

# FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

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50p

Forget the horsey lobby ...

## The Land is Ours!



'Forbidden Britain Day – ploughed-out path near Ladbroke'

This photograph is taken from the book *Freedom to Roam* by Harold Sculthorpe, published by Freedom Press (80 pages, £3.50)

Since *Freedom* goes to press before the 'invasion' of Hyde Park, London, on 1st March by the 'Countryside Marchers', one is commenting on an event which will, in numbers, be a success but will hardly impress the urban population with what the purpose of this invasion of one of their many open spaces (Hyde Park has over six hundred acres, including the Serpentine, fantastic flower beds, trees and open spaces, not to mention Rotten Row for the horse riders) is all about because in fact this is a mass invasion by the hunting-and-shooting fraternity.

This writer is less concerned with the fate of the foxes or the rabbits, but with the fact that these people are also the owners of our land. Half of the land of this island of ours is owned by just *one per cent*, and not

only do they do with it what they like but they also prevent you and me from walking over their land, even when there are official signposts saying that there is a footpath. Go on it and you will follow the hedge (if it is still there) and sink in the mud because it has been ploughed up.

We were sorry to see that *Tribune* (13th February) accepted a whole-page advertisement for the 'Countryside March' knowing full well that it was organised by the hunting/shooting fraternity, which includes the large landowners who haven't even stuck a fork in the ground in their entire lives, but are only concerned with increasing their property and what is now so noticeable in the cereal prairie (Suffolk and Norfolk) is that much of the land is being farmed by contractors, and hence larger machines and fewer farm

workers. That same issue of *Tribune* published a letter from the TGWU (the farm workers no longer have their own union and those who still belong to a union have to join the Transport & General Workers Union) pointing out that those millionaire hunting and shooting rebels will be invading Hyde Park to defend those of us who still live and work in the countryside (including this writer, who has managed to make a living for two people for thirty years from a modest hectare, or 2.7 acres). Nonsense, they will just be defending the millions of acres that should belong to all of us, as should all the footpaths, all the land, all the seas and oceans belong to all of us and not to the exploiters of not just our labour but also our planet. Surely this is what anarchism is all about.

# anarchist fortnightly

# Freedom

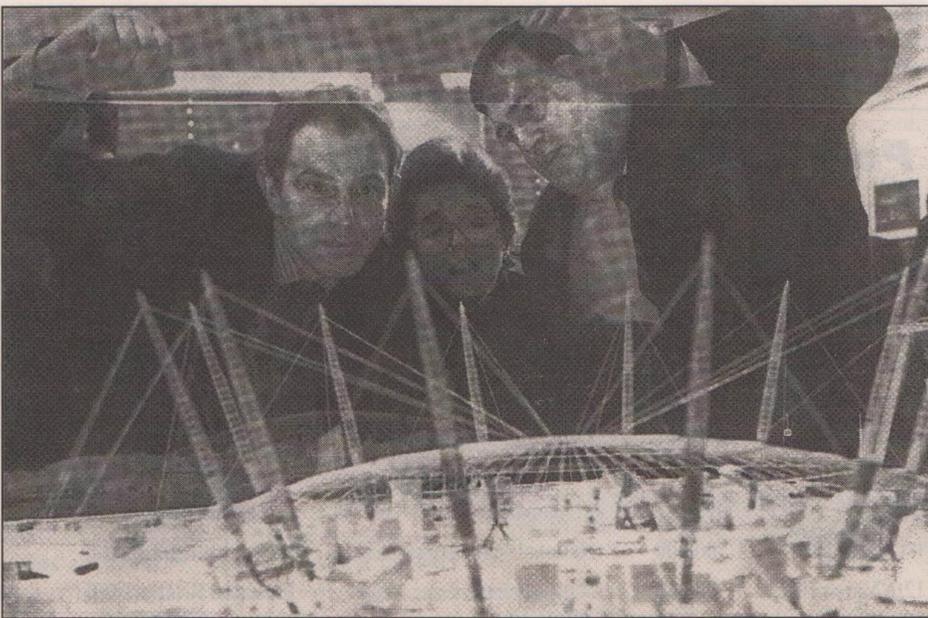
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Blair's flagship and domes ...

## AN ERA OF VAIN EXPECTATIONS



The twentieth century began with men like Rasputin and Russell about to rise to spheres of influence in their respective fields. One the mystic, one the mathematician. One the holy prophet in Mother Russia, the other the English rationalist. Yet by 1917 both men had come to a bad end – Rasputin poisoned and shot in December 1916; Russell intellectually doomed, his rationalist Pythagorean Dream in smithereens and condemned henceforth to write journalism and 'shilling shockers'.

Rasputin and Russell, religion and science stumbling before the abyss. The slippery slope leading from mystic and mathematician to Mandelson and the Millennium Dome. The journey from Lloyd George's welfare programme, through Fabian State Socialism to Tony Blair's flagship Welfare to Work.

Farewell mystic, enter the spin-doctor of the twenty-first century. Goodbye God, ta-ta science, let's find comfort in Blair's theme park for the millennium.

### PULLING THE WOOL OVER OUR EYES

At the time of writing we don't know how much bread will be taken out of the mouths of the poor, the disabled, the lone parents and their children. We will have to wait for Frank Field's Green Paper to find some clues as to whether the Treasury will triumph or not in the details of the New Deal. But no expense, it seems, is going to be spared to delay this erection of the circus tent in Greenwich.

Less bread, more circuses, seems to be the intention of New Labour. A regime ridden with rhetoric. In everything governmental the pursuit of glitter, gloss, glamour and a kind of grandiloquence.

The editor of *The Independent* describes Mr Blair thus: "Sounding like a cross between a Baptist minister high in his pulpit and Lady Thatcher in her most grating 'Rejoice!' mode, he commands us to respect daring and excellence". Last week that same editor, commenting on the glorified Dome ephemera, declared: "It's only a dome, Prime Minister ... does that really justify the preaching and the chiding and the hyperbole Mr Blair served up yesterday? He compared the Dome to St Pauls, and that is

fatuous – not because Richard Rogers is not a fine architect who might conceivably deserve comparison with Christopher Wren, but because the cathedral was built in a Christian age to glorify God, and the transcendental purpose of the Dome is ... what? New Labour offers no secular religion ... Does the Prime Minister intend to worship at the shrine of technology or try to recover modernist sensibility in a post-modern age?"

One suspects, like Welfare to Work, the Dome is yet another dog's breakfast about to be served up. Yet more hubris to cloud the mind. Jonathan Glancey, the modernist design correspondent in *The Guardian*, remarks: "If our dreams are no more vivid that a trip on giant mobile beds through a Disney-inspired cloud cuckoo land – housed in four kooky 'domettes' – we should fear for the future of our children's imagination". Titillation – but will it work?

Mr Glancey suspects it might: "Having studied at the feet of Mickey Mouse, the Dome's administrators and designers should be able to pull the wool, enjoyably so, over the eyes of the twelve million expected visitors".



And to make this a success Mr Mandelson, the project's chief executive in effect, is busy as always with New Labour recruiting private sector sponsors. Rupert Murdoch's Sky is already in toe.

### RAKE UP THE ROOTS

So it's to be a kind of jamboree, a species of fantasy rooted in what Mr Glancey calls "the age of mass entertainment, branding and corporate ideologies".

When we invoke Walt Disney we should perhaps remember that Kenneth Clarke, considering the 'Landscape of Fantasy', places him with Vincent van Gogh, Max Ernst and Graham Sutherland at the end of the tradition now called 'expressionism'. It is a northern form of art which started with Grünwald and Bosch when the "menaces of life were still real", and now we are left with the last symbol of the old German obsessive fears – the Christmas tree – according to Mr Clark "tamed and domesticated by a century of materialism". Left with the Christmas tree and Disney's Snow White, and now an androgynous human figure taller than the Statue of Liberty to dominate Lord Rogers's Dome!

The three exhibitions in nineteenth century France (1855, 1967 and 1889) according to Pierre Lavedan "were first and foremost three great proclamations of the victory of metal construction". In the French Exhibition of 1900 iron was abandoned, and the new style brought in stone for buildings intended to last and stucco and plaster for temporary constructions. *The Independent* editorial describes the Dome thus: "daily we see the spider's web of cables being spun between rocket-like girders. When the skin is added next month it will become a circus tent of giant proportions".

One can only fear with what they may fill the edifice when it's done. The management structure, as with the New Deal, "is a mish-mash of political and executive responsibilities". The editor of *The Independent* describes the preview display: "Yesterday's package of contents was alternately bizarre, mind-expanding and banal".

One suspects the thirteenth century architects who competed with one another to

build higher cathedrals than their neighbours – so that Reims beat Chartres, whose record was bested by Amiens, only in turn surpassed by Beauvais – were building to the glory of God. They still produce a sense of awe in us. But Richard Rogers's Dome seems destined to do no more than tickle our fancy.

