

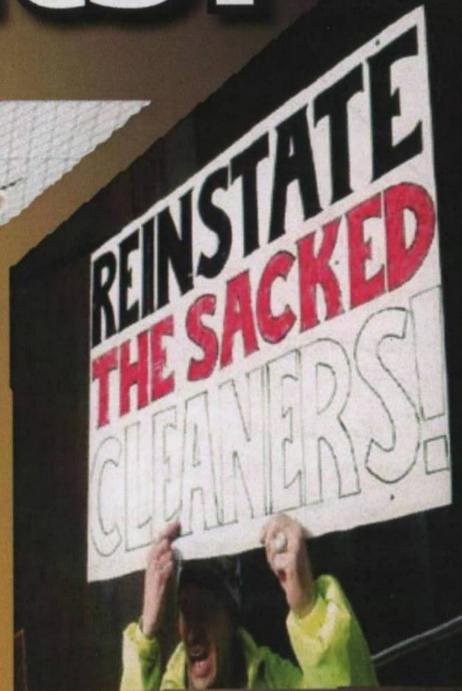
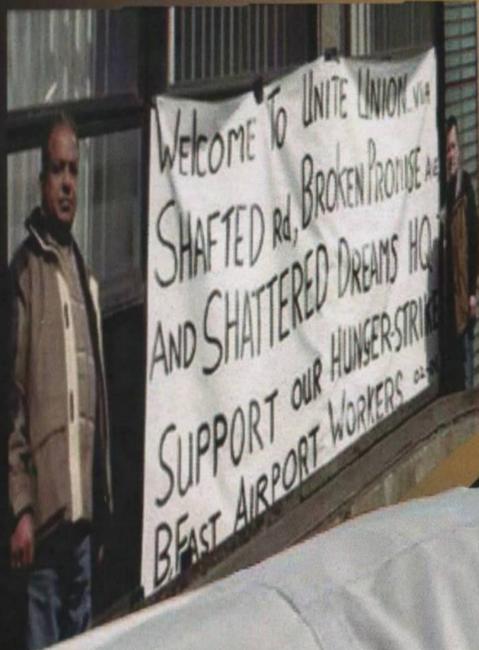
# Black Flag

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## Union sellouts?



Unison's militant exiling, CWU's Royal Mail fiasco, Unite and Gate Gourmet, abandoned Mitie staff, NUT and St Paul's Way, the Belfast Airport farce... what's wrong with the big TUC unions?

**Figurehead:** TUC general secretary Brendan Barber lambasts "bad bosses," but do the member unions of his organisation really stand up when it matters? [Page 7](#)

**Also inside this issue...**

**Exposed:** Scandal of our vicious visa system

**In focus:** A defence of Proudhon's importance

**Plus:** Pirates, the past, the future, reviews and more...

# Editorial

Welcome to issue 232 of Black Flag, which coincides once again with the annual London Anarchist Bookfair, the largest and longest-running event of its kind in the world. Now that this issue is the 7th published by the "new" collective we can safely drop the "new" bit!

We believe that we have come a long way with Black Flag. As a very small collective we have managed to publish and sustain a consistent and high-quality, twice yearly, class-struggle anarchist publication on a shoe-string budget and limited personnel.

Before proceeding further, we would like to make our usual appeal for more people to get involved with the editorial group. The more people who get involved, the more Black Flag will grow with increased frequency and wider distribution etc.

This issue includes our usual eclectic mix of libertarian-left theory, history, debate, analysis and reportage. Additionally, this issue is again somewhat of an anniversary issue, which acknowledges two significant events.

Firstly, it is the 170th anniversary of Proudhon's classic work *What is Property* and his famous declaration "I am an Anarchist."

To celebrate Iain McKay examines Proudhon's work, which is complemented by the first English translation of his 1849 letter to philosopher Pierre Leroux.

Secondly, it is the 100th anniversary of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT. To commemorate we publish a transcription of a recent talk given in Manchester on the years which led to its formation in 1910.

Sticking with classic anarchist theory we also feature part one of the *Evolution of Anarchism*, by Brian Morris, with an analysis of the work of Peter Kropotkin.

The Anarchist Federation takes a look at the economic crisis, while another article offers a critique of the trade unions and the role they play in the grand scheme of things.

Other contemporary features include: The experiences and reflections of a migratory worker, navigating the immigration minefield; Somali pirates put in perspective; an update on the Zapatista communities...

Read on and enjoy.



**Emerging threat:** Can we, like the Black Flag ladybird, emerge from behind the legal jungle to take on the parasites promoting austerity? Picture: Anya Brennan.

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

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# Victims of the

## Exposé: How immigration rules are used as a way to test policy and help MPs look 'tough'

**H**ow do people get into – or thrown out of – the UK? Aside from scaremongering headlines, nationalist sloganeering, institutionalised multiculturalism or inane political banter; what exactly is happening in immigration that plagues foreign students and workers with visa restrictions, absorbent fees, and anxiety?

Most days, it's difficult to say. Immigration rules change every few weeks: in the months leading up to this article the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the Home Office upped fees, made over forms, limited how applicants can pay, adjusted photo requirements, started English language testing for spouse visas, altered student visa rules and introduced an interim immigration cap.

David Cameron announced in the press that only "tens of thousands" of non-EU nationals will be permitted into the UK, down from the "hundreds of thousands" here now who will presumably have to leave when their visa expires.

This maddening bureaucracy is not specific to the Tories. Last April Gordon Brown changed the requirements for all

Earner' category (£150,000+ a year). Even the inconvenience of visa renewal can be dispelled through the £15,000 "Super Premium" visa service that promises to avert hassle and delay for those who can afford it. Immigration policy is yet another manifestation of the hypocrisy and elitism of politicians protecting their personal interests, without even the need to veil inequity with the language of "big society," democracy and fairness.

Under the Points Based System (PBS) – the focus of this article – immigrants are literally quantified by their value to capitalism, automatons either working or preparing to work, categorised by age, nationality and spending potential. If politicians want to nourish working class division, speeches

for new visa applicants.

Foreign (non-EU) spouses, students and some workers were among the first recipients of the now-defunct ID card scheme. The cards were compulsory: visa application forms were changed to include a Biometric Residence Permit form. Biometrics had to be provided during the application process, not after the visa had been issued; and without a visa, applicants were not in a powerful position to challenge the ID card.

By 2012 ID cards were to be compulsory for all foreigners, with visa applicants testing and normalising the scheme before choice was taken away from the rest of the populace. More recently, universities are now forced to report regularly on their foreign students to the Home Office, an ominous development in citizen surveillance and outsourcing of border control. Points based systems are being used outside of immigration, such a scheme is now being piloted to assess incapacity benefit claimants.

### What is the Points Based Immigration System?

The PBS system treats workers and students as, probably, our rulers actually see us: nearly homogenous cogs in a machine that makes money, numerically graded according to our ability to work and consume, devoid of human aspiration.

Phased in between 2008-2010, the PBS replaced over 80 different types of visas for students and workers from outside the EU wanting to (legally) reside in the UK. Under the new system, applicants must score points in order to obtain one of the five visas available in the hierarchical tired visa scheme ('T' visas). Points quantify 'attributes' which are slightly different for each of the five tiers, generally they are awarded for previous earnings, nationality, age, education, sponsorship, language, and funds available in the applicant's bank account.

While the number of points required generally stays the same, what changes month by month is what the applicant must do/earn/be in order to score them.

The rules that govern a visa are the ones in force the day the application is received by the UKBA, precarity arises during visa renewal or when making an initial application. Suddenly requiring an applicant to earn £30,000 a year instead of £20,000 means that someone who worked 12 months believing they could renew their visa is faced with the decision to either go



**Final say:** Lunar house is where visa applications go to die

Points Based System (PBS) visas – affecting non-EU workers and students – with only two weeks' notice in order to better his election announcement speech. Application forms for visas can be 70-plus pages long, and mistakes can lose the applicant both their visa fee (hundreds of pounds) and the ability to enter or remain in the UK. Complicating this treacherous landscape is the UKBA's esoteric website and a domestic cottage industry offering immigration advice whilst extracting maximum profit from people faced with buying a one-way ticket home.

Of course, the financial drain, stress, and precarity of immigration doesn't affect the rich, who can waltz across the border as a member of the UKBA's 'Very High

about a migrant threat to jobs and "England for the English" are backed up by arbitrary changes to immigration rules. Incoming migrants are then graded slightly differently according to the needs of the political class. Visa-holders or applicants have little redress to challenge new rules, many of which are made outside of Parliament and not subject to public debate.

Border control is, of course, people control and these issues are important apart from the heartache of knowing friends or partners trying to enter or stay in the country. Pioneering schemes for surveillance and monitoring are enabled by the rhetoric of "uncontrolled immigration" and terrorism, then first manifest as policy

# political game

home or overstay illegally- risking a 10-year ban on re-entering the UK if caught.

There is no ability to plan long-term when the goalposts continually change, sometimes with only weeks' notice. Students who entered the UK a few years ago believing they could apply for settlement (Indefinite Leave to Remain) in three years now find that it's five. By the time they have jumped through the requisite visa hoops the rules will be completely different.

This is the goal and the PBS is frequently championed by the Home Office and politicians as being reactive to the economic and political environment in the UK. Reactive political changes to immigration policy yield a day's sound bite ("a tough stance on immigration" was popular during the election), and create an ever-shifting labyrinth of sometimes conflicting rules and guidelines. Sudden bureaucratic changes to a form, photographs, or maintenance funds (more on this later) trick people who can't afford expensive legal advice into making administrative mistakes, resulting in denied visas.

The appeals process merely re-counts the points, forms can be corrected but sudden rule changes cannot be contested. As Javier noted back in 2007 when the PBS was unveiled, "Chance, poverty, love, war, family ties, repression, rumours, etc; do not win you any points."

## A brief overview of the visas available under the PBS:

### TIER 1 (T1): HIGHLY SKILLED WORKERS

"Highly skilled" is a slight misnomer, this category is primarily concerned with how much the applicant earns; not what type of labour they do.

This is the only visa that does not require sponsorship, meaning that Tier 1 workers are not tied to a school or workplace and are allowed to change jobs without permission from the Home Office. 90 points are required to obtain this coveted visa in the following areas, that is unless the applicant has £200,000 or £1,000,000 of free capital to obtain an Entrepreneur or Investor version of this visa.

■ **Age:** A peculiar aspect of the PBS is inbuilt ageism. Until recently, applicants under 28 scored 20 points, while those who dared to turn 32 received none. Under (continually) new rules applicants now receive the most points for being under 30. Points lost to aging must be compensated for in thousands of pounds in increased income, or obtaining a Masters or PhD degree (which would require a different visa).

■ **Education:** The 'Very High Earner' (£150,000+) applicant does not need to have formal qualifications of any type. Everyone else must have at least a bachelor's degree.

■ **Previous Earnings:** At the moment, applicants must have earned at least £25,000 - scoring a measly five points - in the 12 months prior to making an application.



**Latest in line:** Theresa May, the Tory Home Office minister, has carried on from Labour policy

Higher income yields more points, which can recoup points lost for age, lack of advanced degrees, or not having previous lived in the UK.

**Language:** In order to 'succeed in the United Kingdom labour market' the applicant must score 10 points for English ability. This includes citizenship from a short list of English-speaking countries (oddly, for a while Canada was excluded), or passing a language test.

**Available Funds (Maintenance Fund):**

The Maintenance Fund is consistently one of the most contentious, confusing, and legally vulnerable requirements of the PBS. Applicants to all five tiers must have between £800 and £2,800 (more if including

dependents) available in a bank account for three months prior to submitting a visa application, the balance never dipping lower even for a day.

In July 2010, a group of students whose applications were rejected due to Maintenance Fund requirements mounted a devastating legal challenge to the PBS that won in appeal. The judgement in *Pakina and others v Secretary of State for the Home Department* ruled that the PBS was not law: "Immigration Rules were approved by Parliament in the same way that legislation



has to be, the Points Based System Policy Guidance was not... This process was neither overseen nor approved by parliament."

Because the hundreds of rule changes were never passed through parliament, they are technically only guidelines. "There is a plethora of Guidance published on the UKBA's website – all of it interlacing with the Immigration Rules to create the system's strict criteria for entry clearance and leave to remain, and also for colleges and employers to be entitled to sponsor students and skilled workers. None of it, it seems, is legally effective."

The Home Office downplayed the judgement while the UKBA pushed dozens of guidelines through parliament in the days that followed, some with a note apologising for the short notice. However, Pakina and others is still the Achilles heel of the PBS.

#### TIER 2 (T2): SKILLED WORKERS

Skilled workers are sponsored by their employer, meaning their ability to remain in the UK is directly linked to their job. If a T2 worker becomes redundant, leaves their job or is fired they have 28 days to either find new sponsored employment (and re-apply for another T2 visa) or leave the country.

Management software sends an active reminder to the Home Office that an employee is no longer working, overstaying illegally becomes much more difficult.

#### TIER 3 (T3): LOW SKILLED WORKERS

Tier 3 was originally established for temporary workers in construction and agriculture, but has been suspended since 2008.

#### TIER 4 (T4): STUDENTS

Similar to T2 workers, students must be enrolled at a university that has been approved by the Home Office.

In addition to installing the Sponsorship Management software, universities must report more than three days' "unauthorised non attendance" to the UKBA, carry out identity checks and comply with requests for information about T4 students.

Since summer 2010 universities have had to apply for a "Highly Trusted Sponsor License," ensuring that all university staff abide with the 21 pages of requirements dictated by the Home Office.

Non-compliance can strip the university of the ability to enroll non-EU students, a major revenue source. Foreign students

## Can't you just get married?

Marriage does not guarantee a spouse visa, which has its own restrictions and complexities. Current immigration policy towards marriage is so shocking it's worth recounting here.

Since 2005, a UK citizen (or a UK resident with Indefinite Leave to Remain) can only marry a non-EU citizen in the UK after obtaining a certificate of approval (permission to marry) from the UKBA, with one proviso: "The rules on certificates of approval do not currently apply if you plan to get married at an Anglican church in England or Wales."

Unfortunately, the physical Anglican Church building isn't the qualifier, the ceremony must be a religious ceremony conducted by an Anglican priest.

Any other religious – or atheistic – ceremony requires permission from the Home Office in order to be valid for a spouse visa.

Anglican priests are instructed to check passports and immigration status before marrying couples, but not all churches are diligent.

Until 2009, it cost £300 to apply for a certificate of approval, when it was challenged in court and the fee reimbursed. Further legal attacks have recently ruled the certificate of approval unlawful, and it may be abolished soon.

## Border Control State

The complexity and inanity of the PBS is no surprise: numerically grading a person to determine solely their worth to the economy is an exercise in artificiality.

Throw in politicians desperate to convince an electorate that the real enemy comes from overseas rather than above and a UKBA with unbridled surveillance and "legal" powers over migrants, it's no wonder the system is so inhuman.

By allowing only those well-off (university educated and previously working) to freely work in the UK and forcing other types of migrants here for refuge, family, love, or desperation into benefits or the black economy, the Home Office has created a self-fulfilling policy.

The PBS has scattered border control away from the boundaries of Britain and into schools, offices, and factories. Policing foreigners is inbuilt into existing hierarchical human relationships: teachers reporting on students, bosses on workers, facilitated by a direct online portal to the Home Office.

It is worrying that these systems are in place, being tested and refined.

The absurdity of the system reveals national borders as nothing more than a means for control and hoarding money; with complete disregard for the fallout of global capitalism or human ambition.

Protest and challenges to the PBS are rising, particularly amongst students and university staff.

People are more than the sum of their points assessment and it's time to reclaim a little humanity.



**Marked out:** Students on foreign visas are constantly monitored

Workers are subject to their own points assessment independent of having sponsorship, scoring points for education and future earning potential.

The inability to walk away from a job without going to Heathrow places T2 workers in an incredibly precarious situation, more so as their employers must possess a Sponsorship License issued by the UKBA.

The obligations for this license include installing "sponsorship management" software provided by the Home Office to directly report online an employee's contact details, if they fail to appear for work, or for violation of immigration status.

The immigration caps recently introduced by the Tories have severely restricted the number of Sponsorship Licenses, making it nearly impossible for T2 workers who lost their jobs during the recent cuts to find new employment. Since the Sponsorship

have very little flexibility in their degrees, universities must ensure that T4 students pass, and it is a criminal offence to switch degrees without permission from the Home Office.

These policies dramatically shift the burden of administering the Home Office's bidding from the bureaucrats and police to university staff and lecturers.

#### TIER 5 (T5): TEMPORARY WORKERS

Similar to T2 category, T5 visas cover a range of short term work visits to the UK in specific fields: religious officials, sportsmen, charity and government workers.

Also included is the Youth Mobility Scheme, allowing citizens aged 18-30 from Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Monaco to come to the UK for two years.

Youth Mobility Scheme workers can remain in the UK for two years, but cannot extend their stay or switch into another tier.





**Grand facade:**  
Congress house, the TUC  
headquarters in London.

**Analysis:** Ed Goddard asks what the trouble is with traditional TUC institutions and shop floor militancy

# RED FLAGS TORN

**T**he '80s have been back in fashion for a while now. It started ironically: a stonewashed denim jacket at a fancy dress party, a "Frankie Says Relax" t-shirt. But like all ironic jokes, it's been taken too far.

As if getting an economy to match our shoes, we now have rising unemployment, attacks on benefits, and public sector pay cuts. And as it obviously didn't matter who got in, we thought a Tory government would complete the look with the Labour Party back as the defenders of the poor, even using phrases like "working class" again.

We all know that any fightback will not come from the Labour Party (or any other party); it'll be from workers, public service users, parents, pensioners, students, the unemployed. If we see a mass working class fightback, we can expect the trade union leaders to be there, at the rallies and demonstrations, urging us forward.

But looking at the struggles of the past few years, should this fill us with confidence? Are these union leaders behind us?

## Some recent defeats and 'almosts'

In 2009, Visteon factories in London and Belfast were occupied. After dragging its heels and giving poor legal advice, Unite encouraged workers to leave the occupied factories.

Eventually a deal was done behind closed doors and the union recommended acceptance of a partial offer that left the crucial issue of pensions untouched.

In 2008, strikes were prepared across the public sector. Workers in Unison, NUT and PCS all took action against the government's 2% pay-cap, sometimes even on the same day.

After only two days of strike action Unison, the biggest of the three unions, took its dispute to ACAS.

The arbitrating body's decision being legally binding, this effectively removed its members from the dispute. The other unions soon followed suit.

In 2007, as the government threatened 40,000 job cuts at Royal Mail and attacked

pay and pensions, wildcat strikes spread across Britain with postal workers refusing to cross each others' picket lines.

The CWU soon called off all action to enter 'meaningful negotiations' which lasted weeks and came to no firm conclusion.

Demoralised and demobilised posties accepted an agreement basically unchanged from the first one.

But the CWU declared victory: they were guaranteed a 'consultation' role in the cuts.

These are just some examples; you can pick many more from recent and not-so-recent history. And they all raise the question: why are our unions so bad at what we expect them to do?

Not being a force for revolution or anything, but bog-standard, Ronseal-advert, doing-what-it-says-on-the-tin, fighting for their members' interests.



## Union troubles, outside and in..

Trade union officials will blame the membership, saying they don't want to fight. This might be true sometimes but didn't the wildcatting posties want to fight? The Visteon workers, after occupying their factories, didn't want to fight? There's more going on than just the 'workers aren't up for it'...

It's not all the unions' fault. Since the Thatcher years we've seen so many new laws restricting strike action that British industrial relations legislation is amongst the most anti-worker in the developed world.

Where once wildcat strikes and secondary picketing were common, now they are a rarity. Even things like forcing ballots to be done in secret, posted from home, where workers can't sense the solidarity of their workmates, is intended to discourage militant action.

But there's a problem with this argument too. These laws were pushed through as a result of working class defeat, a defeat that the unions were complicit in. Unions had

a career ladder that goes beyond the union and into the halls of social democratic governing institutions (think-tanks, Labour Party etc). Such a structure needs people to fill it: bureaucrats, who by definition are separate from the lives of the workers they represent. This is true even of former shopfloor militants.

Having left the workplace, their everyday experiences are not the same as those they used to work alongside. Their priorities and, more importantly, their material interests are not the same.

A victory for a worker means an improvement in working conditions; a victory for a bureaucrat means a seat at the negotiating table. But this seat for the bureaucrat doesn't necessarily mean any improvement for the worker, as the CWU's consultation 'victory' proves.

To say union bureaucrats have different priorities and interests is not just spite. It's to underline that it's not about them being "baddies." Many committed militants become union officials because they want to be employed spreading struggle rather than just working for some asshole boss. But the

became seen by many as an interference with local initiative and in 1909 Turner was accused of playing the "role of one of the most blatant reactionaries with which the Trades Union movement was ever cursed".

The tragedy of John Turner is not as simple as him 'selling out'; he remained an anarchist to the day he died. But as a full-time organiser paid by the union his priority began to be perpetuating the union rather than organising conflicts and soon his union was no different from the other unions.

This is because in the eyes of a trade union official, the union is not just the means to encourage struggle but the means through which struggle itself happens. Building the union is top priority and stopping things which get the union in trouble (like unofficial action) take on the utmost importance; after all, if the workers get the union into too much trouble, how will struggle happen?

Of course, an individual can take on a full-time union job and concentrate on organising conflicts rather than just recruitment.

But full-timers aren't freelancers, their bosses (the union they work for), like any other boss, needs to see results. And 'results' doesn't mean class conflict, it means membership recruitment and retention. Because without members, official trade unionism can't do what it most needs to.

## Meeting employers half-way

Criticisms of the bureaucratic nature of the trade unions are not uncommon on the far-left. Many conclude that we need to democratise or 'reclaim' the existing unions, while others more radically conclude that we need new unions, controlled by the rank and file.

However, this misses the point about what bureaucracies are and why they happen. Unions don't play this role because they're bureaucratic, they're bureaucratic because of the role they play. That is, they try to mediate the conflict between workers and their bosses. The primary way this happens is through monopolising the right to negotiate conditions on behalf of the workforce.

What is crucial when trying to do this is maintaining as high a membership as possible, regardless of how detached from the workplace such a union becomes. As union density drops generally, unions solve this problem with endless mergers as high membership figures help maintain their influence with management (not to mention the TUC and the Labour Party).

If a union is to secure its place as the negotiator in the workplace, it not only has to win the support of its members but also show bosses that they can get the workforce back to work once an agreement is reached. By having membership figures which they can point at to make sure management recognise them as the body able to negotiate wages and conditions, unions are also able to use this position to retain and attract members.

Equally, this influence with the workforce is what's useful to management. Union bureaucrats offer stability in the workplace, diverting workers' anger into a complex world of employment law, grievance

**Sparked anger:** CWU chief Billy Hayes oversaw a pensions deal which many felt amounted to a sellout



been disciplining their members for decades before these laws were even a twinkle in Thatcher's eye.

Whether it be NUM official Will Lawther's 1947 call to prosecute wildcatting miners "even if there are 50,000 or 100,000 of them" or the UPW slapping members with fines totalling £1,000 and threatening expulsion from the union (thus losing their jobs, as it was a closed shop) for refusing to handle post during the 1977 Grunwick strike, one thing seen time and again is union leaders moving against the militant action of their members. Putting it down to legislation passed in the last 20-30 years does nothing to explain such actions before then.

## Bureaucrats

So the problems aren't just external: we can't just act like proud parents and say they fell in with a bad crowd.

The fact is the unions have come to resemble the companies we expect them to fight with highly paid executive decision makers, a downward chain-of-command and

trouble is that 'struggle' and 'the union' are not the same thing and spreading the latter does not mean encouraging the former.

This has always been the case. The contradiction between workers and union bureaucrats has been going on in the UK for over a century. One such example was with the anarchist John Turner, an unpaid leader of the United Shop Assistants Union for seven years who in 1898 became a paid national organiser, travelling up and down the country recruiting to the union.

