit card bills make people less likely to rebel.

Today, the legacy of confusing the basic need to have access to the resources required for personal freedom with private property is becoming clear. The so-called ownership society simply means the debt-society, where you are owned by your creditors just as much as your labour and its products are owned by your boss. The 1990s dot com bubble burst and employees

watched their stock-heavy pensions disappear. Now the 2000s have the subprime mortgage crisis, with millions of homeowners facing repossession.

### The Future

Recession is likely, which brings us to the question of how deep it will be. There is evidence to suggest that it will be deep. The 1990-91 recession in America was brought on by a credit crunch while the 2001 recession was routed in overinvestment (namely, the dot.com bubble and the spurious "investment" that produced).

This time, it looks like both have occurred. Moreover, after pressure to "liberalise" its market in the 1980s, Japan experienced a housing bubble as well. It then spent the 1990s in an economic quagmire which it is just getting out of. While people talk about "a crash" it is useful to remember that even 1929 took time to play itself out. Nor should we forget that the last two US recessions



**DEBT:** Mortgages have rocketed in the last few years, contributing to bad debts

were followed by prolonged "jobless recoveries" - i.e., longer recessions for working class people.

Significantly, Martin Wolf, a columnist at the Financial Times, attacked the world's finance industry as having an extraordinary "talent for privatizing gains and socializing losses" and then get "self-righteously angry when public officials... fail to come at once to their rescue when they get into (well-deserved) trouble... the conflicts of interest created by large financial institutions are far harder to manage than in any other industry." It says a lot that even people who write in the Financial Times are upset about the predominating influence that financial capitalists have on government policy.

And the hypocrisy is clear. Since the 1980s the dominant ideology has been preaching against the evils of state intervention and urging governments to let the markets do their magic. Yet when they face problems, the free marketeers go running to the state and beg for help.

Faced with results of their own actions and ideology, they return to the state they so revile and get it to answer their calls for help. So the mantra of capitalism is simple: if the finance markets make money then they can keep it but if they are losing money then we need to pay for it.

But why be surprised. The stock market is

founded on corporate "Limited Liability" which is an effective means of privatising gains and while socialising losses. Anyone with an awareness of the history of capitalism will know that it has always been parasitical on the state. So while the capitalists want us to support them, they deny us any say.

It seems unlikely that cash injections will countermand the underlying problems caused by the housing and other bubbles – previous cuts in interest rates simply postponed the inevitable.

What comes next is the key. Capitalism will, of course, survive this latest downturn as it has the rest – unless working class people finally act to end it. The good news is that according to a September Pew Research poll, 48% of Americans say they live in a society carved into haves and have-nots. In 1988, it was only 26%.

Sadly, 45% see themselves as part of the haves but even this figure is an improvement (in 1988, 59% thought they were part of the "haves" while 17% placed themselves in the

half-nots, now it is 45% "haves" vs. 34% "have-nots"). It is nice to know that some people are aware that "Trickle Up economics" has worked! Now they have to turn that into action. If they do not, capitalism will continue as they pay the price required to overcome the slump.

Finally, it must be stressed that this analysis does not imply that that capitalism will self-destruct. In spite of crises being inevitable and occurring frequently, revolution is not. Capitalism will only be eliminated by working class revolution, when people see the need for social transformation and not imposed on people as the by-product of an economic collapse.

Bad times may radicalise people into action, but it real change needs ideas and will come about when people are inspired by hope for a better society, when they realise that, to quote Stirner, that "restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm enjoyment. We do not get the comfort of our possessions..."

Our task as anarchists is to help spread this awareness that we need not live like this and get involved in spreading the spirit of revolt needed to bring that hope into reality.



# Self-defence is

## Interview: Rob Ray talks to LCAP about its fight against homelessness

**T**HE London Coalition Against Poverty, based mainly in Hackney and Haringey, has recently passed its first anniversary, and the mood is upbeat.

Not only have LCAP continued to attract members and support from around the inner-city area for their campaigns, but as of March 2nd, Edinburgh has set up its own parallel initiative – ECAP.

Alongside this expansion the group, which has a dozen core members and claims several times that in active supporters, is instigating training days in its methods for anyone who wants to get active.

The training days are the result of a long and arduous process for the group, which spent nearly six months in the planning stages and has seen members effectively

training themselves and each other in the six months since.

LCAP, which is organised on libertarian lines, focuses on using direct action to back up vulnerable people who are being let down by the state, taking on case work primarily from the London boroughs' homeless population.

Jane, an activist with the group, said: "We've concentrated on Hackney, leafleting outside the homeless person's unit and offering help. The borough hasn't provided enough space and people are being turned away, even though they have a right to be housed, so the department can meet their targets.

"Direct action tactics are what we are about and the cases we take on tend to reflect that. At the minute tactics might begin with writing letters, demanding to see their manager and generally pressuring people to adhere to their responsibilities.

"It's not a revolution but it's a growing campaign and we think it's working well for the homeless, empowering people to assert their rights."

LCAP has taken a strongly consultative approach to its activities, asking homeless people not just for their stories but their suggestions. Matt, an LCAP member, said: "The nature of the ideas and needs of the people we have come into contact with has definitely helped to shape our development – it's all very well us sitting in meetings and coming up with ideas based on our politics, but once you actually talk to people about what they want you are bound to come to some different conclusions.

"We believe in self organisation by the people directly affected by poverty, and direct action backed up by demands based on people's real needs. Direct action casework is an important part of this – it's one of the things that separates us from both mainstream advice agencies and lefty campaign groups."

LCAP are looking towards widening their scope as their size grows, with both lobbying work and training on the agenda.

"Recently we have been going to the soup kitchens, asking people about their experiences in conjunction with North London Action For The Homeless." Jane explained.

"One of the ideas is to get the council to pass a motion accepting that 'gatekeeping' (the practice of knocking people off the homeless register to meet targets) is



unlawful and that they won't do it.

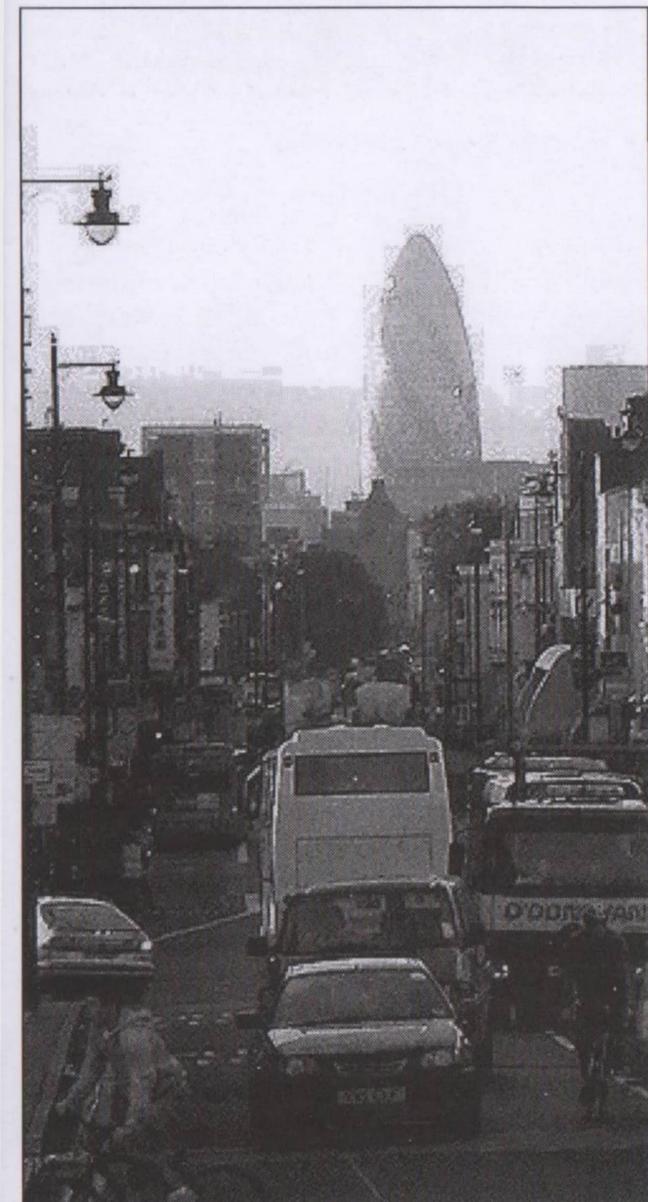
"We don't think that will change things, but we do think we can then use that motion as a weapon, both to publicise the issue and when pressuring them in future.

Matt also listed some of the other issues LCAP have recently been involved in: "Like all activist groups we are limited by our numbers and resources, so we can't get involved in everything we'd like to. Also I can't talk about all our upcoming projects because we don't want to tip our targets off too early.

"However some of us who live in Haringey are involved in a local project with Haringey Solidarity Group to provide support around debt issues, this has included a debt advice surgery and leafleting.

"LCAP has also made links with a broad-based grouping called London Citizens (including trade unions, and church groups) that is campaigning for genuinely affordable housing, and we have supported the "Justice for Cleaners" campaign.

"We were also involved in a last minute mobilisation to prevent Westminster council proposing making the distribution of free food (soup kitchens etc) illegal – they seem to have dropped that threat for now, following



SHADOW OF THE CITY: Looking down Kingsland High Street towards 'The Gherkin'

# seeing success



**HACKTIVITY:** LCAP are focussing on Hackney and Haringey, to help the homeless in areas like Arden, pictured above. Photographs: Hackney Plus (hackney.co.uk)

an extensive letter writing campaign, and a demo outside the meeting that discussed it."

Using the skills built up over the last few months, LCAP are also starting to do outreach work in the form of training days, helping people to learn about the complex issues surrounding homelessness and poverty.

Some of the lessons they are now passing on are more than just legal, they include a social element – for example when it was suggested by a homeless person that meetings and even fundraisers be held in 'dry' venues, to help any recovering alcoholics who are involved to stay on the wagon.

Training days are though going to encompass a wider remit, as LCAP activists reach out to a wider audience where possible.

Jane said: "We do want to break out of the activist community. Our meetings have been getting new people in and people still seem enthusiastic. While some London groups seem to be having trouble with membership numbers we are doing quite well at the moment.

"We had a training day in Stepney recently

which 25 people showed up for, and we had someone from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP, whose highly successful methods in the Canadian city were a strong basis for LCAP) and a person from LCAP talked there.

"Workplace organising is coming up in May, that's part of a programme of training sessions, including for people who want to help us once they've been housed etc with things like translations and interpreting."

"We are also trying to campaign over debt problems at Brighthouse (a hire purchase company which is very aggressive about repayment), which has been very difficult.

"We feel it's exciting but it does take a long time to build up a new organisation and we still need to build up more capacity. Even though OCAP have done very well already their legal issues are different to ours, it's much less down to individual workers in the UK how people are treated.

"Our main thing is getting more people to identify areas in which our tactics can work and we want it to work in Hackney before trying it anywhere else.

Matt agrees: "We have concentrated on Hackney homeless person's unit, and temporary housing in the same borough – while also being involved with various campaigns and support work, but if we don't have the manpower to get involved in broad campaigns with long term and frankly hard to achieve goals, and it would mean we had to reduce our practical work, then we prioritise."

LCAP's focus on practice first has brought it to the attention of activists in Edinburgh, who had their launch meeting for a similar initiative at on March 2nd (call 01315 576 242 for more information).

In a statement, organisers of the event said: "The tabloids and some politicians try to divert attention away from the system which is really responsible for our problems. They go on about asylum seekers, dole scroungers, immigrants from Eastern Europe, and so on. This is just divide and rule.

"All over the world governments are privatising essential services and attacking hard-won rights. Organised struggle won these concessions in the first place, and only organised struggle can defend them and extend them, and put profiteers in their place. Society should be organised for the greatest happiness of everyone, not for private profit."

Ellen, from LCAP, was there to talk about the group's experiences thus far. She said: "I'm in touch with the Edinburgh Claimants Union (who are helping to organise ECAP) and they've been really enthusiastic, they have been looking at how LCAP are doing this sort of organising and they want to start doing more action.

"We're not the first people to be doing this. I think there has been a bit of a lull in the last few years in this sort of activity and when we first started a lot of people who had been active in this sort of stuff in the 70s and 80s wanted to get involved."

Both Jane and Ellen were keen to stress that LCAP has not been a lightning fast process. Before they were able to build a reservoir of support (which now counts in the low hundreds), they had to do a lot of preliminary strategising and buildup work. Ellen remarked: "I think it's been a slow process, which is a good thing because we are building up in a strong way.

"The first steps have been made and we have learned a lot from that, we basically trained ourselves and now we are trying to train others, which means more people will be able to take on the case work."

■ All of the people interviewed in Freedom spoke in a personal capacity and do not represent all members.

■ To get in touch with LCAP, contact: 07932 241 737 or email londoncoalitionagainstpoverty@gmail.com. They are also online at [lcap.org.uk](http://lcap.org.uk)



# Equality for all

## Interview: Members of the Dublin-based Revolutionary Anarcha-feminist Group (Rag) explain why groups like theirs remain not just relevant but necessary in 2008

*THE following questions are answered by Marianne, a long-time Rag member who is also involved in the Seomra Spraoi social centre, and Eve who is "new-ish to Dublin and RAG but we can't remember how we survived without her."*

*Rag is a collective of diverse anarchist women who write a magazine together called 'The Rag'. The collective formed in 2005 in response to a need felt by women organising in Dublin for a women-only group in which they could fully explore issues they felt were neglected by the wider anarchist movement.*

**BF:** What are your major influences?

**E:** We are all anarchists, most of whom have been organising in other anarchist groups, networks and on various campaigns for several years; a lot of our influences and how we work comes from those experiences.

We are also all feminists and were pissed off at the lack of feminist awareness in the anarchist movement. To us feminism is integral to anarchism and without anarchism, feminism doesn't make sense.

But we didn't feel that those connections were being meaningfully made by either anarchists or feminists we encountered. There is no strong tradition of anarcha-feminism in Ireland and there are/ were no expressly anarcha-feminist groups that we know of. We know that individual anarcha-feminists have been around since at least the seventies, more recently within the WSM for example.

**BF:** What aspect of anarchism have you found most inspiring and useful?

**M:** Non-hierarchical organising is probably the most practical aspect. It's always strange working in groups that organise differently; it just makes sense and works better when there is a rotating facilitator and chair and everyone gets the same chance to speak.

Being aware of the dynamics in a meeting, realising who rarely speaks and who dominates, the kind of informal hierarchies that creep in, is something that anarchists here are addressing more and that's a definitely positive thing.

**BF:** The best known anarchist women's organisation is the Spanish "Mujeres Libres". Has that movement influenced your group?

**M:** Mujeres Libres are an obvious influence on any anarcha-feminist group, reading about them and realising that we face many of the same problems today is somewhat depressing.

They struggled to fight for anarchism in Spain but also for equality within the anarchist movement and in society as a whole, which is the crux of anarcha-feminism really.



**COLLECTIVE:** Members of RAG in Dublin

**BF:** Sexism must be a concern for you. How would you say your approach differs from general anarchist groups like the WSM? Are they supportive?

**E&M:** As a feminist group, challenging sexism is a priority for us. We see this as an integral part of anarchism and we write about the interconnectedness of patriarchy and capitalism. Anarchist theory has been quite limited in the issues it has tackled and the sphere addressed is usually the workplace.

Women often have a different interaction with the workplace with more women working part-time and taking time off to have

children. This must be taken into account as well as the fact that anarchism must extend outside the workplace into all aspects of society equally. So much more thought and discussion is needed for anarchism to become really relevant to everyone.

We are quite different from groups like the WSM in terms of what we do; we are a publishing collective whose aim is to educate ourselves and to develop our own ideas about what it means to be a woman in patriarchal capitalist society we bring these ideas into the other groups (including the WSM, Seomra Spraoi etc) that some of us are part of and work with. The WSM have always been very supportive of Rag.

**BF:** The term "manarchist" is used to describe patriarchal, misogynistic and sexist male anarchists. Is this 'trend' prevalent in the movement today?

**M:** I don't think Rag have ever used that term... As far as sexism goes, we have all been brought up in a society which shows us from an early age that women are to be judged on their appearance not their brains.

Women are used as sexual objects in advertising, in films, in kids cartoons. Saying that you are an anarchist does not suddenly undo this socialisation for men or women. We need to address and challenge the behaviours that lead from this. From the objectifying and patronising of women in all aspects of life to the difficulties women face in having confidence in their opinions.