Looking at the photographs of the model of the Dreamscape Zone I'm reminded of Bosch, but I can't ignore what Wittgenstein said: "Our civilisation is characterised by the word progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure".

Hence we are bombarded by special effects. We seem to live under a tyranny of technology in which governments seek to flummox and dazzle the public. But despite Richard Rogers's best efforts, it's hard to see how the Dome can be other than a celebration of political power.

Of course Tolstoy's right: "The leaves of the tree delight us more than the roots". That's the dilemma for all of us when we confront something like the Dome. But for an anarchist answer we can't do better than Wittgenstein again: "I am not interested in erecting a building but in having the foundations of possible buildings transparent before me".

When governments try to blind us, the anarchist war cry must always be for clarity and transparency.

Albert Shore

## THE PEACE PROTESTERS BACK FROM IRAQ

The British peace protesters who recently returned from Iraq have reported on the immense anger expressed by ordinary Iraqi citizens at the suffering caused by United Nations sanctions.

Members of ARROW (Active Resistance to the Roots of War) including *Freedom* correspondent Milan Rai, along with Americans from Voices in the Wilderness, entered Iraq to distribute medicines in open defiance of the sanctions. They visited Iraqi children's hospitals and paediatric wards and saw the suffering caused by lack of medicines, inadequate food and above all lack of clean water, since the sanctions mean no equipment to repair sewage works bombed in 1991.

The groups were also able to visit sites where civilians were killed in mis-targeted bombings, but found the people they talked to were more angry about the sanctions. The two groups attracted much attention from Iraqi (and American) press and television crews, but they say the British reporters were not interested.

We hope to carry a full report shortly. Meanwhile a picket of the Foreign Office in London is held every Monday from 5.30 to 7.00pm.

— PART TWO —

# ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM: AN ENGLISH ECLIPSE

## ANARCHIST INTELLECTUALS

It was the awareness of weekend anarchism, and empty-shell anarcho-syndicalist organisations, that led the 'Mucky Realist' affinity group in Bury to endorse the proposal from Hull Syndicalists for the formation of a national anarcho-syndicalist body. It was felt that a businesslike anarchist effort be made to transform and co-ordinate popular culture at the point where it conflicts with management structures. This was thought to be vital at a time when New Labour, now as the unshamable party of management, is implementing the structures of social control through the Job Seekers' Act, the New Deal, Welfare to Work and retaining laws against organised labour.

In the current *Raven* (No. 36) the determined individualist anarchist Mr Donald Room tells us that "it might be better for anarchists to use a term which is less ambiguous than 'class struggle'." Peter Neville doubts the concept 'class struggle' has any significant basis in classical anarchism. Of course, Bakunin dealt with the ambiguity of social class, which Mr Room has queried in an earlier issue of *The Raven* on class, by saying, as I recall it, that "just because it is hard to define definitely the boundaries of social class doesn't mean it is unimportant or still less doesn't exist. In nature it is sometimes hard to define the categories of animal and plant satisfactorily in some cases." Ambiguity even exists in the natural sciences, but that doesn't mean we dispense with the need for classification and categorisation.

'Power' is a difficult concept to define for intellectuals and sociologists, but does this mean anarchists should declare it an ambiguous concept and adopt only concrete certainties to hang our theories on? What's more, members of society use these classifications of 'power' and 'class' in their ordinary language, without any help from anarchists, marxists or anyone else. In the study *The Unattached Society: an account of the life on Larimer Street among homeless men*, Edward Rose found that while "classificatory decisions about the men made by persons and organisations off the street are clearest ... an individual's involvement with these categories can be astoundingly complicated."

Mr Rose shows how individuals on the street artfully employ categories of class either to advance their interests or their status in the community. A 'drink cadger' may claim to be a 'worker' one minute, but at the "mission services this same man, though completely irreligious, may devoutly take a nose-dive should this bring some short-term advantage". Equally these homeless people will have different definitions for 'tramp' and 'bum' on which clever men like Mr Room or Mr Neville would be able to pour scorn on account of their dubious ambiguity to the high flown intellectual. This is all a glorified form of snobbery, in which some intellectuals like to fancy that they exist as individuals in some

way outside of classes, outside of social categorisations, outside of labels, outside of language, outside of society. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

## SYNDICALISM ON THE ASCENT

The existence of this highly formalised and intellectualised attitude to class and social categories by some anarchists is only one reason for the English eclipse of anarcho-syndicalism in the twentieth century. It became an almost total eclipse in the 1970s, when industry most required a libertarian vision. Industrial disputes took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as Roberts-Arundel and Pilkingtons Glass Co. in St Helens, which led to an upsurge of what might be called modern industrial syndicalism.

Suddenly political strikes became fashionable in this country. Up to 1968, when Lord Donovan produced his report *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (1965-1968)*, the role of shop stewards was described as "helping to regulate workers' pay and working conditions and by representing them in dealings with management". At that time, the report shows, some stewards had a lot of influence with power to control "the distribution of work, the pace of work, the manning of machines, transfers from one job to another, the introduction of new machinery and new jobs, taking on new labour and redundancy". This report noted that "since there are probably about 175,000 stewards in the country, compared with perhaps 3,000 full-time trade union officers, this suggests that shop stewards must be handling many times the volume of business conducted by their full-time officers".

The Donovan report observes that "the work group does not derive its power from the union. The printing chapel with its chapel father, the best organised of all work groups, existed before the printing unions and was subsequently incorporated into their branch structure. Work groups can exert considerable control over their members even where there are no trade unions, or where unions refuse them recognition."

What we can see up to about 1970 is the subtle syndicalism of the shopfloor and the shop steward. Work group control and work group action in pursuit of their member's interests. After 1970 we have a more political syndicalism: the take-over of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' yards by the workers threatened by closure, the occupation of engineering factories by their workers, the miners' strike and the three-day week, and the fall of Ted Heath's government.

Looking back isn't it extraordinary that so many anarchists and so-called anarcho-syndicalists were unmoved by these events? As I said elsewhere, "the Vietnam War was more remarkable than St Helens and the Upper Clyde. The Angry Brigade in the UK, the Baader-Meinhof gang in West Germany, the Italian Red Brigade and the plight of Spanish political prisoners, proved more thrilling for most libertarians than our own native dockers, shipyard workers, mechanics, engineers and glassworkers. A world of passports and clandestine endeavours charmed us more than the daily grind of clocking-on and clocking-off."

True there was local libertarian involvement at Dunlop, Rochdale, in 1969 when an anarchist steward was sacked. In the early 1970s the Manchester anarcho-syndicalists launched a campaign for shop stewards in textiles, after a strike involving an anarchist and some Asian workers. During the 1984-85 miners' strike the Direct Action Movement, under the influence of Jim Petty its secretary and the Burnley anarchists, put in some participation across the country. Then, in the

1990s, thanks to Tony Crowther of the Solidarity Federation, there has been some activity on the railways, mainly in the Manchester area.

But these are but glimpses of the sun in a period of almost total eclipse of anarcho-syndicalism in English society. While these empty-shell anarcho-syndicalist bodies have perpetuated themselves and the anarchists grandes pontificated, British syndicalism soared to great strength. Besides the work-in tactic used in Scotland at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1971, there were other defensive actions by workers to stop the removal of machinery at Plessey, Alexandria, Fisher-Bendix, Kirkby, ITT-Maclaren in Glasgow.

involved in this use of industrial direct action to extract political, social and economic advantage was focused on car workers and among engineers, dockers, builders and print workers - some of the areas where the old 'anarcho-syndicalist' National Rank and File Movement in 1961 had had a presence. In 1979 the publication *International Socialism* produced a table of political strikes (see below).

When we read this list and think back about the history of those years in the 1970s, shouldn't we be asking ourselves, 'What was the level of participation of English anarchists in these disputes, and what was our influence in trying to develop an anarchist industrial challenge during those crucial years?' Take your time, comrades, think about it! What did you do in the war - the class war?

Clearly this must come over as a confession for all of us who were active at that time. We didn't provide an anarchist analysis and vision to the labour movement when it was most needed. It wasn't just a failure of anarchist grandes, or the romantics of the Angry Brigade, but first and foremost those like me who called ourselves anarcho-syndicalists.

