



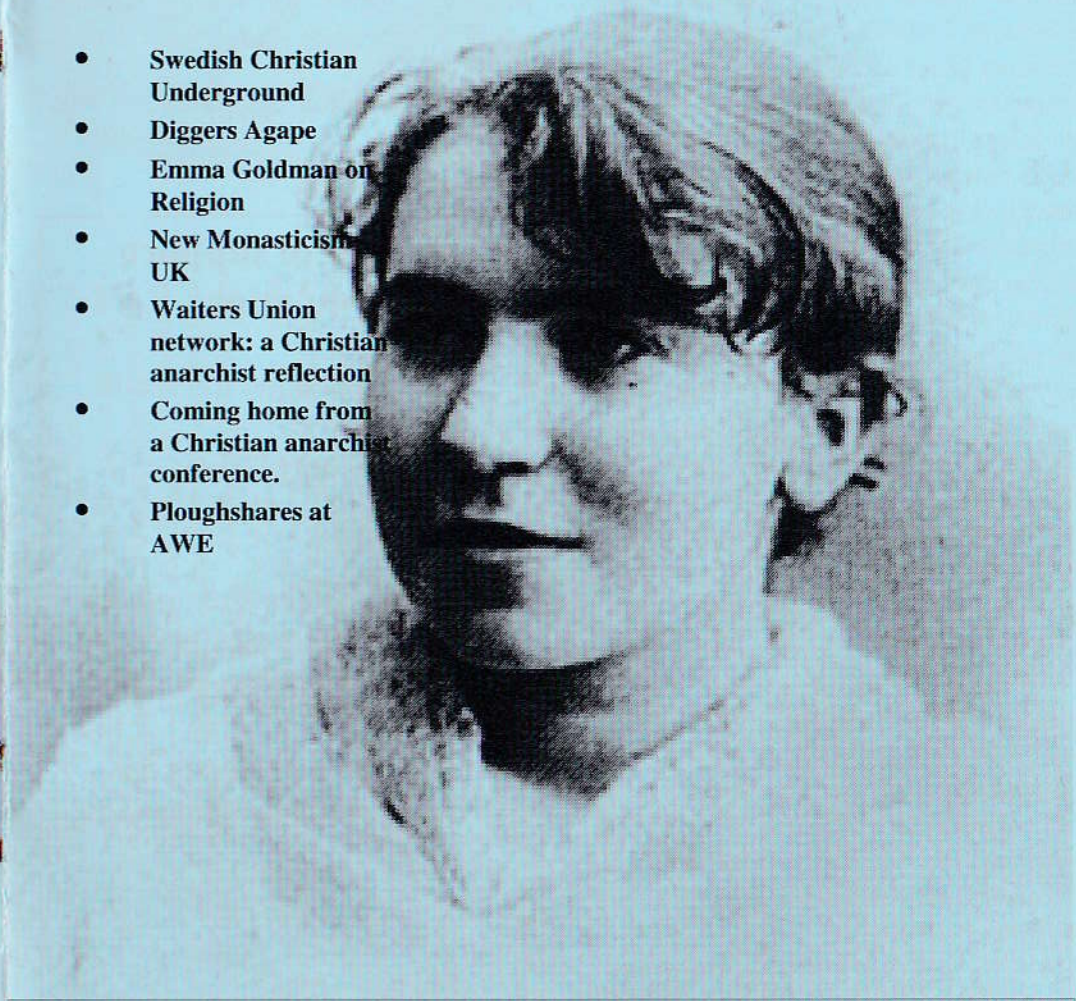
No. 22 November 2010.

a pinch of salt

Christianity is most admirably adapted to the training of slaves, to the perpetuation of a slave society; in short, to the very conditions confronting us today. Indeed, never could society have degenerated to its present appalling stage, if not for the assistance of Christianity. The rulers of the earth have realized long ago what potent poison inheres in the Christian religion. That is the reason they foster it; that is why they leave nothing undone to instil it into the blood of the people. They know only too well that the subtleness of the Christian teachings is a more powerful protection against rebellion and discontent than the club or the gun.

- Emma Goldman

- Swedish Christian Underground
- Diggers Agape
- Emma Goldman on Religion
- New Monasticism UK
- Waiters Union network: a Christian anarchist reflection
- Coming home from a Christian anarchist conference.
- Ploughshares at AWE



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And Pray.