Anarchism needs to follow from the political into the personal life. The term 'manarchist' I would think refers to being all about anarchism at meetings and have no idea what it means to treat women as equals in real life.

**BF:** How do you view the role of male anarchists from an anarcha-feminist perspective in general?

**M:** Well, there are huge problems for men under this patriarchal system. Men are set out roles in the same way that women are. Men are expected to be 'male', to fit into the gender binary set out by a society that gives girls dolls and boys guns. This needs to be explored by anarcha-feminist men and rather than feel threatened or accused by feminism they can work with women to think about

how anarchists can challenge this.

By including struggles that women face in anarchist action, by organising around issues like domestic violence, sex work, sexual assault, abortion, unpaid work within the home, domestic workers struggles, etc. a more inclusive and realistic version of anarchism can emerge.

**BF:** What are your current discussions?

**E&M:** A lot of the way in which our discussions are structured is around putting out our magazine. We discuss topics which people within the group are interested in writing about or have written about. It's about developing our own ideas and politics. Recently some of the discussions we've had have centred around community education, women in activism, domestic violence, women-only organising and 'exploring family structures' for example. We have a monthly open meeting which anyone can attend.

**BF:** Some feminists defend pornography and condemn anti-pornography feminists. Does Rag have a definitive position on pornography?

**M:** Rag has no definitive positions on anything, that isn't how we work.

One of our members, Tobie, wrote an article about sex work and that's the closest we've come to having a discussion on pornography so far. Many anarchists who defend sex work come from a perspective that sex workers (including those who make porn I guess) should unionise and get better working conditions and security etc. The idea is that many women chose to work in the sex industry and this is a valid choice. A good while back, before issue #1, we watched a film called 'Live Nude Girls Unite' about the Lusty Lady in San Francisco and discussed the issues that came up in the film.

I guess personally I was pretty into what the film was saying at first, women can use their bodies however they want and it can be empowering. But even in the film there are glances at a seedier club down the road where women not only have to work long hours and get judged on breast size but have no safety of being behind a glass window as those in the Lusty Lady are. Their fear is not that someone will video them (which is a concern in the LL) but that they will be forced to have sex with the bosses' friends. It's a whole other level. It's about physical safety.

Over the last year through my work I have met a lot of prostitutes and seen first hand the damage that can be done by dodgy clients. The women I work with are homeless drug addicts and for anyone to say that prostitution is a choice for them or that they are empowered by it is a joke.

So I guess I'm saying it's complicated, there are levels of sex work, from phone sex to porn to prostitution. There are levels of prostitution, one woman may be able to choose her clients and what she will do or not do, another has to take whoever/whatever she can get. Recently I have read some more and watched some films by anarchists about this stuff. I'm not saying it's never a choice, just that when a middle class academic with a queer theory slant writes about working as some form of sex worker, they're not speaking for everyone.

I'm not sure I answered your original

question there seeing as you were asking specifically about porn... sorry

**BF:** The Catholic Church must hinder attempts to change perceptions and society. How do you combat it?

**E&M:** The Catholic church was very influential in the formation of the Irish state and its legacy is enshrined in the anachronistic laws that still govern us. Although the influence of the church is waning it still holds influence in key sectors like education where almost all schools (90% plus) are run by the Catholic church and prioritise Catholic students.

The fact that an organisation that is ideologically opposed to contraception, divorce, sex outside marriage and is fundamentally homophobic is responsible for educating 98% plus of children in Ireland is certainly an issue for us. Abortion is illegal in Ireland even in cases of rape and incest.

Although homosexuality among men was decriminalised (in 1993!), inequality and prejudice based on sexuality continues. The impact of the church in Ireland cannot be underestimated. While changes have been wrought in recent decades, some aspects of Catholic conservatism may in fact be creeping back.

Homosexual marriage has not been recognised here, and the only form of family that is recognised by the constitution is the nuclear family, which condemns single parent families too. The constitution is based on the idea that everyone believes in god and that's where our morals come from. Scarily, the EU is the most progressive thing to have hit Irish law since the state was founded.

**BF:** What links do you have with other libertarians? Are you in contact with other anarchy-feminist groups?

**M:** We held our meetings in the libertarian social centre, Seomra Spraoi, until it was closed. We don't really tend to work with outer groups as Rag because as I said before we are a publishing collective primarily. As individuals many of us are part of different anarchist groups.

We organised a feminist walking tour with Choice Ireland (a feminist pro-choice group) for International women's day. We went to a women's gathering in the North of Spain last year and met lots of amazing women from all around Europe.

We met lots of anarchy-feminists but not really any other groups except the Brighton feminist health collective, but I'm not sure if they consider themselves an anarchist group. We are organising a feminist gathering in May here in Ireland so hopefully we'll meet lots more anarchy-feminists there.

**BF:** What is the current state of the Irish libertarian movement?

**M:** It's been growing rapidly the last few years and is very active at the moment. There is a good varied mix of projects, campaigns, groups etc. There is a social centres gathering coming up in May and lots of great people working on that. The Shell to Sea campaign is ongoing working to prevent a gas pipeline being built in the West of Ireland, there is a group starting up around the Lisbon treaty because Irish people are going

to get to vote on it some time this summer. The Dublin anarchist bookfair was also on recently. It's definitely a very healthy movement at the moment.

**BF:** Do the libertarian groups and federations co-operate together?

**M:** Yeah there is definitely some co-operation, by supporting each other, attending each other's events and working together on certain things there is mutual support. There isn't much antagonism anyway. There used to be an anti-authoritarian assembly on every month or so for a good while but they sort of fizzled out.

It was a good way for different groups to find out what other groups are up to, now we wouldn't really know what other groups are doing unless it was advertised as an open event. Everyone was just too busy though. There's a Grassroots Gathering, a broad libertarian event, over the June Bank Holiday weekend so that should be a good chance for everyone to catch up.



**TALKS:** Participants in a day school on sexual violence giving feedback in 2006.

**BF:** What plans has your organisation got for the near future?

**M:** We've organised a feminist gathering in May, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th in Leitrim, two hours west of Dublin.

It's open for all feminists regardless of gender or politics (although the workshops planned have an anti-capitalist/anarchist slant), the idea is to make connections between feminists in Ireland and have some in depth discussions on topics we feel like it's difficult to find time to really get into.

Rag #3 should be coming out in October, in time for the London anarchist bookfair as is tradition now.

We're starting to discuss the things we will write about but we've been really busy the last while with distribution and international women's day, workshops and discussions, and now the gathering...

It'll start coming together soon though so keep an eye on our website for that and for upcoming events, discussions etc. We throw a good launch party too and have some fundraisers for the gathering coming up.

So here's our details - [www.ragdublin.blogspot.com](http://www.ragdublin.blogspot.com) is the temporary one until [www.ragdublin.org](http://www.ragdublin.org) gets back up and running.



# History: Mary Wollstonecraft, her short life Brilliance tinged

In the November 1911 issue of *Mother Earth* there was an announcement of a forthcoming lecture by Emma Goldman entitled "Mary Wollstonecraft, the Pioneer of Modern Womanhood." This lecture is reprinted below. The last, and perhaps also the first, time this lecture appeared was as part of an article by Alice Wexler entitled "Emma Goldman on Mary Wollstonecraft" in the spring 1981 issue of *Feminist Studies* (Vol. 7, No. 1).

**T**HE Pioneers of human progress are like the Seagulls, they behold new coasts, new spheres of daring thought, when their co-voyagers see only the endless stretch of water.

They send joyous greetings to the distant lands. Intense, yearning, burning faith pierces the clouds of doubt, because the sharp ears of the harbingers of life discern from the maddening roar of the waves, the new message, the new symbol for humanity.

The latter does not grasp the new, dull, and inert, it meets the pioneer of truth with misgivings and resentment, as the disturber of its peace, as the annihilator of all stable habits and traditions.

Thus the pathfinders are heard only by the few, because they will not tread the beaten tracks, and the mass lacks the strength to follow into the unknown.

In conflict with every institution of their time since they will not compromise, it is inevitable that the advance guards should become aliens to the very one[s] they wish to serve; that they should be isolated, shunned, and repudiated by the nearest and dearest of kin.

Yet the tragedy every pioneer must experience is not the lack of understanding - it arises from the fact that having seen new possibilities for human advancement, the pioneers can not take root in the old, and with the new still far off they become outcast roamers of the earth, restless seekers for the things they will never find.

They are consumed by the fires of compassion and sympathy for all suffering and with all their fellows, yet they are compelled to stand apart from their surroundings. Nor need they ever hope to receive the love their great souls crave, for such is the penalty of a great spirit, that what he receives is but nothing compared to what he gives.

Such was the fate and tragedy of Mary Wollstonecraft. What she gave the world, to those she loved, towered high above the average possibility to receive, nor could her burning, yearning soul content itself with the miserly crumbs that fall from the barren table of the average life.

Mary Wollstonecraft came into the world at

a time when her sex was in chattel slavery: owned by the father while at home and passed on as a commodity to her husband when married.

It was indeed a strange World that Mary entered into on the twenty-seventh of April 1759, yet not very much stranger than our own. For while the human race has no doubt progressed since that memorable moment, Mary Wollstonecraft is

married a man she did not love in order to escape the misery of the parents' home.

But Mary was made of different material, a material so finely woven it could not fit into coarse surroundings. Her intellect saw the degradation of her sex, and her soul - always at white heat against every wrong - rebelled against the slavery of half of the human race.

She determined to stand on her own feet. In that determination she was strengthened by her friendship with Fannie Blood, who herself had made the first step towards emancipation by working for her own support.

But even without Fannie Blood as a great spiritual force in Mary's life, nor yet even without the economic factor, she was destined by her very nature to become the Iconoclast of the false Gods whose standards the world demanded she obey.

Mary was a born rebel, one who would have created rather than submit to any form set up for her.

It has been said that nature uses a vast amount of human material to create one genius. The same holds good of the true rebel, the true pioneer. Mary was born and not made through this or that individual incident in her surroundings.

The treasure of her soul, the wisdom of her life's philosophy, the depth of her World of thought, the intensity of her battle for human emancipation and especially her indomitable struggle for the liberation of her own sex, are even today so far ahead of the average grasp that we may indeed claim for her the rare exception which nature has created but once in a century.

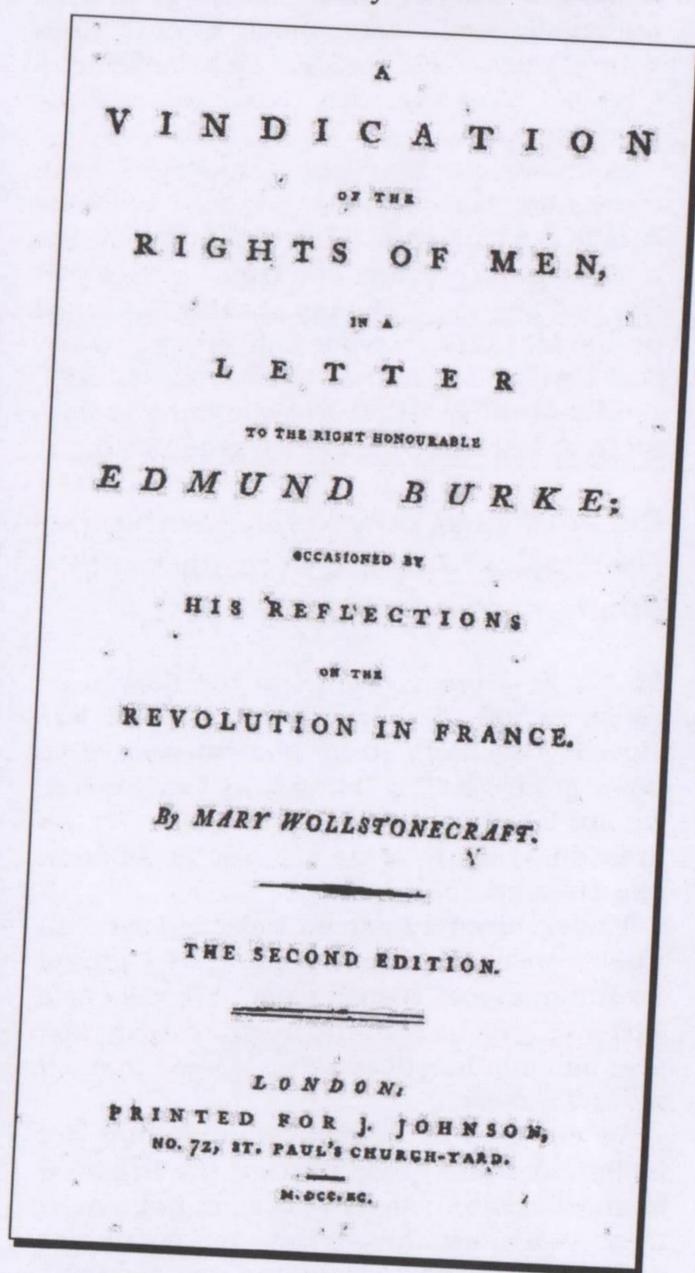
Like the Falcon who soared through space in order to behold the Sun and then paid for it with his life, Mary drained the cup of tragedy, for such is the price of wisdom.

Much has been written and said about this wonderful champion of the eighteenth century, but the subject is too vast and still very far from being exhausted.

The woman's movement of today and especially the suffrage movement will find in the life and struggle of Mary Wollstonecraft much that would show them the inadequacy of mere external gain as a means of freeing their sex.

No doubt much has been accomplished since Mary thundered against women's economic and political enslavement, but has that made her free? Has it added to the depth of her being? Has it brought joy and cheer in her life?

Mary's own tragic life proves that economic and social rights for women alone are not enough to fill her life, nor yet enough to fill any deep life, man or woman. It is not true that the deep and fine man - I do not mean the mere male - differs very largely from the



still very much the pioneer, far ahead of our own time.

She was one of many children of a middle-class family, the head of which lived up to his rights as master by tyrannizing his wife and children and squandering his capital in idle living and feasting.

Who could stay him, the creator of the universe? As in many other things, so have his rights changed little, since Mary's father's time. The family soon found itself in dire want, but how were middle-class girls to earn their own living with every avenue closed to them? They had but one calling, that was marriage.

Mary's sister probably realised that. She

# and her passionate struggle for freedom by tragedy

deep and fine woman.

He too seeks for beauty and love, for harmony and understanding. Mary realised that, because she did not limit herself to her own sex, she demanded freedom for the whole human race.

To make herself economically independent, Mary first taught school and then accepted a position as Governess to the pampered children of a pampered lady, but she soon realised that she was unfit to be a servant and that she must turn to something that would enable her to live, yet at the same time would not drag her down.

She learned the bitterness and humiliation of the economic struggle. It was not so much the lack of external comforts, that galled Mary's soul, but it was the lack of inner freedom which results from poverty and dependence which made her cry out, "How can anyone profess to be a friend to freedom yet not see that poverty is the greatest evil."

Fortunately for Mary and posterity, there existed a rare specimen of humanity, which we of the twentieth century still lack, the daring and liberal publisher Joseph Johnson.

He was the first to publish the works of Blake, of Thomas Paine, of Godwin and of all the rebels of his time without any regard to material gain.

He also saw Mary's great possibilities and engaged her as proofreader, translator, and contributor to his paper, the *Analytical Review*. He did more. He became her most devoted friend and advisor. In fact, no other man in Mary's life was so staunch and understood her difficult nature, as did that rare man. Nor did she ever open up her soul as unreservedly to any one as she did to him.

Thus she writes in one of her analytical moments: "Life is but a jest. I am a strange compound of weakness and resolution. There is certainly a great defect in my mind, my wayward heart creates its own misery.

"Why I have been made thus I do not know and until I can form some idea of the whole of my existence, I must be content to weep and dance like a child, long for a toy and be tired of it as soon as I get it.

"We must each of us wear a fool's cap, but mine alas has lost its bells and is grown so heavy, I find it intolerably troublesome."

That Mary should write thus of herself to Johnson shows that there must have been a beautiful comradeship between them. At any rate, thanks to her friend she found relief from the terrible struggle.

She found also intellectual food. Johnson's rooms were the rendezvous of the intellectual elite of London. Thomas Paine, Godwin, Dr. Fordyce, the Painter Fuseli, and many others gathered there to discuss all the great subjects of their time.

Mary came into their sphere and became

## Factfile: Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

**"Security of Property! behold in a few words the definition of English liberty. But softly, it is only the property of the rich that is secure."**

- Born into a middle-class home, a fall in family fortunes meant the Wollstonecraft worked first as a governess to make ends meet.

