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Randolph Bourne vs. the State

H. W. MORTON

"WAR IS THE HEALTH OF THE STATE." Had Randolph Bourne never written another line he would have earned immortality from those words alone. "War is the health of the State," he announced, and went on to explain:

"It automatically sets in motion throughout society those irrestistible forces for uniformity, for passionate co-operation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense. The machinery of Government sets and enforces the drastic penalties; the minorities are either intimidated into silence, or brought slowly around by a subtle process of persuasion which may seem to them really to be converting them. Of course the ideal of perfect loyalty, perfect uniformity is never really attained. The classes upon whom the amateur work of coercion falls are unwearied in their zeal, but often their agitation instead of converting, merely serves to stiffen their resistance. Minorities are rendered sullen, and some intellectual opinion bitter and satirical. But in general, the nation in war-time attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values culminating at the undisputed apex of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war."

And that, I think, just about sums it up.

Randolph Bourne, a brilliant cripple, was born in New Jersey in that singularly radical year 1886, and died in New York City in 1918. A graduate of Columbia University, and a member of that nebulous clique of Greenwich Village Bohemians, he was a frequent contributor to *The New Republic, The Atlantic Monthly, The Seven Arts* and *The Dial*. Most of his writing, however, would be of little interest to anarchists—I found "The History of a Literary Radical & Other Papers" (New York, Russell, 1956) so uniformly innocuous that I didn't even finish it. On the other hand, had this collection included "The State", I would have no complaint, for "The State" is the healthiest of Randolph Bourne.

"The State", an unfinished essay written at the time of World War I, had long been out of print. It has recently been reissued—in time for World War III—by the Greater New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Human Animal, 150 Nassau Street, New York 38, N.Y. It is well worth the $1.00 price despite a rather bizarre format

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H. W. MORTON is a New York anarchist who, with Sam Weiner, wrote "Were they way out, way back?" in ANARCHY 19.

(28 inches wide, 8 inches high when open).

In its incomplete form the essay defines the State, describes its activities, and discusses its historic evolution. Since it was never completed, we cannot know what further treatment Bourne had planned. He might or might not have intended to propose methods of abolishing the State and discuss the possibilities of a Stateless society. From the content of the work itself, I would infer not.

He begins with vigour and brilliance:

"Government is synonymous with neither State nor Nation. It is the machinery by which the nation, organized by a State, carries out its State functions. Government is a framework of the administration of laws, and the carrying out of the public force. Government is the idea of the State put into practical operation in the hands of definite, concrete, fallible men. It is the visible sign of the invisible grace. It is the word made flesh."

Then after this beautifully anarchistic beginning, Bourne immediately disappoints us: "And it has necessarily the limitations inherent in all practicality." Imagine attacking Government on the basis of practical limitations! I can no more conceive of an anarchist writing that, than of a pacifist complaining that Hydrogen Bombs are no good because they don't work.

However, Bourne immediately redeems himself by pointing out that Government "is by no means identical with" the State. He emphasizes the fact that the State is an abstraction whereas Government is tangible. "That the State is a mystical conception is something that must never be forgotten. Its glamour and its significance linger behind the framework of Government and direct its activities." Here Bourne has put his finger on a critical distinction—one which few people other than anarchists seem to grasp.

Society is the sum total of all the relationships, combinations, associations, institutions, etc. of human beings in an indeterminate territory. *The State* is an involuntary legal relationship whereby a supreme authority has control over all persons and property in a specifically bounded territory. *Government* is merely the mechanism of that legal relationship. In other words, Government is an operating body, constituting only part of the overall legal relationship called the State. Similarly the State is but one relationship among all the innumerable relationships which comprise Society. Conversely, Society includes the State; and the State includes the Government. The confusion over the terms, and the temptation to interchange them, arises because Government is the most prominent part of the State, which in turn is the most powerful relationship of Society.

Without a clear understanding of these terms and their exact inter-relationship, anarchist theory becomes incomprehensible. When we anarchists attack the State we don't want to destroy society, injure government employees, or even demolish their office buildings. Contrasting the millenia of society's' growth and development without the State to the imminent prospect of universal death with it, we have concluded that the State is but a removable malignant tumour on the

body social. Therefore we want to abolish the vicious power arrangement by which we are dominated politically, exploited economically, and jeopardized physically.

For the most part Bourne goes along with us. The following, for example, is fine anarchistic analysis:

"What is the State essentially? The more closely we examine it, the more mystical and personal it becomes. On the Nation we can put our hand as a definite social group, with attitudes and quantities exact enough to mean something. On the Government we can put our hand as a certain organisation of ruling functions, the machinery of law-making and law-enforcing. The Administration is a recognizable group of political functionaries, temporarily in charge of the Government. But the State stands as an idea behind them all, eternal, sanctified, and from it Government and Administration conceive themselves to have the breath of life. Even the nation, especially in times of war—or at least, its significant classes—considers that it derives its authority and its purpose from the idea of the State. Nation and State are scarcely differentiated, and the concrete, practical, apparent facts are sunk in the symbol. We reverence not our country but the flag. We may criticize ever so severely our country, but we are disrespectful to the flag at our peril."

On the other hand some of Bourne's terminology is disturbing: he persistently uses "herd", although he contends that "there is nothing invidious in the use of the term." He also refers occasionally to the "significant classes". Yet he is not necessarily élitist, for it is entirely possible that he is viewing people with sympathy rather than scorn. Thus, although he speaks of the State being "the organisation of the herd to act offensively or defensively against another herd similarly organized" and points out how it "becomes an instrument by which the power of the whole herd is wielded for the benefit of a class," he may be writing more in compassion than contempt. I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt in view of his opinion that the working classes "live habitually in an industrial serfdom, by which though nominally free, they are in practice as a class bound to a system of a machine-production the implements of which they do not own, and in the distribution of whose product they have not the slightest voice . . . From such serfdom, military conscription is not so great a change."

Anarchists might also be irked by the treatment Bourne accords man's gregarious instinct. Here too, however, he might not be deriding mutual aid so much as complaining of how the State brutalizes is: "In this great herd-machinery, dissent is like sand in the bearings. The State ideal is primarily a sort of blind animal push towards military unity." I wish I could decide whether his anger is directed solely at the State or if it includes humanity as well, *e.g.*:

"There is, of course, in the feeling towards the State a large element of pure filial mysticism . . . A people at War have become in the most literal sense obedient, respectful, trustful children again, full of that naive faith in the all-wisdom and all-power of the adult who takes care of them, imposes his mild but necessary rule upon

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them. . .

"In your reaction to an imagined attack on your country or an insult to its Government, you draw closer to the herd for protection, you conform in word and deed, and you insist vehemently that everybody else shall think, speak and act together."

Even if Bourne was closer to Nietzsche than to Bakunin, his criticisms are devastating:

"The State is a jealous god and will brook no rivals. Its sovereignty must pervade everyone and all feeling must be run into the stereotyped forms of romantic patriotic militarism which is the traditional expression of the State herd feeling." . . .

"The State moves inevitably along the line from military dictatorship to the divine right of Kings. What had to be at first rawly imposed becomes through social habit to seem the necessary, the inevitable." . . .

"Government [by the time of George III] had been for long what it has never ceased to be—a series of berths and emoluments in Army, Navy, and the different departments of State, for the representatives of the privileged classes."

Judging solely from this essay I surmise that Bourne has never read any of the anarchist theoreticians. or if he did, that not much had rubbed off. (Still, his milieu probably included a few anarchists). Assuming this essay to be an entirely independent creation, it becomes all the more remarkable for its originality and insight. On the other hand much of his brilliance is wasted in exploring ground already covered quite thoroughly by numerous anarchists before him. For 150 years anarchist theoreticians had been building up a vast body of knowledge on the State. No one individual, even one so penetrating as Bourne, could possibly match that century and a half of evolution by himself. Had he taken contemporary anarchist thinking as a point of departure, there is no telling what he might have achieved. For example, his treatment of the State's historic development—the weakest part of the essay—would have been considerably enhanced had he studied Kropotkin. Conversely, Kropotkin could have benefitted from reading Bourne on War:

"The State is intimately connected with war, for it is the organization of the collective community when it acts in a political manner, and to act in a political manner towards a rival group has meant, throughout all history—war. . . .

"It is States that makes wars and not nations, and the very thought and almost necessity of war is bound up with the ideal of the State . . . for war implies an organized people drilled and led; in fact, it necessitates the State."

War for Bourne is not a continuation of diplomacy—rather, "diplomacy is a disguised war."

" . . . for the last stronghold of State power is foreign policy. It is in foreign policy that the State acts most concentratedly as the organized herd, acts with fullest sense of aggressive power, acts with freest arbitrariness. In foreign policy, the State is most itself.