Though it grew massively, Turner had also started to change his approach. As conflicts flared up so would branches of the union; but as conflicts died down so did the branches. To keep a stable membership, he introduced sickness and unemployment benefits as perks of union membership.

The plan worked. A stable membership was established and by 1910 the Shop Assistants Union was the biggest in the London area. But the nature of the union had changed.

And even if Turner couldn't see it, the workers could. The union bureaucracy



Left out: Supporters of the Visteon workers put up a banner

procedures and casework forms.

As Buzz Hargrove, leader of the militant Canadian Auto Workers union, wrote in his autobiography: "Good unions work to defuse [workers'] anger – and they do it effectively. Without unions, there would be anarchy in the workplace. Strikes would be commonplace, and confrontation and violence would increase. Poor-quality workmanship, low productivity, increased sick time, and absenteeism would be the preferred form of worker protest.

"By and large, unions deflect those damaging and costly forms of worker resistance. If our critics understood what really goes on behind the labour scenes, they would be thankful that union leaders are as effective as they are in averting strikes."

The legal restrictions on unions mentioned earlier are often called "anti-union" laws. However when looked at like this, it becomes apparent that these laws are not so much anti-union as anti-worker.

If anything, it strengthens the union's hand by giving it a total monopoly on all legally recognised (and therefore protected) forms of action.

The same laws which help employers maintain order in the workplace can also be seen helping the union maintain its half of the bargain with the employers.

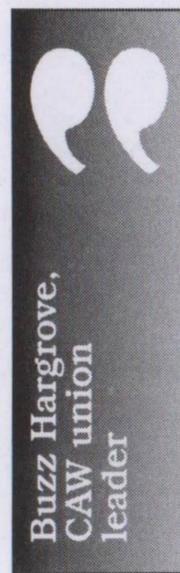
As a result, pro-union radicals often propose the 'wink and nod' strategy: that is, the union officially saying "come on, back to work, the union doesn't condone this..." while giving a sly little wink while the boss isn't looking.

But if bosses don't think a union can keep up its end of the bargain then they won't recognise them as negotiating "partners." Why would they? Why would anyone repeatedly reach an agreement with someone else if they knew that person wouldn't uphold their side of the bargain?

In order to function as representatives of

the workforce, unions have to play by the rules including, where necessary, policing the workforce and directing militancy into the "proper channels." The anti-strike laws reinforce this pressure by threatening unions with financial ruin if they don't rein in legally unprotected actions.

This is where the pressure to discipline members comes from. It's not a question of the right leaders with the right politics or of having the right principles written down in a constitution. It's not about individuals, it's about how structures work to fulfill their needs.



Good unions work to defuse anger. Without unions there would be anarchy in the workplace. Strikes would be commonplace

From John Turner through to today via the French CGT, American CIO, Polish Solidarnosc and countless others, unions have turned, through their role as mediators, away from their origins as expressions of class anger and into organisations disciplining the working class against its own interests.

Notably, the unions that avoided this fate are those that adopted explicitly revolutionary perspectives and consciously refused to play a mediating role, such as the Spanish CNT's refusal to participate in works councils and union elections.

## So what then?

This article is just the start of a wider criticism of unions. But where unions seek to act as mediators and representatives they necessitate the creation of bureaucracies to take on this task and bureaucrats, separated as they are from workers' lives, have different interests from them. They need primarily to maintain their seat at the negotiating table.

Therefore it's no surprise that where gains have been made (even within a union framework) it has been through the threat or actuality of unmediated direct action: from the Lindsey Oil Refinery strikes to the wildcat-prone refuse workers of Brighton to the solidarity of truck drivers not crossing Shell truckers' picket lines.

These strikes, which ended in unqualified victories for the workers, pushed the boundaries of trade union action, breaking anti-strike laws and taking place outside the official union structures (even if organised by lay-reps at local union level).

Our task is to encourage this sort of independent activity, to encourage the control of struggles through workplace meetings of all workers affected (regardless of union affiliation) and to encourage the use of direct action to get results.

These should be the guiding principles for us in workplace organising. Leave 'reclaiming the unions' to the Trots, they can build career ladders for bureaucrats. If union density is what creates militancy then the UK (at 27%) would be far more militant than France (8%). Clearly this is not the case.

We're done building new bureaucracies; we need to take action without them.

By Ed  
Goddard



**Analysis:** A journalist who has been out in the region argues that piracy is big business in Somalia – and as always, big business means big profits for big bosses, not freedom for the pirates. Workers are always the ones to get hurt...

# TERRIFIED ON THE

**W**hat's not to like about Somali pirates? It's not as if revolutionaries have a problem with the notion of relieving ship owners of a few million quid, by any means necessary. That's just a fraction of the cost of the average superyacht.

And anyway, the perpetrators are virtually forced to seize supertankers and containerhips in retaliation for widespread illegal fishing and the dumping of toxic waste. Practical anti-imperialism in action, right?

These attitudes seem common across the left.

Examples of such thinking include a November 2008 article in *Socialist Worker* under the title "Toxic scandal in Somalia gave birth to new piracy" and a January 2009 column by Independent writer Johann Hari, called "You are being lied to about pirates." There's even a Facebook group called Somali pirates: we know the truth, which takes precisely this kind of line.

All three effectively insist that people engaged in piracy are morally justified in what they are doing, given the odious actions of western and Asian capitalist countries in Somali waters, which indisputably do include the deposit of nuclear waste and vast unregulated catches by commercial factory trawlers.

But to my mind, such a conclusion is not thought through.

First, hijacking a ship involves taking ordinary workers hostage at gunpoint for extended periods, which is rather an odd thing for leftists to cheer on in any circumstances.

Typically there are about two dozen seafarers on a modern vessel, mostly third world nationals simply out to earn a living, even if that means leaving their families behind for months on end. The pirates hold

**Dangerous:** Below, pirates on a tiny skiff in the deep ocean are detained by US Navy personnel. Above and right, not all pirates are so lucky.



thousands of them every year.

They are not soldiers willfully entering a combat zone and they are not cops. Most – but not all – get double pay danger money for the two days or so it takes to transit the Gulf of Aden, under a union deal with major shipping employers. But that hardly makes them mercenaries.

Generally those kidnapped are reasonably well looked-after, as they are part of the package being ransomed. But there are instances of ill treatment, and even cases where seafarers have been killed. Do we not have some duty of solidarity to these members of our class?

Second, any headache for shipowners is minor by comparison. The extent of piracy

varies from year to year, but in ball park figures, 20,000 vessels a year pass through Somali waters and around 100 are captured. That's a 0.5% risk of hijack.

Having a ship off hire is an inconvenience, and cargo interests will not be best pleased. But at the end of the day, the insurer picks up the tab, so none of the guys in suits end up out of pocket. That doesn't stop negotiators dragging on talks for months in a bid to shave a few hundred thousand dollars off the final total ransom bill.

Third, any element of piracy amounting to a "volunteer coastguard" scheme that may have been initially present – a description accepted by Hari – has long since disappeared. Piracy is now entirely

## Reportage: The cleaners' fight for basic conditions

**O**ne of the more important areas of struggle in recent years has been in the cleaning sector, where casualisation and exploitation has sparked disputes across Europe.

Most recent has been the case of London & Regional Properties, a multinational company based in London's Baker Street, which owns the Berns Salonger company in Sweden.

Berns is a business run along similar lines to London's Earls Court & Olympia, in that it's a big venue that puts on many national and televised events in Sweden – and it has a notorious record of mistreating its cleaning staff.

Through its favored use of oppressive employment Berns has used a job agency by the name of "NCA." Agencies such as NCA have gained a more stable influence on the Swedish job market in the last few years, leading to a two-tier workforce and creating an oppressive atmosphere for staff who are desperate to earn a few bob in order to stay afloat in the country's right-wing climate – the Swedish conservatives have just won another four years power in the recent election.

Staff employed by Berns though NCA have been forced into working 22-hour shifts, six days a week, but when the cleaners organised through their union, the syndicalist SAC and raised complaints Berns promptly sacked them.

Apparently if one objects to NCA's mantra of "promises to whip up the worktempo drastically" there is no desire to listen – global capitalism is in favour of a quick buck and workers merely tools for their greed and disregard for human beings.

The dispute is now coming up to seven months long, with weekly picketing by SAC members and severe mistreatment coming from the right-wing media (which has for example called SAC "a mafia organisation") and harsh treatment from the boys in blue.

The Moderate Party (Sweden's Conservatives) and the Liberal party have made a point of ignoring union blockades and have held events in support of Berns's management.

As Black Flag goes to press media interest has somewhat cooled down in Sweden but the dispute is still very much ongoing.

■ Cleaners' defence committee on facebook: [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=321918197556](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=321918197556)

■ SAC website: [www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)



organised crime. In the Somali context, this translates into the enrichment of a handful of Mr Bigs on the back of serious risks taken by those lower down the food chain.

Sometimes those at the bottom pay with their lives. One statistic we do not know is how many have died as a result of taking to rough seas in small skiffs for days on end, but the death toll probably numbers hundreds. Others end up in prison, usually in Kenya.

They get paid a few thousand dollars a head per job, which is a fortune in local terms, but is as nothing compared to the cut that goes to the men at the top. They are being exploited.

Somali pirate bosses have become so wealthy that parts of Kenya are now seeing a real estate boom, as they invest takings in land and substantial properties. There are even rumours that a couple of gang leaders are based permanently in London, living as millionaires, with the full awareness of the

intelligence services.

From the left's coverage thus far, I was particularly taken by naivety of the Socialist Worker, which took as gospel the assurances of a pirate leader that the proceeds of one ransom would go towards clearing up pollution. Two years on this has yet to happen.

Somalia offers entirely convincing negative confirmation that anarchy entails rather more than the mere absence of central government. Almost two decades after the collapse of any real functioning state apparatus, it remains a long way removed from any ideal of a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation.

It is not what anybody on the left would advocate positively and any analysis should start from that point.

**anonymity  
requested**



**By Joe  
Hell**



# Who will join an

**T**here's no need here to analyse our current economic climate. It was contested ground in the recent general election, where all political parties were criticised for a lack of transparency and honesty in their economic statements.

The formation of a coalition government and the long Labour leadership contest have not added much clarity but we know that those in power are going beyond balancing the books to a "shock doctrine" restructuring of not just the state (which shouldn't concern us) but social provision and the conditions of workers as well (which does).

We've been in the uneasy position of knowing that something bad is intended for us, but not what, when or where the axe will fall. This has made planning our fightback challenging, but we can look at what we know already. How can we fight against cuts and for continued access to the necessities of life, in a way that benefits our class and doesn't allow politicians to mask the mess that their capitalist system has got us into?

## Not just 'Tory' Cuts: the business as usual behind the bluster

Since the election a "Tory cuts" rhetoric has been gushing from some parties and it's becoming wearing –not least since it neglects to mention that so much "reform" was already implemented by the Labour Party.

This is not a debate of different party political approaches to the economy. Labour, who bailed out the banks with billions of pounds of public money, were only "slower cuts" not "no cuts." Tony Blair's recent endorsement of coalition economic strategy makes the continuity not just clear, but acknowledged. Some of these continuities extend to specific policies.

Take health as an example. The plans for widespread use of GP consortia (independent businesses) in

## In focus: Cuts are coming. So is a fightback. But on whose terms?

the NHS in England are portrayed by unions like Unite as if they were unprecedented steps towards privatisation.

But fundholding by GP surgeries was introduced in the 1990s under a previous Conservative government. The Labour alternatives between then and now have included direct privatisation of services which would then be procured by the NHS. This hardly seems better. Where was the unions' fight then?

The future of Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts was being questioned several years back by the Department of Health under Labour. Add to this that the move to Foundation Hospitals was already in full swing, it surely can't be such a big shock to the unions that this is expanding now. It gives the impression that they were happy to give Labour a free pass over the objections of their workers.

We need to oppose the effects of the cuts but this is not about Labour being better than the Con-Dems.

## Not just hurting public sector workers

While the cuts will fall heavily on union members (and others) in the NHS and elsewhere, it's not just public sector workers who will suffer. It's service users too.

From a patient's perspective, the dangers of GP fund-holding are potentially dire. If (when?) funds are squeezed as they were in dentistry, will we have to queue overnight to find an NHS GP? Also on the cards is so called "cream-skimming" of low- versus high-cost patients – removing sicker patients from GP lists in order to make more profit. We saw it with Labour's introduction of privately-run Treatment Centres, paid upfront for operations they wouldn't necessarily carry out, and who left the main hospital Trusts to pick up the expensive "complex cases" and botches.

A similar thing is already happening with "welfare

reform" where the private contractors who do the training or job placement have a huge incentive to "cream and park." This means taking only the people who are most likely to result in a "job outcome," to ensure the company will get its money under the payment-by-results scheme whilst keeping the rest at arms' length. We can only imagine that the many people who are being, or have been, shoved off IB/ESA on to JSA will be prime candidates for this treatment. Welfare profiteers A4e, who already control 25% of the Department for Work and Pensions' long-term unemployment budget, have welcomed Iain Duncan Smith's reforms.

## Even the cuts are outsourced

This round of economic contraction and open class warfare is the first to take place with devolved governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For party political groups, this makes things more complicated. As they are all implicated in cuts somewhere in the country, they will be wary of rocking the boat. For anarchists, who reject the illusion of change through the ballot box, it makes things simpler. This is an attack on us by politicians of all stripes and levels.

In Scotland, the devolved government is SNP with a LibDem-Labour opposition. After the Westminster election the Conservatives retained a single MP and the country went overwhelmingly to Labour, but as an anti-Tory reflex rather than as a positive choice. You can see similar patterns in Wales and the North of England. This makes anti-Tory rhetoric attractive, but it's flawed.

With services delivered through devolved governments and local councils, there is massive scope for buck-passing. The council blame the devolved parliament for the council tax freeze who in turn blame Westminster for their reduced allocation of funds.

The government blames the previous government. At each level, party political allegiance is different but the policy and its consequences remain the same: pain for the working class, wealth transferred upwards.

Any party which tries to claim that they oppose cuts can be shown to be lying. Political parties have no role to play in a campaign against cuts; there can be no "vote for the anti-cuts candidate," they're all in it together.

Any movement against cuts will be burdened by (real or perceived) links to Labour. Even in Labour heartlands (especially in their heartlands) people have no illusions about them. If it's



# austerity fight?



**In the same mold:** Left, has Tony Blair simply morphed into Cameron? Above, Parliament is continuing on much the same path as before. Picture: Alex Brown

not a Labour council pushing through cuts locally, then the refrain "they got us into this mess" will be heard. We don't have to burden ourselves with apologising for their betrayals – better to be able to agree on the street that they were a disaster. Resist any attempts to link our fate with theirs, whether they come from trade unions or left parties.

## Possibilities

With all this in mind, what possibilities are there for positive action? For a start, we can improve our existing work on practical

community struggles. Not to mop up the state's mess, or to diffuse anger, but to focus that anger and to build our class's strength and confidence by demonstrating ways to successfully fight back. With collective struggle at a low ebb, any victory can be significant.

Claimants' groups and the anti-poverty groups featured in previous issues are, at their best, examples of self organisation and its way to wins.

They always need more help and national co-ordination can help spread knowledge of tactics and celebration of victories.

While these groups shouldn't be confused with an anti-cuts campaigning group, they could be a link in the chain with reach and reputation.

Ideally the movement to defend services would come from those kinds of self-organised groups, organically linking to support each others' struggles. This is not the case at time of writing. Where cuts campaigns exist they are made up of political activists. We have to choose between working with (and against) those groups in a principled way, or doing very little.

Working with them where it promotes a mobilisation of the working class acting in its own interest. Working against the damaging arguments and practices of those groups. No co-opting of anger into electoral campaigns or the rehabilitation of the Labour Party. We can't luxuriate in political purity and isolation though. We need to argue for our ideas – we know they work.

Similarly to political groups, as with trade unions. Here though, a critical point is not to work through official representatives of workers, but with the workers themselves. Recent experience in Edinburgh, where a council workers' dispute has run for 18 months with more support from members of the public than from "their" union Unite, has demonstrated this.

Reaching out directly to workers, not claiming activist superpowers but in simple solidarity with the flexibility to act without limitation by employers. Such action is often appreciated, effective, builds links and spreads confidence in workers' power.

This works equally with service users. The janitor's kids go to the school; the nurse's wife visits the hospital. These informal networks are vital to getting our message across. They give concrete examples of the way that struggles are linked. They're the real "big society." Organising in these areas, instead of in the comfort zone of activists, leftists, the already-politicised, will be key.

## Conclusion

Things look daunting. How can we hope to stop such a massive programme of attacks on so many fronts.

Yet the massive scope of the cuts might be an opportunity – when was the last time that a government programme was set to hit the entire working class? Poll Tax.

If we can make the case for all these struggles being linked, if we can argue against allowing services to be cut one by one, if we can prevent popular anger being diverted into useless gestures and electoralism. Then we might have a chance of learning again what it feels like to win.



# Breathing Utopia:

**D**evelopment today is a mixture of public (arms-length corporations), state (from ministries to municipalities), private (for profit) and “third sector” non-government organisations (NGOs). I was active in development mainly in the 90s and the early '00s (Norway in the 90s and Egypt in the '00s).

What I saw was that the development industry was slowly being built up; away from the state and towards the private sector (both profit and non-profit). It was being liberalised and privatised just like everything else.

The relationship between the various actors has always been one of donors-receivers. Either bilateral funding between states, or multilateral funding from state to state through the UN, World Bank, IMF or EU. Alternatively, funding was funnelled through to NGOs and private sector firms.

From my experience, more and more funding was given to capitalist enterprises (job creation, entrepreneurship etc.) and that funding came with more and more conditionalities. In the 1980s and early '90s NGOs were relatively free to mostly do what the purpose of the NGO was. Now NGOs run after the money and are constantly altering (or completely changing) their aims and goals to suit the funder – in some cases without having the competence to run projects that they propose.

## My experience

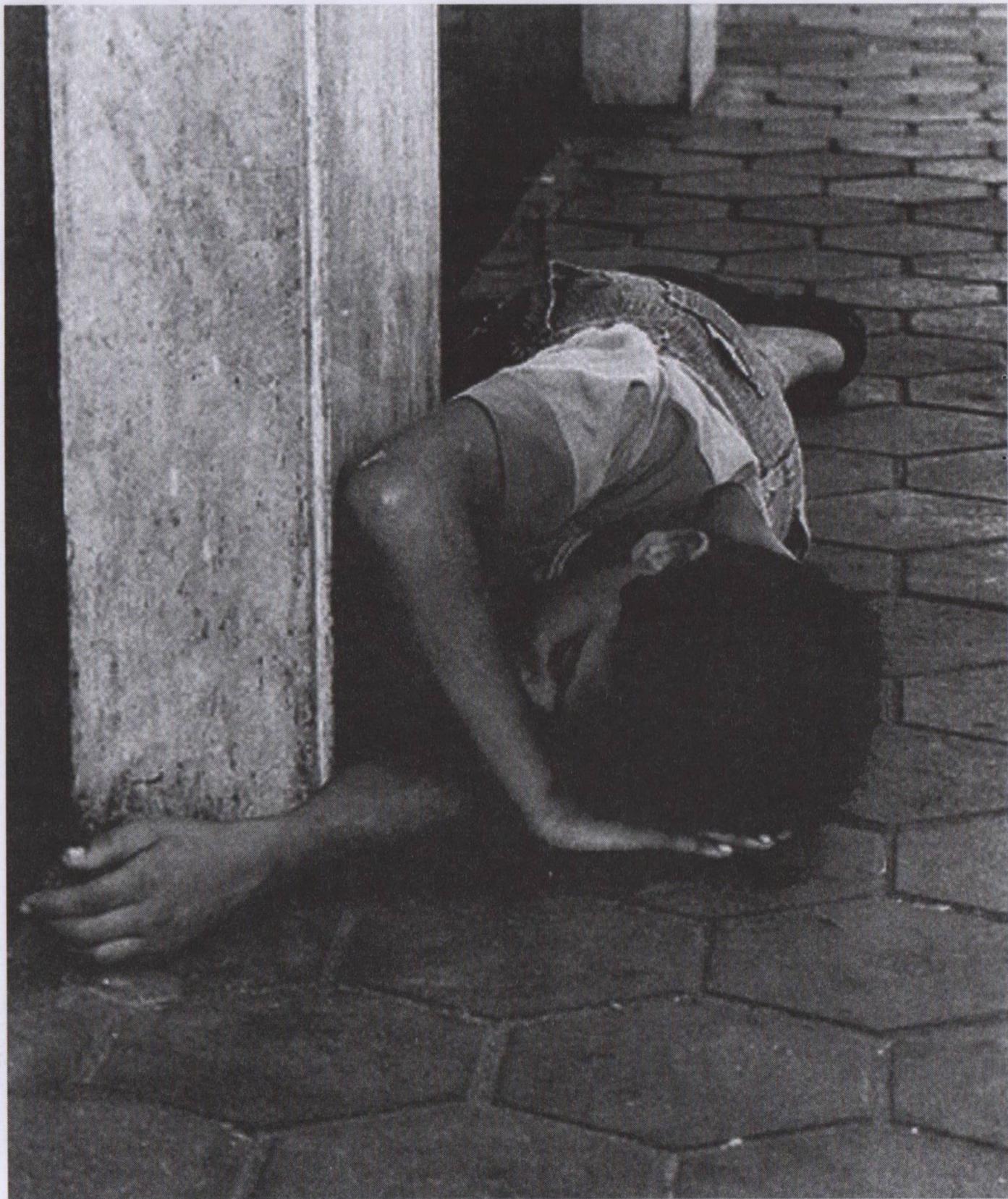
I started out pretty young, around 15-16 years old as part of a youth awareness/fundraising NGO in Norway. We had a ten day awareness raising campaign in the fall (usually October) and on the tenth day school kids went out to work a day (at home, in a factory, busk on the street or whatever) then gave their earnings to the NGO, which would use those funds to run education projects in the developing world.

The work I did was mainly organising the collection of money, finding job placements, running the awareness-raising campaign on the school etc. I then did more or less the same on the regional level before I was selected to the national committee where we were in charge of running the entire NGO. This was good work, which consisted of awareness raising; specifically challenging the stereotypes surrounding development and the developing world.

While working in this NGO I really thought we were saving the world. I'd had the opportunity to go to a few developing countries (Afghanistan, South Africa, Thailand, Nepal, India) with this NGO and a few others, but most things seemed peachy.

I then went to university (at UEA in Norwich) to study development. I became much more critical of the industry through my studies, but when I graduated I wasn't really qualified for anything else and after doing an MA and some other jobs I ended up in an environmental science NGO.

The actual work of the organisation was to promote science based environmental education in Egyptian schools, where



**Round and round:** A boy sleeps on the street in Egypt and right, people starving in India during the British Raj's man-made famine in the 1940s. Khawaga found international development to be an industry which spent more time replicating itself than doing good works. Picture: Youssef Hannah

private institutions paying for our services effectively subsidised state ones. In addition the NGO ran various other projects - a clean water program, some recycling stuff.

What I ended up doing was fundraising. Although the NGO did get money for the school trips, it was not enough. The setup was not sustainable and we were always looking for more money. This meant we had to shift our agenda and take on stuff that frankly we had no business or capacity doing.

For example, the first big thing I was set to do was go through a massive three-round application process for €500,000 from an EU fund for the South Sinai Regional Development Project. The problem was that the SSRDP was focused on Bedouins.

Not only did we not know anyone in Sinai, frankly we did not know what we were doing. In effect, I had to make up a lot of crap.

But with my BA in development, knowledge of buzzwords and carefully crafted bullshit paragraphs and sentences I

guess the bureaucrats in the EU could not see the application for what it really was – and it would easily outshine local Sinai-based NGOs who did not know the required language.

Needless to say, I felt shit about what I was doing and where before I had only known of the problems on a theoretical level, the experience really disillusioned me with development in general.

