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# Anarchism and stateless societies

JOHN PILGRIM

IT IS A COMMONPLACE OF ANARCHIST THOUGHT that the State is only one way of organising society and that its existence is largely dependent on the acceptance of its legitimacy by the majority over whom it rules. What is less commonly realised is that authority systems are only one way of organising power relationships, that power and authority are not identical concepts. In our society authority is legitimate power institutionalised into the social organisation; but *all social relationships are potential power relationships*, in that two or more people affect each other's behaviour. This is something that only Max Stirner, among the anarchist theorists, seems to have fully recognised. Thus anarchists are conceptually confused when they argue that they want to create a society in which power does not exist. This cannot be done. What can be done, and what is usually meant, I think, is to create a society without an authority structure. A power structure there must be, if society, and therefore humanity, is to exist at all, but structure does not imply hierarchy or authoritarianism. When I use the term structure here, I mean the formal recognisable relationships that appear to persist in a society regardless of the turnover of individuals and that therefore can be stated on some level of abstraction. Thus, in an anarchist society, there would be no authority structure, only a power structure resulting from the interaction of the people comprising the society.

The political problem is basically the manner in which, in any given society, the control of force is organised. In governmental societies it is done by creating a specialised and legally recognised power structure on an authoritarian model. This is legitimised in various ways or none. Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia were naked authority structures whereas in the liberal democracies the use of "free elections" acts as a psychological release mechanism and as a method of achieving apparent change without altering the social structure, thus creating the appearance of a "general will", however that might be defined.

Primitive stateless societies use various methods of controlling the use of force but in all of them the political function is performed by other, non-specialised institutions. The question for the anarchist is whether such non-specialised societies perform this function more successfully. Whether in fact we can look to such societies for guidance in building the type of society we would like to see.

One of the defects from which anarchist thinking suffers is the idea



that the State is the prime, if not the only, enemy. Along with this goes the idea that the elimination of the State will lead to the elimination of all the major conflicts in society, and of the competitive scramble for status and prestige with which those who live in western capitalist societies are all too familiar. Now I am not suggesting for a moment that the State is not the major threat both to the type of society most anarchists would like to see, and also to our very existence. However the assumption that abolition of the State would solve all these problems is facile and based on sadly inaccurate and inadequate knowledge of the nature of the stateless societies that have existed in the past and to some extent survive today, albeit with a superimposition of governmental organisation.

The rather idyllic picture of the primitive stateless society (and I use primitive in the non-perjorative sense of a level of technology) that is carried by many anarchists is summed up in the wistful comment of a Pueblo Indian: "In those days there was no law so everybody did what was right". Anarchists have tended to accept this particular myth, just as they have accepted the myth that such societies have no law. This is a matter of definition. If law is defined in Pound's terms as "the systematic application of the force of a politically organised society", then what the anthropologist would term acephalous societies do not have law. But there is a certain amount of confusion about this, because, in western industrial societies, law is regarded as being synonymous with organised legal sanctions. More primitive societies that lack law in this sense, nevertheless do have methods of social control, and an anarchist society will also have to have mechanisms of control and cohesion if it is to be a society at all.

Some of the younger anarchists seem to be totally unaware of this. Recently I heard an anarchist in Hyde Park proclaiming that he "was autonomous and didn't need society". This sort of uninformed comment only goes to underline McGregor's dictum that man must, today, "be sociate, as well as numerate and literate". Without society the human animal cannot develop into a human being, and any theorising about the nature of an anarchist society must start from this point.

However this failure to distinguish between society and the State, while common among the general public, is not common among anarchists, whereas the myth of the Noble Savage does appear to have survived into 20th Century anarchist thought. Thus we find Kenneth Maddock, who (with one degree in law and another in social anthropology) should know better, discussing what he calls the "wonderfully anarchistic Nuer". Now while the Nuer social system has many features that make it attractive to anarchists, it contains many unattractive features too. These tend to be ignored and the myth that stateless society equals the anarchist utopia is perpetuated. The rest of this essay, then, will be devoted to a brief survey of four types of stateless society and the social ethos which they endorse.

It was not until the 1940's, with the publication of *African Political Systems*<sup>1</sup> that the world was given any real factual evidence that a stable enduring social system was possible without organisation in the

form of the State; that order and the State were far from being synonymous. The *fact* had been known before<sup>2 3</sup> but had largely been ignored and detailed studies of how such societies actually functioned had been lacking. Kropotkin, in *Mutual Aid*, had relied over heavily on the universalistic evolutionary theories of the 19th Century, particularly those of Lewis Morgan whose methodological error lay in assuming that terms describing role behaviour described social groups that actually existed or had at one time existed. This led Engels into his highly dubious construct of primitive sexual communism (a condition not found anywhere, except, apparently, among the howler monkeys), an hypothesis that is generally rejected today but that is unfortunately reiterated in the reprinting of John Hewetson's *Mutual Aid and Social Evolution*.<sup>4</sup> Kropotkin's use of these theories, resulting in claims such as that the basic building block of society, the family, "is a late product of human evolution"<sup>5</sup> has tended to obscure the real value of his work, not least his rejection of the Hobbesian thesis that mankind is basically anti-social. Professor Sprott's argument, in *Human Groups*<sup>6</sup> is just a re-wording, from a different angle, of what Kropotkin was setting out in *Mutual Aid*:

"When group standards are thought of as something apart from the interacting of group members, we tend to think of them as somehow 'imposed' upon them. This gives rise to the notion that man is naturally anti-social, and that law-givers or moralists must come along and rescue him from his nasty brutish ways. The generation of, and acceptance of, standards which regulate conduct and preclude randomness is . . . a prerequisite of social intercourse. The having of standards springs out of social intercourse; it is not imposed from outside upon it." Like so many of the perceptive insights of the pioneer anarchist thinkers, from Godwin's ideas of the non-coercive education of children, to Kropotkin's suggestions for the community care of the insane, the mutual aid thesis has become an integral part of sociological thought with little acknowledgement of its originator.

The main point that emerges from *African Political Systems* is that in all stateless societies the political function is performed by other institutions. In Africa at least three types of stateless society can be discerned, those in which the organising principle is clan or lineage, those in which it is the extended family, and those in which the principle of organisation appears *initially* to be a system of free association and mutual aid. It is the latter type that come closest to the anarchist ideal, yet, paradoxically, seem to have been largely ignored by those who have become bemused by the Nuer's admirable Stirnerite individualism, while tending to ignore the latter's wholly unadmirable tendencies to violence and a mechanism of social control at least partly based on a balance of fear. Even the Plateau Tonga, who come into the third of the three categories given above, do not create social cohesion through a saintly avoidance of conflict; their society adheres through a complicated system of cross cutting ties and pressures that recognises the necessity of mutual aid, but also recognises that disputes are bound to arise.



The stateless society is not peculiar to the African continent and I also want to look at two other societies that come into the broad category of acephalous social organisations but whose social ethos is quite foreign to the anarchist outlook and indeed strike this writer as quite repellant, although they bear to a caricatured degree some of the characteristics of the society in which we live. These cultures are those of the Kwakiutl Indians of the North-West coast of America, and the Dobu, of Melanesia.