States, with reference to each other, may be said to be in a continual state of latent war. The 'armed truce', a phrase so familiar before 1914, was an accurate description of the normal relation of States when they are not at war. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the normal relations of States is war. Diplomacy is a disguised war, in which States seek to gain by barter and intrigue, by the cleverness of wit, the objectives which they would have to gain more clumsily by means of war. Diplomacy is used while the States are recuperating from conflicts in which they have exhausted themselves. It is the wheedling and the bargaining of the worn-out bullies as they rise from the ground and slowly restore their strength to begin fighting again. If diplomacy had been the moral equivalent for war, a higher stage in human progress, an inestimable means of making words prevail instead of blows, militarism would have broken down and given place to it. But since it is a mere temporary substitute, a mere appearance of war's energy under another form, a surrogate effect is almost exactly proportioned to the armed force behind it. When it fails, the recourse is immediate to the military technique whose thinly veiled arm it has been. A diplomacy that was the agency of popular democratic forces in their non-State manifestations would be no diplomacy at all. It would be no better than the Railway or Education Commissions that are sent from one country to another with rational constructive purpose. The State, acting as a diplomatic-military ideal, is eternally at war. . . ."

"It cannot be too firmly realized that war is a function of States and not of nations, indeed that is the chief function of States. War is a very artificial thing. It is not the naive spontaneous outburst of herd pugnacity; it is no more primary than is formal religion. War cannot exist without a military establishment, and a military establishment cannot exist without a State organization. War has an immemorial tradition and heredity only because the State has a long tradition and heredity. But they are inseparably and functionally joined. *We cannot crusade against war without crusading implicitly against the State.* (My emphasis—H.W.M.). And we cannot expect or take measures to insure, that this war is a war to end war, unless at the same time we take measures to end that State in its traditional form. The State is not the nation, and the State can be modified and even abolished in its present form, without harming the nation. On the contrary, with the passing of the dominance of the State, the genuine life-enhancing forces of the nation will be liberated . . . For the very existence of a State in a system of States means that the nation lies always under a risk of war and invasion, and the calling away of energy into military pursuits means a crippling of the productive and life-enhancing processes of the national life."

In view of all the above sentiments should we consider **Bourne** an anarchist, a pacifist, both, or neither? Obviously he had a genuine hatred both of the State and of war, but somehow I get the impression that he was not ready to replace either the former with freedom, or the latter with love.

Anarchism and the cybernetics of self-organising systems

JOHN D. McEWAN

THE INTENTION OF THIS ARTICLE is to suggest that some of the concepts used by cyberneticians studying evolving self-organising systems may be relevant to anarchist theory, and that some of the conclusions drawn from this study tend to favour libertarian models of social organisation. Much of the specifically cybernetic material is drawn from lectures given by Gordon Pask and Stafford Beer at Salford College of Advanced Technology. They are not, of course, responsible for any conclusions drawn, except where explicitly stated.

Firstly, what do we mean by a self-organising system? One definition is simply 'a system in which the *order* increases as time passes', that is, in which the ratio of the *variety* exhibited to the maximum possible variety decreases; variety being a measure of the complexity of the system as it appears to an observer, the uncertainty for the observer regarding its behaviour. A system with large variety will have a larger number of possible states than one with smaller variety. Thus such a system may start by exhibiting very varied behaviour, e.g. a large number of different responses to a given stimulus may appear equally likely, but over a period of time the behaviour becomes less erratic, more predictable—fewer and fewer distinct responses to a given stimulus are possible (or, better, have a significantly high probability.)

This definition is, however, in some ways restrictive. The best such a system can do is to reach some sort of optimum state and stay there. Also, if we regard the system as a control system attempting to maintain stability in a fluctuating environment, the types of disturbance with which it can deal are limited by the fixed maximum variety of the system. This point will be dealt with later. The essential thing is that unpredictable disturbances are liable to prove too much for the system.

Such considerations suggest that it would be more fruitful to incorporate in the definition the idea that the maximum possible variety might also differ at different times. Thus Pask restricts the term to situations where the history of 'the system' can best be represented as a series $S_0 S_1 \ldots S_n$ each term a system with fixed maximum variety, and each self-organising in the first sense. With this definition we are

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able to deal with control systems of the type found in living organisms. Indeed, with a few limited exceptions, biological and social organisation are, up to now, the only fields in which such control systems can be found. Some of the exceptions, in the shape of artificially constructed systems, despite their crude and elementary nature in comparison with living organisms, do however exhibit remarkably advanced behaviour, at least in comparison with conventional controllers.

For an example of self-organising behaviour in this sense, we may consider a human being learning to solve certain types of problem, as his behaviour appears to an observer. Over an interval the behaviour may appear self-organising in the first sense. When, however, the learner adopts a new concept or method, there will be a discontinuity in the development of the behaviour, after which it will again be self-organising in the first sense, for a time, but now incorporating new possibilities, and so on.

In many discussions of control situations the concept of 'Hierarchy' appears very quickly. This may tend to make the anarchist recoil, but should not do so, since the usage is a technical one and does not coincide with the use of the term in anarchist criticisms of political organisation.

Firstly, the cybernetician makes a very important distinction between two types of hierarchy, the *anatomical* and the *functional,* to use the terminology adopted by Pask. The former is the type exemplified in part by hierarchical social organisation in the normal sense (*e.g.* 'tree of command' structure in industry), that is: there are two (if two levels) actual distinguishable concrete entities involved. The latter refers to the case where there may be only one entity, but there are two or more levels of information structure operating in the system —as for example in some types of neuron networks. A comparable concept is Melman's 'disalienated decision procedure'.[1] This idea might, I think, be suggestive to anarchists.

Secondly, even in the case of 'anatomical hierarchy', the term only means that parts of the system can be distinguished dealing with diifferent levels of decision making and learning, *e.g.* some parts may deal directly with the environment, while other parts relate to activity of these first parts, or some parts learn about individual occurrences, while others learn about sequences of individual occurrences, and others again about classes of sequences.

Even in the anatomical sense, then, the term need have none of the connotations of coercive sanctions in a ruler-ruled relationship which are common in other usages.

An important phenomenon in self-organising systems is interaction between the information flowing in the system and the structure of the system. In a complex system this leads to *Redundancy of Potential Command*—it is *impossible to pick out the critical decision-making element,* since this will change from one time to another, and depend on the information in the system. It will be evident that this implies that the idea of a hierarchy can have only limited application in such a system.

I will now attempt to give a brief sketch of a partly artificial self-organising system, involving the interaction between human beings and a machine. This provides examples of the concepts introduced, and also, I feel, suggests important general conclusions about the characteristics of self-organising groups—characteristics which may sound familiar to libertarians. The machine in question is a group teaching machine developed by Gordon Pask.[2]

Prior to this Pask had developed individual teaching machines which were important advances in the growth of applied cybernetics.[3] However, on considering the problem of group teaching (for skills where some calculable measure of the pupils' performance, the rate of change of which will serve as a suitable indication of learning, exists), he did not simply combine individual machines.

The important insight he had was that a group of human beings, in a learning situation, is itself an evolutionary system, which suggested the idea of the machine as a catalyst, *modifying the communication channels in the group,* and thus producing different group structures.

In the development of the individual teaching machines, the possibility of the pupil dominating the machine had already arisen. This Pask now extended by introducing the idea of a quality 'money' allocated to each member of the group, and used by each of them to 'buy' for himself control over the communication structure of the group and over the partial specification of the solution provided by the machine. Now, in the individual machine, the degree to which the pupil was helped was coupled to change of his degree of success. If he was becoming more successful then the help given was decreased. In the group machine, the allocation of 'money' is coupled to *two* conditions—increasing success *and* increasing variety in the group structure. This second condition is the key to the novelty of the system.

This system, then, has changing dominance and exhibits redundancy of potential command.

In practice, each pupil sits in a little cubicle provided with buttons and indicators for communication, and a computor is used for control, calculating the various measures, etc. The operator is provided with some way of seeing what is going on, and can deliberately make things difficult for the group, by introducing false information into the channels, etc., seeing how the group copes with it.

The problems which Pask, at the time, had used in these group experiments had been formulated as conveying information about the position of a point in some space, with noise in the communication channels. The group had been asked to imagine that they are air traffic controllers, given co-ordinates specifying the position of an aircraft at a certain time, for example.

He suggests, however, that problems of agreeing on a choice of policy on a basis of agreed facts is not, in principle, very different from this case in which 'the facts' are in dispute, and there is no question of adopting any future policy—except of course the policy to adopt in order to ascertain the true facts and communicate them; this being the problem which the group solves for itself. It is in this sense that

the group may be regarded as a decision maker.

It will be noted that the state of the system when in equilibrium *is* the solution to the problem. Also that this solution changes with time. This is also the case in the first example from purely human organisation which occurred to me—a jazz band (an example also suggested by Pask).

Pask emphasised that he had not then had the opportunity to obtain sufficient data to make any far-reaching well substantiated generalisations from these experiments. The results he had obtained, however, were very interesting and, I think, give considerable insight into the characteristics of self-organising systems, and their advantages over other types of decision-makers.