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Christian Underground: radical Jesus-oriented community

By Maja Ekström

Kristen Underjord (Christian Underground) is a quite loose network of people in Sweden, and I guess I'm one of them. It's hard to know because there is no register or particular organization of the ones who see themselves as members. One way to describe Kristen Underjord is like a forum for radical people to meet and share thoughts and experiences, both virtually and face to face. We arrange gigs, workshops and create meeting points; the best-known is probably the participation in the biggest Christian music festival in Sweden through the gathering point "Virustältet". Kristen Underjord publishes records, books and keeps a web site for which it's probably mostly known, but it is the meeting in real life that's most important. Kristen Underjord also works as a collective label for the members to use. The link that unifies the different members of Kristen Underjord is the endeavour of following Jesus Christ. So as long as you are willing to subscribe the vision of the network you're welcome to call yourself a part of the network and use the label.

Christian Underground vision:

We want to follow Jesus, the prince of peace from Nazareth, by living in a non-violent, non-hierarchic and discovering way. We want to encourage people to do the same and together find out how this could be done.

On the web site (which is mainly in Swedish) Kristen Underjord has collected essays about Christian anarchism and living in community, articles on subjects like making consensus decisions and Romans 13, alternative prayers, relevant and inspiring quotes, video clips, publications from theologians as John Howard Yoder, and of lots of discussions on all these topics. This year Kristen Underjord is engaged in a series called "I'm voting for another system" raising a question among Christians whether or not to participate in the election for the Swedish government this fall; in my opinion an exhilarating and fresh feature in the debate.

Kristen Underjord does not present one final opinion, but wants to work as a platform for another kind of discussion. The aim is to discover an alternative to a system where racism thrives and who has the highest number of single households in Europe, and to do it together, as a truth-seeking community. The take-off point is living as Jesus Christ did, abstaining revenge and violence; to have no other lords than Him and to relate to those people, traditions and denominations that have been before us. As the name hints, we're looking back to our roots, into the early church forced underground by persecutors and oppressing powers. Our focus is to get a better understanding of what is significant for the Christian community today, and try to realize it. Kristen Underjord hopes for an underground revolution of love; and it has already started with Jesus!



Totally Devoted

The challenge of new monasticism



Simon Cross, *Totally Devoted: The Challenge of New Monasticism*, (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2010)

Reviewed by Keith Hebden

Simon Cross, a member of the missional community 'New Horizons' based in South Wales invites us to explore New Monasticism in Britain with him. With so many books out there about what's going in the USA in regards to New Monasticism it's great to have a book for the British reader.

Cross writes for an open-evangelical reader exploring the real possibility of living in community. In order to cover so much ground the story moves quickly so one must not expect to get either an in depth or critical look at groups or even the concept of New Monasticism. The definitions are deliberately vague and broad and Cross gives a lot of space to the people within the communities to speak with their own voices on what they believe they are about.

Cross comes across as generous minded when it comes to describing the work other people are doing. This means references to the criticism of groups like the Bruderhof, Jesus Army, and Betel UK are oblique or absent. All of these groups have a reputation for pastorally stifling or even abusive practices.

We learn from Cross that New Monasticism isn't as new as all that. One can concretely date the language back to Bonhoeffer and the practices back as far as you like. If there is historical continuity: when does old monasticism suddenly become new monasticism?

In many ways this is a story of evangelical renewal: a discovery amongst often charismatic evangelicals of the rich ethical and contemplative legacy of the Celtic, Orthodox, and Catholic traditions. The politics of the book are often implicit: references to local, disordered, un-patriarchal, and decentralised modes of community abound and the language of poverty, simplicity, stability, justice, and ecology drive the book into contemporary concerns as well as holding them in ancient solutions.

Cross often has a chatty style of writing that works for an internet genre-ation and is fond of extended quotes, often of several pages. Publishers don't always like these so it's great to see both used to good effect. The regular change of voice and pace makes the book very readable. This is also a great book for charismatic evangelicals disillusioned with institutional church but still wanting to journey on in their spirituality and in company.

Totally Devoted acts as an introduction, opportunity for reflection, and – most practically – a brochure of new monastic and religious movements in Britain. The idea is that we read this and then get out there and visit them then come home and think about what the implications are for us. If this book does what it could then we'll need a second edition for all the 'new' New Monasticisms that subsequently appear.

“Here is another piece of evidence that there is a movement once again hearing the ancient whisper of God to repair the Church which is in ruins.”

