

**THE**

# **RAVEN**

**COLIN WARD on  
The Path Not Taken**

**TONY GIBSON on  
Burgess Hill School**

**MURRAY BOOKCHIN on  
Social Ecology**

**DONALD ROOUM on  
Anarchism and Selfishness**

**CONROY MADDOX,  
GEORGE MELLY and  
PHILIP SANSOM on  
Surrealism in England (continued)**

**NICOLAS WALTER on  
Alexander Berkman's  
Russian Diary**

**and 8 pages of  
ILLUSTRATIONS**

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**ANARCHIST QUARTERLY**



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### THE RAVEN

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## Editorial

*The Raven* is still hopping about and flapping its wings rather than taking full flight; but in the end there was too much material for this issue, so that several items have been held over for the next one, which should therefore follow rather more promptly; and we hope after a rather confused first year to establish a clearer pattern of publication for the future. One problem, as with so many similar periodicals, is that *The Raven* is produced by unpaid or at best underpaid labour, all generously provided by people who are also committed to many other demanding activities. Another, as with rather fewer periodicals, is that the loose group of people who are involved is in fact so loose that we have never yet all managed to meet in one place at one time!

Colin Ward's article received the compliment of publication (in a shorter form) in the Agenda column of the *Guardian* even before *The Raven* appeared. When he remarks that 'the great tradition of working-class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state', we would add that it *had* to be written off, for reasons which are clear when one looks at what sort of people these were. The main architect of the welfare state, after all, was none other than Bismarck, also the main architect of the German Empire of 1871. His social security legislation, neatly combined with anti-socialist legislation — the carrot and the stick — played an important part in reconciling the growing working class to the growing nation state. The German Social Democrats (the original Marxists), while opposing Bismarck's political policy, supported his social policy, and became the most ardent advocates of the welfare state, which thus co-opted the labour movement into the modern state. Logically, they were also the most ardent advocates of the exclusion of anarchists from the labour movement — as at the congresses of the Second International in 1889, 1893 and 1896. And, predictably, they were also — as the largest single party in Germany from 1912 — instrumental in the entry of Germany into the First World War. The Fabian Society and Labour Party in this country were not far behind. The continuing acceptance of the state by the whole left is still so strong that the current world economic crisis is widely seen as the consequence of the right-wing vision of a



denationalised economy, and the call for renewed state intervention is heard right across the left — even from some anarchists, who seem less interested in self-help and mutual aid than in taking part in the system in one way or another — supporting nationalisation or municipalisation, demanding more taxes and benefits, proclaiming solidarity with trade union hierarchies or welfare bureaucracies. As Colin Ward says, we 'ought to be around with our signposts, pointing the way'; but they must be anarchist signposts, pointing the right way.

We continue our coverage of libertarian education with Tony Gibson's personal account of Burgess Hill School. We hope to follow with an interview with one of the surviving pioneers of anarchist schools in Britain and the United States, Nellie Dick, and then with further such material. Murray Bookchin's polemic with opponents in the Green movement has had only a restricted circulation in the United States but deserves a wider audience. Donald Rooum is well known as an artist in the anarchist movement and beyond, and he is responsible for the delightful ravens who decorate this issue. Franklin Rosemont's article about Surrealism in England in the last issue has provoked a lively discussion, which is joined in this issue by three participants, Conroy Maddox, George Melly, and Philip Sansom. Nicolas Walter's survey of Alexander Berkman's Russian Diary will be followed by further material on unpublished or unknown texts from the past.

Nicolas Walter's review of George Woodcock in the last issue caused both favourable and unfavourable reactions. George Woodcock himself characteristically replied 'with some amusement', 'with some sadness', but 'with no anger'. He points out that the article 'diminishes my role in Freedom Press during the 1940s':

... To say that I 'helped' when the editors were in jail is absurd. The fact is that for that period, Marie Louise and I shared equally in preserving the press and the paper. ... We collected material, wrote more than half of each paper ourselves, read the proofs together, did the paste-up together, and supervised all the printer operations, as well as the other work of Express Printers. A little more than mere 'helping'!

Finally we regret to record the death in October 1987 of Albert McCarthy at the age of 67. He was best known as an expert on jazz and especially as the editor of *Jazz Monthly*. But he was also an active writer and speaker in the British anarchist movement during and after the Second World War, and after the demise of George Woodcock's *Now* he began the *Delphic Review*. This was projected as a quarterly but at a difficult time achieved only two issues (1949-1950), which were nevertheless a model of a serious anarchist magazine in the tradition we ourselves are trying to maintain.



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## Colin Ward

### The Path Not Taken

Most writers produce, every now and then, a sentence or a phrase which, to their immense gratification, other people quote. This is my most-quoted paragraph:

When we compare the Victorian antecedents of our public institutions with the organs of working-class mutual aid in the same period, the very names speak volumes. On the one side the Workhouse, the Poor Law Infirmary, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in Accordance with the Principles of the Established Church; and on the other, the *Friendly Society*, the *Sick Club*, the *Co-operative Society*, the *Trade Union*. One represents the tradition of fraternal and autonomous associations springing up from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above.

My quotable paragraph, which was first published in *Freedom* in 1956, was not at all original. It expresses what ought to be a commonplace of social history. But it stresses a truth that has been ignored by socialists for generations. And since we are in that season when the heavyweights of the left are filling the feature pages of *The Guardian* to provide their own diagnoses of why their chosen parties have failed to win the last General Election, it is worth looking, from an anarchist point of view, at the failure of British socialism to win the hearts of the British public.

In this connection the paragraph I most enjoy quoting, and frequently do quote, comes from the fourth Fabian Tract, published in 1886, called *What Socialism Is*. The anonymous introduction to this document remarked:

English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist, nor yet defined enough in point of policy to be classified. There is a mass of Socialistic feeling not yet conscious of itself as Socialism. But when the unconscious Socialists of England discover their position, they also will probably fall into two parties: a Collectivist party supporting a strong central administration and a counterbalancing Anarchist party defending individual initiative against that administration.

I have always found that to be an extraordinarily interesting unfulfilled prophecy, not because anyone would have expected an anarchist 'party' in the ordinary political sense to have emerged, but because it was evident a century ago that there were other paths to socialism beside the electoral struggle for power over the centralised state. In the nineteenth century the British working class built up from nothing a vast network



of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous enterprises like the trade union movement and the Co-operative movement. How have we allowed that tradition to ossify?

The Indian politician Jayaprakash Narayan used to say that Gandhi used up all the moral oxygen in India, so the British Raj suffocated. In exactly the same way, I would claim that the political left in this country invested all its fund of social inventiveness in the idea of the state, so that its own traditions of self-help and mutual aid were stifled for lack of ideological oxygen. How on earth did British socialists allow these concepts to be hi-jacked by the political right, since it is these human attributes, and not the state and its bureaucracies, that actually hold human society together?

Politically, it was because of the sinister alliance of Fabians and Marxists, both of whom believed implicitly in the state, and assumed that they would be the particular elite in control of it. Administratively, it was because of the equally sinister alliance of bureaucrats and professionals: the British civil service and the British professional classes, with their undisguised contempt for the way ordinary people organised anything. I can't improve on Ivan Illich's conclusions about the professionalisation of knowledge:

It makes people dependent on having their knowledge produced for them. It leads to a paralysis of the moral and political imagination. This cognitive disorder rests on the illusion that the knowledge of the individual citizen is of less value than the 'knowledge' of science. The former is the opinion of individuals. It is merely subjective and is excluded from policies. The latter is 'objective' — defined by science and promulgated by expert spokesmen. This objective knowledge is viewed as a commodity which can be refined, constantly improved, accumulated and fed into a process, now called 'decision-making'. This new mythology of governance by the manipulation of knowledge-stock inevitably erodes reliance on government by people. . . . Overconfidence in 'better knowledge' becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. People first cease to trust their own judgement and then want to be told the truth about what they know. Over-confidence in 'better decision-making' first hampers people's ability to decide for themselves and then undermines their belief that they can decide. The great tradition of working-class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state, aspiring for a universal public provision of everything for everybody. The contribution that the recipients had to make to all this theoretical bounty was ignored as a mere embarrassment — apart, of course, from paying for it. The nineteenth-century working class, living below the tax threshold, taxed themselves in pennies every week for the upkeep of



their innumerable friendly societies. The twentieth-century working class, as well as the alleged 'National Insurance' contributions, pays one-third of its income for the support of the state, quite apart from indirect taxation too. The socialist ideal was rewritten as a world where everyone was entitled to everything, but where nobody except the providers had any actual say about anything. We are learning today in the anti-welfare backlash what a very vulnerable utopia that was.

History itself was rewritten to suit the managerial, political and bureaucratic vision. 'Beatrice Webb admitted doctoring the presentation of her evidence on friendly societies for the 1909 report', remarked Roy Porter (*New Society*, 28 February 1986), as though everybody knew this. And whether in school or in higher education, whatever is taught about the origins of the welfare state implies that twentieth-century state universalism replaced the pathetic unofficial, voluntary, or philanthropic pioneering ventures of the nineteenth century. However, in the past 20 years or so, a new interest in popular history, exemplified by the History Workshop movement and by the boom in local history and oral history, has uncovered buried layers of our past.

Take education as an example. We have all absorbed as gospel the official line that it was only rivalry between religious bodies that delayed until 1870 (and in effect 1880 or later) universal, free and compulsory elementary education. A centenary publication from the National Union of Teachers explained that 'apart from religious and charitable schools, "dame" or common schools were operated by the private enterprise of people who were often barely literate', and it explained the widespread working-class hostility to the school boards with the remark that 'parents were not always quick to appreciate the advantages of full-time schooling against the loss of extra wages' (*The Struggle for Education*, 1970).

But recent historians have shown the resistance to state schooling in a quite different light. Stephen Humphries, for instance, finds that these private schools, by the 1860s 'were providing an alternative education for approximately one-third of all working-class school children', and suggests:

This enormous demand for private as opposed to public education is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that working-class parents in a number of major cities responded to the introduction of compulsory attendance regulations not by sending their children to provided state schools, as government inspectors had predicted, but by extending the length of their child's education in private schools. Parents favoured these schools for a number of reasons: they were small and close to home and were consequently more personal and more convenient than most publicly provided schools; they were informal and



tolerant of irregular attendance and unpunctuality; no attendance registers were kept; they were not segregated according to age and sex; they used individual as opposed to authoritarian teaching methods; and, most important, they belonged to, and were controlled by, the local community rather than being imposed on the neighbourhood by an alien authority. (*Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth, 1889-1939*, Blackwell, 1981).

His point of view is reinforced by a mass of statistical evidence in the study of *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England* (Croom Helm, 1984) by Philip Gardner, who finds that the working-class schools, set up by working-class people in working-class neighbourhoods, 'achieved just what the customers wanted: quick results in basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic, wasted no time on religious studies and moral uplift, and represented a genuinely alternative approach to childhood learning to that prescribed by the education experts'. The price of eliminating these schools has been, in the view of the historian Paul Thompson, 'the suppression in countless working-class children of the very appetite for education and ability to learn independently which contemporary progressive education seeks to rekindle' (*New Society*, 6 December 1984). It is certainly ironical that the centenary of state education was accompanied by a phalanx of sociologists explaining to us that the function of the public education system has been to slot working-class children into working-class jobs.

Another field where the excavation of previously distorted history has yielded surprising facts is that of medicine. David Green's study of self-governing working-class medical societies shows that the self-organisation of patients provided a rather better degree of consumer control of medical services than has been achieved in post-Lloyd George and post-Bevan days (*Working-Class Patients and the Medical Establishment: Self-Help in Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Gower/Temple, 1986). Not the least of the virtues of his remarkable book is that, as Roy Porter notes, 'he takes that hallowed belief of progressives — that the improvement of the people's health hinges on state intervention — challenges its historical accuracy, and questions whether it is, in any case, a good doctrine for the Left to hold' (*New Society*, 28 February 1986).

Housing is another area where there is a buried tradition recently re-discovered. Just at the moment when the building societies (the normal source of private housing finance in Britain) are getting rid of the last vestiges of their non-profit, friendly society origins, it is worth reminding ourselves that they too began as organs of working-class self-help. We have had almost two centuries of popular aspirations to get out of the landlord-tenant relationship, beginning with the 'terminating' building societies begun by people who clubbed together



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to house themselves. What kind of ideological idiocy in the labour movement has allowed the Conservatives to present themselves as the champions of council tenants against municipal paternalism? We actually reached such a degree of absurdity that when Lewisham's Labour council decided by one vote to turn over those sites which were too small or uneven for its own housing programme to the Lewisham Self-Build Housing Association (formed by people on its own waiting list), the leader of an adjoining borough, faced with the immense success of this enterprise, remarked, 'We aren't going to turn *our* tenants into little capitalists' (see my book *When We Build Again*, Pluto Press, 1985). In Liverpool, a whole series of co-operative initiatives have shown the ability of poor people to find a site, select their own architect with whom to design their own housing, and then to commission their own builder, and finally to run their own estate (see Alan McDonald, *The Weller Way: The Story of the Weller Street Housing Co-operative*, Faber, 1986). Faced with these achievements of working class self-organisation, you would expect their socialist councillors to rejoice. Instead they have responded with absolute hostility.

How sad that in Britain, birthplace of friendly societies, trade unionism and the Co-operative movement, socialists should have been so intoxicated with power and bureaucracy and the mystique of the state that they should dismiss their own inheritance as a path not worth taking! Social welfare has been surrendered to the state as well as the income to pay for them, the state's way. For most of the post-war decades there was a consensus between the political parties on state paternalism in welfare. The advent of Thatcherism ended that and, if you believe that continued electoral success implies the popularity of a government, Thatcher's three terms of office, even though the politicians of the left tend to exaggerate the extent of the onslaught on welfare, certainly indicate, first, that the intention is there and, second, that the British public hasn't risen in outrage to defend the threatened edifice.

Thatcherism has two opposite characteristics: its rhetoric and its actions. The rhetoric is about lifting the burden of the state and encouraging local enterprise and individual initiative. The action is about destroying the pretence that local government is local and imposing central government's will on more and more areas of life. A dissenting Conservative MP, Ian Gilmour, sums up current policy as 'Manchester liberalism minus the idealism and plus a centralising State' (quoted in *The Observer*, 9 August 1987). If it is confusing to the citizen, it also provides difficulties for anarchist propagandists. For decades people responded to our propaganda about the nature of the state with the observation that our views were out of date: it was a



benign organisation for social welfare. If we now use the new historical research, as I am seeking to use it, people tell us that it is very like Thatcherism. Philip Gardner's comments on those parent-controlled schools sound like the 'Parent Power' sloganising of the Conservative Secretary of State for Education. But the shallowness of the slogan is revealed by his intention to impose a National Curriculum on all state schools.

It is the same with housing. My own agitation for many years for dweller control as the first principle of housing is echoed by the language of the Thatcher government, and is bitterly opposed by the political left. But in fact the co-op housing movement, as a contemporary survey shows, is 'caught in the crossfire between local authorities and central government'. José Ospina goes on to remark: 'The irony of foisting co-ops on councils that don't want them, while blocking the schemes put forward by the councils that do, must not be lost on us. But such opportunism is bound to undermine and demoralise those who are promoting such initiatives seriously' (*Housing Ourselves*, Hilary Shipman, 1987).

Maybe it was the advice of their advertising agents that enabled the party of big business to exploit deeply felt popular sentiment with such triumphant cynicism. But the fault is that of the labour movement in rejecting its own history and origins for the sake of a version of socialism which is governmental, bureaucratic, paternalistic and unloved. The Sociologist Ray Pahl put it well when he suggested:

Not only have those with a collectivist ideology imposed this as the so-called natural or 'instinctive' political response of ordinary workers, but they have managed to imply that those who object to the tyrannies of the town hall have been de-radicalised. . . . People have been puzzled to discover that what they most wanted — a home of their own — was in some way a betrayal of a greater goal. 'Privatisation' was scorned by the municipal socialists, who thus alienated themselves from their natural supporters (*Division of Labour*, Blackwell, 1984).

It's going to be a long haul for the political left to unburden itself of all that Fabian, Marxist, managerial and professional baggage, and rediscover its roots in the tradition of fraternal and autonomous associations springing up from below. We anarchists ought to be around with our signposts, pointing the way.

A shortened version of this article appeared in *The Guardian* on 12 October 1987.



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## *Tony Gibson*

### **Burgess Hill School: A Personal Account**

#### **The Post-War Background**

In March 1945, before the war had ended and when I was employed as an agricultural worker in South Wales, I was told by the local office of the Ministry of Labour that carpenters were wanted in London to repair the bomb-damage, and that the Ministry was willing to accept such work as fulfilling the requirements of my registration as a Conscientious Objector. I must have put myself down as a carpenter on their books on the strength of some amateurish training at evening classes while working at the war-time ambulance station in London. The pay was certainly better than that of agricultural workers, and this seemed an excellent opportunity to get back to London with Betty and our son. A friend of hers had a flat in Chelsea, which she was willing to lend us, but at first Betty did not accompany me back to London, and I came alone.

At first, too, I didn't go to the carpenter's job, for I heard that there was work on timber extraction on the fringe of London, for £5 a week, which was then quite good pay for a manual worker and better than I could earn as a carpenter. A number of anarchist friends were working at it, and although I hadn't got the proper employment cards for it, I was allowed to join the gang. Soon it came to the ears of the boss that a number of anarchists were working illegally in his firm, and he ordered us to be sacked, so my bonanza of 'high' pay lasted for only a few days.

Then I got my cards from South Wales and obtained employment as a carpenter in a firm repairing the bomb-blasted houses in Hackney, East London. Here again pacifist and anarchist contacts stood me in good stead, for the building firm belonged to pacifists, and most of its workers were Conscientious Objectors of one kind or another — Christian pacifists, members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, anarchists, fringe Trotskyists, and a few deserters from the forces who lived precarious lives without proper identity documents. When inspectors came round, the foreman told these latter characters to make themselves scarce for a while, since they didn't appear on the firm's books. We even had one genuine Fascist, a mild little man who admired Mussolini (who had recently been killed). This fellow had a bad time in



arguments with his work-mates, and was indeed threatened with violence to drive him off the job, until a brawny young socialist declared that he would be his protector: 'A man is entitled to his opinions, however daft.'

### Getting into Burgess Hill

While I was working on this job I heard that Burgess Hill School wanted a temporary handyman. I had applied unsuccessfully for such a job at this school about a year before when they were still at Cranleigh. Now with the ending of the war they had returned to London and occupied four large and rather dilapidated houses in Oak Hill Park, Hampstead.

The school got its name from a road in West Hampstead where it had originally functioned as a fairly conventional little private day-school before the war. With the coming of the war it was evacuated to Cranleigh, and there it was a co-educational boarding-school, eventually taking children up to the age of about sixteen. The 'progressive' element developed under war-time conditions. With most young men called up for war service, the school naturally attracted Conscientious Objectors as male teachers: there were three pacifist males on the staff — Tony Weaver, Frank Lea and Trevor Pugh. I don't know exactly what happened at Cranleigh; Tony Weaver referred to the episode as 'getting rid' of the headmaster, and anyway it was decided to run the school without any head on the joint responsibility of several of the senior staff. The company that owned the school, New Age Schools, was prepared to countenance this experiment, and its 'progressive' nature attracted Herbert Read, the well-known literary critic who was then an anarchist (but later became Sir Herbert) to join the board of directors and lend the *cachet* of his name. Later he regretted it in the embarrassing circumstances that blew up in 1946, and even promised £1,000 to the school if he could be extricated from the mess. He was extricated, in the manner that will be related later, but we never got the £1,000.

In 1945 Trevor Pugh, who was handyman, applied for leave of absence in order to act as a full-time Labour Party election agent in the coming General Election. I was offered the job as a temporary replacement for Pugh, and I was very pleased to accept, for I had long been interested in progressive education, being inspired by the books of A. S. Neill many years before I had a child of my own. Pugh then obtained a permanent job with the Labour Party, and so my temporary job at the school became a permanency. Also, the housekeeper, Mrs



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Jackson, wished to leave the school, and as they had heard about Betty, she was invited to come in that capacity. Thus Betty and I, with our son Peter, then aged six, were given residential accommodation in the school. This suited us from every point of view.

### Early days

When Betty and Peter moved into the school just before the opening of the Autumn term, I was in hospital. As we had been away at Odam Hill School, and then at Penarth in South Wales and subsequently at the flat in Chelsea, all our furniture had been stored for over a year at the house of some friends in Hampstead. Betty had it transported to the top of the house at 13 Oak Hill Park where she camped among boxes and dusty furniture as she struggled to take over the demanding job of housekeeping for the school. She had never done such a job before, but relied on her capacity for hard work and her common sense in conditions of considerable chaos. The buildings were not fully repaired or decorated, and a lot of the school's equipment and furniture had only recently been brought up from Cranleigh.

Looking back on the mess and disorder at that time, it seems surprising that parents would send their children to a fee-charging school in such a condition. But in the immediate post-war period of 1945 there was an acute shortage of school places in private schools, and parents were very keen to get their children accepted as they came back to London from their various war-time residences. In the junior school, where there were three classes, there were no flush toilets working, and the children had to use a row of Elsan chemical buckets placed in an empty room. I remember that a little girl called Zuleika Dobson slipped down half into a chemical bucket, and had to be taken to Betty to be cleaned up.

Actual decision-making and administration — the sort of matters that would be managed by a head teacher in more conventional schools — were in the hands of three 'full members' of the staff — Tony Weaver, Tamara Osborn and Paddy Coyle (a married woman with a child). Tony was a general teacher, Tamara was a music teacher (who also worked in other schools), and Paddy was the secretary. Then there was Nommie Durrell the art teacher, and Marjorie Mitchell a science teacher, who later became 'full members'. Some of the staff had children in the school: Paddy had a son a little older than ours, Marjorie a daughter Juliet (now a well-known psychoanalyst and feminist writer, who had her lessons at a nearby progressive school but lived at Burgess Hill), and Helen Byrne who was then a cleaner, a son Michael (now an



actor). Tony Weaver and Marjorie later produced a baby, Gregory, a circumstance that added to the general scandal that brewed up in 1946 and nearly led to the closure of the school.

When the school opened in the Autumn term of 1945, there were three teachers of junior classes — Richard Prinksheim, Chile Grey and Nelly Patzau — and two kindergarten teachers — Maggie Dodds and Doris Wetterhahn — in addition to those already mentioned. There were also one or two musical protégés of Tamara, whose part-time duties were vague, including Richard Prinksheim's brother.

The cook was a German refugee called Liesl, and we had various part-time kitchen hands and cleaners. It may be noted that quite a number of the staff had German Jewish names, being drawn from the considerable refugee population in Hampstead. Virtually all the staff lived in, the four big houses providing ample accommodation, and part of Number 10 was rented out. The school ran to some degree as a community, for there was communal catering and ordinary household matters were settled at weekly meetings of domestic staff and teaching staff with equal voting rights. All this had a great appeal to me, for during the war I had lived in a community and I had anarchist ideals of workers' control and the abolition of authority.

The running of the school was of course in the hands of the 'full members'. Among them Tony Weaver often tended to act as though he were the headmaster, although this was against his principles. He meant well, and was prepared to put his own money into the school, but at times he would make quite unreasonable demands of other people. The houses were being repaired and decorated by a firm of builders, and Tony Weaver proposed that in order that the work should be completed more quickly I should work alongside the builder's carpenter, as well as continuing with my other duties. The carpenter rejected the suggestion on trade-union grounds! My duties included taking classes in woodwork, a subject that was very popular with children of all ages and both sexes, and doing all the normal small repair and maintenance jobs that normally fall to a handyman. Then there was the stoking of the coke boiler that supplied the hot water, and providing fires in the classrooms. Nearly all the classrooms were heated by coal fires, and to get them going in about six or eight rooms was of course a considerable labour in the mornings. While the teachers would keep the fires going, they would have liked to arrive in the mornings to a warm classroom and an established fire, rather than to a heap of smoking coal with a recently lighted paraffin fire-lighter under it. Fuel was strictly rationed at that time, and I had to eke it out by buying logs.

In the immediate post-war period everyone accepted an extreme degree of austerity as normal. We are apt to forget that most food was



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rationed up until 1953. I needed timber for teaching woodwork, and found it hard to get. At that time one could obtain excellent wooden orange boxes from greengrocers, and this provided my regular standby.

### Progressive education

Having read the ideas of Neill on education and upbringing in his books, I was very interested to see how progressive education functioned in practice. At Burgess Hill attendance at classes was 'compulsory' but no real punishments were meted out to children who chose to cut classes. When they absented themselves it was up to the teacher to inquire *why*, and this would sometimes develop into a more or less good-tempered argument between teacher and child. Attendance and good order were maintained more or less as in the average family, children being averse to being scolded by an adult with whom they are normally on good terms. The system worked because the numbers were small, classes seldom containing more than about twenty children, and many were much smaller. Over the years I was there, we occasionally had teachers who were pretty ineffective, and their inefficiency showed up glaringly in a way that would not have been so manifest at a more conventional school. But whereas at a conventional school the incompetence of a teacher may be publicly concealed, but actually result in teasing, ragging and even persecution, here the occasional teacher lacking in competence or adequacy of personality was more likely to be treated by the children with amused tolerance.