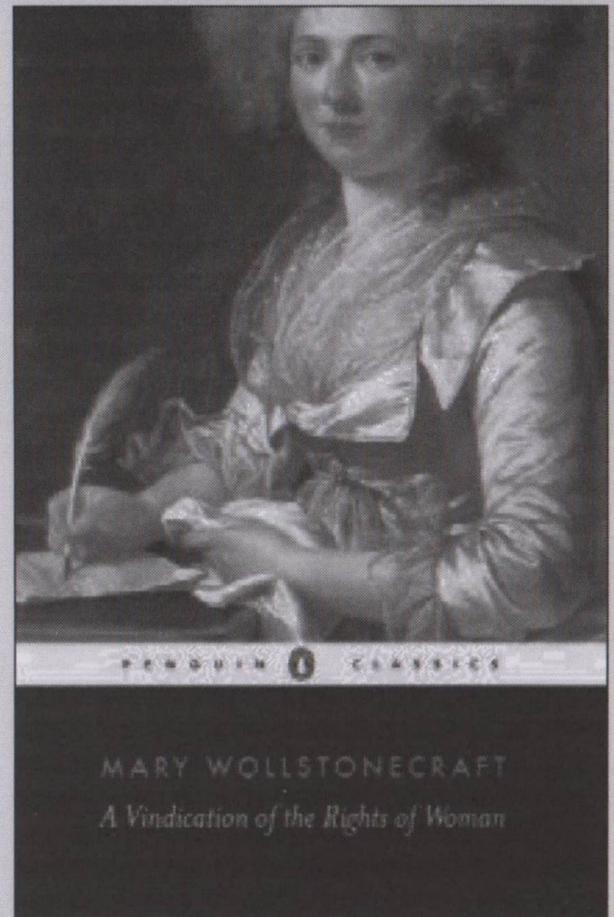
- She was a trailblazer when she became an author and reviewer, taken under the wing of publisher Joseph Johnson.

- Her intelligence and strong views led to her becoming influential in some of the top intellectual circles of the time.

- In 1792 she wrote her most celebrated work, *A Vindication of the rights of Woman*, at the age of 33.

- In 1795 she attempted suicide, as a disastrous relationship with Gilbert Imlay

- Following her rescue and recovery, she fell in love with and married William Godwin, widely acknowledged to be a major early



**MAJOR WORK:** A modern edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, with a portrait of Wollstonecraft on the cover

influence on anarchist theory.

- She died giving birth to her second child when the placenta broke and became infected

the very center of that intellectual bustle. Godwin relates how he came to hear Tom Paine at an evening arranged for him, but instead he had to listen to Mary Wollstonecraft, her conversational powers like everything else about her inevitably stood in the center of the stage.

Thus Mary could soar through space, her spirit reaching out to great heights. The opportunity soon offered itself.

The erstwhile champion of English liberalism, the great Edmund Burke, delivered himself of a sentimental sermon against the French Revolution. He had met the fair Marie Antoinette and bewailed her lot at the hands of the infuriated people of Paris.

His middle-class sentimentality saw in the greatest of all uprisings only the surface and

not the terrible wrongs the French people endured before they were driven to their acts.

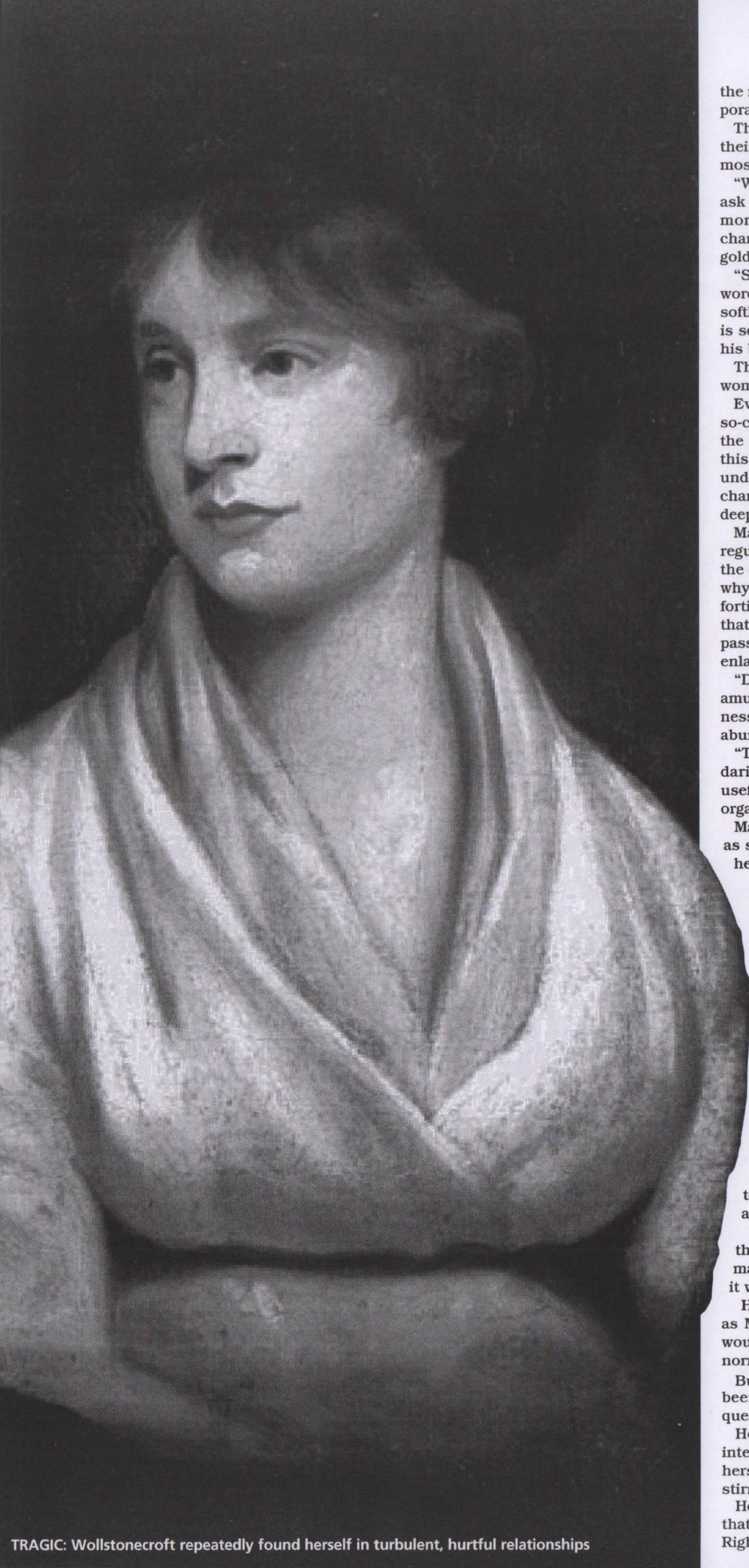
But Mary Wollstonecraft saw and her reply to the mighty Burke, *The Vindication of the Rights of Man*, is one of the most powerful pleas for the oppressed and disinherited ever made.

It was written at white heat, for Mary had followed the revolution intently.

Her force, her enthusiasm, and, above all, her logic and clarity of vision proved this erstwhile schoolmistress to be possessed of a tremendous brain and of a deep and passionately throbbing heart.

That such should emanate from a woman was like a bomb explosion, unheard of before. It shocked the world at large, but gained for Mary





the respect and affection of her male contemporaries.

They felt no doubt, that she was not only their equal, but in many respects, superior to most of them.

"When you call yourself a friend of liberty, ask your own heart whether it would not be more consistent to style yourself the champion of Property, the adorer of the golden image which power has set up?"

"Security of Property! behold in a few words the definition of English liberty. But softly, it is only the property of the rich that is secure, the man who lives by the sweat of his brow has no asylum from oppression."

Think of the wonderful penetration in a woman more than one hundred years ago.

Even today there are few among our so-called reformers, certainly very few among the women reformers, who see as clearly as this giant of the eighteenth century. She understood only too well that mere political changes are not enough and do not strike deep into the evils of Society.

Mary Wollstonecraft on passion: "The regulating of passion is not always wise. On the contrary, it should seem that one reason why men have a superior judgment and more fortitude than women is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passion and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds.

"Drunkenness is due to lack of better amusement rather than to innate viciousness, crime is often the outcome of a super-abundant life.

"The same energy which renders a man a daring villain would have rendered him useful to society had that society been well organised."

Mary was not only an intellectual, she was, as she says herself, possessed of a wayward heart.

That is she craved love and affection. It was therefore but natural for her to be carried away by the beauty and passion of the Painter Fuseli, but whether he did not reciprocate her love, or because he lacked courage at the critical moment, Mary was forced to go through her first experience of love and pain.

She certainly was not the kind of a woman to throw herself on any man's neck. Fuseli was an easy-go-lucky sort and easily carried away by Mary's beauty.

But he had a wife, and the pressure of public opinion was too much for him. Be it as it may, Mary suffered keenly and fled to France to escape the charms of the artist.

Biographers are the last to understand their subject or else they would not have made so much ado of the Fuseli episode, for it was nothing else.

Had the loud-mouthed Fuseli been as free as Mary to gratify their sex attraction, Mary would probably have settled down to her normal life.

But he lacked courage and Mary, having been sexually starved, could not easily quench the aroused senses.

However, it required but a strong intellectual interest to bring her back to herself. And that interest she found in the stirring events of the French Revolution.

However, it was before the Fuseli incident that Mary added to her *Vindication of the Rights of Man* the *Vindication of the Rights of*

Woman, a plea for the emancipation of her sex.

It is not that she held man responsible for the enslavement of woman. Mary was too big and too universal to place the blame on one sex. She emphasised the fact that woman herself is a hindrance to human progress because she persists in being a sex object rather than a personality, a creative force in life.

Naturally, she maintained that man has been the tyrant so long that he resents any encroachment upon his domain, but she pleaded that it was as much for his as for woman's sake that she demanded economic, political, and sexual freedom for women as the only solution to the problem of human emancipation: "The laws respecting women made an absurd unit of a man and his wife and then by the easy transition of only considering him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere cypher."

Nature has certainly been very lavish when she fashioned Mary Wollstonecraft. Not only has she endowed her with a tremendous brain, but she gave her great beauty and charm.

She also gave her a deep soul, deep both in joy and sorrow. Mary was therefore doomed to become the prey of more than one infatuation.

Her love for Fuseli soon made way for a more terrible, more intense love, the greatest force in her life, one that tossed her about as a willless, helpless toy in the hands of fate.

Life without love for a character like Mary is inconceivable, and it was her search and yearning for love which hurled her against the rock of inconsistency and despair.

While in Paris, Mary met in the house of Thomas Paine where she had been welcomed as a friend, the vivacious, handsome, and elemental American, Gilbert Imlay.

If not for Mary's love for him the world might never have known of this Gentleman. Not that he was ordinary, Mary could not have loved him with that mad passion which nearly wrecked her life.

He had distinguished himself in the American War and had written a thing or two, but on the whole he would never have set the world on fire. But he set Mary on fire and held her in a trance for a considerable time.

The very force of her infatuation for him excluded harmony, but is it a matter of blame as far as Imlay is concerned? He did for her all he could, but her insatiable hunger for love could never be content with little, hence the tragedy.

Then too, he was a roamer, an adventurer, an explorer into the territory of female hearts. He was possessed by the Wanderlust, could not rest at peace long anywhere. Mary needed peace, she also needed what she had never had in her family, the quiet and warmth of a home. But more than anything else she needed love, unreserved, passionate love. Imlay could give her nothing and the struggle began shortly after the mad dream had passed.

Imlay was much away from Mary at first under the pretext of business. He would not be an American to neglect his love for business.

His travels brought him, as the Germans say, to other cities and other loves. As a man that was his right, equally so was it his right to deceive Mary. What she must have endured only those can appreciate who have themselves known the tempest.

All through her pregnancy with Imlay's child, Mary pined for the man, begged and called, but he was busy. The poor chap did not know that all the wealth in the world could not make up for the wealth of Mary's love.

The only consolation she found was in her work. She wrote *The French Revolution* right under the very influence of that tremendous drama.

Keen as she was in her observation, she



**INSPIRED:** Emma Goldman saw Wollstonecraft as uniquely ahead of her time.

saw deeper than Burke, beneath all the terrible loss of life, she saw the still more terrible contrast between poverty and riches and [that] all the bloodshed was in vain so long as that contrast continued.

Thus she wrote: "If the aristocracy of birth is leveled with the ground only to make room for that of riches, I am afraid that the morale of the people will not be much improved by the change. Everything whispers to me that

“ It was her search and yearning for love which hurled her against the rock of inconsistency and despair. ”

names not principles are changed.”

She realised while in Paris what she had predicted in her attack on Burke, that the demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of man.

With all her work Mary could not forget her love. It was after a vain and bitter struggle to bring Imlay to her that she attempted suicide.

She failed, and to get back her strength she went to Norway on a mission for Imlay. She recuperated physically, but her soul was bruised and scarred.

Mary and Imlay came together several times, but it was only dragging out the inevitable. Then came the final blow. Mary learned that Imlay had other affairs and that

he had been deceiving her, not so much out of mischief as out of cowardice.

She then took the most terrible and desperate step, she threw herself into the Thames after walking for hours to get her clothing wet [so] that she may surely drown. Oh, the inconsistencies, cry the superficial critics. But was it?

In the struggle between her intellect and her passion Mary had suffered a defeat. She was too proud and too strong to survive such a terrible blow. What else was there for her but to die?

Fate that had played so many pranks with Mary Wollstonecraft willed it otherwise. It brought her back to life and hope, only to kill her at their very doors.

She found in Godwin the first representative of anarchist communism, a sweet and tender camaraderie, not of the wild, primitive kind but the quiet, mature, warm sort, that soothes one like a cold hand upon a burning forehead.

With him she lived consistently with her ideas in freedom, each apart from the other, sharing what they could of each other.

Again Mary was about to become a mother, not in stress and pain as the first time, but in peace and surrounded by kindness.

Yet so strange is fate, that Mary had to pay with her life for the life of her little girl, Mary Godwin. She died on September tenth, 1797, barely thirty-eight years of age.

Her confinement with the first child, though under the most trying of circumstances, was mere play, or as she wrote to her sister, "an excuse for staying in bed." Yet that tragic time demanded its victim.

Fannie Imlay died of the death her mother failed to find. She committed suicide by drowning, while Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin became the wife of the sweetest lark of liberty, Shelley.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the intellectual genius, the daring fighter of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth Centuries, Mary Wollstonecraft, the woman and lover, was doomed to pain because of the very wealth of her being.

With all her affairs she yet was pretty much alone, as every great soul must be alone – no doubt, that is the penalty for greatness.

Her indomitable courage in behalf of the disinherited of the earth has alienated her from her own time and created the discord in her being which alone accounts for her terrible tragedy with Imlay.

Mary Wollstonecraft aimed for the highest summit of human possibilities. She was too wise and too worldly not to see the discrepancy between her world of ideals and her world of love that caused the break of the string of her delicate, complicated soul.

Perhaps it was best for her to die at that particular moment. For he who has ever tasted the madness of life can never again adjust himself to an even tenor.

But we have lost much and can only be reconciled by what she has left, and that is much.

Had Mary Wollstonecraft not written a line, her life would have furnished food for thought. But she has given both, she therefore stands among the world's greatest, a life so deep, so rich, so exquisitely beautiful in her complete humanity.

# No god, no boss,

## History: Reviving Argentina, and the first anarcha-feminist group

**T**HE world's first explicitly anarchist-feminist group was created as part of the thriving nineteenth-century Anarchist movement in Argentina. It produced the first anarcha-feminist newspaper, *La Voz de la Mujer*. Sadly, the history of anarchist-feminism in Argentina has rarely been acknowledged, at best mentioned in passing, at worse ignored or forgotten.

*La Voz de la Mujer* was published in Buenos Aires only nine times, beginning on January 8, 1896 and ending almost exactly one year later on New Year's Day.

Its donors included "Women Avengers Group," "One Who Wants to Fill a Cannon with the Heads of the Bourgeois," "Long Live Dynamite," "Long Live Free Love," "A Feminist," "A Female Serpent to Devour the Bourgeois," "Full of Beer," "A Man Friendly to Women."

Most of it was written in Spanish, with only occasional items in Italian. This is not surprising, as it was primarily from Spain that anarchist feminism came to Argentina.

Even the feminist material in the Italian press was written largely by Spanish authors. Another version of the paper and bearing its name was published in the provincial town of Rosario (its editor, Virginia Bolten was the only woman known to have been deported in 1902 under the Residence Law, which gave the government the power to expel immigrants active in political organizations).