- Shane Claiborne



Discovering the inner anarchist

By Katy Resop

I spent the summer as an intern on the Catholic Worker Farm in Hertfordshire. As an American living in England, I learned many things, notably some colloquialisms that shouldn't be said in an English pub, but I also discovered Christian Anarchism and my complex relationship to “the state.”

The farm hosted a Christian Anarchist Conference in July during which every American thing about me felt challenged. As I began “de-mythologizing the state” with the rest of the attendees, I felt myself enter into a ideological crisis from which my return seemed doubtful. I recalled the countless ways I had been indoctrinated by my nation--from my beloved Saturday morning cartoons with catchy American history lessons (simply search “School House Rock - Fireworks” on YouTube and you'll see what I mean), to Washington, D.C. and its venerable temples for past presidents, to the exhilaration I felt the night Obama was elected president. The more we deconstructed, the more the world felt like a lie.

But I was a budding Christian Anarchist before I even stepped foot on the farm. I just didn't know it. When I lived in Chicago I often angrily stewed about the fact that the city neglected my neighborhood because it

didn't contain the demographic or the touristy attractions of the north side. When I walked down my boulevard and spied trash accumulating against trees and in gutters, I silently cursed the Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation.

Until one spring day while walking down Armitage Avenue, cursing the city of Chicago's neglect, it dawned on me. Why am I depending on the city to clean up my neighborhood: my neighborhood? What kind of effort would it really take for me to get up some Saturday morning to stuff a plastic bag with the abandoned rubbish? I had given up my power and responsibility for my neighborhood to a corrupt city government.

The saddest thing is I never acted on my thoughts. I've always been one for overthinking to the point of inaction, but on the Farm with my anarchist friends, I learned to act.

At the end of the conference and all of our discussions about anarchism, we decided to put our thoughts into action at Northwood Military Base, the UK's headquarters for conducting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We prayed outside of the grid iron gates for all involved in the conflict, for the conflict to end, and for the forgiveness of our complicit involvement in the violence. While we prayed, the police arrived. They were a stark contrast to our peace-making--the arrival of 4 officers, completely clad in their black, bulletproof vests and gun belts.

I remember feeling shock and disillusionment in the wake of some new understandings about the world. Never before had I been of police concern. Were we such a cause of fear, asking for an end to senseless acts of violence? In those moments, my thoughts on Christian anarchism became more solidified. I witnessed the state defending the war machine, “keeping the peace” in a way that seemed contrary to the friendly images of police I was embedded with at a young age.

I left the farm in August and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to help low-income teenagers go to university. I left England with a panic that I couldn't explain my thoughts to my friends and family or translate my experience to my new life in Milwaukee. And I panicked that as soon as I landed in the U.S.A. I would lose the insights gained.

But I didn't. Since being back in the USA, I've gone from meekly stating, "I think I might be a Christian anarchist," to just yesterday boldly proclaiming to my unsuspecting roommates, "I'm a Christian anarchist!!!" prompted, in large, by the petty dramas of "Election 2010." I will not allow a politician or government to rob me of my power and responsibility to pick up the damn trash when it needs picking up or to peacefully protest an unjust war. Or, in my new city, to address the 2010 census results that Milwaukee is now America's 4th poorest city.



Emma Goldman's Challenge to Christianity

By Tim Saunders

Emma Goldman (1869—1940), atheist anarchist, Eastern European migrant to the USA and fierce critic of patriarchy and the state offered Christian anarchists an important pause for thought in her challenge to their religion.

I hang dry my clothes and eat porridge every morning for breakfast. I'm working with this city's neglected youth. I'm planning to grow my own food. I volunteer at the Milwaukee Catholic Worker. I'm becoming a woman of action thanks to my friends on the farm. And as the result of my encounter with Christian anarchism, I am utterly turned off by the laughable soap opera of partisan American politics. I've decided upon the unthinkable, the un-American, and the undemocratic: I've made the conscious political decision not to vote in the upcoming Autumn election.

Christian anarchism ruined my life. No longer am I allowed to pass the buck to someone else to pick up trash or care for the poor, and to find it justifiable to complain when they don't. With my fellow Christians, I'm responsible for the Gospels, for building the kingdom of God here on earth. I'm taking action as a newfound Christian anarchist.

For centuries Christians have worked hand-in-hand with oppressors - a fact that is often brushed off as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (Constantinian Christianity). Arguments about the metaphysical beliefs of Christians - in God, or in miracles for instance - often miss the point. So we stay comfortably distant from the Atheism vs. Christianity debates going on within Christian and anarchist circles.