Some groups, after an initial stage while they were gaining familiarity with the machine, began assigning specific roles to their members and introducting standard procedures. This led to a drop in efficiency and inability to handle new factors introduced by spurious information, etc. The learning curve rises, flattens, then drops sharply whenever some new element is introduced. The system is now no longer self-organising.

Necessary characteristics for a group to consituted self-organising system, Park suggests, are avoidance of fixed role-assignments and stereotyped procedures. This is of course tied up with redundancy of potential command.

I think we might sum up 'fixed role assignment and stereotyped procedures' in one word—institutionalisation.

Note that these characteristics are *necessary,* not *sufficient*—at the very least the group must first of all constitute a system in a meaningful sense; there must be communication between the members, a sufficient structure of information channels and feedback loops.

The role of the computer in Pask's system may be worrying some. Is this not an analogue of an authoritarian 'guiding hand'? The answer is, I think, no. It must be remembered that this is an artificial exercise the group is performing. A problem is set by the operator. There is therefore no real situation in actuality for the group to affect and observe the result of their efforts. It is this function of determining and feeding back success/failure information which the machine fulfils.

The other important aspect of the machine as a catalyst in the learning process, we have already mentioned. There is a rough analogy here with the role of 'influence leader' in the Hausers' sense,[4] rather than any authoritarian 'overseer'. I will return to this question of the role of the machine shortly.

Regarding the group as a decision maker, Pask suggests that this is perhaps the only sense in which 'two heads are better than one' is true—if the 'two heads' constitute a self-organising system. The clue as to why a number of heads, *e.g.*, notoriously, in committees, often turn out to be much worse than one, is, he suggests, this business of role assignment and stereotyped procedure. He has not, however, suggested why this should arise.

Drawing on knowledge of behaviour of a self-organising nature

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exhibited in other groups, *e.g.* informal shop-floor organisation, the adaptability and efficiency exhibited in instances of collective contract working, and similar phenomena,[5] we may perhaps offer some suggestions as to how institutionalisation may arise in certain types of circumstances.

Imagine a workshop of reasonable size, in which a number of connected processes are going on, and where there is some variation in the factors affecting the work to be taken into account. There is considerable evidence that the workers in such a shop, working as a co-operating group, are able to organise themselves without outside interference, in such a way as to cope efficiently with the job, and show remarkable facility in coping with unforseeable difficulties and disruptions of normal procedure.

There are two levels of task here:
1. The complex of actual production tasks.
2. The task of solving the problem of how the group should be organised to perform these first level tasks, and how information about them should be dealt with by the group.

In situations of the kind I am imagining, the organisation of the group is largely determined by the needs of the job, which are fairly obvious to all concerned. There is continual feed-back of information from the job to the group. Any unusual occurrence will force itself on their notice and will be dealt with according to their resources at that time.

Purely for the purpose of illustration, let us now consider the situation of the same type of shop, only this time assuming that it is organised by a committee from outside the shop. The situation in which the committee finds itself is completely different from that of the work group. There are now three levels of problem:
1. The problems solved by the individual workers, *i.e.* their jobs.
2. The problem of the organisation of the work group.
3. The problem of the organisation of the committee itself.

The determining success/failure information for all these has still to come from (or at least is supposed to come from), the net result of the solution of the first level problems, *i.e.* the state of production in the shop.

The committee is denied the continuous feed-back which the group had. While working on its solution to the second level problem, it will have no information about the success of its alternatives, only previous findings, coded, in practice, in an inadequate way. The degree of success will only be observable after a trial period after they have decided on a solution. (Also unusual circumstances can only be dealt with as *types* of occurrence, since they cannot enumerate all possibilities. This is important in determining the relative efficiency of the two methods of organisation, but is of less importance in our immediate problem.)

It follows that the committee cannot solve the third problem by a method analogous to that used by the original work group in solving the second level problem; while working on the second level problem the committee has no comparable information available to determine the solution of the third level problem. But they must adopt some procedure, some organisation at a given time. How then is it to be determined?

In theory, such a controller could still remain an adoptive self-organising system, learning the structure to adopt in particular circumstances over a longer period of time, though it would still suffer from imperfect information.

In practice, however, the committee promptly convene a meeting, assign specific functions and decide on standard procedures. The actual determining information is probably a mixture of personality factors (including externally deprived status) and the existing ideas on organisation theory (including local precedent) possessed by the members. Once decided they will shelve the third level problem unless disaster, or a new superior, strikes, when a similar, but more cumbersome, procedure will be necessary to re-organise the committee along the same general lines.

In other words, within the closed system of the committee and work group, there is no, or virtually no, coupling between the success of the actual undertaking, *i.e.* the production job, and the decision procedure solving the third level problem. Worse, the factors influencing the solution of this problem, far from increasing the possible variety of the committee, lead to rigidity and low variety. Owing to this structure it will generally prove less efficient than a single imaginative person.

We might suggest, then, that it is this isolation from the process in terms of which the success of their own activity is defined, which is generally typical of the committee situation, which leads to their common failure to exhibit self-organising characteristics, and frequent inadequacy as decision makers.

Consider the first case of the self-organising work group again. Here it is the *job itself* which provides the analogue of Pask's machine, as far as feedback of success/failure information is concerned. Also, it has frequently been pointed out that in a 'face-to-face' group in this kind of situation (*i.e.* where the need for the situation demanding collective action are fairly obvious, and where some common criteria of success exist), that group leadership tends to be granted to the member or members best suited to the particular circumstances obtaining,* and to change as these circumstances change. In other words, changing dominance, determined by the needs of the situation. Here again, the job, acting through the group psychology of the face-to-face group performs a function analogous to Pask's machine, allocating temporary dominance in accordance with success.

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*'best suited' that is from the point of view of the group.

I now wish to turn from this question of small group organisation to that of larger systems, and consider some criticisms of conventional industrial organisation developed, in particular, by Stafford Beer. He maintains that conventional ideas of control in complex situations, such as an industrial company, or the economy of a country, are crude and inadequate. "The fact is," he says, "that our whole concept of control is naive, primitive, and ridden with an almost retributive idea of causality. Control to most people (and what a reflection this is upon a sophisticated society!) is a crude process of coercion."[6]

In the lecture referred to earlier, his main thesis was the impossibility of truly efficient control of a complex undertaking by the type of rigid hierarchic organisation with which we are at present familiar. That such systems manage to survive, and work in some sort of manner, as they obviously do, is, he suggested, due to the fact that they are not entirely what they are supposed to be—that there are unofficial self-organising systems and tendencies in the organisation which are essential to its survival.

Beer is unusually perceptive, and frank, in emphasising the prevalence and importance of unofficial initiatives at all levels, e.g. (of shop-floor workers). "They arrange things which would horrify management, if they ever found out", (of charge-hands, etc.) "If they did not talk things over and come to mutual agreements, the whole business would collapse."

The main keystones in Beer's argument are Ashby's 'Principle of Requisite Variety' from the theory of homeostats, and information-theoretic requirements for adequate channel capacity in a multi-level system.

The principle of requisite variety states that, if stability is to be attained, the variety of the controlling system must be at least as great as the variety of the system to be controlled. We have already had an instance of this, for this was really the trouble with our hypothetical committee: due to its rigid structure and the need to issue instructions in terms of standard procedures to be adopted, it could not possibly be efficient in a situation of any complexity. If we made the further assumption that there was no organisation of the work group other than that imposed by the committee, chaos would be unavoidable. Approximations to this occur in 'working to rule'. In normal working, the initiatives of the shop-floor workers would serve as an additional source of variety, this enabling the principle of requisite variety to be satisfied, at least as far as normal variations in the factors affecting the production situation were concerned.

The relevance of the requirements of channel capacity is to the inadequate, attenuated information available at the top of the hierarchy —this is inevitable, for, in practice, the channel capacity could never be made adequate in the sort of pyramidical structures we have—and also to the inadequacy of the formal channels between subsystems (e.g. departments) which require to co-ordinate their activities.

To emphasise how far conventional managerial ideas of organisation are from satisfying the principle of requisite variety, Beer used an

amusing parable concerning a Martian visitor to Earth, who examines the activities at the lower levels of some large undertaking, the brains of the workers concerned, and the organisational chart purporting to show how the undertaking is controlled. The visitor is most impressed, and deduces that the creatures at the top of the hierarchy must have heads yards wide.

In discussing the attempts of an inadequate control system to control a system of greater variety, Beer pointed to the accumulation of unassimilable information likely to occur as the control vainly struggles to keep track of the situation.

A comparable converse phenomenon was pointed out by Proudhon in 1851, in what must rank as one of the most prophetic statements about the development of social organisation ever written: "(The government) must make as many laws as it finds interests, and, as interests are innumerable, *relations arising from one another multiply to infinity,* and antagonism is endless, lawmaking must go on without stopping. Laws, decrees, ordinances, resolutions, will fall like hail upon the unfortunate people. After a time the political ground will be covered by a layer of paper, which the geologists will put down among the vicissitudes of the earth as the *papyraceous formation.*"[7] (The first italics are mine.)

This is also an early, and lucid, statement of the complexity of the control situation in social organisation.