Another *La Voz de la Mujer* was published in Montevideo, where Bolten was exiled.

*La Voz de la Mujer* described itself as "dedicated to the advancement of Communist Anarchism." Its central theme was that of the multiple nature of women's oppression.

An editorial asserted, "We believe that in present-day society nothing and nobody has a more wretched situation than unfortunate women." Women, they said, were doubly oppressed – by bourgeois society and by men.

Its feminism can be seen from its attack on marriage and upon male power over women. Its contributors, like anarchist feminists elsewhere, developed a concept of oppression that focused on gender oppression.

Marriage was a bourgeois institution which restricted women's freedom, including their

sexual freedom. Marriages entered into without love, fidelity maintained through fear rather than desire, oppression of women by men they hated – all were seen as symptomatic of the coercion implied by the marriage contract.

It was this alienation of the individual's will that the anarchist feminists deplored and sought to remedy, initially through free love and then, and more thoroughly, through social revolution.

*La Voz de la Mujer* was a paper written by women for women, it was an independent expression of an explicitly feminist current within South America's labour movement and was one of the first recorded instances of the fusion of feminist ideas with a revolutionary and working-class orientation.

As with Emma Goldman, Louise Michel and Voltairine de Cleyre, it differed from mainstream feminism by being a working class movement which placed the struggle against patriarchy as part of a wider struggle against economic and social classes and hierarchies.

It was not centred on educated middle-class women, whose feminism was dismissed as a "bourgeois" or "reformist."

Anarchist feminism emerged in Buenos Aires in the 1890s, where the growth of the economy increased the demand for labour which was satisfied through immigration on a vast scale.

The largest ethnic group were the Italians, followed by the Spaniards and French. It was among these immigrant communities that the group producing *La Voz de la Mujer* arose and was active.

As with elsewhere in the Americas, Anarchism was originally imported by immigrants from the European countries in which there was a strong Anarchist movement – Italy, Spain, and France.

Anarchist groups and publications first emerged in the 1860s and the 1870s and, due to the social conditions in Argentina, found fertile soil. Like the immigrant communities they were part of, the anarchists formed an integral part of the working class movement in Argentina and shaping its ideas and struggles.

The anarchists helped form some of the first unions, organising strikes and demonstrations. In the 1880s and 1890s there were sometimes as many as 20 Anarchist papers being published at any one time, in French, Spanish, and Italian.

*La Voz de la Mujer* appeared after half a century of continuous Anarchist activity.

It was part of the communist-anarchist tradition and was dedicated to the overthrow of the existing society and the creation of a new, just, and egalitarian social order



# and no husband

organised on the principle of "from each according to ability, to each according to need."

As was the case elsewhere, a distinctive feminist current developed with the main impulse for anarchist feminism coming from Spanish activists (however, Italian exiles like Errico Malatesta and Pietro Gori gave support to feminist ideas in their articles).

Equal pay for women was raised as a demand and supported by a significant number of labour unions in the Argentine Workers' Federation in 1901.

La Voz de la Mujer's militant anti-reformist stance aroused response among women workers in the cities of Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Rosario, as it lasted a year and printed between 1,000 and 2,000 copies of each issue, a respectable number for an Anarchist paper of its time.

Its editors were drawn from the large Spanish and Italian communities and identified themselves with the women of the working class. Its distinctiveness as an Anarchist paper lay in its recognition of the specificity of women's oppression. It called upon women to mobilise against their subordination both as women and as workers.

Its first editorial was a passionate rejection of women's lot: "fed up as we are with so many tears and so much misery; fed up with the never ending drudgery of children (dear though they are); fed up with asking and begging; of being a plaything for our infamous exploiters or vile husbands, we have decided to raise our voices in the concert of society and demand, yes, demand our bit of pleasure in the banquet of life."

Its appearance received a mixed response from the rest of the Anarchist movement, ranging from silence and hostility to praise. One paper gave it a particularly warm welcome, stating that "a group of militant women have unfurled the red flag of anarchy and intend to publish a magazine for propaganda among those who are their comrades both in work and in misery."

We greet the valiant initiators of this project, and at the same time we call on all our comrades to support them." The response reflected that a substantial section of the Anarchist press was sympathetic to feminist issues at this time. The mid-1890s in Argentina saw increasing coverage of issues relating to women's equality and in particular to marriage, family, prostitution, and the domination of women by men.

Some papers even published special series of pamphlets devoted to "the woman question." La Question Sociale, the Italian-language paper founded by Malatesta when he came to Argentina in 1883, published a series of pamphlets "especially dedicated to an analysis of women's issues."

The journal Germinal, which first appeared in 1897, was particularly concerned with the "woman question" and carried several articles under the general heading of "Feminism," and it defended "the extremely revolutionary and just character of feminism" against the charge that it was merely a creation of "elegant little ladies."

## Factfile: La Voz de la Mujer

**"We have decided to raise our voices in the concert of society and demand, yes, demand our bit of pleasure in the banquet of life."**

- Founded in 1896, La Voz de la Mujer lasted almost exactly a year, selling thousands of copies
- The paper's stance was particularly attractive to women workers in Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Rosario
- Largely drawn from and influenced by the ranks of Spanish emigres, La Voz de la Mujer was staunchly anarchist-communist
- The paper was written almost exclusively by women, a marked change from the existing anarchist presses which were often male-dominated
- The paper drew a mixed response from male anarchists, with some praising the paper's militant outlook, while others shamefully shouted 'when we men are emancipated and free, we shall see about yours'.

Much if not all of the feminist material in the Anarchist press appears to have been written by women.

Yet this apparent sympathy for feminism in principle within the Anarchist ranks was matched by substantial opposition in practice.

The first issue of La Voz de la Mujer seems to have aroused considerable hostility, because in the following issue the editors attacked the antifeminist attitudes prevalent among men in the movement in no uncertain terms.

As they put it: "When we women, unworthy and ignorant as we are, took the initiative and published La Voz de la Mujer, we should have known, Oh modem rogues, how you would respond with your old mechanistic philosophy to our initiative.

"You should have realized that we stupid women have initiative and that is the product of thought. You know - we also think..."

"The first number of La Voz de la Mujer appeared and of course, all hell broke loose: 'Emancipate women? For what?' 'Emancipate women? Not on your nelly!'... 'Let our emancipation come first, and then, when we men are emancipated and free, we shall see about yours.'"

The editors concluded that women could hardly rely upon men to take the initiative in demanding equality for women, given this kind of hostile attitude.

The same issue contains an article entitled "To the Corrupters of the Ideal" in which men are warned, "You had better understand once and for all that our mission is not reducible to raising your children and washing your clothes and that we also have a right to emancipate ourselves and to be free from all kinds of tutelage, whether economic or marital."

The editorial in the third issue emphasised that they were attacking not male Anarchist comrades in general but only those "false Anarchists" who failed to defend "one of Anarchism's most beautiful ideals - the emancipation of women."

The editors' outrage was justified given that

Anarchism advocated freedom and equality for all humankind, not just men. As women were oppressed by patriarchy they, as an oppressed group, could rightly demand support from fellow Anarchists in their struggle for emancipation.

However, for many male anarchists such issues could be ignored until "after the revolution" a position the editors of La Voz de la Mujer rightly rejected as self-serving.

Anarchism, more than other schools of socialism with their emphasis on economic exploitation, was able to accommodate the struggle against patriarchy. However, this theoretical support for feminism was more often than not associated with sexism in practice.

It is not difficult to see why feminists were attracted to Anarchism and why they were so rightly opposed to male anarchist hypocrisy. Its key ideas stress the struggle against authority, including the power exercised over women in marriage and the family.

All anarchists should be seeking freedom within relationships. The Anarchist emphasis on oppression and on power relations opened up a space within which women could be seen simultaneously as the victims of class society and as the victims of male authority.

As La Voz de la Mujer expressed it in its fourth issue: "We hate authority because we aspire to be human beings and not machines directed by the will of 'another,' be this authority, religion, or any other name." Its aim is best summed up when one of its supporters signed herself "No God, No Boss, No Husband."

■ For more information see Maxine Molyneux's "No God, No Boss, No Husband: Anarchist Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Argentina" (Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 13, No. 1, Latin America's Nineteenth-Century History, Winter, 1986) on which this article is based.

# Hypocrisy, elitism and communism in France

## Comment: The 2007 French strikes

**T**HE strikes last November in France against Sarkozy's so-called reforms were inspiring. In Britain, we are so used to people grumbling but ultimately accepting any crap imposed by the government and bosses that it is refreshing to see so many people talking direct action and showing solidarity.

The attempt to "reform" the pension system is, of course, Sarkozy's first attempt to "do a Thatcher" and try to break French working class militancy. He has staked his self-proclaimed "reformist" credentials on facing down the protests, aiming to stand firm on an issue which created three weeks of strikes in 1995 and led to a U-turn and then collapse of Chirac's government.

majority against the strikes, with a majority in favour of reform of the schemes, which are seen as unfair. What can be said, beyond the obvious that what is good enough for the "leaders of the free world" should, surely, be good enough for the rest of us, including striking workers!

The hypocrisy does not stop there. Supporters of capitalism regularly attack socialism as being based on envy, hatred of those who do well and being rooted in altruism.

Now, we are being subjected to attacks on "greedy" workers who have "unfair" terms and conditions and who should consider not their own interests but those of others.

Apparently greed is bad – if it is working

So the key is not to grumble about the "privileged" position of others but, rather, ask why the non-"privileged" should not have the same.

The French should, in other words, level up! If the majority think the pension schemes are unfair then they should join the strikes and demand that all have the same scheme.

In that way, the militant minority can become the militant majority and "reforms from below" become a real possibility (and, hopefully, social revolution).

Which brings us nicely to the issue of minorities and majorities. Anyone reading Leninist critiques of anarchism will often come across the claim that we are "elitists" because we reject majority rule.

American Marxists tend to point to Emma Goldman's classic 1910 essay "Minorities versus Majorities" although they do not actually refute her arguments.

Emma was not dismissing the masses, rather she stated the obvious – that the mass is not the source for new ideas.

Rather, new, progressive, ideas are the product of minorities and which then spread to the majority by the actions of those minorities.

This applies, as Emma knew, in the class war as well, with most strikes starting with a minority taking action and the rest joining in. The action of the minority inspires the majority.

The current strike wave is a classic example of this, with Sarkozy stressing his "democratic" credentials and portraying the strikes as the actions of an undemocratic minority.

So the next time a Leninist proclaims anarchism as "undemocratic" remember to ask whether he supports the French strikes. If he does, then he is just as "elitist" as we are!

Then point out that the Leninism is fundamentally elitist, aiming to give power to a "revolutionary" government made up of the few leaders of the "revolutionary" party. If the Bolshevik experience is anything to go by, this "revolutionary" government will then repress the working class, in its own name, to remain in power.

All the while proclaiming that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" requires the "dictatorship of the party" (to use Trotsky's frank admission).

Ultimately, the minority has the right to disobey as the majority can be wrong. This is doubly true when the majority are stupid enough to vote for a bunch of politicians who are seeking to make conditions for everyone bar the rich worse!

And representative government is minority



**STRUGGLE:** Strikers demonstrate against Sarkozy's 'reforms'

One of Sarkozy's top aides, Henri Guaino, warned if this reform could not be achieved, the entire Thatcherite programme was under threat – "all the reforms will be compromised."

We can only hope so. After the strike wave, the urge to "reform" was apparently placed on hold so, to some degree, direct action got the goods. However, there are some interesting theoretical issues at play here. Firstly, there is the hypocrisy of the matter.

During the run-up to the Iraq invasion, much was made of the necessity of resolute leaders to ignore the will of the majority and do what was best. Bowing to the majority, it was asserted, showed bad leadership and the key to good democratic government was precisely its willingness to defy the people.

Now, the fact that the majority of French citizens are, allegedly, against the strikes is being stressed. Surveys by newspapers, dutifully reported by the TV, indicate a small

class people who are seeking better conditions. Ah, the hypocrisy of neo-liberals using pseudo-egalitarian arguments in order to level (others) downwards!

Luckily, a sizable minority of the French saw the attacks on the strikers for the hypocritical nonsense that they were. They knew that these so-called "reforms" were simply the first stage of an attack on all workers' wages and conditions.

Unions provide a floor for all workers under which wages, working conditions and terms and conditions cannot fall.

Faced with the better wages and conditions unions win, other bosses have to offer more to attract staff and stop existing ones organising.

This applies to pensions as well. If the pension schemes of the so-called "privileged" workers are levelled downwards then this will allow the bosses to impose cuts on other workers.



**SUPPORTIVE: 1000 school students march in solidarity demo in Perpignan**

government, the rule by the many by the few.

Genuine democracy is not based on grimly following the orders issued from above. It is about taking actively participating in the decisions that affect your life.

As such, the minority of strikers are expressing a genuine democratic impulse which exposes the hypocrisy and limitations of representative so-called democracy and, needless to say, workplace despotism of capitalism.

Lastly, the impact of the strikes shows a striking confirmation of communist-anarchist principles. According to the marginal productivity theory of bourgeois economics, workers get paid according to their contribution to production.

Yet when they go on strike, the media is full of reports of how much they are "costing" the country - and it always far exceeds the sum of their wages. Clearly, their contribution to the economy far exceeds their own wages (assuming, of course, the highly unrealistic assumptions required to prove marginal productivity theory exist - which they do, indeed can, not).

Which shows that the arguments of communist-anarchism are correct, that in modern industry there is no such thing as an individual product as all labour and its products are social. The combined productive work of a given set of workers far exceeds their wages, as shown when they collectively withdraw that labour.

And talking of marginal productivity theory, it should be noted that according to it wages should rise with productivity. Between the end of the Second World War and the mid-

1970s in America, that was the case. Since then, productivity has continued to rise while medium wages have stagnated. Inequality, by some strange coincidence, has exploded.

This period has also, by coincidence, also been associated with the application of neo-liberal reforms and the breaking of the American unions and labour militancy.



**JE DESOLE: Sakozy's plans are not well liked**

So 30 years of applying "reforms" to the economy to bring it more in line with economic ideology has refuted one of its key dogmas. Strangely, mainstream economics has not revised its position in light of this empirical evidence.

Perhaps, given this, the willingness of French workers to resist their Reagan clone can be understood.

Of course, there are problems. The union bureaucrats really have no idea what they are doing. The biggest rail union - the communist-dominated CGT has agreed to sector-by-sector talks between the government, unions and employers.

You would expect the bosses to seek to divide and rule, but you really would expect unions to at least not to suggest it! Have they really forgotten how Thatcher went after industry after industry?

The key issue is whether there are sufficient links between the rank and file of the unions and a body of militants willing to organise independently of the bureaucracy. Without an organised rank-and-file movement, which can counteract the influence of the official leadership, it seems unlikely that the struggle will win.

With a trade union bureaucracy which seems unwilling to pursue the most obvious means of success, wide-scale action, we can only hope that the French workers are as willing to defy their union leaderships as they are the Thatcher-would-be they have the misfortune to be governed by.

**By Iain McKay**



# No real cause

## Interview: Rob Ray talks to Vadim, a Russian anarchist

**Rob Ray:** What is the economic situation in Russia at the moment?

**Vadim:** The economic situation is very different now compared with the crash of the 1990s, when industrial production declined drastically.

Of course, growth hasn't come as a result of neoliberal shock therapy but rather follows from rising international oil prices.

The industries which are developing now are in oil and gas production, building (many

in decline.

According to the state the general sum of backpay owed was 4.435 billion Rb. (about \$171m) in May last year. Unofficially, it is higher, in particular for migrant workers (often they simply aren't paid at all).

Generally, wages in Russia remain very low. Officially, it is \$400 a month on average (in Moscow it's around \$1,000), but the real situation is very different.

In 2005, only 18% of population obtained more than \$430 (12000 Rb.), 24% from \$250 (7000 Rb.) to \$430 (12000 Rb.) and 18%

But the situation is not uniform here either. Unemployment in the south of Russia is on average three times more than in regions such as Moscow, St.Petersburg or Wolga, and twice much as in Siberia and the Far East. Youth unemployment is very high and people with further education also have difficulty finding work: 28% (14% in Moscow) and 11% (32% in Moscow) respectively.

But only a minority of unemployed register themselves with the state service when looking for work because it is ineffective.

In the first three months, the unemployed obtain 75% of their monthly wage, in the next four months 60% and in another five months 45%.