## Political Strikes from 1969 to 1979

DATE	APPROX NOS INVOLVED	MAIN AREAS	ISSUES
27th Feb 1969	150,000	Scotland / Merseyside	In Place of Strife
1st May 1969	250,000	National	In Place of Strife
8th Dec 1970	600,000	London / Manchester	Industrial Relations Bill
1st Jan 1971	50,000	Midlands	Industrial Relations Bill
12th Jan 1971	180,000	Merseyside / Scotland / Manchester / Coventry	Industrial Relations Bill
Feb 1971	250,000	London demo	Industrial Relations Bill
1st March 1971	1,500,000	National engineering strike	Industrial Relations Bill
12th March 1971	1,500,000	National engineering strike	Industrial Relations Bill
23rd June 1971	100,000	Clydeside	UCS and unemployment
18th Aug 1971	150,000	Scotland	UCS and unemployment
24th Nov 1971	85,000	South & NW London	Unemployment
24th July 1972	250,000	National: dockers / Teeside / Merseyside / Manchester	Free the Five versus NIRC
Sept 1973	8,000	Scunthorpe	Old Age Pensions
18th Dec 1972	55,000	London / Oxford / Sheffield	Against NIRC fine on AUEW
20th Dec 1972	170,000	National: dockers / engineers	Against NIRC fine on AUEW
1st May 1973	2,000,000	National	Against Phase 2 and the NIRC
Nov 1973	n/a	National: engineering	Against Con-Mech fine on AUEW
Dec 1973	2,000	Birmingham: building trade	Against trial of Five
15th Jan 1974	10,000	National: building workers	Jailing of Shrewsbury Three
8th May 1974	500,000	National: official AUEW	Against NIRC seizure of funds

Then in 1972 factory take-overs were used offensively by Manchester engineering workers to get a new national agreement and a 35-hour week. This was such a threat that when the Labour government put its Criminal Trespass Act through Parliament in 1978 it contained measures to use against a future wave of factory occupations.

In 1972 the Yorkshire miners had used the weapons of the mass picket and the flying picket to close oil-fired power stations and ports through which coal imports might be brought in. In the summer of 1972 flying pickets were used again by building workers to widen their strike to become national in a feebly-organised industry. This led to the arrest of eighteen Shrewsbury pickets, and jail for Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson. In July 1972 Fleet Street newspapers didn't come out after the jailing of five dockers for illegal picketing following an unofficial strike by print workers in SOGAT. A contagious all-out token strike forced the intervention of the 'Official Solicitor' to purge the contempt of the five dockers. This action destroyed the Industrial Relations Act as a tool for use against the flying pickets.

Between 1969 and 1974 there was widespread acceptance of the use of the political strike against the government. The sectors

The best bet now seems to be to try to end the cacophony in the anarchist movement, as Derek Pattison suggested, and to seek an attunement with English popular culture. This, it seems to me, has been the endeavour that the 'Mucky Realists' in Bury have set themselves. The project put up by Hull Syndicalists for a 'National Syndicalist Alliance', we hope, is an insurance policy taken out to guarantee that in future anarchists are in-tune with the popular culture and not detached from it in some sort of snobbish way.

If anarchists are to avoid the sterility of the English eclipse of the 1970s they must apply themselves to entering what Wittgenstein called "the storm of life" in English society, and not shutting themselves off from it. I have doubts if we can do this. Not many of us in this country have the breadth of vision of a William Blake. In the twentieth century most men and women of England are poor stunted beings, as reflected in the paintings of Francis Bacon. We are not even like Pepé Gomez and the modern Spaniards. Most of us are, as Derek Pattison observed recently, "emotionally constipated". Yet we must try to make the ascent and seek out the new dawn, and the National Syndicalist Alliance offers us a chance, if a slim one.

Brian Bamford

out now from Freedom Press

## The Raven

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on

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## Anarchy in the UK?

The traditional prejudice against and ignorance of anarchism still prevail in the media, despite the quantity of easily available material on the subject and the number of easily accessible organisations and individuals in the movement. This is true even of serious newspapers. A good example appeared last month, following the incident when a pop singer threw a bucket of water over John Prescott and claimed to be an anarchist. The *Independent on Sunday* on 15th February included a long article by Rupert Cornwell, one of its leading reporters, headlined 'Anarchy in the UK?' and filled with nonsense about the nature of anarchists in the past and the political affiliation of terrorists in the present.

The following letter from us at Freedom Press was not published:

"Rupert Cornwell's guide to anarchism consists mainly of misinformation and misunderstanding.

It is true that Bakunin believed in a 'collectivist utopia', but he always opposed communism in every sense. It is true that Errico (not 'Enrico') Malatesta believed in 'propaganda by deed', but he always opposed terrorism of any kind. It is true that some anarchists resorted to violence, but they were a small minority, and they didn't include the assassins of Tsar Alexander II.

Coming down to the present, it isn't true that either the Montana militias or the Branch Davidians, either Ted Kaczynski or Timothy McVeigh, ever had anything to do with anarchism. Neither did almost all the urban guerrillas of the '60s, '70s and '80s; thus the Red Brigades in Italy, far from being 'first and foremost anarchists' were Marxists from first to last.

And it is absurd to discuss 'Anarchy in the UK' without even mentioning any of the anarchist organisations which have been active here for more than a century, or the part played by anarchists in the labour movement or the peace movement, or any of the individuals who have been involved, from William Godwin and Peter Kropotkin through Herbert Read and Alex Comfort to Stuart Christie and Colin Ward.

Ignorance may be bliss, but it is a bad basis for serious journalism."

However, the following letter from our comrade Jonathan Simcock was published on 22nd February:

"Anarchism advocates a society with neither state nor government, based on individual

freedom, mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. Readers of your article could be forgiven for assuming that it advocates terrorism. It does not.

The Red Brigades are revolutionary Marxists, not anarchists. The alleged Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, is not an anarchist but a neo-Luddite, and accepts both the existence of governments and the use of the power to effect his proposals. Timothy McVeigh is part of the right-wing racist anti-US Federal Government Militia Movement, but neither he nor this movement is politically anarchist.

The vast majority of political terrorism has never come from anarchists but from Marxists, nationalists, royalists, fascists and other political movements seeking to seize state power."

Any hope that the *Independent on Sunday* will be more careful next time? Not a lot.

## Fatchet Chumba'd

Derek Fatchet is the MP for Leeds Central, but as a minister in the Foreign Office he has recently been absent from his constituency; instead he's been hot-footing it on missions to the Middle East. He therefore had to cancel an advertised talk in the School for International Studies, University of Leeds - the amended poster read "Labour's ethical foreign policy: postponed". However, with the visit of Kofi Annan to Baghdad and the brief respite this gave to our eager war-mongers, busy ministers had a chance to deal with more mundane constituency matters. A group of concerned constituents under the banner AWOL (Anti-War Offensive Leeds) went to Mr Fatchet's surgery on Friday 20th February at the Lincoln Fields Day Centre.

A number of questions were put to Fatchet: By what right did the US and British governments prepare to bomb a foreign country and kill thousands of people? He replied that only the Republican Guard and communications vital to the regime were to be targeted. How could he guarantee there would be no collateral damage? He couldn't, but force was necessary to back up diplomacy. How could sanctions responsible for the deaths of up to a million people be justified?

But how can anyone expect a government minister to be able to deal with questions like these? Such people choose to play a dangerous game with other people's lives: they are flying too close to the sun, getting a little hot under the collar! For this reason we decided that Fatchet needed cooling down, with a bucket of iced water!

Leeds Correspondent

## EDINBURGH: Claimants defy court sentence and carry out new 'third strike' action

On the morning of 11th February 1998 Edinburgh Sheriff Court sentenced a claimant to 150 hours community service for delivering an Edinburgh Claimants 'three strikes' warning letter to a Benefits Office official at High Riggs Unemployment benefit office. Four hours later twenty claimants and supporters carried out a 'third strike' action against Marianne MacDonald, a Project Work interviewer at High Riggs, and her manager Mr Laird.

Demonstrators, all wearing masks consisting of Marianne MacDonald's face, stormed into the benefit office in central Edinburgh. They carried posters of MacDonald with the words 'NO ONE LIKES A BULLY'. Protesters gave out leaflets bearing MacDonald's photo and detailing how she had consistently harassed claimants and tried to cut their benefits on eight documented occasions. The leaflets denounced Labour's New Deal as 'compulsory slave labour' and condemned the cuts in single parent's benefits.

Police arrived but too late to stop the action. There were no arrests. Edinburgh Claimants declared "We won't be intimidated by the police and courts. The 'three strikes' resistance continues".

In the court case the Sheriff stated that the 'three strikes' campaign was "a pre-meditated and clearly illegal attempt to undermine the operation of the welfare benefits system". Earlier, on 21st January, the claimant had been found guilty of Breach of the Peace at Edinburgh Sheriff Court for delivering the 'three strikes' letter. In court the Procurator Fiscal described the whole 'three strikes' campaign in Edinburgh, including the fly-posting of a photo of a dole official round the city and the placing of the photo on the internet. The Sheriff (the judge) said this was a "sinister offence" and he was "considering a prison sentence".

The 'three strikes' campaign is a collective response by claimants to harassment and benefit cuts - dole officials and their managers responsible for particularly bad treatment of claimants are given warning letters asking them to treat claimants fairly: if they ignore two warnings and commit a third 'offence' then their photo is taken and put on posters with details of their actions, and a demo is held at their benefit office.