Burgess Hill, like other progressive schools, attracted a few 'problem' children. Their disturbed behaviour would have been sternly repressed at a conventional school, although sometimes resulting in violent outbreaks, but here they were fairly free to make a nuisance of themselves most of the time. Bertrand Russell in his autobiographical account of the school which he and his wife Dora ran at Beacon Hill commented on the extreme cruelty and destructiveness of the disturbed children in their school, which appears to have constituted a major problem. This was certainly not the case at Burgess Hill, although we certainly had our share of little horrors. Often such children would calm down a lot when they found that they were treated kindly and sympathetically, and the major source of social control that stopped bullying was, I think, public opinion. Perhaps Russell's school was just unlucky in getting a quite inordinate number of disturbed children, for two or three together can certainly make life very difficult for those around them and pervert public opinion. So far as I know, we never refused entry to a new pupil because he or she had a terrible record, nor



do I think that any pupil was actually expelled, although that sanction was threatened in more than one case. On the whole my memory is of quite well-behaved children who called the staff by their first names, just as they would do in a big family, but were seldom aggressive or rude.

The disruption caused by disturbed children, although never a major problem, sometimes led the better-behaved and more studious pupils to resent the free-and-easy atmosphere of the school, because they wanted these disruptive individuals suppressed, and they would have welcomed harsh, punitive sanctions. Children naturally like a certain measure of order and discipline, but those teachers who obtained it by sheer force of personality were more popular.

Being a day-school, at least in the early years in Hampstead, unlike Beacon Hill, Summerhill or Dartington Hall, the many problems of communal living that the latter schools had to cope with did not apply at Burgess Hill. The children were out of their parents' care for only a few hours and so the responsibility of the school was relatively limited. In later years, when the school acquired a few boarders, there were more difficult problems to be dealt with, problems including stealing, sex and all the troubles of adolescence throughout the twenty-four hours. I was at the school between 1945 and 1954, and I cannot write of the later years before the closure of the school early in the 1960s, when it had shrunk drastically in size and become very chaotic. Peter Vansittart has published an autobiographical account of the school which depicts it in extremely comic terms. This picture may have been true of the final years of the school after I ceased to know it, but it certainly does not apply to the time I am writing about.

In the immediate post-war years the school increased in size until the numbers rose to about 120 pupils. There was a Senior school which prepared a few children for School Certificate (the equivalent of the modern GCE O level examination), a Junior school, and a kindergarten. One of the great assets of the school was the four big overgrown gardens at the back, gardens with large trees that children could climb and in which they could build tree-houses. There were also sand-banks in which they could dig and tunnel, and eventually an open-air stage was built. It was a natural adventure playground, ideally suited to the needs of the younger children. Even some of the teenagers could regress a little in age and play out their fantasies in games of the cops-and-robbers variety. The academic standards of the school were not good; we had too many children with disturbed backgrounds relating to the social conditions of the war years. Parents with educationally backward children would naturally send them to a progressive school because conventional schools would have been



reluctant to take them. I am referring, of course, to independent fee-charging schools. State schools in the 1950s, even in better-class districts, were a good deal rougher in every sense than they are today. It was more of a social custom in those days for middle-class parents to have their children educated in private schools.

Being in Hampstead, we naturally had a promising selection of parents in the district — writers, actors, and professional people of the more bohemian kind. There was also the political 'left' of the time who favoured progressive education. Hampstead also had a fair Jewish minority who favoured the school because there was no Christian indoctrination. With such a pool of intelligent and cultured parents, it is natural that although some of the children were educationally rather backward, they were basically of higher than average intelligence in terms of genetic potential, and had backgrounds that would encourage them to continue their education and make their way in the world. I can think of a number of children who were pretty illiterate at about the age of ten, who have now done very well for themselves in later life. When they left Burgess Hill they doubtless had to struggle hard for a time to repair their neglected formal education, and perhaps they regretted how they had 'wasted' their school time. However, educational research and developmental psychology have not clearly established just what sort of regimes are best for the developing child. We know next to nothing about the factors in childhood that foster the development of a mature and creative personality.

### **Anarchism, Communism and personal squabbles**

I had been at Burgess Hill for a little over a year when the school began to get into difficulties. My position was by no means secure, because Betty resigned from her position as housekeeper, a job rendered increasingly difficult by the constant interference from some of the senior members of the staff. I knew all about this interference, and I thoroughly sympathised with her throwing in the job. So there we were, with a son aged seven, and occupying two small rooms in the school. True, my wage was ludicrously small, as with the rest of the staff, and we did pay £8 a term tuition fees for Peter's education. In the circumstances the 'full members' of the staff decided that they should get more work out of me, and it was Tony Weaver who suggested to me that I should put in some hours of work in the evenings on general maintenance. I declined to do this as a regular thing, saying that since I started work at 8 am, and continued maintaining the kitchen boiler and another stove during the evenings, I was working a good deal harder



than most of the staff. In addition to working as the handyman, I was taking quite a lot of classes in woodwork. Later on, I gathered that the 'full members' were divided on the question of whether they should get rid of the Gibsons.

Some of the staff wished to get rid of us for an additional reason. At that time I was very much involved with the anarchist movement, and this irked those members of the staff who were 'fellow travellers' of the Communist Party. This Communist connection extended to some of the influential parents such as J. D. Bernal and his second wife Margaret. In September 1946 it was planned to hold a big anarchist summer school in London, and I applied to the Burgess Hill staff meeting to hold it on the school premises during the vacation. We offered a reasonable fee for the use of the premises with catering facilities provided. A hot debate ensued, but by a majority decision permission was granted, and the committee of the 'full members', being themselves divided, did not overrule it.

The anarchists did indeed have a most successful summer school. Betty, who had recently had our daughter Jenny, was confined to bed with a cold, and I remember alternating between chairing meetings and washing nappies. Peter, who was an extremely pretty and charming boy, became the pet of the anarchists, and to the horror of an old teetotal stalwart, Lilian Wolfe, had to be carried up to bed having helped himself too liberally from the cider barrel.

It may be thought that Betty and I were extremely arrogant and self-seeking, having found a job, a place to live and a school for our son in this manner — and then Betty opting out of the job and adding a new baby to the menage for good measure! Perhaps we were arrogant, but I can only say that no one was more devoted to the ideals of progressive education at that time and prepared to work extremely hard for them, than I was. Betty had not the same ideological commitment, but when she took on the housekeeping job she worked extremely hard at it, and relinquished it only when conditions were made quite impossible. She saw very clearly that some of the staff were not really competent to carry through the tasks of management that were needed, and the ensuing course of events demonstrated how right she was.

I think that Tony Weaver and Frank Lea had put up some money for the school, because a course of unwise spending was embarked on. One of their extravagances was the appointment of a metal-work teacher, Nahum Slutski, who had previously worked at Dartington Hall, and left with rather a bad reference from the headmaster, who warned of his extraordinary extravagance. Slutski demanded that a whole room should be set aside as his private workshop as well as a room for teaching, both rooms to be appointed at a fairly lavish cost compared



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with the general scale of provision in the school. He was undoubtedly a very skilled metal-worker and had a creation in the Victoria & Albert Museum. He was a Communist living in rather mysterious exile from Russia, and had social contacts with some of the Hampstead members of the Party who were influential with one section of the parents on the board of directors of New Age Schools. It was thought that having a well-known art metal-worker (if he really was well-known) on the staff would add some special cachet, and pay off in the end, and that it did not matter that Slutski was most obviously devoted first and foremost to his workshop business, and prepared to do a bit of teaching as a sideline. But Burgess Hill did not have the financial resources of Dartington Hall, and this appointment eventually proved to be one of the various financial errors that were made.

### **The big scandal**

The increasing quarrelling among the staff committee of 'full members' produced various crises and scandals, and the board of directors of New Age Schools decided that in order to continue to run the school they must take the power of government out of the hands of this staff committee and appoint a headmaster to pull things together. The quarrels were principally between Tamara Osborn, a very strong-minded but wrong-headed woman of Russian-Georgian origins, and Tony Weaver. Paddy Coyle sided with Tamara, and Marjorie Mitchell with Tony Weaver. The liaison between the latter two was blown up into a big scandal, it even being declared that the children in the school were uncertain about the father of Marjorie's baby — some even suspecting Frank Lea! This rumour was quite untrue, as the two parents went around together quite conspicuously. No doubt a good deal of scandal-mongering was also done about Betty and me because it was known that we were not married, and I was involving the school with the anarchist movement. It was Tamara who had the strong Communist connections, while Tony Weaver was a declared anarchist.

When the directors announced that they intended to appoint a headmaster, there was a general protest from the staff. In spite of many sorts of differences among us, there was a general feeling that we were running a co-operative venture, and that the general staff meeting, which was attended by all members teaching and otherwise, did determine most general policy although it was not the final centre of power. After meetings with the staff and much argument, the directors called a parents' meeting at which they announced the name of the person they had decided to appoint as headmaster — Frank Lea.



This was an absurd tactical move, because the directors had not previously informed the staff of this decision. Frank Lea had already announced his decision to resign from the staff in order to take the post of editor of *Peace News*, and here he was being appointed to bring us all to order! I attended this parents' meeting by virtue of being a parent as well as a member of the staff, and I was so shocked by this unexpected announcement that I made a quite unjustified accusation against Frank Lea. I said: 'Now that Frank Lea has achieved the headmastership, how many members of the staff do you think will consent to work under him? You can have my resignation for a start!' This horrid innuendo produced a storm of protest from some of the parents. The way I saw things was unjustified, of course, for Frank had not 'achieved' the headmastership; he was a fool to allow himself to be persuaded to take the job. I made my public declaration out of surprise and anger, and it raised a real flurry among the parents who realised that they must face the prospect of their children being unable to go to school next term because there would be too few staff staying on to teach them and cater for them. Tony Weaver had been persuaded to resign and leave the school.

After this meeting I went back to the school and announced to my astonished colleagues that Frank Lea had been appointed headmaster, and the general reaction was the same as mine — that we should all resign. It was an impulsive reaction, but none the less sincere. We felt that the directors had acted in an underhand manner, and we were amazed that Frank, who had seemed to stand aside from all the squabbles and declared that he was leaving, should now appear in the orthodox role of headmaster. Obviously the school could not open in the autumn term if many of the staff resigned, so Frank had the difficult task of going round trying to repair the damage.

A compromise was eventually arrived at — that Frank's appointment should be only for one term, during which time the directors would seek to find a headmaster (a headmistress was never mentioned) of whom the staff approved. It was obvious that the old system of government by a small committee of senior staff had failed, and we were prepared to accept the proposal, poor Frank staying on for a term in the unenviable position of a headmaster whom most of the staff barely tolerated.

### The new headmaster

The post of headmaster was advertised, and the staff were invited to meet two applicants. The first was an extraordinarily unsuitable



character who had been head of a school in West Africa. He created a poor impression, and all I can remember about him is that he told us: 'Your African, you know, is always rather a bully.' Afterwards the directors, through Margaret Bernal, had the grace to apologise for presenting us with such an unsuitable person. The next candidate showed up very well by contrast. He was Hugh Child, who had been working with his wife as assistant staff at Bedales School, and he had a very good appearance and manner. He was acceptable to the staff, and was duly appointed. One snag about the appointment was that hitherto, as a matter of principle, all staff — teachers, cooks, cleaners, administrative — received the same wage, but Hugh Child demanded a higher remuneration because with his family commitments he could not otherwise have come.

Hugh's good manner certainly inspired confidence at parents' meetings. Unlike the rest of us, he wore a well-cut blue suit and looked like a business executive. But although he may have been quite a competent teacher, he was quite hopeless as an administrator. He had the handicap of having Paddy Coyle as school secretary, and she had had no training in business management and office routine. Hitherto, I imagine, the office had been largely run by Tony Weaver, who for all his faults was certainly more competent than Hugh Child. The new headmaster went around in his suit with a worried frown on his face, obviously most unhappy in his job. He had a very strong-minded wife who came up to the school quite a lot, and even did a little teaching, and we soon realised that she was the driving force behind Hugh. Had she been appointed headmistress, things would probably have been a lot better, but she had her Hugh with his good superficial appearance, and she was obviously determined to make something of him.

It was at the end of Hugh Child's first term, I think, that both Paddy and Tamara resigned from the staff. As Betty was then unemployed and was a trained and experienced secretary, she was given the job of school secretary. She organised the office as any business office is organised, and Hugh Child was utterly delighted. He had never realised that things could be run so simply and efficiently, and at a parents' meeting he publicly declared his immense indebtedness to her.

### **The staff syndicate takes over**

But soon the money ran out. The unwise spending of the past regime, and the withdrawal of too many children because of the past chaos and scandals, had crippled the school financially. The directors proposed a scheme to raise some money by asking the parents to pay one term's



fees *in advance*. The parents were assured that they could lose nothing by this advance because when their child eventually came to the last term in the school, no fees would be payable for that term. They were not told the full extent of the school's financial embarrassment. It says a lot for Hugh Child's public manner, which exuded confidence, that he was able to sell this scheme to the parents. I do not know what proportion of them paid over a term's fees in advance, but a sum of money was raised that paid off the more pressing debts, and the school continued. It was, I think, just two terms later that the chairman of the directors almost literally passed the hat round at a parents' meeting in a most undignified manner, and declared that unless they got some money from somewhere the school would not open next term. The children would be left high and dry, and as for the parents who had paid over a term's fees in advance, well, they were just unlucky.

Whereas previous scandals had centred on sex, politics and rows between staff, this one concerned money and business integrity. It was something to give the people of Hampstead a lot to talk about, and did not redound to the credit of those responsible for the direction of the school. The staff, of course, were to be sacked without the term's notice to which they were entitled, and we all felt properly indignant about this. The staff then produced a scheme of which we were justly proud. We, as a corporate body, would buy the school from New Age Schools, and continue to run it. The parents who had unwisely paid fees in advance would continue to get their money's worth, and the school would be saved. But where was the money to buy the school to come from? Well, in the shockingly embarrassed position of the directors of New Age Schools, they were glad to let us have the title to the school for free, although I believe that some nominal purchase price was agreed upon. We formed a new company, Burgess Hill School Ltd., and most members of staff had a £10 share in it. All of us roused around our friends and relatives to get people to buy £10 shares, and I remember that I even got a contribution from an old anarchist comrade in Glasgow, Frank Leach, for was this not a practical example of anarcho-syndicalism and workers' control? The great majority of the staff were certainly not anarchists, and the whole thing was run in the very bourgeois setting of Hampstead. Yet certain anarchist principles applied.

We did not revert to the system of having the school run by a small committee of 'full members'. We retained the post of headmaster, although he was content to have the school run on very democratic principles by staff meetings at which everyone had an equal vote. We did not reappoint Hugh Child; instead we appointed one of our colleagues, Geoffrey Thorp, to be headmaster. He was a man in his



fifties who had been a teacher all his life and had been headmaster of two schools, the City School of Norwich and a war-time international school in Portugal. He came from a very conventional background and *looked* very conventional. He tended to wear tweeds and cavalry twill, and somehow gave the appearance of an army man. He had been to a public school and Oxford and had a number of upper-class affectations of speech such as pronouncing 'laundry' as 'larndry'. Somehow his experience as head of the Norwich school had turned him against conventional education. I think it was something to do with his emotional rejection of the practice of caning boys, but there were other troubles involved with his quarrels with the governors of that school, the nature of which I never knew. His rejection of conventional education led him, after the war, to take a post at Summerhill, but he was never very happy there, and I think that his criticisms of that school were justified. He was, in fact, a very nice and humane man of a highly sensitive and rather nervous disposition. He became very fond of Betty in quite a platonic way, and together they took a great deal of responsibility in the running of the school within the framework of the general democratic control by the staff. Geoffrey Thorp was certainly a much more efficient headmaster than Hugh Child, although he didn't have anything like Child's impressive public manner.

The new company that bought the school had a very democratic constitution. Directors were elected on a yearly basis by the meeting of shareholders, and in addition the staff as a corporate body appointed two of their number to be directors. I believe that there was provision also for parents as a body to be represented on the directorate, for I can remember meetings at which there was one parent-director who was not a shareholder. Things ran pretty smoothly in the school for some years. I had given up the job of handyman to Eric Ansell when I took on the teaching of biology in addition to woodwork, before the appointment of Hugh Child. My previous studies as a medical student were held to give me sufficient basic qualifications to teach elementary biology, and originally I did this as an assistant to Marjorie Mitchell who was a well-qualified biology teacher. I was never very happy about my capacity to teach biology to the older pupils, and eventually I gave it up to a new appointee. Marjorie left the school to take a job in a teachers' training college. At one time I considered becoming a properly qualified and certificated teacher of woodwork, and took the appropriate course of evening classes, run by the City & Guilds, but to qualify I would have had to have left Burgess Hill and worked for a time in a local authority school, and this I was not prepared to do.

My memories of the school between 1948 and 1953, when things were running quite smoothly, are not so vivid. One does not remember



well periods when one is absorbed, busy and happy, and these years were, I suppose, the best years in the school for me and my family. The earlier years at Burgess Hill were more hectic years of storm and stress, and were much more memorable. However, the economic climate of the late 1940s made it increasingly difficult to run a private school. More and more pupils were withdrawn and sent to the rival Hampstead school, King Alfred's, which was well established and much better endowed than Burgess Hill. Children got a much better formal education at King Alfred's, but the fees were a good deal higher and the atmosphere rather more stuffy in a social sense, so many parents and children continued to have a special affection for and loyalty to Burgess Hill. King Alfred's did not take boarders, and this was a side of Burgess Hill that we developed after the staff syndicate had taken over, but the number of boarders was always very limited. The policy of taking boarders was mainly financial, but it was favoured by those of the staff who had their own children in the school, and the presence of this small community of boarders gave the school a pleasantly 'family' atmosphere, at least for those of us who liked to have children around out of school hours, which was not the case for all of the staff.

By the beginning of the 1950s the economic position was such that we had to retrench. We reduced the staff a little; we asked Eric Ansell the handyman to go, and I took over some of his duties. All available spare rooms were let to lodgers to increase the school's income, and to balance the fact that the running repairs for the buildings were a heavy item of expense.

### **The camps**

One of the interesting contributions that I made to the school was running the camps. In the summer term of 1946 Tony Weaver and Marjorie took the children of the senior school camping for a week in Devon. This was apparently a great success and the children talked about it a great deal. Tony Weaver had long been associated with camping activities for children, although not with the Boy Scout movement which was held to be right-wing politically. His main association was with the left-wing Woodcraft Folk, which was connected with the Co-operative movement. For all of my childhood I had enjoyed camping holidays with my family, and this seemed a good opportunity to start organising camps. I therefore proposed that I should take the junior school camping during this, my first summer term, and the proposal was welcomed.

I remember that the first junior school camp was while Betty was



nearing her time to have a baby, so I took Peter, who was then only in the kindergarten, away with me. That camp was not a great success, for I had a lot to learn about the management of children at camp, but on subsequent years I learned by experience. After the big row of 1946, Tony Weaver left the school and I took over the running of the camps. I continued this activity after I left the school right up to 1957, the last four camps being run entirely on my own responsibility. I did this partly because the camps made an excellent family holiday.

The camps were interesting in that they provided an opportunity to test the limits of the idea of progressive education. How far was it possible for a community of thirty or more children to enjoy a camping holiday with the minimum of rules and restrictions? In practice, we found that it was feasible to allow children a greater degree of freedom than most people thought possible without anyone coming to harm. We were aided by two things: a run of good luck, and the general background of the children who came to the camps. In the last years of my camps the quality of the children deteriorated because fewer and fewer children from Burgess Hill and similar schools attended them, and I had to make up numbers by advertising in the *Observer* and the *New Statesman*.

I don't know a great deal about Tony Weaver's camps. I gathered that the custom was for the children to be divided into 'clans' which were semi-autonomous groups having their individual camp-fire and doing their own group catering. I tried it at the first camp I ran for the seniors, and it didn't seem to work very well, and on the second year, having started the camp on this system, I intervened and abolished it by adult authority. I was *in loco parentis* to these children and, when I found them living in dirty conditions and eating off unwashed plates, I judged that the time had come to institute more sanitary conditions by decree. Henceforward catering and washing up were done centrally under adult supervision and so the children got properly cooked food prepared under hygienic conditions and eaten off clean plates. The necessary camp chores, such as emptying latrine buckets, were done by shifts of orderlies who were simply conscripted. This entirely authoritarian procedure was accepted by the children fairly cheerfully. Most of them were not dedicated to any folksy ideal of camping, but simply wanted to come to a camp to enjoy themselves, and accepted that the proper role of adults was to organise things. By accepting that they must occasionally be conscripted for orderly duty, they obtained a great deal of freedom during the time they were not so occupied. Had we been camping for months at a time, no doubt a different system would have evolved, but as the camps were of limited duration, this system worked pretty well.



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I tried to ensure the presence of a reasonably large number of staff at the camps, and as in the latter years the camps took place in the school holidays, not only were there staff from the school but friends I recruited mainly from contacts in the anarchist movement who came for the fun of it and to enjoy an unusual holiday. A number of funny and sometimes ridiculous incidents often enlivened the camps. One year, being a little short of staff, I advertised in the *Observer* for someone to assist at a 'camp holiday'. A young man applied apparently thinking, as I afterwards realised, that the word 'camp' was being used in its slang sense. I accepted him, but had to throw him out after a short time because he would do little work other than devote himself to the pursuit of a pretty French boy. Apparently the boy was quite willing to accept his advances, for a little while after the camp I received a furious letter from his mother in Paris. The young man had contacted the boy in London and literally took him off the boat train to spend a week with him at his flat.

Because both children and staff often came from rather bohemian and unconventional backgrounds, most of them did not find the conduct of the camps particularly odd. A few children who were friends of friends and not Burgess Hill pupils were often quite amazed at first by the absence of restrictions, but when they found that nobody appeared to notice if they smoked in public or slept in mixed-sex tents, or gave up washing, such gestures lost their appeal. The management of children without recourse to institutionalised sanctions is really much simpler than most people think, provided there is a supportive body of public opinion. I was often asked whether in such conditions of lack of close supervision the teenagers had sex together, but as a matter of fact I do not think that they did, and for quite a curious reason. In the 1940s and 1950s teenage sex was not so *fashionable* as it is today. If boys and girls slept in the same tent together, as they sometimes did, I am pretty sure that nothing much happened. In the conditions of these camps the grapevine was a pretty reliable source of information, and what was going on was generally a matter of public knowledge. I can think of one exception. The boy was a rather difficult character, very mature physically but childish in his emotional reactions, and given to a preoccupation with guns, swords and violence. If ever there was a little hooliganism going on at school he was generally behind it. The girl was a mature sixteen, and obviously no virgin. She liked the look of this tough boy and set about seducing him. When it was drawn to my attention that they were sharing a bed in a single tent, and I was asked by another member of the staff what I proposed to do about it, I decided to do nothing. The danger was that the girl would get herself pregnant, but she appeared to be such a competent and relaxed young



woman that I was pretty sure that it was not her first affair and that she was well able to take care of herself. Had I objected to their sharing a tent, they would undoubtedly have made love in the surrounding woods.

Actually, this sexual affair had a remarkably beneficial effect on the boy. From being a rather tough and truculent boy, he became much gentler and better-mannered under the girl's influence. He knew that the staff realised that he was having an affair, but as no one seemed to disapprove, he became much more affable and confiding. His own father would no doubt have been outraged if he had known what was going on, but here were adults whom he felt to be sympathetic and able to be trusted.

Occasionally I got letters from parents after the camps complaining that their children had boasted that they had been allowed to smoke openly, to get cider from the pub, or sleep in mixed-sex tents. My replies were to the effect that my son, then a teenager, and many of his immediate friends did not smoke although they were free to do so, and as for the other things we knew that we could not really prevent them from taking place — they could make love in the woods if they chose to — so was it not better that most of their activities were fairly public knowledge? Our luck held, and we never had any great trouble.

That the camps were a success was due in no small measure to the sort of people who came to them as staff. Betty was a reliable mother-figure and developed excellent techniques of cooking over a large open fire. People such as Donald Rooum, Doranne Brown, Geoffrey and Eva Ostergaard, Judy Janson-Smith, and Jane Brereton came to the camps year after year and saw the regular attenders grow up. True, we had occasional misfits on the staff, such as the young man who came attracted by the slang meaning of 'camp', and another young man who left in horror after staying just one night.

The last camp I ran was in 1957, and its partial failure demonstrated that, to have a community of children and adults where reasonably good order and harmony prevail without a lot of rules and supervision, there has to be a sufficiently strong body of public opinion among the children that makes much imposed order unnecessary. At this last camp there were few current and past Burgess Hill pupils, nor were there many children who had attended year after year. The camp ran according to our traditional system, but it was not such fun for children and staff, and it seemed pointless to run any more.

I have mentioned that Burgess Hill did not have to face the social problems that arise in boarding schools that use progressive methods. To some extent the camps introduced me to those problems in an intensified form, although one can hardly compare the children's



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experience of two or three weeks on holiday with the term-long experience at a boarding-school.

### Exit the Gibsons

An event that was to presage a very big change in the school, and its eventual closure, was that Geoffrey Thorp became involved in an affair and got the girl pregnant. The future prospect of supporting a mother and child, a responsibility he was prepared to shoulder, meant that he must leave and get a job at a much higher salary. The school advertised for a new headmaster, and the only possible candidate who applied was Jimmy East, one of the assistant staff at Summerhill. Very soon Betty decided that she did not wish to work with Jimmy East and she gave notice. The directors, who respected her greatly, tried to persuade her to stay, but I remember her telling them that it was not just Jimmy, but that the school had gone sour on her and she wished to leave anyway. I had left the year before, because I had unexpectedly inherited some money that made it possible for me to study at university to get myself a professional qualification. We left the school in 1954, our son staying on as a day-boy for a little while, until he left to get himself an education at Kingsway Day College. He was very sad to leave this setting of his childhood at the age of fifteen, as indeed we all were. The years at Burgess Hill had been years of hard work, much colourful comedy, and of high drama. I have set the bare bones of it down on paper; the fabric of these hectic years would be difficult to convey.