### THE NUER

The political structure of the Nuer has already been described in past issues of ANARCHY.<sup>7</sup> Briefly, it is a segmented tribal *and* lineage system in which the political allegiance of any section can only be defined in terms of its opposition to another section. This division is cross cut by kinship and residential ties, the clans are exogamous, and these kinship and residential ties create considerable pressure for dispute settlement. The tribe is the largest political unit, in the sense that it is the largest unit within which arbitration and compensation will be accepted in the settlement of a dispute but the larger the unit, i.e. the greater the social distance between the opposed groups, the less likelihood there is of a dispute being settled. Disputes within the smallest economic unit, the village, are settled much more easily as they are a greater threat to social and economic life. An interesting feature of Nuer "law", and indeed of the legal customs of many other technologically primitive societies, is that the major emphasis in dispute settlement is on restitution rather than retribution. Where a mediator exists, as with the Nuer's misnamed "Leopard Skin Chief", or the "go-between" of the Philippines' Ifuago, a dispute is not regarded as settled until both sides are satisfied with the settlement. Thus the emphasis is on a socially acceptable solution rather than the imposition of an arbitrary solution by force which is characteristic of the governmental legal system.

This wholly admirable arrangement, however, only comes into play when *both sides are ready to seek a settlement*. The basis of Nuer law, as of law anywhere, is force. As Evans-Pritchard says:

"We must not be misled by the enumeration of traditional payments for damage into supposing that it is easy to exact them unless a man is prepared to use force. The club and the spear are the sanctions of rights. What chiefly makes people pay compensation is fear that the injured man and his kin may take to violence. *It follows that a member of a strong lineage is in a different position from that of a member of a weak lineage.* . . . Since self-help, with some backing from public opinion, is the main sanction, it is only operative when people are within easy striking distance. . . . Nuer law must be treated in connection with the blood feud. . . . It is the knowledge that a Nuer is brave and will stand up against aggression with club and spear that ensures respect for person and property" (italics mine).<sup>8</sup>

Thus even among the "wonderfully anarchistic Nuer", might is right and physical weakness is likely to result in injustice; violence,

or the threat of violence, remains the ultimate sanction. This is not to deny that the political system of the Nuer has not some desirable features. The emphasis on restitution rather than retribution is one; another is that the lack of an authority structure, as we understand it, means that warfare can only take place, at least while the population remains stable, on a raiding rather than a conquest basis, for there is no means by which domination can be perpetuated. However this should not blind us, as Kenneth Maddock's articles have tended to blind some of the more impressionable anarchists, to the fact that Nuer society is a belligerent violent one and hardly a blueprint for anarchists. It is a moot point whether fear of the feud or recognition of the need for mutual aid is the major cohesive factor in Nuerland, and there are a great many other factors that cannot be enumerated in the space available. A great deal depends on the conceptual spectacles with which one is viewing the society but, among the Nuer, fear and the balance of power certainly play a large part.

The Nuer are basically a pastoral people existing in a subsistence economy where there is never enough to eat. This, I would suggest, is one of the factors making for social cohesion. While the basic economic unit is the nuclear family, in another sense the village community, which is the primary political unit, is a co-operative group combining to obtain the necessities of life; the economic activities in both the dry season cattle camps and the villages being very much interdependent. The cohesion of Nuer society is thus to some extent a function of economic necessity. During the dry season the same cattle camp may contain members of several villages; conversely members of the same village may join different camps. This seasonal migration helps to maintain a sense of unity beyond the village unit, as economic necessity forces a measure of social forbearance and a recognition of common interests.

There is in every tribe a tri-partite social structure. There are aristocrats (that is, a clan which is socially dominant within a particular tribe), Nuer of other clans, and Dinka, who have been absorbed into the Nuer people. However these strata are not classes and the predominance of a clan gives prestige rather than privilege. There is, nevertheless, a limited system of authority relations within the community; this is found in the age-set system. A Nuer boy becomes an adult after a series of rites and ordeals, and although these age-sets have no corporative activities, and therefore no political functions, every Nuer male is in "a status of seniority, equality, or juniority toward every other"<sup>9</sup> by virtue of the position of his age-set in the total structure. The attitude of a man toward any other man, at least in the local community, is, then, largely determined by their respective positions in the age-set system.

I have briefly mentioned the institutionalisation of the feud through which the political system operates. It is arguable that Evans-Pritchard, when he made his study of Nuer society, overestimated its importance as a method of social control and underestimated the effects of environmental conditions in aiding the working of the mutual aid principle.



Those who think in authoritarian terms will tend to place the emphasis on the feud, libertarians will tend to emphasise the importance of mutual aid to Nuer survival. But both views oversimplify the situation.

Among the Nuer, the agnatic kinship tie (kinship by blood through males) is the most important and in theory a group of close agnates constitute a vengeance group which acts together against an enemy of one of their members. But as Professor Gluckman has pointed out,<sup>10</sup> this vengeance group is often scattered so that conflict may well arise between loyalty to the vengeance group of agnates and the ties which link a man to his local community, which he must also support by custom as well as interest. Thus the demands of community solidarity may require that a man mobilise with the enemies of his vengeance group. Gluckman argues therefore that this division in one set of relationships produces a wider cohesion in the society as a whole; that if there are sufficient conflicts of loyalties at work, social cohesion may be maintained; that "the whole system depends for its cohesion on the existence of conflicts within the smaller subsystems."<sup>11</sup>

The rules of exogamy, of marrying outside a defined set of kin, constitute a further set of ties with people who would by other standards be enemies. Some tribes state quite explicitly: "They are our enemies, we marry them" and some anthropologists have found the origins of the incest taboo in the need to maintain peaceful relationships between conflicting groups. But whatever explanations are advanced to explain the social cohesion of an acephalous society like the Nuer, it must be recognised that simple explanations like the recognition of the need for mutual aid, while expressing an underlying truth, are no longer sufficient. And while admiring some aspects of Nuer social organisation, we should not forget that they place a premium on military prowess and when not engaged in fighting an external enemy they tend to fight among themselves.

The Nuer, then, are an example of a stateless society where "scarcity is the economic problem" as the textbooks say. It could be argued that much of the conflict in such a society would arise from this scarcity, disputes over water, pasturing, etc. It would be a mistake, though, and one that many Marxists and Anarchists tend to make, to assume that the elimination of this scarcity would *mechanically* lead to the elimination of conflict, competition, or status distinctions. With the Nuer it is possible that the recognition that the common enemy is starvation has inhibited the growth of status distinctions and aided social cohesion. For when we turn to a stateless society with a surplus economy, we find a competitive scramble for status, an emphasis on conspicuous consumption, and a wastage of resources, that may be aptly compared with contemporary America.