Beer has some suggestive ideas on the question of centralisation *vs.* decentralisation in industry. (That is, centralisation of control. The question of centralisation of *plant* is a different, if related, problem.) He puts the dilemma thus:

Centralise: insufficient channel capacity, etc.—cannot work efficiently.
Decentralise: completely autonomous units—no cohesion, probably
　　　ceases to be a system at all

The point, he suggests is that neither alternative corresponds to what we find in really efficient systems, *i.e.* complex living organisms. What we do find are a number of different, interlocking control systems. Beer also draws attention to the prevalence, and importance, of redundancy of potential command in self-organising systems, and points out that it is completely alien to the sort of theory of organisation found in industry and in similar undertakings.

The type of organisation at which we should aim is, he suggests, an organic one, involving interlocking control systems, intermeshing at all levels, utilising the principle of evolving self-organising systems, with the channel capacity and flow of information kept as high as possible.[8]

He mentioned in this connection an American businessman who claimed that his business was, in part, organised along somewhat similar lines and seemed to work very well. The idea was that anybody at all, no matter how 'junior' (I do not know whether this was actually restricted to what are termed 'staff' or not), could call a conference at short notice, to discuss anything they wanted, whether connected with

their work or not. Such a meeting could call in the president of the company himself, or anyone they thought they needed.

In context of interlocking control structures, we may note, as a fairly crude example, the syndicalist attempt to co-ordinate the activity of their basic units, the factory unions, through an interlocking two-fold structure of industrial and territorial federation.

Let us now contrast two models of decision making and control. First we have the model current among management theorists in industry, with its counterpart in conventional thinking about government in society as a whole. This is the model of a rigid pyramidal hierarchy, with lines of 'communication and command' running from the top to the bottom of the pyramid. There is fixed delineation of responsibility, each element has a specified role, and the procedures to be followed at any level are determined within fairly narrow limits, and may only be changed by decisions of elements higher in the hierarchy. The role of the top group of the hierarchy is sometimes supposed to be comparable to the 'brain' of the system.

The other model is from the cybernetics of evolving self-organising systems. Here we have a system of large variety, sufficient to cope with a complex unpredictable environment. Its characteristics are changing structure, modifying itself under continual feedback from the environment, exhibiting redundancy of potential command, and involving complex interlocking control structures. Learning and decision-making are distributed throughout the system, denser perhaps in some areas than in others.

Has any social thinker thought of social organisation, actual or possible, in terms comparable with this model? I think so. Compare Kropotkin on that society which "seeks the fullest development of free association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all conceivable purposes: an ever-changing association bearing in itself the elements of its own duration, and taking on the forms which at any moment best correspond to the manifold endeavours of all."[9]

Further, "A society to which pre-established forms crystallised by law, are repugnant, which looks for harmony in an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium between a multitude of varied forces and influences of every kind, following their own course."

The language is perhaps somewhat vague and ambiguous, but for a brief description in non-technical terms, of a society conceived as a complex evolving self-organising system, it could hardly be bettered. Certainly not in 1896.

The tragedy is not that so-called progressive thinkers today think that anarchist ideas of society and social organisation are inadequate. (This is excusable, and indicates failure on the part of anarchist propagandists to develop and spread their ideas.) It is that they think the other model *is* adequate. Also that they are incapable of thinking in any other terms.

Hence such thinkers are surprised when they cannot find the great efficient decision makers they expect in control of our institutions. The

'solutions' they propose to the muddle they do find, would require super-men-gods to work—even if the supermen could obtain adequate information to determine their decisions. This, from the nature of the structure, they can never do.

Again, when existing systems break down, as in industrial disputes, the tendency for the leaders on both sides is to attempt to remedy the situation by measures which increase the inadequacy of the system. That is, they attempt, by reorganisation and contractual measures, to increase the rigidity of the system by defining roles and responsibilities more closely, and try to confine the activities of human beings, who are themselves evolving self-organising systems, within a predetermined contractual framework. An interesting example of this will be found in *Wildcat Strike* by A. W. Gouldner.

To return to the conventional picture of government and the supposed control by the governed in democratic theory:

Firstly, does what I have said about the inefficiency and crudity of the governmental model as a control mechanism conflict with Grey Walter's analysis in his article "The Development and Significance of Cybernetics" in ANARCHY 25, in which he claimed that Western democratic systems were remarkably sophisticated from the cybernetic point of view?

I do not think so. The point is that what I am claiming is that they are inadequate for controlling the economy, say, or providing the greatest compatible satisfactions for the governed, as Proudhon pointed out. I would also claim that they are inadequate as mechanisms for maintaining order in society, unless society is conceived as largely self-regulating without the governmental institutions. Given this, I do not deny that the government-electorate system has proved an efficient *machine for maintaining itself,* although I might be inclined to give a little more importance to unofficial, informal elements in the system in this context than Grey Walter does in his article.

I agree that the system is well adapted to this task. Also, various psychological factors outside the scope of cybernetics help in the self-perpetuation of a system of this nature.

If the model of effective control by the government is inadequate, the naive democratic theory of control of the government by the people is much more so. This theory puts great stress on the importance of elections as the means by which the governed control their rulers and on the results of the elections, and hence, derivatively, on the constitution and behaviour of the government, as expressions of 'the will of the people'.

If we consider the individual, in a two party system, he is allowed one binary choice every five years or so, in which to reflect all the complex, dimly understood, effects of government actions, intended and unintended. The model seems to allow of no structured subsystem to be indentified as 'the people'—there is only an aggregate of individual choices.

It seems to me significant that this theory of self-government of the people, by the people, through universal, or at least wide, suffrage,

developed in the 18th and 19th centuries along with the growth of the 'rabble hypothesis' of society (*i.e.* society as an unstructured aggregate of individual social atoms, pursuing their own egocentric interests, held together only by authority and coercion). Sociologists and social psychologists now find this picture of society completely inadequate.[10]

This is not to deny the genius of some of the thinkers who worked within the limitations of this model of democracy, for they were able to see the difficulties in practice, and devised most complicated systems of checks and balances to render their systems practicable, (*e.g.* the architects of the American constitution, as Grey Walter points out). However, they could not be expected to overcome the fundamental inadequacies of their model of government of the people, by the people, for the people, no matter how successful they were in developing the skeletons of viable self-perpetuating systems.

In contrast to the 'rabble hypothesis', we find that libertarian socialist thought, especially in Kropotkin and Landauer, showed an early grasp of the complex group structure of society; society as a complex network of changing relationships, involving many structures of correlated activity and mutual aid, independent of authoritarian coercion. It was against this background that they developed their theories of social organisation.

Neither am I convinced by the more sophisticated pressure group theory of democracy, introduced in an attempt to avoid the obvious inadequacy of the naive theory. As a descriptive theory of the actual situation it does seem reasonably adequate, but as a means by which the individual obtains a voice in decisions affecting him, it is just as inadequate as the naive theory. This in fact is generally admitted by its adherents, who have largely dropped the idea of democracy as self-government.[11]

In the case where a group, of a self-organising type, freely organises itself to tackle some situation, the resulting structure adopted by the group might be taken to exhibit 'the will of the group'. More generally, groups of this nature are capable of genuine group decisions. Such expressions as 'the will of the group (people)' are, I suggest, acceptable, and only as a rather dangerous shorthand, solely in cases of this sort.

In direct application, this is, of course, limited to fairly small groups, since, beyond a certain size, an unstructured aggregate of human beings is unable to act as a group, because there is too much information to be handled. The channel capacity is probably inadequate, and, even if the individual member could be presented with sufficient information, he would be unable to deal with it.

In certain work situations where the job effectively constrains the system, and only part of the behaviour needs to be correlated, we might expect larger aggregates to be capable of behaviour as a group. This is borne out by experience. In a situation where complex activity has to be correlated and there are few prior constraints, *e.g.* collective improvisation in a jazz band, most research groups, discussion groups, a maximum of the order of ten seems to be imposed; in manual jobs

of certain types, and in the groups of the gang system at Coventry, much larger aggregates are found capable of coherent behaviour—groups of the order of a hundred or even a thousand members. Some of the very large groups, *e.g.* in the motor industry, may, however, be examples of more complex organisation.

We have said that only small aggregates of human beings, if regarded initially as unstructured, can exhibit genuine group behaviour. There is no reason, however, why large aggregates, if *sufficiently structured,* should not maintain coherent behaviour, while retaining genuine self-organising characteristics enabling them to deal with unpredictable disturbances in their environment (including in 'environment' their own 'substance', *i.e.* the human being constituting the aggregate) without developing a hierarchic structure in the authoritarian sense.

This is not to say that there will be no hierarchy in the *logical* sense. There will certainly be functional hierarchy in the sense of multi-level information flow, *i.e.* problem solving at the level of group environment, internal activity of subgroup, relations between sub-groups, and so on. We have seen that this need not *necessarily* mean different isolatable physical parts handling the different levels. In a situation of great complexity, however, we would expect to find anatomical hierarchies, in as far as there would be identifiable subgroups, of varying degrees of permanence of form and constitution, dealing with different levels of activity.