The exact charge was: "That on 12th June 1997 in the Job Centre at the Department of Social Security, 20 High Riggs, Edinburgh, you did conduct yourself in a disorderly manner, pass offensive abusive and threatening writings to Marianne MacDonald, employee there, and place her in a state of fear and alarm and commit a breach of the peace."

The letter passed to the official read: "Dear Marianne MacDonald, You have already received a written warning explaining our THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT campaign. Yet you have persisted in harassing claimants to the point where we have received another complaint against you. THIS IS YOUR FINAL WRITTEN WARNING. One more complaint against you and we will take your photograph and transform it into a giant poster with details of your offences highlighted. There will also be an angry demonstration held at your place of work and the Edinburgh media will be alerted. We are sure that you, like us, hope there will be no need for a STRIKE THREE measure and that you will temper your over-zealous behaviour accordingly. Sincerely, Edinburgh Claimants".

The delivery of the final written warning was due to no fewer than three separate complaints being made against the official in May 1997, as a result of her activities as a Project Work interviewer.

We would like to thank everyone who gave their solidarity to the defendant and Edinburgh Claimants over the past few weeks, and we hope everyone will step up their own activities. Don't let them intimidate us.

**Contact:** Autonomous Centre Of Edinburgh / Edinburgh Claimants, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5 HA Scotland tel: 0131-557 6242 (ansaphone) e-mail: anarchy@cableinet.co.uk pager: 01426 128984 (short message only)

**Legal Note:** In court the claimant pleaded guilty to the charge as above; the prosecution dropped the part of the original charge that he made "abusive, offensive and threatening remarks". He stated that although he had delivered the letter, he was not a member of Edinburgh Claimants nor had he been involved in any other 'three strikes' related activity. Please bear this in mind in anything written.

## Green Anarchist's jailed editor taken to hospital

Steve Booth is presently in Lancaster Royal Infirmary, chained to a bed under 24-hour surveillance, with a suspected perforated duodenal ulcer. He was taken there from Lancaster Castle prison.

Steve was an editor of *Green Anarchist*, one of three sentenced to three years in prison for conspiracy to incite criminal damage. He may be written to at: Stephen Booth (CK4323), HMP Lancaster Castle, Lancaster, LA1 1YL. Saxon Burchnall-Wood (CK4322) is now at HMP Send, Ripley Road, Woking GU23 7LJ. Noel Molland (CK4321) at HMP Channings Wood, Newton Abbot, TQ12 6DW.

The remaining 'Gandalf' defendants, Paul Rogers of *Green Anarchist* and Robin Webb of the Animal Liberation Front, have applied to be tried separately, and for Mr Justice Selwood to disqualify himself on the ground that he might be suspected of being influenced by the previous trial. The judge was due to announce his decision on 6th March.



# Old Ghosts

The naming of names has always been a sellers' market for, when the full confession has been tortured out of the broken human shell, then comes the demand for 'names, names, names'.

Of what use is the full confession once the body and the mind have been rendered useless, for the politics of the hunt are for more and more names to be caught and questioned and from them more and more names. Like a pool of piss, the innocent and the implicated will in their turn be called upon to supply names, names, names as the pool expands, demonstrating that the militant arm of the state, the church, the party and the local tennis club are earning their weekly wage in those ol' brown envelopes. Stalin, Hitler, the Un-American Committee, the social security system, even Oswald it is said, the factory voluntary sick club all seek names of those they maybe hold are using their particular system in a manner that is at fault with their bureaucratic leadership for, put two bureaucrats together within the same secretly barred lavatory, and a need for names has to be high on the toilet roll, and which bureaucrat dare trust the other so name him/her as a name to be asked for names.

All this could be treated with a lilted laugh on a wet day in Bradford, but the evil of the naming of names is the standard follow-up, and I have listened to it so many times that if those who are being questioned have done nothing 'wrong' then they have nothing to worry about and therein lies the evil for Kafka-like, if you are named then innocent of any assumed fault then you are guilty 'otherwise your name would not be one of the names' and many a high-brow and low-brow sits in that confined space wondering who dropped them in the shit and what about, which is the logic of the Theatre of the Absurd. Name any point on the map at any moment in history and Omar's 'moving finger writes' and, friend, it ain't the lottery prize when it spotlights on your puzzled brow, so throw away your army good conduct medal and your hundred yards swimming certificate for this is Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame, so

just give them the names.

We live in traumatic times, but then we always did, in that the Masons are being legally force, 'tis claimed, to reveal their list of names of their secret membership, and just for the alleged offence of doing a T.S. Eliot in that "I am old, I am old, I wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled". Never was there a greater need to defend, in print if not in action, cry freedom. Helen Rawlings, a senior lecturer at the University of Portsmouth, has written a worthy reappraisal of recent literature, nay a re-evaluation, of the late Spanish Inquisition. Her essay, that shares space with James Casey's *Historian No. 56* lovefest of the late Philip II of Spain, 1527-1598, seeks to demonstrate that via the writings of others "the Inquisition was nowhere near as bloodthirsty as commonly perceived. The holocausts of the 1480s were short-lived. For most of its active history the execution rate remained below 2% — an average of five people per year. Major heretics such as Judaisers, Moriscos, Alumbrosos and Lutherans accounted for 40% of the victims to the boys in black between 1540 and 1700 and the offence to hold opinions at variance to the official church-ridden state. Part of the lunacy of the Inquisition following on from the Council of Trent was to demand that minor rank and file accused by friends or neighbours of pigging it in bed on Sunday mornings should be called upon to recite the four basic church prayers, to state on Christian oath how many times they had attended communion and confession and to make the sign of the cross, and, as a barrack-room lawyer with my office at the beer-wet table within the White Hart, I wonder what is the position of someone who outwardly performs all the ritual required of the church muscular in full view of the neighbours from hell, yet in the confessional blasphemes God, Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Church and the price of wine. Dare the priest in the confessional expose the heretic who will leave with a jaunty swing of the hips to fall face down before the Holy Altar performing the ritual required by the church and state? When the state, in its



search for victims, spreads its net too wide then claimed offenders get lost in the human mire and hide in conformity. This is what happened in central Castile in that "Spaniards were becoming more devout Catholics and the Spanish people would indeed be foolish if they did not perform the required King, Queen and Jack keeping the Ace in reserve.

Jean-Dedieu regarded the Inquisition as "a giant teaching machine" which, with the use of the auto da fe as its main public frightener, held that among the masses ignorance of the faith was more to be condemned than lack of faith. In such a place as Galicia, the local Inquisition was made up of local men, which meant that economic, family or social hatreds could get you condemned when to be condemned is to be guilty.

That politics became the main instrument of the Inquisition's dealings is shown in the Barcelona groupings in that when the victims

were chiefly Moriscos, foreign immigrants and sodomites. By ignoring the peccadilloes of the 'Old Christian' community they gain their mob and political support, and blasphemy was ignored in exchange for the 'yes' vote.

One of the many evils that came from the Inquisition's black period was that in places such as Castile not only was political and mob support given but the auto da fe became public entertainment for the laughing many-headed. There are those among us to take up a biblical stance who will smile and say that this was but the awful past and, with the Millennium Dome, all that is past history. But we are of that generation who read daily of the Stalin, Hitler, Un-American trials when the crowd cheered and hands were raised for the 'yes' votes. In Ireland the religious, loyalist, political and fund-raising this day in 1998 murder and slaughter the innocent in the name of Holy Mother Ireland, and one sits among the late-joiners in the White Hart pub listening to the apolitical, amoral, anti-religious who hone their arguments to a fine edge to give murder and ethnic cleansing a rational justification. And now that re-assessment of evil is in the name of rational, historical logic. I have no feelings concerning the late Henry VIII's saintly hit-man and, minus his bonce, fall-guy Sir Thomas More in that via Robert Bolt's *Man for All Seasons* he was a saintly fruit who loved the Pope, not wisely but too well. Until, shame me, I read John Carey's essay on More wherein he writes: "He flattered the king for his wasteful, pointless French campaign, calling him 'greater than Caesar'; he obediently vilified his fallen patron ... and as the government's chief heretic-hunter, he had organised a thought-police of spies and informers, interrogating suspects at his grand house in Chelsea, and, it is said, attending the torture chamber at the Tower to see them racked. When they were burned alive at Smithfield he rejoiced at their sufferings with ghastly relish, jubilantly predicting that they would roast in hell for all eternity. His victims were not criminals but devout men, guilty of nothing more heinous than doctrinal difference from Rome and the wish to read the Bible in the English language." Yours was a long season, nay, as they say in the murderous back-streets of Belfast, just a mite too long Johnny.