*(My son, Peter Gibson, has written a well-researched and well-illustrated history of Burgess Hill School from the point of view of a pupil who has kept in touch with many former pupils and staff, which should soon be published.)*

### Note

Relevant material about Burgess Hill has previously appeared in Tony Gibson's Freedom Pamphlet *Freedom for Youth* (1948) and in various articles in *Anarchy* 103 and 105 (September and November 1969) and in *New Era* (January 1972).



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## Murray Bookchin

### Social Ecology versus 'Deep Ecology' A Challenge for the Ecology Movement

The environmental movement has travelled a long way beyond those annual 'Earth Day' festivals when millions of school kids were ritualistically mobilised to clean up streets and their parents were scolded by Arthur Godfrey, Barry Commoner, Paul Ehrlich, and a bouquet of manipulative legislators for littering the landscape with cans, newspapers and bottles. The movement has gone beyond a naive belief that patchwork reforms and solemn vows by EPA bureaucrats to act more resolutely will seriously arrest the insane pace at which we are tearing down the planet.

This shopworn 'Earth Day' approach toward 'engineering' nature so that we can ravage the Earth with minimal effects on ourselves — an approach that I called 'environmentalism' in the late 1960s, in contrast to social ecology — has shown signs of giving way to a more searching and radical mentality. Today, the new word in vogue is 'ecology' — be it 'deep ecology', 'human ecology', 'biocentric ecology', 'anti-humanist ecology', or, to use a term that is uniquely rich in meaning, 'social ecology'.

Happily, the new relevance of the word 'ecology' reveals a growing dissatisfaction among thinking people with attempts to use our vast ecological problems for cheaply spectacular and politically manipulative ends. As our forests disappear due to mindless cutting and increasing acid rain, as the ozone layer thins out because of the widespread use of fluorocarbons, as toxic dumps multiply all over the planet, as highly dangerous, often radioactive pollutants enter into our air, water, and food chains — all, and innumerable hazards that threaten the integrity of life itself, raise far more basic issues than any that can be resolved by 'Earth Day' clean-ups and faint-hearted changes in existing environmental laws.

For good reason, more and more people are trying to go beyond the vapid environmentalism of the early 1970s and develop a more fundamental — indeed, a more radical — approach to the ecological crises that beleaguer us. They are looking for an *ecological* approach: one that is rooted in an ecological philosophy, ethics, sensibility, image of nature, and, ultimately, an ecological movement that will transform our domineering market society into a non-hierarchical co-operative



society — a society that will live in harmony with nature because its members live in harmony with each other. They are beginning to sense that there is a tie-in between the way people deal with each other, the way they behave as social beings — men with women, old with young, rich with poor, white with people of colour, First World with Third, elites with 'masses' — and the way they deal with nature.

The question that now faces us is: What do we really mean by an *ecological* approach? What is a *coherent* ecological philosophy, ethics, and movement? How can the answers to these questions and many others *fit together* so that they form a meaningful and creative whole?

Just as the earlier environmental movement was filled with well-meaning people, riddled by 'spokesmen' like Arthur Godfrey and his kind who sold detergents over television while driving 'environmentally' sound electric cars, so today the newly emerging ecological movement is filled with well-meaning people who are riddled by a new brand of 'spokesmen', individuals who are selling their own wares — usually academic and personal careers. If we are not to repeat all the mistakes of the early 1970s with their hoopla about 'population control', their latent anti-feminism, their elitism, their arrogance, and their ugly authoritarian tendencies, so we must honestly and seriously appraise the new tendencies that today go under the name of one or another form of 'ecology'.

### Two conflicting tendencies

Let us agree from the outset that the word 'ecology' is no magic term that unlocks the real secret of our abuse of nature. It is a word that can be as easily abused, distorted, and tainted as words like 'democracy' and 'freedom'. Nor does the word 'ecology' put us all — whoever 'we' may be — in the same boat against environmentalists who are simply trying to make a rotten society work by dressing it in green leaves and colourful flowers, while ignoring the deep-seated *roots* of our ecological problems.

It is time to honestly face the fact that there are differences within the so-called 'ecology movement' of the present time that are as serious as those between the 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism' of the early 1970s. There are barely disguised racists, survivalists, macho Daniel Boones, and outright social reactionaries who use the word 'ecology' to express their views, just as there are deeply concerned naturalists, communitarians, social radicals, and feminists who use the word 'ecology' to express their own views.

The differences between these two tendencies in the so-called 'ecology movement' consist not only over quarrels with regard to



theory, sensibility, and ethics. They have far-reaching *practical* and *political* consequences. They consist not only over the way we view nature, or that vague word 'Humanity', or even what we mean by the word 'ecology': they also concern how we propose to *change* society and by what *means*.

The greatest differences that are emerging within the so-called 'ecology movement' of our day are between a vague, formless, often self-contradictory and invertebrate thing called 'deep ecology' and a long-developing, coherent, and socially orientated body of ideas that can best be called 'social ecology'. 'Deep ecology' has parachuted into our midst quite recently from the Sunbelt's bizarre mix of Hollywood and Disneyland, spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and, in some cases, eco-Fascism, while 'social ecology' draws its inspiration from such outstanding radical decentralist thinkers as Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, and Paul Goodman among many others who have advanced a serious challenge to the present society with its vast hierarchical, sexist, class-ruled, statist apparatus and militaristic history.

Let us face these differences bluntly. 'Deep ecology', despite all its social rhetoric, has virtually no real sense that our ecological problems have their ultimate roots in society and in social problems. It preaches a gospel of a kind of 'original sin' that accurses a vague species called 'Humanity' — as though people of colour are equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, the poor with the rich, the exploited with their exploiters.

This vague, undifferentiated 'Humanity' is essentially seen as an ugly 'anthropocentric' thing — presumably, a malignant product of natural evolution — that is 'overpopulating' the planet, 'devouring' its resources, destroying its wildlife and the biosphere — this, as though some vague domain called 'Nature' stands opposed to a constellation of non-natural things called 'Human Beings' with their 'Technology', 'Minds', 'Society', etc. 'Deep ecology', formulated largely by privileged male white academics, has managed to bring sincere naturalists like Paul Shepard into the same company with patently anti-humanist and macho mountain-men like David Foreman of 'Earth First!' who preach a gospel that 'Humanity' is some kind of cancer in the world of life.

It is easy to forget that it was out of this kind of crude eco-brutalism that a Hitler, in the name of 'population control', with a racial orientation, fashioned theories of blood and soil that led to the transport of millions of people to murder-camps like Auschwitz. The same eco-brutalism now reappears a half-century later among self-professed 'deep ecologists' who believe that Third World peoples should be permitted to starve to death and desperate Indian immigrants from



Latin America should be excluded by the border cops from the United States lest they burden 'our' ecological resources.

This eco-brutalism does not come out of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It appears in *Simply Living*, an Australian periodical, as part of a laudatory interview of David Foreman by Professor Bill Devall, who co-authored *Deep Ecology* with Professor George Sessions, the authorised manifesto of the 'deep ecology' movement. Foreman, who exuberantly expressed his commitment to 'deep ecology', was to frankly inform Devall that:

When I tell people how the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid — the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve — they think this is monstrous. . . . Likewise, letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing. It's just putting more pressure on the resources we have in the USA.

One can reasonably ask such compelling questions as: What does it mean for 'nature to seek its own balance' in a part of the world where agribusiness, colonialism, and exploitation have ravaged a once culturally and ecologically stable area like East Africa? Or, who is this all-American 'our' that owns the 'resources we have in the USA'? Are they the ordinary people who are driven by sheer need to cut timber, mine ores, operate nuclear power plants? Or are they the giant corporations that are wrecking not only the good old USA but have produced the main problems these days in Latin America that send largely Indian folk across the Rio Grande? As an ex-Washington lobbyist and political huckster, David Foreman need not be expected to answer these subtle questions in a radical way. But what is truly surprising is the reaction — more precisely, the *lack* of any reaction — which marked Professor Devall's behaviour. Indeed, the interview was notable for the laudatory, almost reverential, introduction and description Devall prepared in his description of Foreman.

### What is 'deep ecology'?

'Deep ecology' is so much of a 'black hole' of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas that one can easily express utterly vicious notions like Foreman's and still sound like a fiery radical who challenges everything that is anti-ecological in the present realm of ideas.

The very words, 'deep ecology', in fact, clue us into the fact that we are not dealing with a body of clear ideas but with a bottomless pit in which vague notions and moods of all kinds can be sucked into the depths of an ideological toxic dump.

Does it make sense, for example, to counterpose 'deep ecology' with 'superficial ecology' as though the word 'ecology' were applicable to *everything* that involves environmental issues? Given this mindless use



of 'ecology' to describe anything of a biospheric nature, does it not completely degrade the rich meaning of the word 'ecology' to append words like 'shallow' and 'deep' to it — adjectives that may be more applicable to gauging the depth of a cesspool rather than the 'depth' of ideas? Arne Naess, the pontiff of 'deep ecology', who inflicted this vocabulary upon us, together with George Sessions and Bill Devall who have been marketing it out of Ecotopia, have taken a pregnant word — 'ecology' — and deprived it of any inner meaning and integrity by designating the most pedestrian environmentalists as 'ecologists', albeit 'shallow' ones, in contrast to their notion of 'deep'.

This is not an example of mere word-play. It tells us something about the 'mind-set' that exists among these 'deep' thinkers. To parody the word 'shallow' and 'deep ecology' is to show not only the absurdity of this vocabulary but to reveal the superficiality of its inventors. Is there perhaps a 'deeper ecology' than 'deep ecology'? What is the 'deepest ecology' of all that gives 'ecology' its full due as a philosophy, sensibility, ethics, and movement for social change?

This kind of absurdity tells us more than we realise about the confusion which Naess-Sessions-Devall, not to speak of eco-brutalists like Foreman, have introduced into the current ecology movement as it began to grow beyond the earlier environmental movement of the 1970s. Indeed, the Naess-Sessions-Devall trio rely very heavily upon the ease with which people forget the history of the ecology movement, the way in which the same wheel is reinvented every few years by newly arrived individuals who, well-meaning as they may be, often accept a crude version of highly developed ideas that appeared earlier in time. At best, these crudities merely echo in very unfinished form a corpus of views which were once presented in a richer context and tradition of ideas. At worst, they shatter such contexts and traditions, picking out tasty pieces that become utterly distorted when they re-appear in an utterly alien framework. No regard is paid by such 'deep thinkers' to the fact that *the new context in which an idea is placed may utterly change the meaning of the idea itself*. German 'National Socialism', which came to power in the Third Reich in 1933, was militantly 'anti-capitalist' and won many of its adherents from the German Social-Democratic and Communist parties because of its anti-capitalist denunciations. But its 'anti-capitalism' was placed in a strongly racist, imperialist, and seemingly 'naturalist' context which extolled wilderness, sociobiology (the word had yet to be invented but its 'morality of the gene', to use E.O. Wilson's delicious expression, and its emphasis on 'racial memory' to use William Irwin Thompson's Jungian expression), and anti-rationalism — features one finds in latent or explicit form in Sessions' and Devall's *Deep Ecology*. (Unless otherwise indicated, all



future references and quotes come from this book, which essentially has become the bible of the 'movement' that bears its name.)

Note well that neither Naess, Sessions, nor Devall have written a single line about decentralisation, a non-hierarchical society, democracy, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, and tolerance that was not worked out in painstaking detail and brilliantly contextualised into a unified and coherent outlook by Peter Kropotkin a century ago and his admirers from the 1930s to the 1960s in our own time. Great movements in Europe and an immense literature followed from these writers' works — anarchist movements, I may add, like the Iberian Anarchist Federation in Spain — a tradition that is being unscrupulously 'red-baited' by certain self-styled 'Greens' as 'leftist', 'eco-anarchist', and, in the case of George Sessions, who was asked at a recent eco-feminist conference about the differences between 'deep ecology' and social ecology, as one between spiritualism and 'Marxism' — this, a particularly odious and conscious falsehood!

But what the boys from Ecotopia proceed to do is to totally recontextualise the framework of these ideas, bringing in personalities and notions that basically change their radical libertarian thrust. *Deep Ecology* mingles Woody Guthrie, a Communist Party centralist who no more believed in decentralisation than Stalin (whom he greatly admired until his physical deterioration and death), with Paul Goodman, an anarchist who would have been mortified to be placed in the same tradition with Guthrie. In philosophy, Spinoza, a Jew in spirit if not in religious commitment, is intermingled with Heidegger, a former member of the Nazi party in spirit as well as ideological affiliation — all in the name of a vague word called 'process philosophy'. Almost opportunistic in their use of catch-words and what Orwell called 'New-speak', 'process philosophy' makes it possible for Sessions-Devall to add Alfred North Whitehead to their list of ideological ancestors because he called his ideas 'processual', although he would have differed profoundly from a Heidegger who earned his academic spurs in the Third Reich by repudiating his Jewish teacher, notably Edmund Husserl, in an ugly and shameful way.

One could go on indefinitely with this sloppy admixture of 'ancestors', philosophical traditions, social pedigrees, and religions that often have nothing in common with each other and, properly conceived, are commonly in sharp opposition with each other. Thus a repellent reactionary like Thomas Malthus and the neo-Malthusian tradition he spawned are celebrated with the same enthusiasm in *Deep Ecology* as Henry David Thoreau, a radical libertarian who fostered a highly humanistic tradition. 'Eclecticism' would be too mild a word for this kind of hodge-podge, one that seems shrewdly calculated to



embrace everyone under the rubric of 'deep ecology' who is prepared to reduce ecology to a religion rather than a systematic and deeply critical body of ideas. However, behind all of this is a pattern. The kind of 'ecological' thinking which enters into the book seems to surface in an appendix called 'Ecosophy T' by Arne Naess, who regales us with flow diagrams and corporate-type tables of organisation that have more in common with logical positivist forms of exposition (Naess, in fact, was an acolyte of this repellent school of thought for years) than anything that could be truly called organic philosophy.

If we look beyond the spiritual 'Eco-la-la' (to use a word coined by a remarkable eco-feminist, Chiah Heller), and examine the *context* in which demands like decentralisation, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, and tolerance are placed, the blurred images that Sessions and Devall create come into clearer focus. Decentralism, small-scale communities, local autonomy, even mutual aid and communalism are not intrinsically ecological or emancipatory. Few societies were more decentralised than European feudalism, which, in fact, was structured around small-scale communities, mutual aid, and the communal use of land. Local autonomy was highly prized and autarky formed the economic key to feudal communities. Yet few societies were more hierarchical. Looming over medieval serfs, who were tied to the land by an 'ecological' network of rights and duties that placed them on a status only slightly above that of slaves, were status groups that extended from villeins to barons, counts, dukes, and rather feeble monarchies. The manorial economy of the Middle Ages placed a high premium on autarky or 'self-sufficiency' and spirituality. Yet oppression was often intolerable and the great mass of people who belonged to that society lived in utter subjugation of their 'betters' and the nobility.

If 'nature-worship' with its bouquet of woodsprites, animistic fetishes, fertility rites and other such ceremonies, magicians, shamans and shamanesses, animal deities, gods and goddesses that presumably reflect nature and its forces — all, taken together, pave the way to an ecological sensibility and society, then it would be hard to understand how ancient Egypt managed to become and remain one of the most hierarchical and oppressive societies in the ancient world. The pantheon of ancient Egyptian deities is filled with animal and part-animal part-human deities with all-presiding goddess as well as gods. Indeed, the Nile River, which provided the 'life-giving' waters of the valley, was used in a highly ecological manner. Yet the entire society was structured around the oppression of millions of serfs and opulent nobles — indeed, a caste system so fixed, exploitative, and deadening to the human spirit that one wonders how notions of



spirituality can be given priority to the need for a critical evaluation of society and the need to restructure it.

That there were material beneficiaries of this spiritual 'Eco-la-la' becomes clear enough in accounts of the priestly corporations which 'communally' owned the largest tracts of land in Egyptian society. With a highly domesticated, 'spiritually' passive, yielding, and willess population — schooled for centuries in 'flowing with the Nile', to coin a phrase — the Egyptian ruling strata indulged themselves in an orgy of exploitation and power for centuries.

Even if one grants the need for a new sensibility and outlook — a point that has been made repeatedly in the literature of social ecology — one can look behind even this limited context of 'deep ecology' to a still broader context: the love affair of 'deep ecology' with Malthusian doctrines, a spirituality that emphasises self-effacement, a flirtation with a supernaturalism which stands in flat contradiction to the refreshing naturalism that ecology has introduced into social theory, eruptions of a crude positivism in the spirit of Naess that work against a truly organic dialectic so needed to understand *development*, not merely bumper-sticker slogans, and a regular tendency to become unfocused, replacing ideas by moods — when a Devall, for example, encounters a macho mountain-man like Foreman. We shall see that all the bumper-sticker demands like decentralisation, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, tolerance, and even an avowed opposition to hierarchy go awry when we place them in the larger context of a Malthusian anti-humanism and orgies about 'biocentrism' that mark the authentic ideological infrastructure of 'deep ecology'.

### The art of evading society

The seeming ideological 'tolerance' which 'deep ecology' celebrates has a sinister function of its own. It not only reduces richly nuanced ideas and conflicting traditions to their lowest common denominator; it legitimates extremely regressive, primitivistic, and even highly reactionary notions that gain respectability because they are buried in the company of authentically radical contexts and traditions. Consider, for example, the 'broader definition of community (including animals, plants); intuition of organic wholeness' with which Devall and Sessions regale their menu of 'Dominant and Minority' positions in their book. Nothing could seem more wholesome, more innocent of guile, than this 'we-are-all-one' bumper-sticker slogan. What the reader may not notice is that this all-encompassing definition of 'community' erases all the rich and meaningful distinctions that exist between animal and plant



communities, and above all between non-human and human communities. If community is to be broadly defined as a universal 'whole', then a unique function which natural evolution has conferred on human society dissolves into a cosmic night which lacks differentiation, variety, and a wide array of functions. The fact is that human communities are *consciously* formed communities — that is to say, *societies* with an enormous variety of institutions, cultures that can be handed down from generation to generation, lifeways that can be radically changed for the better or the worse, technologies that be redesigned, innovated, or abandoned, and social, gender, ethnic, and hierarchical distinctions that can be vastly altered according to changes in consciousness and historical development. Unlike most so-called 'animal societies' or, for that matter, communities, human societies are not instinctively formed or genetically programmed. Their destinies may be decided by factors — generally, economic and cultural — that are beyond human control at times, to be sure, but what is particularly unique about human societies is that they can be radically changed by their members — and in ways that can be made to benefit the natural world as well as the human species.

Human society, in fact, constitutes a 'second nature', a *cultural* artifact, out of 'first nature', or primeval, non-human nature. There is nothing wrong, 'unnatural', or ecologically 'alien' about this fact. Human society, like animal and plant communities, is in large part a *product* of natural evolution — no less so than beehives or anthills. It is a product, moreover, of the *human* species, a species that is no less product of nature than whales, dolphins, California condors, or the prokaryotic cell. 'Second nature' is also a product of *mind* — of a brain that can think in a richly conceptual manner and produce a highly symbolic form of communication. Taken together, 'second nature', the human species which forms it, and the richly conceptual form of thinking and communication so distinctive to it, emerges out of natural evolution no less than any other life form and non-human community — and this 'second nature' is uniquely different from first nature in that it can act thinkingly, purposefully, wilfully, and, depending upon the society we examine, creatively in the best ecological sense or destructively in the worst ecological sense. Finally, this 'second nature' we call society has its own *history*: its long process of grading out of 'first nature', its long process of organising or institutionalising human relationships, its long process of human interactions, conflicts, distinctions, richly nuanced cultural formations, and its long process of actualising its large number of potentialities — some eminently creative, others eminently destructive.

Finally, a cardinal feature of this product of natural evolution we call



'society' is its capacity to intervene in 'first nature' — to alter it, again in ways that may be eminently creative or destructive. But the capacity of human beings to deal with 'first nature' *actively, purposefully, wilfully, rationally*, and, hopefully, *ecologically* is no less a product of evolution than the capacity of large herbivores to keep forests from eating away at grasslands or of earthworms to aerate the soil. Human beings and their societies alter 'first nature' at best in a rational and ecological way — or at worst, in an irrational and anti-ecological way. But the fact that they are constituted to act upon nature, to intervene in natural processes, to alter them in one way or another is no less a product of natural evolution than the action of any life-form on its environment.

In failing to emphasise the uniqueness, characteristics, and function of human societies or placing them in natural evolution as part of the development of life, or giving full, indeed, unique due to human consciousness as a medium for the self-reflective role of human thought as nature rendered self-conscious, 'deep ecologists' essentially evade the *social* roots of the ecological crisis — this, in marked distinction to writers like Kropotkin who outspokenly challenged the gross inequities in society that underpin the disequilibrium between society and nature. 'Deep ecology' contains no history of the emergence of society out of nature, a crucial development that brings social theory into organic contact with ecological theory. It presents no explanation of — indeed, it reveals no interest in — the emergence of hierarchy out of society, of classes out of hierarchy, of the state out of classes — in short, the highly graded social as well as ideological development which gets to the roots of the ecological problem in the social domination of women by men and men by men, ultimately giving rise to the notion of dominating nature in the first place.

Instead, what 'deep ecology' gives us, apart from what it plagiarises from radically different ideological contexts, is a deluge of 'Eco-la-la'. 'Humanity' surfaces in a vague and unearthly form to embrace everyone in a realm of universal guilt. We are then massaged into sedation with Buddhist and Taoist homilies about self-abnegation, 'biocentricity', and pop spiritualism that verges on the supernatural — this for a subject-matter, ecology, whose very essence is a return to an earthy naturalism. We not only lose sight of the social and the differences that fragment 'humanity' into a host of human beings — men and women, ethnic groups, oppressors and oppressed; we lose sight of the individual self in an unending flow of 'Eco-la-la' that preaches the 'realisation of "self-in-Self" where the "Self" stands for organic wholeness'. That a cosmic 'Self' is created which is capitalised should not deceive us into the belief that it has any more reality than an equally cosmic 'Humanity'. More of the same cosmic 'Eco-la-la'



appears when we are informed that the 'phrase "one" includes not only men, an individual human, but all humans, grizzly bears, whole rain forest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil, and so on'.

A 'Self' so cosmic that it has to be capitalised is no real 'self' at all. It is an ideological category, as vague, faceless, and depersonalised as the very patriarchal image of 'Man' that dissolves our uniqueness and rationality into a deadening abstraction.

### On selfhood and viruses

Such flippant abstractions of human individuality are extremely dangerous. Historically, a 'Self' that absorbs all real existential selves has been used from time immemorial to absorb individual uniqueness and freedom into a supreme 'Individual' who heads the state, churches of various sorts, adoring congregations — be they Eastern or Western — and spellbound constituencies, however much such a 'Self' is dressed up in ecological, naturalistic, and 'biocentric' attributes. The Paleolithic shaman, regaled in reindeer skins and horns, is the predecessor of the Pharaoh, the institutionalised Buddha, and, in more recent times, a Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini.

That the egotistical, greedy, and soloist bourgeois 'self' has always been a repellent being goes without saying, and 'deep ecology' as personified by Devall and Sessions makes the most of it. This kind of 'critical' stance is easy to adopt; it can even find a place in *People's* magazine. But is there not a free, independently minded, ecologically concerned, indeed, idealistic self with a unique personality that can think of itself as different from 'whales, grizzly bears, whole rain forest ecosystems [no less!], mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil, and so on'? Is it not indispensable, in fact, for the individual self to disengage itself from a Pharaonic 'Self', discover its own capacities and uniqueness, indeed, acquire a sense of personality, of self-control and self-direction — all traits indispensable for the achievement of *freedom*? Here, I may add, Heidegger and, yes, Nazism, begin to grimace with satisfaction behind this veil of self-effacement and a passive personality so yielding that it can easily be shaped, distorted, and manipulated by a new 'ecological' state machinery with a supreme 'Self' embodied in a Leader, Guru, or Living God — all in the name of a 'biocentric equality' that is slowly reworked as it has been so often in history into a social hierarchy. From Shaman to Monarch, from Priest or Priestess to Dictator, our warped social development has been marked by 'nature worshippers' and their ritual Supreme Ones who produced unfinished individuals at best or deindividuated the 'self-in-Self' at worst, often in



the name of the 'Great Connected Whole' (to use *exactly* the language of the Chinese ruling classes who kept their peasantry in abject servitude as Leon E. Stover points out in his *The Cultural Ecology of Chinese Civilization*).

What makes this 'Eco-la-la' especially sinister, today, is that we are already living in a period of massive deindividuation — not because 'deep ecology' or Taoism is making any serious inroads in our own cultural ecology but because the mass media, the commodity culture, and a market society are 'reconnecting' us into an increasingly depersonalised 'whole' whose essence is passivity and a chronic vulnerability to economic and political manipulation. It is not an excess of 'selfhood' from which we are suffering but selfishness — the surrender of personality to the security afforded by corporations, centralised government, and the military. If 'selfhood' is identified with a grasping, 'anthropocentric', and devouring personality, these traits are not to be found not so much among the ordinary people, who basically sense they have no control over their destinies, but among the giant corporations and state leaders who are not only plundering the planet but also women, people of colour, and the underprivileged. It is not deindividuation that the oppressed of the world require, much less passive personalities that readily surrender themselves to the cosmic forces — the 'Self' — that buffet them around, but reindividuation that will render them active agents in remaking society and the arrest the growing totalitarianism that threatens to homogenise us all as part of a Western version of the 'Great Connected Whole'.