Yet the arguments against Christianity expressed by Emma Goldman in her essay 'The Failure of Christianity' take their ammunition neither from the actions of the modern church, nor from the niceties of Christian theology. Rather, she critiques the very teachings of Jesus himself, believing that just as oppressive governments cannot be reformed into benefactors of the people, oppressive religion cannot be reformed into something free and life-giving. Her criticisms are shocking, and we need to attend to them;

stopping every now and again to question our beliefs and the way we live them is crucial to direct our future actions.

Emma Goldman spent her life organising, speaking and writing for the poor and the oppressed, and against power and militarism. She was sent to jail multiple times. First, for 'inciting a riot' - by publicly telling unemployed workers "Ask for work. If they do not give you work, ask for bread. If they do not give you work or bread, take bread." Later, for distributing birth control literature and finally for persuading people to resist the draft during the first world war, before she was deported from the USA. She is widely considered to be one of the founders of anarcho-feminism, and in her writings both her love of individual freedom and her anger at economic injustice and violent authority are evident throughout. This is the basis of her dislike of Jesus' teachings - she argues that they have led to the acceptance of injustice and to the denial of the good and the beautiful in people.

Jesus' blessing of the meek, and his command to 'resist not the evildoer', she claims, have been part of the reason people have accepted slavery and terrible conditions - because they believed meekness was a virtue, and they must not resist or stand up for themselves. God would give them rest and reward in heaven anyway. Jesus' blessing of the poor in spirit is taken to be in praise of weakness, of lack of creativity. How can this possibly create justice and equality, she asks? Isn't poverty the very thing we are trying to end? 'What is [the sermon on the mount] but a eulogy on submission to fate, to the inevitability of things?' She believed Jesus promise of reward in heaven for the poor, such as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, meant the poor accepted oppression, and may even have made the oppressors worse too. She also criticised apparent concessions in Jesus' teaching. For instance, although he said 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled', how could this ever happen when 'the poor shall always be with you'? The worst of these is

'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's' - she says "this single compromise was sufficient to prove, down to this very day, a most ruthless weapon in the hands of the oppressor, a fearful lash and relentless tax-gatherer, to the impoverishment, the enslavement, and degradation of the very people for whom Christ is supposed to have died".

It is tempting to simply argue with her interpretation of scripture - of course, one can say, 'resist not the evildoer' should be translated as 'do not resist the evildoer with violence', or that 'once you give God what's God's, there is not much left for Caesar'. However, it is impossible to deny that, for centuries, Emma Goldman's understanding are what Christ's teachings have meant to the poor and the oppressed, and what has been preached to them. Even among 'radical' Christians, there is a tendency to romanticise poverty. If we dwell too much on meekness, then I believe that we will change nothing, and only serve to propagate the things we are fighting against.

The way Jesus' teachings are understood by most people will not be determined by scholars, or by what we say between ourselves in reading groups and discussions, but by how we interpret them with our lives. If the Church, which is the body of Christ, stands meek and bumbling against evil, compromising with state power at every turn, then that is what the world will think Jesus was about. If however, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, the Church refuses to back down against oppressors and injustice, if it refuses to bow before the idol of political conformity, then perhaps the world will see a Jesus they haven't seen before.

Emma Goldman's criticism should be seen as a call to Christian radicals to love more fiercely, to stand firm in their convictions, and not compromise with the powers that be, to name and fight the capitalism, sexism and militarism that we see in our world—and even in our churches—with all the force we can muster.



The Waiters Union

By Anne Rampa and Jim Dowling

Anne and Jim come from a Catholic Worker tradition/ Christian Anarchist tradition. They have also been part of the Waiters Union network since its beginnings. Here they give an anarchist perspective on the Brisbane based network. (Adapted for Pinch).

Christianity and anarchy came together when Cain asked God the all-important question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). For Christians the answer is a clear "Yes". God tells the Israelites what a disaster it will be if they become like other nations and appoint a king as their "keeper". God warns that the king will take their sons and daughters and make them work for him and his officials, that they will become enslaved to him, and that they will cry to Yahweh because of the king they have chosen, "but on that day Yahweh will not hear you"(1 Sam. 8: 7-22).

This may seem a different situation to the one in Australia, because Australians have the power to elect new leaders on a regular basis, although in theory we still do have a queen. But our enslavement to this system deserves a closer examination: the passing of Christian responsibility for others onto the government is an obvious symptom of this. The Israelites wanted a king to "rule us and lead us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:5). They no longer wanted or trusted God to do so – and we are no different today. We would argue that instead of a king we are ruled by the more abstract tyrant of modern capitalism, embodied in the businessman.