### THE KWAKIUTL INDIANS

This society, no longer extant, is that of the Kwakiutl Indians who lived on the North-West coast of America, in the area that is now British Columbia. Their economy came into the general category of food-gathering economies and was primarily dependent upon fish. The

settlement group or village was the primary "political" unit, the tribes having little unity beyond a community of language and similarities in the details of custom and ceremonial. A few noble or chiefly families formed the core of each village, "possessing" fishing, hunting and collecting grounds which provided their wealth and enabled them to validate their claims to a variety of social and ceremonial positions.

There was no question of these families owning the means of subsistence. From that point of view, at least until white settler intervention, there was plenty for all. They had, in fact, one of the highest standards of living the world has ever known, yet they were obsessed with rank to the point of creating artificial shortages in the social system, and the striving for social position became an integral part of their economy. The key to their socio-political structure was the lineage of the noble families. Commoners did not form a separate caste but seem to have been cadet branches of lineages which, having failed to inherit, or (more important) to validate, social and ceremonial privileges, were dependent on their wealthy and distinguished relatives for reflected prestige.<sup>12</sup> The commoner and slave dependents of these noble families could be regarded as a political following, but as social standing had to be continually validated, and enhanced prestige was built upon the social ruin of a rival, no centralised political authority of the type possessed by the Zulu, or ourselves, could develop. The religious organisation paralleled that of the secular and the year was divided between the two:

"In the summer the secular organisation was in force and every man took precedence according to the respective rank of the title of the nobility which he held. In the winter . . . the whole structure built around these titles was put aside . . . for the period of the winter ceremonial a man had rank according to the greatness of the name he held (as a member of a religious society)".<sup>13</sup>

The basis of validating titles and prerogatives was the institution known as the "potlatch". These were feasts at which presents and gifts were made to the guests according to rank. The guests in turn would be expected to give feasts in return where the gift would be repaid with considerable interest. Failure to do this meant considerable social demotion for the family or village concerned. These "gifts" were usually in the form of blankets (or goods valued in terms of blankets) or "coppers" (worked sheets about two feet long); these latter were valued according to the amount paid when they last changed hands. According to Bohannon<sup>14</sup> the potlatch system operated as a series of exchanges, in which non-subsistence wealth, expressed in terms of blankets (which might be fictitious), were carried out with the aim of socially ruining a rival. When the number of blankets became too high, an exchange of coppers would start culminating in the moment when a given individual decided he had exhausted his opponent's resources, when the most valuable copper would be destroyed. Unless the rival could destroy an equal or greater copper, he was defeated and shamed, and in this act of destruction, in which household goods, including the house, might also be destroyed, the



"symbol for computed wealth was turned into 'pure value', i.e. reputation".

It is this desire to shame one's rivals and add to one's own glory that Ruth Benedict sees as the primary motivating force in Kwakiutl life. With this went attitudes of arrogance, boastfulness, extreme cruelty (like the burning of slaves for prestige purposes), marriage as a business transaction, murder to acquire privileges, and so on. Although Ruth Benedict's study has come under fire in recent years, and current anthropological orthodoxy regards her delineation of Kwakiutl psychology as overstated, there is still little doubt that among the Kwakiutl a competitive ideology had reached a-social proportions. Later the introduction of money was to render the whole "gift" system dysfunctional enough to wipe out the culture. Death in this society was "the paramount affront", according to Ruth Benedict, "it confounded a man's pride and could only be handled in terms of shame". Thus if the destruction of property was considered insufficient to wipe out the shame of a relative's death, then the killing of a neighbour of similar rank was considered appropriate. Suicide was another common method of wiping out shame.

"There are many stories of this behaviour at death. A chief's sister and her daughter had gone up to Victoria . . . they never came back. The chief called together his warriors . . . and they set up a warpole to announce their intention of wiping out the injury. They set out and found seven men and two children asleep and killed them. Then they felt good when they arrived at Sebaa in the evening."

Here, then, was a society which had institutionalised competition to a degree comparable with capitalist societies. Such a social system was made possible by the tremendous surplus of goods, over and above those necessary for subsistence, provided by the natural resources of the area. It is interesting to note that areas with a similar environment and resources, Southern Chile for example, or Tasmania, failed to develop such a competitive ideology but also failed to exploit their natural resources to anywhere near the same extent as the Kwakiutl Indians. This lends at least *prima facie* support to the Weberian thesis that, although the economic base of a society may limit its line of development, it does not determine the ideological superstructure to the extent that Marxists would have us believe. Ruth Benedict argues that "the megalomaniac paranoid trend, so readily observable among the Kwakiutl Indians, is a definite danger in our own society". Yet theirs was a stateless society and we live in one in which centralised authoritarianism has become endemic. Kwakiutl culture was dominated by rivalry; all attention was concentrated upon outdoing a competitor; ours is towards outdistancing one's neighbours and owning more than anyone else, a situation that anarchists attribute all too readily to the institutions of capitalism. Yet the social waste involved in Kwakiutl culture is no different in kind from the social waste of Anglo-American culture. A cross cultural comparison of this kind (only carried out in far more detail than is possible here) should make it obvious that *neither the economic nor the political re-organisation of society can,*

*on their own, set us on the road to an anarchist Utopia.*

### THE DOBU

The third culture, that of the Dobu, provides all qualities of a paranoid nightmare; the malevolent, hostile, fear-ridden world compounded of King Lear, and McCarthy's America in which the Hobbesian model of society has approached actuality. In looking at this society I have relied on Ruth Benedict's account of Dr. Fortune's book *The Sorcerers of Dobu*. Thus, as with the previous culture, it could be argued that the psychological traits Dr. Benedict attributes to the Dobu may be exaggerated; nevertheless the organisation of their society is as she describes it.

The Dobu live off Eastern New Guinea, close to the better known Trobriand Islands. Unlike the fertile Trobriands, the soil is very poor and there is little good fishing. Even in their most prosperous period, the villages rarely seem to have numbered more than about 25 people; at the time of Dr. Fortune's study a dozen seem to have been the average village population. Their social structure has been depicted as a series of concentric circles centred on the village, within each of which particular forms of hostility are permissible. The largest political grouping is a named locality, consisting of a number of villages, which constitute a war unit and outside of which no one could venture except on a war basis.

The basic core of the village is a matrilineal kin group who own the gardens and the house-sites within which inheritance passes and co-operation takes place. This grouping, the *susu*, consists of the living female descent line and the brothers of these women in each generation. The children of these brothers are not included; they belong to, and inherit from, their mothers' villages. There are no casual visiting relationships between the villages, strangers must skirt the village if they have to pass through the area, and a spouse may enter only by invitation. After the death of their father, the children of the men of a village may not even approach it. The nature of the incest taboo means that marriage must be outside that village but the marriage becomes very much "a socially regulated act of hostility". Marriage among the Dobu can be regarded as an institution which allies two villages between which enmity is high, although, due to the nature of the marriage arrangements, it would be more correct to say that it creates a channel of communication rather than an alliance.