We are also confronted with the delicious 'and so on' that follows the 'tiniest microbes in the soil' with which our 'deep ecologists' identify the 'Self'. Here, we encounter another bit of intellectual manipulation that marks the Devall-Sessions anthology as a whole: the tendency to choose examples from God-Motherhood-and-Flag for one's own case and cast any other alternative visions in a demonic form. Why stop with the 'tiniest microbes in the soil' and ignore the leprosy microbe, the yearning and striving viruses that give us smallpox, polio, and, more recently, AIDS? Are they too not part of 'all organism and entities in the ecosphere . . . of the interrelated whole . . . equal in intrinsic worth', as Devall and Sessions remind us in their effluvium of 'Eco-la-la'? At which point, Naess, Devall, and Sessions immediately introduce a number of highly debatable qualifiers — i.e., 'We should live with a minimum rather than a maximum impact on other species'; or, 'We have no right to destroy other living being without sufficient reason'; or, finally, even more majestically, 'The slogan of "non-interference" does not imply that humans should not modify[!] some [!] ecosystems as do other [!] species. Humans have modified the



earth and will probably [!] continue to do so. At issue is the nature [!] and extent [!] of such interference[!].'

One does not leave the muck of 'deep ecology' without having mud all over one's feet. Exactly who is to decide the 'nature' of human 'interference' in 'first nature' and the 'extent' to which it can be done? What are 'some' of the ecosystems we can modify, and what are not subject to human 'interference'? Here, again, we encounter the key problem that 'Eco-la-la', including 'deep ecology', poses for serious, ecologically concerned people: the *social* species in the evolutionary scheme of things.

Implicit in 'deep ecology' is the notion that a 'Humanity' exists that accurses the natural world; that individual selfhood must be transformed into a cosmic 'Selfhood' that essentially transcends the person and his or her uniqueness. Even nature is not spared from a kind of static, prepositional logic that is cultivated by the logical positivists. 'Nature' in 'deep ecology' and David Foreman's interpretation of it becomes a kind of scenic view, a spectacle to admire around the campfire (perhaps with some Budweiser beer to keep the boys happy or a Marlboro cigarette to keep them manly) — not an *evolutionary* development that is cumulative and *includes* the human species, its conceptual powers of thought, its highly symbolic forms of communication and, grading into 'second nature', a social and cultural development that has its own history that has its own history and metabolism with pristine 'first nature'. To see nature as a cumulative unfolding from 'first' into 'second nature' is likely to be condemned as 'anthropocentric' — as though human self-consciousness at its best is not nature rendered self-conscious.

The problems which 'deep ecology' and 'biocentricity' raise have not gone unnoticed in the more thoughtful press in England. During a discussion of 'biocentric ethics' in *The New Scientist* 69 (1976), for example, Bernard Dixon observed that no 'logical line can be drawn' between the conservation of whales, gentians, and flamingoes on the one hand and the extinction of pathogenic microbes like the smallpox virus. At which point, God's gift to misanthropy, David Ehrenfeld, cutely observes that the smallpox virus is 'an endangered species' in his *Arrogance of Humanism*, a work that is so selective and tendentious in its use of quotations that should validly be renamed 'The Arrogance of Ignorance'. One wonders what to do about the AIDS virus if a vaccine or therapy should threaten its 'survival'? Further, given the passion for perpetuating the 'ecosystem' of every species, one wonders how smallpox and AIDS viruses should ever be preserved? In test tubes? Laboratory cultures? Or, to be truly 'ecological', in their 'native habitat', the human body? In which case, idealistic acolytes of 'deep



ecology' should be invited to offer their own bloodstreams in the interests of 'biocentric equality'. Certainly, 'if nature should be permitted to take its course', as Foreman advises us for Ethiopians and Indian peasants, plagues, famines, suffering, wars, and perhaps even lethal asteroids of the kind that exterminated the great reptiles of the Mesozoic should not be kept from defacing the purity of 'first nature' by the intervention of 'second nature'. With so much absurdity to unscramble, one can indeed get heady, almost dizzy, with a sense of polemical intoxication.

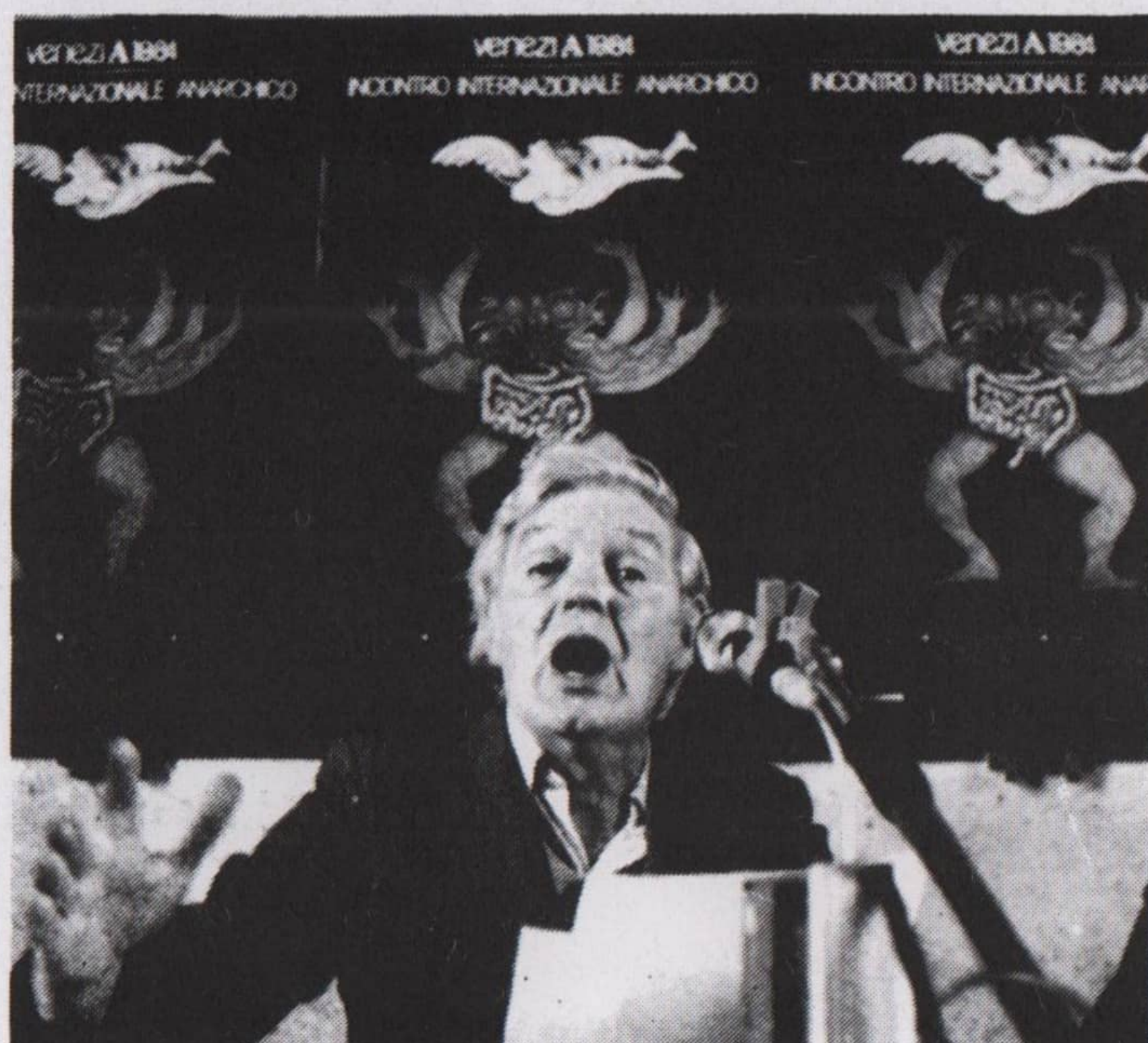
At root, the eclecticism which turns 'deep ecology' into a goulash of notions and moods is insufferably reformist and surprisingly environmentalist — all its condemnations of 'superficial ecology' aside. It has a Dunkin' Donut for everyone. Are you, perhaps, a mild-mannered liberal? Then do not fear: Devall and Sessions give a patronising nod to 'reform legislation', 'coalitions', 'protests', the 'women's movement' (this earns all of ten lines in their 'Minority Tradition and Direct Action' essay), 'working in the Christian tradition', 'questioning technology' (a hammering remark, if ever there was one), 'working in Green politics' (which faction, the 'Fundies' or the 'Realos'?) — in short, everything can be expected in so 'cosmic' a philosophy. Anything seems to pass through 'deep ecology's' Dunkin' Donut hole: anarchism at one extreme and eco-Fascism at the other. Like the fast-food emporiums that make up our culture, 'deep ecology' is the fast food of quasi-radical environmentalists.

Despite its pretence of 'radicality', 'deep ecology' is more 'New Age' and 'Aquarian' than the environmentalist movements it denounces under these names. 'If to study the self is to forget the self', to cite a Taoist passage with which Devall and Session regale us, than the 'all' by which we are presumably 'enlightened' is even more invertebrate than Teilhard de Chardin, whose Christian mysticism earns so much scorn from the authors of *Deep Ecology*. Indeed, the extent to which 'deep ecology' accommodates itself to some of the worst features of the 'dominant view' it professes to reject is seen with extraordinary clarity in one of its most fundamental and repeatedly asserted demands: namely, that the world's population must be drastically reduced, according to one of its acolytes, to 500 million. If 'deep ecologists' have even the faintest knowledge of the 'population theorists' whom Devall and Sessions invoke with admiration — notably, Thomas Malthus, William Vogt, and Paul Ehrlich — then they would be obliged to add: by measures that are virtually eco-Fascist. This spectre clearly looms before us in Devall's and Sessions' sinister remark: '. . . the longer we wait [in population control] the more drastic will be the measures needed.'





*Murray Bookchin (above) and Colin Ward (below), speaking at the International Anarchist Conference in Venice in September 1984 (from 'Ciao Anarchici')*







*Burgess Hill School — a class (above) and rehearsing  
'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (below)*







*Burgess Hill School — a summer camp (above) and Geoffrey Ostergaard making tea (below). Photographs by Tony Gibson and Peter Gibson.*

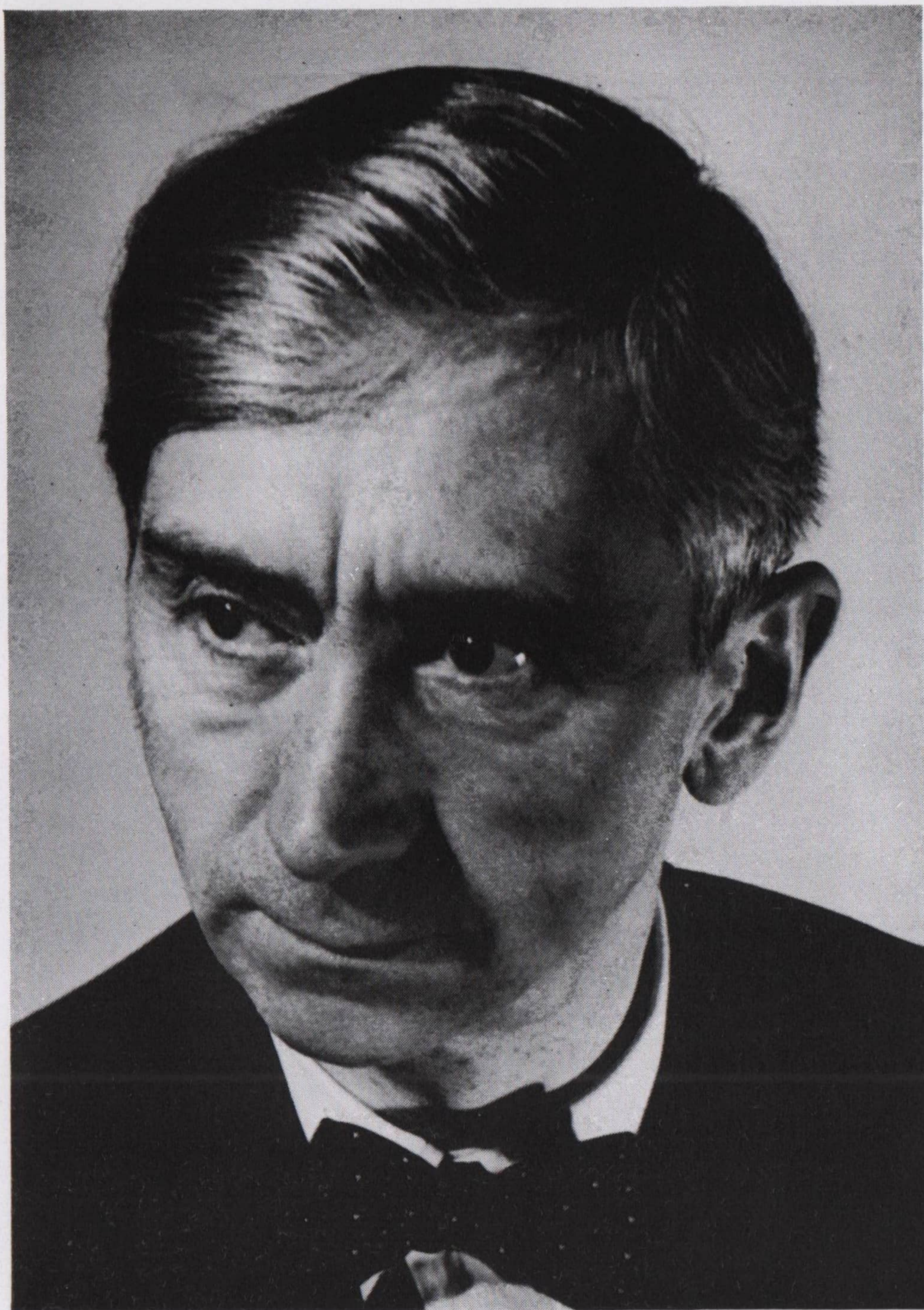




*Donald Rooum in pen and ink  
(above) and in flesh and  
blood (below)*

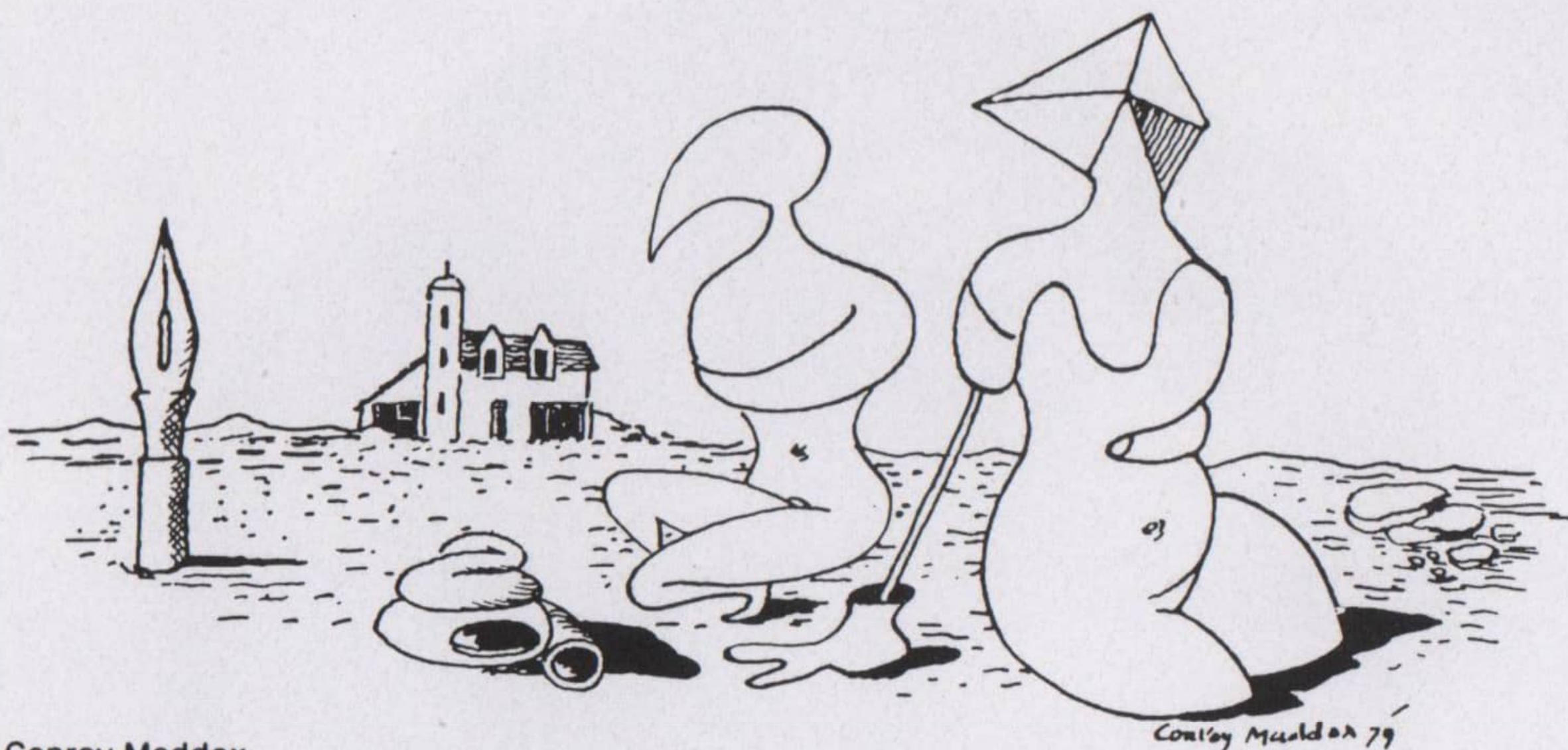




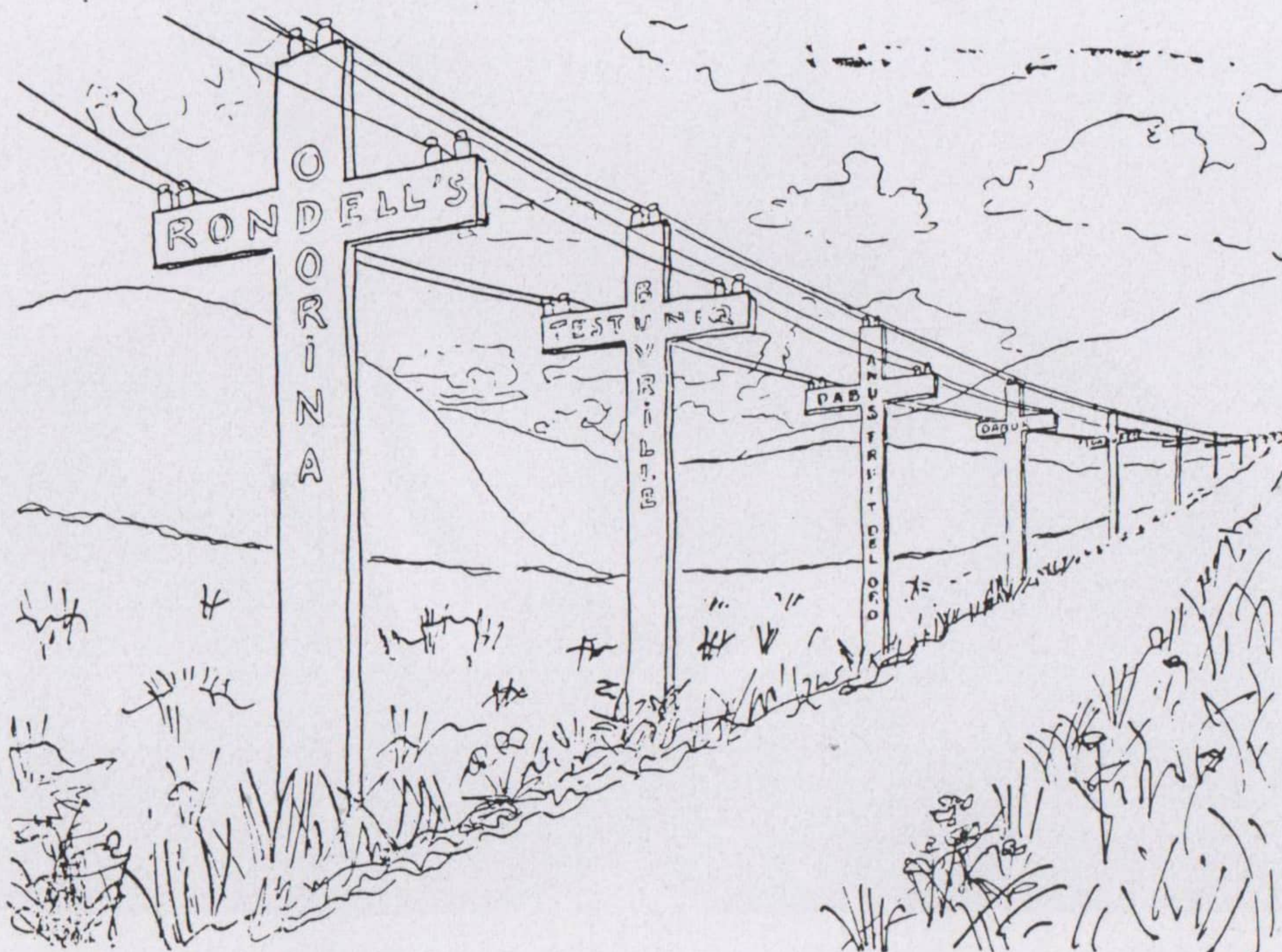


*Herbert Read (not yet Sir).  
Photograph by V. Richards*





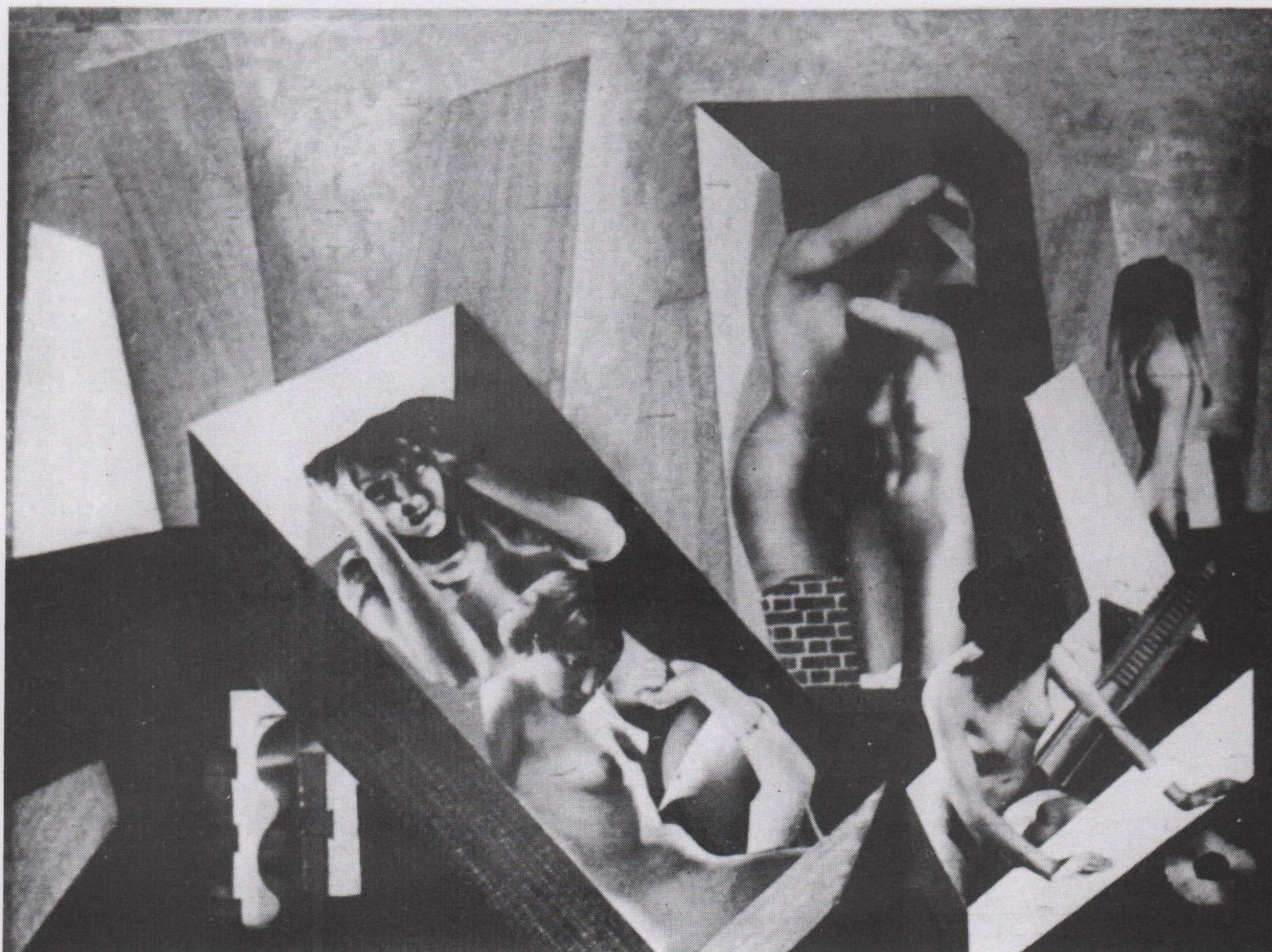
Conroy Maddox



"The Future of Christianity".

J. B. Brunius.





*'In the Warehouses of Convulsion' by Conroy Maddox (from 'Free Unions')*



1919

(1)

December 20<sup>th</sup>, Saturday. 10 P.M. ordered out of cell at Ellis Island, N.Y. to large bare room, upstairs. Wires & letters. Kidnapped 4<sup>20</sup> A.M. Dec. 21, - to Ferry. To U.S. Transport Buford. Started 6 A.M.

Dec. 22. Winters quiet.

" 23. Men getting sick. Women separately. Visit G.

" 25. Visit E. Men very sick.

" 26. A.B. in charge of things - representing the men, tending sick.

" 27. Uncertainty of diet.