Arthur Moysé

## A Note on the Anarchists of Islam

Politics and religion are intrinsically connected in Islam, and it is worth beginning this note by quoting the words of Muhammad Al-'Alawi (1880-1964), a Moroccan sufi who played an important role in the Moroccan nationalist movement. When told by a French colonial officer to avoid political issues in his lectures on Islam he is reported to have said: "Anyone who claims to give lectures on the religion of Islam without discussing politics is either a liar, a hypocrite, or an ignoramus. For Islam demands the liberation of the human being and calls for both justice and freedom and the quest for knowledge." (Munson, page 80).

Liberty, justice, the pursuit of knowledge, tolerance and the freedom of thought are not the sort of things that many people associate with Islam, but Al-'Alawi is a classic example of a sufi or religious scholar who embodies the notion of the 'righteous man of God' who dares to defy the unjust ruler. For throughout his long life Al-'Alawi was not only a thorn in the flesh of the French colonial administration, but at the end of his days dared to challenge the oppressive government of King Hassan. Although religious scholars (ulama) throughout the long history of Islam have

tended to support or remain passive in relation to the various political dynasties or sultans, there is an important tradition of 'rebel Islam', as the sociologist Fatima Mernissi describes it. This tradition not only affirms the right of every Muslim to revolt against an unjust or oppressive political regime, but it is also suggestive that the Islamic community (umma) has no need of a ruler, or any coercive authority. The dominant political tradition, of course, is that expressed by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) who, like Thomas Hobbes, affirmed the necessity of political rule, quoting the Quranic verse "Obey Allah [God], and obey the messenger of God and the people in authority among you" (4:59).

Yet, as Mernissi writes, the world has never seen a power as fragile as that of the Islamic ruler (caliph, sultan, imam), for he is owed obedience only to the degree that he follows the divine law (shari'a) and is just ('adil) and promotes the happiness and well-being of all members of the community. If he does not fulfil these conditions then insurrection or revolt is justified. This tradition of 'rebel Islam' Mernissi describes as a sort of spontaneous democracy, or 'people's power', that reacts against injustices by killing the caliph or political ruler "without putting much thought into how to bring about basic changes" (page 26) — Mernissi herself being an advocate of an Islamic democratic state. These rebels thus have affinities with Russian populists and

such anarchists as Johann Most who felt, at the end of the nineteenth century, that the assassination of presidents and monarchs was justified. In the first decades after the death of the prophet, these rebels, the Kharijites, raised the question: whether you must obey the caliph if he does not rule justly, and protect your basic human rights. Do you always have to obey the caliph (ruler) or can you trust your own intellectual judgement? The Kharijites came to the conclusion that you need not obey an oppressive ruler, and that you can 'go out' (kharaja) from obedience. 'To go out', Kharijites, is thus the title they gave themselves, and their motto was 'La hikma illa lillah' ('power belongs only to God'). Political assassination became therefore an intrinsic aspect of early Islam, and apart from Abu Bakr, who succeeded the Prophet and who ruled for only two years (632-634), it is noteworthy that three of the four righteous caliphs — Umar, Uthman and Ali (who were close affinal relatives of the prophet) — were all assassinated while performing prayers (Ahmed, pages 33-36).

But some Kharijite sects not only advocated getting rid of an unjust ruler through assassination but were, in essence, religious anarchists, believing that no caliph or imam was necessary. This was preached by the followers of Najda Ibn 'Amir. Described as one of the most extreme of the Kharijite sects, they were of the opinion that people did not

really need an imam, but only had to organise themselves to ensure justice and well-being. Najda Ibn 'Amir was himself assassinated in 691, fifty-nine years after the death of the prophet (Mernissi, page 28).

In his introduction to history, *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun, wrote: "Some people have taken the exceptional position of stating that the position of the imam is not necessary at all, neither according to the intellect nor according to religious law. People who have held that opinion include the Mu'tazilah [rationalist philosophers] and certain Kharijites, among others. They think it necessary only to observe the religious laws. When Muslims agree upon [the practice of] justice and the observance of the divine laws, no imam is needed, and the imamate is not necessary" (Ibn Khaldun, page 157). There is a saying of the Prophet which suggests that "the nearer a man is to government, the further he is from God" (Ahmed, page 51).

Needless to say, Ibn Khaldun affirmed the need and the legitimacy of royal authority — for divine law censures only the evil resulting from it, not the authority itself — and throughout Islamic history the dissident Kharijite tradition has been harassed and repressed.

Brian Morris

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— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

# Fermin Rocker's Story

He's a quiet, low-key, gentle person and there couldn't have been a nicer way of commemorating Fermin Rocker's recent 90th birthday than the exhibition of his paintings, drawings and prints at a gallery in Chelsea last month, and the simultaneous publication by Freedom Press of his recollections of childhood in Stepney before and during the First World War (*The East End Years*, £7.95).

Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958) was a German anarchist reared in a Catholic orphanage and apprenticed as a book-binder. On his travels in the 1890s he came into contact with the anarchists, settling in Paris in 1893. In 1898 he was asked to become editor of the Yiddish paper *Arbaiter Fraind*, founded thirteen years earlier in Whitechapel. He had to learn the

language in order to do so, and two years later started another journal, *Germinal*. From then until 1914 Rudolf Rocker was endlessly busy as an anarchist editor and orator, and organiser of workers in the baking and tailoring trades, including the famous tailors' strike of 1912 which sought to end the sweating system.

Rudolf and his companion, Milly Witcop, and his Paris-born son Rudolph, moved when Fermin was three years old to Dunstan Houses,

a five-storey tenement block in Stepney Green. Their flat consisted of a kitchen, front room and bedroom to house this family of four as well as a stream of visitors, since, as Fermin recalls, "there was probably more hospitality extended by these poor people than by the better-off today".

Fermin's recollections of childhood give vignettes of many figures from anarchist history: the educators Jim and Nellie Dick — who before emigrating to America ran a 'free school', on the model of Ferrer's Escuela Moderna, in a rambling old house near Victoria Park — and of course Kropotkin, remembered only vaguely, and Malatesta, remembered vividly since "poor as he was, he invariably had a little gift for me whenever he would see me, either a little bag of sweets, a coin or a toy. In this regard he was not playing any favourites, for he had a way with children and was known and loved by all the youngsters in the neighbourhood."

There were also Alexander Schapiro and his family, and Fermin's aunt and uncle, Rose Witcop and Guy Aldred (whose life was described at length by Nicolas Walter in volume 1, number 1, of *The Raven*).

But the real delight of Fermin's book is not as a link with figures from anarchist history. It stands by itself as another account of childhood in the East End of London: the entertainment provided by the neighbourhood, the pleasures of weekend excursions to Victoria Park or Epping Forest, the rich life of the street, the flavour of the London County Council's elementary schools, and odd details that I never thought about until reminded by this book, like the fact that Leadenhall Street was full of offices of the shipping companies who would display in their windows exquisitely detailed scale models of the vessels they owned.

It was odd things like this that caught young Fermin's attentive eye, and provide a direct link with his paintings and drawings. These are mostly of a peopled urban landscape: the street scene, the theatre, concert hall or meeting room, bookstalls, barber shops, the pub and the park — a quiet celebration of the way we make use of ordinary environments.

His urban idyll of a childhood began to fall apart with the outbreak of the First World War.

Rudolf was interned as an enemy alien, firstly at the exhibition centre in Olympia, then on a ship called the Royal Edward anchored off Southend Pier, and finally at the Alexandra Palace in North London. Then his elder brother Rudolph was arrested, since "for reasons of their own, the authorities decided that this was the time for him to make a decision, to either declare himself a Frenchman and join the French army or claim German citizenship and be interned".

On the same day Fermin came home from school to find that the flat had been raided and his mother taken to Holloway Prison. Then, under an agreement between the warring nations, an exchange of civilian prisoners of war took place in Holland, and eventually Milly and Fermin were able to join Rudolf there. This brings us to the end of *The East End Years*. So Fermin grew up in Weimar Germany but in 1929, accompanying his father to the United States intending to stay briefly, he settled and worked for years in a cartoon film animation studio and then in commercial art. He visited London after 37 years in 1966 and found Dunstan Houses still standing. "A certain amount of face-lifting had been done. There was less grime and soot, the streets seemed less cluttered and messy. Even the people did not look quite the same, their grey and featureless attire having given way to bolder colours. They seemed more polite, better mannered."

Finally in 1972 Fermin and his family moved to London where he continued his life as a book illustrator and painter. This well-produced book has twenty of his drawings and a selection of family photographs. As the publishers' note puts it, Rocker's story "reminds us that the visionary topography of his paintings has its roots in a lost world".