Around that time I got a job offer from a friend of my then wife. She was the daughter of a stinking rich Libyan family that owned an oil drilling company and a tourism development firm. She offered me double pay and lots of travelling to Libya. At first I balked; it was after all for a private company that was involved in oil drilling. Part of my liberal self was still screaming, even though by then I had already become an anarchist.

But it didn't take long before I accepted; after all the pay was better, I got to travel, my previous job was shit and in the new job

## after the revolution...

we would do what we wanted to do because we had money. My boss could just lean on her daddy (or uncle) and voila, we could get another \$100,000 if we really needed it.

I stayed there for a year before I called it quits with development entirely and moved to Canada to pursue an academic career. At least when I was working for the oil drilling company we could do more or less what we wanted. In the end it was in the private sector that I felt less alienated about development, but I was still fed up.

### The problems

What has happened is that development is more and more donor driven, which squeezes out NGOs that are critical of the system. There's more focus on results (typical neo-liberal management metrics), turning every NGO into a small bureaucracy, which involves "capacity building" so that we know the way in which the donor wants us to write proposals, reports and so on.

Connected to the donor driven crap is the rise of those private sector firms that do fund raising for you (think of those Oxfam charity muggers on the street) and handle your PR (typical small black child with flies around mouth imagery).

New developments have been a focus on "homo economicus" methods, for example micro-finance and the idea that everyone can be an entrepreneur. Someone who starts an NGO now is a social entrepreneur, not a humanitarian.

What remains the same though is that "they" are the underdeveloped and "we" are supposed to develop them. Forget participation, equality etc, they're all buzzwords used to get money from donors. The main goal of development hasn't changed either, it's still about making developing countries "developed" by becoming stable capitalist systems.

The problem is that doesn't work. Development has been going on at least since world war two and nothing has really changed that much. Sure, capitalism is more entrenched in the developing world but the most pressing social needs of food, housing, clean water, during disease etc are nowhere near solved.

Instead, a massive bureaucracy has been built up. There's just no end to it and it seems to become just more and more of it. The main problem with this is that it is extremely paternalistic/imperialistic. Very good local groups that have excellent knowledge, know the locals, have good projects etc. are often squeezed out by Western NGOs (or well-connected local ones) only because they are not up to date with the latest management system, the buzzwords or do not write/speak the language in which the donor wants proposals.

### Post revolution

I think that the "relief industry" would still have to be in place in some form. If an earthquake, tsunami or whatever happens we need to have experts that can get to the area quickly and help.

I, however, worked in long term

## A former worker in international development puts his industry under the microscope and suggests how it might function in an anarchist society



development and I think most of the industry would not be needed. The reason is that development is completely part of the cash nexus – needs meets project designers/implementers meets donor. The system is also very paternalistic.

Without reliance on cash/ private property a lot could be fixed there and then. No need to teach folks how to become a worker or an entrepreneur if needs are met directly. Still, quite a lot of expertise would be needed, but most of the practical stuff like where to drill for water, where to place water faucets (if that's a limitation), health stuff (inoculations, but also just basic health care and advice), there would still be need for educators.

In essence, the vocational/practical stuff that development agencies do would still be required. Of course some of the logistical aspect would have to remain, but that would be folded into the social economy at large (I'd assume that a large part of social wealth would be purposefully directed towards place that are most in the shits at the moment).

What would disappear would be the armies of fundraisers, accountants, useless managers and such. Basically what I ended up doing would be gone, and fuck me, I would be happy about that.

The way I've always seen the development industry is that its main goal should be to abolish itself. When the problems are fixed there's no need for it anymore.

Apart from the relief part of the industry, I think that "development" as a separate industry would be completely wiped out.

After all it emerged to rectify (well ideally anyway, "real politik" has dominated development since its inception) the disparities between the wealthy North and poor South.

In an anarchist society, this paternalistic relationship would be wiped out and social production could be put to directly improve everyone's lives.

Rob Ray talking  
to Khawaga



**A** part of the CNT's history which is less well known is its origin, the first years. It is important to look at these origins because anarchists have to go to the root of any matter to understand it and learn from the mistakes made. It also allows us to understand the essential ideas of the CNT – those of the International Workers' Association.

The CNT, including its earliest versions, is more than 150 years old. It was created in 1910 but existed long before. So I want to start in 1840 when the first socialist ideas started to penetrate into the Iberian Peninsula (the region incorporating Spain and Portugal).

Going back to that year, a comrade called Joaquin Abrero started spreading early socialist ideas through Andalucia after coming from France, bringing with him the ideas of Fourier to the city of Cadiz in southern Spain.

The same happened in Catalonia where the Montreal brothers and another comrade, [indecipherable] constituted a core of comrades to spread the first socialist ideas of that time. In that year the first "society of resistance" – how they referred to unions which were then banned – was created in Barcelona in the guise of an insurance company and 15 years later the workers' movement in Barcelona was organised.

Meanwhile in Andalucia there were a lot of insurrections of peasants. The lands were, and it's still this way, distributed amongst a few hands, those of the aristocracy, so there were lots of rebellions against them, all coming from this unfair distribution. This too saw organisations built up around it.

In 1868 one of the country's most famous intellectuals, Francisco Pi y Margall, returned from France after two years in exile following the 1866 army revolt (in which the sergeants shot their officers in response to pro-democratic propaganda).

His writings on libertarian thought were hugely influential and at around this time, the ideas of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) also started to take hold in Spain, specifically after the arrival of Giuseppe Fanelli, an Italian comrade on the anarchist side of the international who made the voice of the IWA very clear. The Red Flag had to be raised against all political parties and all frontiers. Political and economic equality was considered to be a lie. To get these rights would be impossible without a social revolution.

Fanelli, who was born in 1827 and died in 1877, arrived in Barcelona in 1868, that famous year of revolution in Europe, and immediately started to spread anarchist ideas. He was sent directly by Bakunin to build support there. Travelling to Madrid in 1869, he met Spanish comrades, Julio Rubau Donadeu at his flat and Francisco Mora Mendez and Tomas Fernandez Pacheco. These three people went to the flat and in only one year they had brought their membership to 1,000. That was to form the core of the IWA in Spain.

Then in 1869 the first fully active precursor CNT was created. It was called the Spanish Regional Federation, the Spanish section of the IWA which would last until 1881 when it changed names to the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region, then in 1889-1893 we had the Agreement for Union and Solidarity of the Workers of the Spanish Region and finally, in 1907 until 1910,

# CNT

## THE EARLY YEARS

**Interview:** In this transcription of a recent talk in Manchester, a member of the Spanish CNT talks about the earliest origins of anarcho-syndicalism in the Iberian Peninsula to mark his union's centenary

Solidaridad Obrera (Workers' Solidarity), which was the core of the CNT itself.

The organisation was based on three documents which had been brought to Madrid. The first was the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx, recommending the constitution of political parties. The second was very different, the statutes

abolition of private property, abolition of all social classes, collectivisation of land and property and the establishment of a universal system of free associations in place of the state.

This third document was the one selected by those first comrades for the movement.

In 1870 the organisation officially joined

### Earliest record:

Giuseppe Fanelli (top) with Madrid comrades in 1869

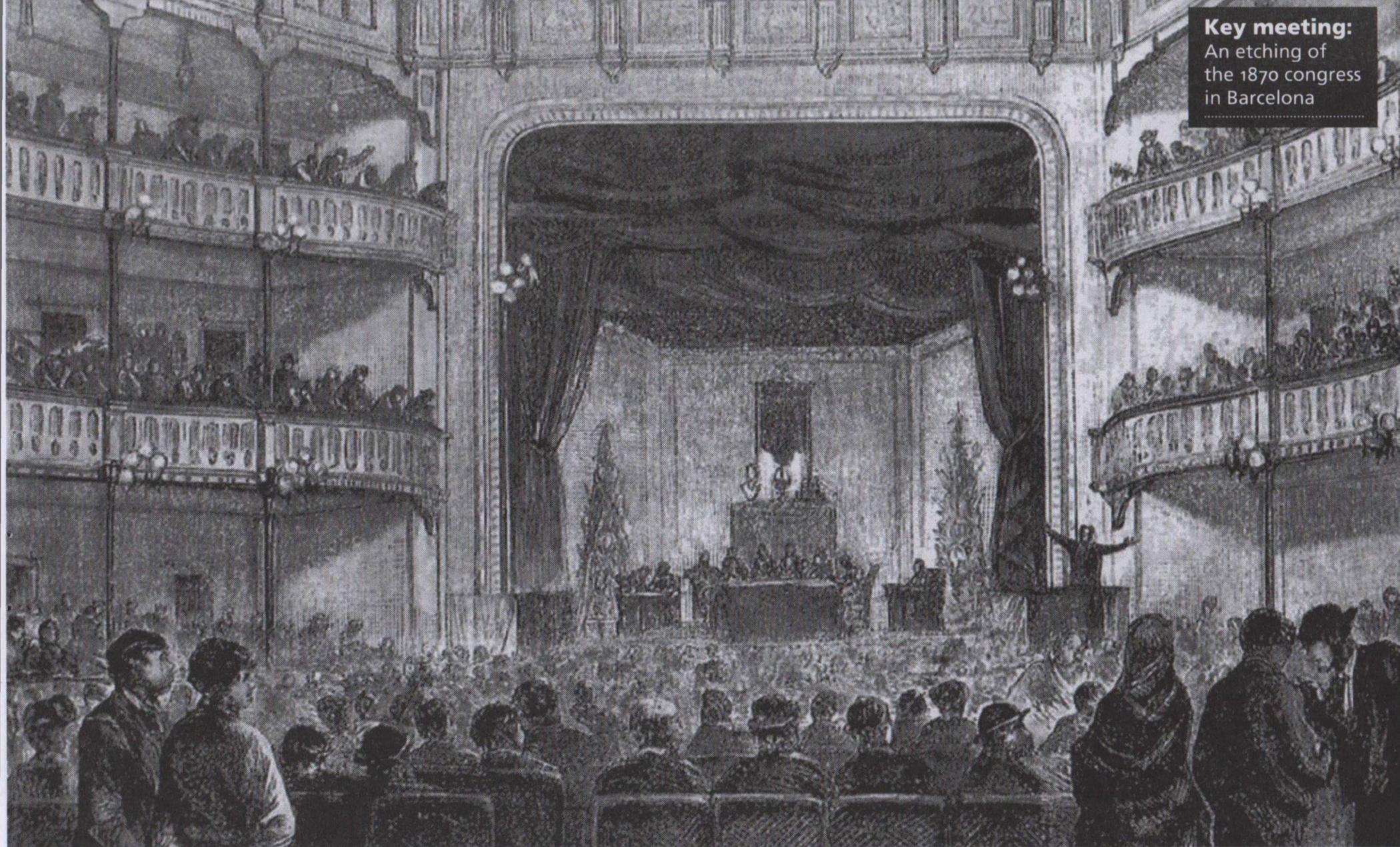


of the IWA talking about solidarity and things which are closer to our ideas. The third document was the Programme of the Alliance for Socialist Democracy which was the organisation formed by the anarchists and all the principles in this were really the ones of the first Spanish Regional Federation. These were the economic and social equality of individuals of both sexes,

the IWA and three years after Fanelli's visit there was another famous arrival to Spain, Paul Lafargue who was sent to form a workers' political party in the country. He tried to influence the workers in the opposite way to Fanelli but made little headway and eventually he left.

This was a year of excitement for comrades as there were many social revolts in Spain

**Key meeting:**  
An etching of  
the 1870 congress  
in Barcelona



and the rest of Europe. Many comrades went to France and Portugal – where they formed the core of the first Portuguese organisation within the IWA. Anselmo Lorenzo Asperilla, one of the Madrid founders, was presenting his ideas about federalism and the organisation of workers in London where the IWA was having its congress. So in just a few years the movement had developed into something close to the current CNT.

Unluckily in 1874 there was the restoration of the Bourbons, the monarchy in Spain, so we had hard times then and our activity went absolutely clandestine. Social conditions declined amid brutal repression which led many comrades to take violent action – we were setting fire to the fields of the owners, attacking private property, boycotting and taking actions against the king of Spain, Alphonse XII. This in turn sparked more repression from the state.

Workers in Spain at that time were growing as individuals with a lot of revolutionary consciousness and they were very frustrated with the politicians. During the first Spanish Republic they had shown the people they could not fulfil their promises of change. So the ideas of the IWA came to Spain as very fresh and original ideas which were very welcome.

In 1882 the workers of the Spanish Regional Federation had almost 50,000 members, most of them, 43,000 were in Catalonia in the north-east of Spain, with most of the rest in rural Andalucia. At the beginning of the 20th century membership declined through the repression but interest remained and in 1902 a metallurgical strike broke out, which came as a surprise and a promise for the whole working class of Spain, leading to a new spring for the anarchists and the founding of Solidaridad Obrera.

Two years later, the “Tragic Week” took place, where a major rebellion took place against deteriorating social conditions and in reaction to Spain’s imperialist war in Morocco,

which was claiming many lives. Fighting broke out across Catalonia, centred on Barcelona where churches were burned, police stations attacked and railroads destroyed. Government repression saw hundreds imprisoned, unions closed, newspapers shut, and the shooting of prominent anarchists, including the educational radical Francisco Ferrer, a founder of libertarian educational ideas – who wasn’t even in the city at the time but was chosen because of his importance in education.

But the repression forced people to look at how to improve their organisation and at the end of October 1910, the CNT itself was born in Barcelona, with two main purposes. First was to create an independent organisation for the whole Spanish working class, and the second was the political emancipation of workers, for which there was only one way – through social revolution. We share the same principles today.

In 1911 the first agreement was for the organisation to remain illegal for three years – as its activities included campaigning against the war in Morocco and supporting the metallurgists this placed them outside the law. So from its very beginnings the union was not in offices but in the streets – that has been a characteristic of the CNT for its whole history.

The next major event was the Russian Revolution in 1918, which had a huge impact across European social movements. At that year’s regional congress in Barcelona it was decided first to follow the principle of direct action, a major break from parliamentarianism, and then to begin building industrial unions – which until then had not been a feature of the movement but had become more and more necessary as the Catalan region industrialised. This was very modern for the time anywhere in Europe, and bosses were very surprised by this adaptation.

Why? Because it allowed a much more powerful reaction within industries and gave the union information from whole sectors. It

offered better possibilities for co-ordination and a real working model for how to run things when the means of production were in the hands of workers. The change was highly successful and “*syndicato unico*,” the “one union” model co-ordinated people very effectively in solidarity.

The bosses actually tried to copy this system and created their own Federation Patronal, a federation of employers for the whole of Spain within which they decided common reactions against workers. Employers’ unions were also formed, the “*syndicato libres*,” or free unions, but they weren’t free. They were actually groups of mercenaries employed by the bosses who murdered anarchist comrades, they worked with the police and authorities to persecute trade unionists.

To combat this, action groups were formed by the CNT who were armed and started fighting back against these mercenaries, blacklegs and informers. It is certain that without their actions many more would have been murdered.

So by 1919 the atmosphere was heating. In Catalonia alone the union had grown to 500,000 members, 1 million across Spain, when the key conference of Madrid was held.

The main aims of the CNT were decided here, the moral and political liberation of humanity which had to come through the socialisation of the means of production and the destruction of the state – libertarian communism.

Tactics were more clearly defined, saying there would be no mediators, no delegators, that direct action would be the main tool of struggle. This would define the next years of struggle, from the victorious La Canadiense strike of 1919, through the quieter 1920s and into the 1930s, where struggle would finally erupt into the Spanish Civil War.

**Edited transcript  
by Rob Ray**



# Attacked from all

**A** new phase of attacks has for the last year been targeted against communities and adherents to the Zapatista-initiated Other Campaign in Chiapas.

These attacks, in various parts of Zapatista territory where there are economic interests at stake, are intended to put an end to the group's struggle for improvements and autonomy for the region and in particular its indigenous peoples.

Although repression has been constant since the early years of the Zapatista project, it increased as 2010 approached and throughout the following year has been ever-present.

In September and October alone, attacks took place on an autonomous school, people were violently run off their land by paramilitaries and as devastating floods hit the country Indian communities were last to be informed of the danger – if at all. Reports also suggest that aid has been denied to Zapatista-supporting communities in the region since the disaster.

The Father Bartolomé Human Rights Centre has linked paramilitary attacks to a corporate tourism project, the Centro Integralmente Planeado Palenque – CIP, the Tourist Plan for Chiapas.

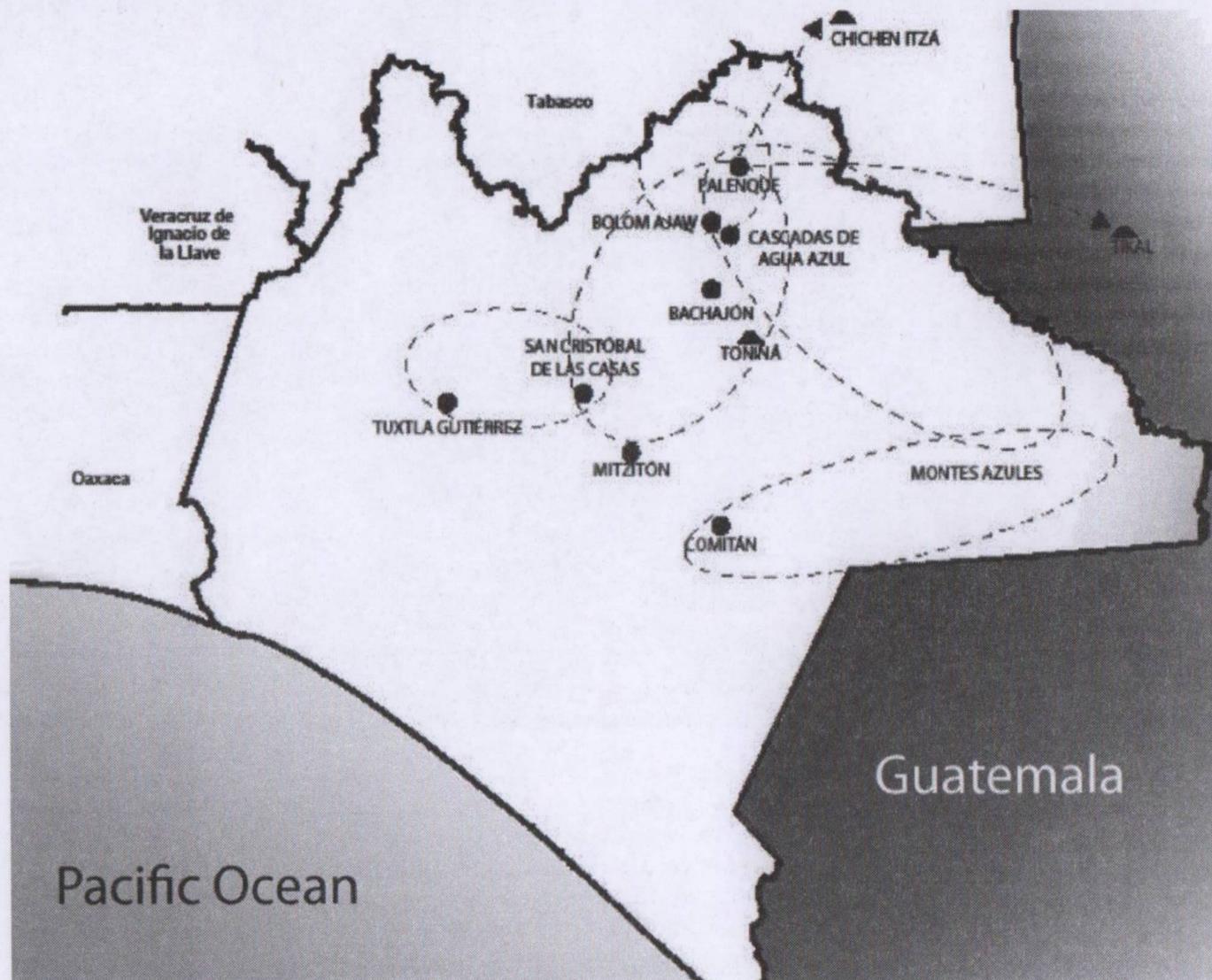
For the plan to go ahead the government needs to buy the land or evict the indigenous communities from the land that is located in the project areas. The £149 million road from San Cristobal De Las Casas to Palenque and the new £36 million Palenque airport still need to be built and businesses require long-term security assurances before they invest.

In a carrot and stick approach, the Mexican government is offering sheet roofing, cement and wooden planks even as it protects paramilitaries who have been seizing collectively-owned grazing lands.

And in a direct attempt at bribery, it has increased its offers of financial assistance for leaving the affected areas – up to 200,000 pesos (£10,000) per family.

## Bolon Ajaw

The government needs to buy Bolon Ajaw



**Pressure:** Chiapas with the affected Zapatista strongholds marked out

community land to build a luxurious hotel and exploit its waterfalls and also for commercial areas at Azul Waterfalls.

But Bolon Ajaw lies on land recovered by the Zapatistas Support Base in 1994. The 32 families who live there are part of autonomous municipality Comandanta Ramona – and the government cannot negotiate because the Zapatistas will never sell. Therefore the government's strategy is to use a paramilitary group,

OPDDIC (Organisation for the Defence of Indigenous and Campesino Rights), a fake indigenous group, to take over this land and then buy it. As a result, the Bolon Ajaw community is having to resist continuous harassment and attacks by OPDDIC members.

## San Sebastián Bachajón

Adherents of The Other Campaign control the toll booth at the entrance to the Azul Waterfalls. Attempts to remove them from there have been constant and there have been near-daily threats against civilians by local police and OPDDIC members.

In April 2009 for instance, the payment booth was dismantled through an operation involving state and federal police. A Zapatista supporter and seven Other Campaign supporters were arrested, detained without charge and falsely accused of highway robbery.

They were tortured and forced to sign confessions not in their own language, Tzeltal. In the first few days local residents built roadblocks to demand their freedom, but it was broken up by police.

OPDDIC collaborated with the Federal and State police during the repression of the roadblock. As a result, OPDDIC, took the money from the entry booth to the waterfalls. They were also the real perpetrators of the robberies. The Zapatista supporter was released after a few weeks. Five others were released in July that year thanks to national and international solidarity.

That autumn the Tzeltal population of San Sebastián Bachajón peacefully regained control of the booth through a consultation process in assemblies in the three centres of the community. The response of the government, headed by Juan Sabines, was to intimidate and threaten the community by despatching about 250 police to the area.

## Factfile: Zapatista organisation

- The Zapatista community is based on communal assemblies with equal participation for men and women. Assemblies elect officers who are responsible for securing the communal safe house, education officers and health commissioners who meet regionally.
- They also select delegates to one of six Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees (CCRIs), each of the six Zapatista language groups having its own.
- Each CCRi has 16-40 members depending on the regional population. Eleven delegates are then chosen to sit on the ruling CCRi-General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.
- The overall consensus reached by the Zapatista village assemblies guides and directs the decisions of the EZLN's leadership. Consultations are held with the village assemblies on a regular basis on all major decisions including whether to go to war what positions to take in negotiation with the Mexican government.

# sides: Zapatistas

## Reportage: A zone by zone look at how the money men are trying to take control

### Montes Azules

One of the tourist routes, the Comitán-Montes Azules Corridor, is rich in natural resources, water and biodiversity. Apart from eco-tourist plans, natural resources could be extracted from this area, but the presence of indigenous communities stops this possibility. Both the government and transnational companies are in a hurry to evict these communities.

As part of The Mesoamerica Project (formerly The Puebla-Panama Plan), federal and state governments had agreed to greatly expand the agro-fuels industry for the use in Mexico's aviation sector.

Friends of the Earth International reported in February 2010: "Families from the Biosphere of Montes Azules, Lacandon Jungle, are being evicted from their land in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. The evictions, being forced by police operations, are to make way for palm oil plantations."

Heavily armed police arrived in helicopters and with aggressive violence evicted men, women and children from their homes, which they then burnt down and, with no explanation, removed the community to the city of Palenque. Over 40 communities have now been evicted from the area.