The marriage itself begins with an act of hostility, by the mother-in-law:

"She blocks with her own person the door of the house within which the youth is sleeping with her daughter, and he is trapped for the public ceremony of betrothal."<sup>14</sup>

Marriage in their society sets up a basic conflict as strongest loyalties are to the *susu* and if a separate home is to be provided for the married couple the problem arises as to which of the couple is going to put him or herself at a social and magical disadvantage by living in the other's village. The solution used by the Dobu is that



the couple reside alternately in each other's village for a year, where the "foreigner" is subjected to every form of social humiliation the ingenious Dobu mind can devise. Thus the village populations divide into two groups, those of the matrilineal line; and those who have married into the village, together with those who are the children of the men "owners". This situation is ideal for maintaining the *status quo*. The matrilineal group are united, the outsiders come from a number of different villages and have little in common apart from the fact that they are visitors. During the year's residence, the visiting spouse is the object of calculated abuse and made to feel in every way an inferior being. Because the marriage involves economic exchanges, the susu will support the related spouse in marital quarrels and to add to the problems, although marriage within the village is frowned upon, adultery with classificatory "brothers" and "sisters" is the favourite pastime. Partly this is a result of the poisonously suspicious atmosphere on Dobu (it is safer to have sexual relations with someone of the same village) and partly structural, i.e. it would disrupt the economic system to have obligatory exchanges between two parts of the same settlement. The following year, of course, the outraged spouse can retaliate similarly in his or her own village. Broken marriages are, it says here in the book, not uncommon.

The culture of the Dobu appears to have institutionalised treachery and ill-will to an extent that makes it possibly unique among human cultures. All existence is cut-throat competition and every advantage is gained, or thought to be gained, by the victimisation of someone else, but unlike Kwakiutl society, where such competition is carried on in the open, in Dobu it is secret and treacherous:

"The good man, the successful man, is he who has cheated another of his place. The culture provides extravagant techniques and elaborate occasions for such behaviour. In the end all existence in Dobu is brought under the domination of these purposes."<sup>15</sup>

The deviant in Dobu was the man who was naturally friendly, who enjoyed work, was not frightened of the dark, and did not spend his time plotting to overthrow his fellows. Such a man might well be regarded as simple-minded. In this, I think, we can find a parallel between Dobuan culture and our own, where a man who is not interested in "getting on" is, outside certain specific roles where economic and social betterment are not supposed to be primary motives, regarded as distinctly odd. If it is argued, as some do, that the norms of any culture are manufactured by the dominant group in that culture to maintain themselves in power, then we still have to explain the fact that many of the elements of Dobu and Kwakiutl culture are also prominent in our own. Certainly the briefest glimpse of Dobuan culture shows that the commonly accepted anarchist view of primitive stateless societies, the idea of "each co-operating together for the benefit of all" is an idealisation far removed from the actuality.

In Dobu, although economic success is sought, it is dangerous to achieve it. Whatever harvest a man has in excess of his neighbours is thought to have been stolen by means of magic and a good crop is

a confession of theft. Such thefts are thought to take place even within the otherwise united susu. The amount of any harvest is carefully concealed and reference to it is an insult. In the case of disease or death a diviner will often blame resentment at an overly successful crop. Tied up with this is the use of disease charms, specific for particular diseases (causing, that is, not curing); usually the knowledge of these charms is spread around so that at least one is owned by everyone. The balance of terror, it seems, is not peculiar to those countries which have devised more technologically advanced ways of maintaining it. "Suspicion" in Dobu, "runs to paranoid lengths, and a counter charm is always suspected."<sup>16</sup> The competitive ethos, which is limited to some extent within the community by the need for secrecy, is given full play when the Dobu participate in the ritual kula exchanges with other islands, where sharp practice, particularly the watered stock equivalent known as "wabu wabu", is held in high regard.

The omnipresent fear of sorcery creates considerable tension when a death occurs and this is dissipated to some extent by a ritual exchange of insults. Death is also believed to be caused by poisoning; individuals own various poisons which they try out in readiness for the occasion when it might be needed to save a member of their own susu whose life is thought to be threatened by a member of another village.

Finally it should be noted that Dobuan conventions exclude laughter, the appearance of happiness is regarded with extreme suspicion. Dr. Benedict quotes the case of a man visiting the Amphletts who was watching a dance. He indignantly repudiated the suggestion that he might join in: "my wife would say I had been happy". Prudery in Dobu is as extreme as among the New England Puritans, but is rather oddly accompanied by pre-nuptial promiscuity and a high estimation of sexual patterns and techniques. Even here competition and acquisition show themselves. Women entering marriage are taught that the way to hold their husband is to keep him as exhausted as possible. The good man is one who has worsted many opponents in conflicts. It is taken for granted that he has killed children and close associates by sorcery, thieved and cheated. Theft and adultery are the object of the valued charms of the valued men of the community. Behind a show of friendship, behind the evidences of co-operation, the Dobu believe, lie only treachery. If he goes on a Kula expedition, he takes it for granted that those he leaves behind are working against him. Thus, life in Dobu, a stateless society, fosters extremes of malignancy and animosity that most societies attempt to minimise by their institutions. Neither the culture of the Dobu, or that of the Kwakiutl Indians bear out John Hewettson's contention, in his 20-year-old *Mutual Aid and Social Evolution* that primitive societies "are everywhere characterised by sociability, mutual trust, and the absence of violence within the group". No matter how exaggerated Dr. Benedict's reading of Dobu culture, on the best possible construction it could hardly be said to be characterised by sociability and mutual trust. This is an area where increased knowledge has invalidated some anarchist assumptions.



But it has not invalidated theory. In many ways both Kwakiutl and Dobu cultures underline Kropotkin's fundamental hypothesis. In both these high competitive and perhaps paranoid cultures, the need for co-operation had been recognised to the extent that mechanisms had been evolved to make it possible, and channels existed for the ritual dispelling of hostility from time to time, in order that the society could continue to function.

### THE PLATEAU TONGA

A much happier society, at least on the information available, is that of the Plateau Tonga, of Northern Rhodesia. It is difficult to elucidate the real form of their social organisation before the advent of Europeans. During the 19th Century they were badly battered by raids, succeeding armies raiding the area for cattle and slaves, but these raids never, apparently, caused a united front to develop. It is therefore difficult to separate the indigenous social structure from the form grafted onto it by the European administration. However, it is possible to examine the social structure of life on the reserves and, to the extent that this can be artificially separated from the European framework which protected the reserves from outside raids, the form of organisation comes under the general heading of stateless societies.

The Plateau Tonga combine cattle rearing with agriculture but without the transhumant pattern of the Nuer. (Possibly a factor that permits their much looser form of organisation.) The primary division of labour is between the sexes, and thus the minimum economic unit is one that includes at least one man and one woman, although the woman is less dependent on her co-partner than the man, as women plant the crops, do most of the weeding and harvesting, plaster the hut walls, and brew the beer. The latter is important ritually as without a wife to brew beer a man cannot approach his ancestral spirits. When larger numbers are needed, for a fish or game drive, the individual concerned gives a beer party and announces that help is needed. Attendance is, of course, completely voluntary, but those who fail to turn up for the work parties of others may find their own poorly attended. Work parties of the village headman or the European-installed chief do not draw larger attendances than any others and the party attacks the job without any apparent guidance or leadership.