The essential points are that the existence of redundancy of potential command, with changing dominance, means that any analysis of part of the system at any time in terms of a hierarchic model must be regarded with caution, and that, where such anatomical hierarchy is distinguishable, it need not be a question of the higher levels controlling the lower by coercive sanctions, but rather of feeding back information to bias the autonomous activity of the other subgroup. In short, a very different sort of hierarchy from that of managerial theory.

There certainly need not be any isolatable 'control unit' controlling the rest.

I am using 'structured' here in a sense comparable to Buber, *i.e.* possessing a structure of connected subgroups, groupings or subgroups, etc., of a functional nature, but I would place relatively less emphasis on formal federation of subgroups, even in multiple federation, than Buber,[12] and more on more complex forms of connection. Also I am counting as subgroups both localised and more diffuse structures, formal and informal. One form of connection which seems to be of importance, is the case of diffuse substructures 'penetrating' into more localised ones, *e.g.* certain members of a particular subgrouping being members of some more widespread grouping, some sort of interest association, say, and thus serving as a means by which information about special forms of activity, passing in the more widespread structures, can pass into the localised structure, and play a part in determining its subsequent behaviour.

I hope I have shown that ideas derived from cybernetics and information theory are suggestive of fruitful lines of approach in considering social organisation, especially to the libertarian. I would not, however, expect too much in the way of rigorous direct application of cybernetic technique to social situations, for two reasons. Firstly there is the difficulty of specifying adequate and generally acceptable models of complex social situations, where the bias of the observer is notoriously effective in determining the picture he adopts. Secondly, the information theoretic concept of 'information' is an abstract one which emphasises only the selective characteristic on information. There are situations in which this is not entirely adequate.

This, however, is no excuse for remaining bound by a primitive and inadequate model of decision-making and control procedures. The basic premise of the governmentalist—namely, that any society must incorporate some mechanism for overall control—is certainly true, if we use 'control' in the sense of "maintain a large number of critical variables within limits of toleration.' Indeed, the statement is virtually a tautology, since if such a situation did not exist, the aggregate would not possess sufficient stability to merit the designation 'a society'.

The error of the governmentalist is to think that 'incorporate some mechanism for control' is always equivalent to 'include a fixed isolatable control unit to which the rest, *i.e.* the majority, of the system is subservient'. This may be an adequate interpretation in the case of a model railway system, but not for a human society.

The alternative model is complex, and changing in its search for stability in the face of unpredictable disturbances—and much less easy to describe. Indeed, we are perhaps just beginning to develop an adequate language to describe such situations, despite the prophetic insights of a few men in the past.

A quotation from Proudhon makes a fitting conclusion—and starting point—"People like simple ideas and are right to like them. Unfortunately, the simplicity they seek is only to be found in elementary things; and the world, society, and man are made up of insoluble problems, contrary principles, and conflicting forces. Organism means complication, and multiplicity means contradiction, opposition, independence."[13]

1. See Seymour Melman: **Decision-Making and Productivity** (Blackwell, 1958).
2. Gordon Pask: "Interaction between a Group of Subjects and an Adaptive Automaton to produce a Self-Organising System for Decision-Making" in the symposium **Self-Organising Systems, 1962,** ed. Jovits, Jacobi and Goldstein (Spartan Books).
3. See Stafford Beer: **Cybernetics and Management** (English Universities Press, 1959) pp.123-127, and Gordon Pask: **An Approach to Cybernetics** (Hutchinson 1961).
4. See Richard and Hephzibah Hauser: **The Fraternal Society** (Bodley Head, 1962).
5. See, for example, the paper by Trist on collective contract working in the Durham coalfield quoted by H. Clegg in **A New Approach to Industrial Democracy** (Blackwell 1960) and the discussion of this book by Geoffrey Ostergaard in ANARCHY 2. Note the appearance of new elements of job rotation.

Despite his emphasis on the formal aspects of worker organisation, Melman's analysis (see Note 1) of the worker decision process at Standard's brings out many of the characteristics of a self-organising system: the evolving nature of the process; the difficulty of determining where a particular decision was made; changing dominance; the way in which the cumulative experience of the group changes the frame of reference against which subsequent problems are set for solution. A better idea of the gang system from which this derives can, however, be obtained from Reg Wright's articles in ANARCHY 2 & 8.

6. Beer, **op. cit.** p.21.
7. P.-J. Proudhon: **The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century** (Freedom Press, 1923).
8. Compare also the concluding section of Pask's **An Approach to Cybernetics,** in particular the discussion of a 'biologically organised' factory.
9. Peter Kropotkin: **Anarchism, its Philosophy and Ideal** (Freedom Press, 1895).
10. See, for example J. A. C. Brown: **The Social Psychology of Industry** (Penguin 1954), Ch. 2.
11. See Clegg: **A New Approach to Industrial Democracy** and G. Ostergaard's discussion in ANARCHY 2.
12. See Martin Buber: **Paths in Utopia** (Routledge, 1949).
13. P.-J. Proudhon: The Theory of Taxation (1861) quoted in Buber **op. cit.**

Beatnik as anarchist?

IAN VINE

MANY YOUNGER ANARCHISTS ARE USED TO BEING CALLED BEATNIKS, because it is a word which has been seized on by our free press and turned into a term of derision, to be applied indiscriminately to young non-conformists who dare to challenge the social norms in sex, dress, and mass murder. It is frequently been applied in ways very different from those intended by its originators, and unless we re-define it, is a word without real meaning.

Who then are the real Beats? Clellon Holmes described being beat as:

" . . . not so much weariness, as rawness of the nerves; not so much being 'filled up to *here*' as being emptied out. It describes a state of mind from which all inessentials have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it, but impatient with trivial obstructions. To be beat is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up; to be existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre sense."

Kerouac says:

" . . . we seek to find new phrases . . . a tune, a thought, that will someday be the only tune and thought in the world and which will raise men's souls to joy."

But these are only the spokesmen. Most beats do not think in such high-flown terms as these. Most society disaffiliates will admit to sharing *some* of the ideas and feelings of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Mailer, whether they be anarchists or not, but most will not be Beat in the extreme sense. Similarly, by no means all of the definitive Beat characteristics are possessed by these writers.

I shall then confine my use of the word to a particular extreme group, which is in fact that furthest outside society, and which happens to coincide remarkably closely with what the Sunday papers would have us believe is the *norm* amongst nuclear disarmers. Actually, although statistics are impossible, I doubt if these are more than a few hundred such beats in the whole of the British Isles.

These real beatniks are often visually distinctive, the boys frequently having beards, long hair, threadbare jeans, sandals, and a variety of eccentric coats and neck-ties, while the girls, except for the beards, are more or less the same. But appearances can be confusing, for there are a large number of other social rebels who adopt the same or similar uniforms without adopting the Beat philosophy and way of life. These range from art students and anarchists to the dissident sons of aristocrats, and to attempt to analyse *their* ideas and motivations would take a book in itself. One interesting point is that the bowler-hats and starched collars of the "ravers" are usually absent among the real beats—an indication that they largely eschew the ostentation of oddity for oddity's sake.

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the beat is his restlessness. The average beat (if such an animal exists) likes to be "on the road", always moving on, never forming fixed attachments with his environment. Although there are certain recognised "scenes", there are few permanent beat communities. The population in any given town is constantly changing as someone moves on, perhaps not to return for a year, and someone-else "makes town". The traditional method of travel is hitching lifts, and if you can con the driver for a meal and a few fags then so much the better. It is remarkable how far some beats travel by this means, most have covered almost the whole of Britain this way, and many have travelled widely abroad. One who was recently in Bristol for the winter was last heard of in the Sahara nuclear testing area, being looked after by the Foreign Legion The relevance of all this to anarchists may be questioned, but it brings me to my first main contention: that the beat has found a solution to the problem of how to remain almost entirely free in an authoritarian society. His solution may not be to our liking, but

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IAN VINE, born 1943, left school to become an apprentice at Bristol Aircraft Ltd., but after four years his abhorrence of capitalist industry and the war machine had grown to such an extent that he left, and enters Bristol University in October. A member of the West Committee of 100 and the Bristol Federation of Anarchists, he has just published his first book of poems, The Holy Eye.

because he has one he is certainly worthy of our serious attention.

Needless to say, they have bought their freedom at a price. Most of them do not work, and few can afford a "pad" of their own. Occasionally a flat is taken over by a small group who happen to have found an easy means of temporary employment, but this never lasts for long, either because the landlord is getting no rent, or because of the intolerance of neighbours. Most of them will if necessary, rough it under a hedge or in a bus shelter, but normally they will stick to scenes where someone is prepared to put them up for a few days or weeks. They do in fact depend largely on charity, which is usually pretty freely given, usually by someone on the beat fringe who has a permanent pad. Frequently their only possession is a sleeping bag, and occasionally even these get lost *en route*. And that too can be an advantage if it gets you the spare mattress.