One of the two communities uprooted from their lands in the January 2010 displacements described above was a Zapatista support base settlement. Their lands are now being watched over by private guards. Laguna San Pedro, Laguna El Paraiso and Laguna Suspiro are under threat and are preparing to resist.

### Mitzitón

A planned superhighway from San Cristobal de Las Casas to Palenque could have taken over the land of the Mitzitón community, who are also adherents to the Other Campaign.

The local government has used the paramilitary group "Army of God," part of the evangelic church "Eagle Wings," to harass the community and impose the road,

saying that the conflict is religious and that the police force should intervene.

Construction of the San Cristobal to Palenque toll road was due to begin in 2009, as one of the first steps in the plan to develop the Palenque - Agua Azul area into a luxury paradise for ecotourism. In February 2009, the Chiapas state government announced that it was to begin preparations for work on an eight mile stretch of road between San Cristobal and the Rancho Nuevo military base. Engineers went to Mitzitón, without asking permission, and told local people they were measuring for the super-highway, for which Mitzitón was to be "kilometre zero." The community met together in assembly in March, and decided to reject the highway which would cut their ejido in half, destroying their homes, lands, forests and water sources. They were able to drive away the surveyors.

In July of that year 30 Other Campaign adherents were attacked by 60 members of the evangelical group with machetes, slingshots, clubs and stones. A truck killed Aurelio Diaz Hernandez, but the driver of the truck was never arrested or charged.

At the end of July, members of the Other Campaign in the ejido of Mitzitón together with two other affected indigenous communities, Jotolá and San Sebastián Bachajón, established a roadblock of the highway to demand the cancellation of the highway from San Cristóbal to Palenque, self-determination for the communities and justice for Aurelio Díaz Hernández.

The Chiapas state government continued to deny that the route of the road had been decided, while engineers visited communities seeking approval for the super-highway passed through their lands. In August 2009, after the state government's denials were published in the media, agents of the Secretary of Communications and Transportation went to Mitzitón asking them to sign a paper stating that the assembly had agreed to let the toll road pass through their territory.

Ejido members refused. Threats continued and on August 24th several members of the Army of God entered a house in Mitzitón, brandishing machetes, and told a woman they were going to kill her husband. The three communities demonstrated together again in October in San Cristobal.

The heavily armed Army of God members continues to threaten violence recently they beat up a 17-year-old boy and cut down hand-painted signs proclaiming resistance to the toll road.

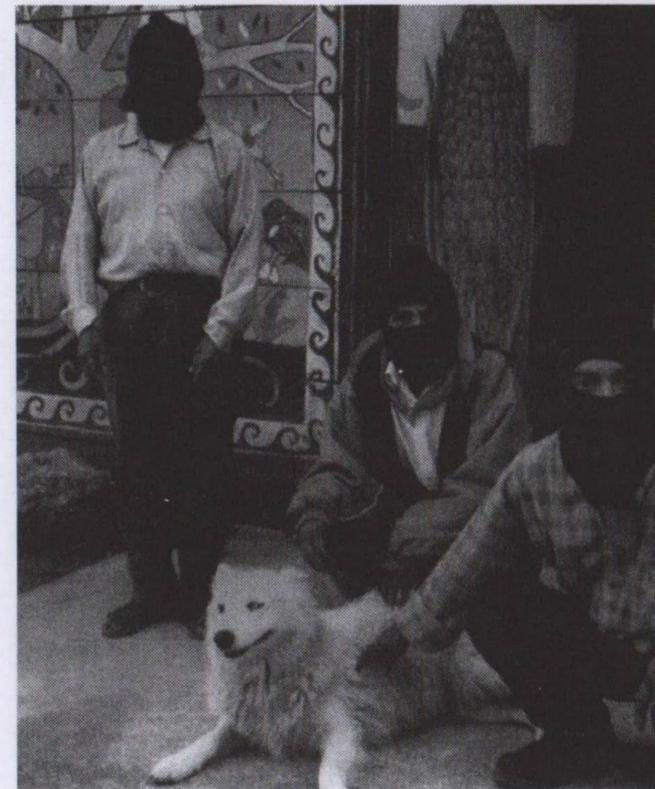
In a surprise move in October, the Chiapas government finally announced the route of the new road, which had previously been surrounded in secrecy. Instead of adopting the original plan drawn up by the Ministry of Communications and Transportation, which would have cut Mitzitón in half, the state chose an alternative route, which did

not pass through the community.

Paramilitary attacks have continued, but so has community resistance in the form of more roadblocks.

### Agua Clara

The area's location in the path of the future Palenque-Comitán motorway also gives it strategic importance. A counterinsurgency strategy of misrule led to the splitting of the population and now there are people who support the PRI (neo-liberal Institutional



Revolutionary Party) and OPDDIC. To access Agua Clara you must now pass through two toll booths.

The first one belongs to PRI/OPDDIC who have already sold their collective land to the government. OPDDIC charge double for those leaving the site and try to scare people by saying the Zapatistas are "thieves and thugs." The government constructed a spa-hotel there in order to privatise the use and ownership of this land. From there OPDDIC sells alcohol, which has had a socially destructive impact on indigenous communities in the past. Prostitution is also allowed.

The second toll booth belongs to the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas manage their site collectively organised by a weekly rotation of 20 to 70 people from the Caracol of Morelia. They also run the hotel there. PRI/OPDDIC have allegedly attacked the Zapatista toll booth with their machetes on several occasions and in 2009 attempted to violently seize control of the resort. The Zapatistas faced up to them quickly and PRI/OPDDIC withdrew before there was a serious confrontation.



# I AM AN ANARCHIST

**In focus:** It's 170 years since Proudhon uttered this immortal line. In our main feature, we look at the life and works of the father of anarchism

In 1840, two short expressions, a mere seven words, transformed socialist politics forever. One put a name to a tendency within the working class movement: "I am an Anarchist." The other presented a critique and a protest against inequality which still rings: "Property is Theft!"

With *What is Property?* Pierre-Joseph Proudhon became one of the leading socialist thinkers of the nineteenth century and the libertarian movement was born, that form of socialism based on "the denial of Government and of Property" and which did "not want the government of man by man any more than the exploitation of man by man."

Proudhon's ideas played a key role in the development of revolutionary anarchism in the International Working Men's Association (IWMA). Their application in the Paris Commune of 1871 was praised by Marx (although he did not mention the obvious

source). Michael Bakunin proclaimed that "Proudhon is the master of us all" while for Peter Kropotkin he laid "the foundations of Anarchism."

It is easy to see why, for Proudhon was the first to discuss most of the ideas we associate with anarchism: the critique of property and capitalism, critique of the state, socio-economic federalism, free association, socialisation of the means of life, decentralisation, the abolition of wage-labour by self-management; and so on.

## Critique of the State

Proudhon subjected the state to withering criticism. While recognising that the state had exploitative and oppressive interests of its own, he clearly saw its role as an instrument of class rule: "Laws! We know what they are, and what they are worth! Spider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in

the hands of the government."

The state protected the class system: "In a society based on ... inequality of conditions, government, whatever it is, feudal, theocratic, bourgeois, imperial, is ... a system of insurance for the class which exploits and owns against that which is exploited and owns nothing."

For Proudhon, the state was "the external constitution of the social power" by which the people delegate "its power and sovereignty" and so "does not govern itself." Others "are charged with governing it, with managing its affairs." Anarchists "deny government and the state, because we affirm that which the founders of states have never believed in, the personality and autonomy of the masses." Ultimately, "the only way to organise democratic government is to abolish government."

For Proudhon democracy could not be limited to a nation as one unit periodically picking its rulers. Its real meaning was much deeper: "Politicians, whatever their colours, are insurmountably repelled by anarchy which they construe as disorder: as if democracy could be achieved other than by distribution of authority and as if the true meaning of the word 'democracy' was not dismissal of government."

Given this, Proudhon did not think seizing political power could transform society. This was confirmed when he was elected to the French National Assembly in 1848: "As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of the current events ... One must have lived in that isolator which is called a National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it." There was "ignorance of daily facts" and "fear of the people" ("the sickness of all those who belong to authority") for "the people, for those in power, are the enemy."

Thus, rather than having some idealistic opposition to the state, Proudhon viewed it



**Influence:** A rendering of the French revolution of 1848, which Proudhon saw first hand



**Controversial thinker:** Proudhon in cartoon form as a destroyer of property

as an instrument of class rule which could not be captured for social reform. The state "finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat ... The problem before the labouring classes ... consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly."

### Critique of Property

Proudhon's analysis of property was seminal. The distinction he made between use rights and property rights, possession

and property, laid the ground for subsequent socialist theory as well as his analysis of exploitation and his vision of socialism.

Property allowed the owner to exploit its user ("property is theft") as well as creating oppressive social relationships between them ("property is despotism").

These are interrelated, as it is the relations of oppression that property creates which allows exploitation to happen and the appropriation of our common heritage by the few gives the rest little alternative but to agree to such domination and let the owner

appropriate the fruits of their labour.

Proudhon's genius and the power of his critique was that he took all the defences of, and apologies for, property and showed that, logically, they could be used to attack that institution. By treating them as absolute and universal as its apologists treated property itself, he showed that they undermined property. This meant that "those who do not possess today are proprietors by the same title as those who do possess; but instead of inferring therefrom that property should be shared by all, I demand, in the name of general security, its entire abolition."

Property "violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism." It has "perfect identity with robbery" and the worker "has sold and surrendered his liberty" to the proprietor.

Anarchy was "the absence of a master, of a sovereign" while "proprietor" was "synonymous" with "sovereign" for he "imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control." Thus "property is despotism" as "each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property." Freedom and property were incompatible: "Thus, property, which should make us free, makes us prisoners. What am I saying? It degrades us, by making us servants and tyrants to one another.

"Do you know what it is to be a wage-worker? To work under a master, watchful of his prejudices even more than of his orders ... Not to have any thought of your own, to study without ceasing the thought of others, to know no stimulus except your daily bread, and the fear of losing your job!"

Property produced exploitation, which occurred in production. Like Marx, but long before him, Proudhon argued that workers produced more value than they received in wages:

"Whoever labours becomes a proprietor ... And when I say proprietor, I do not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists) proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages, - I mean proprietor of the value he creates, and by which the master alone profits ... The labourer retains, even after he has received his wages, a natural right in the thing he has produced."

Property meant "another shall perform the labour" while the proprietor "receives the product." The boss also appropriated the additional value produced by collective effort (what Proudhon termed "collective force"). Thus 100 workers co-operating in a workplace produced more than 100 working alone and this excess was kept, like their product, by the employer who also appropriated their surplus-labour:

"the labourer ... create[s], on top of his subsistence, a capital always greater. Under the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely, like the revenue, to the proprietor ... the labourer, whose share of the collective product is constantly confiscated by the entrepreneur, is always on his uppers, while the capitalist is always in profit ... political economy, that upholds and advocates that regime, is the theory of theft."



Little wonder Rudolf Rocker argued that we find "the theory of surplus value, that grand 'scientific discovery' of which our Marxists are so proud, in the writings of Proudhon."

### Self-Management and Association

Given an analysis of property that showed that it produced exploitation ("theft") and oppression ("despotism"), the question of how to end it arises. There are two options: either abolish collective labour and return to small-scale production or find a new form of economic organisation.

The notion that Proudhon advocated the first solution is as false as it is common. He favoured the second solution: "it is necessary to destroy ... the predominance of capital over labour, to change the relations between employer and worker, to solve ... the antinomy of division and that of machinery; it is necessary to *organise labour*."

"As "all labour must leave a surplus, all wages [must] be equal to product." To achieve this the workplace must be democratic for "[b]y virtue of the principle of collective force, labourers are the equals and associates of their leaders" and to ensure "that association may be real, he

forward to "the abolition of capitalism and of wage-labour."

Significantly, this support for workers' self-management was raised at the same time he proclaimed himself an anarchist. As "every industry needs ... leaders, instructors, superintendents" they "must be chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves, and must fulfil the conditions of eligibility" for "all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor."

### Socialism from below

While Proudhon urged a "revolution from below," he also rejected violence and insurrection. While later anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin embraced the class struggle, including strikes, unions and revolts, Proudhon opposed such means and preferred peaceful reform. However, they shared a common vision of change from below by working class self-activity:

"Workers, labourers, men of the people, whoever you may be, the initiative of reform is yours. It is you who will accomplish that synthesis of social composition which will be the masterpiece of creation, and you alone can accomplish it."

He urged workers to create new forms of

to work: "But experience testifies and philosophy demonstrates ... that any revolution, to be effective, must be spontaneous and emanate, not from the heads of the authorities but from the bowels of the people: that government is reactionary rather than revolutionary: that it could not have any expertise in revolutions, given that society, to which that secret is alone revealed, does not show itself through legislative decree but rather through the spontaneity of its manifestations: that, ultimately, the only connection between government and labour is that labour, in organising itself, has the abrogation of government as its mission."

This suggested a bottom-up approach, socialism from below rather than a socialism imposed by the state:

"From above ... evidently signifies power; from below signifies the people. On the one hand we have the actions of government; on the other, the initiative of the masses ... revolution from above is ... inevitably revolution according to the whims of the prince, the arbitrary judgement of a minister, the fumbings of an Assembly or the violence of a club: it is a revolution of dictatorship and despotism ...

"Revolution on the initiative of the masses is a revolution by the concerted action of the citizens, by the experience of the workers, by the progress and diffusion of enlightenment, revolution by the means of liberty ... a revolution from below, from true democracy"

For Proudhon, "revolutionary power ... is no longer in the government or the National Assembly, it is in you. Only the people, acting directly, without intermediaries, can bring about the economic revolution." It is this vision which was taken up and expanded upon by later libertarians.

### Anarchist Society

In place of capitalism and the state, Proudhon desired libertarian socialism based on socio-economic federation of self-managed associations.

As in the Paris Commune, this federation's delegates would be mandated and subject to recall by their electors: "we shall make them transmit our arguments and our documents; we shall indicate our will to them, and when we are discontented, we will revoke them ... the mandat impératif, permanent revocability, are the most immediate, undeniable, consequences of the electoral principle."

As in the Commune, the "legislative power is not distinguished from the executive power" and federalism ended the "unity that tends to absorb the sovereignty of the villages, cantons, and provinces, into a central authority. Leave to each its sentiments, its affections, its beliefs, its languages and its customs."

His mutualist society was fundamentally democratic: "We have, then, not an abstract sovereignty of the people, as in the Constitution of 1793 and subsequent constitutions, or as in Rousseau's Social Contract, but an effective sovereignty of the working, reigning, governing masses ... Indeed, how could it be otherwise if they are in charge of the whole economic system including labour, capital, credit, property and wealth?"

Rejecting state socialism, Proudhon



**Elected:** But Proudhon, second from right in this 1849 political cartoon, quickly rejected the Assembly

who participates in it must do so" as "an active factor" with "a deliberative voice in the council" with everything "regulated in accordance with equality." This requires free access and so all workers "straightway enjoy the rights and prerogatives of associates and even managers" when they join a workplace.

Co-operatives ended the exploitation and oppression of wage-labour as "all positions are elective and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members" and "the collective force, which is a product of the community, ceases to be a source of profit to a small number of managers and speculators: It becomes the property of all the workers."

"Industrial democracy" would then replace the "hierarchical organisation" of capitalism. He denounced "the radical vice of political economy" of "affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition" the division of society into classes and looked

economic organisation and to pressurise the state from outside. During the 1848 revolution he "propose[d] that a provisional committee be set up to orchestrate exchange, credit and commerce amongst the workers" and this would "liaise with similar committees" elsewhere in France.

This would be "a body representative of the proletariat ... a state within the state, in opposition to the bourgeois representatives." He urged that "a new society be founded in the heart of the old society" by the working class for "the government can do nothing for you. But you can do everything for yourselves." The proletariat "must emancipate itself without the help of the government."

Given the nature of the state as a centralised, top-down structure organised to maintain class society, joining the government to achieve socialism was, for Proudhon, contradictory and unlikely

proposed "a solution based on equality – in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property."

He favoured socialisation, genuine common-ownership and free access. The "land is indispensable to our existence, consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation" and "all capital ... being the result of collective labour, is, in consequence, collective property." Against property, Proudhon argued for a society of "possessors without masters" with self-managed workers' associations running the economy "under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is social ownership ... We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations ...

"We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic."

He later termed this the agro-industrial federation. Unsurprisingly, then, Bakunin talked about Proudhon's "socialism, based on individual and collective liberty and upon the spontaneous action of free associations."

In opposition to various schemes of state socialism, Proudhon argued for a decentralised federal market socialism based on workers' self-management of production and community self-government.

### From Mutualism to Collectivism

Proudhon's ideas developed and evolved as he thought through the implications of his previous insights. They also reflected, developed and changed with the social and political context. He influenced the developing working class movement and was influenced by it. For example, he often called his libertarian socialism "mutualism," a term invented not by him but by the workers in Lyon in the 1830s.

This did not stop with his death in 1865. The ideas Proudhon championed continued to evolve as working class people utilised them to understand and change the world. Mutualists were instrumental in forming the International Working Men's Association in 1864 and it was in that organisation that libertarian ideas evolved from reformism to revolutionary anarchism.

The debates on collective ownership in the IWMA were primarily between socialists heavily influenced by Proudhon. All sides agreed on workers' associations for industry, disagreeing on the issue of collectivising land.

By 1871, the transition from reformist mutualism to revolutionary collectivism as the predominant tendency within anarchism was near complete. Then came the Paris Commune. With its ideas on decentralised federations of communes and workers' associations, the Commune applied Proudhon's ideas on a grand scale and, in the process, inspired generations of socialists.

Sadly, this revolt has been appropriated by Marxism thanks to Marx's passionate defence of the revolt and his and Engels systematic downplaying of its obvious Proudhonian influences. As Bakunin suggested, Marx and Engels "proclaim[ing]

that [the Commune's] programme and purpose were their own" flew "in face of the simplest logic" and was "a truly farcical change of costume."

### Communist-Anarchism

Proudhon's lasting legacy is his contribution to anarchism. It is little wonder that he has been termed "the father of anarchism" for while anarchism has evolved since Proudhon's time it still bases itself on the themes first expounded in a systematic way by the Frenchman. Indeed, it is hard to imagine anarchism without Proudhon – even if a few anarchists may wish to.

Modern, revolutionary, anarchism developed within the IWMA and reflected the federalist and self-managed vision expounded by Proudhon.

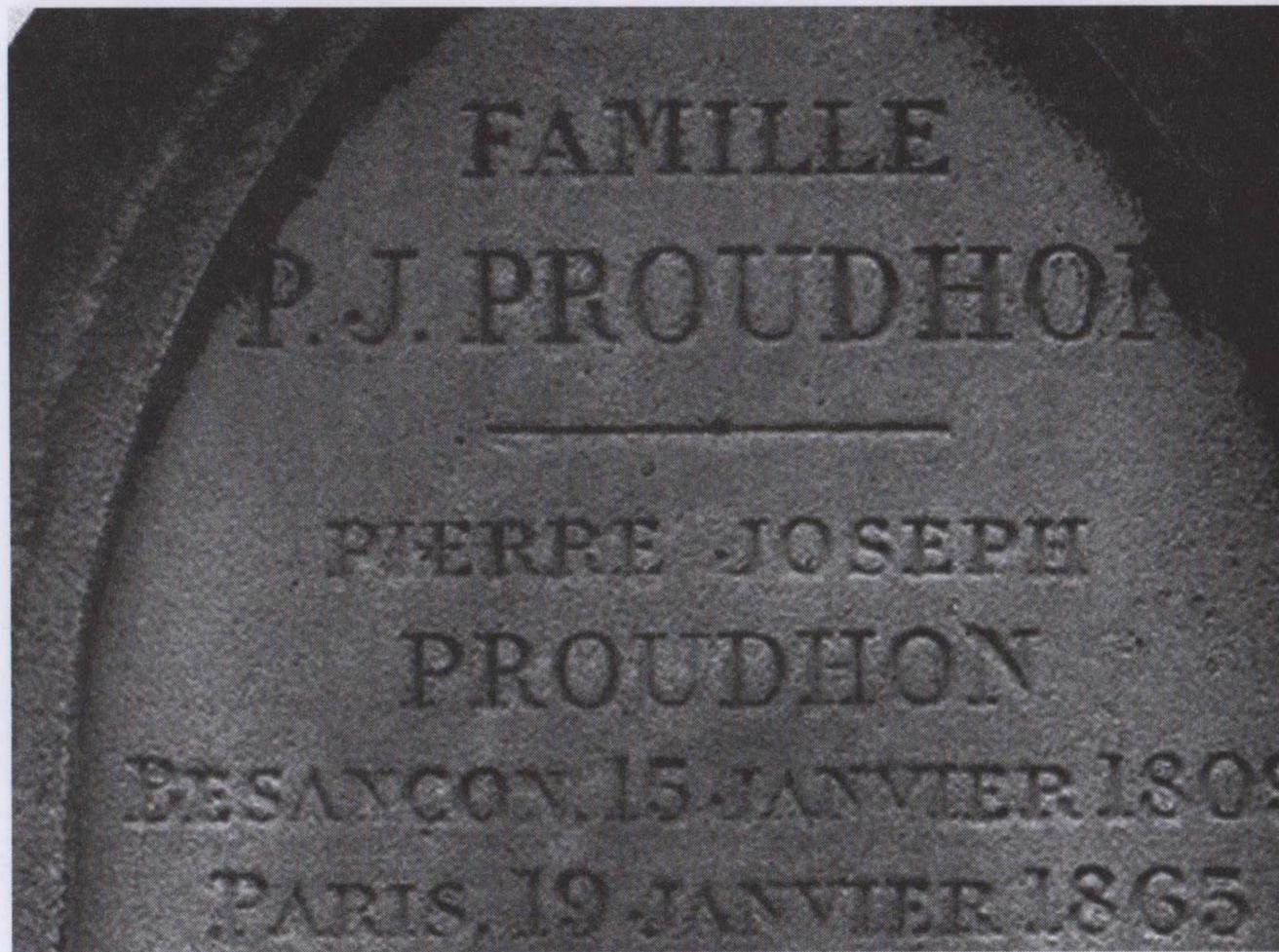
It rejected his reformism and transformed

So Proudhon and the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin had more in common than differences. Even a cursory glance at revolutionary anarchism shows the debt it has to Proudhon. Bakunin, unsurprisingly, considered his own ideas as "Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences."

### Conclusion

While Proudhon may not have been the first thinker to suggest a stateless and classless society, he was the first to call himself an anarchist and to influence a movement of that name.

This is not to suggest that libertarian ideas and movements had not existed before Proudhon nor that anarchistic ideas did not develop spontaneously after 1840 but these were not a coherent, named, theory.



**Humble:** The gravestone of Proudhon in Montparnasse cemetery, Paris

his call for a "revolution from below" into a literal support for a social revolution. With reformism rejected as insufficient, the revolutionary anarchists stressed the need for what would now be termed a syndicalist approach to social change.

Rather than seeing workers' co-operatives and the "organisation of credit" as the focus for social transformation, unions, strikes and other forms of collective working class direct action and organisation were seen as the means of both fighting capitalism and replacing it. Proudhon's dual-power strategy from 1848 was applied in the labour movement with the long term aim of smashing the state and replacing it with these organs of popular power.

It also rejected Proudhon's anti-communism in favour of going beyond abolishing wage-labour and advocating distribution according to need rather than deed as both more just and consistent (i.e., the extension of the critique of wage-labour into opposition to the wages-system).

It rejected as well Proudhon's support for patriarchy in the family as inconsistent with the libertarian principles he advocated against capitalism and the state.

Nor is it to suggest that anarchism has to be identical to Proudhon's specific ideas and proposals, rather they have to be consistent with the main thrust of his ideas – in other words, anti-state and anti-capitalism.

Anarchists are not Proudhonists, Bakuninists, Kropotkinites, or whoever-ists. Most reject the idea of naming their ideas after individuals.