The basic residential and economic unit is the village and in pre-European days, and to a certain extent even today, the village recognised no superior authority. The term headman is used but this would appear to be something of a misnomer as the headman appears to have little, if any, authority. His position is perhaps analogous to that of Freedom Press in the English anarchist movement, in that he exerts no political control but is accorded a certain respect for having been "on the scene" before most of the villagers. The man who comes first to an unoccupied area is usually termed the "owner" of the land, and his heir may continue to receive a certain respect for his primacy, but he has no control over the area. Other villagers that may move into the area do not recognise that he has disputes in the

land which override his own, nor do they look to him to settle disputes or perform ritual on their behalf. No headman holds his position, if it can be termed that, by reason of his leadership of an organised body of kinsmen. Many of the male members of the village may be related to him in various ways but others will have just moved into the village, without any initial kinship or clan ties. A man's place in the community will be affected by his various kinship ties but will not be based upon them. His duties and rights in the community arise from the fact of residence alone. Once he has moved into an area, built his huts, and cultivated a field, he is regarded as a full member of the local group, can look to them, within limits, for assistance, and will be identified with them by outsiders.

The diffuseness of the social organisation of the Tonga led many Europeans to believe that they had none at all. This was far from true but it is difficult to summarise the highly complex system by which their society coheres. The residential group is not the defence or vengeance group and the latter tends to be dispersed anyway. Elizabeth Coulson, in one of her later studies of the Plateau Tonga (in which she revised some of the opinions about their social organisation expressed in the book she edited with Max Gluckman),<sup>17</sup> said:

"Local organisation is dependent on the general recognition that in order to till one's fields and tend one's herds it is necessary to live at peace with one's neighbours, and this recognition of common interests finds expression in rites which it is incumbent upon all members of the community to participate under penalty of mystical sanctions which may affect, not only the offender, but the community as a whole . . . the mystical sanction has its practical expression in mob action against someone who is thought to be endangering others in the community."

However, this local group takes no responsibility for the action of its members in other spheres. This is left to small groups organised along matrilineal kinship lines, i.e. those who recognise their descent from a common ancestress. Even here the ties are often fictitious, as a man is presumed to be a member of a kinship group by virtue of his acting in common with members of that group. However this group tends to be dispersed in different neighbourhoods, although while members remain close enough to visit each other, it continues to act together in certain situations, particularly conflict situations. The matrilineal group is held together, partly by the mutual aid principle, but rather more important are the supernatural sanctions which mean that the spirits of the ancestors may visit their displeasure on the kinship group or any member of it. Within the kin group neither compensation or vengeance is permissible and theft cannot exist. Adultery with a kinsman's wife is regarded as incest and it is thought to bring forth supernatural sanctions. Alternatively the injured party may drive off a few cattle and the transgressor will be expected to accept this. This gives one set of cross cutting ties similar to that which can be found among the Nuer; the conflicting demands of the residential group and the kinship group. The Tonga though, have elaborated



these ties to a high degree. Thus each man is regarded as a member of his mother's matrilineal group, and as the child of his father's. Each of these groups is expected to provide the bridewealth of the men and share the bridewealth of the women. A man is also dependent on his father's group for his ritual wellbeing as he cannot approach the spirits of his father's line directly, although they may affect him.

The marriage rules complicate this pattern further. It is thought improper for two closely related men to marry two closely related women, and marriage arrangements that suggest that two groups are exchanging wives is frowned upon. Thus a dispersal of ties is created and make each marriage a political relationship. Each party to the marriage is identified with two groups which are thus brought into association. Each member of these four groups is bound by similar ties to many other matrilineal groups. Thus bad relationships between any two groups involve many others who also have an interest in the dispute. Because of the dispersal of these groups, a local community could thus be disrupted by a quarrel occurring elsewhere. Yet a further set of ties is created by the practice of lending cattle; this creates a strong economic pressure toward dispute settlement. In any dispute the primary aim is not the punishment of the offender but the restoration of good relations between the groups involved.

In a society structured like this, the institution of the blood feud, as it can be found among the Nuer, would be quite impossible. Although isolated acts of vengeance do occur, each act mobilises different groups whose interests are involved; thus a feud would lead to complete community disruption. Feuds are only really possible where the groups are living sufficiently far apart for clashes to be unlikely to occur. Where they could occur, bonds of kinship and locality intervene to force a settlement. Thus even though the Tonga, rather more than most stateless societies, present some of the characteristics of the anarchist ideal, with its emphasis on mutual aid, they also have sets of highly complex relationships by means of which social cohesion is maintained. As Max Gluckman has said, in an essay on stateless societies:

"Quarrels and conflicts cannot be wished out of existence. They must be redressed by other interests and other customary loyalties so that the individual is led into association with different groups. The more his ties require that his opponents in one set of relationships are his allies in another, the greater the likelihood of peace. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

In some respects the Plateau Tonga, as far as internal cohesion is concerned, is the most successful of the four stateless societies I have touched on, and the most appropriate group from which we can draw lessons. The methods by which conflict is regulated in their society avoids the kind of disruption that is an omnipresent danger among the Nuer and provides a highly flexible system which combines mobility and personal freedom with social cohesion. The rather sorry state of the Plateau Tonga at the time of the European takeover, resulting from the attacks of more centralised societies, only proves

that such a social structure is not a good basis for fighting a war. It should be recognised, although I have only touched on the subject, that supernatural sanctions play a strong role in the cohesion of Tonga society; much of the strength of these interlocking ties are derived from supernatural sanctions. An anarchist society would have to find some substitutes for these. As Colin Ward has written, in his review of *Tribes Without Rulers*<sup>19</sup>:

"Successful anarchy, we may conclude, is a function, not of a society's simplicity and lack of social organisation, but of its complexity and multiplicity of social organisations."

I have attempted to show here that the absence of the State as a method of social organisation does not necessarily involve the absence of those other undesirable features of western society that we would like to see abolished; competition, class divisions, status seeking, authoritarianism, restrictions on individual freedom, and so on. The acceptance of this myth is partly a result of the 19th Century tendency to seek universal monocausal explanations. The anarchist postulate that the State is the prime reason for divisions in society and the source of its inequalities is simply inadequate. The easily seized fact that centralised and authoritarian Zulu and Bemba societies had differences of social status and wealth, while the acephalous Nuer, Tonga, and Tallensi did not, cannot be held to prove that the State is the causal factor, in view of the strong emphasis on validated rank among the Kwakiutl Indians and the Trobrianders, both stateless societies. The State may well be a means of perpetuating these divisions, but the fact that some stateless societies have also found means of perpetuating them would seem to argue that the cause lies elsewhere. As I have attempted to show, the Kwakiutl Indians created a society that, in its economic ethos, showed a greater similarity to the current American ethos of conspicuous consumption, than to the type of society that anarchists would like to see. Again the kinship systems of many of these societies involve a restriction on individual freedom of action that no anarchist would accept for a moment, and that most people in our society would find highly uncongenial.