Colin Ward

Publication of *The East End Years* by Fermin Rocker coincides with his 90th birthday exhibition at Bartley Drey Gallery in London from 17th February to 7th March, open from Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10am to 6pm. Bartley Drey Gallery is at 62 Old Church Street, London SW3



'Arrest', drawing by Fermin Rocker taken from his book *The East End Years*

## Melancholic Troglodytes

*Melancholic Troglodytes*, issue No. 2, January 1998, £3 (available from Box MT, 121 Railton Road, London SE24 — note this publication is not stocked by Freedom Press).

A revolving mirror of a magazine in English and Persian, which gives the advantage of opening from opposite ends. As do some of the contributors' pseudonyms. As does the editorial disappointment at the response to the first issue being simultaneously frosty and sent to the desert. Well, experts are divided on global warming. An interesting extended metaphor for the producers' rejuvenated interest in production, though Khatemi's transference, according to current Irani folklore, is liable to be even more pitiable. The question is: at who is it aimed? Presumably anybody prepared to take an interest. Then, apart from the novelty, why use resources (their own) which must be reflected in the cover price and therefore also those of purchasers, who will only read their most comfortable language? Which, in this case, is generally post-situationist (which is an intriguing exercise in Persian).

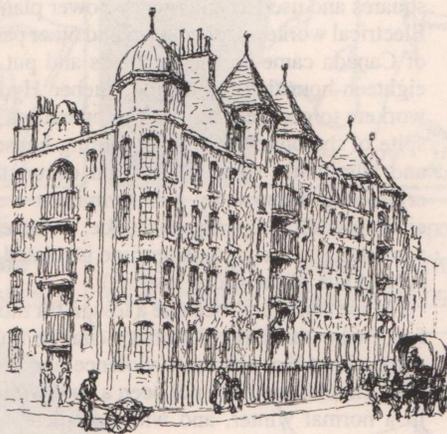
A good mixture of topics. Afghanistan to illustrate models of society, especially when at war (and there, it tends to be); circumcision and baseball as power tools, which have Freudian resonances; a piece on torture and

punishment extends this further. What did Zarathustra spracht? (and you can't get more Persian than that). There is a critique of the anti-JSA campaign, at a tangent, which it would be in *Freedom*. Understandably, from such a source, there is an anti-Islamicist tone. The Nation of Islam hardly needs this in a revolutionary publication. The concept of an Islamic Barbie doll would be surreal if I didn't have a daughter. T'aarof explores the use of over-extended courtesy as a method of social control — you should have met my father-in-law. There is a detailed history of the development of chess used as a social metaphor, which is beyond my knowledge. A fanatic says that it's a mixture of interesting historical facts and ludicrous political analysis. The references to the game itself are extremely superficial.

This is generally a well produced magazine. The writers are convincingly transcultural. It contains graphics, never mind text, which would cause problems in Iran but produce a shrug in Britain (Beardsley, Indian erotica, Japanese cunnilingual octopus — seen it). It skulks menacingly between the two faces of its mirror. Native English speakers need an interest in Iranian/Persian culture. Iranians don't need the English text. Lots of fun and worth a read.

Ali

## Fermin Rocker The East End Years A Stepney Childhood with drawings by the author



*The East End Years: A Stepney Childhood* appeared in German translation a few years ago. This is its first publication in the original English. In exploring his origins as an artist, Fermin Rocker conjures a moving and colourful picture of his remarkable father, of anarchism and of the Jewish East End.

192 pages

ISBN 0 900384 92 1

£7.95

Freedom Press  
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

# THE BIG ISSUE MEANS BIG BUSINESS AS USUAL

The following editorial was published in the February issue of *Street Spirit*. Editor Terry Messman is now suggesting a boycott of *The Big Issue* and/or *The Body Shop* (its financial backer). *The Big Issue* violates its own charter and moves into Los Angeles/Santa Monica in a move that some predict will destroy the local homeless newspaper *Making Change*. Both NASNA and the National Coalition for the Homeless have both publicly opposed *The Big Issue's* move into LA and supported *Making Change*. Neither have taken any position on the proposed boycott, nor do the opinions in the following editorial represent their position.

At the Seattle founding convention of the North America Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) last September, *Big Issue* representative Ruth Turner told the assembled street paper editors the Big Secret of Big Business. "There is so much money, money, money available from advertising", Turner said with great relish. "It's money for nothing."

It was a revealing self-portrait of an acquisitive corporation ruled by the profit motives of Big Business. For although *The Big Issue* is sold by homeless people, in truth it is a multinational corporation that cultivates advertising more than it fosters activism. As we are seeing in Los Angeles, it is more likely to emulate the hostile take-over strategy of big corporations than to demonstrate the kind of mutual support and solidarity that must be the hallmarks of the homeless movement. Founded and funded by the Body Shop corporation, *The Big Issue* has launched a major bid to take over the large 'market' for street newspapers it perceives in Los Angeles, arrogantly shouldering aside a pre-existing street paper, *Making Change*, produced by Jennafer Waggoner, a homeless woman and dedicated non-violent activist. *The Big Issue* is charged by Waggoner with violating the Charter of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP), which prohibits members from staging hostile or competitive infringements on another street paper's territory. Waggoner recently wrote to *Big Issue* editor/publisher John Bird: "Does not your INSP Charter state a member will not invade the established selling area of an existing charter member? My paper is a member of NASNA. NASNA is a member of the INSP. This means *Making Change* is an INSP member whose territory you are violating. How can we not see your moves and your motives as hostile?"

By ignoring its own INSP Charter, *The Big Issue* has triggered deep resentment in some homeless advocacy circles. NASNA's Executive Committee met on 8th January and agreed that it was "unanimously opposed to *The Big Issue* setting up in Los Angeles". The NASNA body discussed ways of "turning up the heat on *The Big Issue*", including "mobilising allies in the global streetpaper movement to register

protest, arranging a picket of their London headquarters, and registering complaints with their major funders". The Executive Board of the National Coalition for the Homeless also approved a resolution opposing the *Big Issue's* actions.

*Big Issue* Editor Bird wrote to NASNA that he was "very disturbed" by its opposition to his Los Angeles venture, and quickly reached for legal muscle to protect his business interests. Bird wrote: "It would seem that we have so outraged NASNA that we are now threatened by you. I am not sure of the legality – or otherwise – of your threats [to protest *The Big Issue*], but I shall certainly be taking legal advice as to whether you are within the law to make such threats".

Uh oh! Big Lawyers! Big Trouble! Big Legal Bills! Big Business As Usual! The fight between *The Big Issue* and its small opponent is hardly a fair one. It is an unseemly spectacle to have such a large, well-funded company running roughshod over a homeless woman who puts out a grass-roots newspaper with next to no funding, no advertising, and no corporate deep pockets to draw on. *The Big Issue*, on the other hand, is a multi-million-dollar corporation founded and funded by the Body Shop in London in 1991.

This is not the first time *The Big Issue* has tried to seize the market in a US city. It made similar unsettling moves in San Francisco in 1994 and New York in 1997. Paul Boden,

director of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness, told the London paper in no uncertain terms that he would consider any attempt to set up a *Big Issue* clone in the Bay Area an unacceptable attack on the Coalition's Street Sheet.

In New York, *The Big Issue* was planning on driving *The Street News* out of business, an especially cold-blooded proposition considering that Bird acknowledges getting the idea for his paper from the New York street paper.

NASNA Chair Tim Harris attended the General Assembly of the International Network of Street Papers in London in 1996. In an article about the conference, Harris reported the thinking behind *The Big Issue's* craving to grab the Big Apple.

"Bird claimed that New York's *Street News*, which has inspired *The Big Issue* and numerous other papers since it began in 1989, is on the verge of complete failure because the paper is 'unreadable'. The New York paper has, in recent years, focused editorially on poverty issues, but has been racked by internal difficulties. While no formal announcement was made, several lower-level *Big Issue* staff confirmed rumours that *The Big Issue* plans to begin a competing paper in New York, probably before the summer of 1997."

To my ears, this strategy sounds similar to a vulture carefully keeping a death watch on the weakest animal in the herd, but in the world of venture capitalism such behaviour is all too often the norm.

Gordon Roddick, chairman of the Body Shop and co-founder of *The Big Issue*, reportedly held talks with Bird about funding a competing paper in New York in October, 1997, with moves into Los Angeles and San Francisco to follow. The New York attempt was thwarted, but the move into Los Angeles, alas, proceeded.

Because of these repellent machinations, I personally will never again buy anything from the Body Shop. I join *Street Sheet* editor Paul Boden's call for people to refuse on principle to purchase *The Big Issue*. The paper and its corporate backer must be held accountable for this Machiavellian marketing strategy.

*The Big Issue* identified the largest market where they perceived some weakness in an existing street paper, and went after it in an ill-disguised take-over bid. New York City was the largest market with a seemingly weak paper. But the prediction of the impending demise of the New York *Street News* was premature. *The Big Issue* ran headlong into the steadfast fighting spirit of *Street News* editor Indio Washington.