After one year, the dole is very low: from \$27 to \$111 a month in 2006 (it depends on the region). This is of course insufficient for life. So there are many migrations to big cities as Moscow by people independently looking for work (mainly non-skilled).

Furthermore, a lot of employment is only part-time or casual, in particular in the Far East and Wolga regions (here and there about 20% of workers); in Moscow between 10 and 20%. This sector represents around five or six million people.

**RR:** What is the situation in education, healthcare and utility (water, power) provision?

**Vadim:** All these sectors are in a deep crisis. In spite of a good financial situation for the country (\$406.6 billion in gold reserves, of which the government's found \$117 billion for stabilization, and foreign debt amounts to \$113 billion), the ruling clique continues to destroy free public services (such as education and health care) and to increase the prices for provision of water, power and other housing and communal services.

At the same time, active privatisation occurs. So the possibilities for finding free places in education, the quality of public healthcare service, drugs at reduced prices etc are falling. In education, the principles and mechanics of selection are being introduced, the number of paid student places are growing. There are many private schools and universities.

The house-and-communal-services-reform bill has brought through the privatisation of utility provision. Unfortunately, there is very little resistance against these moves.

The student movement as such is absent. The main target of protests for people in the city is rather the problem of commercial



**AT WAR:** Russian Anti-fascists demonstrate in Moscow at the killing of Aleksey Krylov (inset) earlier this year

of the workers in the sector are from the other republics of the ex-'Soviet Union', who often have no rights or even legal status) and in metal production (mainly for export).

Some traditional industries (such as textiles and machine-building) are in decline. But it is necessary to take into account that most existing productive capacity and the whole infrastructure is very old and can be left to ruin in the near future.

The other big problem is the very uneven situation in different regions. In such cities as Moscow, St.Petersburg or Nizhni Novgorod there is major development of services, in the banking industry etc. But many regions are

\$180-250 (5-7,000 Rb.). In many regions and industries the situation is much worse. While workers in private services obtain good wages, in agriculture, textiles and in public service the wages are rarely greater than 5,000 Rb.

**RR:** What is unemployment like?

**Vadim:** It is not easy. For market reforms like those in Russia, an unemployment level of 20 or 30 % was expected. Actually it is (according to Western data) 7-8%. Growth is restrained due to low wages and non-payment of wages.

# for optimism

re-planning and the building of elite housing.

**RR:** What about trade unionism?

**Vadim:** All trade unions in the modern Russia are bureaucratic and anti-worker structures. The biggest organisation is the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (in Russian: FNPR) which is a new name for the old 'Soviet' official trade unions.

The leaders of FNPR claim they have 28 million members in their unions but the majority don't do anything and only pay dues.

It's important that FNPR privatised the big property of old 'Soviet' unions, such as sanatoriums, rest homes, tourist bases, hotels, sports establishments, stadiums, homes of culture etc for its own benefit.

So the FNPR is on the one hand a giant bureaucratic apparatus of paid functionaries, and on the other it's a social infrastructure with less expensive rest and health possibilities in sanatoriums, presents for children, for people in difficult situations etc.

It is often the case that there are also leading managers or members of the administration of businesses in the unions of FNPR. So it is no possible to say that the FNPR is a normal trade union in Western sense!

The unions of FNPR try normally to agree with business leaders peacefully and regard the strike as an extreme action. At the end of the 1990s, teachers and health workers (most public sector workers are in the FNPR unions) and the miners of FNPR struck, but the leadership took control: they prevented the generalisation of struggle and suppressed all initiatives from below.

The FNPR supported the Labour Law in 2001 which helped give business more powers to dismiss their workers and promoted precarization.

Apart from the FNPR, there are many different trade unions and federations which name themselves "free" and stress their "independency" from a "Soviet" heritage. They don't have leading managers in top positions. But they are also vertical, bureaucratic structures, mostly with paid functionaries and they declare their fidelity to social partnership between the workers, bosses and authorities.

There are examples of self-organised workers' resisting too – from individual sabotage action to little spontaneous strikes or "Italian" strikes. But self-organised collective actions are still rare.

**RR:** What are the most powerful political strands at the moment?

**Vadim:** The ruling political current around Putin is nationalist, strongly centralist and authoritarian in internal politics and neoliberal in economic politics. The general political objective is to reestablish Russia as a great power. The regime rests on the support of some parts of big business and on

## Factfile: Russian anarchism today

■ **KRAS**, The Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists, was founded in August 1995, and is affiliated to the International Workers Association. Publications include Black Star, and Direct Action

Website: [kras.fatal.ru](http://kras.fatal.ru)

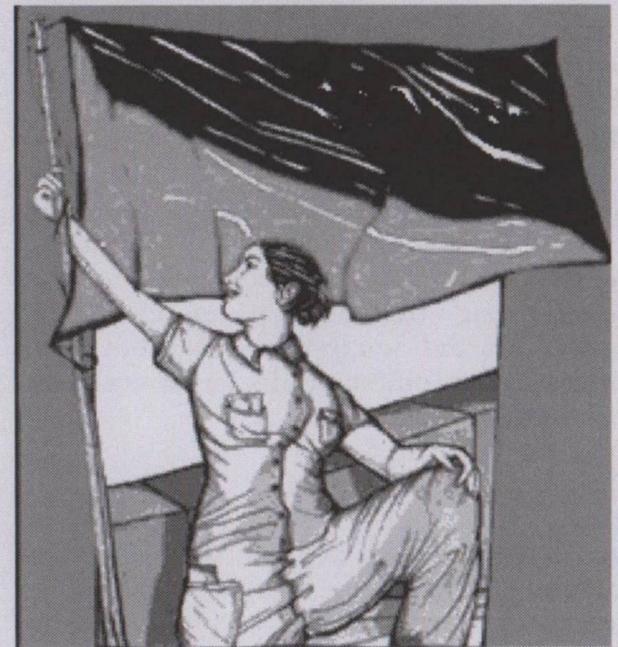
■ **Moscow's Anarchist Black Cross** was refounded in January 2008, following a spate of detentions from the authorities

■ **The Kazan Anarchists Alliance**, one of the oldest post-USSR groups, was established in 1989 in the Russian province of Kazan in Tataristan

■ **Autonomous Action** is an anarchist-communist group founded in January 2002, in Novgorod. Among others, the group publishes the magazine *Autonomy* and newspaper *Situation*.

Website: [avtonom.org](http://avtonom.org)

■ **New Revolutionary Alternative** is or was an insurrectionist group,



INTERNATIONAL: KRAS is linked to the IWA

labelled as terrorists by the state, involved in arson attacks and bombings during the Chechen war of 1996.

■ **Basic translations of web material can be done using [google.com/translate](http://google.com/translate)**

structures in the secret service and military.

The Putin group utilised aggressive Russian nationalism and spread anti-Caucasian hysteria (including the recommencement of the colonial war in Chechnya) to increase their power.

Of course, the spreading of these spirits stimulated the growth of pure fascist political tendencies. Gangs of boneheads terrorize migrant workers, foreign students and even children of parents coming from different republics of the ex "Soviet Union". There are violent attacks and murders. Moreover, there were cases of big spontaneous pogroms in some cities (Kondopoga, Stavropol) against non-Russian populations.

The ruling group is too nationalistic, of course. But they are afraid of a split in Russia and try to show themselves as more "moderate" nationalism. They want to strengthen the centralisation of power by limiting State federalism, by seizing regional administration from above and revising their relationship with regional elites on more favourable terms.

As the state's economical and social politics, it is oligarchic and neoliberal. The ruling group reallocates property, taking control of some companies and driving back economic competitors.

This isn't a real broadening of state control but the strengthening of existing economic

forces coupled with the state power.

Social measures are openly in favor of the rich. So Russia is one of very few countries where income tax isn't progressive: all must pay a flat rate of 13% of income – from multi-millionaires to ordinary workers!

**RR:** Are there any causes for optimism?

**Vadim:** Optimism? I don't think that the actual situation generates much optimism because the level of self-organised resistance is very low now. But we are pessimists in our understanding of the situation, optimists in our actions. Resistance is for us not only a question of survival but also one of human dignity.

The younger generations don't have so many illusions about private market capitalism as existed at the beginning of the 1990s. They are mainly passive now, but we hope they will overcome the social shock of that decade and will begin to react and resist.

Especially when we take into consideration that economic growth in Russia, linked with the oil prices, isn't stable and the majority of people don't have chances in this system.

# Review: Pilger spoiled by pandering to nationalists

War on Democracy

Directors: Christopher Martin and John Pilger

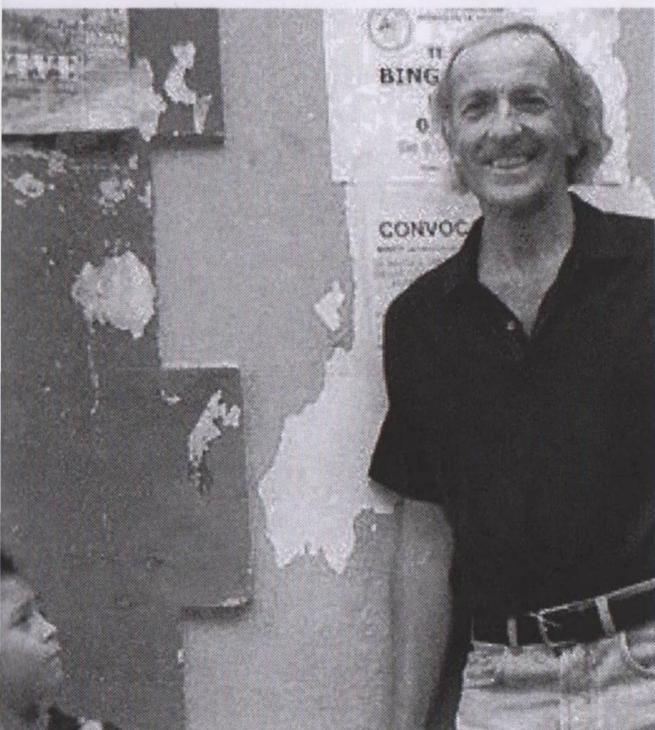
Distributor: Lion's Gate

98 Mins

£12.98

THE cinema release of veteran journalist John Pilger's *The War On Democracy* (co-directed with Chris Martin) permits more wide-ranging thematics than his usual scrupulous but relatively narrow television coverage of specific historical outrages (most famously in Vietnam, Cambodia, Nicaragua and East Timor).

Summarising Washington's installation of brutal regimes in Central and South America over five decades, he wanted to analyse 'freedom' and 'democracy' as spun by Western governments: "revealing through vivid testimony, the story of great power



**TOO KIND:** Pilger fails to criticise the many shortcomings of the South-American left

behind its venerable myths... [in order] to understand the true nature of the so-called war on terror".

The replacement of social democratic formations with rule by death squad throughout the region is then contrasted with Venezuela and Bolivia, where Presidents Chavez and Morales have recently been elected vowing to derail the rich and foreign elite gravy train in the interests of the dispossessed.

The experience in Chile – where Pinochet's fascists seized power on 9/11 1974 with extensive CIA support – is contrasted with the 2002 right-wing coup in Caracas which failed purportedly due to street protests by the urban masses.

Despite local and US media saturation denouncing Chavez' project as evil communist insanity, ordinary Venezuelans clearly rejected the certain misery of unfettered

neoliberal dictatorship – the film counterposes footage from 2002 with visits to shanty towns and a millionaire's mansion, succinctly conveying the social bases of political polarisation in the country.

Similarly, the litany of slaughter and repression under American tutelage precedes a chat with Duane Clarridge, ex-CIA chief in Chile, reiterating the continuing utter contempt for human rights. Pilger then interviews Hugo Chavez, showing his personal integrity, humility, and a warmth for the common people reciprocated in the barrios – cementing the populist appeal of promises of a basic welfare state now capturing imaginations across the continent.

## Naming and shaming the backyard bully

Of course memories of the ravages of military regimes weigh heavily across the region. But two decades of the wholesale looting of resources by multinationals and local lapdogs (IMF and World Bank conditions for 'democracy' to return) – destroying subsistence economies with the concomitant growth of vast slums around cities – doubtless also inflect the motivation to vote for marginally lesser evils.

Actually, a relative waning of Washington's directly malevolent intervention (with its attention elsewhere) has coincided with very diverse developments in South American political spheres crucial to understanding what is happening now. However, framed only in terms of earlier US foreign policy, *The War On Democracy* ignores the crucial integration into global trade (and subsequent bankrupting) of entire nations – which that historic policy facilitated rather than caused.

Thus the far-reaching political convulsions in Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador are ignored, and the significance (beyond boosting national budgets) of natural resource extraction by American corporations – quite irrespective of Dubya's posturing – is missed.

The rise of so-called Bolivarian social-democracy in Venezuela and comparable state-capitalist compromises elsewhere are better seen as strategic nationalist defences against emerging lower-class social movements which have threatened to coalesce in much more radical directions.

For example, Evo Morales has co-opted impressive grass-roots mobilisations of shanty-neighbourhood and indigenous groups (detailed by Forrest Hylton in *New Left Review*, 35 & 37, 2005/6) amid large-scale industrial unrest in Bolivia into a shaky electoral alliance, appealing to the military and local and international capital that revolution can be pre-empted.

In 'Is Latin America Really Turning Left?' (reprinted on the libcom website), James Petras explains the contortions of the new parliamentary socialists negotiating corporate demands for super-profits while retaining popular support with negligible redistributive trickle-down from oil and gas

bonanzas.

Both phenomena are clear in Venezuela, which has the largest heavy crude reserves in the world and hence room to manoeuvre in buying off popular discontent. After the 1989 Caracazo uprising, unprecedented social movements mushroomed in the country, while an abortive 1992 military coup attempt saw Chavez and other junior officers involved jailed. Later in the decade his alternative, parliamentary, organisation, and carefully-designed personality cult catapulted him to the Presidency and a world record number of election victories since with manifestoes stressing health, education, housing and job-creation.

Sadly the grass-roots networks have been taken over and reconstituted merely as electoral groups and self-aggrandising militarised client bureaucracies dispensing favours, while precious few welfare benefits have materialised. Dissatisfaction at unmet promises is escalating, with any opposition dismissed as 'counter-revolutionary' and encountering increasingly repressive policing.

Most seriously, the government's economic strategy is to sell off the whole of the natural environment for pillage by multinationals (to their great satisfaction) demanding less than the going international rent in return and with absolutely no regard for devastating consequences for the rainforest and its indigenous inhabitants or global climate ramifications. And we're supposed to applaud a brave and honest desire to improve the lives of the poor...

Packing so much in, it's understandable that *The War On Democracy* neglects historical and contemporary complexities in Venezuela. Unfortunately, the results reinforce prejudices about lower-class susceptibility to charismatic leadership while demonstrating little inkling of the real characteristics of the Bolivarian state, the prospects for its modest socialism, or the social, environmental or economic impacts of its national development programme.

Just as parachuting reporters into warzones with no independent sources inevitably yields subservient conclusions, embedding perspective within the Chavista circus here obscures its real contradictions and conflicts.

True, Pilger has consistently broken through the media's role as poodle to power, permitted only sporadic fractional deviations from official dishonesty masquerading as serious journalism. But despite a welcome demystification of US machinations, this film reproduces the liberal-left's fatal inability to transcend the us-and-them oversimplifications it derides in the mainstream.

The need for simultaneous critique of imperialism and nationalism – of the interwoven structures of capitalism and the state – remains.

By Tom Jennings



# Review: Horizontalism

**Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina**

**Edition: pb**

**ISBN: 9781904859581**

**Publisher: AK Press**

**£12.00**

THERE has always been a tendency amongst radicals to glamourise those things in the world that are unfamiliar to their experience.

It seems far easier to establish some kind of abstract solidarity with a far off land, than to settle down to the serious business of dealing with our own troubles and the difficulties of people closer to us.

Events like the 2001 popular uprising in Argentina allow us a sort of vicarious victory.

From our sofa we can see gloriously liberated people chanting the most radical of slogans – "que se vayan todos" (they all [the politicians] must go) – and dispensing with the most powerful authority in the land four times in a fortnight.

In a way these events can make the idea of revolution seem even more alien, like something that only happens somewhere else, more exciting, more foreign and more adventurous.

The process unleashed by what Argentinians often refer to simply as "the nineteenth and twentieth" (the massive demonstrations to oust President De La Rúa in December 2001), of creating new public forms of democracy, assemblies of the unemployed, of whole neighbourhoods, of workers occupying factories, of community media and art, might just seem like something that people in the rich world just don't do.

You certainly get this feeling from Marina Sitrin's introduction to *Horizontalism*.