However, we can and do acknowledge the contributions of outstanding thinkers and activists, people who contribute to the commonwealth of ideas which is anarchism. Seen in this light,

Proudhon should be (for all his faults) remembered as the person who laid the foundations of anarchism. His libertarian socialism, his critique of capitalism and the state, his federalism, advocacy of self-management and change from below, define what anarchism is.

Today, anarchists are continuing the task started in 1840 – replacing capitalist statism with anti-state socialism.

By **Iain McKay**



# Away sir, with

Letter to Pierre Leroux  
Translator: Paul Sharkey  
14 December 1849  
My dear Pierre Leroux, [...]

**O**n the basis of a few snatches of text quarried from my books and utterly misconstrued, you have cast me as an adversary of your own devising – anti-democratic, anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary, Malthusian and atheistic.

in this century could honestly be ignorant of; all in order to banish me benignly from the democratic and social community.

[...]

Thus you take me to task for having made a distinction between the labour question and the question of the State, two questions which are, at bottom, identical and susceptible to one and the same solution.

If you were as eager to acknowledge the common ground between your thoughts and mine as you are to highlight where they

that the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the abolition of the government of man by man are one and the same formula; when, taking up arms against communism and absolutism alike, those two kindred faces of the authority principle, I point out that, if the family was the building block of feudal society, the workshop is the building block of the new society; it must be as plain as day that I, like you, look upon the political question and the economic question as one and the same.

What you upbraid me for not knowing on this score is your own sheer ignorance of my own thinking and, what is worse, it is a waste of time.

But does it follow from the fact that the labour question and the State question resolve each other and are, fundamentally, one and the same issue, that no distinction should be made between them and that each does not deserve its own resolution?

Does it follow from these two questions being, in principle, identical, that we must arrive at a particular mode of organising the State rather than the State being subsumed by labour?

Neither of those conclusions holds water. Social questions are like problems of geometry; they may be resolved in different ways, depending on how they are approached. It is even useful and vital that these differing solutions be devised so that, in adding further dimensions to theory, they may add to the sum of science.

And as to the State, since, despite this multi-faceted character, the ultimate conclusion is that the question of its organisation is bound up with that of the organisation of labour, we may, we must, further conclude that a time will come when, labour having organised itself, in accordance with its own law, and having no further need of law-maker or sovereign, the workshop will banish government.

As I argue and into which we shall look into, my dear philosopher, whenever, paying rather more heed to the other fellow's ideas and being a little less sensitive about your own, you may deign to enter into a serious debate about one or other of these two things, about which you are forever prattling without actually saying anything: Association and the State.

The government question and the labour question being identical, you rightly remark that such identity is articulated in the following terms: *The Question of the organisation of Society*.

Now, read through chapter one of *Contradictions Économiques* and you will find it formally spelled out that it is incorrect to say that labour is organised or that it is not; that it is forever self-organising; that society is an ongoing striving for organisation; that such organisation is at one and the same time the principle, the life and the purpose of society.

So, my dear Pierre Leroux, be so kind as



**Spat:** Proudhon (above) felt Leroux (right) had misrepresented him

This is the imaginary creature to which you address your arguments, without in the least bothering if the man you depict thus to proletarians fits the description.

Sometimes you credit me with saying things that I never said, or you credit me with conclusions diametrically opposed to my actual ones; at other times, you take the trouble to lecture me on what no one living

differ, you wouldn't have had any difficulty persuading yourself that, when it comes to the questions of labour and the State, as well as on a host of other matters, our two outlooks have no reason to feel jealous of each other.

When I state, say, that the capitalist principle and the monarchist or governmental principle are one and the same principle;

# your straw men

## Radical Reprint: Proudhon takes on state socialist Pierre Leroux over his political assumptions

to think me somewhat less of an ignoramus and above all less of a sophist than I may seem to your frightened imagination: it will lay to rest three quarters of our quarrel.

[...]

Yes, I tell you, the February Revolution (and I am sticking to my formula precisely on account of its concrete simplicity and its very materiality), the February Revolution has posed two questions; one political and the other economic.

The first is the question of government and freedom; the second that of labour and capital. I defy you to express bigger issues in fewer words. So leave the Supreme Being to heaven and religion to conscience, to the household, a matter for the mother of the family and her offspring.

Let me add – and there is nothing in me to

and that it will do so.

But it does not follow at all from my speaking on the basis of socialism in order to reject the buy back of such assets as nonsensical, illegitimate and poisonous that I want to see individual ownership and non-organisation of the instruments of labour endure for all eternity.

I have never penned nor uttered any such thing: and have argued the opposite a hundred times over. I make no distinction, as you do, between real ownership and phony ownership: from the lofty heights of righteousness and human destiny, I deny all kinds of proprietary domain.

I deny it, precisely because I believe in an order wherein the instruments of labour will cease to be appropriated and instead become shared; where the whole earth will be depersonalised; where, all functions having become interdependent [*solidaires*], the unity and personhood of society will be articulated alongside the personality of the individual.

True, were I not familiar with the candour of your soul, I should think, dear Pierre Leroux, that such misrepresentation of my meaning and my words were done on purpose.

But how is such solidarity of possession and labour to be achieved? How are we to make a reality of such personhood of society, which must result from the disappropriation, or de-personalising of things?

That plainly is the issue, the big question of the revolution.

Together with Louis Blanc, you make noises about *association* and *buy back*: but association, such as it must emerge from fresh reforms, is as much a mystery as religion, and all the attempts at association made by the workers before our very eyes and more or less modelling themselves on the forms of companies defined by our civil and commercial codes, can only be deemed transitory. In short, we know nothing about association.

But, besides its requiring the acquiescence of all property-owners, by all the citizenry – which is an impossibility – buying back assets is a notion of mathematical nonsensicality.

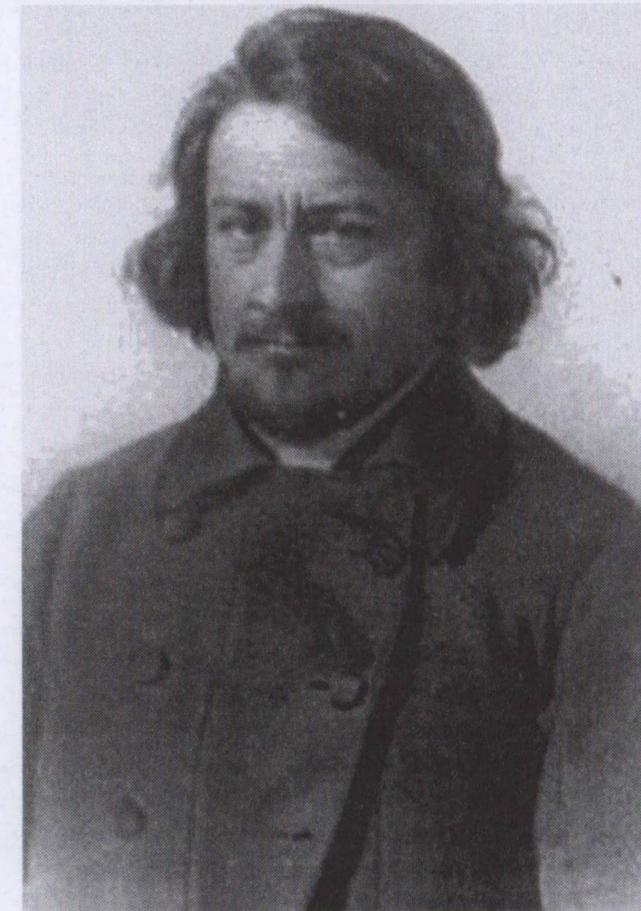
What is the State supposed to use to pay for assets? Why, assets. Buy back across-the-board adds up to universal expropriation without public usefulness and *without compensation*. Yet your sense of caution, Pierre Leroux, has no misgivings about being compromised by fostering such claptrap!

There is a more straightforward, more

effective and infinitely less onerous and less risky way of transferring ownership, achieving Liberty, Equality and Fraternity: And I have pointed that way out lots of times; it is to put paid to capital's productivity by means of a democratic organisation of credit and a simplification of taxation.

Capital having been divested of its power of usury, economic solidarity is gradually brought into play, and with it, an equality of wealth.

Next comes the spontaneous, popular formation of groups, workshops or workers' associations;



Finally, the last to be conjured and formed is the over-arching group, comprising the nation in its entirety, what you term the State because you invest it with a representativity beyond society [*représentation extra-sociale*] but which, to me, is the State no more.

That, dear philosopher, is how I see the Revolution going; this is how we should shift from Liberty to Equality and thence to Fraternity.

Which is why I so forcefully insist upon the importance of economic reform, a reform that I have given this makeshift designation: *Free credit*.

By Pierre Joseph Proudhon

“ Capital having been divested of its power of usury, economic solidarity is gradually brought into play and with it, an equality of wealth ”

P J Proudhon

validate your entertaining doubts, the way you do, about my feelings on this score – that once those two major issues have been resolved, the republican catch-cry, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, is a reality.

If this is what you refer to as *God's kingdom on earth*, let me say to you, indeed, that I have no quarrel with that. It is a real comfort to me to find out at last that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of liberty, equality and fraternity. But could you not express yourself in everyday language?

You have me saying, and I really do not know where you could have found this, that *ownership of the instruments of labour must forever stay vested in the individual and remain unorganised*.

These words are set in italics, as if you had lifted them from somewhere in my books. And then, on the back of this alleged quotation, you set about answering me that society, or the State that stands for it, has the right to buy back all property assets, that it has a duty to pursue such *buy-backs*

# Analysis: Brian Morris looks at the theories of a key figure in the evolution of anarchism

In the opening pages of my book on Bakunin (1993) I offered a quote from the Ghanian poet Ayi Kwei Armat. It reads: "The present is where we get lost, if we forget our past and have no vision of the future."

Drawing on the past does not entail that we engage in a kind of ancestor worship, any more than envisioning a better future for humankind entails that we become lost in utopian dreams. Nobody chides biologists for having an interest in the work and theories of Charles Darwin, nor should socialists feel embarrassed in examining and drawing on the work of an earlier generation of socialist theorists – not as historical curiosities, but as a source of inspiration and ideas.

In this article I want to critically explore the writings of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) focusing on his politics and his critique of the Marxist theory of the state as an agency of revolutionary transformation. The writing of the essay has been provoked by the numerous self-styled anarchists – though they are invariably Stirnerite individualists, or anarcho-primitivists – who join forces with Marxists and liberals in declaring that the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin are "obsolete" or have no relevance to present day political struggles. Whereas, in fact, anarchism, revolutionary libertarian socialism, is the only tenable political alternative to neo-liberalism.

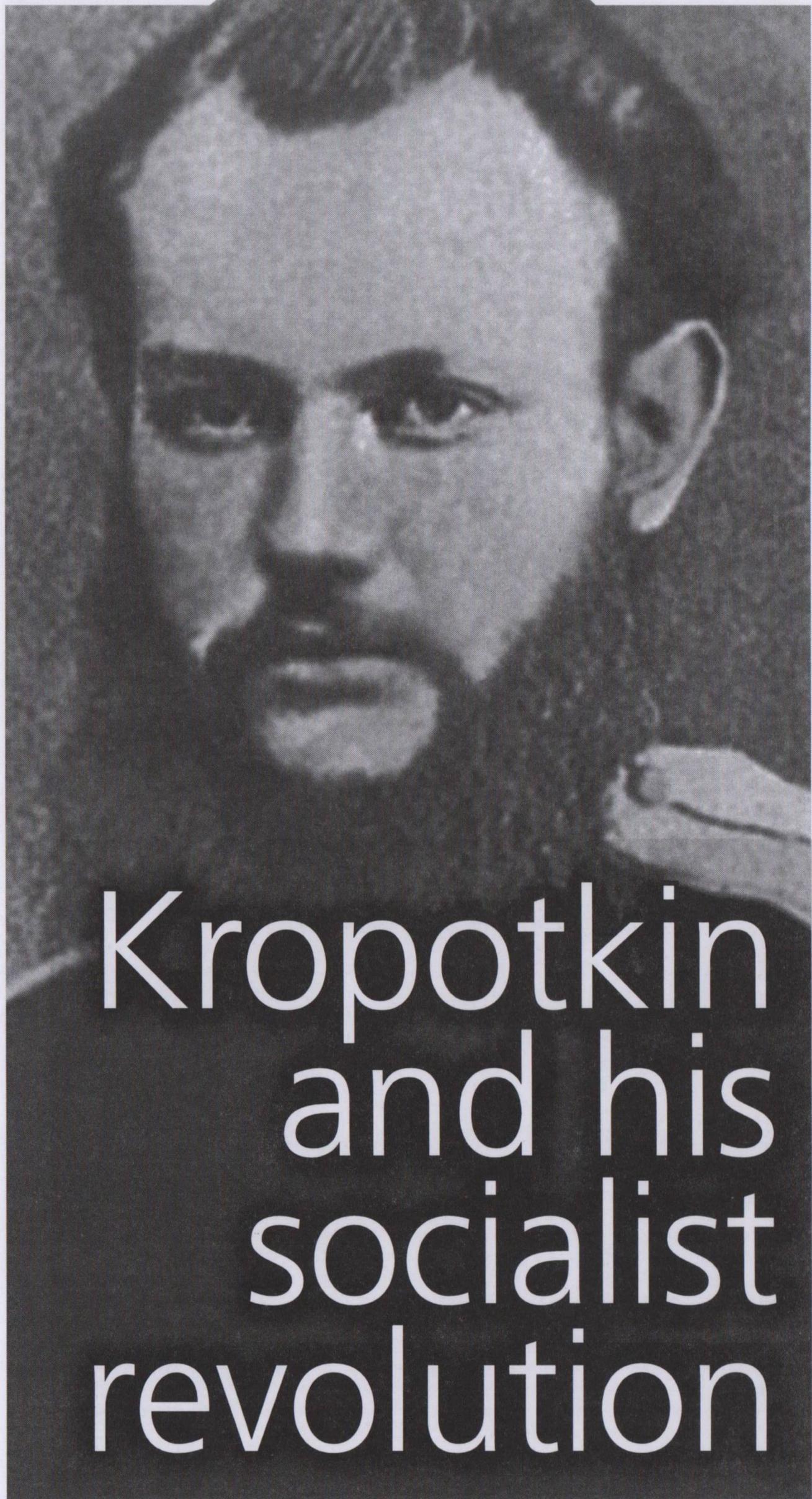
## Kropotkin and Anarchism

As a political philosophy, anarchism has had perhaps the worst press. It has been ignored, maligned, ridiculed, abused, misunderstood and misrepresented by writers from all sides of the political spectrum: liberals, Marxists, democrats and conservatives. In common parlance anarchy is invariably linked with disorder, violence and nihilism.

A clear understanding of anarchism is further inhibited by the fact that the term "anarchist" is applied to a wide variety of different philosophies and individuals, as can be seen from Peter Marshall's (1992) well known history of anarchism. Thus Gandhi, Spencer, Tolstoy, Stirner, Ayn Rand, Nietzsche, along with more familiar figures such as Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, have all been described as anarchists.

This has enabled liberal and Marxist scholars to dismiss "anarchism" as a completely incoherent philosophy.

It isn't. For what has to be recognised



# Kropotkin and his socialist revolution

is that anarchism is fundamentally an historical movement and political tradition that emerged only around 1870, mainly among the working class members of the International Working Men's Association, widely known as the First International.

Although they did not initially describe themselves as anarchists but rather as "federalists" or as "anti-authoritarian socialists" this group of workers adopted

the label of their Marxist opponents and came to describe themselves as "Anarchist Communists." Anarchism as a political movement and tradition thus emerged among the workers of Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, and among its more well-known proponents were Elisee Reclus, Errico Malatesta, Jean Grave and Peter Kropotkin.

Although Kropotkin himself described

“anarchist communism” as the main current of anarchism it is in fact virtually synonymous with anarchism as a historical movement, which between 1870 and 1930 spread throughout the world and was thus by no means restricted to Europe.

Anarchism, anarchist communism, libertarian socialism can therefore be regarded as synonyms.

The main inspiration of this movement was Michael Bakunin, who also was an important political theorist in his own right, for it was Bakunin who first articulated in a coherent fashion, a theory of anarchism as libertarian socialism.

Importantly, contemporary scholarship has indicated that Bakunin was by no means the “intellectual buffoon” bent on violence, destruction and millennial dreams as his liberal and Marxist detractors have tended – quite falsely – to portray him.

But the key figure in the development of anarchist communism as a coherent political tradition was Peter Kropotkin who towards the end of the nineteenth century wrote a series of essays and tracts outlining the basis and principles of anarchist communism.

These were later published as pamphlets, or in book form, two texts being particularly significant – “Words of a Rebel” (1885) and “The Conquest of Bread” (1892).

## Anarchist Communism

Anarchist communism was established as a political doctrine largely as a reaction against both the economic theories of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who was the first to positively describe himself as an anarchist, and the authoritarian politics of the revolutionary communist Karl Marx. Thus anarchist-communists envisage a society in which, as Kropotkin puts it: “all the mutual relations are regulated, not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between members of that society” (Baldwin 1970: 157).

Kropotkin’s basic premise was thus a deep and fundamental commitment to individual freedom, and to the self-development of the human person. Through mutual agreements and free association what Kropotkin sought was the “most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects ... for all imaginable aims” But such freedom could only be exercised within a social context, and in a free society: – not in a society based on hierarchy and exploitation. It is futile, he wrote, “to speak of liberty as long as economic slavery exists” (123, 124).

Kropotkin repudiated both the state and capitalism. He thus saw a future socialist society as implying the emancipation of humans from both the powers of capitalism and of coercive government. This implied the rejection of all forms of government, including representative government, as well as of the market economy, and what Kropotkin described as the “wage system.”

Production would be achieved through voluntary associations and self-management, geared to human need and not for profit, and distribution would follow the old adage: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” Land and all other means of production would be held in

common not as private property.

Thus for Kropotkin mutual aid, social solidarity, individual liberty through free cooperation was to be the basis of social life, and he came to describe anarchism as the “no-government system of socialism” (46).

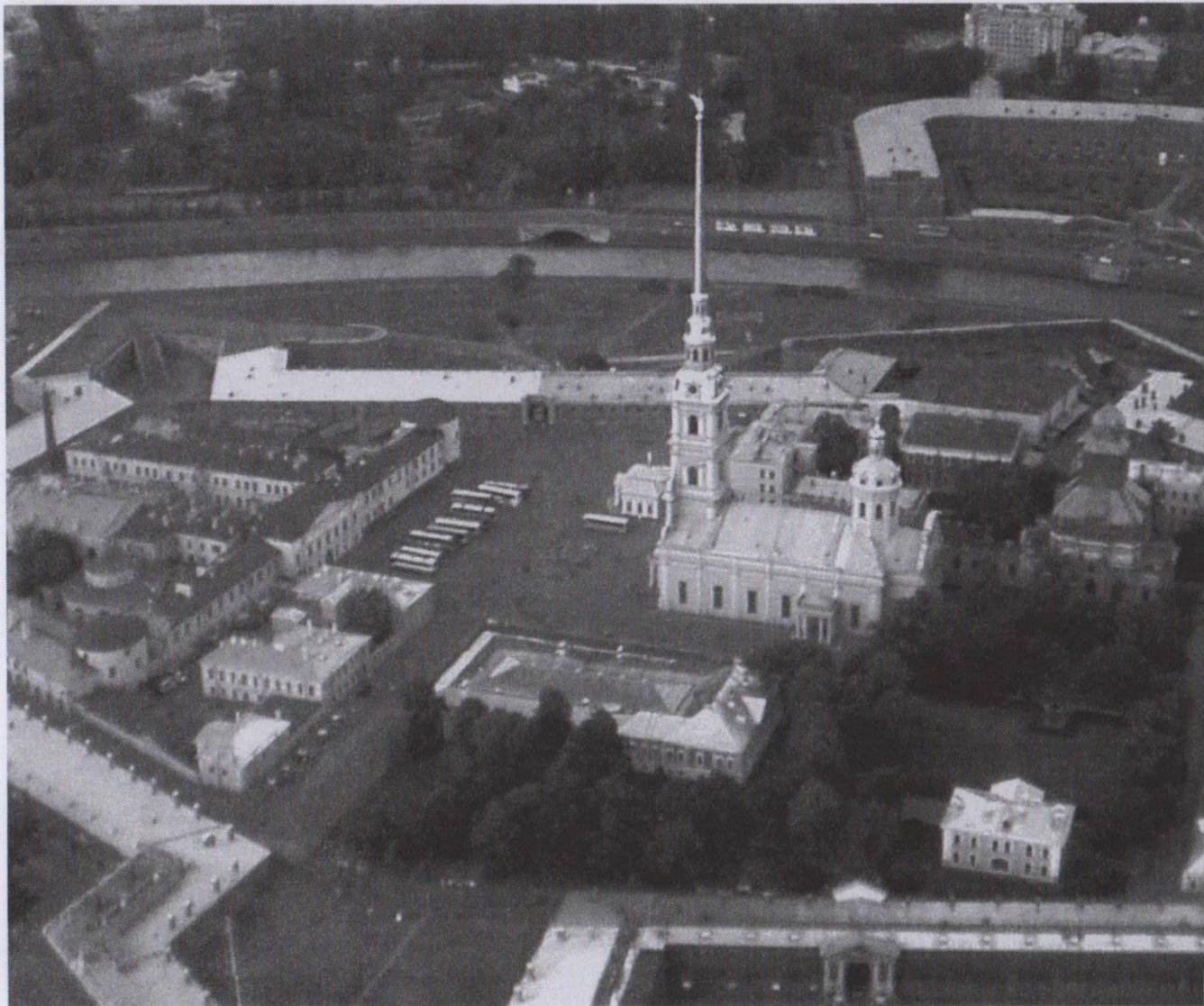
The functions of government were to be replaced by local communities and local assemblies, united through a federal system, and Kropotkin insisted on the importance of maintaining and enlarging “the precious kernel of social customs without which no human society can exist”. (137).

In their important study “Black Flame” (2009) Van der Walt and Schmidt argue strongly that anarchism is a form of libertarian socialism and for historical reasons should be identified with anarchist communism. They thus repudiate the idea that Godwin, Tolstoy, Proudhon, Stirner

1970: 185-186). Being a member of the First International, Kropotkin had a fairly clear understanding of the kind of politics expressed by Marx and Engels, and he was certainly right to describe Marxism as a form of state socialism (perhaps better described as “state capitalism”).

In “The State: Its Historical Role” (1896) Kropotkin emphasised, like Marx, the intrinsic symbiotic relationship between state power and capitalism, whether *laissez-faire*, welfare or state capitalism.

Though of comparatively recent origin, throughout history the essential function of the state, Kropotkin argued, had been to uphold systems of hierarchy, and class exploitation, and the modern nation-state, representative government was no different. For Kropotkin “parliamentary rule was capital rule” (1988: 41). The state for Kropotkin, as for Marx and Engels, was



**Extradordinary life:** Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg where Kropotkin was imprisoned for his political views in 1873. He escaped in 1876, running out of the front gate to a waiting carriage as provisions were being brought in, and fled to England. Left, as a young officer.

and Tucker are, in fact, anarchists, even though they may have expressed libertarian sentiments. Kropotkin, however, is quite willing to admit that they are anarchists; he simply affirms that anarchism is best understood as libertarian communism. The tendency of Marxists and individualists to make a radical dichotomy between anarchism and socialism is therefore, on both conceptual and historical grounds, quite misleading, and distorts our understanding of socialism.

## Kropotkin and State Socialism

Throughout his life Kropotkin was critical of three important radical traditions of the nineteenth century: mutualism, individualist anarchism and what is now described as Marxism, but which Kropotkin described as “state socialism,” or implied that it involved “centralised state capitalism” (Baldwin

thus an organic or agency of class rule, the oppression of one class by another. Kropotkin was therefore always hostile to the notion that a socialist revolution could ever be achieved through the state. (1993: 159-201)

Kropotkin rarely mentions Marx in his writings, and when he does so, he tends to interpret him as a worshipper of the centralised state. He even suggests that Marx is an exemplar of the Jacobin style of politics (Baldwin 1970: 50, 165).