Modern society does not believe in a Church's State; it believes in a businessmen's State. Increasingly the State is controlled by business. Now that economics directs our lives, instead of God, we accept that everything we do can be assigned a monetary value. What is given the least monetary value? The care and companionship of the old, young, sick, imprisoned, and poor – the very ones to whom Christ directs us in order to be involved with Him?

Christian anarchists choose God, as revealed in the life and words of Jesus, to be our ruler. Much inspiration for this comes from the Beatitudes. The repeated reading of the Beatitudes converted the hard-nosed atheist anarchist Ammon Hennacy to Christianity and it will convert us too – away from violence and towards poverty, gentleness, compassion, purity, seeking after justice and peace. The Waiters Union embraced this radical new direction towards God by firstly looking for the needs around us which we could help meet, then caring for and companionship those people without any concern for monetary input. We were quickly plunged into the issue of the displacement of the poor in our neighbourhood.

If one believes in a sacred equality of all people, not a system of some having power over others, then it seems the only way to survive is to love and serve one another, to "wait on" one another, as the name "Waiters Union" implies. Anarchism is not angry rebellion but awesome acceptance of personal responsibility – for one another and the world around us. For us it also intrinsically includes the rejection of any sort of violence as a means to try and solve our problems. We confront these in a variety of ways, including nonviolent direct action, which could end in arrest and imprisonment, and sometimes has. Without a supportive network like the Waiters Union around us it would have been so much harder to maintain this level of resistance, especially as we began to have children.

Does the Waiters Union function as some ideal of anarchist organising or Christian living? Very few, possibly none, of those involved over the years would answer, "Yes".

We watched from the sidelines the inevitable fights over power and direction of the Waiters Union. We have remained good friends both with people who have left the Waiters Union very bitter over these issues, as well as those still there. The truth is the Waiters Union has not always functioned as a perfect model of anarchy or of Christianity. However, our most common observation has been that many of the complaints about power, have involved a desire for perceived power without a corresponding desire to take on all the responsibility it entails. We have never felt that space has not been given for us to speak or act. At the same time, being the flawed humans we are, there is little doubt that some of the criticism of those "in power" is valid.

Generally we would say the Waiters Union has functioned as a group with an amazing amount of equality in terms of respect for one another. Perhaps from an underlying philosophy of respect for the marginalised, there seems to be little room for elitism.

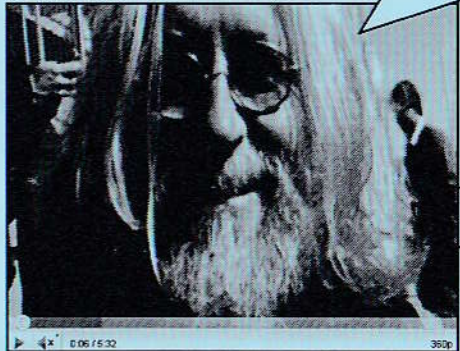
The Waiters Union has often embraced some of the most marginalised people from hostels or refugee camps and put them at the centre of community living. Not just eliminating a society where the leaders "lord it over others" as Jesus warned the disciples against (Matt. 20: 24-28), but building a society where those with little power or respect from society can have a voice.

In doing this we have often seen in the Waiters Union the beautiful and moving reality of Christian anarchism at work.

From Andrews and Beazley (eds), *Learnings: Lessons we are learning from living together*, (Woolloongabba: Community Initiatives Resource Association)

"What's really significant about the waiters union is we don't see ourselves as a community; we are a catalyst for community in our neighbourhood so we don't define ourselves apart from our locality but as part of our locality and we don't service ourselves as a Christian community because although we are inspired by the enchanting example of Jesus we want to be open to all people, people who identify with Christianity but people who don't so we want to develop and inclusive sense of community that includes anybody who wants to work for a more devoted more inclusive more nonviolent community in their locality."

www.youtube.com/beyondtolstoy



"The Waiters Union ...we're anarchist, not in an ideological sense – because we're anti-ideology – but in the sense we're opposed to the powers that oppress and exploit people. Particularly the power of religion – even our own religion – exploits people. We're committed to a spirituality that is meant to be empowering not overpowering."