" 29 Monday - Noon. Passed Azore Is.

" 31. Visit G. Talk & discussed Bolshes. with Berkshire & Colonel.  
Getting friendly with soldiers.

New Year's - Biscay Bay. Rolling. 2324 miles from N.Y. 876 to Dover.

Jan. 2. Visit E. Also Berkus. Rumor going to Liban or Riga.

" 3. Expect arrive Sun. am in Engl. Channel. Rumor Danzig.

" 4. No channel. No land. Busy with sick. Bad night. I work hard.

" 5. AM. No channel yet. Night w. Dr.

" 6. In channel at last. - Pilot Boat. Rejoicing. Sent many letters per Ma.

" 7. In North Sea - clear, quiet, cool. Eve. rolling. Bread been very bad.  
I put 2 of my own biscuits in. Buying many things from soldiers & waiters.

The opening page of Alexander Berkman's Russian Diary  
(International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam)



### The 'deep' Malthusians

The 'population issue' has a long and complex pedigree — one that occupies a central place in the crude biologism promoted by Devall and Sessions — and one that radically challenges 'deep ecologists' very way of thinking about social problems, not to speak of their way of resolving them.

The woefully brief 'history' Devall and Sessions give us of the population issue can only be considered embarrassing in its simple-mindedness were it not so reactionary in its thrust.

Thomas Malthus (1766-1854) is hailed as a prophet whose warning 'that human population growth would expotentially outstrip food production . . . was ignored by the rising tide of industry/technological optimism'. We shall see that this statement is pure hogwash and what Devall and Sessions call the 'rising tide of industrial/technological optimism' was in fact the nineteenth century radicals who opposed the vicious abuses inflicted by industrial capitalism on the oppressed of the world, often in the name of Malthusianism. Devall and Sessions thereupon extol William Catton Jr. for applying 'the ecological concept of carrying capacity' for an ecosystem (I used this expression years before Catton in my mid-1960s writings on social ecology, albeit for very different purposes than Catton's), and George Perkins Marsh for warning 'that modern man's impact on the environment could result in rising species extinction rates' (by no means a novel notion when the passenger pigeon and bison were facing extinction, as everyone knew at the time). Devall and Sessions finally land on all fours. 'The environmental crisis', we are solemnly told, 'was further articulated by ecologist William Vogt (*Road to Survival*, 1948), anticipating the work of radical [!] ecologist Paul Ehrlich in the 1960s.'

Devall and Sessions often write with smug assurance on issues they know virtually nothing about. This is most notably the case in the so-called 'population debate', a debate that has raged for over two hundred years and more — and one that involves explosive political and social issues that have pitted the most reactionary elements in English and American society (generally represented by Thomas Malthus, William Vogt and Paul Ehrlich) against authentic radicals who have called for basic changes in the structure of society. In fact, the 'Eco-la-la' which Devall and Sessions dump on us in only two paragraphs would require a full-sized volume of careful analysis to unravel.

First of all, Thomas Malthus was not a prophet; he was an apologist for the misery that the Industrial Revolution was inflicting on the



English peasantry and working classes. His utterly fallacious argument that population increases expotentially while food supplies increase arithmetically was not ignored by England's ruling classes; it was taken to heart and even incorporated into social Darwinism as an explanation for why oppression was a necessary feature of society and the rich, the white imperialists, and the privileged were the 'fittest' who were equipped to 'survive' — needless to say, at the expense of the impoverished many. Written and directed in great part as an attack upon the liberatory vision of William Godwin, Malthus's mean-spirited *Essay on the Principle of Population* tried to demonstrate that hunger, poverty, disease and premature death are *inevitable* precisely because population and food supply increase at different rates. Hence war, famines and plagues (Malthus later added 'moral restraint') were necessary to keep the population down — needless to say, among the 'lower orders of society', whom he singles out as the chief offenders of his inexorable population 'laws'. (Cf. Chapter 5 of his *Essay*, which, for all its 'concern' over the misery of the 'lower classes', inveighs against the Poor Laws and urges that the 'pressures of distress on this part of the community is an evil so deeply seated that no human ingenuity can reach it'.) Malthus, in effect, became the ideologue par excellence for the land-grabbing English nobility in its efforts to dispossess the peasantry of their traditional common lands and for the English capitalists to work children, women and men to death in the newly emerging 'industrial/technological' factory system.

Malthusianism contributed in great part to that meanness of spirit that Charles Dickens captured in his famous novels, *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*. The doctrine, its author, and its overstuffed wealthy beneficiaries were bitterly fought by the great English anarchist, William Godwin, the pioneering socialist, Robert Owen, and the emerging Chartist movement of the English workers in the early nineteenth century. When the 'rising tide of industrial/technological optimism' proved that Malthus was sucking his ideas out of his thumb and his mutton, indeed, when improved economic conditions revealed that population growth tends to diminish with improvements in the quality of life and the status of women, Malthusianism was naively picked up by Charles Darwin to explain his theory of 'natural selection'. It now became the bedrock theory for the new *social* Darwinism, so very much in vogue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that saw society as a 'jungle' in which only the 'fit' (usually the rich and white) could 'survive' at the expense of the 'unfit' (usually the poor and people of colour). Malthus, in effect, had provided an ideology that justified class domination, racism, the degradation of women, and, ultimately the empire-building of English



imperialism, later to phase into German Fascism, with its use of industrial techniques for mass murder.

All of this occurred long after the English ruling classes, overstuffed on a diet of Malthusian pap, deliberately permitted vast numbers of Irish peasants to starve to death in the potato 'famines' of the 1840s on the strength of the Malthusian notion that 'nature should be permitted to take its course'.

Malthusianism was not only to flourish in Hitler's Third Reich; it was to be revived again in the late 1940s, following the discoveries of antibiotics to control infectious diseases. Riding on the tide of the new Pax Americana after the Second World War, William F. Vogt and a whole bouquet of neo-Malthusians were to challenge the use of the new antibiotic discoveries to control diseases and prevent death — as usual, mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Again, a new 'population debate' erupted with the Rockefeller interests and large corporate sharks aligning themselves with the neo-Malthusians and caring people of every sort aligning themselves with Third World theorists like Josua de Castro, who wrote damning, highly informed critiques of this new version of misanthropy.

Paul Ehrlich and his rambunctious Zero Population Growth fanatics in the early 1970s polluted the environmental movement with demands for a government bureau (no less!) to 'control' population, advancing the infamous 'triage' ethic as a standard for aiding or refusing aid to so-called 'undeveloped' countries. The extent to which this 'ethic' becomes a formula for dispensing food to countries that aligned themselves with the United States in the Cold War and for refusing aid to those which were non-aligned would make an interesting story by itself. Ehrlich, in turn, began to backtrack on his attempts to peddle a 1970s version of neo-Malthusianism — perhaps until recently, when 'deep ecology' has singled him out for a prophetic place in the pantheon of 'radical' ecology. Rumour has it that black students in Ehrlich's own academic backyard viewed his *Population Bomb* as basically racist and neatly tailored to American imperialism.

In any case, it is a novelty to learn that Ehrlich is to be regarded as a 'radical' and that 'anti-reformists' like Devall and Sessions are splashing around in the cesspool of Malthusianism — as do many people who innocently call themselves 'deep ecologists'. One wonders if they realise how reactionary a role this doctrine has played over the centuries?

In *Food First*, Francis Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins have done a superb job in showing how hunger has its origins not in 'natural' shortages of food or population growth but in social and cultural dislocations. (It is notable that Devall and Sessions do *not* list this excellent book in their bibliography.) The book has to be widely read to



understand the reactionary implications of 'deep ecology's' demographic positions.

What is no less important: demography is a highly ambiguous and ideologically charged social discipline that cannot be reduced to a mere numbers game in biological reproduction. Human beings are not fruit-flies (the species of choice which the neo-Malthusians love to cite). Their reproductive behaviour is profoundly conditioned by cultural values, standards of living, social traditions, the status of women, religious beliefs, socio-political conflicts, and various socio-political expectations. Smash up a stable, pre-capitalist culture and throw its people off the land into city slums and, due ironically to demoralisation, population may soar rather than decline. As Gandhi told the British, imperialism left India's wretched poor and homeless with little more in life than the immediate gratification provided by sex and understandably numbed sense of personal, much less social, responsibility. Reduce women to mere reproductive factories and population rates will explode.

Conversely, provide people with decent lives, education, a sense of creative meaning in life, and, above all, free women from their roles as mere bearers of children — and population growth begins to stabilise and populations rates even reverse their direction. Indeed, population growth and attitudes toward population vary from society to society according to the way people live, the ideas they hold, and the socio-economic relationships they establish. Nothing more clearly reveals 'deep ecology's' crude, often reactionary, and certainly superficial ideological framework — all its decentralist, anti-hierarchical, and 'radical' rhetoric aside — than its suffocating 'biological' treatment of the population issue and its inclusion of Malthus, Vogt and Ehrlich in its firmament of prophets.

The close connection between social factors and demography is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe, improved living conditions began to reduce rates of population increase, in some cases leading to negative population growth rates. During the interwar period, such declines became so 'serious' to countries readying themselves for the Second World War that women were granted awards for having sizable numbers of children (read: cannon fodder for the military). More recently in Japan, industrialists were so alarmed by the decline in the country's labour force due to the legalisation of abortion that they demanded the abrogation of this legislation.

These examples can be generalised into a theory of demography in which the need for labour often plays a more important role historically in population fluctuations than biological behaviour and sexual desire.



If women are seen as female fruit-flies and men as their mindless partners, guided more by instinct than the quality of life, then Devall and Sessions have an argument — and, almost certainly, a crude patronising, gender-conditioned outlook that requires careful scrutiny by feminists who profess to be 'deep ecologists'. If people are not fruit-flies, then 'deep ecology' reeks of the odour of crude biologism that is matched only by its naive reading of Malthus & Company.

Not surprisingly, *Earth First!*, whose editor professes to be an enthusiastic 'deep ecologist', carried an article titled 'Population and AIDS' (May 1st, 1987), which advanced the obscene argument that AIDS is desirable as a means of population control. This was no spoof. It was carefully worked out, fully reasoned in a Paleolithic sort of way, and earnestly argued. Not only will AIDS claim large numbers of lives, asserts the author (who hides under the pseudonym of 'Miss Ann Thropy', a form of black humour that could also pass as an example of macho-male arrogance), but it 'may cause a breakdown in technology [read: human food supply] and its export which could also decrease human population'. These people feed on human disasters, suffering and misery, preferably in Third World countries where AIDS is by far a more monstrous problem than elsewhere.

Until we can smoke out 'Miss Ann Thropy' (is it David Foreman again?), we have little reason to doubt that this mentality — or lack thereof — is perfectly consistent with the 'more drastic . . . measures' Devall and Sessions believe we will have to explore. Nor is it inconsistent with a Malthus and Vogt, possibly even an Ehrlich, that we should make no effort to find a cure for this disease which may do so much to depopulate the world. 'Biocentric democracy', I assume, should call for nothing less than a 'hands-off' policy on the AIDS virus and perhaps equally lethal pathogens that appear in the human species.

### What is social ecology

Social ecology is neither 'deep', 'tall', 'fat' nor 'thick'. It is *social*. It does not fall back on incantations, sutras, flow diagrams or spiritual vagaries. It is avowedly *rational*. It does not try to regale metaphorical forms of spiritual mechanism and crude biologism with Taoist, Buddhist, Christian or shamanistic 'Eco-la-la'. It is a coherent form of *naturalism* that looks to *evolution* and the *biosphere*, not to deities in the sky or under the earth for quasi-religious and supernaturalistic explanations of natural and social phenomena.

*Philosophically*, social ecology stems from a solid organismic tradition in Western philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus, the near-



evolutionary dialectic of Aristotle and Hegel, and the superbly critical approach of the famous Frankfurt School — particularly its devastating critique of logical positivism (which surfaces in Naess repeatedly) and the primitivistic mysticism of Heidegger (which pops up all over the place in 'deep ecology's' literature).

*Socially*, it is revolutionary, not merely 'radical'. It critically unmasks the entire evolution of hierarchy in all its forms, including neo-Malthusian elitism, the eco-brutalism of a David Foreman, the anti-humanism of a David Ehrenfeld and a 'Miss Ann Thropy', and the latent racism, First World arrogance and Yuppie-nihilism of post-modernistic spiritualism. It is rooted in the profound eco-anarchistic analyses of a Peter Kropotkin, the radical economic insights of a Karl Marx, the emancipatory promise of the revolutionary Enlightenment as articulated by the great Encyclopedist, Denis Diderot, the *Enragés* of the French Revolution, the revolutionary feminist ideals of a Louise Michel and Emma Goldman, the communitarian visions of Paul Goodman and E. A. Gutkind, and the various eco-revolutionary manifestoes of the early 1960s.

*Politically*, it is *Green* — and *radically Green*. It takes its extra stand with the left-wing tendencies in the German Greens and extra-parliamentary street movements of European cities, with the American radical eco-feminist movement that is currently emerging, with the demands for a new politics based on citizens' initiatives, neighbourhood assemblies, New England's tradition of town-meetings, with unaligned anti-imperialist movements at home and abroad, with the struggle by people of colour for complete freedom from the domination of privileged whites and from the superpowers of both sides of the Iron Curtain.

*Morally*, it is avowedly *humanistic* in the High Renaissance meaning of the term, not the degraded meaning of 'humanism' that has been imparted to the word by David Foreman, David Ehrenfeld, a salad of academic 'deep ecologists', and the like. Humanism from its inception has meant a shift in vision from the skies to the earth, from superstition to reason, from deities to people — who are no less products of natural evolution than grizzly bears and whales. Social ecology accepts neither a 'biocentricity' that essentially denies or degrades the uniqueness of human beings, human subjectivity, rationality, aesthetic sensibility, and the ethical potentiality of this extraordinary species. By the same token, social ecology rejects an 'anthropocentricity' that confers on the privileged few the right to plunder the world of life, including women, the young, the poor, and the underprivileged. Indeed, it opposes 'centricity' of *any* kind as a new word for hierarchy and domination — be it that of nature by a mystical 'Man' or the domination of people by



an equally mystical 'Nature'. It firmly denies that 'Nature' is a scenic view which Mountain Men like a Foreman survey from a peak in Nevada or a picture window that spoiled Yuppies place in their tacky-tacky country homes. To social ecology, nature is natural *evolution*, not a cosmic arrangement of being frozen in a moment of eternity to be abjectly 'revered', 'adored' and 'worshipped' like the Gods and Goddesses that priests and priestesses place above us in a realm of 'Supernature' that subverts the naturalistic integrity of an authentic ecology. Natural evolution is nature in the very real sense that it is composed of atoms, molecules that have evolved into amino acids, proteins, unicellular organisms, genetic codes, invertebrates and vertebrates, amphibia, reptiles, mammals, primates and human beings — all, in a cumulative thrust toward ever-greater complexity, ever-greater subjectivity, and finally, ever-greater mind with a capacity for conceptual thought, symbolic communication of the most sophisticated kind, and self-consciousness in which natural evolution knows itself purposively and willfully.

This marvel we call 'Nature' has produced a marvel we call Homo sapiens — 'thinking man' and, more significantly for the development of society, 'thinking woman', whose primeval domestic domain provided the arena for the origins of a caring society, human empathy, love, and idealistic commitment. The human species, in effect, is no less a product of natural evolution than blue-green algae. To degrade that species in the name of 'anti-humanism', 'Miss Ann Thropy' (to use the coarse language of an unknown *Earth First!* Mountain Man), to deny the species its uniqueness as thinking beings with an unprecedented gift for conceptual thought, is to deny the rich fecundity of natural evolution itself. To separate human beings and society from nature is to dualise and truncate nature itself, to diminish the meaning and thrust of natural evolution in the name of a 'biocentricity' that spends more time disporting itself with mantras, deities, and supernature than with the realities of the biosphere and the role of society in ecological problems. Accordingly social ecology does not try to hide its critical and reconstructive thrust in metaphors. It calls 'technological/industrial' society *capitalism* — a word which places the onus for our ecological problems on the *living* sources and *social* relationships that produce them, not on a cutesy 'Third Wave' abstraction which buries these sources in technics, a technical 'mentality', or perhaps the technicians who work on machines. It sees the domination of women not simply as a 'spiritual' problem that can be resolved by rituals, incantations, and shamanesses, important as ritual may be in solidarising women into a unique community of people, but in the long, highly graded, and subtly nuanced development of



hierarchy, which long preceded the development of classes. Nor does it ignore class, ethnic differences, imperialism, and oppression by creating a grab-bag called 'Humanity' that is placed in opposition to a mystified 'Nature', divested of all development.

All of which brings us as social ecologists to an issue that seems to be totally alien to the crude concerns of 'deep ecology': natural evolution has conferred on human being the capacity to form a 'second' or cultural nature out of 'first' or primeval nature. Natural evolution has not only provided humans with *ability* but also the *necessity* to be purposive interveners into 'first nature', to consciously *change* 'first nature' by means of a highly institutionalised form of community we call 'society'. It is not alien to natural evolution that a species called human has emerged over billions of years that is capable of thinking in a sophisticated way. Nor is it alien for that species to develop a highly sophisticated form of symbolic communication which a new kind of community — institutionalised, guided by thought rather than by instinct alone, and ever-changing — has emerged called 'society'.

Taken together, all of these human traits — intellectual, communicative and social — have not only emerged from natural evolution and are inherently human; they can also be placed at the *service* of natural evolution to consciously increase biotic diversity, diminish suffering, foster the further evolution of new and ecologically valuable life-forms, reduce the impact of disastrous accidents or the harsh effects or mere change.

Whether this species, gifted by the creativity of natural evolution, can play the role of a nature rendered self-conscious or cut against the grain of natural evolution by simplifying the biosphere, polluting it, and undermining the cumulative results of organic evolution is above all a *social* problem. The primary question ecology faces today is whether an ecologically orientated society can be created out of the present anti-ecological one.

'Deep ecology' provides us with no approach for responding to, much less acting upon, this key question. It not only rips out invaluable ideas like decentralisation, a non-hierarchical society, local autonomy, mutual aid, and communalism from the liberatory anarchic tradition of the past where they have acquired a richly nuanced, anti-elitist and egalitarian content — reinforced by passionate struggles by millions of men and women for freedom. It reduces them to bumper-sticker slogans that can be recycled for use by a macho Mountain Man like Foreman at one extreme or flakey spiritualists at the other extreme. These bumper-sticker slogans are then relocated in a particularly repulsive context whose contours are defined by Malthusian elitism, anti-humanist misanthropy, and a seemingly benign 'biocentricity' that



dissolves humanity with all its unique natural traits for conceptual thought and self-consciousness into a 'biocentric democracy' that is more properly the product of human consciousness than a natural reality. Carried to its logical absurdity, this 'biocentric democracy' — one might also speak of a tree's morality or a leopard's 'social contract' with its prey — can no more deny the 'right' of pathogenic viruses to be placed on an 'endangered species list' (and *who* places them there in the first place?) than it can deny the same status to whales. The social roots of the ecological crisis are layered over by a hybridised, often self-contradictory form of spirituality in which the *human* 'self', writ large, is projected into the environment or into the sky as a reified Deity or deities — a piece of anthropocentrism if ever there was one, like the shamans who are dressed in reindeer skins and horns — and abjectly 'revered' as 'Nature'. Or, as Arne Naess, the grand pontiff of this mess, puts it: 'The basic principles within the deep ecology movement are grounded in religion or philosophy' — as though the two words can be flippantly used interchangeably. Selfhood is dissolved, in turn, into a cosmic 'Self' precisely at a time when de-individuation and passivity are being cultivated by the mass media, corporations, and the state to an appalling extent. Finally, 'deep ecology', with its concern for the manipulation of nature, exhibits very little concern for the manipulation of human beings by each other, except perhaps when it comes to the 'drastic' measures that may be 'needed' for population control.

Unless there is a resolute attempt to fully anchor ecological dislocations in social dislocations, to challenge the vested corporate and political interests we should properly call capitalism — not some vague entity called 'industrial/technological' society which even a Dwight D. Eisenhower attacked with a more acerbic term — to analyse, explore and attack hierarchy as a *reality*, not only as a sensibility, to recognise the material needs of the poor and of Third World people, to function politically, not simply as a religious cult, to give the human species and mind their due in natural evolution, not simply regard them as 'cancers' in the boisphere, to examine economics as well as 'souls' and freedom as well as immerse ourselves in introspective or in scholastic arguments about the 'rights' of pathogenic viruses — unless, in short, North American Greens and the ecology movement shift their focus towards a *social* ecology and let 'deep ecology' sink into the pit it has created for us, the ecology movement will become another ugly wart on the skin of society.

What we must do, today, is return to *nature*, conceived in all its fecundity, richness of potentialities, and subjectivity — not to *Supernature* with its shamans, priests, priestesses and fanciful deities



that are merely anthropomorphic extensions and distortions of the 'Human' as all-embracing divinities. And what we must 'enchant' is not only an abstract 'Nature' *that often reflects our own systems of power, hierarchy and domination* — but rather human beings, the human mind, and the human spirit that has taken such a beating these days from every source, particularly 'deep ecology'.

'Deep ecology', with its Malthusian thrust, its various 'centricities', its mystifying 'Eco-la-la', and its disorienting eclecticism degrades this enterprise into a crude biologism that deflects us from the social problems that underpin the ecological ones and the project of social reconstruction that alone can spare the biosphere from virtual destruction.

We must finally take a stand on these issues — free of all 'Eco-la-la' — or acknowledge that the academy has made another conquest: namely that of the ecology movement itself.

June 25, 1987

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## ***Donald Rooum***

### **Anarchism and Selfishness**

Governments cannot survive long by coercion alone. They need a measure of acceptance. To this end people in governed societies are encouraged to believe that government is for the benefit of everyone, that nature is controlled by supernatural forces (God, Karma, Historical Necessity, or whatever), and that people should be ashamed of their selfishness.

Early opponents of government believed in supernatural control. Some of them denounced earthly rulers as usurpers of power belonging to God, as if to suggest (which they did not intend at all) that if God were a fiction, earthly rulers would be acceptable. Since the eighteenth century, however, both supporters and opponents have recognised the usefulness of God to the state. There are anarchists who believe in God, but their concept of God is different from that of Top Boss. Anarchists agree that the best excuse for a tyrant on earth is a tyrant in heaven.

Yet it is still not thought strange to denounce bosses for pursuing their own selfish advantage, as if to suggest that they would be acceptable, if only they were all incorruptible idealists. It has become obvious that bending the knee to a god and touching the forelock to a boss are mutually reinforcing activities, but it is still not clear to everyone that calling shame on selfishness is another activity of the same kind. I hope this essay may help to make perception clearer.

#### **Ethical doctrines**

Ethical doctrines are guides for intentional behaviour. They may be classified into regulatory, idealistic, and selfish. I learned this classification from a Sunday school teacher when I was eleven or twelve years old.

Regulatory doctrines say we should behave by strict rules. My Sunday school teacher gave as an example his aunt, who would not let him trim a broken fingernail with scissors on a Sunday. When he pointed out that she was knitting she grew indignant. If she came to a point in her knitting, she said angrily, where the use of scissors was unavoidable, she would put her knitting away until Monday. She



resented the imputation that she would commit the sin of using scissors on a Sunday.

Idealistic doctrines say we should serve ideals, not sticking to strict rules but modifying our behaviour according to our perception of what will serve the ideals best. My Sunday school teacher was himself a devout idealist, in the service of Peace and Love. I like peace and love as occurrences, but as ideals they are not incompatible with conflict.

Selfish doctrines say we should only seek to satisfy our individual desires, 'looking after Number One'. My Sunday school teacher believed that unashamedly selfish persons existed, but claimed at the time that he was not personally acquainted with any. At other times, however, he claimed personal acquaintance with God.

All accounts of God portray Him as totally selfish. He acts only on His Own behalf, worshipping no other god, and acknowledging no government over Himself. His entire creation exists only to fulfill His Own purposes. I say we should all live according to the ethical code which God Himself follows. What is good enough for my Father is good enough for me.

By all ethical doctrines, virtue is its own reward. Advocates of regulatory doctrines may talk of propitiating deities, but their basic impulse is a gut feeling that the rules and tabus are right, not to observe them is wrong, and there is an end of the matter. Advocates of idealistic doctrines may talk of heavenly reward, but they would disapprove of serving the ideal just to get the reward, for that would be not really serving the ideal, but using the ideal for selfish ends. Advocates of selfish doctrines promise nothing except freedom from the shame of selfishness.

Ethical doctrines describe how people intend to behave, not how they behave in practice. People seldom, if ever, behave as they think they should. For predicting what someone will do, the record of their past behaviour is a far better guide than an account of their sincere ethical convictions.

### **Selfishness defined**

Every anarchist has met the difficulty that the word 'anarchy' is used in senses which anarchists do not intend. For instance, in the United States it is called 'anarchy' if the Executive Arm acts contrary to the decisions of the Legislative Arm. For another instance, if a civil war fizzles out with no contender completely successful and the population subject to competing gangs, that also is called 'anarchy'. Dictionaries (which record how words are used as distinct from dictating how they



should be used) include among the definition of anarchy, 'capricious or disorderly government', 'want of settled government', and 'chaos'. Nobody wants anarchy in any of these senses.

When we say anarchism means striving towards anarchy, we have to make it clear we mean anarchy only in the sense of a society with no government at all.

The word 'selfishness' is also used with a variety of meanings, most of which I do not intend. I have heard the Nazis described as selfish, though no one denies that they advocated and practised individual self-denial. Perhaps they are counted selfish because the ideal they served was a mystic racial 'self', or perhaps more likely, the word 'selfish' was used in this context as a mere swearword. I do not advocate selfishness in either of these senses.