Work is definitely frowned on (and when it's not there aren't many employers who would employ a long-haired, bearded, unwashed beat), but few beatniks draw national assistance or unemployment benefit. This is not through any laudable refusal to be involved in the dealings of a capitalist system, or a matter of conscience, but mainly because most of them are ineligible to draw them. They are vagrants in the most literal sense, and apart from having no fixed address dislike having to stay in one area, and being obliged to present themselves regularly in front of some hostile official. This is not only an assertion of their freedom, but also provides their second, and inevitable, claim to being anarchists, namely their hatred of orders and authority.

They are of course not alone in this respect, since they share the characteristic with the teds as well as with us, but they differ from most groups who detest the police in that they are not interested in wasting time in contemplating libertarian utopias, they prefer to enjoy life here and now. Ignoring all that doesn't happen to suit them, their search for living involves them in the drugs and alcoholic excesses which delight the Fleet Street snoopers; and their disregard for "trivialities" makes them unenthusiastic bathers—especially as few of them have a change of clothes anyway. All this horrifies the righteous, but criticism means nothing to them. If we can consider them as anarchists we should never expect them to help propagate the anarchist cause or listen to our criticisms. The typical beat could by no stretch of the imagination be called "politically minded". It is true that many of them wear CND badges, and even march with us at Aldermaston, but they'll never be found at political meetings or civil-disobedience demos. Their reason is common enough—their ability to see through the humbug of politicians, and their disbelief that anything can ever remove them. Most of them have packed more into 20 years experience than the "squares" do into 70, and they are cynical in the extreme. This is one very significant beat characteristic—there is no desire to influence or convert, each beatnik is his own philosopher and his own master, and is happy to remain such.

Despite the divergence here from the anarchist aim of promoting change I feel we have still something to learn from the beats. One

important positive virtue they have is their close community and co-operative sense. This has been effectively described by Colin Wilson in his novel "Adrift in Soho", but an example from my own experience should help make the point. Recently a group of eight or so spent a couple of weeks in Bristol. Each evening they would congregate in the local left wing pub (where the landlord far prefers them to the teds), and sit around talking, singing, and cadging drinks—which were freely shared—while one played guitar for hours on end, both for enjoyment and to entertain the attentive crowd. Towards closing-time the prettiest girls would go round with beer mug, sidling up to listeners and asking "Put some money in the glass, for the singer?" By doing a very effective "poor little girl" act they would bring in several shillings in a few minutes. This would then be counted out on the table and divided up between the group, either equally or dependent on need. Likewise, one beat would assiduously collect all the dogends from the ashtrays and these would then be taken back to the pad for a communal roll-up.

This existence of this communistic sense amongst the beats is partly due no doubt to force of circumstances, mutual co-operation being essential to guarantee their survival. But it is an indication of its strength that it exists despite the remarkable egoism and ruthlessness of some of them. Most will willingly fleece any outsider who thinks to use them as a source of amusement, but only the smallest few will cheat their own kind. They often display remarkable resourcefulness. The "Please mister, sell me a cigarette for tuppence" is well known, but there are many more techniques, and the interesting thing is that their begging does not make them servile as it might be expected to. I have known some who almost make a living out of leading on queers, accepting food, drinks, and fags, and then giving them the slip just before the time of reckoning comes. I have seen a few openly begging in the streets, but their pitiful looks only hide their secret smiles; they are parasites, but far less so than the successful ones who ride in Jaguars and make their millions on the Stock Exchange; in some ways they are degenerate, but not as degenerate as the crooks who uphold Christian morality and outward respectability while they deceive the world with the myth of democracy. They are under no illusions, and their rejection is total. The world that judges them by its own imaginary standards is false, and for this reason they see no wrong in milking it dry in whatever way they can. Many will lie or shoplift, con or cheat, their only principle is personal freedom from the rat-race, and this, in a crooked world that rejects them out of hand, is the only way they can see to attain it.

The average anarchist, who rather proudly sees himself as the *most* responsible type of human animal, may perhaps feel little sympathy for the beat way of life. He may regard the beats as lost souls, lazy tramps who are little good to anyone. But this is a very unanarchistic position. These are lovers of freedom, lively and cheerful people, wanderers who can surely claim the right to live the life of their choosing. They harm no one, they oppress no-one, their pleasures are mainly

innocent enough. They make no claim to be intellectuals or leaders of the world. They are a mixed lot, and every generalisation must inevitably exclude a sizable proportion of them, but most are basically working-class in origin, with little regard for formal culture, intellectuals, and symbols of status. Their rejection of current society is largely an emotional one, their awareness is based on intuition rather than erudition, but they are observant, and quietly perceptive of beauty around them. Although they are rarely especially articulate they have very real and personal ideas. Although they mock at religion many of them are religious. In response to a local Sunday afternoon evangelist who stopped in a Bristol park to tell a group that God was 'in his heaven and they should roll up and be saved,I heard one say: "God? God is everywhere. In this grass and trees, not in your little book".

I suppose few beatniks would consciously admit to being anarchists, but I maintain that in their positive love of personal freedom and hatred of restrictions, their detestation of Authority and its instruments —the police, the church, the monarchy, the armed forces—and their communistic sense, they are anarchist in all but name, anarchist if not Anarchist. The question then is what is their relevance to us? They are not martyrs; they see no merit in suffering for their beliefs any more than they have to, and I see no hope that many of them can ever be roused to political action. Their presence on the Aldermaston march is more in the nature of a social occasion than an assumption that it helps ban the ever-present bomb. It is almost the annual gathering of the cult. Despite all this I believe that we can learn from them.

They manage to live a personally anarchistic life in spite of the system that surrounds them. Their cynicism does not have the stifling effect that it has on some politically conscious left-wingers. They are all very much alive, and they show that a small number of determined people scattered about the country can remain a remarkably coherent and loyal group when the will is strong enough (and we can certainly learn something from them there!). Perhaps because they have no desire to expand they are unharmed by public derision and press distortion, and they get away with the very minimum number of compromises. As yet they are a young generation, mainly in their early twenties or late teens. They have not experienced parenthood or lonliness. Perhaps the Beat movement will die a natural death, but more likely it will continue to be a young generation, the present beats finally compromising with conformity in their late twenties while a new generation takes their place. In doing so the civilisation will continue, standing out not as an example of behaviour for the anarchist to follow, but as a constant reminder that all souls are not captive ones, and that it *is* possible, at least in the early years, to live a life unhampered by the threat of imminent death.

Above all the beats are practical rebels, not the armchair revolutionaries sometimes to be found in anarchist and socialist circles. Of course they wouldn't be found at the barricades, fighting is for fools, they can live without a revolution. Life is what you make it, and the Beats can make it almost anywhere.

Anarchism and practicablity

JEFF ROBINSON

ASK THE PRESENT PEOPLE OF BRITAIN if they would like to live in a peaceful, classless, raceless society and the only dissenters would be those who imagined they had something to lose or who for reasons of personal inadequacy or support of reactionary ideas approve of hierarchical society and dread a world of free and equal human beings. Explain to the assenters the probable time scale, the fact that much of 'our British way of life' must be discarded, and that the personal effort involves much more than a vote every 5 years and their number will be greatly diminished. There remains those people who are disenchanted with present society, see the need for radical change and, most important, are prepared to do something about it.

Now tell these remaining people that you are describing an anarchist society and that the method of achieving it is anarchism and you are left with a few curious people and the convinced libertarians. Why then do so many well-intentioned people reject anarchism and devote their energies to short-term solutions to human problems which rarely deal to lasting good? One of the main reasons is that they regard anarchism as impracticable. The arguments used to support this assertion fall into two categories: the first concerns assumptions which anarchists are falsely accused of making; the second concerns views they do express. The first group are the familiar 'rationalisation' based on fear, prejudice and ignorance. Such as 'anarchists believe people are naturally good' when all that is maintained is that they could be good enough to live in a free society. Or that 'you can't change human nature' (whatever that is) when what you hope to change is human behaviour by creating a society which promotes good behaviour. Or that 'men are concerned primarily with self-interest' which is true and the creation of a harmonious society is surely in everyone's self interest. Or it is pointed out that private grief and personal antagonisms would still exist in a free society as though lovers' quarrels necessitate a standing army.

The second category of objections, however, those based on actual anarchist ideas includes many valid points which must be considered if anarchism is ever to become a practical, positive force in society. There must be plenty of people, perhaps even a few in high places, who would be glad to adopt libertarian solutions to human problems if they thought such solutions realistic. They often do adopt them in

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limited fields but this is not enough. Pre-Hitler Germany was full of experiments in art and films, psycho-analysis, nudism, wandering idealistic youth movements but the resulting mental climate did little to prevent Hitler's rise to power. Indeed, really clever controlling classes would encourage libertarianism in unimportant fields to divert attention from the main issue which is economic.