■ The second part of this article will appear in *Black Flag* issue 233, in which Morris will examine what aspects of Marxist theory Kropotkin rejected and his responses. Check out [blackflagmagazine.blogspot.com](http://blackflagmagazine.blogspot.com) for updates.

By Brian  
Morris



# The history of

**Analysis:** Liz Willis looks into whether the adage 'history is written by the winners' still holds true

**T**here are a number of historical contexts which might be expected to attract a libertarian historian looking for a research topic, those times when significant numbers of people did appear to be acting collectively to take control of their lives and inaugurate a fairer, non-authoritarian form of society: the Paris Commune of 1871, workers' councils in the Russian Revolution, Spain 1936-37, and Hungary 1956 spring to mind.

A lot of good work has been done on these and there is room for plenty more, not only to draw the lessons – that what was achieved once could be possible again; what went wrong and why – but as a corrective to the disinformative history that the opponents of libertarianism tend to propagate. In the case of Spain, there are still books being produced which manage almost entirely to 'disappear' the anarchists.

It has been well observed that history is written by the winners and libertarians have not won in the long run (yet), although the proposition is less tenable now that your actual working historians are a comparatively large and varied set of people and many amateurs have access to a range of resources for research and communication.

Historians of medicine sometimes tell the story of the brain surgeon who said "I think I'll take up history when I retire" to a historian, who replied "Good idea. I'm retiring soon too, maybe I should take up brain surgery."

It doesn't quite work, though: while taking the point that history can claim to be a serious occupation rather than a hobby and a bit of study and training in techniques is likely to be

useful, it isn't really rocket science, or brain surgery – and there is some sense in the idea that anyone can decide to do it.

This article will look at some ways in which it has been done, and at some of those who have done it, and consider whether a case can be made for a distinctive libertarian contribution to the theory of the subject as well as to its content.

## Rebels and Pioneers

While much of recorded history has indeed been for and about the winners – powerful ancient rulers and imperial conquerors seeking to justify and consolidate their dominant position (and denounce their opponents), medieval chroniclers generally supporting the status quo in church and state – a parallel, contrasting view of the past subsisted in popular memory, transmitted by oral tradition, in stories, songs and rhymes, to emerge as a unifying theme in times of rebellion.

The Peasants' Revolt (1381) repudiated the idea that class divisions were divinely ordained "When Adam delved and Eve span." The Diggers of the 17th century "English Revolution" saw their actions as a reassertion of ancient rights, invoking a pre-Conquest age of communal ownership and shared work on the land.

Subsequent popular movements have looked to both of these, not for the historical accuracy of their alternative myths, but for their rejection of the dominant ideology and vision of a different way of life.

The modern kind of history, old-fashioned as it may appear from some points of view, can be traced to the 18th century,

located among cultural developments in the wake of the Enlightenment. Edward Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" is the celebrated blockbuster archetype.

Less well known is one of the few women writers whom Mary Wollstonecraft could regard with approval or as any kind of inspiration, Catherine Macaulay (1731-91), produced an eight-volume History of England and was famed, or notorious, in her time as a prominent "Bluestocking," daring to appear openly intellectual in defiance of social expectations.

As well as the slights and slanders that went with this territory she came in for personal attacks when, as a widow, she married a noticeably younger man. With the irrationality of dominant-male ideology, her reputation as a writer suffered too.

Recent commentators have been more generous, hailing her as the first (noteworthy) English woman historian and a proto-feminist who advocated equal liberties for all. She is said to have based her writings mainly on primary source materials, unusually for the time and to have had a political, rather than a moral, purpose; her work was popular in revolutionary America and France.

## Revolutions

Wollstonecraft herself (1759-97) showed an awareness of history in her Vindication of the Rights of Woman and an ability to look at it in her own way, from her take on the "half-civilised Romans" to her analysis and rejection of patriarchal authority, tyrannical rule, and supposedly "natural" gender roles and values.

When she reported on the French Revolution – bringing her intelligence to bear on events which were affecting her and her friends, at a time when her personal life was in turmoil – she was at pains to explain the social and economic background and recognised the deep causes of the repellent violence of the Terror.

Revolutions and uprisings are naturally a favourite subject for libertarians, as for socialists (and some reactionaries).

Kropotkin wrote about The Great French Revolution; a signed copy with an inscription to one of the professors is, or was in 1968, on an open shelf in Aberdeen University library, available to be borrowed by students and shown to the local anarchist group (we did return it).

His aim and that of libertarians generally would have been to contest the prevailing historiographical preoccupation with guillotines



# history itself

and massacres, in order to understand the process, including the class realities involved.

While underlining the power of collective action, it was also necessary to acknowledge the double dangers of authoritarian revolutionary leaders and post-revolutionary repression.

Those themes were even more forcefully present when it came to writing about the Russian Revolution of 1917. The members of the French Convention in 1792 had consciously made a break with the past to the extent of declaring Year 1 and inaugurating a new calendar; the Bolsheviks brought only a slight change in dates (from "Old Style" to new) but were otherwise insistent on their historical mission.

The theory of dialectical materialism was taken to justify their seizure and retention of power, and rapid elimination of opponents (including anarchists) of the left and centre as well as right.

If history did not support their claim to embody the will of the masses, then history was at fault. Their version did not go uncontested and in the long run the suppression of unacceptable facts was not final.

George Orwell later denounced the rewriting of history and perversion of collective memory as practised by totalitarian regimes in the fictional but well-grounded books *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

His *Homage to Catalonia* made a major contribution to preserving the truth about events in Spain.

For the most part, however, it was left to less widely published, committed writers and publishers such as, in Britain, Freedom Press, or later Solidarity, Cienfuegos, and currently AK Press, to document the libertarian content of revolutions and the fate of anarchist activists.

## ... and all that

Much of what many normal (non-revolution-minded) people still think of as history – kings and queens, battles and so on, boring stuff laced with scandalous or comic anecdotes by way of light relief – was familiar enough in the early 20th century to be thoroughly satirised in *1066 and All That* (W J Sellars and R J Yeatman, 1930), still a fun read even if getting the full flavour depends on "common knowledge" which is now far from common.

It ended, fans may remember, with America becoming "top nation" and history coming to a full stop. The focus was obviously on Britain, especially England; other countries had their own national myths equally crying out for debunking.

Ellen Wilkinson – "Red Ellen" who won fame on the 1936 Jarrow march against unemployment, later becoming a Labour MP and Minister – realised "how little real history" had been on offer when she went to

Manchester University as a student in 1910.

Such feelings would have been shared by most of those at the receiving end of formal education at all levels, over many decades.

Gradually the situation improved in several respects. Received wisdom was contested; "social history" – including vast swathes of human experience, work, culture and almost anything to do with women – were no longer relegated to occasional chapters,

lacking in latter-day episodic what-it-was-like to be a Roman/Viking etc. methods in use at junior levels.)

Despite pretensions to (social) scientific status, the initial attraction was often, and remains, akin to that of literature, and there's nothing necessarily wrong with liking a good story. Why should the devil have all the best tunes or the ruling class the best stories? – as long as reality is



**Historic:** The Jarrow marchers in 1936. Right, 18th century historian Catherina Macaulay

footnotes and brief asides, diversions from considerations of serious (men's) business like running countries and waging wars.

Even if the Academy remained dominated by patriarchal attitudes and authoritarian assumptions there were contexts where different approaches could be explored: Evening classes for "self-improvement," public libraries, books and magazines, political groups.

In schools, whether or not pupils were turned on to history probably depended a great deal on the inspirational or off-putting style of individual teachers and the chances of passing exams (Formula: when discussing an event apply the formula 'causes, course, results;' if a personality, say who they were, what they did, why they were important), rather than the content of the curriculum.

Traditional teaching had its uses, at its best inducing analytical habits of thought, and equipping students to organise their ideas and develop their own interests. (It also managed to convey a sense of chronology, something which seems to be

allowed to get in the way when it has to.

In the words of G M Trevelyan, "The poetry of history does not consist of imagination roaming at large, but of imagination pursuing the fact and fastening upon it..."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, even outright fiction can have a place in stimulating appreciation of conditions in the past, but should not be confused with actual evidence. In the higher echelons of academia the narrative mode might have been deemed inferior to the study of documents and the compilation of statistics but it persists through successive fashions, controversies and "turns."

■ The second part of this article will be published in *Black Flag* issue 233 in May 2011, covering the entry of Marxists into the system and how the field has modernised since the 1960s. Check out [blackflagmagazine.blogspot.com](http://blackflagmagazine.blogspot.com) for updates.

By Liz Willis



# Can 'faction' be

**Review: Semi-real story told in Pistoleros! 1 and 2 is interesting but it raises many questions**

Pistoleros! 1918  
ISBN 978-1-873976-37-1  
£12.95  
254pp

Pistoleros! 1919  
ISBN 978-1-873976-41-8  
197pp  
£12.95  
by Farquhar McHarg  
Pub. Christie Books in Read 'n' Noir series,  
2009-10

and he found himself in a group of anarcho syndicalists with the insurrectionary scene all around. This was a rapid course of political education for which he was quite unprepared, but he was a quick learner.

World capitalism was everywhere in crisis and Spain was no exception – uprisings, assassinations, strikes, revolutions and

of course is another and bigger story.

The books comprise two separate strands. The narrative tells the story of McHarg, his life in amongst the anarcho syndicalists including his relations with a local girl, Lara, and the detailed story of the group - written in the form of a diary.

The second book deals largely with the famous Canadiense strike in 1919. The CNT consolidated their position and initially won a grand victory but retribution came quickly as the ruling class re-grouped and won back much of their losses – but not all. The strike has a honourable place in working class history. And should be celebrated at large

That is the content but the form is that of "faction," that is fact-based fiction.

Victor Serge perfected this technique with novels like Birth of Our Power but this effort is much less skilled and we can figuratively "see the joins." The cover blurb talks, a little dishonestly, of "memoirs" and "chronicles," but the text is clearly very recently written. Even so, it leaves a large number of loose ends.

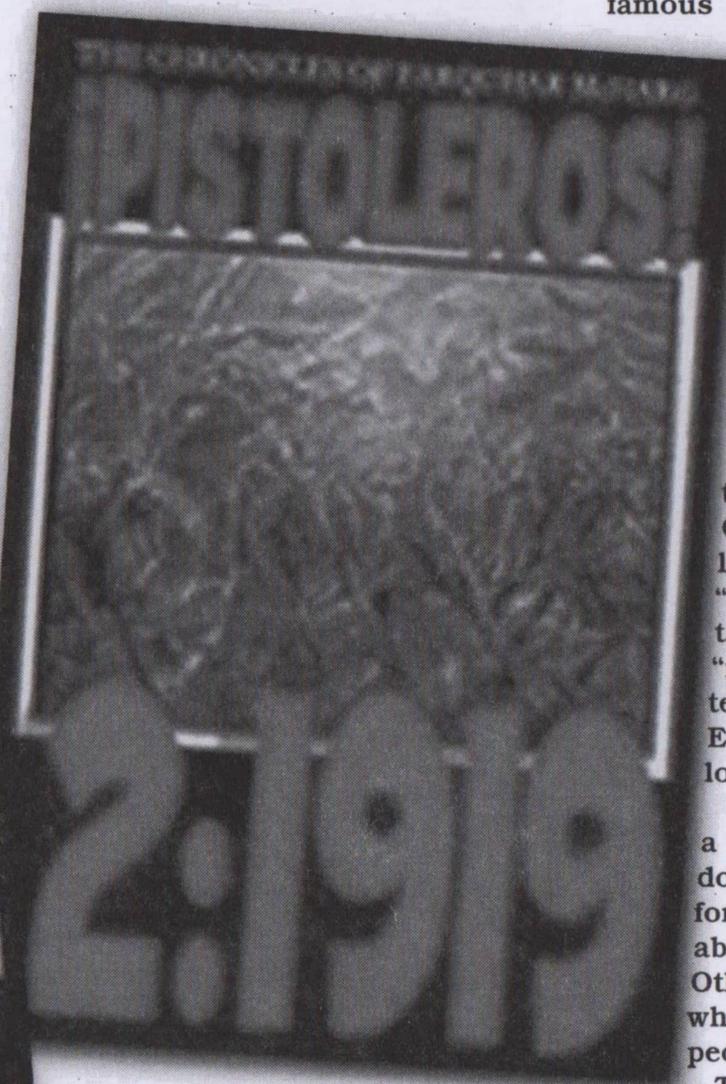
I'm old fashioned enough to like a beginning and ending but we just don't know what happened to McHarg for most of his life, nor are we told about his friendship with the Lara. Other unanswered questions include what happened in the war? How did people escape, etc?

The second strand is Notebook, or Notes, or Observations. These which begin in the first volume by elaborating on the text in passages immediately following the narrative headings but imperceptibly becomes a tale of the politically reactionary bosses, state police and ruling classes of the time.

The format is research reports, conspiracy theories and other document-based paragraphs. It involves numerous organisations, activities and conferences.

In the second book the "narrative/notebook" parallel approach is abandoned and the Notes are all collected at the end.

Thus disconcertingly we are led through a repeat version. The book ends by leaping forward to the post war period, around the theme of the history of the CNT in exile, told though the story of Farquhar's companero or comrade Laureano Cerruda, the original



demonstrations.

It was the period where the majority union of the workers, the CNT National Confederation of Labour, was resisting the extremely violent repression by the Spanish ruling classes as the Old Order found its power in danger as a result of the insanity of world war.

Their greed and selfishness looked likely to tumble, but the ruling class was desperately using all its resources to delay change. This included the prevaricating socialists and their UGT union federation.

In the event, a decade of delay with the military dictatorship of de Rivera ended with prolonged crisis that culminated in the Spanish revolution of 1936.

Mutiny and three years of war, with the communist betrayal, followed, though that

These two very well illustrated volumes of 'biography' deal primarily with the events in Barcelona at the end of the world war one. Strangely the crisis of these years has re-visited us and we are again faced with cuts, unemployment and other familiar failings of capitalism.

The publication is timely for another reason as 2011 sees the 75th anniversary of the later Spanish revolution and we can expect more books like this.

Our hero had become involved by chance when working as a marine engineer from Glasgow whose boat docks at Barcelona

# a stonger voice?

man behind the scenes.

This theme may be new to readers, it certainly was to me, but there is some uncertainty about authenticity, and we are unsure what is fact and what is speculation

One brighter note – a sub theme of a very corrupt and murderous Spanish policeman – weren't they all? – called Portillo, who gets bumped off in the end.

Other points – the style is carefully written with explanations of Spanish expressions missing from other books and occasional use of the author's Scottish tongue.

This goes well beyond the Robert Burns level and the whole text is richly illustrated by a multitude of literary references in both languages, some not stated as such. There are some fine woodcuts by Helios Gomez and hundreds of photos and press cuttings.

## Reading

Murray Bookchin; *The Spanish Anarchists – the heroic years 1868 to 1936* [1977 USA, 1998, 316pp]; useful one volume history, reviews other books, and recently revised.

Alexander Cordell, *To Slay the Dreamer*, [1980, 318 pp] perhaps over dramatised popular novel;

Stuart Christie: *We, the Anarchists – a study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* [2000, 127 pp] a surprisingly well-argued political polemic on the anarchist political party. Very thoughtfully presented.

George Orwell, *Homage To Catalonia* [1962, 246pp] possibly the best single account of the conflict at a later stage

Victor Serge, *Birth of Our Power* [1970, 245pp], a powerful novel which covers the 1917 rising in Barcelona and includes a biography of Serge and his eventful life by Richard Greeman;

Pedro de Paz: *The Man Who killed Durruti?* [2005, 134 p], recent faction, see also his (?) Pocket Archive book *The Spanish Civil War* [1997, 197 pp]

We end with more questions – who actually wrote the narrative and selected the Notes?

Unfortunately there are no prizes for guessing the answers for this publication.

However you may need a crash course in revolutionary history to supplement the text if you don't already have the "Knowledge" of "The Idea" as Spanish libertarianism has been called.

The recommended book for that crash course to Spanish history is Murray Bookchin's volume on the heroic years, 1868 to 1936, which has been recently updated and reprinted.

Bookchin stands out as a committed author, reviewing new evidence, other books and making rational judgement of

the history in an easily available publication [Bookchin].

There are remaining three points to make about the books :

■ The title of "Pistoleros" refers to the start of the reaction of the Spanish ruling class to the revolutionary agitation after the world war. Around the globe, rulers resorted to massive political repression in these decades, usually some form of fascism. Historically the sequence was the pistolismo, the dictatorship of de Rivera and finally the mutiny of the Generals which promoted a the longest workers regime in the world before the repression of 1936-39.

So the tale of the use of gunmen by the police and employers – very damaging to the anarcho syndicalists' cause – is quite appropriate

Having said that, Bookchin does quote CNT's Angel Pestana reporting that a few members of the CNT union – Cenetistas – engaged in equally violent retaliatory killings before the affinity groups of Durruti and co did so officially unofficially, if you see what I mean.

■ The Notebook comprises a round up of the world revolutionary events at its most active and busy period. Unfortunately this is limited to the politics of the day (1920s), is frequently out of date and in places just plain wrong.

Workers' councils are not "trades councils" by any stretch of the imagination and it is a mistake to promote such clearly false ideas.

This section gives thumbnail sketches of the workers' leaders – Ramon Archs Serra, Salvador Segui, Pestana, etc – and nearly all are included in the pages of photos. There are many also of the politically conscious workers themselves, los obreros conscientes.

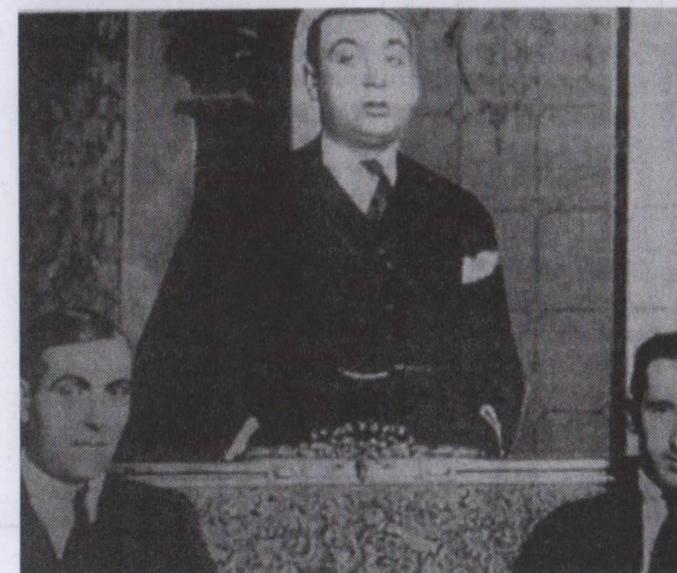
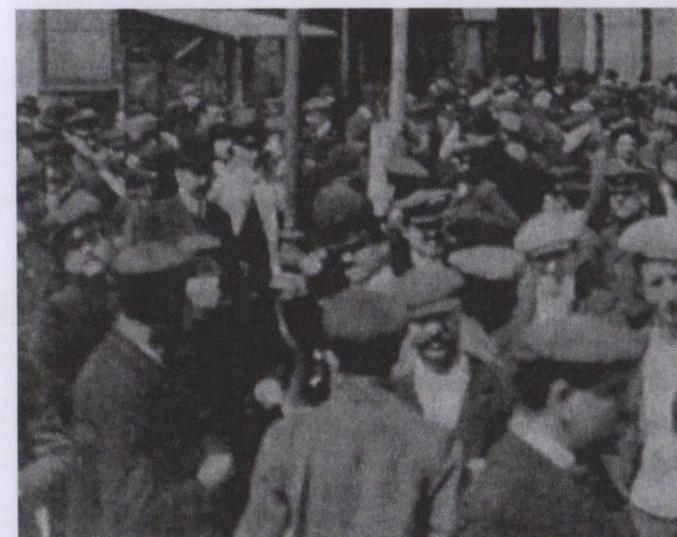
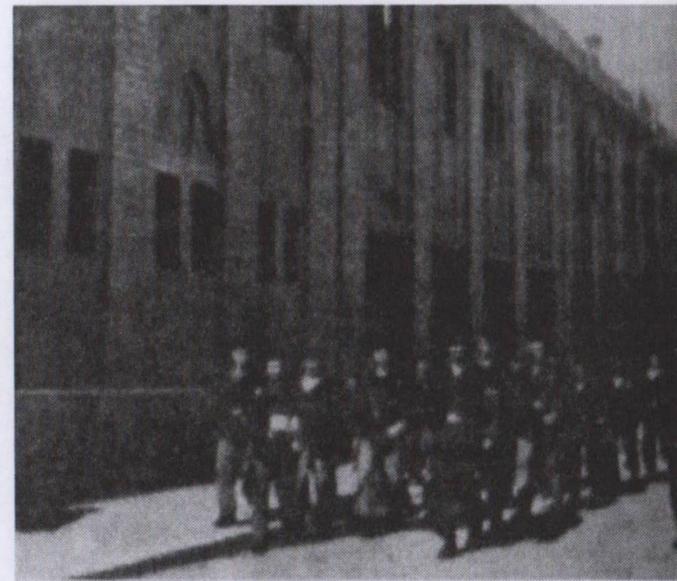
■ The narrative or biography of Farquhar McHarg, whatever its origins, is a jolly enough tale and can be classified as a piece of hidden history revealed by the book.

Readers wishing to prepare for the anniversary can browse through the book list below or consult Libcom.org for more information

In conclusion, we must consider the nature of "faction." Another recent book in this mode is *The Man Who killed Durruti?* where the imaginative re-construction is followed by a lengthy explanation, also from Stuart Christie [de Paz].

But many will prefer their reading as either historical fact of imaginative creative writing. Faction merges the two into an art form which can have a truth greater than the component parts. I recommend it to readers to try.

By Alan Woodward



1918-19: Clockwise from top left, Milqans del Bosch and (inset) Bravo Portillo, Candiense strikers are marched out of the plant, milling around after voting to end the strike, key unionists Quemades, Segui and Pestana, and a meeting of La Patronal



# Hob's Choice

**W**elcome once more to our regular pamphlet mini-review feature. Thanks go out once again to the Anarchist Federation - probably the most prolific pamphleteers in the UK today - Liz Willis from the Libertarian Socialists Group and a regular Black Flag contributor; Kate Sharpley Library and the Tempest Collective for submitting the pamphlets that make this feature possible.

**Women in the Spanish Revolution.** Liz Willis. Pub. Libertarian Socialists Publications. Autumn 2010. A5 format. 16pp. £1. PO Box 45155, London N15 4SL, UK.

Re-edited and re-published by the author herself. This now classic pamphlet was

**Introduction to Anarchist Communism.** Pub. Anarchist Federation (Anarchist Communist Editions). March 2010. A5 format. 38pp. £2 (payable, 'Anarchist Federation'). BM Anafed, London, WC1N 3XX, UK

Once more to the AF, and their much talked about pamphlet Introduction to Anarchist Communism. This pamphlet is just about as good as you will get as an introduction to anarchist-communism.

The pamphlet covers the fight against capitalism and hierarchy; Who we are and what we believe - Revolution and anarchist communism; and building a culture of resistance. The main text is inter-spaced with examples from history to illustrate the ideas described in the main text.

Spain; The second world war; The Party and the Working Class; Workers Councils and much more.

I am afraid that this mini-review cannot do justice to this very important work. In 1986 Wildcat said: "The powerful arguments put forward by the APCF to support their case that all out struggle against capitalism is the ONLY meaningful opposition to war are as true and as relevant today as ever before.

"Their call for the 'destruction of ALL imperialism by the Proletarian World Revolution' must be taken up to prevent the horrors of the last war being repeated again." In 2010 this sentiment can only be reiterated.