Nor do I advocate selfishness in the sense of having no consideration for others. I have no ethical grounds for condemning lack of consideration, but that is altogether different from advocating it as a principle.

I advocate selfishness in the sense of seeking only to satisfy one's individual desires.

Let me clarify the distinction between these last two meanings. if 'selfish' means 'without consideration for others', then a person who scoffs the lot when others are hungry is selfish, a person who goes without so others may eat is unselfish, and a person who eats when food is plentiful is neither selfish nor unselfish. If 'selfish' means 'seeking only to satisfy one's individual desires', then a person who scoffs the lot when others are hungry is selfish (satisfying greed), a person who goes without so others may eat is selfish (satisfying a benevolent impulse), and a person who eats when food is plentiful is selfish (satisfying normal hunger).

In the sense of selfishness which I advocate, almost anything anyone does is selfish. But not quite everything, and the exceptions are important. It is never selfish to feel guilty because one has failed to abide by a fixed rule or live up to an ideal.

The decision to take selfishness as your ethical code is not a meaningless or trivial decision, since it requires the rejection of regulatory and idealistic ethics.

### **Selfishness after death**

All right, so the hereafter has nothing to do with anarchism. Indulge me, or skip to the next section.

Belief in personal survival after death takes various forms. Some



believe that a person is not a body, but an immortal soul or spirit or ghost infesting a body. When somebody dies, the soul and the body part, and the soul stays about the vicinity, or moves to another body, or goes to a gathering-place of souls. Others believe that, when a person dies, there simultaneously comes into being, in another part of the universe, a person whose memory is continuous with that of the dead person.

It is not for an ethical essay to discuss whether these propositions are true, or why anyone believes them. The ethical question is, how does belief or disbelief in personal survival affect one's ethical attitude?

Believers in personal survival are usually opposed to selfishness and will tell you there is a connection between their anti-selfishness and their belief. Whatever the nature of this connection, however, it is evidently not a necessary connection. For there are a few believers who are unashamedly selfish, and many people opposed to selfishness who are unbelievers.

If you believe that all fungi are poisonous, or that the kitchen is on fire, or that Proxima Centauri is four light-years distant, then your factual belief, true or mistaken, may affect your behaviour in practical ways, but will have no effect on the ethical doctrine which guides your behaviour. This is true of all factual beliefs, including factual beliefs about the hereafter.

A nasty belief about personal survival is that one may be tortured, not to death but for ever, in retaliation for behaviour on earth which was not to the taste of the Boss of the Universe. If the punishable offences are overt acts, such as genocide or using scissors on a Sunday, they may be avoided. But if selfishness is an unpardonable offence, a selfish person has no escape. One cannot stop being selfish in order to avoid the punishment, for that would be giving up selfishness for a selfish reason, which is a contradiction.

If personal survival after death is a fiction, no one will ever find out. If it is a fact, unbelievers will discover their error, but that in itself will be no reason to change their ethics. A selfish person is a selfish person, alive or dead.

## **Benevolence**

As I use the word here, 'benevolence' includes love of one's nearest and dearest, and also includes kind acts and intentions towards victims of distant famines, unlovely people like homicidal rapists in prison, and beetles stranded on their backs.

There is a verbal trick, apparently proving that benevolence does not



occur. *'Why are you giving a fiver to Oxfam?'* 'I think it might relieve someone's distress?' *'Do you like the thought of relieving someone's distress?'* 'Yes.' *'Then you are not doing it to relieve someone's distress, but for your own pleasure in relieving someone's distress.'*

The trick is exposed if we apply the same procedure to an act which is not benevolent. *'Why are you singing in the bath?'* 'The reverberations make my voice sound great.' *'Do you like your voice to sound great?'* 'Yes.' *'Then you are not doing it to make your voice sound great, but for your own pleasure in making your voice sound great.'*

Obviously there is no distinction between wanting one's voice to sound great and wanting the pleasure of one's voice sounding great. Nor is there any distinction between wanting to relieve someone's distress and wanting the pleasure of relieving someone's distress. The trick depends on the false assumption that benevolence and selfish pleasure are incompatible.

Awareness of someone else's emotions causes us to experience a semblance of the same emotions ourselves. This phenomenon is called 'empathy'. When the other person's emotion is painful it is called 'primary distress', and the response it produces is called 'empathic distress'.

Empathic distress may be relieved by becoming less aware of the primary distress, for instance by running away or hiding one's eyes. Or it may be relieved by relieving the primary distress, which is a benevolent act.

To obtain maximum benevolence from others, maximise their awareness of your distress. The Ethiopian famine of 1984 was a usual type of famine, which at first provoked only a usual type of caring response. Then the first carers managed to get pictures of the suffering on television, and a massive, popular relief effort started. People were more moved to empathic distress by the sight than they had been by the news.

Empathy is not the only motive for benevolence. Species in which the invariable response to empathic distress is to run may care for their mates and young from entirely different urges. In humans, there is also the pride of perceiving oneself to be benevolent. These are all selfish motives, and all produce real benevolence.

The capacity for empathy varies from individual to individual, between the morbid extremes of those who feel so much for others they are unable to cope with life, and those who feel so little they are a social menace. The capacities for parental love and pride in oneself vary just as widely. But no one is ever benevolent except for selfish reasons.



## Self-sacrifice

Self-sacrifice means choosing to act against one's personal preference from some noble motive. A donation from a poor person to a worthy cause is counted as self-sacrifice, because it is presumed that the poor person would prefer to spend the money on comfort. Dying for an ideal counts as self-sacrifice because it is presumed that the idealist would prefer to live. Suicide is not self-sacrifice, because it is presumed that the suicide prefers to die.

As I shall show, the notion of self-sacrifice is illogical and pernicious.

In 1986 I watched the Remembrance Sunday broadcast (Remembrance Sunday, as British readers will know, is a day of official mourning for those killed in battle). One broadcast sentence so startled me that I wrote it down: 'The sacrifice is worthwhile even when it achieves little or nothing, because everything that is of value depends on self-sacrifice.' The presenter used the tone and expression of someone comforting the bereaved. If his words were spontaneous it would be unfair to analyse them, because we comfort people mostly with tone and gesture, not paying much attention to the words. But he was not speaking spontaneously. He was reading from a prompt board. He had already read the words at least once, during the run-through, and before that they had been carefully considered by at least two people, the script-writer and the producer. It is not unfair to criticise the sentence as a piece of literature.

We see immediately that it embodies a formal logical fallacy. The statement that everything involving self-sacrifice is worthwhile, because everything worthwhile involves self-sacrifice, is an instance of 'A contains B therefore B contains A'. One might argue with equal validity that everything with legs is a peacock, because all peacocks have legs. Irrationality is common in talk of self-sacrifice; inevitably, because it is an irrational notion.

Life is full of choices. We continually want to have our cake and eat it, stay in bed and get up, or, in general, do two things which exclude each other. Mostly we choose the alternative we like best. Self-sacrifice is said to occur in some instances where someone chooses the alternative they like least. I say 'said to occur' because I do not think it ever really occurs that anyone chooses against their preference. I think it is logically impossible.

If you are asked whether you want tea or coffee, and answer, 'I prefer coffee but I will choose tea', your answer calls for an explanation: '. . . because coffee keeps me awake', '. . . because the coffee they serve here



is terrible', '. . . because there is only enough coffee for one, and I want you to have it'.

All the explanations I can think of describe circumstances which change the balance of preference in the particular instance, that is to say they make a distinction between habitual preference and preference on this occasion. 'I prefer coffee but I will choose tea' means the same as either: 'usually I prefer coffee but in these special circumstances I prefer tea'; or, 'usually I choose coffee but in these special circumstances I choose tea'. To say, 'taking all present circumstances into account I prefer coffee, but taking all present circumstances into account I choose tea', is to contradict oneself.

We may deduce what people prefer to do by observing what they choose to do. So-called self-sacrifice occurs when preferences are not what we expect. The archetype of self-sacrifice is said by some to be the man who lays down his life for his friends, but the very fact that he chooses to do so shows that he prefers his friends to his life. This is evidence of great love for his friends, but it is not self-sacrifice.

The Remembrance Sunday presenter, when he said 'the sacrifice is worthwhile even when it achieves little or nothing', was talking in fact about one of those appalling incidents in the First World War, when a crowd of young men set out to massacre another crowd of young men, and unintentionally got massacred themselves. This is not self-sacrifice, not is it evidence of great love. It is evidence of either murderous patriotism, or a fear of disobeying orders which exceed the fear of death.

This is what makes the notion of self-sacrifice pernicious. Dying for love of one's friends is called self-sacrifice, dying in the attempt to kill someone is called self-sacrifice, and, using the kind of fallacious reasoning which is used in Remembrance Sunday broadcasts, war is identified as an act of love. The Remembrance Sunday broadcast of 1986 was illustrated with snatches of film, alternately showing benevolent acts like caring for the sick and warlike acts like recapturing the Falklands, all of which were described as self-sacrifice. Love and war were quite deliberately confused.

Viking captains would visit the mothers of those killed in battle, and comfort them by saying their sons had died enjoying themselves, and gone to Valhalla where dead heroes joyfully kill each other every day, and wake up next morning to kill each other again. Modern British mothers are comforted by the thought that their sons who died in battle were doing something benevolent. There is nothing wrong with using nonsense to comfort the bereaved, but self-sacrifice is a nasty nonsense.



## Us and them

Humans have a strong sense of group identity. Solidarity within groups is reinforced by antagonism between groups. A large group is likely to divide if it has no enemies, but small groups may unite against a common adversary.

Most animals with an 'us and them' sense know only one 'us', a family group which together exploits a territory and keeps 'them' other groups out. Modern humans inhabit a number of overlapping family, neighbourhood, working and friendship groups, any of which may be felt as 'us' against 'them', with varying degrees of loyalty. Fighting gangs exist, whose only purpose is to experience the intense comradeship which comes of group conflict.

Humans also have the imaginative capacity to develop feelings of group loyalty to divisions of humanity which are not groups at all, but categories: the British Nation, the Catholic Church, the Master Race, the Working Class. Such categories can never come together as groups because, besides being very numerous, most of their members are dead. A face-to-face group 'us' may be maintained by love, but a category 'us' cannot easily exist without a continuous, hostile 'them'.

Category loyalties are essential if governments are to be considered beneficial. Patriotism, the most common form of category loyalty, makes a national government seem like leaders within the group, rather than a particular group invading everybody else. When rulers say things like 'My country may she always be right, but my country right or wrong', or 'Ask not what my country can do for me but what I can do for my country', they can judge from the applause how well the swindle is working. I do not say all rulers are hypocrites; some, no doubt, are as patriotic as the most gullible of their subjects. But the 'my country' speeches are so blatant that they must be conscious claptrap.

Governments need war, since they depend on patriotism or something similar, and patriotism depends on hostility. Now that weapons exist which are capable of destroying governments along with subjects, those governments which have them are careful not to declare war on each other, but equally careful to stay always on the brink of war.

The idealistic solution to war, the one advocated by my old Sunday school teacher, is that everyone should feel the highest group loyalty to the highest possible number, the entire human species. I do not deny that my Sunday school teacher felt such a loyalty, and I know some anarchists who feel the same. But Humanity cannot attract the same passion as its sub-categories, because it is an 'us' without a hostile



'them'. Group loyalty to Humanity can never be as emotionally satisfying as, say, patriotism, unless there is an attack from space. Those who hold that we are all children of God are organised in bickering factions, and it is not unknown to declare war on other humans, 'on behalf of the Human Race'.

A more realistic counter to war is that everyone should feel their highest group loyalty to the lowest possible number, 'Number One'. An individual is not a group, but neither is an abstract category. I know from personal experience that 'loyal selfishness' is feasible, and I suspect it is easier to feel than patriotism. No one can ever know all the members of a country, but I already know all the members of me. The reason patriotism is so much more common than 'loyal selfishness' is that it is dinned into every one of us, from early childhood onwards, that we should be proud of our country and ashamed of our selfishness.

It seems to be a genetic feature of human behaviour that 'us and them' will be felt among groups of people who know each other. If this is so, it will occur among groups of unashamedly selfish people as it occurs among patriotic and religious people. People acting as groups experience passions which they do not experience individually. Groups of idealists urge themselves into battle with cries of 'Holy! Holy! Holy!', or 'God bless America', or 'Get the Bastards'. I like to imagine a group of anarchists urging themselves to safety with cries of 'Self first, Self last, and if any left, Self again!'

Responding to natural emotion, an unashamedly selfish person might die trying to save another individual, but I cannot see a loyally selfish person risking life for the benefit of a category. If everyone were unashamedly selfish, war would be impossible.

### Acknowledgements and plea

Readers will have noticed ideas and phrases taken from Michael Bakunin, Tony Gibson, John Hick, Jack Kennedy, Errico Malatesta, Tom Muff, P. H. Nowell-Smith, Sid Parker, Bertrand Russell, Eddie Shaw, Max Stirner, Bonar Thompson, and others.

The most influential source is Max Stirner. I am happy to be called a Stirnerite anarchist, provided 'Stirnerite' means one who agrees with Stirner's general drift, not one who agrees with Stirner's every word. Please judge my arguments on their merits, not on the merits of Stirner's arguments, and not by the test of whether I conform to Stirner.



## *Conroy Maddox*

### **Dubious Guests at the Party**

It is beyond question that all who were Surrealists remained deeply suspicious of just how far the movement in England departed from Surrealist principles and thereby made any progress as a cohesive group unlikely and even impossible. There was no doubt that the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 brought pictorial and literary Surrealism to the attention of a wide public, and it would suggest of the 23 British painters represented and the numerous articles published that the group was very much alive and flourishing. But what was the true situation? Many of the contributors to the exhibition were, in many cases, made up of painters who were committed abstractionists drawn from that 'nest of gentle artists' around Hampstead. Herbert Read was their spokesman as well as being one of the organisers of the selection committee for the Surrealist exhibition. He had discovered Surrealism in time for the exhibition and discovered it in many of the abstract painters which he justified by claiming that a surreal element in British art was indigenous and manifested nothing different from what he chose to call 'super-realism' in William Blake, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and the Pre-Raphaelites.

It was not the first of his pronouncements that lacked any real understanding of Surrealism. As a result, committed abstract artists were allowed to graft a bit of fantasy on to their works and invited to show without any of them being asked as to their adherence to Surrealist principles. I was invited to show along with John Melville and with the support of his brother Robert. Instead we sent an open

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Conroy Maddox held that the day-to-day activities, professional habits and ethics of most British artists in the 1936 London exhibition could only be called anti-surrealist, but he joined the London group in 1938, taking part in activities throughout the war. He showed in the Paris exhibition of 1947 and regularly since in Munich, Stockholm and Amsterdam, where, he feels, 'a more enlightened attitude is noticeable'. He has works in the Tate Gallery, the V&A, Ulster and British Museums and many private collections.



letter to the organisers in which we drew the attention of the general public and of the intelligentsia to the fact that the British participation in the exhibition was mainly made up of artists who, in their day-to-day activities, professional habits and ethics could only be called anti-Surrealist. It was sufficiently accurate, since we were not invited to show in later exhibitions, only joining the group after some reforming had taken place in 1938.

Inevitably, after the initial enthusiasm, the English group ceased to exist and the same thing happened again, after being represented in the 1947 International Exhibition in Paris. Read's excuse was that the English are nationally and historically individualists. He stressed the Churches, and the British constitution which permits endless confusion, equivocations and disguises, and capitalism which is able to maintain these confusions better than anywhere else. He went on to suggest that in England the proper way to work was for the artist with cranky ideas, confused ideas which were the best outlet for artistic creation. It was all in the best tradition of individualism, making any idea of group activity impossible. One should read his remarks as a way of directing attention away from his own failure to see Surrealism as anything but a corroboration of his aesthetic bias. Read's platform for Surrealism in England was to ground it firmly in the romantic tradition. 'Surrealism', he once wrote, 'was reality transformed by the imagination'. A definition which clearly showed that he had no need of Surrealism.

The Surrealists in France fully acknowledged the existence of a tradition. Names like Nerval, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont represented a defiant anti-establishment role and were far removed from the tradition of 'official' literary history that Read had in mind.

Muddled critical writings about Surrealism were not confined to Read alone. Hugh Sykes-Davies, fully attuned to the English approach, wrote of the Surrealist movement as the natural and inevitable product of historical forces which had their beginning in the Romantic revival of the early nineteenth century. The emphasis such theorists put on certain aspects that they chose to see in Surrealism were precisely those that diluted what revolutionary importance the movement might have had in England.

While the literary contributions were being used to destroy the entire basis of surrealism, we find Paul Nash, whose attenuated paintings had achieved such resounding but uncritical success, making his own contribution to the movement. 'I do not allow the prompting of the unconscious', he tells us, 'to lead me beyond a point of defensive control in support of certain aesthetic convictions.' Here again Surrealist discovery is being debased for aesthetic purposes and



illustrates the attitude of so many of the English participants: the avoidance of what Surrealism is in order to make it serve some other purpose.

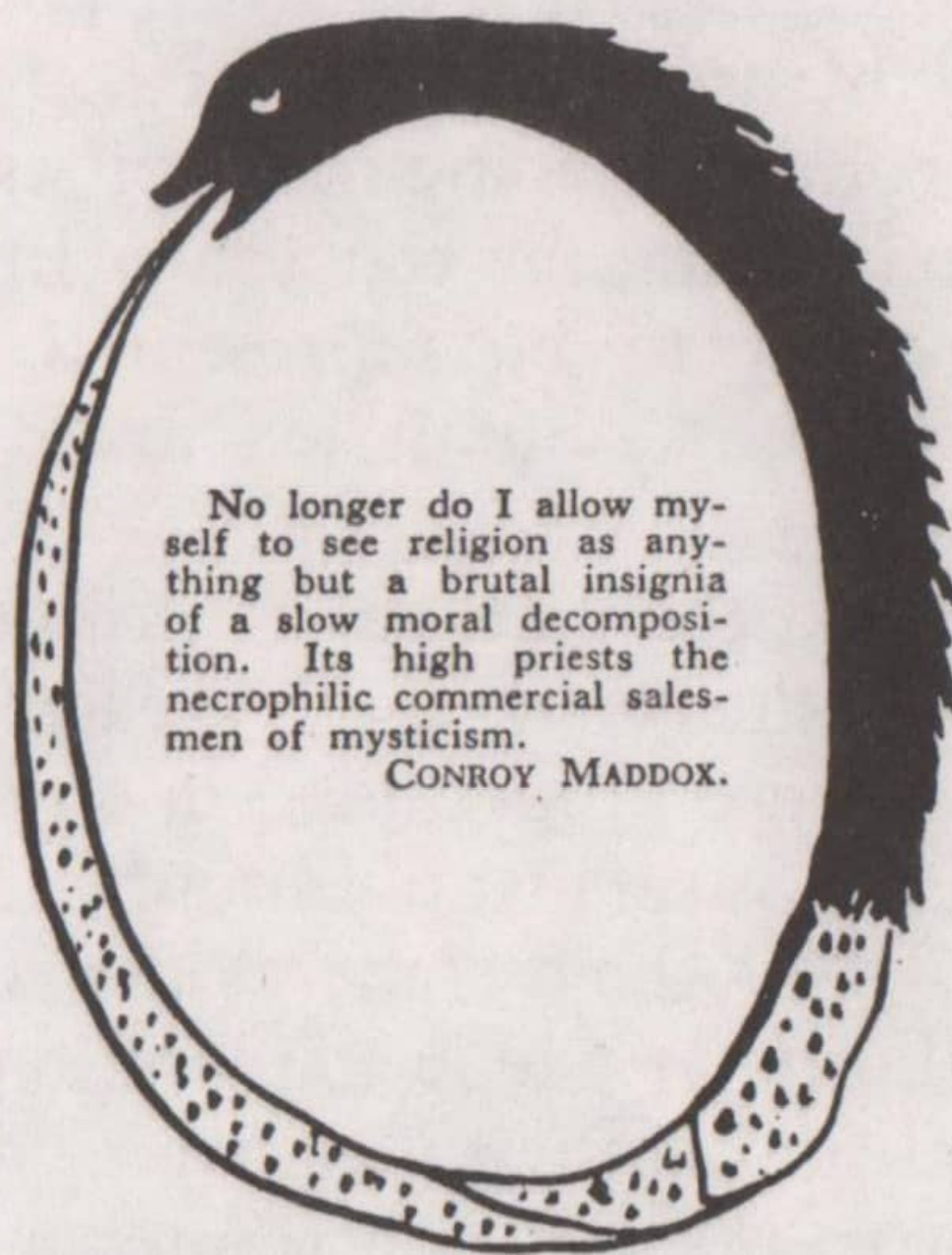
How was it that a practising psychoanalyst, Dr Grace Pailthorpe, and an artist named Reuben Mednikoff, who had both been invited to show in the 1936 exhibition, were able to carry out scientific experiments to demonstrate the therapeutic value of surrealist painting? They were claiming that surrealism and psychoanalysis shared the common aim of freeing the psychology of the individual from internal conflict so that he or she may function freely. After Mednikoff had given her some elementary lessons in painting, they proceeded to produce and analyse each other's works, thereby reducing their brand of Surrealism to a symptom. As Paul Ray pointed out, 'The most cursory reading of Freud showed that the whole purpose of his therapy is to reconcile man to the demands of reality, not to free him from these demands.' It was precisely on this point that the Surrealists had parted company with Freud. The outcome of the Pailthorpe-Mednikoff research culminated in an exhibition in the late 1930s. Alongside each painting was a framed text giving their Freudian interpretation of the psychological problems they found in each other, and there were many. It had about as much significance for Surrealism as an army that begins a war by wrecking its own base. Yet only two attacked their approach, both from outside the group.

When the International Surrealist Exhibition ended, Surrealism in England almost disappeared. Read continued to write art criticism for the *Listener* and to edit the ultra-conservative *Burlington Magazine*, which never once mentioned Surrealism. Sykes-Davies disappeared. Humphrey Jennings became a maker of documentary films which underwhelm one with their banality. While a fair proportion of the artists scurried back to the security of their pattern-making that raised the question not so much of taste but of waste.

It was due to E. L. T. Mesens, the Belgian Surrealist, who settled in England after the exhibition, that a limited activity continued through the London Gallery with exhibitions and meetings. With Roland Penrose he published the *London Bulletin*, of which 20 issues appeared between 1938 and 1940. Mesens, fully aware of the problems that beset the group, called a meeting. His twelve propositions were a call for greater unity. Three were of particular importance:

- (1) Adherence to the proletarian revolution;
- (2) Boycott of any association, professional or otherwise, except the Surrealist group;
- (3) Boycott of any exhibition or publication except those under the auspices of the surrealists.





Most of the group objected. Ithell Colquhoun, who wished to continue her occult studies and Rosicrucian philosophy, while still insisting on her commitment to Surrealism, left the group. Others, like Pailthorpe and Mednikoff, raised objections, but were expendable. Herbert Read, presumably because of his usefulness as a propagandist, was allowed to continue his connections with the publishing world. Few of the painters accepted the curtailment of exhibiting outside Surrealist exhibitions. As a result Mesens' attempt was very much more difficult in winning the English group back into a cohesive body than that of an anti-missionary in following Billy Graham around, winning people back from God.

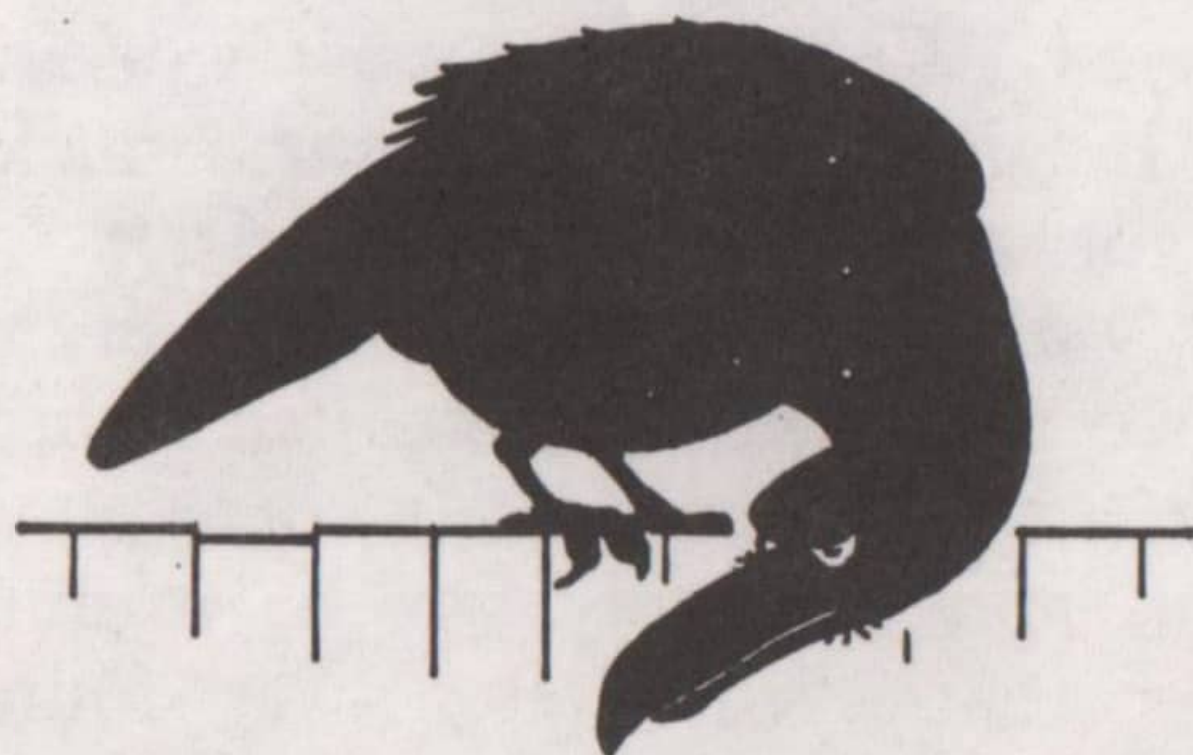
Although we organised one more exhibition, 'Surrealism Today' at the Zwemmer Gallery, which had the distinction of opening on the day the Germans marched into Belgium, the rift created by Mesens' demands meant the group had become a very loose organisation. It would be true to say that Surrealism in England was dead. However, the burial was delayed. With Mesens now working for the BBC, broadcasting to the Belgians, Toni del Renzio made his appearance with the proposal for a magazine called *Arson*, which made its appearance in 1942 without the collaboration of Mesens. The rift between them widened when del Renzio edited a surrealist section for *New Road* (1943). Apart from some lively correspondence in *Horizon* attacking del Renzio and his reply which, it must be said, was sufficiently orthodox that even Breton was found wanting, the interment was carried out and, one suspects, much to the relief of the group.