Many anarchist ideas are of no practical use, have no relevance in the modern world and should be consigned to the museum. Before going on to discuss some of these useless ideas and trying to suggest realitic alternatives, the word 'practicability' must be defined, for according to how long you are prepared to wait and bearing in mind the state of flux prevailing in present society it is possible to argue that anything, even the most Utopian science-fiction type society is practicable! In this article, however, the word means 'that which can reasonably be regarded as practical either now or in the forseeable future.

Many objections concern the shape of an anarchist society and while this can only be described in the broadcast of broad outlines there are two often heard versions which can well be set aside. The first is of a totally agricultural (or even pastoral) society with machinery discarded. If individuals want this well and good and there is nothing to prevent them starting next week providing they are capable of making the necessary effort. But to expect whole populations to rvert to the simple-life is mere wishful thinking. The ultimate end of some simple-lifers, the sort of ego-projection they mistake for the future was aptly described by Ted Kavanagh in ANARCHY 28 as 'groups of ballet dancers cavorting on verdant lawns with the Mantovani Strings in the background and groups of fair-haired children singing the verses of Patience Strong'.

At the other extreme from the dream of rustic simplicity is the vision of a society in which the smallest whim can be satisfied by pressing a button. This may be possible in the extreme long run but the time-scale is enormous, the degree of planning and organisation required is difficult to visualise in a free society and the material resources of the world would probably not permit such massive materialism. The time scale is the most relevant point. To expect people to work now for something which may be possible 1,000 years hence, is a waste of time. However, left-wing ideas about societies which belong to the remote future, instead of stressing the time-scale, often give the impression that such societies are realisable in the next few years. The Labour Party made this mistake before coming to power in 1945. Their pre-election propaganda promised a higher standard of living, less work and to free the Empire on which the meagre living standards largely depended. All this in the aftermath of a destructive war. They forgot to make clear the length of time necessary to effect such a programme and the result was that many Labour voter became disillusioned when the Socialist Utopia wasn't created between 1945 and 1951. The hard fact is that there isn't enough productive capacity in existence now to provide the whole world with the standard of the

British working-class of 1900. Before going any further with ideas of a shiny new world with everything on tap remember that at this moment most people haven't got the bare essentials and that due to population increases the average world living standard is actually decreasing. In world terms the British are exploiters. Our standard of living still depends very much on the sweat of Asia and Africa. Coupled with the fact that people in rich countries will probably have to tighten not loosen their belts if a universal healthy living standard is to be reached and maintained is the fact that people in a heavy-consumption free society would have to show a great deal of patience while the garden cities and automated factories were being constructed. Who gets the first and who gets the ones inherited from the preceding capitalism? Remember it's not a matter of waiting ten minutes in a bus queue but of waiting years, possibly decades, while construction is going on. If people in such a free society can voluntarily restrict consumption in the initial stages and wait their turn for new products then they can surely do without luxury gimmicks and gadgets altogether.

A sensible material standard for any type of society, free or not, is one which is healthy and wholesome and easily attainable on a large scale.

Ideas about the size and nature of the organisational unit of a free society need clarifying. A free society is one in which responsibility for the running of society is taken by the whole community and not by ruling cliques. To this end anarchists have envisaged national states being split into collectives, communes and syndicates each autonomous but co-operating with each other for mutual benefit and either self-supporting or fulfilling a function in a region. Now if members of these collectives, etc., are to be responsible for their own communal activities, then they must make all the decisions affecting these activities. So the communities must be of such a size that mass decision making is possible. Therefore large industries with many workers will have to be split into functional committees, the activities of which will have to be co ordinated. The larger the industry the remoter will seem the co-ordinating committee to rank and file workers and the growth of a permanent bureaucracy with authoritarian tendencies is almost inevitable if the industry is to function efficiently. The people concerned may have the best will in the world but sheer size will breed institutionalisation. Can anyone envisage for instance, the international petrol production and distribution industry functioning efficiently without some sort of centralised authoritarianism however mild and benevolent that authority might be.

In mass decision making complete unanimity is highly unlikely. In contemporary organisations like amateur sport and social clubs where there are no vested interests and people voluntarily co-operate there are three or four opinions on all the relatively trivial decisions which have to be taken. Which is a healthy sign. And so people vote and so they must in anarchist societies. To expect complete agreement is naive and behind it lies the idea that there are 'natural" ways of doing things which in anarchy become self-evident. On small issues

like the colour scheme of the hospital or the layout of a park compromise is possible but in decisions regarding large scale enterprise such as the siting of a reservoir or a change in working techniques, one decision must be final if chaos is to be avoided, and voting is the only answer. Anarchists then must be prepared to practise local democracy, this word not to be confused with the hypocritical farce which is called democracy today.

Voting, institutionalisation in large industries and even group enterprises themselves can only be avoided in societies of total simplicity or total automation neither of which are likely to come about.

So much for ends, now a few words about means. Firstly, the idea that in sophisticated, industrialised countries 'spontaneity', 'instinct' and 'natural reactions' could still play a part in other than comparatively unimportant aspects of life can be dropped once and for all. The anarchists of the future will have to be educated in the positive aspects of anarchism. The idea that could government and coercion be suddenly removed society would 'instinctively' adopt a libertarian pattern is at least a century out of date. In Northern Europe and North America instinct got lost in the smoke of the industrial revolution, and natural spontaneity is a lost cause. It is excellent in love-making but not in industrial decision taking. We are not a simple, good-hearted people as were the Spaniards, close to the soil or only a generation removed, thinking in terms of their own village or area, co-operative and idealistic. Such people take to anarchism as a duck takes to water. The anarchist message put into words what they had felt all their lives. In Britain debased capitalist values have been at work for nearly two centuries and people are largely corrupt. The slow process of education alone can implant positive anarchist ideas into peoples' minds.

As with positive anarchist ideas so with ethics, values and personal behaviour standards. These do not come out of thin air any more than anything else does. It is true that the lives of certain primitive tribes suggest that there is a natural standard of ethics and values but whether it would find a place in the complexity of an industrial society is dubious to say the least. In achieving a free society the standards and values of capitalism must be discarded. What is to replace them? May I suggest a simple all-embracing idea like 'do unto others—' which is applicable to all people at all places at all times. To the objection that the teaching of values is authoritarian I can only repeat 'values do not come out of thin air'. Spanish ones owed a great deal to simplified Christianity although it's a fact not often admitted.

* * *

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Kropotkin saw Europe and to a lesser extent the rest of the world, as a place where mutual aid and solidarity were very real things and where the newer ideas of education, science, humanism, rationalism, etc., were coming into prominence. Kropotkin, a man of wide learning realised that if the older mutual aid ideas were joined to the more recent educational type ideas, the result promised to lead to a free or freer society. This imminent practicability of anarchist ideas is one of the reasons for the compara-

tively large anarchist and syndicalist movements at that time. But alas, the propaganda process was slow and society did not stand still. Scientific development rapidly altered the environment, the state got wise to education and solidarity declined. Today's environment is shaped by a handful of scientists, industrialists, etc., and is usually at least two decades ahead of public awareness of it. Many people in Britain today are mentally in the 1930's, some in the nineteenth century, a few still in the Middle Ages. The mental climate necessary for anarchy in Kropotkin's Britain of 1900 wasn't available till 1930 and you can't expect people to revert 30 years. The H-bomb was never part of my consciousness until the nuclear disarmament campaign was well under way: I knew of the Bomb and could probably have given elementary facts about its destructive powers but the awful significance of those facts never entered my head. The consciousness of the masses drags behind reality.

Again many people can't see further than the ends of their own noses. This is partly due to an education system primarily interested in producing cogs for the capitalist machine but mainly due to a lack of native intelligence. They have enough common sense to know that ranting about the machinations of governments and the chicanery of politicians will get them nowhere, but lack the patience and intelligence to understand sociology, economics, power politics and similar subjects. Shouting 'more grub and down with the boss' was fine with the unsophisticated Spaniards, but is useless in complex, highly organised societies like Britain and America. And at the other extreme trying to relate anarchist propaganda to, and promote social consciousness in, a society which gets progressively more complex, gets progressively more difficult.

Does all this make anarchism impossible. Definitely not. What it does make impossible is the kind of anarchism where you think of a libertarian pattern for contemporary society and hope to work towards it. It is no good having cut and dried type free societies and saying 'look, isn't it nice, let's set about achieving it'. Anarchism can have no fixed ends, although an anarchist society could be static but that would be by chance rather than design. Tentative ideas, of organisation and of possible broad outlines of a free society can be discussed as in this article because people aren't likely to move into the unknown. What should be advocated mainly however is positive libertarianism combined with having as little as possible to do with the state. The freedom to be encouraged is not the 'absence of the awareness of coercion' else every bingo-player and telly-watcher is free. Nor is it the 'freedom' to indulge in every selfish, little whim produced by present society. The kind of freedom to promote is that which encourages the growth of the positive side of the human personality, and you don't need a degree in Sociology to know what that is. When there is more kindness, co-operation, freer education, do-it-yourself, mutual orgasms, cultural and economic equality, responsibility, urban decentralisation, good health and smiling faces people will be more ready to offer two fingers to the state. It will not solve all the world's problems but it will be a long way down the right track.