The author makes sure to inform us that all of these developments are infinitely far removed from our own experiences outside Argentina, even if they find analogies in other far off places. We are told that the language – horizontalidad, autonomía, autogestión – can't be readily translated, we have no proper notion of these concepts in English. The practice of this new popular power is portrayed as being totally new and completely alien to our experience.

In a way it's understandable, the book is an oral history and most of the subjects join the author in stating that their new social movement is a complete novelty to them, a rupture with previous ways of living.

Yet what strikes you from the outset of the interviews is actually just how familiar much of their world view is to us. The events of the nineteenth and twentieth read like the possibility of a different world for all of us, not just those on the impoverished periphery of global society.

The interviewees describe a political system that excludes the people, a meaningless hollow democracy, in which representatives are completely unaccountable. Business is conducted through punteros, political power brokers with access to the limited resources given by power to the poor.

The unemployed, the working class, the middle class, all complain of a society plagued with dead ends, where their voices are never heard; by the government, central or local, by businesses, or by trade union bureaucrats. It was this they came to break during the uprising, a culture of representation that stifled and repressed the people as a whole.

Time and again workers, indigenous peasants, unemployed, dispossessed middle class people, talk of the feelings of discovery and empowerment that come from discovering the solidarity of those around you.

People describe how they found large demonstrations by hearing the banging of pots and pans (the uprising was a

world.

When this happens people don't tend to reach for forms that recreate the old dominant societies, they experiment and create new ways of living that embrace ideas like horizontalism, direct democracy and autonomy.

The tragedy is that every revolution has this tale of grasping for something different, only to have it bought off, repressed or degenerate into something else.

The assemblies in Argentina have set up spaces where a different kind of world, a non-capitalist one, can grow. The re-cuperated factories and workplaces, reclaimed by redundant workers and temporarily under their custody, experiment with workers' control of production, a form of economic life without bosses.

They use their resources to provide their workers and the community with healthcare, to treat with dignity the compañeros and compañeras whom they live and work with, regardless of their economic capacity.

They practice ways of organising that authoritarian societies have long told us are impossible, impractical and utopian, yet make more sense than a system that throws productive people and factories in the dustbin.

The unemployed assemblies, the famous piqueteros, which predated the uprising by some time, give a sense of purpose and direction where previously there could only be despair.

They initiate economic activity where capitalism can provide none, occupying buildings to provide childcare and family services, to make communal kitchens to efficiently feed whole communities, to create spaces that can be used for arts and education.

Not only do they create in the margins, from the dust and debris of capitalist society, but they confront that society, by claiming their rights through direct action.

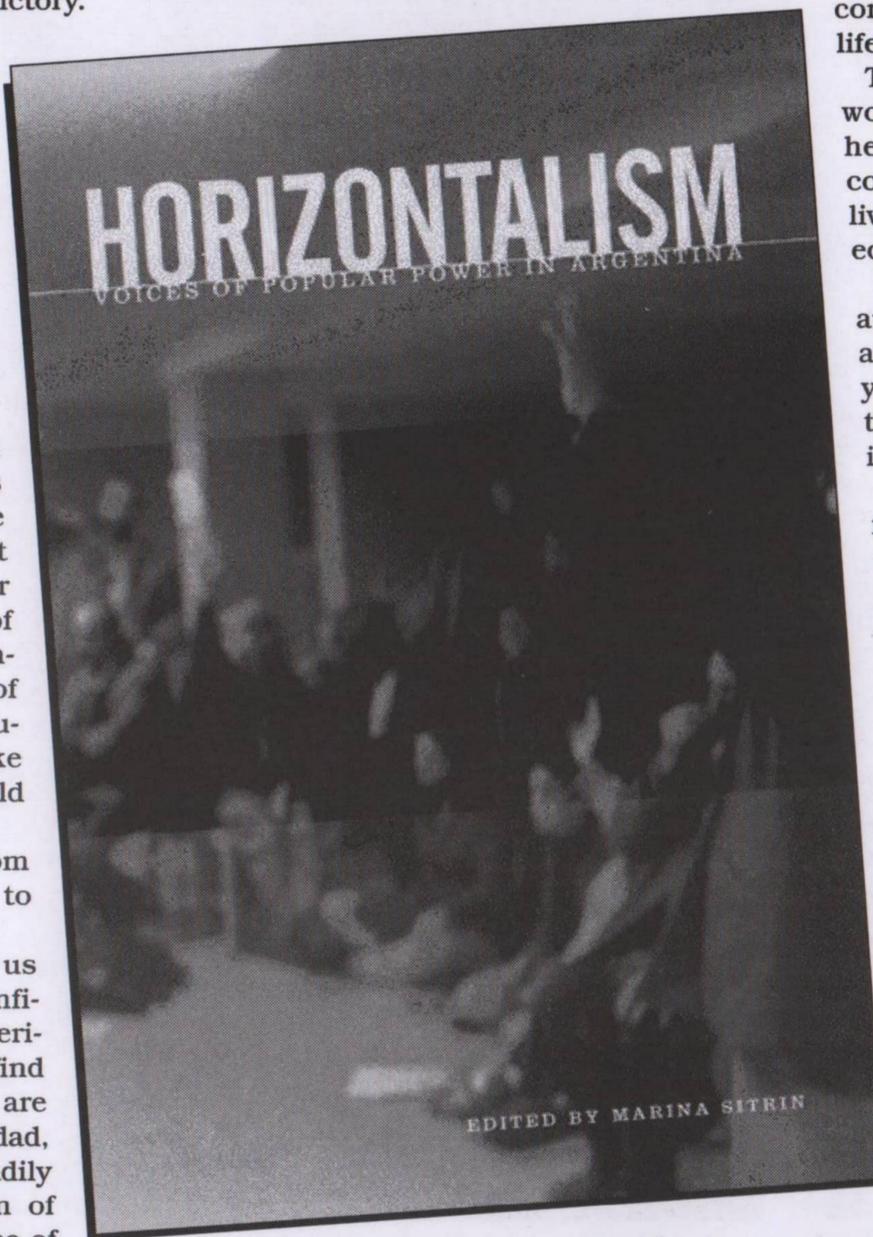
The damning indictment of the society they are trying to escape comes with the repression. Not simply the horrific tales of their activists tortured and killed, but also

the petty harassment.

Most people would recognise that taking over an empty factory and making it work for its employees and those around them is unambiguously a good thing, likewise re-opening healthcare clinics, or creating spaces for the community in abandoned buildings.

The state inevitably crashes into all of this, quietly evicting occupied nurseries, and allowing people's livelihoods to be smashed because of the demands of private property. The sheer irrationality of it, shutting down a factory twice, just so the workers can't make a living outside of your own twisted logic.

As the people interviewed in *Horizontalism* would tell you, the thing to do is keep grasping for a different kind of society, to keep dreaming and creating, rather than accept repression as the end of struggle.



cacerolazo, a type of protest involving everyone making as much noise as possible from their stew pots), then walked outside to discover their neighbours doing the same. Some describe this as meeting them for the first time. It was then that notices started to appear, "assembly, wednesday 8pm", written anonymously on the street, calling the neighbourhood assemblies into existence.

I've heard this same joyous discovery described by countless groups across the world who suddenly discovered this capacity to make their own world, to no longer just accept what power does to them.

What I find heartening about the values of the various assemblies is actually how universal they are to the human experience. When authoritarian relationships break down, as they did when many Argentinians felt the need to chant "they all must go", people start from scratch making new ones, actively participating in the design of a new

By Jack Ray

# Review: Stripping Marxism of its Bolshevik currents

**Anti-Bolshevik Communism by Paul Mattick**

Edition: 231pp. paperback

ISBN: 978 0 85036 223 7

Publisher: Merlin Press

Price: £14.95

IT is always a thrill to see a favourite book back in print, and especially having the opportunity to write a review.

Anti-Bolshevik Communism is a collection of essays written by council communist Paul Mattick (1904- 1981). The essays were originally written between 1935 and 1967, and were first published in various council and left-communist journals.

In 1978 Merlin Press published these selected essays from the vast array of studies made by Mattick on economics, council communism, workers control and class struggle, as Anti-Bolshevik Communism. The book was reprinted, again by Merlin, in 2007. What first catches the eye with this edition is the powerful and hard-hitting title, boldly emblazoned in red against a black cover. An enticing blurb tempts the reader thus:

"Communism aims at putting working people in charge of their lives. A multiplicity of councils rather than a big state bureaucracy is needed to empower working people and to focus control over society..."

"Mattick develops a theory of council communism through his survey of the history of the left in Germany and Russia. He challenges Bolshevik politics: especially their perspectives on questions of party and class, and the role of trade unions".

How can one resist such allure?

This edition carries no new introduction or foreword, relying on Mattick's original 1978 introduction. In the introduction Mattick remains consistent with his revolutionary socialist, anti-Leninist theme – a theme he tirelessly advocated for over sixty years.

Mattick writes of the dangers of Leninism, national-revolutionary movements and the inevitability of state capitalism, and its decremental and counter-revolutionary effect upon class-struggle and revolutionary independent working class organisation.

In the introduction Mattick writes: "The preoccupation with national-revolutionary movements that still characterises left-wing radicalism has led, on an international scale, to a re-dedication to Leninist principles in either a Russian or Chinese garb and dissipates the energies thereby released into meaningless and often grotesque activities.

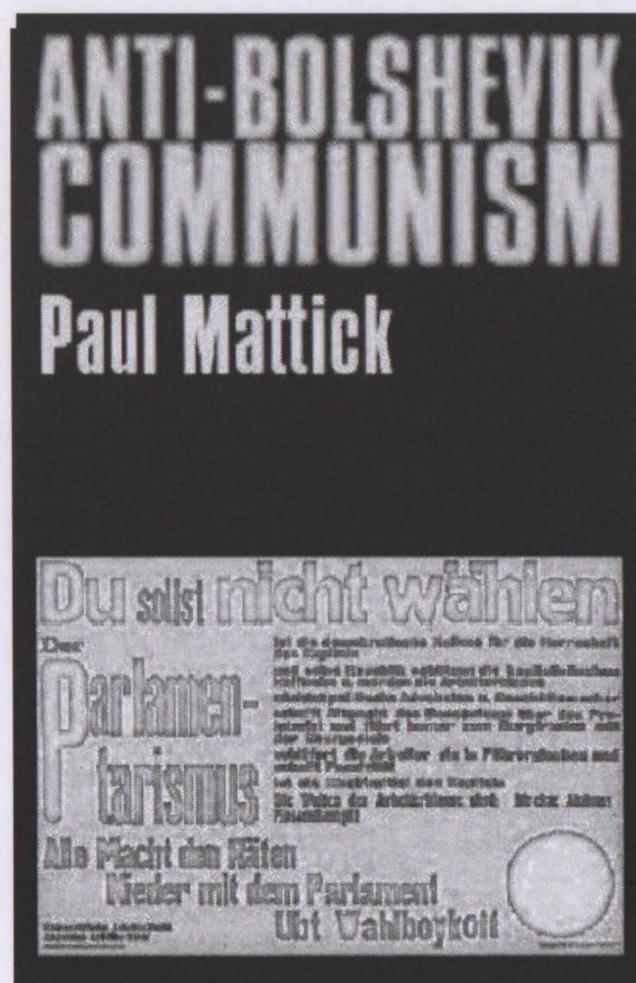
By trying to actualise the Leninist ideas of revolution and its organisation in capitalistically-advanced nations, would-be radicals necessarily hinder the development of a revolutionary consciousness adequate to the tasks of the socialist revolution.

Because new revolutionary socialist movements may arise in response to capitalism's increasing social and economic difficulties, it is essential to pay renewed attention to the

aspirations and accomplishments of former similar movements and here, in particular, to Bolshevism and its Leninist creed."

"By itself, the workers' self-initiative and self organisation offers no guarantee for their emancipation. It has to be realised and maintained through the abolition of the capital-labour relationship in production through a council system, which destroys the social class divisions and prevents the rise of new ones based on the control of production and distribution by the national state.

"However difficult this may prove to be, the history of the existing state-capitalist systems leaves no doubt that this is the only



way to a socialist society.

"This had already been recognised by small minorities in the radical movement prior to, during, and after the Russian Revolution and was brought into the open within the communist movement as an opposition to Bolshevism and the theory and practice of the Third International.

"It is this movement and the ideas it brought forth, which this volume recalls, not, however, to describe a particular part and phase of labour history, but as a warning, which may also serve as a guide for future actions."

"The revolutions which succeeded, first of all, in Russia and China, were not proletarian revolutions in the Marxist sense, leading to the 'association of free and equal producers', but state-capitalist revolutions, which were objectively unable to issue into socialism. Marxism served here as a mere ideology to justify the rise of modified capitalist systems,

which were no longer determined by market competition but controlled by way of the authoritarian state.

"Based on the peasantry, but designed with accelerated industrialisation to create an industrial proletariat, they were ready to abolish the traditional bourgeoisie but not capital as a social relationship.

"This type of capitalism had not been foreseen by Marx and the early Marxists, even though they advocated the capture of state-power to overthrow the bourgeoisie – but only in order to abolish the state itself."

Furthermore, Mattick goes on to say that 'Marxism-Leninism' presents itself as a "purely reformist movement, which, like the Social Democracy of old, prefers the democratic processes of social change to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

In some countries, France and Italy, for instance, relatively strong communist parties offer their services to capitalism to help it overcome its crisis conditions. But should everything fail, and an intensified class struggle pose the question of social revolution, there can be no doubt that these parties will opt for state-capitalism, which in their views, is the only possible form of socialism.

Thus, the revolution would be at once a counter-revolution. The end of capitalism demands first of all the end of Bolshevik ideology and the rise of an anti-Bolshevik revolutionary movement as has been attempted at the earlier revolutionary situation to which this book tries to draw attention."

The essays in Anti-Bolshevik Communism cover the following themes: Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler (1939); Luxemburg versus Lenin (1935); The Lenin Legend (1935); Bolshevism and Stalinism (1947); Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement (1945); Karl Korsch: His Contribution to Revolutionary Marxism (1962); Humanism and Socialism (1962); Marxism and the New Physics (1960); Monopoly Capital (1966); Council Communism (1939), Spontaneity and Organisation (1949) and Workers Control (1967).

All the essays are well-written, informative and surprisingly refreshing given the ever-shifting political landscape and changing scenarios. The essays on Council Communism, Spontaneity and Organisation and Workers Control piqued my interest in particular and offered invaluable insights from an organisational perspective.

In Council Communism Mattick writes that council communists recognise: "No real social change is possible under present conditions unless the anti-capitalistic forces grow stronger than the pro-capitalist forces, and that it is impossible to organise anti-capitalistic forces of such a strength within capitalistic relations. From the analysis of present-day society and from a study of previous class struggles it concludes that spontaneous actions of dissatisfied masses will, in the process of their rebellion, create

their own organisations, and that these organisations, arising out of the social conditions, alone can end the present social arrangement."

That council communists further realise that socialism "can function only with the direct participation of the workers in all decisions necessary; its concept of socialism is unrealisable on the basis of a separation between workers and organisers.

"The groups do not claim to be acting for the workers, but consider themselves as those members of the working class who have, for one reason or another, recognised evolutionary trends towards capitalism's downfall, and who attempt to co-ordinate the present activities of the workers to that end. They know that they are no more than propaganda groups, able only to suggest necessary courses of action, but unable to perform them in the 'interest of the class'. This the class has to do itself."

In *Spontaneity and Organisation* Mattick explores the differing interpretations of revolutionary consciousness and class struggle advocated by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as that of Georges Sorel and the syndicalists. Mattick concludes that: "The search for ways and means to end totalitarian capitalism, to bring self-determination to the hitherto powerless, to end competitive struggles, exploitation and wars, to develop a rationality which does not set individuals against society but recognises their actual entity in social production and distribution and allows for human progress without social struggles, will go on in the empirical, scientific manner dictated by seriousness.

"It seems clear, however, that for some time to come the results of all types of resistance and struggle will be described as spontaneous occurrences, though they are nothing but the planned actions or accepted inactivities of men.

"Spontaneity is a manner of speech, attesting to our inability to treat the social phenomena of capitalism in a scientific, empirical way. Social changes appear as climatic outbursts of periods of capital formation, disorganisation, competitive frictions and long-accumulated social grievances that finally find their organisational expression.

"Their spontaneity merely demonstrates the unsociality of capitalism's social organisation. The contrast between organisation and spontaneity will exist as long as there exists a class society and attempts to end it."