**The Third Revolution? Peasant and Worker Resistance to the Bolshevik Government.** Nick Heath. Pub. Kate Sharpley Library. September 2010. A5 format. 32pp. Price £2 (payable, 'Kate Sharpley Library'). KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX, UK.

More often than not it is the Makhnovist movement that is highlighted as the driving revolutionary force against the Bolshevik government.

However, in this relatively short pamphlet, dubbed the 'Third Revolution' - the first and second being February and October 1917, author Nick Heath traces further examples of mutinies, workers opposition and peasant revolts in opposition to the embryonic soviet state. Although the pamphlet is on the slim side it is well researched and extensively referenced.

**Anarchist International Action Against Francoism From Genoa 1949 to the First of May Group.** Antonio Téllez Solà, translated by Paul Sharkey; with a tribute to Téllez by Stuart Christie. Pub. Kate Sharpley Library. 2010. A5 format. 28pp. Price £2. Details as above.

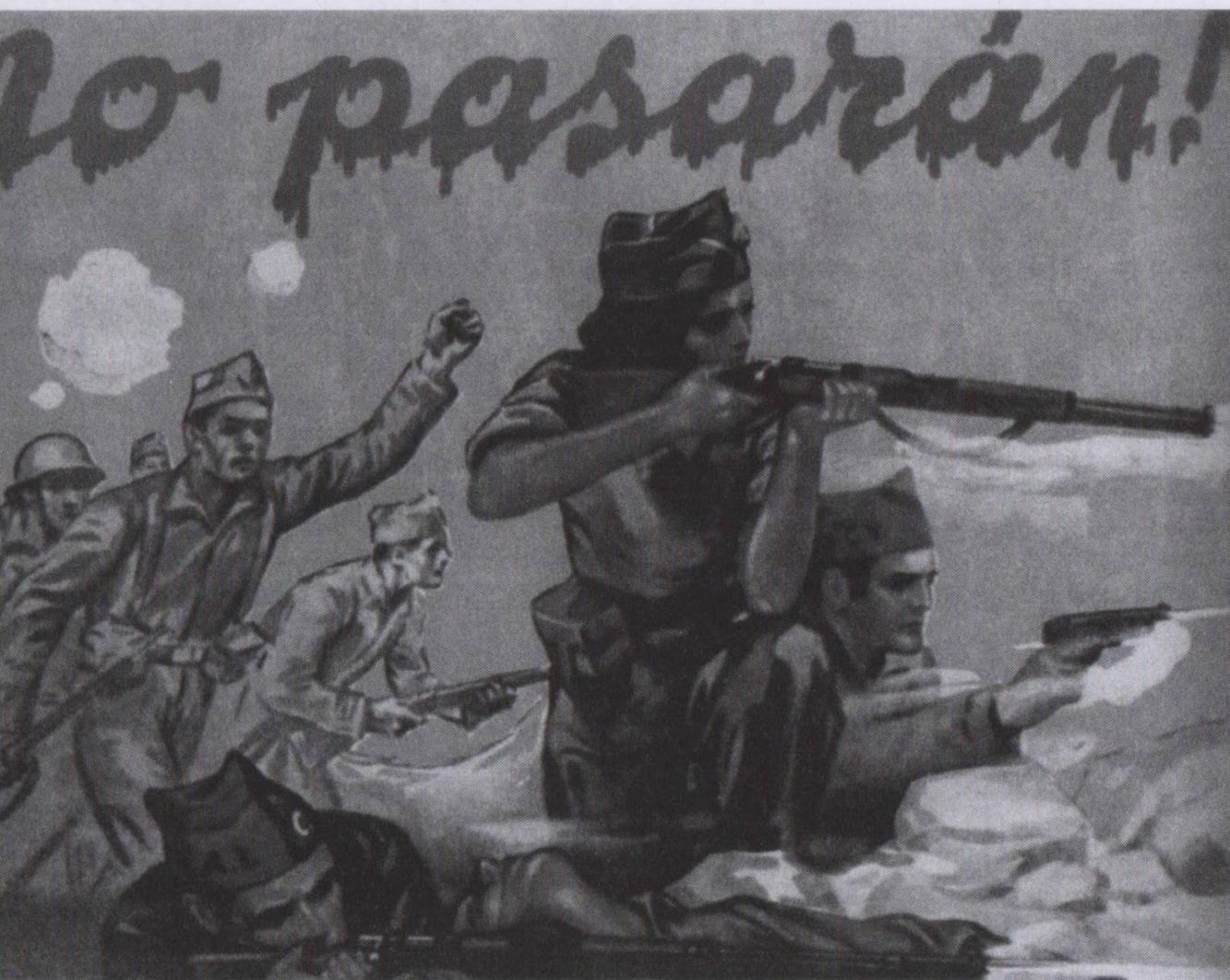
After the Spanish civil war ended militants waged an underground struggle and armed resistance against Franco's regime.

One such militant was anarchist Antonio Téllez Solà, who died in 2005 aged 84. KSL have reprinted a series of articles written by Sola, which first appeared in the Spanish anarchist publication Polemica in the mid-90's, featuring the said struggle. The pamphlet also includes a fine tribute by Stuart Christie, a friend and comrade.

**To Work or Not to Work. Is that the Question?** Gilles Dauvé. Tempest. August 2010. A5 Format. 32pp. No price. <http://tempestlibrary.wordpress.com>. Or Tempest Library, 63a Reichenbergerstr, 10999, Berlin, Germany.

Tempest is a new publisher for us. Tempest, as well as regularly publishing pamphlets, run a library in Berlin and organise other activities within the radical/revolutionary milieu.

In this pamphlet they re-print Dauvé's work first published in 2002. The pamphlet



**Role change:** Recruitment posters featured women fighters during the Spanish civil war

originally published by London Solidarity Group in October 1975 as Solidarity Pamphlet No.48.

The pamphlet looks at the role and status of women before, during and after the Spanish Revolution/Civil War from a libertarian perspective. A timely publication given that 2010 is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), the Spanish anarcho-syndicalism union, which arguably, had some influence in the changing role of women during this era.

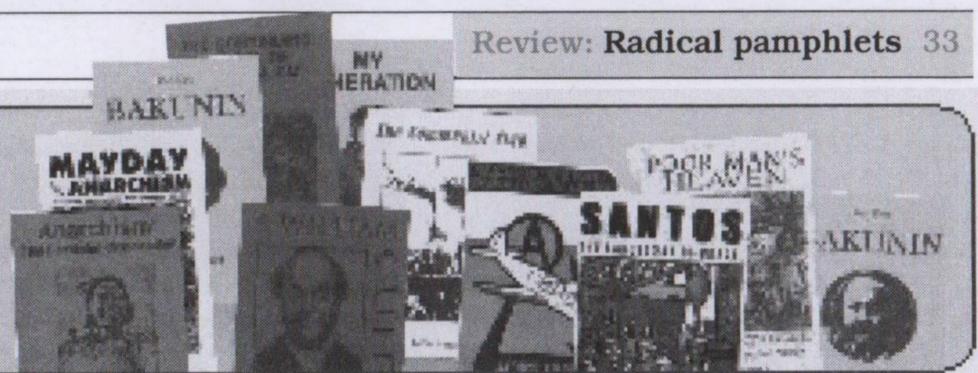
Coincidentally, an 'unauthorised' and unedited version of the original 1975 pamphlet was also published in March of this year by Peterloo Press, a Manchester Anarchist Federation imprint - Women and the Spanish Revolution - price £2!

**Class War on the Home Front. Vols 1, 2 & 3.** Articles from the pages of Solidarity, the paper of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation from 1935 to 1945. With Commentaries and afterword by Wildcat from 1986. Pub. Anarchist Federation. (AF Manchester/Peterloo Press). 2010. A5 format. 34, 28, & 28pp. £2 each (payable, Anarchist Federation). Details as above. [www.af-north.org](http://www.af-north.org).

The 1986 Wildcat introduction states that this pamphlet "chronicles the hidden history of revolutionary opposition to the second world war..."

Articles contained in the three volumes were first published in their paper Solidarity and include: A history of the APCF; Their Principles and Tactics; The Civil War in

The printed word and the 'art' of radical pamphleteering must be kept alive. It is a revolutionary tradition that cannot be allowed to die.



examines the changing nature of work and resistance towards it from a revolutionary perspective.

To sum up Dauvé's conclusion, in one sentence, for the true emancipation of the working class: "Revolution will only be possible when the proletariat act as if they were strangers to this world, its outsiders, and will relate to a universal dimension, that of a classless society, of a human community."

I've always rather liked the work of Dauvé without necessarily agreeing with it all.

For further information the following archives can be accessed: [troploin0.free.fr/ii/index.php/textes?start=10](http://troploin0.free.fr/ii/index.php/textes?start=10) and [http://](http://libcom.org/tags/gilles-dauve)

[libcom.org/tags/gilles-dauve](http://libcom.org/tags/gilles-dauve)

What's it all about? An interview with the Troploin Collective. Tempest. September 2010. A5 format. 32pp. No price. Details as above.

Tempest have republished in English a 2007 interview, previously published in French and German, between the German anti-state communist group Revolution Times and the French Left-Communist Journal Troploin, founded by, amongst others Gilles Dauvé.

This pamphlet is a comprehensive package of 24 questions about how Troploin view the world.

It covers important issues such as: the

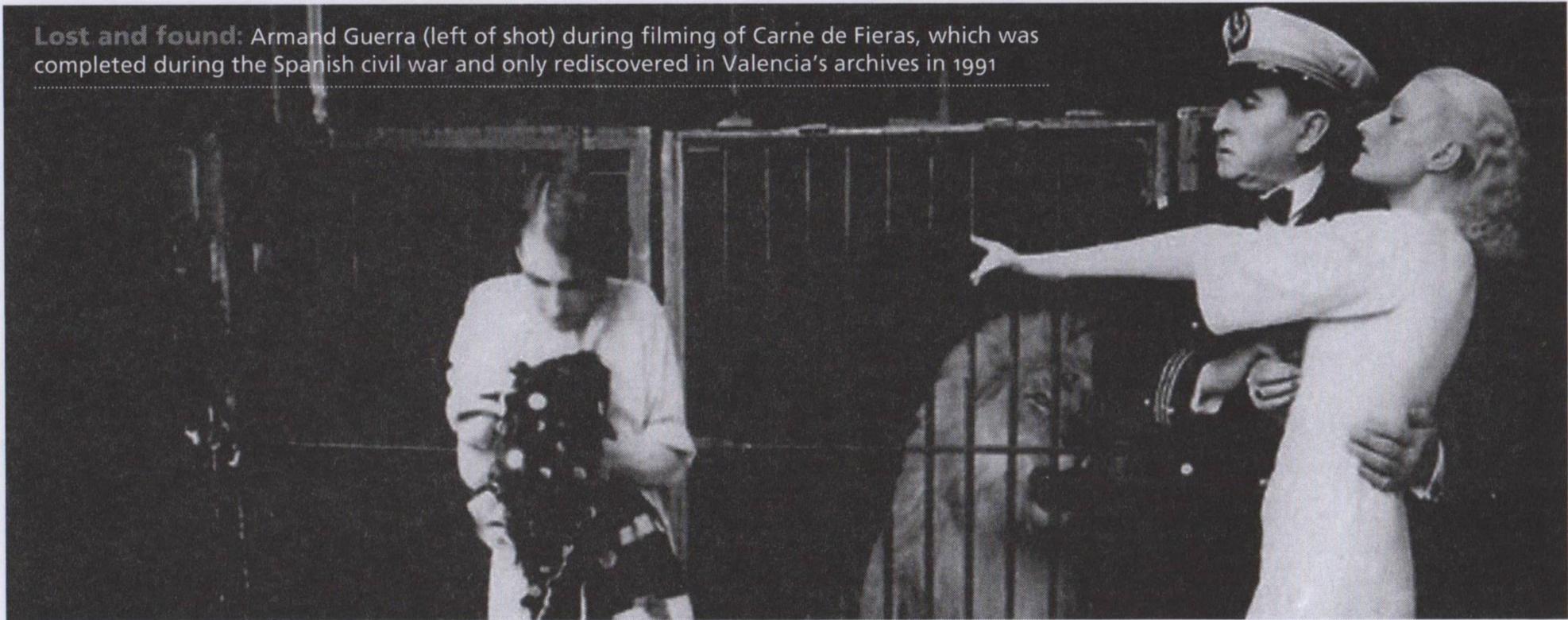
'left'; anti-globalisation movement; anti-fascism; Israel/Palistine; self-management; Islam; the Holocaust and much more.

■ Publishers are invited to submit newly published or recent pamphlets for a mini-review. Each review will include publishing details, content summary and occasional comment. Comprehensive book reviews will continue to be published elsewhere in Black Flag.

By Ade Dimmick



**Lost and found:** Armand Guerra (left of shot) during filming of *Carne de Fieras*, which was completed during the Spanish civil war and only rediscovered in Valencia's archives in 1991



## Short Review: The Arena series

Arena 1. On Anarchist Cinema  
Guest Editor Richard Porton.  
Christie Books/PM Press (2009)  
Paperback 174pp  
Price £7.50  
ISBN: 1-873976-35-6

Arena 2. Anarchists in Fiction  
Editor Stuart Christie  
Christie Books/PM Press (2010)  
Paperback 142pp  
Price £7.95  
ISBN: 1-873976-42-9.

From Christie Books, PO Box 35, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1ZS, UK.

These two beautifully produced, highly informed, well researched and academically inclined tome-worthy periodicals from the South Coast are courtesy of prolific writer and publisher Stuart Christie and both are very much in keeping with that fine anarchist tradition and affinity, if not obsession, with the arts.

The Arena blurb states: "Arena, like its predecessor, The Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review, aims to tap into the

rich seam of libertarian ideas, culture, history and practice by providing a focal point for anarchist debate.

The Journal will bring together stimulating writing and scholarship on all aspects of libertarian culture, arts, life and politics hopefully provoking discussion, polemic and debate in the process.

Designed for a general, critically-minded readership Arena will cover the entire spectrum of the arts: film, theatre, art, criticism, ideas' political theory and practice, reportage, fiction and non-fiction."

Arena 1 is split into two parts; cinema in the past - the early years of the 20th century and the present, looking at the influence of new media.

Features include: The history of The Cinema Du People; The Union de Cooperativas Cinematographic Españolas; A chronology of film director Armand Guerra; Anarchist cinema during the Spanish revolution and civil war; Aranda's Libertarias; Anarchist film festivals; Cop Watch LA; and anarchist video at the beginning of the 21st century.

Arena 2 moves along and looks at anarchists in fiction and features an eclectic selection of equally enticing material, which includes: William Godwin and Caleb Williams; The literary work of Louis Michele and her connection with *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which she allegedly wrote, selling the manuscript to Jules Verne; Léo Malet: From Anarchism to Arabophobia; Traven Hypothesis from *The Death Ship*; Anarchists in Fiction, taken from *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review 1980*; A short story by Joseph Conrad entitled *An Anarchist: A Desperate Tale*, originally published in 1908; Another short story entitled *Bakunin At The Beach* which sees Mr and Mrs Bakunin taking a vacation at Lake Maggiore in Switzerland; and new perspectives on the Spanish Civil War.

I found both volumes compulsive reading and enjoyed reviewing them immensely. Highly recommended. I can't wait for number Arena 3!

By Ade Dimmick



# Review: Outflanking the Leninist Marxists?

Philosophy of Revolution – towards a non Leninist Marxism  
by Lenny Flank  
Red and Black Publishers (2007)  
Paperback 136pp  
£8.02  
ISBN: 978-0979181382

This small publication by Red and Black Publishers, in their "Towards a non Leninist Marxism" series, should be considered as an introductory essay. It cannot be considered for comparison with Rudolf Rocker's classical Anarcho Syndicalism, or the more

assess it in that role.

I am concentrating on three discernable themes in the volume – a skeleton historical survey, a brief outline explanation of the weakness of the "scientific socialism" of Marxism and some notes on recent writers and movements of anarcho syndicalism.

The survey first – this is a selection around the idea of workers' councils which like previous volumes it defines in terms of Marxist ideology.

I did discover some minor errors. Workers' councils first came to light as an organisational form in the series of east

opposition to the aggressive approach of the libertarians of the day, inspired by Michael Bakunin and P J Proudhon, who pushed 100% for liberation even in the as yet immature capitalist countries.

Marx also dismissed the revolutionary perspectives of the Paris Commune in 1871 but had to dramatically revise his ideas and reject, by default, much of the Communist Manifesto of 1848.

Flank traces the conflict between those who advocated the Party road and the libertarian road, to this miscalculation. Flank's writings on the Commune are valuable in themselves. Finally, one question – on page 46 some paragraphs read suspiciously like another "end of capitalism" announcement. But perhaps I am reading too much into this?

The third theme looks more positively at anarcho-syndicalism with a Marxist fringe. Now perhaps it should be said from the start that I'm sceptical about both syndicalism and Marxism and regard the offspring in much the same light.

While both ideas have some value for libertarians, both have serious faults which will have to be explored by libertarian socialists in detail one day.

But for now the constructive aspects of the book can be examined. These are mainly in the chapter on Revolutionary Action and include a review of the writings of Abraham Guillen and the urban guerrilla movement in Uruguay, and Carlos Marighella in Brazil plus a snapshot of the Italian workplace councils of the same period, late sixties.

Both Guillen and Marighella are new to me and I am anxious to find more information, though the Italian councils are in the process of wider exposure.

The urban movement has been a bit overshadowed by events in Bolivia, Mexico and Venezuela, but seen useful in their own right. In Europe we can only look on and analyse as these big movements progress in that continent.

Meanwhile it is perhaps worth mentioning that we are approaching the 20th anniversary of the publication of A Troublemaker's Handbook. This invaluable volume give hundreds of practical examples of how to organise, in the workplace in this tradition. Some now a little out of date. Though the politics of the originators – Labor Notes of USA – are a little too moderate for my liking, the book itself has plenty of good information and its quite imaginative in places.

Lenny Flank's little book re-states the case of organising at work and for that alone, is probably worth your money, less than £10. You may have to order it in the UK. The rest of the series is also anticipated with some enthusiasm.



**Mentions:** The Paris Commune and inset, Carlos Marighella

recently published historical volumes of Black Flame, for example. It has no Index, reference for its quotations or reading list, but its value is as original contribution, creating discussion and debate. We need to

European strikes culminating in the 1905 Russian uprising, not in the following decade. This is in itself not very important but does mean that any diligent readers following up the subject would be deprived of a brilliant contribution by the left Marxist Rosa Luxemburg in her Mass Strike.

Though herself an active Marxist, she is extremely critical of the large German Marxist Social Democratic Party which was following the inevitable path of most such parties into parliamentary moderation. Her book celebrates the councils and can be considered the first of such documents, ahead even of Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter. As Daniel Guerin points out, her attempt to square Marxism with libertarianism results in a document that leans very heavily towards the latter [Guerin].

Continuing with the idea of Marxism, or rather its limitations, Lenny Flank offers a conventional explanation. He points out the great theorist was obsessed by his concepts and that one of these was the stages he imagined capitalism had to go through before socialism was possible. Thus his

## Reading

Daniel Guerin: *Anarchism – from theory to practice* [1970, USA, 166pp]

Rosa Luxemburg: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Union*, [1908 and more recently, 92 pp]

Rudolf Rocker: *Anarcho-syndicalism* [1938 & 1989, 166 pp]

Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt: *Black Flame – the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*; [volume 1, 2009, 396 pp]

Jane Slaughter editor: *A Troublemaker's Handbook – how to fight back where you work and win* [first edition 1991 & second 2005, USA, 372pp]

By Alan Woodward



# The definitive Dave Douglass

**Lifetime radical:**  
Miners' strike stalwart,  
union theoretician and  
recovering Posadist  
Dave Douglass,  
pictured here at a CND  
demonstration in 1966

**Review: All  
three volumes  
in one take**

**Geordies Wa Mental**  
ISBN 978-1-873976-34-0  
309 pp  
Price £9.95

**The Wheel's Still in Spin**  
ISBN 978-1-873976-36-4  
466 pp  
Price £12.95

**The Ghost Dancers**  
ISBN 978-1-873976-40-1  
475 pp  
Price £12.95  
by David John Douglass  
Pub. Red and Noir, 2008-10

Dave Douglass has been a prolific writer (a booklist is at the end of this review) and played an important role in the miners strike of 1984/85.

The blurb for volume three claims it is the definitive history of that strike but it is more a collection of speeches and anecdotes – the actual facts of an event or movement being available in other books.

So it would be truer to say that the trilogy is a definitive history of Douglass himself, as indeed it should be.

The books are a detailed story of the man who was to be a revolutionary Marxist, from the 1950s to this year 2010.

The first impression is that Douglass in his younger days made every conceivable mistake in his political and personal life that is possible – and survived – but he is redeemed by his incredible work for and on behalf of the miners of Hatfield main colliery.

He is an articulate rank and file leader of the Yorkshire miners. It was perhaps inevitable that towards the end he clashed increasingly with Arthur Scargill as the great man completed his trajectory to Leninist autocracy. And there are interesting chapters on other union issues, but little of value on political activity until near the conclusion. In this, the volumes resemble some of the old Stalinist autobiographies, with the style of glossing over the facts of social reality, in what could be called a mixed bag of memoirs.

The first volume is written largely in Geordie dialect which he admits few can understand and it re-appears in the others as well. Other Geordies did manage to write their autobiographies in English [Hunter], and this seems an affectation in fact, “tourist Geordie” as some have called it.

## Volume One

The book covers the period mainly in Newcastle up to the age of 21 in 1969, by which time he was in and out of the Young

Communist League. Earlier he tells of his Catholic schooling – frank playground language – and links with Ireland.

At this age he was active in CND, the Committee of 100, Tyneside Against the Bomb and he came across peace movement material. There is a passing mention of the International Socialists, the Young Socialists and a united Vietnam Action Committee. Also a Women's Socialist Action group and its hectic meetings.

In his description of his early mining days no interesting project, not emphasised enough, is the rank and file paper. This journal, described as “revolutionary,” now presumably only available from the archives, appears to have followed the tradition of reporting news, generally communicating and encouraging political resistance.

Its independence, the other key aspect, is of course more problematic but in the absence of actual copies, remains undefined. More could be written about unofficial miners' papers, this one in particular, as much less is known than about metalworking publications. A circulation of 1,000 is mentioned and “40 stencils” for pages. A job for someone to research here.



As in the other volumes, there are sections describing the actual coalface work Douglass was part of in some detail, very technical, and often using the vernacular dialect. This reduces comprehensibility and cohesion but these pages are still a valuable addition, perhaps unique, to the many books on the miners. Another separate volume [1983] goes into this in greater detail and has a useful glossary of technical and workplace terms.

The volume records his love of music and alcohol – he admits later to being a compulsive drinker. [2009] Also the start of his curious obsession with physical force and things military, like bombs and guns, in a series of references. Lastly he becomes a vegan, a difficult lifetime choice at that time and place, but he has kept to it.

Douglass's political journey has been astonishingly wide and he documents the early years in *Geordies Wah Mental*.

Ominously, while the inevitable clash with the ultra trotskyist Socialist Labour League was a hint of what was to come, the mysterious Posadists start to appear and later in the book he and a group of his friends join that peculiar trotskyist sect of political absurdities.

The theoretical base for this group – world war one produced Soviet Russia while two brought the Chinese revolution, so roll on a third – cannot be seriously considered. I have always thought this group were an information collecting agency for the Russian secret police or whatever, but I could be wrong. Either way, it was just one of Douglass's long and fruitless associations with Communist Party front organisations.

Finally, a rear cover note reveals that some events recalled are "composited" from "a number of people and events" but are all real, he says. Historians beware personal accounts. This book was re-published by Christie Books in 2008. Readers should be aware that some pages and paragraphs in the original publication are repeated in volume two, without explanation.

## Volume two

Next the seventies, at the end of which he was 32. In this section he continues working as a miner and is still with the trotskyists. As Comrade "Leam," he is concerned with the "Central Committee," "Political Bureau" and a series of concerns too absurd to recall.