By 1940 many of the original group had gone into the forces or hurriedly dissociated themselves from Surrealism and its political implications, for the promise of being made official war artists, leaving only a few of us to meet during the war years. In 1947 an attempt was made to re-form in order to be represented in the International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, but it led to no revival of organised activities.

It is beyond dispute that the pictorial contributions to Surrealism in England have had over the years a far greater impact than all the misguided theories that were propounded in an attempt to reconcile a dotty utopianism with the Surrealist philosophy. Many of the paintings during the years 1936-1947 show some evidence of a 'community of aims', of a peculiar liberty in which exploration and discovery were evident. There is no doubt that their ideas were consciously inspired by Surrealism and in their works they contributed a vitality and freshness which, although available in the English tradition, had not been enjoyed for many decades.

Certainly the hesitancy and compromise that permeated so many of the English Surrealists, whose instinctive dislike of any communal effort soon became evident and who thought of themselves as being able to come and go whenever they liked without any commitment to any basic ideas or attitudes, inevitably spelt failure. For a short time, with a few exceptions, these artists mimicked a style and not the philosophy. Nevertheless they claim our attention possibly because of what might be called the Englishness of English Surrealism, and in doing so made their contribution to an ongoing movement of what J. H. Matthews called the 'joy of discovery, the sense of release, of revelation, the penetration and exploration of the world of the surreal'.





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## George Melly

### Gentlemen First

Much as it grieves me to agree with Franklin Rosemont (his book on Breton was a hideous piece of hagiography), I must admit there is a great deal of truth in what he says about British Surrealism.

It *was* ineffectual. It *did not* consist of an effective 'movement'. Its adherents were thoroughly confused as to its meaning. It held people until they were offered something unacceptable to it (eg. Henry Moore's 'Madonna and Child'), whereupon they left it immediately. Not only Herbert Read but Roland Penrose accepted knighthoods — in fairness, it is impossible to imagine Breton wearing the Légion d'Honneur, etc., etc.

The question is: What stopped Surrealism from taking root in Britain?

Rosemont suggests individualism as the reason — the usual explanation. But he is rightly a little tentative as to whether this alone is enough to explain its failure. I propose the following additional causes:

#### (A) English Protestantism

Surrealism needed Catholicism to work effectively. That is why France was its true home and Spain its powerhouse. Its atheism was central to it. You can't profane the Host without transubstantiation. No point in jumping on a piece of ordinary bread or pissing in admittedly inferior wine! It is interesting that David Gascoyne, this country's most committed Surrealist, should have become religious. The rest remained gentlemanly freethinkers.

#### (B) The non-existence of cafés

This may seem frivolous, but it is not. Pubs are hopeless settings for the exchange of ideas; restaurants too formal. The British Surrealists tried both and found them wanting. The café was Surrealism's natural theatre.

#### (C) Timing

The great 'heroic' years of Surrealism were from 1924 to 1930. The movement didn't reach here until 1936! This enabled highbrow critics to dub it 'old hat', for high society to patronise it as 'amusing'. Even in



France by this date there was much that was suspect — *Minotaure* had replaced *La Révolution Surréaliste* etc., but here it started out as a sensation, a joke.

#### (D) No Breton

The paradox of the movement was that, devoted to total freedom, its long life can be put down to Breton's imposition of his own view as to what Surrealism stood for at any given time. Aragon remarked slyly that 'André always gave the impression of being in a majority of one'.

Here in Britain the leader of the movement was my much loved, much missed friend, E. L. T. Mesens, a Belgian. Intelligent, an admirable poet and collagist, he just didn't have the muscle to act as legislator. If he tried to institute a Surrealist commandment, those it would affect adversely just left. Jacques Brunius, a Frenchman of great charm, stood in, as it were, for Breton's Peret.

I attended many of the later meetings of the group. They were rowdy, good fun, even challenging, but they achieved nothing.

#### (E) Yes, Individualism

The British are bad at collective action. In some cases, it is just as well they are!

Edward Burra, for example, in my eyes the most genuine 'Surréal' painter we've had, left almost as soon as he'd joined. When I asked him why, he explained, 'I didn't like being told what to think, dearie!'

The war finished Surrealism in Britain. The nation turned in on itself; neo-romanticism became the measure of our insular preoccupations. You couldn't *give* away Surrealist paintings until time turned them into 'investments'.

There was a revival of interest in the 'mechanism' of Surrealism in the 1960s, but none in its rigorous programme. A few people *did* try to keep it alive as a movement. In particular, grumpy but endearing John Lisle in Exeter achieved the authentic tone of Breton in orchestrating quarrels and declaring excommunications. He was, however, as Mesens described him, 'a general without an army'.

Mesens, by the way, had his own explanation of the movement's failure in this country: 'The English are always gentlemen first, Surrealists second.'



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## Philip Sansom

### Surprise, Surprise! A Curate's Egg!

I sit here staring blankly at the blank page in my octopus-typewriter\*, consulting my muse on the principles of no-principles and the great toss-up of attack or defence. Do I burrow away and come up like a mole, or piss from a great height? Worms get us all in the end, and they and their kind may well survive the holocaust and inherit the earth, but in the immediate scenario the sky is darkened by the wings of the albatross. Or do I mean the raven? When Franklin Rosemont asks 'Heads or Tails?', he forgets the wings.

What emerges from the recent controversy — if that does not flatter the blather — is that wage slavery damages the health. If you sell yourself to a public service, no matter how much you may wriggle, you may well endow yourself in your mind's eye with a tinsel halo, but you live for ever with that dichotomy in your head of trying to reconcile a vision of service to the public with your submission to a mediocre bureaucracy and the necessity of making a profit. Similarly, if you sell yourself to a reactionary lackey of capitalism, an agent of everything you profess to resist — say, for example, a virulently right-wing organ of the Fleet Street press — the guilt in your mind is manure for a fine crop of confusion. (None of which is meant to refer to Franklin Rosemont!)

A common reaction to such discomfort is to pour scorn on all who try, however unsuccessfully or successfully, to punch their way out of their own paper bag.

Thus, for Arthur Moyse, on the one hand, 'Surrealism is no more than the recording of the undisciplined mind as unrelated acts, opinions, beliefs and suppressed passions pour out and on to the page. It is the mind of the drunkard, the drug-taker or the mentally unstable, therefore, it is, always was, and can only be a literary manifestation.'

Well, presumably, something recorded on a page, in words, in writing, *can* only be a literary manifestation!

However, nine lines further on in his patient explanation, we find Arthur declaring: '. . . ten seconds with a reproduction can give a

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\*Secret reference to a surrealist broadsheet, Chicago 1978.



greater cachet than the boredom of the printed word. Herein lies the tragedy of Rosemont's aesthetic wrong belief, for the pretty paintings of Dali, Magritte, Tanguy, the films of Buñuel, the sculpture of Duchamp or the collages of Ernst or Schwitters were never the product of the ol' Freudian unconscious mind, but the result of clear rational minds planning each composition with the care of Giotto knocking off the Holy Roman Church commission.'

So, suddenly, the drunken, mentally unstable, drug addict (which doesn't leave many of us out, does it, Arthur?) has become capable of clear rational composition to Giotto standards! So Moyse answers Rosemont: 'Heads I win, tails you lose!'

Now I have on my walls two small works by Arthur Moyse which are not rational in their content, which is why I like them. If the Inland Revenue is reading this (there's my paranoia!), I hasten to say they were both gifts and wouldn't fetch much on the open market. My point is that they are not impressionist, expressionist, cubist, abstract, fauviste, pointilliste, futurist, constructivist, certainly not social realist, and most certainly do not go back to Constable, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, or, dare I say, Giotto? I suppose they might be described as products of an unconscious mind, consciously creating irrational images . . . or perhaps the other way round.

Now, back, or forward, to the person who started off this fascinating argy-bargy: Franklin Rosemont of Chicago.

The main complaint of this comrade — and he *is* a comrade, let there be no mistake about that — is that Surrealism did not take root in England in any organised form in modern times. I can't quite tell why he is so upset about this. Is he equally concerned about why Surrealism didn't flourish in Chicago? After all, this was a wide-open city for many years — just at the time Surrealism was flourishing in Europe. Admittedly that was nearly 4,000 miles away and, culturally, was on another planet anyway. I certainly don't want to drag up the famous history of Chicago during the prohibitionist period of the 1920s and 1930s, and its results — but why could there not have been a super-realist revolt against the super-capitalist wars that were fought on the streets of the Windy City? Well, frankly, Franklin, I think we all know the answer to that. Happiness is a warm gun, what?

Surrealism emerged in Europe just before the *real* gangsters began to kill each other — or, rather, to get their servile populations to kill each other for them. It was in 1912 that Apollinaire launched his monthly review *Les Soirées de Paris*, providing a platform for the poetry of the emerging Dadaists — and it was Apollinaire who was credited with coining the word 'surréaliste'. In the same year, De Chirico was already painting his mysterious and surprising townscapes and Marcel



Duchamp had already produced his 'La mariée mise à nu par les célibataires'— no, feminist comrades, not pornographic.

In a word, Surrealism existed before the word, and Dada was conceived slightly before that, but never caught on *as a word* as well as Surrealism did. I imagine this may have been because grown men who had been genuinely surprised by Dada were embarrassed about going around shouting 'Dada, Dada' like nine-month-old babies. But then, I'm British. And that's not my fault.

Now, if you've been paying attention, you will have noticed that I have used the words 'surprising' and 'surprised' within a very short space. This is because I have just discovered them, and I have De Chirico to thank for that. For he it was, apparently, who defined the idea of surprise as *essential* (as did Apollinaire in *L'Esprit Nouveau*): 'When Nietzsche talks of how Zarathustra was conceived, and says "I was surprised by Zarathustra" — in this participle, "surprised", is contained the whole enigma of sudden revelation.'

That was the whole secret of Surrealism: the shock of sudden surprise, as in the phrase: being *taken* by surprise. All our preconceptions brutally challenged; the idea of what is right and proper turned upside down. Not made self-consciously ridiculous — that, anybody who has spoken on street corners to scorning men, can deal with — but just not to be considered at all. That of course is the unkindest cut of all. Ask your loved ones.

As I write this, I am aware that I am answering for myself a question that has been at the back of my mind when considering the survival of the Surrealists: how did they outlast two world wars? And not merely survive, but continue to work with brilliant concentration and clarity — albeit as individuals and not as organised groups, and certainly not a coherent international movement?

The answer is that clearly they did not get sucked into the larger lunacy; that was an involvement not to be considered. Theirs was the super-reality, and if they found ways to keep their heads down while everybody else was rushing over the parapets, then we are the beneficiaries. The wars that are fought by workers against workers on behalf of their masters are part of the capitalist, imperialist and religious nightmare constantly being confronted by the Surrealist dream.

I suppose it is no more than an interesting coincidence that Surrealism emerged in Europe around 1912, just two years before the beginning of the 'Great War' ('The War to End War'), and it 'officially' reached England in 1936, just three years before the outbreak of the Second World War. It is this latter that George Melly is referring to when he mentions 'timing' as a factor in the feebleness of Surrealism's



impact on English revolutionary thought, such as it was. It is not Franklin's fault if he is unaware of the effects that the gathering clouds had upon the British psyche. It was certainly clear by 1938 that war was on its way and that this time death and destruction would be carried to the civilian populations. This was something that *mainland* America never had to deal with, although it was thought possible, as was shown by the paranoid removal of thousands of Japanese Americans from their long-established homes on the West Coast — over 2,000 miles from Pearl Harbor. Even on the East Coast, New York could only have been shot at by the odd U-boat; no planes could have reached it.

The great International Surrealist Exhibition opened at the New Burlington Galleries in London on 11 June 1936 and closed on 4 July — just 12 days before Franco launched his attack on the Spanish Republic and 15 days before the beginning of the Revolution. For the majority of British people what happened in Spain was an internal affair. For the right-wing press (the majority) Franco was 'a gallant Christian gentleman', the Labour Party and Trade Union movement declared 'non-intervention', and only the minority of communists, anarchists and socialists gave real support to the republican and revolutionary causes (for whatever different interests!). For the majority of British people, the smell of war was in the air, and after Guernica, they knew what twentieth-century war was to bring. They pulled up the drawbridge and the minorities had other things on their minds.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Paris Surrealists, led on a pretty tight rein by André Breton, made determined efforts to be recognised as a social revolutionary force and not just a new art movement or psychological phenomenon. Among many manifestos and happenings, they produced two journals with 'Revolution' in their titles: *La Révolution Surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. Note the subtle change in emphasis!

The first appeared in December 1924 and continued with ever-increasing gaps until December 1929, its twelfth issue. The second title appeared between 1930 and 1933, during which time six issues appeared, sporadically. (It sounds to me a painfully familiar pattern!) What seems rather astonishing, at this distance in time and in view of what we must now think of as the importance of these journals, produced with the support of the great names in Surrealist history — Breton, Eluard, Péret, Duchamp, Giacometti, Dali, Tzara, Ernst, Ray, even, in one, a letter from Sigmund Freud! — is the pitiful circulation. At the end, *La Révolution Surréaliste* was printing just over 1,000, and *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* between 350 and 500. And yet — what an influence they had!

In case you are by now asking yourself what the hell I am getting at,



it is simply this: if Franklin Rosemont's beef is that Surrealism did not take England by storm, in spite of *some* advantages, and so there must be something wrong with the too-individualistic English — why didn't it take France by storm when it had so many brilliant exponents? George Melly quotes his old friend (and, may I say, mine?), E. L. T. Mesens, as saying that the English remain too stubbornly 'gentlemen' — but have you ever come up against a real French bourgeois? Or, even more frightening, bourgeoisie? The French, having made their revolution rather later than the English and made a much more bloody job of it, now sit back on their laurels and don't expect to be bothered by such an upheaval again. 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité', it says, so what more do you want?

There was one thing about the French Surrealist movement which almost certainly helped in its decline: its leaders embraced Marxism. Encouraged by the Communist Party's paper *L'Humanité*, in 1925, André Breton read a copy of Trotsky's work *Lenin*, and contradicted Aragon, who had previously been critical of the Bolsheviks, saying: 'On the moral plane, where we have decided to place ourselves, it seems as if a Lenin is unassailable.' With, perhaps, his own eye on a position on the moral plane.

From then on, by all accounts, he was impossible. Magritte left Paris and went back to Brussels; at some point, Giacometti was expelled from the group for using a model! The Surrealists had exchanged one set of orthodoxies for another.

If at this stage I leap some decades, please forgive me, but a quotation from 1978 is most apposite:

When we speak of Dada or Surrealist art, it is not like speaking of Fauve or Cubist art, of Gothic or Baroque art; it is like speaking of, say, Tantric art or, for that matter, Christian art. Dada and Surrealism are not art movements; they are not even literary movements with attendant artists. They are religions, with a view of the world, a code of behaviour, a hatred of materialism, an ideal of man's future state, a proselytising spirit, a joy in membership of a community of the like-minded, a demand that the faithful must sacrifice other attachments, a hostility to art for art's sake, a hope of transforming existence. Even their history suggests the history of a religion. Dada, like primitive Christianity, is fervently new, somewhat nomadic, unsystematic in doctrine, unbureaucratised; Surrealism resembles the established Church, with its centralised direction and its empire-building, its hierarchy and its hagiography, its orthodoxy and its heresies, its excommunications and its schisms.

The author of those words was David Sylvester, and they are taken from his introduction to the catalogue for an exhibition mounted at the Hayward Gallery, London, in the Spring of 1978. It was called 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed', and no doubt that sounds as though David Sylvester was just passing through. He has probably already been dealt



with by those more qualified than I, who only want to say that there is the aura of truth in his words.

The smaller the sect, the more easily does a sense of exclusivity creep in, and the greater the hatred of suspected apostasy. Without coming nearer home, just take a look, as Sylvester says, at Christianity, not in its beginnings, but when it was on the rise and winning the fight against paganism — and then when 'Christians' were fighting among themselves to establish the one true orthodoxy.

Breton's orthodoxy had spread to England before the 1936 exhibition, and his lead on Marxism had been accepted, with whatever reservations. We should remember at this point that the orthodox view on art in the Soviet Union, as laid down by that great aesthete, art critic and historian, Joseph Stalin, had come up with a revolting and mundane set of clichés known as Social Realism. This had swept aside the more imaginative Constructivism that followed immediately after the Russian Revolution and which led to a great popular upsurge of vitality in both the graphic and the literary arts.

By 1930 Stalin had seen the dangers in letting the imagination go free and he proceeded to put it back in chains; only on *his* terms would poets and artists live and breathe.

Poets Yesenin, Bagritsky and Mayakovsky — not only a poet but a great organiser of 'Agitprop' among workers and peasants — chose not to accept his terms and committed suicide. This was in 1930, and you would have thought that André Breton would have heard about it and worked out why. No doubt certain news was slow to get out of Russia in those days. But then, until the Moscow Trials and the great purges of the mid-1930s, so many were starry-eyed about the Soviet Union — the land of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' — as if that very ambivalent phrase itself should not send a shiver down your spine. But then it's easy to enjoy the benefit of hindsight; in 1917, the word 'dictatorship' had not seen Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler spell it out. And talking about spelling out, perhaps it is because I am English and therefore primarily a gentleman that I cannot bring myself to use the word 'proletariat'! Except in quotes.

So it was that when the Surrealist exhibition opened in London in June 1936, political experience of the Communists was still relatively limited; the Moscow Trials were only just a-brewing. And don't forget that Hitler had come to power only three years before that and only gradually established himself as the world's Public Enemy Number One. Even British reactionaries like Winston Churchill were only just beginning to wonder if they had backed the right horse after all. Still plenty of scope for 'radicals' to be starry-eyed about Joe Stalin!

But if Breton had publicly embraced the Communist Party in



France, it did not mean anything more to the party than that they had another little organisation under their belt to use for party purposes. And at that time, party purposes meant Moscow's purposes.

I don't know how many in England who were interested in Surrealism were also sold on Communism. One, Herbert Read, was already established as England's leading writer on modern art in all its facets. His books, *The Meaning of Art*, *Art and Industry* and *Art and Society*, were almost required reading for my generation of art students — to say nothing of his many works of literary criticism and creative poetry and prose. *Art Now* first appeared in 1933 and a short chapter towards the end of the book introduces us to Surrealism. Freud was credited with being the real founder of the school, for he found a key to the perplexities of life in dreams, where the Surrealists also found their best inspirations. Surrealism, said Read, 'is not the art of the unconscious; it is rather, as its name indicates, the art of the complete mental personality; a synthesis of all its aspects and activities'. And, more significant perhaps for our discussion: 'As a movement it is not confined to the plastic arts, but includes poetry, drama, and even psychology and philosophy; *it has somewhat unreciprocated affinities with communism in politics*' (my emphasis — PS).

I find the choice of the words 'somewhat unreciprocated' delightful! The edition I have of *Art Now* from which I have taken these quotes is dated 1938 (if I read those Roman numerals correctly), and I must admit that I haven't gone back to the original 1933 to see if there has been any alteration in this line. A second edition appeared in 1934, and a 'New and Revised' edition in October 1936, of which my 1938 edition is a reprint. When did Herbert begin to change his mind about the USSR?

Well, he was involved with the 1936 exhibition in London, during the course of which a series of lectures were presented at the good old Conway Hall, scene of quite a bit of blood-letting, philosophical, psychological and physical. Speakers on different evenings included André Breton, Paul Eluard, Hugh Sykes Davies, Salvador Dali and Herbert Read, from whose speech I present the following quotes, of interest for the political connections:

Surrealism will only be truly successful in the degree to which it leads, not to social entertainment, but to revolutionary action. . . .

The surrealist . . . believes that no satisfactory basis for art can be found within the existing form of society. He is, therefore, revolutionary, but not merely revolutionary in matters of art. He begins with a revolutionary attitude in philosophy, with (to be precise) that revolutionary conception for which Marx was responsible, and which may perhaps be summarised in two propositions: 1) that the validity of theory must be tested in the field of activity; and 2) that the object of philosophy is not to interpret the world, but to transform it.



Beginning from such a standpoint, the surrealist is naturally a Marxian Socialist, and generally claims he is a more consistent Communist than many who submit to all manner of compromise with the aesthetic culture and moral conventions of capitalism.

Perhaps in those last couple of lines we see the beginning of the end of his flirtation with Marxism — at least as interpreted by the Communists, who will always be challenged by other interpreters, of whom there are more than enough. My edition of *Art Now*, remember, appeared in February 1938, and perhaps he had no control over its publication. By that time, however, though obviously a quick and prolific writer, he must surely have already written *Poetry and Anarchism*, the first edition of which appeared in June 1938 — also from Faber & Faber. He could, of course, have been 'converted' by two of the leading members of the Paris group — Max Ernst and Man Ray — who were already anarchists.

It was not entirely a conversion, but rather, as he said, 'a return to Proudhon, Tolstoy and Kropotkin, who were the predilections of my youth . . . a mature realisation of their essential rightness'. He excuses his straying from these essential predilections with: 'So long as Lenin and Stalin promised a definitive "withering away of the State" I was prepared to stifle my doubts and prolong my faith. But when five, ten, fifteen, and then twenty years passed, with the liberty of the individual receding at every stage, a break became inevitable. . . . Then for a few breathless months it became possible to transfer our hopes to Spain, where anarchism, so long oppressed, emerged as a predominant force in constructive socialism.'

Then, however, he goes on to a piece of unrealistic prophecy: 'The struggle in Spain was the first phase of the world struggle against fascism, and the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini inevitably involves the overthrow of their ally Franco.' Our own comrades of the CNT (or at least those few hundred who were exiled in Britain during the war) were also convinced the Second World War was a war against Fascism when it was of course nothing of the sort. The enemies this time just happened to be Fascists, that's all.

Herbert's public commitment to anarchism, however, had deepened by the time Freedom Press published a third (revised) edition in 1941, for *The Philosophy of Anarchism* had been specifically written for Freedom Press and published in September 1940 — at the height of the Battle of Britain and the blitz on London. By 1943, when I discovered it (and *Poetry and Anarchism*), it was in its fifth edition.

From the quotes above, Herbert emerges as one always willing to look for the best, always at least an optimist, and always ready to make propaganda for his enthusiasms. He was eclectic, patiently explaining that which was of value in art movements, literature, philosophies, all



that concerns the quality of life. Inevitably, he was sometimes led up blind alleys and perhaps, behind it all, he was a conscious egoist who used what was of value to him in his particular search for the truth. An educationalist, a propagandist, and even if it is a slightly derogatory term, a *populariser*. (Boo, boo, hiss!) Within the Surrealist ambit, as Franklin Rosemont says, he was never a Surrealist in terms of his own work. His poems are lyrical, tender, oblique, understated, and can in no way be included in the Surrealist canon. But for thousands of us of the *hoi polloi*, he shed a little light. He described himself as a 'sympathising intellectual' (enough to damn him in some quarters!), but his sympathies were strong enough to give him strength to stand up and be counted, side by side with those he considered his comrades, when it mattered and even if it meant making public stands against the law. Thus he played an important part in the defence of the Freedom Press Four (as they would be called today) in 1945, when we were put on trial for 'Incitement to Disaffection'.

It was not exactly Herbert's fault if he was *faute de mieux*, 'the best-known spokesman for the [Surrealist] movement in Britain', as Rosemont says. Not only that, but Herbert's book *Surrealism*, which appeared in the wake of the 1936 exhibition (it was probably meant to coincide with it, but was either too late, or was perhaps cashing in on the publicity?), remained the best-known available source of information on the subject until the 1978 exhibition 'Dada and Surrealism Revisited' — already referred to — and its splendid catalogue. This, however, was more explanatory than declamatory. I'm sorry to say, Franklin, that *neither* of these seminal publications had anything of significance from Gascoyne.

If Herbert stood up to be counted with us in 1945, it was a great blow to us when he *knel*t to accept a knighthood for services to literature. But really, should it have wiped out in our memories all he had given before? When Kropotkin decided, against all his own teachings in advance of the First World War (the German attempt to get a bit of empire), to support the British Empire against the Prussians, did the anarchists of the day all cry: 'To hell with *Mutual Aid*'; 'burn *Fields, Factories and Workshops*!'; 'obliterate his memory'? Yet Kropotkin's defection was much more serious than Herbert Read's — and not only because of the great difference in their revolutionary stature. It was a lapse of basic principle. Herbert's lapse was one of integrity, a slip into a bit of vanity, an inability to refuse a recognition from officialdom of a fruitful career. This was really all that Herbert's misdemeanour in anarchist terms consisted of — the fact that the spotlight was on him, was because *we* switched it on. *We* made use of *him* when it suited us,



and kicked him out when it didn't. The Surrealists seem to take the same attitude. It doesn't do any of us much credit.