In *Workers Control* Mattick adds: "While there cannot be socialism without workers' control, neither can there be real workers' control without socialism. To assert that the gradual increase of workers' control in capitalism is an actual possibility merely plays into the hands of the widespread demagoguery of the ruling classes to hide their absolute class-rule by false social reforms dressed in terms such as co-management, participation or co-determination.

"Workers control excludes class-collaboration; it cannot partake in but instead abolishes the system of capital production. Neither socialism nor workers' control has anywhere become a reality. State-capitalism and market socialism, or a combination of both, still find the working class in the position of wage workers without effective control over their production and its distribution.

"Their social position does not differ from that of workers in mixed or unmixed capitalist economy. Everywhere, the struggle for

## Factfile: Paul Mattick (1904-1981)

**"While there cannot be socialism without workers' control, neither can there be real workers' control without socialism"**

■ Born 1904 in Pomerania, Germany and raised in Berlin by class-conscious parents.

■ Member of the Spartacists' Freie Sozialistische Jugend aged 14.

■ Trained as a toolmaker . Apprentices' delegate at Siemens plant Workers Council during German Revolution in 1918. Arrested many times.

■ Joined KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands) in 1920.

■ Forged links with the AAU (Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union) and the AAUD (Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands). Contact made with Jan Appel and Otto Ruhle.

■ Emigrated to USA in 1926 - maintaining links with KAPD and AAU in Germany.

■ Attempted to unite German workers' groups in US. Including reviving Chicagoer Arbeiterzeitung - once edited by August Spies.

■ Member of the IWW for a while. Then formed own council communist group and founded the journal International Council

Correspondence in 1934. Forged links with Dutch and German council communists and the APCF (Anti-

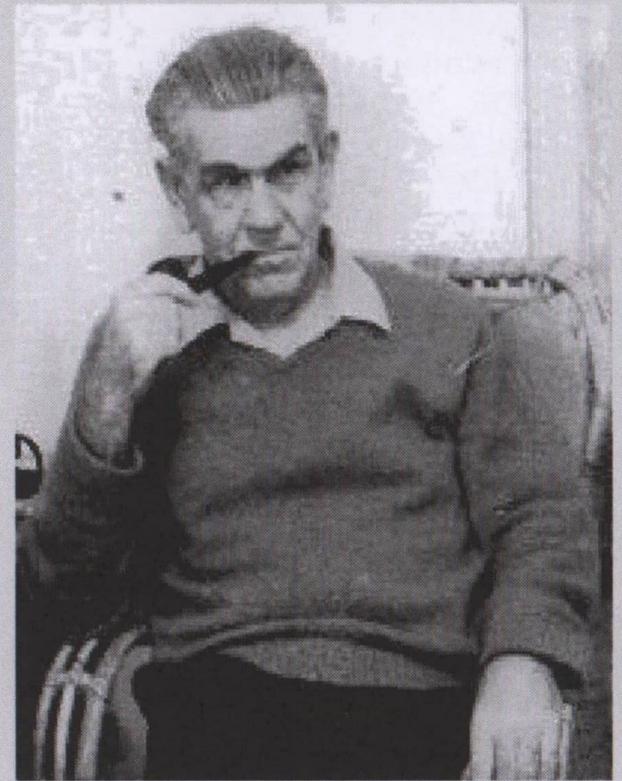
working class emancipation has still to begin and will not end short of socialisation of production and the abolition of classes through the elimination of wage labour".

Readers of *Black Flag* may ask what a book on Anti-Bolshevik Communism by a council communist has got to offer.

I would say a lot. Traditionally the adherents of council communism are Marxists, albeit libertarian Marxist. Historically these not always the most comfortable of travelling companions for large sections of the mainstream anarchist movement.

However, in times of revolutionary struggle they have worked in tandem. They share a lot of common ground: The recognition and rejection of the reformist nature of the Trade Union movement as it is seen as an integral part of the capitalist system; the rejection of self-styled leaders, reformist political parties and parliamentarism as vehicles for working class emancipation.

Their support for unrelenting revolutionary class struggle; independent working class organisation; the realisation of workers councils and the abolition of the wages



COUNCIL-COMMUNIST: Paul Mattick

Parliamentary Communist Federation) in Britain.

■ Workplace militant, writer and lecturer. Books include, *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of a Mixed Economy*; *Critique of Herbert Marcuse - The One Dimensional Man in Class Society*; *Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation*. Last manuscript, *Marxism - Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie*, posthumously edited and published by his son, Paul Mattick jnr.

■ Conducted International lecture tours well into his seventies on Marx's critique of political economy and the history of the workers movement

system. I feel the anarchist movement would be ill-advised to ignore the historical legacy, revolutionary perspective and theoretical analysis expounded by the council communist movement.

Similarly, the threat of the state-communist Leninist left, as outlined by Mattick, should never be underestimated. (Anarchist history is peppered with pertinent reminders of their capabilities and uncompromising fascistic tendencies).

Furthermore, although Mattick wrote in the 'heyday' of the Soviet Empire, which has now all but disappeared, his observations on so-called socialist, national-revolutionary movements and the development and inevitability of state-capitalism, still hold relevance today.

When I first read this book in 1979 I found it enthralling. I wasted no time in recommending it to fellow workers and comrades alike. Now, almost 30 years on I still do. I believe *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* is essential reading.

By Ade Dimmick

# Review: Churchill's crusade

Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918 - 1920

By Clifford Kinvig

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IN this somewhat hefty tome, military historian, Major General Clifford Kinvig, retired, documents a detailed account of the 1918, British and 'Allied' invasion of the fledgling Soviet State.

It is not a book about the revolution or about workers struggle. It is a book about a disastrous military campaign initiated by the British Government.

In 1918 British troops invaded the Soviet Union on three fronts, Murmansk, Archangel and Vladivostok, in an attempt to crush the revolution. Although Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War and Air, was not the initial architect of the invasion, he very quickly became its chief advocate and its driving force.

Churchill's hatred of socialism, any kind of workers' organisation, and his contempt for the working class is well known. In November 1918 he said, "Russia is being reduced by the Bolsheviks to an animal form of barbarism.... civilisation is being extinguished over gigantic areas, while Bolsheviks hop and caper like troops of ferocious baboons amid the ruins of their cities and the corpses of their victims."

Alongside the British, an estimated 300,000 foreign troops took part in the invasion, giving support to the poorly disciplined and militarily inept White armies, which were scattered across the vast expanses of what was Imperial Russia. Locally recruited 'Whites' were also kitted out in British uniforms.

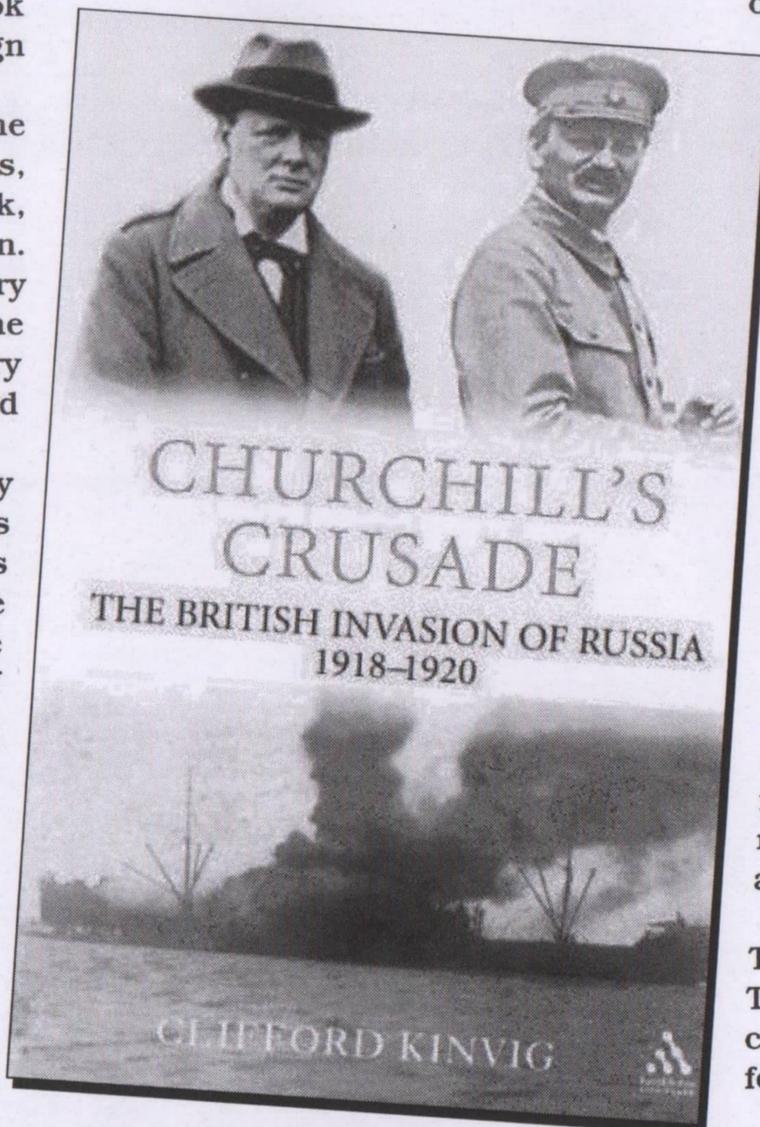
From a military point of view the campaign was a disaster. As the White armies collapsed to the unrelenting onslaught of the Red Army, the British and their allies could no longer sustain (or justify) their presence and started tactical withdrawal. The last British troops withdrew from the Crimea, along with Tsarist General Wrangel and 150,000 of his troops and dependents, on June 29, 1920.

Pressure on the home front for withdrawal was great. The Daily Herald and Manchester Guardian tirelessly led the press campaign. The intervention was also largely unpopular with the general population, still reeling from the effects of WW1, and seriously ques-

tioning the motives behind an undeclared war.

Furthermore, the troops themselves were far from happy at the situation. Lloyd George said in 1919, "the army was in a state of general incipient mutiny..." Mutinies and soldiers strikes broke out up and down the country, as well as overseas.

Kinvig documents a catalogue of significant mutinies and Strikes. The Daily Herald reported the prevailing mood, "The war is over, we won't fight in Russia, we mean to go home".



The commanding officer reported, "The atmosphere was distinctly revolutionary in January and February 1919 and the troops under arms were in no mood to be trifled with"; 4,000 soldiers at the Park Royal barracks in West London set up a Soldiers Council and marched on Downing Street with a 10 point list of demands, including "No drafts to Russia".

Soldiers and air men refused to go on parade; mine sweeper crews on the Mersey refused to put out to sea; 159 soldiers from the Army Service Corps drove in a convoy of lorries to Whitehall to petition the Government.

However, not all mutinies took part in the UK, or on British bases in Western Europe. One of the most powerful was that of 6RMLI, the Royal Marine Light Infantry, in Murmansk.

After days of heavy combat, the Marines refused to continue fighting. Their officers sided with the men. In the resulting Court Martial, 2 officers and 94 men of other ranks were charged with 'disobeying so as to show wilful defiance'; both officers and 84 men were found guilty.

One NCO and 12 Marines were sentenced to death, the others were given up to 10 years imprisonment or hard labour.

Predictably, one Officer was discharged from the Service and the other given a 'severe' reprimand!

Following public, press and even governmental outrage, the death sentences were commuted and the prison sentences reduced.

In his book, Alarms and Excursions, General Tom Bridges wrote: "From time immemorial the classic penalty for mixing in a family quarrel had been a thick ear, and our ill-staged interference in the Russian Civil War cost us some thousands of British soldiers' lives and £100,000,000 in money, while we earned the bitter enmity of the Russian people for at least a decade... On the credit side I can think of nothing".

Kinvig adds, "As to casualties, there are 526 burials recorded in the British military cemeteries in north Russia; many hundreds more were wounded in action or maimed by frostbite.

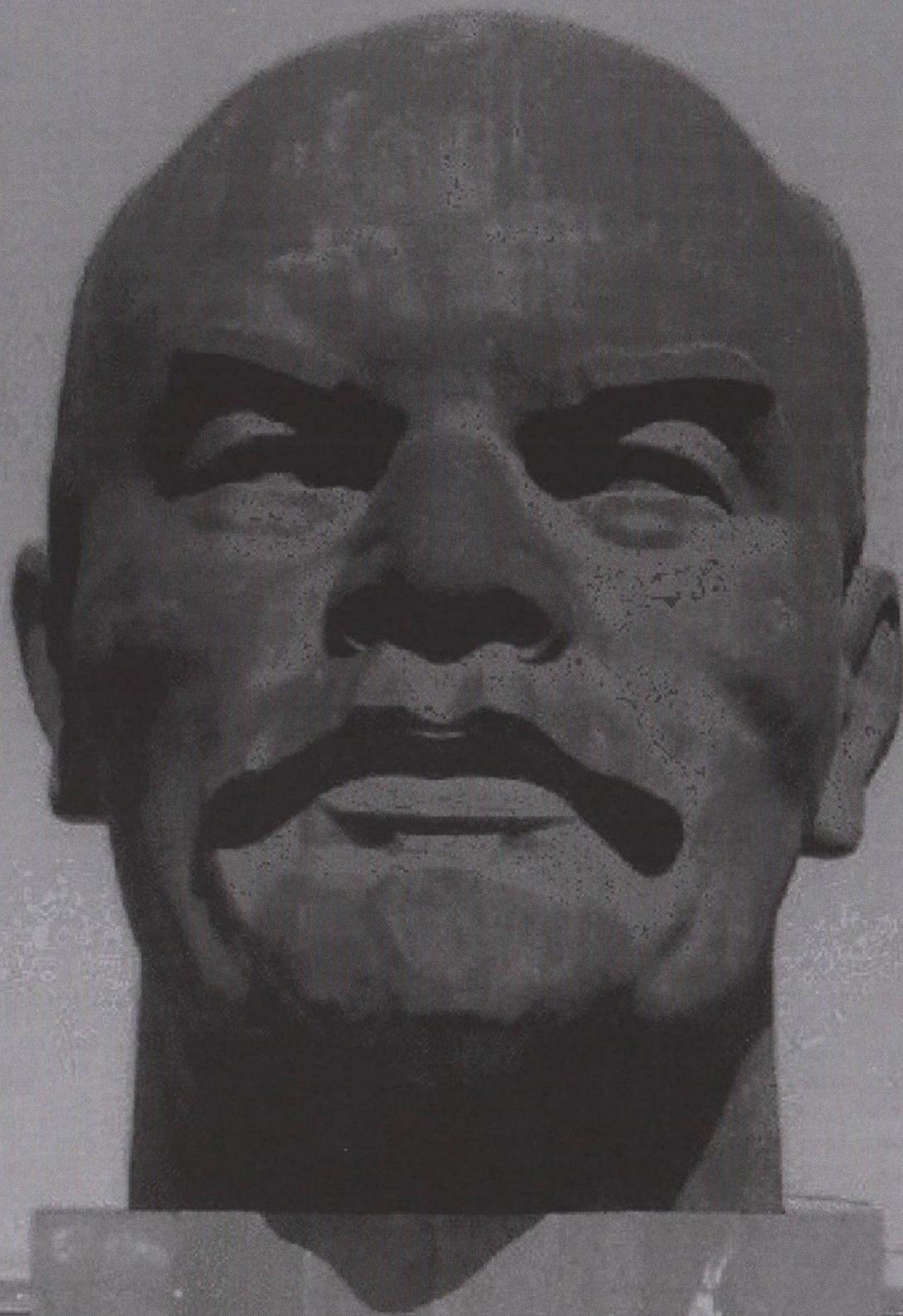
"There were also those killed in the Transcaspien campaign against the Tashkent Bolsheviks, though land casualties elsewhere were relatively few.

"To be added are, as we have seen, the Royal Navy's losses in the Baltic and there were others elsewhere. Finally, no account was taken of the men who died from influenza and typhus contracted in the confines of ships, trains and crowded stations. (The Navy lost 17 vessels with the loss of 128 lives).

Military history may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I found Churchill's Crusade a fascinating read and from a historical perspective of great interest. It highlights another shameful, and largely played down, episode in the history British military interventions.

The question also has to be asked, to what extent did the mutinies and strikes limit the invasion, and to what extent did they contribute to the success of the Russian revolution?

By Ade Dimmick



**CULT OF PERSONALITY:** The largest bust in the world, of Lenin, in Ulan-Ude

# How revolution lost its way (part 2)

**Analysis:** War did not excuse the Bolsheviks

**T**HE Bolshevik tradition has found a use for war, namely as justification for the degeneration of Bolshevik policies.

Harman argues that "the tasks at hand in Russia were determined, not by the Bolshevik leaders, but by the international imperialist powers.