In closing, it should be mentioned that I do not regard the mechanisms of social control described as being the sole factors in keeping any given culture from chaos and social disintegration. Most members of a society internalise its norms early in life, as part of the process of socialisation. The mechanisms of social control exist to buttress this process and prevent the results of incomplete socialisation from causing disintegration, in addition to providing for the resolution of disputes that are bound to arise in the course of social interaction.

I began this essay by quoting Professor McGregor's dictum that "man today must be sociate, as well as numerate and literate". This applies even more to anarchists. The abolition of the State is obviously desirable, but we need a great deal more knowledge of the methods of creating social cohesion, before such an abolition could become viable on terms that we would accept. Mutual aid is, as Kropotkin



correctly argued, a factor in evolution. It is not the sole basis of any known human society.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup>Fortes and Evans-Pritchard: *African Political Systems* (OUP).
- <sup>2</sup>Kropotkin: *Mutual Aid* (Heinemann, 1910 edition).
- <sup>3</sup>Ruth Benedict: *Patterns of Culture* (Routledge).
- <sup>4</sup>Hewetson: "Mutual Aid and Social Evolution" (ANARCHY 55).
- <sup>5</sup>Kropotkin: *Mutual Aid*.
- <sup>6</sup>Sprott: *Human Groups* (Penguin).
- <sup>7</sup>Maddock: "The Bounds of Possibility" (ANARCHY 16).
- <sup>8</sup>Maddock: "Primitive Societies and Social Myths" (ANARCHY 24).
- <sup>9</sup>Evans-Pritchard: *The Nuer* (OUP).
- <sup>10</sup>Gluckman: *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Blackwell).
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup>Forde: *Habitat, Economy and Society* (Methuen).
- <sup>13</sup>Bohannon: *Social Anthropology* (Holt, Reinhart & Winston).
- <sup>14</sup>Benedict: *Patterns of Culture*.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup>Coulson & Gluckman: *Seven Tribes of Central Africa* (MUP).
- <sup>18</sup>Gluckman: *Custom and Conflict in Africa*.
- <sup>19</sup>Ward: "Harmony Through Complexity" (*Selections from FREEDOM*, Vol. 8).

## and a comment on Anarchy 55

### KENNETH MADDOCK

JOHN HEWETSON in ANARCHY 55 ("Mutual Aid and Social Evolution") follows Kropotkin in asserting the importance of mutual aid and co-operation in social life. In developing his argument he begs or blurs a number of questions.

1. If there really are innate tendencies moving men to mutual aid and co-operation, as Hewetson believes, then there must be innate tendencies moving them to competition and to exercise of and submission to coercion. How otherwise explain the existence, let alone the preponderance, of non-anarchist social organizations?

2. Few would deny that men co-operate with each other—sometimes. But whether men, on any particular occasion, co-operate with, compete against or simply ignore each other is surely determined by the task in hand. It is a matter of everyday experience that A and B can support each other in *this* but oppose each other in *that* activity. Hewetson may have been blocked from recognizing this fact by his resort to notions of "sociability", "anti-sociability", "the useful", etc. Now whether a thing is useful can be determined only by reference to the thing's users: a tool useful to a carpenter will very likely be useless to a scholar; the revolver on which the gangster relies will be useless to the pacifist. The diversity of customs and conventions in our own and other societies make it meaningless to characterize a person as social or anti-social unless the customs and conventions the speaker has in mind are specified.

3. Hewetson's evidence does not prove that co-operation and mutual aid can *wholly* displace competition and coercion. In fact, even some of his evidence indicates the co-existence of the two sets of process (see, for example, his remarks on the Punan).

4. Hewetson's entire line of argument, with its belief in a total scheme of things manifest in the universe (social evolution) and its invocation of edifying but vacuous notions ("the useful"), diverts attention from issues of real interest to anarchists—from, for example, inquiry into the characteristics of anarchist social organizations and independent movements whenever and wherever they have existed and into the extent to which they can be created or fostered today. I would be surprised if inquiry found that such organizations and movements required the exclusion of competition and struggle, either within or without their own ranks.

### OBSERVATIONS ON ANARCHY 57:

### THE RELEVANCE OF JUDISPRUDENCE

LAW MAY BE DEFINED as the will of the State sanctioned by the authority of that State. Primarily, this is the law the anarchist objects to, and Natural Law Theories which may or may not tend to mitigate the harshness of positive law may be dismissed as more or less irrelevant. The reformer desires justice in the law, the anarchist requires its abolition.

Thus the central Jurisprudential conflict between law as it is, and as it ought to be, is of little importance. Law has no right to exist and the "is" and the "ought" are both rejected.

John Austin, the Positivists, the Legal Realists, Professor Hart, Hans Kelsen, etc., all favour a more or less analytical approach and attempt to exclude entirely from their study of the law the concept of the value. These theories being expositions of the law as it is are useful to anarchist and non-anarchist alike.

The same cannot be said for the Natural Lawyers. If, as Thomas Hobbes felt, the life of man in a state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short", clearly a sovereign government is desired to make social life possible. However, in fact the majority of the theorists propounding Natural Law ideas, e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Locke, etc., regard man as naturally good and with adequate potential for co-operation. Having made a sound premise, they fail to follow it logically (i.e. to anarchism) but concern themselves with reconciling law as they think it ought to be and law as it actually is. At worst, their ideas are vague and meaningless, at best they are reformatory, neither of which are of any use for the anarchist.

Birmingham

RICHARD EKINS



# A state of statefulness

RODERICK BARRY

I HAD A FRIEND ONCE who was born Portuguese, but his father wasn't. His father was his father, but wasn't Portuguese. He bought it that his son might be born it, in a way, but he did better at it than his son. For his son, it had complications.

My friend's father lived in Salonika under Turkish rule, groaned, that is. For he was a Jew and so was his father before him and his father before him and his father . . . when *he* suddenly found himself living in Salonika under *Greek* rule. Because they won the war against the Turks and Salonika became Greek. It had come about, however, that Salonika was composed mainly not of Greeks or Turks, but Jews. Not that this posed a problem for the Greeks, but it did, as usual, for the Jews. Should they remain Turkish? No. Greek? What if the Turks came back? And if Greek, Army service was compulsory. Just swap one army for another? It didn't seem sensible. Then, what? A foreigner? Ah, to be a foreigner was safest. It had been under the Turks, it still would be under the Greeks. That was the thing. But . . .

How?

Well, how's a small word. There were ways, all involving money, of course, but these things always involve money.

Nationalities for sale.

You could be Italian, considered quite good, French, but very expensively, English, but very difficult to get. The most popular was Spanish. Unfortunately for my friend's father, however, it had a major defect: it cost 100 golden Turkish pounds. That was money. It was money for everybody but for him it was more. He didn't actually have to pay more than the others, but it hurt him more to do it, so he didn't. He found something else. At 20 golden Turkish pounds—Portuguese! At that price only a fool wouldn't, and he wasn't a fool, so he did.