The result? *Street News* is still going strong, so Bird took the travelling, colonising roadshow to the West Coast, where Los Angeles beckoned with the second largest media market in the country, and only a tiny street paper edited by Jennafer Waggoner in the way. A push-over. But Waggoner is a dedicated activist who stands up for the human rights of homeless people, and has been arrested for her principled acts of civil disobedience, most recently for occupying the vacant Flamingo Motel. Her paper, *Making Change*, is born out of the struggles of homeless people in Santa Monica and Los Angeles. *The Big Issue* is born out of a London-based corporation's grandiose ambitions to colonise ever-new territories to further the expansionist drive of a paper 'empire'.

Waggoner's paper, and her entire activist life, is based on advancing the human rights of homeless people and conducting the kind of hard-hitting reporting on justice issues practised by most North American homeless advocacy papers.

*The Big Issue*, on the other hand, is a paper that, as Bird himself wrote in a letter to NASNA on 9th January, has "an editorial balance of 20% social matters and 80% general interest". This means that by his own estimate, *the Big Issue* consists disproportionately of entertainment fluff, rock star biogs and celebrity coverage. Add in all the column inches devoted to advertising, and a true picture emerges of where *The Big Issue's* heart is – and isn't.

They concocted their 'editorial balance' as shrewdly as they crafted their move into Los Angeles. Infotainment sells, and bland editorial content doesn't offend advertisers or challenge the public with too much hard-hitting reporting about 'difficult' subjects.

*USA Today* and *People* magazine also feature entertainment journalism and eschew outspoken political advocacy, but they do not promote themselves as a street newspaper, nor do they compete with grass-roots homeless papers, nor try to knock them out of business. In his article about the INSP conference, Harris reported that Bird said he was committed to spreading his paper's model of "general interest entertainment journalism and corporate support", and that the major function of street newspapers is to be a 'business'.

"*The Big Issue* is not a homeless paper", Bird said. "It never has and never will be. It is a paper sold by homeless people. While we have a ghetto in the paper for the homeless called *Streetlights*, we want to break people out of that."

It is insufferably demeaning for Bird to dismiss the one part of his paper where homeless people express themselves as a 'ghetto' that they must break out of – presumably so they can write about more commercial subjects such as Madonna, Oasis, or people addicted to playing the Lottery.

There is an urgent need for the kind of passionate, politically committed journalism practised by *Making Change* and many North American street papers. The real threat posed by *The Big Issue* is that with its big budget and big corporate backing, it will engulf and devour smaller papers and replace their crusading reporting with its dumbed-down entertainment journalism (and its 20% reporting on what Bird blandly calls 'social matters').

The most important goal of homeless newspapers is not to attract advertising revenue but to fearlessly tell the truth about the injustices suffered by poor people and to build a movement to safeguard basic human rights. A street paper with a conscience must join in solidarity struggles with the homeless community and promote activist campaigns to win decent housing, jobs, welfare entitlements, health care and disability rights.

In his letter to NASNA on 9th January Bird wrote: "Many of your members will no doubt see *The Big Issue* as a piece of fluff, too slick by half. I would be very surprised if it were different. Their vision of a street paper is totally opposite to that of *The Big Issue* as it is represented in its UK incarnation."

"A piece of fluff, too slick by half" – finally we can agree on something.

Terry Messman

## THE GREAT ICE STORM OF '98

No doubt some of you read about the terrible Nice storm we had in Eastern Canada recently. More than three million people were without electricity (about half the population of Quebec), many of them for ten days or more. Twenty people died and the cost has been more than two billion dollars. As I write (20th January) several hundred thousand people are still freezing in the dark. What does this natural disaster have to do with anarchism?

First off, the extent and duration of the blackout was the result of a conscious policy of centralisation by Quebec Hydro and the government that owns it. Two major hydro projects supply power to the Greater Montreal area (one of which is James Bay – remember the Cree) and when the ice caused the immense pylons to fall like nine-pins the result was darkness. A decentralised system using hydro dams on smaller streams and natural gas-fuelled generation plants would not be nearly so vulnerable.

One result of the centraliser mentality is empire building and bureaucratic lethargy. Quebec Hydro paid householders to switch to electric heating from other sources, such as wood and natural gas, in order to rationalise the existence of and create an internal market for the James Bay project. Way back in 1910 a commission demanded that all electrical wiring in urban areas be placed underground. Eighty-eight years later, only 6% of wires are buried. The major problem for the electrical workers is not the big high tension wires but the small local lines, *tens of thousands* of which were broken.

On the positive side of things, this disaster showed that solidarity and mutual aid has not

been swallowed up by post-modern selfishness. Hundreds of thousands of people moved in with friends and family members who were lucky enough to still have power. The extended family and the hippie commune became the social norm. For those people with no place to go shelters were set up in schools and churches and people from all across Canada and the US donated money, food, firewood and clothing. Unofficial neighbourhood electrical co-ops sprang up as extension cords were strung from house to house from small generators. The railway donated several diesel-powered locomotives which were trucked to village squares and used as emergency power plants. Electrical workers from the US and other parts of Canada came by the hundreds and put in eighteen-hour days alongside Quebec Hydro workers to get the lines back in operation. In spite of the opportunities for looting houses, and admittedly some of this did occur, the crime rate dropped by half (criminals were either afraid of slipping on the ice, or there is something to the view that crime is related to breakdown of the social instinct).

The ice storm also became a lesson for those folks who think revolutionary change must come about through mass violence and civil war. Thankfully it has not been a cold winter. In a normal winter, and with complete dislocation of services such as would occur in mass violence, the result would be thousands of deaths. We are so vulnerable today, and everybody knows it. Civil war would be a kind of auto-genocide. You can be assured that the vast majority of people would never tolerate this.

Larry Gambone

Rich and Poor



To the Commons to hear debate on the Gulf War or peace. Dismal scene: a few bored MPs, not many listeners in the gallery either. Not a single woman on the Tory benches, a few on Labour's, but they are mute and leave the talking to the men. Except for Benn, Dalyell and Corbyn, none of the speeches are well informed or make sense. Roberson (the War Minister) slips in a remark about 'Agent 15' which he says is now part of the Iraqi chemical weapons armoury. Who then supplied those precious drops to them? Wasn't Agent 15 the cause of Gulf veteran's syndrome? This was denied at the time and the soldiers are still waiting for compensation. How obliging of the western chemical companies to supply their 'enemies' with such deadly poisons. Some twerp on the Labour benches advocates use of the neutron bomb. Roberson pretends not to hear him (hubbub, uproar). Blair is not there, neither is Hague. A man falls asleep in the public gallery, snores and is removed by the ushers - to the dungeons? Come 10pm Robin Cook pulls Roberson's coat-tails and his puppet stops speaking abruptly. Division bells. Almost 500 toe the line, 27 say no to the war. As to where they found all that many MPs to vote, there were never more than a hundred or so in the chambers. Perhaps they have adopted the old trick of the auction rooms where, when no bids were forthcoming for some worm-eaten chair, the auctioneer took the bids off the 'ceiling'.

When the news of the possibility of war in Iraq came up I attended the first of many vigils in Whitehall with perhaps twenty people, brave lovely people. But the numbers multiplied rapidly as the threat grew greater. On one such occasion there were about two thousand people intending to link arms and encircle the Ministry of Defence building. That was the intention anyway, was it not, for the heroes of the Socialist Worker's Party who broke ranks and stormed the iron gates of Downing Street holding their placards aloft to gain publicity. So the encirclement was a bit patchy. As to what the SWP were playing at in breaking up an anti-war demonstration is as unfathomable as it is predictable in all their manifestations. Perhaps they missed Paul Foot's advice on the matter who, at the same time, was reciting Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy* to a packed audience at the Conway Hall.

Busy life. Also went to Northwood in the same cause where, together with a hundred brave people, we blocked the entrances of the nerve centre of the war machine: the HQ of the Rapid Deployment Force. Agile people sat on the high gates and displayed a huge banner of which you may have seen photographs. It said: *WE ARM DICTATORS THEN BOMB THEIR PEOPLE.*

Ominous place. Police guarding soldiers, soldiers cuddling machine guns. The quietest demonstration I have ever been to. People stood there for hours facing each other across the gates without a word spoken, except for a child of about six years of age who suddenly ran to the gate and kicked the wire and piped at the soldiers "It is wrong to kill people". The soldier's face went red and his hands tightened on the gun.

Then the evening vigil with candles and speeches, and now a very large crowd. This time I took some copies of *Freedom* along and, lo and behold, the fifty copies went like hot cakes, including to such notables as Harold Pinter, Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn.

The atmosphere was indeed funereal before the visit of the UN secretary general to Iraq, when almost all the speakers, with the exception of Jeremy Corbyn, were convinced that war was unavoidable. George Galloway MP made a speech which even told us what to do in the event of the start of the bombing. This was a time when the war party nearly got away with it. Typical to the indifference to people's feelings was the dreary *Evening Standard's* headline lying in the gutter at Whitehall, which shouted in mockery of the peace chant: 'All we are saying is give war a chance'.