Penultimately, what about anarcho-syndicalism? (Never mind Jesus, Arthur, what about the workers?) The fact is, that there *has* been a connection, within the Surrealist groups in both London and Chicago. One of the English comrades who was instrumental in causing the serious split in the Anarchist Federation in 1944, on the grounds that we were not giving enough emphasis to 'working-class politics' — i.e. anarcho-syndicalist propaganda — was Ken Hawkes, who in fact (so he told me) came to the anarchists through his interest in Surrealism. He did not, to my knowledge, produce any Surrealist works of his own, nor even expound upon it in public — although he was a strong outdoor and indoor speaker on anarchism and syndicalism. I have, however, a small publication from November 1944 called *Message from Nowhere*, edited by E. L. T. Mesens and published by the London Gallery Editions (and printed on the anarchist press in Whitechapel — then Express Printers) which carried a report by Ken Hawkes of a meeting addressed by a certain Mr (and Mrs) Toni del Renzio which was broken up by 'a number of French, Belgian, American and British Surrealists who were determined to prevent the further discrediting of the movement by this quaint couple'. I don't know if it is a misprint, but the report goes on: 'The Charwoman of the meeting refused to read the letter of protest from one of our friends.' As for Toni del Renzio, only two years before, in a Surrealist publication called *Arson*, he had a full page of text, 'The Return to the Desolation (for my English comrades)', and a reproduction of one of his paintings, and was described by Robert Melville as 'the explorer of the territory between Chirico and Dali'. Phew! He must have had *something* — if only the ability to fool some of the people some of the time.

*Arson* was in fact published in 1942 by Toni del Renzio, but obviously, in this case, with the full approval of all the approved Surrealists living in England — and in it we had the evidence of how they had all managed to survive the Second World War: they all got the hell out of it, with the exceptions of Magritte and Delvaux who, astonishingly, stayed in Belgium, and Picasso who stayed in Paris. Brauner, Péret and Fini went only as far as Marseilles, but Breton, Ernst, Calas, Masson, Matta, Seligmann, Carrington, Tanguy went to New York, whilst others scattered to Mexico, Guadaloupe, Cairo, and E. L. T. Mesens came to London, where, one way or another, together with Jacques Brunius, he kept the flame alive — partly by finding kindred spirits among the anarchists.

Among these, one to emerge with dedication and skill was Simon Watson Taylor, one of those who rallied round Freedom Press when we



were prosecuted in 1945. While Herbert Read rounded up an impressive list of names to sponsor a Freedom Press Defence Committee, Simon became our first secretary — an onerous and unpaid job which entailed an enormous amount of correspondence and organising ability. He was an actor — at least when he was working, which didn't seem to be too often — and when we were safely banged up, the Committee decided to continue as the Freedom Defence Committee (the National Council for Civil Liberties — NCCL — at that time being securely in the hand of Stalinists) as a general purpose civil rights defence committee.

Simon Watson Taylor was an expert French scholar and he set out to produce a publication called *Free Unions / Unions Libres* presenting work from all the known Surrealists in England — spreading his net wide enough to include such famous honorary English gentlemen as the Marquis de Sade and Alfred Jarry, with some scenes from his infamous *Ubu Roi*, the archetypical English King of Poland.

It was not Simon's fault that production of *Free Unions* had only reached the halfway mark when I came out of prison in 1946. I knew nothing about printing and when I went to work at Express Printers discovered I couldn't manage the proverbial wheel-stall, either. When *Free Unions* appeared in 1947, however, its circulation exceeded that of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, no doubt because of its splendid cover by Conroy Maddox. I hope it was only ever intended to be a one-off.

(The drawing of 'War, War' which appeared in *Raven 2* should have been credited to *Free Unions*. It is one of the reasons why I have never claimed to be a Surrealist.)

Simon Watson Taylor went on to achieve fame as one of the founders of the College of 'Pataphysics, complete with Regents, Satraps and 'Patacessors. We cannot begin to explain, much less demonstrate, the simple yet abstract fundamentals of this new science which has fundamentally altered all our lives; instead readers are advised to get themselves a copy of that famous New York scientific journal *Evergreen Review*, which, understanding the importance of 'Pataphysics, devoted a whole issue to it (Vol. 4, No. 13, May-June 1960). It was provedited by Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor.

Instead, as Franklin generously indicated, I turned my attentions, as Ken Hawkes had done, to anarcho-syndicalism. It was not much easier to put across to English audiences, but it was much easier for me to understand. Ken Hawkes went on to be one of the founders of the Syndicalist Workers Federation (we all love federations, don't we?) and for many years played a leading part in the production of *Direct Action*, its official organ (some of us love official organs). After producing it



practically single-handed for several years, he fell back exhausted, and has never been heard of since.

Another interesting connection takes us back to Chicago itself, for it is quite clear that the group producing Surrealist material there are also concerned with both the reactionary and the anarchist history of that toddlin' town. Last year, David Roediger and Franklin Rosemont produced a massive publication called *Haymarket Scrapbook*, commemorating the centenary of the events of 1886 — the Haymarket bombing and the anarchist martyrs who paid the price for being involved in the struggle for the eight-hour day and all that ensued. It truly is a scrapbook in that it contains reproductions of newspapers, posters, memorabilia of all kinds, as well as writings of today.

So there is a connection between Surrealism and anarcho-syndicalism, even if it is obscure for those who don't wish to see. And the connection does not lie merely in those individuals who share interests between one battlefield and another. If the freeing of the body of the worker through his own efforts does not involve also a freeing of his mind and spirit, it leaves his essential self to be controlled by somebody else. This, well disguised, is one of the secret weapons of the Marxists, and all authoritarians, who preach economic salvations, but are careful to keep their own thought police well rehearsed. We all know impatient workers who demand, 'What have art, sex, to do with the working-class revolution?', or, 'Stuff your dreams, mate, we want a ten per cent rise!' It is no coincidence that, rather late in the day, the Surrealists have tended to shuffle off Marxism and show more interest in anarchism. Which nudges me to say, briefly, that a recent publication, *International Surrealist Bulletin* (Number One, September

*Only the rebel can be a hero; he alone is lucid and can look on concrete reality. He will see fire in diamonds, read the future in flames, love in the heart, will discern the forms hidden at night, shadows tied to day, in water the secrets of the dream and the reasons of sleep; he will reveal whatever is daring; heroic, he will not court martyrdom; brave, steadfast, proud, he knows that to be right is not a verdict that history pronounces like an impassive supreme tribunal, but a conquest that the genius wrests from the future at the price of unremitting warfare. The poet fills the air with the breath of his revolt!*

From 'The Light of Words' by Nicolas Calas  
(Arson, London, 1942)



1986), cannot resist a few backward glances at the words of old Karl. Don't be backward, comrades!

One final word. The influence of Surrealism in England should not be under estimated just because it is not frothing on the surface. We English are more subtle than that, don'tchaknow! Rosemont mentions Peter Sellers, presumably thinking of *The Goon Show*. Well, I don't know if *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (a television spectacular series) has reached the States yet, but if and when it does, Franklin, take a butcher's hook at, not just the black humour of the sketches, but also the graphics and cartoons. Quite a bit of plagiarism there! And only the other night, watching an Alan Bennett play on television, I saw a rebellious butler creep under the table and suck the toe of a lady guest. Buñuel would have been delighted!

PS: Please, Franklin, give my regards to Bud Freeman — greatest of Chicago-style tenor saxophone players. If you haven't heard *The Eel*, you haven't lived. I had meant to say something about that, a propos of nothing — but I ran out of breath.



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### Correction

In Heiner Becker's article on Johann Neve, it should be noted that Sketchley's first name was John (not James) and that Andreas Scheu's reminiscences are the most unreliable (not reliable) — see pages 105 and 114. And the *Freedom* leaflet reproduced on p.56 was originally published as a leaflet in 1883 by Joseph Lane (not in the English *Freiheit* of 1881).



## Nicolas Walter

### Alexander Berkman's Russian Diary

Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) was one of the busiest, bravest and best members of the anarchist movement for nearly half a century, and is well worth remembering half a century after his death.

He was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Lithuania — then (and now) part of the Russian empire — and was brought up in St Petersburg. He soon became a religious and then a political dissident, emigrated to the United States at the age of 17, and in the aftermath of the recent Haymarket affair was drawn towards anarchism, joining Jewish and German groups in New York. In 1889 he met Emma Goldman (1869-1940), who had a similar background; they became lovers for a time, and remained friends and colleagues for the rest of his life.

In 1892 he tried to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the bosses' leader in a bitter steel dispute at Homestead, Pennsylvania, and was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment. He served 14 years, about which he wrote *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912), one of the classics both of prison literature and of revolutionary autobiography. On his release in 1906 he joined Emma Goldman at the head of the English-speaking anarchist movement in the United States, editing her paper *Mother Earth* (1908-1915), then his own paper *The Blast* (1916-1917), and then their *Mother Earth Bulletin* (1917-1918), also editing her various books and pamphlets, and in addition lecturing and teaching, helping to organise working and unemployed people, and campaigning for civil rights and freedom of speech. From 1914 they opposed the First World War, and from 1917, when the United States entered the war, they opposed conscription, for which they were both imprisoned on and off from 1917 to 1919. From 1917 they supported the Russian Revolution and indeed the Bolshevik seizure of power, putting revolutionary solidarity before anarchist sectarianism.

At the end of 1919, at the height of the post-war Red Scare in the United States, they were among hundreds of American radicals of Russian origin who were deported to the Soviet Union. They spent two years there, first gladly working for and then gradually turning against the increasingly repressive Communist regime. At the end of 1921 they left Russia again. They travelled to Sweden, moved to Germany, and



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were later based in France. They took a leading part in the anarchist critique of the betrayal of the Russian Revolution, speaking and writing wherever they could get a hearing. In particular, Goldman produced a series of articles reprinted as a pamphlet, *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* (1922), and the autobiographical book, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, which was published in two parts in the United States (1923-1924) and in one part in Great Britain (1925); meanwhile Berkman produced three pamphlets in a 'Russian Revolution Series' (1922), a documentary collection of *Letters from Russian Prisons* (1925), and the autobiographical book *The Bolshevik Myth* (1925), with its sequel *The 'Anti-Climax'* (1925); he also organised an international relief fund for prisoners and exiles in Russia, and edited its *Bulletin* for several years.

Berkman and Goldman were now major figures in the world anarchist movement. He produced a general introduction to anarchism, which was simultaneously published in 1929 as *What is Communist Anarchism?* and as *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, and an abridged version of which was later published as *ABC of Anarchism* (1942)\*; she produced a two-volume autobiography, *Living My Life* (1931). He earned a precarious living as an editor and translator, and when he became seriously ill he killed himself rather than become a burden; she earned an almost equally precarious living as a writer and lecturer, worked for the anarcho-syndicalists during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, and died during a lecture-tour of Canada.

Berkman has been overshadowed by Goldman since their deaths, just as he was during their lives, but although she was more dramatic and glamorous he was more sensible and reliable. By contrast with all the attention she has received in recent years, he doesn't even have a biography yet, though there is at least one academic thesis and some of his writings have been reprinted. He deserves better.

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The Russian Revolution was the most significant event in their lifetimes, and their period in Russia was one of the most important episodes in their lives. In general the experience of the anarchists who were present in Russia between 1917 and 1922 and who witnessed the development of the first Marxist revolution was crucial not only to them personally but to the wider anarchist movement; in particular the

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\* The latest reprint is available from the Freedom Press at £2.



observations of Berkman and Goldman were both very vivid and very widespread, and their contribution to the libertarian view of the subject was especially valuable. In the circumstances the actual documentation of their observations is of great interest, yet curiously little attention has been given to this aspect of their work.

As it happens, both Berkman and Goldman fortunately preserved many of the papers they accumulated during their crowded careers, especially after their return to Europe. Berkman always kept a diary, and had used one in writing his prison book. One of the basic documents they both used in their subsequent writings on the Russian Revolution was the diary which he kept throughout the whole period of their journey to, adventures in, and journey from Russia. It has generally been assumed that this diary was reproduced more or less intact in *The Bolshevik Myth* when it was written during most of 1923. The book's subtitle is 'Diary 1920-1922' (although it begins in 1919 and ends in 1921); according to Berkman's preface, 'the present work is compiled from the Diary which I kept during my two years' stay in Russia' and which is now 'presented to the public in the present volume'; according to the jacket blurb, 'this is the diary of an Anarchist leader's stay in Russia'; according to the publicity leaflet, it was 'a diary kept by Alexander Berkman during his two years in Russia'; according to the press advertisements, it was 'a day to day record of the author's two years stay in Russia'; the title-page of *The 'Anti-Climax'* describes it as 'the concluding' chapter of my Russian diary "The Bolshevik Myth"; and Berkman's preface describes that as 'a day to day record kept during my two years' stay in that country'. Most of the text looks like a diary, with entries arranged under dates in chronological order, and is written like a diary. The reviews at the time understandably assumed that the book was what it seemed, and subsequent references to and quotations from it have similarly and naturally been made as if it were the actual diary and a primary source.

But this is not the situation at all. The published book is in fact only a secondary source, being not just based on or compiled from but elaborately rewritten from the original diary, which still exists and is available for comparison. The manuscript was not only brought out of Russia (though it went missing for a few weeks), and used first by Goldman and then by Berkman for their respective books, but after that it was preserved in his papers (as was his prison diary). These were passed to her after his death, and were then passed by her — together with her own papers — before her own death to the new International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. And there his Russian Diary survives to this day, almost intact, in File XXV of the extensive and valuable Alexander Berkman Papers.



Of course this document has been known to and used by the few scholars who have examined these papers. Paul Avrich discovered and consulted the manuscript more than 20 years ago for his standard history of *The Russian Anarchists* (1967). The bibliographical note on *The Bolshevik Myth* mentioned that 'the full manuscript (with much additional material of importance) is in the Berkman Archive'; there were also a couple of quotations from early entries, and a footnote to the first of them mentioned that 'a much shortened version of Berkman's diary was published in 1925 as *The Bolshevik Myth*'. Yet the other references were to the published book rather than the manuscript, and even cited the former as if it were the same as the latter — as did all the references in his later standard history of *Kronstadt 1921* (1970) and in his anthology of *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (1973). Anyway, Avrich's pioneering work wasn't followed up, except by occasional researchers — especially William G. Nowlin Jr, who also used the manuscript for his doctoral thesis on 'The Political Thought of Alexander Berkman' (1980). But this hasn't been published, and Nowlin's work hasn't been followed up either. *The Bolshevik Myth* itself has been almost forgotten, though an elusive reprint appeared in 1974, a French translation appeared in 1987, and a new English edition is being prepared; and Alexander Berkman's Russian Diary itself still has to be properly brought into public view.

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This document is in fact not a single diary but a series of three consecutive diaries, containing a total of nearly 300 small pages, rapidly but legibly written by hand (mostly in pencil or crayon), almost entirely in good and clear English, with a few words and phrases (mostly proper names or technical terms) in Russian. Most of the pages are still in the original American notebooks, though some have been cut out but kept in order, and there are also a few loose notes in no particular order. On the front cover of the first notebook is scrawled, 'Diary: Russia 1919-1921'; the second consists of loose sheets; the front cover of the third is blank. The entries are almost continuous. There are several short gaps when Berkman was too busy to make daily entries, and some longer gaps when he later wrote up several days at a time; there are a few much longer gaps when he seems either to have made no entries or else to have made separate entries which were later lost. In the end there is a unique record containing about 100,000 words of contemporary documentation of nearly the whole of the two years he spent in Russia, presented in a much more direct and convincing way than was later done in *The Bolshevik Myth*.



One of the most unexpected and intriguing points which emerge from a study and comparison of the manuscript diary and the published book is that, while they are obviously related and generally similar, they are also very different in many ways. The situation is not just that the former contains additional material or that the latter is a shorter version — indeed the comparable sections are more or less the same length — but rather that when the latter was written, a couple of years after the former, it was radically revised in the process. In many cases, indeed, the original entries have been shortened, especially by the omission of personal details but frequently by the omission of political material. In many other cases, however, the original entries have been lengthened just as much, presumably by the addition of details from memory. In yet other cases, which is the real surprise, the original entries have been altered, sometimes beyond recognition, raising several problems of interpretation and calling into question the factual status of the published version.

Ideally, a complete transcript of the whole manuscript diary should be published, but this would take a full-length book and would involve very considerable labour and expense. Certainly, the part covering the period of the Kronstadt rebellion — February-March 1921 — would be well worth publishing on its own as a precious first-hand account of that critical episode and as a fascinating parallel to the version in *The Bolshevik Myth*. Immediately, it is possible here only to give some indication of the character of this extraordinary document.

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In general the diary is much barer than the book. It contains more events but gives fewer details about them, and none of the elaborate descriptions and conversations which bring the book to life. To take a curious example: one of the most striking things in the book is Berkman's acquaintance with a young girl he calls Lena, whom he first meets in a Moscow street-market in February 1920, visits in her poor home in March 1920, and meets again a year later when she is working as a prostitute; she doesn't appear at all in the diary, and though she may have been present in missing entries she is absent from surviving entries where she should appear. Did Berkman suppress her in one, or invent her in the other? There are many such puzzles. On the other hand, the diary reports many impersonal events which aren't mentioned in the book, such as visits to palaces and churches, museums and galleries, concerts and plays, lectures and readings, and books read. Thus Berkman took opportunities to see the paintings in the



Hermitage and to hear Shalyapin sing Boris Godunov, to attend Bely's tribute to Blok and to read Dostoyevsky during the Kronstadt crisis.

At the beginning the diary is much shorter than the book. The voyage from the United States is described at greater length in the book (Chapter I) and with greater immediacy in the letters which Berkman sent back to his American comrades at the time, the bulk of which were published in *The Liberator* (April 1920), and the originals of which are preserved in the same file as the diary itself. The arrival in Russia in January 1920 is also described at greater length in the book (Chapter II), and the diary lacks the rhetorical passages: 'We touched the soil of Soviet Russia. . . . With bared head I stood in the presence of the visible symbols of the Revolution Triumphant. . . . I longed to embrace humanity. . . . It was the most sublime day of my life.' It says little more than 'Great reception — Red Army, music — on R. side'. There follows a long gap — covering Berkman's first month in Russia, when he settled first in Petrograd and then in Moscow, and visited Kropotkin in Dmitrov (Chapters III - X) — which is particularly regrettable. His earliest account of meeting Kropotkin was written after he left Russia — the English version being published in *Freedom* (March 1922) — and resembles that in the book; the absence of a contemporary record is puzzling.

Entries are resumed in March 1920, but remain summary. The account of the anarchist club in Moscow is shorter than in the book (Chapter IX) but includes some details not given there; thus Rogdaev, who isn't mentioned in the book, is described on 8 March as 'fine fellow; intelligent; sincere, active. Broad vision & objective judgement.' Similarly an account of a visit to the anarcho-syndicalist bookshop of *Golos Truda* (Voice of Labour) on 7 March includes the following passage: 'Whole building of literature. Tremendous demand from all parts of the country — can't be supplied, as new things are not published by them — impossible to get nationalized paper.' The encounters with leading Bolsheviks, including Lenin, are described much as in the book (Chapters XI and XIII). So are the various jobs Berkman did — or tried to do — with the authorities (Chapters XIV - XVIII). But the beginning of serious disagreement with the regime during summer 1920, because of the growing persecution of anarchists, is described much more briefly than in the book (Chapter XIX); and there are several discrepancies. In the book Berkman gives a detailed account of how he was asked to translate Lenin's *Infantile Sickness of Leftism* into English and replied that he would do so if he could add a preface replying to Lenin's argument, which was naturally rejected; in the diary there is only this brief entry: 'Asked me to translate Lenin's pamphlet. Am too engaged now. Recommended Shapiro' (22 May



1920). (Did Shapiro take the job?) The second visit to Kropotkin, in July 1920, again isn't mentioned in the diary or in the book, though it is described in the 1922 article (and in Emma Goldman's writings): another puzzle.

The work Berkman and Goldman undertook for the Museum of the Revolution, involving a long journey south to Ukraine (Chapters XXI - XXXV) and a short journey north to Archangel (Chapter XXXVI) in summer and autumn 1920, is described in the same sequence as in the book but with many differences of emphasis and without the rich anecdotes. Far less space is given to the references to Makhno than in the book, and the valuable account of the meeting with Makhno's wife in Kiev is barely recognisable in the following entry: 'Met wife of Mr Father, came for cure to Kiev. Some pluck! . . . Talked with them late. . . .' (Makhno's Ukrainian title *Batko* meant 'Father'!)

The account of Kropotkin's death and funeral in February 1921 is more fragmentary than in the book (Chapter XXXVII), because Berkman was closely involved in the course of events and had already described them in messages sent out of Russia. The account of the Kronstadt rebellion is different in so many ways from that in the book (Chapter XXXVIII) that it should be considered on its own and in full, but it does show that Berkman felt much more uncertain about the Bolsheviks and the rebels than he later indicated.

At the end the diary is much longer than the book. The whole period of nine months from the fall of Kronstadt to the departure from Russia is covered in a single chapter of the book (Chapter XXXIX), in which a score of detached entries from March to September — described as 'Last Links in the Chain' — fill only 15 pages. In the diary the same period fills more than 80 pages, and the chain is much longer and less clear. As well as all the desperate campaigns for persecuted anarchists which dominated Berkman's last months in Russia, for example, he managed to travel to Minsk in November 1921, trying but failing to trace a sister he hadn't seen for 35 years. And, as a final puzzle, in the last part of the diary the best-known passage from the book never appears: 'Gray are the passing days. . . . The Revolution is dead. . . . I have decided to leave Russia.'

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For anarchists, one of the most intriguing aspects of the diary must be the occasional glimpse of Berkman's feelings about anarchism in the Russia of the Revolution and Civil War. Thus he writes soon after his arrival:

There is no An. movement in Petr. or Moscow. That I know of my own



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experience. A few good comrades here & there, but really no movement worthy of the name. Though in some workshops etc. there is much sympathy with An. ideals & ideas. In other parts of the country it is worse yet, I am told. I want to find out for myself — visit the South, the Volga districts, perhaps even Siberia. — And then — what ought to be the attitude of the An. in the present situation. We have long ago suggested an All-Russian conference of An. Now plans are being formed in this direction, but I haven't much faith in the practical results of this undertaking. In Moscow the An. club has opened a seminary, courses for students etc. Talking of a paper, a journal, a conference. Not much enthusiasm, no outstanding directing figure among them. It all depresses me terribly. . . . (12 April 1920)

Then, a few months later, after visiting several parts of the country and finding out more for himself, he returns to the subject:

I, for my part, feel that An. & the An. have failed to work out concrete forms of action, even of thought, to apply to actual revolution & the revolutionary period bound to follow it, as is now the case in R. Many vital problems find no adequate answer in our books & theories. Result — the tragedy of the An. in the midst of the revolution & unable to find their place or activity. A sad, terrible tragedy. I do not agree with E. who thinks that we are fit by our whole former life & activity to fight only against capitalism — I don't think the explanation is the chiefly correct one. The trouble is that we have not clarified certain fundamental problems. Thus for instance the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or even of labour. Merely to say that An. is opposed to it, is not sufficient. Have we anything to offer in its place? How would we manage things? What would we, as An., advise in this or that urgent moment at the time of revolut. upheaval? And how would we carry on the work of rebuilding? . . . (3 December 1920)

And, a few months later still, just as the Kronstadt crisis was breaking, he returns to the subject again:

There are too many different currents in the An. movement in general, and in R. in particular. To that circumstance is due, to a great extent, lack of organization & of common effort. The R. Revol. has split the An., as well as other revolut. movements, into many parts. It has proved inapplicable, or at least for the present impracticable some tenets and tactics. We must profit by the great lessons of the Rev. & revise, where necessary, our foundations even, not to speak of our methods & tactics. There are some basic questions that need revision — or at least clarification. Our struggle so far has been within & against the capit. regime. Our methods & tactics were adapted to that form of struggle & to its needs. But the fact of the R. Rev. & preparation for it in other countries necessitates that we take a definite stand on the new problems — new in the sense of having become urgent in this new epoch. We must clearly define our position on the dictatorship, our proposed method of conducting the revolution, our program industrial & agrarian the day after the barricades. These & many other questions must receive our immediate solution. And the An. movement, as such, has so far not said its word on these vital matters, except taking a negative attitude on some of them. Besides, there is the matter of the Third Internat., the proposed Labor Internat., An. Internat., etc. All



these demand urgently a reply, not from individual comrades, but from the whole movement. The Russ. An., should by right be the first to have their say on these matters. The comrades in Europe & U.S. have the right to expect the first word from us, from those directly participating in or witnessing the first Social Revolution. . . . (2 March 1921)

Such doubts had no place in the book, perhaps, though they strike at the heart of anarchism when faced by a revolutionary situation (and they have never been settled); but they are essential to a proper appreciation of Berkman's thoughts and writings about that situation.

Such an appreciation, however, involves difficult questions of hermeneutics and exegesis (to borrow appropriate terms from biblical criticism) — that is, questions about the interpretation and exposition of complex texts whose composition and intention are obscure. How did Berkman write his Russian Diary in the first place, we may ask, and why did he rewrite it later for publication? William C. Owen said in his unsigned review of the book in *Freedom* (June 1925): 'Berkman's book is a diary in which have been set down the events that passed before his eyes, the activities in which he took a hand, and his views of the innumerable personalities he met — as they struck him at the moment. Such records are always the best of histories. . . .' In fact it is clear that the book is nothing of the kind, though it isn't clear what kind of book it really is. Whatever the various answers may be, *The Bolshevik Myth* remains one of the most important books about the Russian Revolution; but one of the even more important documents of that tragic episode is Alexander Berkman's Russian Diary.

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