Fine. It worked very well. But later, when the family moved to Turkey because the father got a job there, troubles came. Troubles

always come. In Portugal, Salazar had come to power. He found he had a lot of Portuguese to rule, which perhaps added to his sense of greatness, but one thing didn't: there were more outside Portugal than in. And as part of this majority living as a minority in Turkey, the little community of new Portuguese in Istanbul felt insecure. One of them, who had connections in Portugal, decided he had a solution: what they needed was a Consul—in the form of himself. All he needed was—these things always involve money—was money. Contributions from his fellow-nationals. And he got it, and he went to Portugal, and he came back, and he was Consul. Only my friend's father didn't pay, because he didn't want to hurt himself, and he quarrelled with his Consul. And his Consul never forgave him.

The years up to the Second World War passed, during them my friend was born Portuguese, and early on he contracted tuberculosis of the spine, which nobody wanted to believe. So it was diagnosed very late and he was in and out of hospital all the time.

After the war, he needed to go to Switzerland for medical treatment. Therefore he went to his Consul to get a passport. His Consul said he couldn't have one. Your father, he said, owes me money. But I was born Portuguese. . . . No money, no passport, said the Consul. Nevertheless he got one, through the intervention of a visiting official from Portugal. His Consul, however, made it clear that he'd never renew it, unless of course his father . . . but there was no likelihood of that.

The passport was valid for two years and said in Turkish it could only be renewed by—and then in very large letters—J. J. Alabanel, Portuguese Consul, Istanbul. At first my friend liked his passport because frontier officials kept saluting him as J. J. Alabanel, Portuguese Consul, Istanbul, and everywhere he found respect. Also, Switzerland is a land to have a passport in, or at least papers, and he had a passport.

Unfortunately, though, his passport began to expire before he was ready to leave Switzerland, and one night he received warning of the shape of things to come. He was riding along on a bicycle without lights when a policeman stopped him. He was very apologetic, the policeman very friendly. He even made a joke, the policeman, without having looked at any of my friend's papers, and looking into his face at the time, he said: Aha, don't they have lights in Portugal, then? My friend laughed . . . and the next day he left for France. Perhaps it was better for the paperless there and he wouldn't be on file, or in the head of every village policeman.

It was in Paris, then, that his official identity expired and he took it along to the appropriate office and laid it on the table. I want to renew my visa, he said, smiling. The official looked at the passport, not smiling. **It's expired, he said.** My friend appeared startled, seized his passport and looked at it with great indignation. . . . Not only that, he said angrily, it seems it can only be renewed in Istanbul. The official snatched the passport back and glared at the Turkish on



it. Well, it's nothing to do with us, he said, it's a Portuguese affair, that is, Portuguese. My friend nodded vigorously. And meanwhile could he have a temporary permit? Yes, he could.

When he got to the Portuguese Consulate, the Consul put forward a policy of non-intervention: Istanbul's affair, he said, send it to them. So my friend sent it. And he never saw it again.

Meanwhile, from the French police he kept getting extensions of his permit to stay, but the demand for a valid passport grew fiercer and fiercer. They kept insisting he go to the Portuguese Consul, so they met frequently without being able to find a subject of conversation.

Finally, there came the time when the police informed him that they'd deport him to a country of his choice—one that was, of course, prepared to choose him. But he'd thought of that and had a medical certificate ready stating he was unfit to travel.

He now reached the conclusion that a state of statelessness was preferable to that of a passportless Portuguese and he decided to divest himself of his nationality. So he asked the French authorities for a *laissez-passer*, and they told him he couldn't have one because he was . . . a Portuguese. First he must denounce that. I denounce it, he said. No, no, they said, that's a Portuguese affair. He went to the Portuguese Consul, who got very angry. I have nothing to do with non-Portuguese, he said, I am here to bear witness to those who *are* Portuguese. Get out!

When he went back to the French authorities this time, they issued a *laissez-passer* as a method of getting rid of him. And then he had a bit of luck. He heard that his sister and her husband, whose passport described him as "Soviet citizen" and who had, with his wife, just been expelled for that reason from Turkey (as Russian agents), had arrived in Italy. They were in Como, where the husband was being treated for a minor illness. My friend determined now to get into Italy at all costs, and lucky again, he met an old girl-friend from Turkey, whose passport described her as Italian, and who happened to be a friend of the Italian Consul. So he played chess with the Consul. And lost to him. Then one day he went to see the Consul in his office and explained his difficulty. No difficulty, said the Consul. Giovanni!, he shouted loudly.

Giovanni appeared. Si, Commendatore, he said. I want, said the Commendatore, a visa for my good friend here. Without formalities. Quickly. Giovanni disappeared to get the visa. He reappeared with the regulations. The Commendatore looked at them and an affronted, hurt expression appeared on his face. The regulations are changed, he said. For stateless persons, a visa is now only possible if they have a return visa to the country they came from.

In the Ministry of Interior my friend explained this. It was explained to him that he would not come again to the Ministry to make fun of France. It is now two years since you entered the country, he was told, and for most of that time we have been trying to induce

you to leave it. When we are about to deport you, you ask us for a visa to come back again—before you've even left! So my friend ascended to the office of the Chief. He gave the uniform outside his card—with nothing but his name on it—and the uniform went into the office and the uniform came out. The Chief would see him, said the uniform. The Chief, who met a lot of people, remembered him, of course, but wondered exactly where they had first met? My friend apologised: they hadn't. He set out his problem. The Chief told him that what he wanted was impossible, congratulated him on his ingenuity and persistence, quite impossible, of course, but not for the Chief. He would do it. My friend left the Ministry with his return visa.

Next day when Giovanni came in his Commendatore smiled at him. Ecco!, he said, and handed him the return visa. Giovanni disappeared. The Commendatore beamed, then sighed to himself. Giovanni reappeared and handed a document to the Commendatore, who looked at it and turned very slowly to my friend. The regulations, he said, are changed . . . again. Visas cannot now be issued to any stateless persons. You understand, you understand it is because there are so many, so many. After the war . . . so many.

But the girl from Turkey had some news for my friend. In cases of family need, when a relative was dying, even stateless people could get a visa. There was still a difficulty: his brother-in-law had an illness he could not possibly die of, a peculiar disease, in fact, of the big toe. However, when he knew the situation, he took a sudden turn for the worse. The Commendatore was informed, for it was his duty to discover whether the relative was really in danger. He therefore instructed the Italian police in Como to find out.

Meanwhile, he couldn't do enough to console my friend. Repeatedly, he lost to him at chess. But it wasn't enough. The tension that night was terrible: the Commendatore all sympathy, hoping for good news, my friend all fear, hoping for bad. At last the Commendatore was summoned to the phone. There was a long, aching interval. The Commendatore came back with the tread of doom. I'm afraid I have very bad news for you, he said. Your brother-in-law is on the danger list. He is *what?*! shouted my friend in triumph. In danger of death, intoned the Commendatore. You may have your visa immediately.