The crisis is not over. Iraq was meant to be only the first hurdle. This time, temporarily, the war machine has been checked. All honour to the few protesters here and elsewhere who stood up and stood together.

John Rety

Can only anarchists be ethical?

Dear *Freedom*,  
Edmund MacArthur and Francis Ellingham (7th February) disagreed with my assertion in the previous edition that only anarchists can be ethical. In doing so they produced some woolly thinking, perhaps a marker of British academic ethics or philosophy, which both glossed over what I actually said and failed to follow the logic of their own contentions.

If I may take more of your space, I might reinforce the logical and very reasonable views of the earlier article with some further rational arguments. These are, that ethics are (must be, by definition) based upon reason, and that to reason objectively you must be as free as possible of the dogma and assumptions which trammel behaviour and individual choices in any culture. In addition to being reasonable, you must also be logical and rational. Of all the socio-cultural and political systems, anarchy provides the only irrefutable foundation for such freedom. To repeat what I claimed for those who attempt to think freely and rationally, "the degree to which individuals reason rationally about ethical questions is a measure of the degree of anarchy which they display".

This is utter rubbish, according to Edmund MacArthur. But in claiming that non-anarchists (the non-free?) such as Marxists, Liberals, Socialists and Conservatives, and even some religious thinkers, can think freely, is surely a contradiction in concepts. When politicians, say Conservatives, think freely they are accused, are they not, of 'breaking the

party line'. Being a Conservative or whatever consists exactly in subscribing to the dogma of that party line. Such people are 'free' to agree or leave (or be excommunicated). In serious cases some are even accused of causing an outbreak of 'anarchy' in the party or religion. Edmund MacArthur is not unusual, he wants the comfort of unthinking dogma with the luxury of an illusion of freedom.

The objections of Francis Ellingham appear more subtly reasonable. However in quoting David Hume - "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" - to refute my claim that ethics must be "based on reason and rational or logical thought", he overlooks the fact that although Hume's argument may be based on reason, and even be logical, it is far from rational. Take a contemporary example. People who want to lose weight could do so by cutting their heads off. Reason and logic tells us that headless (or bodiless if you prefer) they would weigh less. However rationality would add that, whether considering the head or the body, it would not be the same person which weighed less. The reasonable and logical process of losing weight in this way has lost something else. It was this loss of something else in the absence of rationality towards which Hume was heading. The difficult thing about ethical thought is that it requires all three: reason, logic and rationality. Two out of three is just not good enough.

As for Ellingham's distortion of the implication of Kant's Categorical Imperative, it would probably have dear old Immanuel reasoning in his grave. A suicidal misanthropist with a bacteriological weapon could wipe out the human race without contravening it? I think not. Is a suicidal person acting reasonably, rationally or logically? Even if they are, and I don't dispute their right to take their own life, it is surely obvious that they are behaving unethically in seeking to take the lives of others, is it not?

I share the hunch that we may not be autonomous choosers ('we' being humans in general), but to claim that therefore the correctness or otherwise of choices based on ethical theories which assume that we are, is not determinable, misses the point (it also reinforces my original contention). One of the major points about anarchy is that we seek, struggle, fight even, to be autonomous individuals. As part of that struggle the intellectual activity which Francis rejects is unavoidable. Without it we, that is humans in general, would still be wondering if it was okay to go into the caves out of the rain or to be individuals rather than serfs or to think for ourselves instead of relying on gods and not desiring to govern our lives in free association with others.

The freedom of anarchy may not only be the basis of ethical thought; it may also be the basis for human social evolution. Change comes from those who, in the spirit of anarchy, take the freedom necessary to think and/or act outside the norm, outside the law, which, no matter how reasonable it may appear, is still dogmatic and static.

Colin Johnson

Class struggle and syndicalism

Dear *Freedom*,  
I find Brian Bamford's letter (21st February 1998) to be puzzling. Is he suggesting I looked up the term 'class struggle' in an index in order to forget about it? Surely not? I looked up the term to read what the authors said and published some of their comments in my article in *The Raven*. His comment: "Mr Neville's method of discovering the significance of 'class struggle anarchism by perusing the index of a book, denuded of its text, would seem to be beneath contempt". Of course I read the texts. I suggest Bamford re-reads the article then he would not make such a silly comment about sociology. And what has his clear hatred of sociology got to do with slum landlords, or me for that matter? He is only expressing his bigotry. If he supports 'class struggle' fair enough. Insulting others by factual inaccuracies does not help nor make his case. It just makes it sound ridiculous.

I agree with Larry Gambone's perceptive remark: "Class is a concept or analytical device, not a thing". I would also go further and point out that sociological studies of social stratification ('class' if you like) have now become quite sophisticated. Few sociologists (apart from the odd marxists) now use terms like 'working class', 'middle class', 'upper class' or even 'ruling class' because these terms no longer mean anything but are simply clichés, not descriptions of reality, and I often have had to make a mental jump when moving from a sociological audience to an anarchist audience because of the naivety of the latter's conception of reality.

Peter Neville

Dear *Freedom*,  
Reading the first part of Brian Bamford's autobiographical sketch, 'Anarcho-Syndicalism: an English eclipse' (21st February) I am struck by the similarity of our backgrounds. We both lived as children in two-up, two-down terraced houses, with fathers who were skilled workers and also had workbenches at home, his with *Hobbies Weekly*, mine with *Newnes Practical Mechanics*.

I was a factory worker who found an easier life by training as a designer. He was a manual worker who found an easier life by becoming

a full-time trade union officer. I joined the Anarchist Federation of Britain (AFB) in 1949. He joined the same group in 1960, after it had changed its name to the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF).

One difference between us is that he seems quite proud to have been a member of the AFB/SWF, whereas I came to see my membership as a mistake and dropped out.

I was aware that in early 1945, when the editors of *War Commentary* were awaiting trial, there had been an ill-natured split in London between the anarchists who became the Freedom Press Group and their supporters, and those who became the AFB. But I saw no reason to take sides in a London split. I contributed articles to both *Freedom* and the AFB's *Direct Action*, and when I hitchhiked to London to make direct contact I contacted both sides. I quickly learned that the aims of the AFB were not particularly anarchistic.

I learned this in conversation with Ken Hawkes, a founder of the AFB and its most influential thinker. I wanted workers' control in the anarchist sense: the people who do the work making the decisions, free from control by anybody else. Ken wanted workers' control in the sense of individuals coming under the control of the workers collectively.

The AFB manifesto said that delegates elected to the various levels of decision making should be instantly recallable, so that power could not be seized by a new oligarchy regardless of the electorate. The aim was genuine majority rule, not phoney majority rule, and certainly not individual sovereignty. A young AFB member to whom Ken Hawkes referred me for information told me he was an ex-trotskyist attracted to syndicalism by its aim of "putting the working class in power". When the AFB decided to drop 'anarchist' from the name, I guess this was in recognition that it was not anarchist, although of course it had anarchists among its members.

Anarchism and syndicalism are not incompatible, but, as Larry Gambone put it in *Freedom* a few months ago, "when people hyphenate anarchism with something else, when push comes to shove, they tend to forget the anarchist bit".

Donald Room

What about the leisure society?

Dear *Freedom*,  
*Freedom* has asked the right question: 'What about the leisure society?' (24th January). But there are some positive things happening. Several million people in North America have 'cashed out' of the system and gone to live simpler and more leisurely lives in small towns and rural areas. In fact, during the past fifteen years or so, the population increase in villages and the countryside has been greater than in urban areas. Several million also work at home via fax, modem and Internet, allowing them to set their own work time and pace and to not waste hours in commuting. Many workers are retiring in their fifties, and indeed the majority of Canadians claim to be aiming to retire by age 55. Some have immigrated. One comes across Americans or Europeans in places like Thailand or Costa Rica living there for the inexpensive and leisurely lifestyle.

Indeed, as society has become more wealthy, it has become possible to opt-out. No skilled worker of a hundred years ago could even dream of retiring in his fifties, but had to keep his nose to the grindstone until death. For all but the poorest sector of the workforce, it is possible to have that life of leisure. But this goal has to be a priority. Too many people get trapped in consumerism which keeps them working like slaves.

Larry Gambone

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**13th March** General discussion

**20th March** Symposium on 'Anarchism and  
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**27th March** General discussion

**3rd April** 'In the Belly of the Beast: Anarchists  
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**10th April** General discussion

**17th April** The London Anarchist Forum meets  
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**24th April** General discussion

**1st May** Symposium on 'Anarchist Alternatives'

**8th May** General discussion

**15th May** 'May '68 in Paris by a Participant'  
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