The spontaneous university

ALEXANDER TROCCHI

IN A RECENT ESSAY ARNOLD WESKER, concerned precisely with the gulf between art and popular culture and with the possibility of reintegration refers to the threatened strike of 1919 and to a speech of Lloyd George. The strike could have brought down the government. The Prime Minister said:

> . . . you will defeat us. But if you do so have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state. Gentlemen have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?

The strikers, as we know, were not ready. Mr. Wesker comments:

> The crust has shifted a bit, a number of people have made fortunes out of the protest and somewhere a host of Lloyd Georges are grinning contentedly at the situation . . . All protest is allowed and smiled upon because it is known that the force—economically and culturally—lies in the same dark and secure quarters, and this secret knowledge is the real despair of both artist and intellectual. We are paralysed by this knowledge, we protest every so often but really the whole cultural scene—particularly on the left—'is one of awe and ineffectuality'. I am certain that this was the secret knowledge that largely accounted for the decline of the cultural activities in the Thirties—no one really knew what to do with the philistines. They were omnipotent, friendly, and seductive. The germ was carried and passed on by the most unsuspected; and this same germ will cause, is beginning to cause, the decline of our new cultural upsurge unless . . . unless a new system is conceived whereby we who are concerned can take away, one by one, the secret reins.

Although I found Mr. Wesker's essay in the end disappointing, it did confirm for me that in England as elsewhere there are groups of people who are actively concerned with the problem. As we have seen, the political-economic structure of western society is such that the gears of creative intelligence mesh with the gears of power in such a way that, not only is the former prohibited from ever imitiating anything, it can only come into play at the behest of forces (vested interests) that are often in principle antipathetic towards it. Mr. Wesker's 'Centre 42' is a practical attempt to alter his relationship.

I should like to say at once that I have no fundamental quarrel with Mr. Wesker. My main criticism of his project (and I admit my knowledge of it is very hazy indeed) is that it is limited in character and that this is reflected in his analysis of the historical background.

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He takes the 1956 production of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger,* for example, to be the first landmark in 'our new cultural upsurge'. A serious lack of historical perspective, the insularity of his view . . . these features are, I am afraid, indicative of a kind of church-bazaar philosophy which seems to underlie the whole project. Like handicrafts, art should not be expected to pay. Mr. Wesker calls for a tradition 'that will not have to rely on financial success in order to continue'. And so he was led to seek the patronage of trade unions and has begun to organise a series of cultural festivals under their auspices. While I have nothing against such festivals, the urgency of Mr. Wesker's original diagnosis led me to expect recommendations for action at a far more fundamental level. Certainly, such a programme will not carry us very far towards seizing what he so happily refers to as 'the secret reins'. I do not think I am being overcautious in asserting that something far less pedestrian than an appeal to the public-spiritedness of this or that group will be the imperative of the vast change we have in mind.

Nevertheless, at one point in what remains an interesting essay, Mr. Wesker quotes Mr. Raymond Williams. Who Mr. Williams is and from what work the quotation is taken I am unfortunately ignorant. I only wonder how Mr. Wesker can quote the following and then go out and look for patronage.

> The question is not who will patronise the arts, but what forms are possible in which artists will have control of their own means of expression, in such ways that they will have relation to a community rather than to a market or a patron.

Of course it would be dangerous to pretend to understand Mr. Williams on the basis of such a brief statement. I shall say simply that for myself and for my associates in Europe and America the key phrase in the above sentence is: *'artists will have control of their own means of expression'.* When they achieve that control, their 'relation to a community' will become a meaningful problem, that is, a problem amenable to formulation and solution at a creative and intelligent level. This we must concern ourselves forthwith with the question of how to seize and within the social fabric exercise that control. Our first move must be *to eliminate the brokers.*

How to begin? At a chosen moment in a vacant country house (mill, abbey, church, or castle), we shall foment a kind of cultural 'jam session': out of this will evolve the prototype of our *spontaneous university.*

The Jewish settlements in Israel turned a desert into a garden and astounded all the world. In a flowering garden already wholly sustained by automation, a fraction of such purposiveness applied to the cultivation of men would bring what results?

Then there was the experimental college at Black Mountain, North Carolina. This is of immediate interest to us for two reasons. In the first place, the whole concept is almost identical to our own in its educational aspect; in the second, some individual members of

the staff of Black Mountain, certain key members of wide experience, are actually associated with us in the present venture. Their collaboration is invaluable.

Black Mountain College was widely known throughout the United States. In spite of the fact that no degrees were awarded graduates and non-graduates from all over America thought it worthwhile to take up residence. As it turns out, an amazing number of the best artists and writers of America seem to have been there at one time or another, to teach and learn, and their cumulative influence on American art in the last fifteen years has been immense. One has only to mention Franz Kline in reference to painting and Robert Creeley in reference to poetry to give an idea of Black Mountain's significance. They are key figures in the American vanguard, their influence everywhere. Black Mountain could be described as an 'action university' in the sense in which the term is applied to the paintings of Kline *et alii*. There were no examinations. There was no learning from ulterior motives. Students and teachers participated informally in the creative arts; every teacher was himself a practitioner—poetry, music, painting, sculpture, dance, pure mathematics, pure physics, etc.,—of a very high order. In short, it was a situation constructed to inspire the free play of creativity in the individual and the group.

Unfortunately, it no longer exists. It closed in the early Fifties for economic reasons. It was a corporation (actually owned by the staff) which depended entirely on fees and charitable donations. In the highly competitive background of the United States of America such a gratuitous and flagranty non-utilitarian institutions was only kept alive for so long as it was by the sustained effort of the staff. In the end it proved too ill-adapted to its habitate to survive.

In considering ways and means to establish our pilot project we have never lost sight of the fact that in a capitalist society any successful organization must be able to sustain itself in capitalist terms. The venture must pay. Thus we have conceived the idea of setting up a general agency to handle, as far as possible, all the work of the individuals associated with the university. Art, the products of all the expressive media of civilisation, its applicatons in industrial and commercial design, all this is fantastically profitable (consider the Musical Corporation of America). But, as in the world of science, it is not the creators themselves who reap most of the benefit. An agency founded by the creators themselves and operated by highly-paid professionals would be in an impregnable position. Such an agency, guided by the critical acumen of the artists themselves, could profitably harvest new cultural talent long before the purely professional agencies were aware it existed. Our own experience in the recognition of contemporary talent during the past fifteen years has provided us with evidence that is decisive. The first years would be the hardest. In time, granting that the agency functioned efficiently from the point of view of the individual artists represented by it, it would have first option on all new talent. This would happen not only because it would be likely to recognize that talent before its competitors, but because of

the fact and fame of the university. It would be as though some ordinary agency were to spend 100 per cent. of its profits on advertising itself. Other things being equal, why should a young writer, for example, not prefer to be handled by an agency controlled by his (better-known) peers, an agency which will apply whatever profit it makes out of him as an associate towards the extension of his influence and audience, an agency, finally, which at once offers him membership in the experimental university (which governs it) and all that that implies? And, before elaborating further on the economics of our project, it is perhaps time to describe briefly just what that membership does imply.

We envisage an international organisation with branch universities near the capital cities of every country in the world. It will be autonomous, unpolitical, economically independent. Membership of one branch (as teacher or student) will entitle one to membership of all branches, and to travel to and residence in foreign branches will be energetically encouraged. It will be the object of each branch university to participate in and 'supercharge' the cultural life of the respective capital city at the same time of the respective capital city at the same time as it promotes cultural exchange internationally and functions in itself as a non-specialised experimental school and creative workshop. Resident professors will be themselves creators. The staff at each university will be purposively international; as far as practicable, the studnts also. Each branch of the spontaneous university will be the nucleus of an experimental town to which all kinds of people will be attracted for shorter or longer periods and from which, if we are successful, they will derive a renewed and infectious sense of life. We envisage an organisation whose structure and mechanisms are infinitely elastic; we see it as the gradual crystallisation of a regenerative cultural force, a perpetual brainwave, creative intelligence everywhere recognizing and affirming its own involvement.

It is impossible in the present context to describe in precise detail the day-to-day functioning of the university. In the first place, it is not possible for one individual writing a brief introductory essay. The pilot project does not exist in the physical sense, and from the very beginning, like the Israeli kibbutzes, it must be a communal affair, tactics decided *in situ,* depending upon just what is available when. My associates and I during the past decade have been amazed at possibilities arising out of the spontaneous interplay of ideas within a group in constructed situations. It is on the basis of such experiences that we have imagined an international experiment. Secondly, and consequently, any detailed preconceptions of my own would be so much excess baggage in the spontaneous generation of the group situation.

The cultural possibilities of this movement are immense and the time is ripe for it. Scientists, artists, teachers, creative men of goodwill everywhere are in suspense. Waiting. Remembering that it is our kind even now who operate, if they don't control, the grids of expression, we should have no difficulty in recognising the spontaneous university as the possible detonator of the invisible insurrection.