The end comes when a local couple are disciplined for the crime of conceiving a baby without the Party's permission, and participants are segregated from sleeping together at a weekend event. This grotesque attitude finally brings home the madness

of Posadism and attention was switched to a local body, the Doncaster Socialist Union [Internationalist].

In this volume there is reference to the Doncaster Socialists Alliance, Working Peoples Party of England, the Proletaria (?) bookshop, the Broad Left, Troops Out, the International Workers Party of the USA on a visit. He also went to Cuba and Russia.

Douglass refers occasionally to his nickname "Danny the Red" throughout the series but never explains it. More perceptive readers will already have realised this is a reference to Daniel Cohn Bendit, the German council communist student leader during the May 1968 events in France. The German student's account of these tumultuous events, not even casually referred to by the autobiography, has never been out of print to this day and is regularly reprinted.

The later debate between some other deviant council communists and Douglass is examined below but the exclusion of the biggest general strike in history does require some explanation. We await a reply.

One more criticism should be noted. Support is given to Sinn Fein, a further

revolts and Solidarity-for-workers-power was doing precisely this. One issue to applaud. The group decided that world war two was more than just the imperialist war central to the assorted Trotskyists. I agree and wonder how the others would justify opposition – from the concentration camps? – to any occupying German regime. No answer yet on that.

Douglass's physical force obsession continues with the EMC, an unbelievable venture in running about on the moors practicing fighting incidents and suchlike – yes, seriously, practicing for THE ARMED REVOLUTION! Later he took up martial arts but the motive is unclear.

In other studies he attended Ruskin College and the History Workshop and did some serious and productive research, mainly on early miners and dockers. As competent a speaker as he was in union matters, he appears never to have thought of an academic career, and to give him his due, he returned to the shop floor, having worked his holidays there. Later the Workshop was to publish several of his essays on the strike and related issues, in



manifestation of total political support for the national liberation struggle. Later he ponders over how the Good Friday Agreement reflected the Shinners' shift to conventional politics in Northern Ireland, and admits he has not a clue about why it happened.

Of course, rule by home-grown capitalists can be better than the foreign sort but the evidence is mixed. Mostly, struggles reflect the Leninist obsession with recruiting support. Anyway somebody should really have told him about the inevitable consequences of even successful armed

a valuable contribution [Samuel].

In connection with this, he is vocal in criticism of Beatrice and Sidney Webb's books and ideas about workers' history. Their very obvious habit of announcing a theory and making the facts fit into it is eminently susceptible to attack, though they are better known for their estimation of Soviet Russia as a new civilisation.

His personal life was showing big changes as well. The "open" relationship with his partner Maureen – no sexual relationships close to home, or permanent ones – predictably broke down but he kept

his daughter Emma who was to prove a diamond later in life [Douglass 86].

This volume closes with a neat survey of organisations of "the left," briefer than the Widgery book on the subject [1976] but more local and immediate.

The title incidentally comes from Bob Dylan's 1964 hit *The Times They Are A-Changin'*.

### Volume three

This centres on occupational matters, the great strike of 1984/5 where Douglass was in his element and clearly played a key role. His authority on this cannot be challenged, and we can only comment selectively on the great event in this review.

Hundreds of books have been written, the issues exhaustively debated and the facts quite well known, including the historical repeat of the defeat, as planned and executed by the new capitalists and their accomplices in the labour movement (he looks at the IRIS organisation).

I won't go over them again, readers wishing for information could do no better than to consult Dave's own books and booklets, listed at the end. In addition Seamus Milne is most useful about perspectives [1995], Paul Mackney valuable on urban support groups [1987] and of all the volumes on the magnificent contribution by the women, Chrys Salt's *Here We Go* is easily the most memorable [1985]. For those still believing our police are wonderful and that Germany 1933 and the Gestapo "could never happen here," the books show that IT DID, and still they continue with their brutality and illegality, above the law.

What is new here is the account of the crisis of the aftermath, specifically around the biggest whack of closures in 1992. Douglass tells of the years of frantic activity, the overconfidence of the rampaging new capitalists in the Tory Party. Almost everyone of a certain age is likely to recall the downturn after the elation of the strike support itself but this is a useful account of the closure crisis.

The story is told through the Yorkshire Area of the NUM and the Doncaster pits especially. The book recalls the triumphant management aided by government compulsion but also the dogged resistance by the remaining miners.

Not the least of their problems was the understandable depression that set in among many of the workers themselves. This was basically "Fuck the pit. the industry, the job, give us our money now, we're out."

The big redundancy sums, adding to government expense after those of the year long conflict, resulted in massive resources left in un-mined coal seams, derelict pits and a regional society broken by the same people that now moan about "broken Britain."

Predictably the decline forced the national union to turn in on itself. Douglass still faithfully records the annual and regional conferences of the NUM as a new phenomena appears. Arthur Scargill, no longer pressured by a militant membership, went to astonishing lengths to consolidate his own position and policies. While the Dave Douglasses of the union battled on to resist management and money grabbing, Arthur's growing autocracy presented a new obstruction.

Despite union subs losses it was still able to call on financial reserves and earnings from legal welfare cases and the national union gradually overcame local activists.

Constitutions were amended, dissidents eliminated, as the book relates the sad details. Arthur finally got the relatively well-off Yorks Area, in an open reversion to Official Trade Unionism. Note quite the "support evermore" we sang about.

It could be said that Arthur's political Leninism and consequential surrender to moderate trade unionism facilitated the decline, and that he had exhibited this tendency all along. But the ferocity of the battle, around 100 pages of the "Barnsley Wars," still make painful reading.

Though the author does not draw the parallel, the similar collapse of Scargill's Socialist Labour Party despite its extremely auspicious start displays much the same symptoms. Readers will grasp the obvious link.

Hatfield Main colliery, before the final closure in 2007, remains a star of these years. Dave Douglass's unshakeable faith in his workmates, explained more fully in the narrative of *Pit Sense* [1993] makes



**Dreams of revolution:** Douglass taking weapons training as a young man

inspiring reading and the book is a must-buy for socialists.

### A conclusion – political debate

Going back to the world of ideas, it was during this later period of the change over to the new millennium that a debate happened, which while not mentioned in the autobiography and quite inconclusive in the end, does show the political shortcomings of both Douglass's "unionism" and some factions of libertarianism.

This was the ideological conflict of attitudes to "The Unions" and the related issue of workers' council communism. It is necessary to return to origins about the general nature of dissident revolutionary socialism.

Writer Anton Pannekoek [1947] identifies the emergence of workplace organisation in the first two decades of the 20th century through the factory councils which he foresaw as the key structures for the coming years.

These workplace units became federated into area bodies, or soviets, in Eastern Europe. In the more industrial economies in the West the shop stewards committees became political bodies during the crisis of

world war one and were identified as basic, directly representational groups, also in conflict with Official Trade Unionism.

Hence a movement took shape, with a potential political wing. In Britain, Germany and Italy, it displayed itself in differing identities – one half formed, another part of a much wider outbreak and thirdly in wide occupations in certain cities.

The new idea developed rapidly in Russia in 1917 when some freedoms were suddenly realised. The Bolsheviks were quick to realise its revolutionary potential and took steps to squash the workplace factory councils and commandeer the area delegate soviets for Party control [Brinton].

From the conflict – with labour leaders and Bolshevism – what became known as "workers council communism" arose, based on workplace unionism rather than political parties, a wayward child of anarchism and dissident Marxism.

Specifically it came as a practical response to an undemocratic union leadership and political opposition to Lenin's autocratic bolshevism. It was centred on the workplace councils, NOT the all powerful Party or even, alternatively, the parliamentary system.

Repressed by Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Roosevelt and miscellaneous Labour/communist Parties, the movement of Hermann Gorter and Anton Pannekoek quickly declined and only the skeleton remained, mainly in Holland [Bourrinet].

But the idea of an independent workers movement did survive, though some later disciples were quite confused in their ideology, as we shall see.

For our purposes, a debate broke out between Douglass and these disciples who interpreted their ideas to mean rejection of even defensive workplace unions as well as the institutionalised structure above that.

Official Trade Unionism can take various forms in various unions and at various times from the corrupt and nepotistic formation in the General and Municipal Workers Union [Weller] to the more vigorous bodies in the NUM [Cliff].

Douglass identifies these but sees them more as different models rather than different tactics used by the full time officials to retain control through changing circumstances. He could, in fact, have



argued that the NUM of the time was an example of exceptionalism to the overall degeneration, but this is not explicit.

In *Pit Sense*, as well as being a criticism of the SWP's intervention and policy of setting up its own Party strike support committees, he catalogues chapter and verse about the full time officials' manipulation. He knew the facts but doubted the politics.

In the other corner, there were the assembled libertarians – the veteran Dutch councilist Cajo Brendel, the Anarchist Federation, the Communist Workers Organisation – whoever they were – *Wildcat* journal, another obscure one called *Analysis* and perversely, *Class War* which all attacked “the unions,” as such, conflating two quite separate and politically different sections.

This crude, ill-advised and fundamentally incorrect assault sparked Douglass into a vigorous defence of the NUM as such, also underestimating the broad moderatism of the Official Trade Unions as a whole. As we saw above, he was soon to learn from its “reversion to form” this century.

The position of the full time officials, paid but not controlled by union members, comprises essentially the considerable skill of the individual FTO being rewarded by income or a career in the Union's higher levels – government, parliament or state institutions, or the same from professions in academia, legal circles or the media.

As such union officialdom stands as a semi-independent institution, mediating the affairs of workers by clever use of a variety of tactics and persuasions.

Another separate dimension in the game.

At the time, the debate raged though two publications [ICO and Douglass 1999], dozens of articles and thousands of works – to no avail. Neither of the two protagonists became any the wiser it seems. Today Douglass survives, though older, wiser and more libertarian – an interest he had always had with the Syndicalist Workers Federation and *Class War* – to the wider movement after the Russian collapse in 1989. On the other hand, Brendel, his “Thought and Action” group, *Wildcat*, *Analysis*, the CWO, and *Class War* are gone and the AF has slowly adjusted. A full account of Cajo Brendel is still awaited. Our history is to be celebrated but do we always avoid repeating our mistakes?

## Factfile: Further reading

- Philippe Bourrinet (unascrbed)/ICC: *The Dutch and German Communist Left* [2001, 416 pp]; Maurice Brinton ( Chris Pallis): *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-21* [1970, 86 pp] totally destroys Bolshevik pretensions;
- Goodway, David Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, *Marxism and the Trade Union Struggle – the general strike of 1926* [1986 , 320pp], probably the best book on trade unions overall;
- Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit: *Obsolete Communism – the left wing alternative* [1969, 256 pp];
- David Goodway, editor: *For Workers' Power – the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379 pp] which includes useful accounts of debate over original publications, plus reprints of his three main works;
- Herman Gorter: *An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1921, 1995, 41 pp], demolition of the claim to socialism;
- Bill Hunter: *Lifelong Apprenticeship – life and times of a revolutionary*, [1997, 440 pp];
- Anton Pannekoek: *Workers Councils* [1947 & 2002, 219 pp], not perfect but still a major work;
- Paul Mackney: *Birmingham and The Miners Strike, Birmingham Trade Council*, [1987, 178 pp], well documented account of a large support group, with accurate political analysis;
- Seamus Milne: *The Enemy Within – the secret war against the miners*, [1995, 511 pp];
- Raphael Samuel and Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas, ed: *The Enemy Within – pit villages and the miners' strike of 1984-5* [1986, 260pp],
- Chrys Salt and Jim Layzell: *Here We Go! – women's memories of the 1984/85 miners strike* [1985, 88 pp]
- Solidarity-for-workers-power: Ceylon – the JVP uprising of April 1971* [1972, 50 pp] includes a definitive 10-page summary on Third Worldism or Socialism; pamphlet 42;
- Ken Weller, writing as Mark Fore: *Scab Union* [1977, 34 pp];
- David Widgery: *The Left 1956-68*, [1976, 549 pp] ;
- Alan Woodward: *The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle – an outline history of the international shop stewards movement and socialism* [2009, 64 pp], much needed perspective on workplace organisation and its politics.

### Publication

The last two volumes were compiled after the pit closed in 2007 and were apparently financed by his pension lump sum. The writing is bang up to date, recording the death of his parents and other personal details. The title of the final book refers to the last rituals of the American native people before the final US repression, an imaginative comparison.

The centre is still going and readers wishing for more information on comrade Douglass can go to his excellent and comprehensive website at [minersadvice.co.uk](http://minersadvice.co.uk). This too is relatively up to date, though currently does not include the third volume.

The Centre has much information for miners, their families and the general reader, in a range of pages. There are several good films – used at each anniversary as well – available from the Advice Centre at £10 :

■ **Where do I stand?** featuring the young Dave and the revolutionary miners' paper *The Mineworker*;

■ **Here we go**, a 1985 documentary about the Strike;

■ **Living With the Enemy**, with Douglass and an aristocrat in battle of words ;

■ **Kilroy on class** with Douglass in the hot seat.

I cannot resist recalling his own memoirs of the whole period from the 1950s and comparing them to this autobiography. Born pre-war to a London working class family, Dave Douglass went on from an early commitment to the still libertarian International Socialist to a lifetime of encouraging workplace resistance by teaching on shop stewards courses around the country.

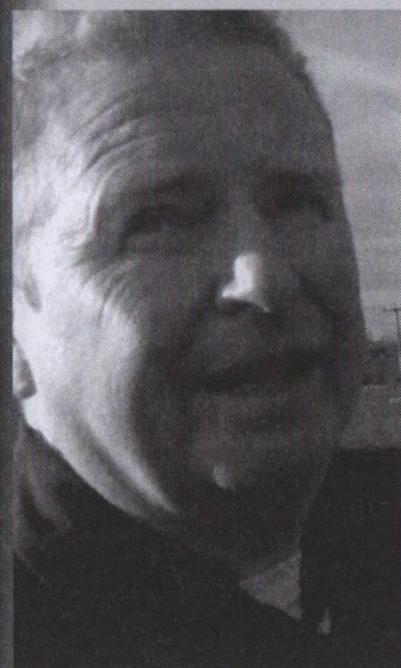
Like many others, he finally turned to the libertarian option, a last hope in a disillusioned world.

This modest contribution compares poorly with the story herein. The author and I share the same belief in workers on the shop floor and their organisations, mainly workers' councils.

I can only salute Dave Douglass – though we have not met really beyond being in the same place at the same time – for his persistence and ultimate triumph.

I recommend you buy these books, laugh at his misadventures and learn the constructive lessons.

## Factfile: Other Douglass books



**Pit Sense versus the State** – a history of the militant miners in the Doncaster area [1993, 112 pp], includes material on the miners strike 1984/5;

**A Year of Our Lives** – a colliery community in the great coal strike of 1984/85 [1986, un-numbered pp];

**All Power to the Imagination** [1999, 120 pp] ; the debate with some libertarians;

**Tell Us Lies About the Miners** – the role of the media in the great coal strike of 1984/85 [1985, 30 pp];

**Come and Wet this Truncheon** – the role of the police in the coal strike of 1984/1985 [1986, 36 pp]

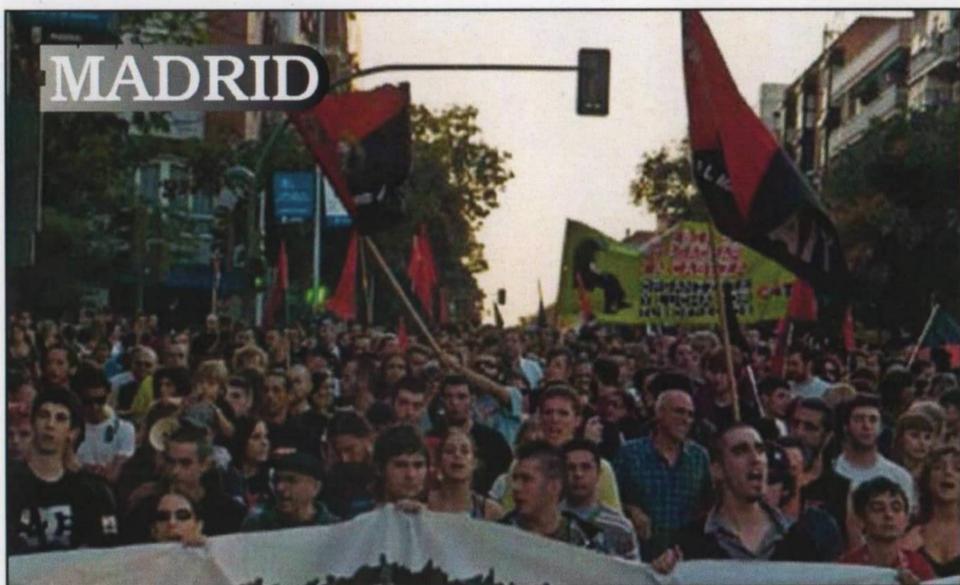
(From the ICO) **Goodbye to the Unions** [1992 , 43 pp] ; the debate with some libertarians, from the other side;

(With Joel Krieger) **A Miner's Life** [1983 , 117 pp] ; much on occupational aspects and has an excellent glossary of terms;

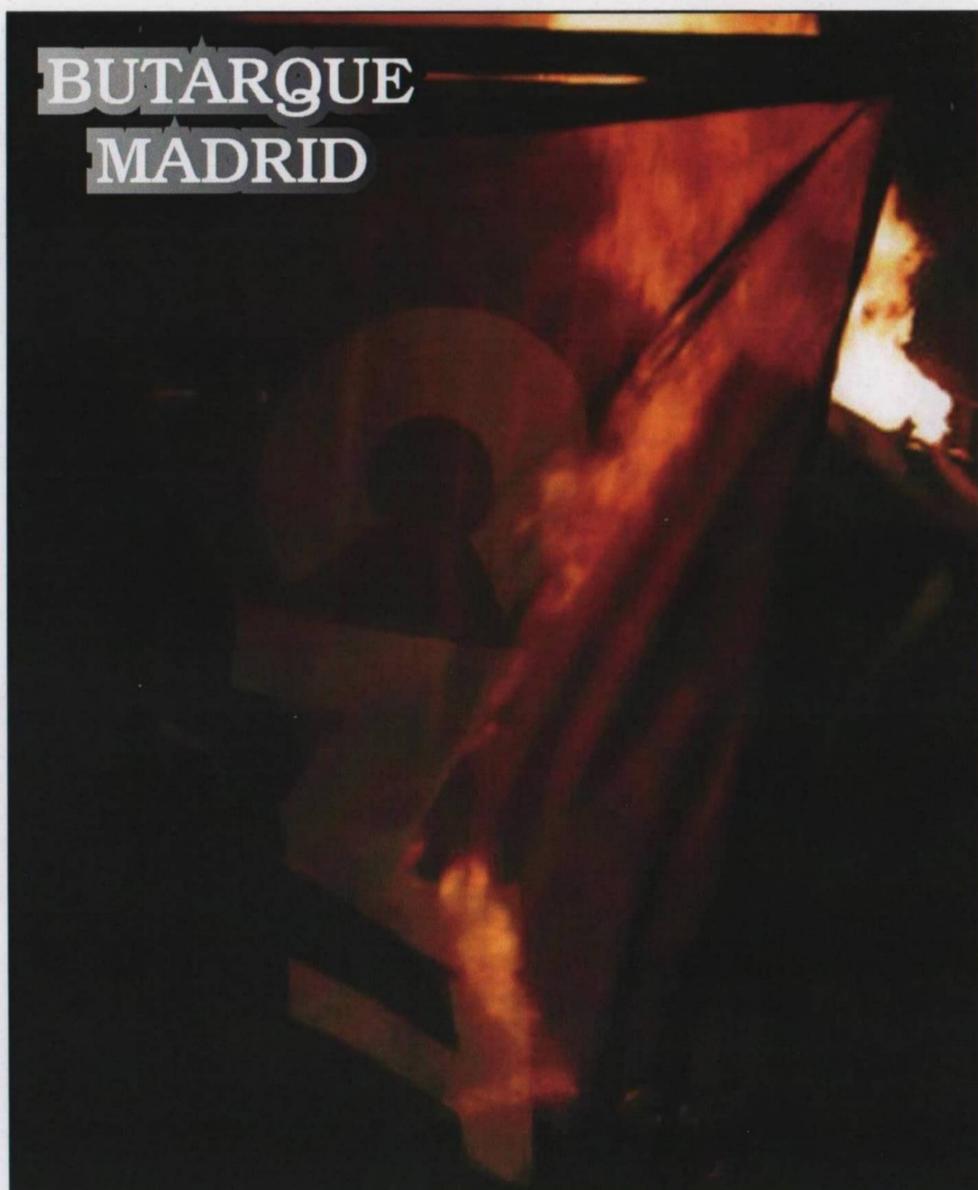
(By Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas, eds) **The Enemy within** – pit villages and the miners' strike of 1984-5 [1986,260 pp] , includes several Douglass essays.

By Alan Woodward





MADRID



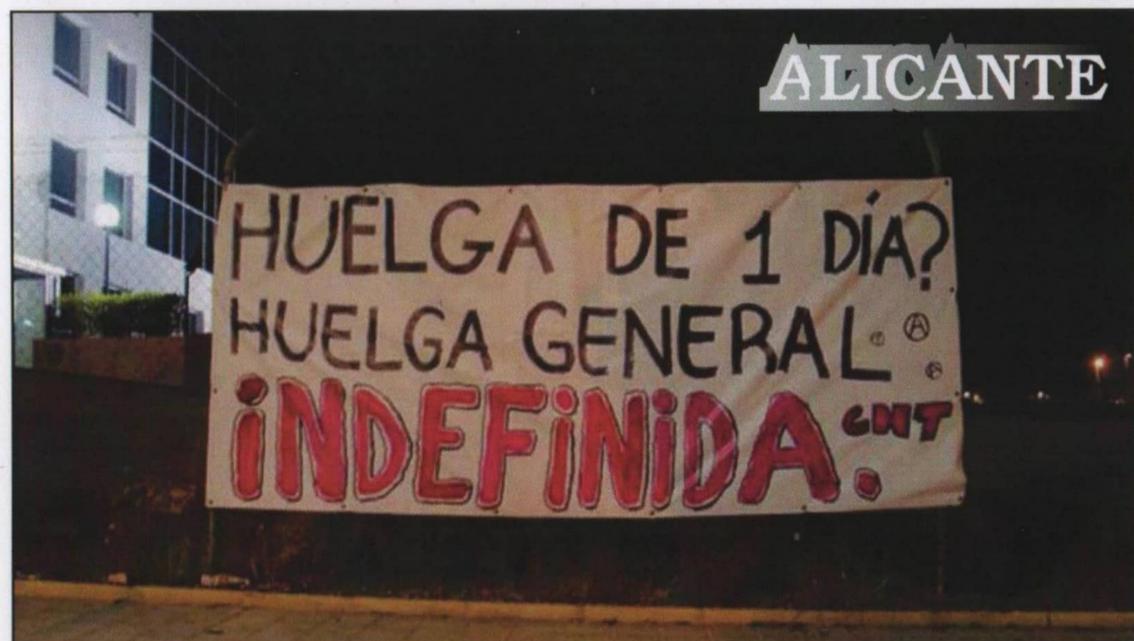
BUTARQUE  
MADRID



VALENCIA

Fighting back: Demos took place across the country as part of a general strike on September 29th, with CNT banners calling for it to be made indefinite

# In colour: Spain's strike



ALICANTE



GRENADA



CARTEGENA



CORDOBA

F.A.I.



¡Compañeros!  
LISTANDOOS EN LA

COLUMNA

BERNIA

REFORZAREIS LA  
LUCHA CONTRA  
FASCISMO

**Art of war:** A poster from the early part of the Spanish civil war urging comrades to fight for the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) of Valencia in the Iberian Column against the advancing fascist forces of General Franco. The conflict's origins and the anarchists' part is explained in our article on page 16