Saying The Grace and Turning the Table

By Keith Hebden

I took hold of the pheasant, given by a friend and reflected on the last moments of his life. His beak was bent in the middle, there was bruising and a tear under one wing, a puncture in the fold of opposite leg. Whatever hit him did so at such speed that I doubt he knew the first thing about it. Perhaps in the moments before he'd been alarmed by the noise, tremble, and glare of the approaching thing but before he'd hit the trees it had already ended. I thanked him for his life, showed respect for his untimely end, and began to remove the feathers while still trying to be 'attentive' – in the Buddhist sense of the word – to the task in hand.

I first became interested in eating road-kill at the third Christianity and anarchism conference, in Sheffield, when a re-wilder called Rob (issue ?) told me about his tracking and freegan-ing life. As we all sat eating a delicious vegan loaf with veggies found in a skip Rob detailed discovering, gutting, eating, and tanning a grey squirrel. It was also Rob who turned me to thinking more seriously the implications of animism for a Christian politics of food.

Much of my life I've said *The Grace* before meals but it has always bothered me and still does. You may know the sort of thing: "Lord for what we are about to receive make us thankful and ever mindful of those in need."

How can I eat this food and be mindful of those in need? The high expectation illuminated by prayer casts the shadow of injustice over the table.

Faith sets a high bar. But since beginning to explore the spirituality and politics of food I've started to realise that what I'm experiencing at The Grace is alienation. I eat the product of detached, depersonalised exploitation and human domination of the environment. It humiliates both the eater and the eaten.

One day I will be eaten too. Perhaps I will be road kill, two and a half thousand of us are every year in the UK. I hope the micro-organisms and hidden creatures that attend to me will do so with greater care and attentiveness than I have ever shown my food. Humans are not at the top of any food chain; it's a food loop.

I was given the pheasant at a "Diggers Agape". A Diggers Agape is a meal with act of worship inspired by the 'love feasts' of the early church and the vision of Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger – or True Leveller – movement of 1649-50. The Diggers believed the whole earth to be a common treasury for all, to be dug, held together, and shared according to need. Winstanley's pamphleteering and direct community action brought the weight of the newly formed Cromwellian government down on him and the project was short lived.

Our Digger Agape was a simple invitation from a Tolstoyan Methodist minister to bring something never bought or sold to share with others. In January this was tough – especially for vegans. For me the meal was both a sign of hope and a measure of our own resilience against the state capitalist system. We were not exactly a shining beacon though, we continue to do tricks for cash, at least for the moment, and to say The Grace despite the shadow cast over our food.

Open for Disarmament!

Three members of the ploughshares movement were arrested at AWE Aldermaston, where Trident nuclear warheads are tested and built, after opening the base for disarmament.

Martin Newell, Passionist Priest from the London Catholic Worker, Susan Clarkson of the Oxford Catholic Worker, and Chris Cole also from Oxford, cut a doorway into the outer fence of the nuclear base. They then attached a sign saying 'Open for Disarmament: All Welcome'.

The three then entered the base through the new gateway, knelt and prayed. In a statement the three said: "We come to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston to open a new gateway into this tightly guarded factory of death. We come inspired by the message of Jesus to love our enemies, to be peacemakers and to live act nonviolently at all times."

All three have been involved in several non-violent direct actions prior to this and jailed as a result. Their prophetic witness rooted in their personal commitment to marginalised people in their own communities.

Susan and Martin have been part of the Christian anarchist conferences over the years. Chris Cole is currently campaigning against the use of spy-drones. (dronewarsuk.wordpress.com/aboutdrone).



Objections to anarchism

By George Barret 1888 – 1917

No. 20. How will you regulate sexual relationship and family affairs?

It's curious that sentimental people will declare that love is our greatest attribute, and freedom the highest possible condition. Yet if we propose that love shall go free they are shocked and horrified.

There is one really genuine difficulty, however, which people do meet in regard to this question. They look at things as they are today, and see all kinds of repulsive happenings: unwanted children, husbands longing to be free of their wives, and – there is no need to enumerate them. For all this, the sincere thinker is able to see the marriage law is no remedy; but, on the other hand, he sees also that the abolition of that law would also in itself be no remedy.

This is true, no doubt. We cannot expect a well-balanced humanity if we give freedom on one point and slavery on the remainder. The movement towards free love is only useful if it takes its place as part of the general movement towards emancipation.

Love will only come to a normal and healthy condition when set in a world without poverty, and without all the incentives to crime which exist today. When such a condition is reached it will be folly to bind men and women together, or keep them apart, by laws. Liberty and free agreement must be the basis of this most essential relationship as surely as it must be of all others.