"These had begun a 'crusade' against the Soviet Republic. White and foreign armies had to be driven back before any other questions could be considered."

It is easy to refute this claim by noting that fundamental decisions on important "questions" had already been formulated before this "crusade" took place.

As well as the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the Bolsheviks had already presented economic visions.

Lenin, in April 1918, was arguing for one-man management and "[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the



dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."<sup>(1)</sup>

The first group of workers subjected to this policy were the railway workers.

As such, "the tasks at hand" were determined by the Bolshevik leaders, who had answered numerous "questions" before the White and foreign armies appeared (which, according to Lenin, was inevitable anyway).

This makes Harman's comment that after 1921 "the 'red industrialists' began to emerge as a privileged group, with high salaries, and through 'one-man management' in the factories, able to hire and fire at will" seem inadequate.

If, as Harman implies, this was a key factor in the rise of Stalinism and state-

preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism" and so socialism "is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly."<sup>(3)</sup>

It is "merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly."

A few months later, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken over and used to create socialism.

Unsurprisingly, when defending the need for state capitalism in the spring of 1918 against the "Left Communists," Lenin stressed that he gave his "'high' appreciation of state capitalism" "before the Bolsheviks seized power."<sup>(4)</sup>

And, as Lenin noted, his praise for state capitalism can be found in his *State and*

The Bolsheviks, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of unified administration based on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war (and, moreover, systematically stopped the factory committee organising together).<sup>(6)</sup>

This was very centralised and very inefficient: "it seems apparent that many workers themselves... had now come to believe... that confusion and anarchy [sic] at the top were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification.

"The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic... Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists.

"The Supreme Economic Council... issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."<sup>(7)</sup>

Faced with the chaos that their own politics, in part, had created, the Bolsheviks blamed the workers for the failings of their own policies and turned to one-management in April, 1918.

This was applied first on the railway workers.

The abolishing the workers' committees, however, resulted in "a terrifying proliferation of competitive and contradictory Bolshevik authorities, each with a claim of life or death importance... Railroad journals argued plaintively about the correlation between failing labour productivity and the proliferation of competing Bolshevik authorities."

Rather than improving things, Lenin's one-man management did the opposite, "leading in many places... to a greater degree of confusion and indecision" and "this problem of contradictory authorities clearly intensified, rather than lessened."

Indeed, the "result of replacing workers' committees with one man rule... on the railways... was not directiveness, but distance, and increasing inability to make decisions appropriate to local conditions. Despite coercion, orders on the railroads were often ignored as unworkable."

It got so bad that "a number of local Bolshevik officials... began in the fall of 1918 to call for the restoration of workers' control, not for ideological reasons, but because workers themselves knew best how to run the line efficiently, and might obey their own central committee's directives if they were not being constantly countermanded."<sup>(8)</sup>

That it was Bolshevik policies and not workers' control which was to blame for the state of the railways can be seen from what happened after Lenin's one-man management was imposed.

The same terrible results reappeared as Bolshevik policy was imposed in other industries. The centralised Bolshevik economic system quickly demonstrated how to really mismanage an economy.

The Bolshevik onslaught against workers' control in favour of a centralised, top-down economic regime ensured that the economy was handicapped by an unresponsive system which wasted the local knowledge at the grassroots in favour



**STARVATION:** Efficient production proved difficult to restart under the Bolsheviks

capitalism, then, clearly, Lenin's input in these developments cannot be ignored.

After advocating "one-man management" and "state capitalism" in early 1918, he remained a firm supporter of them. In early 1920 "the Communist Party leadership was no longer distracted by the Civil War from concentrating its thoughts and efforts on the formulation and implementation of its labour policies...

"The apogee of the War Communism economy occurred after the Civil War was effectively over." Indeed, one-man management only became commonplace in 1920.<sup>(2)</sup>

Clearly, you cannot blame an event (the civil war) for policies advocated and implemented before it took place.

Indeed, the policies pursued before, during and after the Civil War were identical, suggesting that Bolshevik policy was determined independently of any "crusade."

#### Socialism as State Capitalism

Then there is the Bolshevik vision of socialism. The Bolsheviks saw the socialist economy as being built upon the centralised organisations created by capitalism.

They confused state capitalism with socialism. "State capitalism," Lenin wrote in May 1917, "is a complete material

Revolution.

Given this perspective, it is natural that workers' control would not given a high priority once the Bolsheviks seized power.

While in order to gain support the Bolsheviks had paid lip-service to the idea of workers' control, the party had always given that slogan a radically different interpretation than the factory committees had.

While the factory committees had seen workers' control as being exercised directly by the workers and their class organisations, the Bolshevik leadership saw it in terms of state control in which the factory committees would play, at best, a minor role.

It is unsurprising to discover which vision of socialism was actually introduced: "On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being.

At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial and control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."<sup>(5)</sup>

Given his vision of socialism, Lenin's rejection of the factory committees and their vision of socialism comes as no surprise.

of orders from above which were issued in ignorance of local conditions.

This led to unused stock coexisting with acute scarcity and the centre unable to determine the correct proportions required at the base. Unfinished products were transferred to other regions while local factories were shut down, wasting both time and resources (and given the state of the transport network, this was doubly inefficient).

The inefficiency of central financing seriously jeopardised local activity and the centre had displayed a great deal of conservatism and routine thinking.

In spite of the complaints from below, the Communist leadership continued on its policy of centralisation (in fact, the ideology of centralisation was reinforced).<sup>(9)</sup>

A clearer example of the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution would be hard to find.

Simply put, while the situation was pretty chaotic in early 1918, this does not prove that the factory committee's socialism was not the most efficient way of running things under the (difficult) circumstances.

After all, rates of "output and productivity began to climb steadily after" January 1918 and "[i]n some factories, production doubled or tripled in the early months of 1918... Many of the reports explicitly credited the factory committees for these increases."<sup>(10)</sup>

Lenin never wavered in his support for one-man management nor in his belief in the efficiency of centralism to solve all problems, particularly the problems it itself created in abundance.

Nor did his explicit call to reproduce capitalist social relations in production cause him any concern for, in Lenin's eyes, if the primary issue was property and not who manages the means of production, then factory committees are irrelevant in determining the socialist nature of the economy.

Post-October Bolshevik policy is a striking confirmation of the anarchist argument that a centralised structure would stifle the initiative of the masses and their own organs of self-management.

Not only was it disastrous from a revolutionary perspective, it was hopelessly inefficient. The constructive self-activity of the people was replaced by the bureaucratic machinery of the state.

The Bolshevik onslaught on workers' control, like their attacks on soviet democracy and workers' protest, undoubtedly engendered apathy and cynicism in the workforce, alienating even more the positive participation required for building socialism which the Bolshevik mania for centralism had already marginalised.

The pre-revolution Bolshevik vision of a socialist system was fundamentally centralised and, consequently, top-down.

This was what was implemented post-October, with disastrous results. At each turning point, the Bolsheviks implemented policies which reflected their prejudices in favour of centralism, nationalisation and party power.

This also undermined the genuine socialist tendencies which existed at the time.

Therefore, the Leninist idea that the

politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing.

### The Opposition

As Harman recounts, the Bolsheviks suppressed the opposition (in the case of the anarchists, before the start of the civil war although he does not mention this).

As regards the Mensheviks, he argues that "their policy was one of support of the Bolsheviks against the counter-revolution, with the demand that the latter hand over power to the Constituent Assembly."

In practice this meant that the party contained both supporters and opponents of the Soviet power.



**MASSACRE:** The first Assault on Kronstadt, caught on film, was a disaster for the Red Army

"Many of its members went over to the side of the Whites (e.g. Menshevik organisations in the Volga area were sympathetic to the counter-revolutionary Samara government, and one member of the Menshevik central committee... joined it)."

He quotes from Israel Getzler's book Martov (page 183) as evidence. What he fails to mention is that these people were "expelled from the party" (and the Central Committee member went "without its knowledge" to Samara).

The Volga Mensheviks were "sharply reproved by Martov and the Menshevik Central Committee and instructed that neither party organisations nor members could take part in... such adventures."

These quotes, it should be stressed, are on the same page as the one Harman references! Moreover, in October 1918, "the party dropped, temporarily at least, its demand for a Constituent Assembly."<sup>(11)</sup>

It would be harder to justify the suppression of the Mensheviks if these facts were mentioned. Little wonder he distorts the source material for his own ends.

The official Menshevik position was one of legal opposition to the Bolsheviks as "any armed struggle against the Bolshevik state power... can be of benefit only to counter-revolution" and any member who ignored this was expelled.<sup>(12)</sup>

They developed a policy of "legal opposition party" which was, as noted above, successful in period running up to June 1918.

Harman argues that "the response of the Bolsheviks was to allow the party's members their freedom (at least, most of the time), but to prevent them acting as an effective political force."

In other words, even those who legally opposed the Bolsheviks were crushed. Little wonder working class collective power in the soviets evaporated.

Harman produces an impressive piece of doublethink to justify all this. He argues that "in all this the Bolsheviks had no choice."

"They could not give up power just because the class they represented had dissolved itself while fighting to defend that

power.

"Nor could they tolerate the propagation of ideas that undermined the basis of its power - precisely because the working class itself no longer existed as an agency collectively organised so as to be able to determine its own interests."

If the working class did not exist, nor could express itself collectively, then why would Menshevik propaganda be harmful? And Harman does not mention the fact that the Bolsheviks generally blamed strikes and other forms of workers protest on opposition parties.

Nor does he mention that the Bolsheviks refused to "give up power" before the start of the Civil War when they lost soviet elections. Opposition ideas had to be suppressed because the workers were capable of collectively determining its own interests and taking collective action to realise them. The general strike in Petrograd which inspired the Kronstadt revolt is proof enough of that.

### Kronstadt

Turning to that revolt, Harman argues that "Kronstadt in 1920 was not Kronstadt of 1917."

The class composition of its sailors had changed. The best



socialist elements had long ago gone off to fight in the army in the front line.

They were replaced in the main by peasants whose devotion to the revolution was that of their class." This popular assertion of Leninists has been refuted.

Israel Getzler has demonstrated that of those serving in the Baltic fleet on 1st January 1921 at least 75.5% were drafted before 1918 and so the "veteran politicised Red sailor still predominated in Kronstadt at the end of 1920."

Further, he investigated the crews of the two major battleships which were the focus of the rising (and renown for their revolutionary zeal in 1917).

His findings are conclusive, showing that

raise either of those demands. As Paul Avrich notes, "'Soviets without Communists' was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan."<sup>(14)</sup>

As for agriculture, Kronstadt demanded "the granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil, and of the right to own cattle, provided they look after them themselves and do not employ hired labour."<sup>(15)</sup>

This was point 11 of 15, indicating its importance in their eyes.

Ironically, most workers' strikes during the civil war period raised the demand for free trade (including the general strike in Petrograd which the Kronstadt sailors

### The German Revolution

Harman quotes Lenin from 7th March 1918: "The absolute truth is that without a revolution in Germany we shall perish." The idea that "isolation" was the root of Russia's problems is commonplace.

However, on closer inspection the idea that a German revolution would have saved the Russian one is flawed.

As, according to Harman, "direct workers' power had not existed since 1918," we need to compare Germany in the period 1918-19 to Russia in 1917-18. Simply put, Germany was in as bad a state as Russia.

In the year the revolution started, production had fallen by 23% in Russia (from 1913 to 1917) and by 43% in Germany (from 1913 to 1918).

Once revolution had effectively started, production fell even more. In Russia, it fell to 65% of its pre-war level in 1918, in Germany it fell to 62% of its pre-war level in 1919.

Thus, in 1919, the "industrial production reached an all-time low" and it "took until the late 1920s for [food] production to recover its 1912 level...

In 1921 grain production was still... some 30 per cent below the 1912 figure." Of course, in Germany revolution did not go as far as in Russia, and so production did rise somewhat in 1920 and afterwards.

What is significant is that in 1923, production fell dramatically by 34% (from around 70% of its pre-war level to around 45% of that level).

This economic collapse did not deter the Communists from trying to provoke a revolution in Germany that year, so it seems strange that while economic collapse under capitalism equates to a revolutionary situation, a similar collapse under the Bolsheviks equates to a situation where revolution is undermined.<sup>(17)</sup>

Thus, if a combination of civil war and economic disruption caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, then why would a similarly afflicted Germany help Russia?

Equally, Russia and Germany both prove Kropotkin's argument that a revolution means "the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops," the "complete disorganisation" of capitalism and that "exchange and industry suffer most from the general upheaval."

Ultimately, it seems strange that Harman blames the side effects of every revolution for the failure of the Russian one.<sup>(18)</sup>

By Iain McKay



**BETTER PREPARED:** The second assault, despite huge heroism from the sailors, was successful with the Bolsheviks using white camouflage clothing and many more troops.

of the 2,028 sailors where years of enlistment are known,

93.9% were recruited into the navy before and during the 1917 revolution (the largest group, 1,195, joined in the years 1914-16).

Only 6.8% of the sailors were recruited in the years 1918-21 (including three who were conscripted in 1921) and they were the only ones who had not been there during the 1917 revolution.<sup>(12)</sup>

Harman argues that this change in "class composition" was "reflected in the demands of the uprising: Soviets without Bolsheviks and a free market in agriculture."

However, the Kronstadt rebellion did not

rebel in solidarity with this aim.

In reality, what the Kronstadt rebellion demanded first and foremost was free elections to the soviets, freedom of assembly, organisation speech and press for working people and the end of party dictatorship:

"In effect, the Petropavlovsk resolution was an appeal to the Soviet government to live up to its own constitution, a bold statement of those very rights and freedom which Lenin himself had professed in 1917. In spirit, it was a throwback to October, evoking the old Leninist watchword of 'All power to the soviets.'"<sup>(16)</sup>

Little wonder Harman distorts its demands.

### NOTES:

1. Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, contained in The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), p. 44

2. Aves, p. 17 and p. 30

3. The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it (Martin Lawrence Ltd., undated), p. 38 and p. 37

4. Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 636

5. Thomas F. Remington, Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia: Ideology and Industrial Organisation 1917-1921 (University of Pittsburgh Press, London, 1984), p. 38

6. Brinton, p. 36 and pp. 18-9

7. William G. Rosenberg, Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power, p. 116

8. William G. Rosenberg, "Workers' Control on the Railroads and Some Suggestions Concerning Social Aspects of Labour Politics in the Russian Revolution", pp. D1181-D1219, The Journal of Modern History, vol. 49, no. 2, p. D1208, p. D1207, p. D1213 and pp. D1208-9

9. Silvana Malle, The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918-1921 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 232-3 and pp. 269-75

10. Carmen Sirianni, Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy (Verso/NLB, London, 1982), p. 109

11. Getzler, p. 185

12. quoted by Getzler, p. 183

13. Getzler, Kronstadt 1917-1921: The Fate of a Soviet

Democracy (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), pp. 207-8

14. Paul Avrich, Kronstadt 1921 (W.W. Norton and Company Inc., New York, 1970), p. 181

15. Unlike Lenin's capitalist NEP, the Kronstadt rebels demanded no market for labour in agriculture and so their vision for agriculture was socialist in nature.

16. Avrich, pp. 75-6

17. Tony Cliff, Lenin: The Revolution Besieged, vol. 3 (Pluto Press, London, 1978); V. R. Berghahn, Modern Germany: society, economy and politics in the twentieth century, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987).

18. Kropotkin, Conquest of Bread (Elephant Editions, Catania, 1985), p. 70



**POVERTY AND DEATH:** Above, children in Russia fared particularly badly during the Russian civil war. Clockwise from below right, Leon Trotsky talks to the sailors of Kronstadt as they defend the Bolsheviks against the Whites (he was later to lead the troops which wiped them out), Bolshevik inspectors talk to peasants as they forcibly requisition food, troops are readied to attack the Kronstadters who had demanded a return to the values of Soviet democracy, and bodies laid out in rows after the Kronstadt uprising was crushed.

*Photographs: Russian archives*

## In colour: The Russian revolution



# The BIG PICTURE: Haymarket Martyrs



“ There will be a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today. — Augustus Spies ”

In this reimagining, Black Flag lends a bit of colour to the faces that stare out at us across the centuries. Left hand side, top to bottom: Adolph Fischer, Albert Parsons, Louis Lingg, George Engel. Right hand side, top to bottom: Augustus Spies, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe and Samuel Fielden. Main photograph: The Haymarket Monument in Chicago