And he got it.



# Homelessness and humanitarian turpentine

**BRIAN RICHARDSON**

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE AND GODFREY WINN were on BBC 3, discussing what had struck them in the Sunday papers. Godfrey Winn picked out the report on the King Hill Hostel for homeless families, where husbands are not accommodated and are permitted to visit during the day only at week-ends. Before he could elaborate his sentiments, Malcolm Muggeridge attempted to shock us in reverse by recalling a story from the bad old days of the segregated workhouses, when an old man who had been looking forward for years to getting away from his wife, found on admission that the warm-hearted reformers had just arranged for the men and women to be together.

He made the observation that humanitarians like Godfrey Winn always think they know what is best for people. Then he told the parable of the two kind-hearted ladies who, finding that the swans on an ornamental lake had green paint from the park seat on their feathers, cleaned it off with turpentine. When the birds went back on the water they sank like stones.

For me, as one of those engaged in the struggle for some humanity at King Hill, this conversation had uncomfortable implications. Is there a danger that our intervention, however well-meaning, could be harmful in the end?

It seems a risk we have to take. The Godfrey Winn in me responded strongly to the dramatic resistance by the women of King Hill to the bailiffs trying to evict them. My indignation was roused by the threat hanging over all these mothers of having their children taken into care at the end of the twelve-week stay, and I was full of admiration for the husbands who defied the rules and moved in with their wives and children.

This confrontation of arbitrary authority, the exercise of solidarity among the families, had been done spontaneously, without the knowledge or assistance of the anarchists and solidarists who later, delighted to see their principles being demonstrated, offered their help. The

question then arose: what useful role can the outsider play in such a case? Because we all have our own homes, we cannot enter the struggle directly. Even the proposal that we should attend evictions and arrange sit-downs, to obstruct the authorities, was discarded because we couldn't get people to the hostel in sufficient numbers, or quickly enough to be of any use. Anyway, the families there were confident that they could handle such situations themselves!

So our activities have been to give help and advice. First, a lot of people from outside have now visited the hostel (always at the invitation of the occupants), have seen the conditions for themselves, and met the people there. A large number of friendships have sprung up. I think that just this sheer contact has been a good thing. One of the great miseries of the women there had been the feeling that they were shunted down to West Malling and forgotten, and they have been heartened by having visitors, particularly other women. Talking of this isolation from the main stream of society, one particularly capable and vigorous woman remarked, "Before you people came down, I had sunk so low I didn't give a bugger what happened to me." Now she is determined not to let the children go into care, which is bound to happen if she is evicted without having somewhere else to go.

For this to be possible, there must either be a change in policy by the local authorities, or she, and the others, must find a house.

So far, most of our efforts have been applied to the first objective. This has meant getting publicity for the hostel and conditions there. The jointly arranged meeting of families and friends of the hostel, at which a charter "to make King Hill Hostel a place fit for human habitation" was adopted, did well in this respect. We were helped by the arrival of the police who stormed in to break up the fancy dress parade for the children which was taking place immediately after the meeting. They ordered the press to leave and made angry remarks about us all being scum (SCUM).

The appearance of government ministers at the Erith bye-election meetings also provided an occasion for conditions at King Hill to be raised by hostellers and friends, particularly as the rostrum for Mr. Crossman, Minister of Housing, was adorned by an official poster reading "Protection from Eviction: Another Labour Pledge Fulfilled!" The resulting disturbances were widely reported. We have also had the unfamiliar experience of working with a friendly politician. Eric Lubbock, Liberal MP for Orpington, had already been outspoken in criticism of King Hill before the wave of resistance started, and has been most helpful to us. He has sponsored the Fighting Fund which has been set up to defray legal expenses which are already heavy, as the husbands involved with a High Court injunction have had to engage counsel, and they have been refused legal aid.

Another useful piece of publicity was a poster parade outside the High Court when the husbands were in front of the judge, bearing slogans such as: "Is marriage a crime? Kent County Council says YES" and "Four men on trial for sleeping with their wives".

The husbands were instructed by the judge to visit the hostel only



between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, and under threat of imprisonment for contempt, the men accepted. But since then two of them have written to the Court saying that they cannot abide by so cruel and arbitrary a restriction.

The chairman of the Housing Committee of the London Borough of Bromley was lobbied as to why the homeless had not been on the agenda of his meeting, and he admitted having no knowledge of any Bromley people at West Malling. He knows now, and since that meeting it has been reported that the Borough is in the process of acquiring four houses for their own homeless, so as not to have to use King Hill.

Of course, the short term effect of this publicity has tended to antagonise the authorities. I had been present at a conversation between the welfare officer at the hostel and a few homeless and other people after the public meeting, to discuss her contention that the points of complaint in the charter were factually wrong. In spite of the differences and some exchanges of rudeness, there were many points of contact in the discussion, and I was sorry it had to be cut short because the woman was ill and becoming distressed. So I wrote her a polite and conciliatory note suggesting a further meeting. My reply was from the County Welfare Officer alleging that I was a trespasser, and saying, "in no circumstances will officers of this department enter into discussions with you or anyone for whom you purport to speak".

However, it may well be that, behind the scenes, the furore is having some effect, and one can assume that at least the Kent County Council will be making representations to the local authorities who send people to the hostel to honour their obligations and provide permanent accommodation for their families before they become troublesome at King Hill. (The KCC is not a housing authority, and is obliged only to provide temporary accommodation for those in urgent need. Much of the argument resolves around this point—is "temporary", in this sense, "for a limited time" as the KCC suggest when justifying their decision to limit the stay to twelve weeks followed by eviction, or does it mean "not permanent" as we suggest, bearing in mind that the homeless family is still in urgent need at the end of the twelve weeks if it remains homeless?)

But one hopes that the long term effect will be to increase public awareness of the monumental difficulties facing perfectly ordinary people in a situation of housing shortage when they involuntarily join the few who find there is no room for them. This awareness must then be directed to ensuring that intelligent plans are made to meet future housing needs and that proper emergency facilities are made available for those who are in difficulties in the meantime.

#### KING HILL FOOTNOTE

Since Brian Richardson's account was written, the campaign over the homeless families at King Hill Hostel has intensified. Phil Redman

reported in FREEDOM (13.11.65) that:

"On November 4th, once again several families and various supporters attended a meeting in Erith this time addressed by Crossman's assistant, Bob Mellish. Most of us were refused admission. About half way through, one militant youth went to a side door and managed to open it from the inside. We tried to push our way in but were stopped by police and stewards. After three successive tries I managed to squeeze my way in. The meeting then started to get out of hand and eventually Mellish stood up and said that he had prepared a statement for the families, and would address them outside after the meeting. After cries of 'Why not inside so the voters can hear?' he got up and walked out. He then addressed the families and told them that this was nothing to do with housing but in fact came under welfare which is the Minister of Health. However he had personally seen the Minister, and he assured them that something would be done. He agreed that the recent judge's decision was completely 'inhuman'.

"On November 5th, Stan Daniels appeared in court. The case was over in about ten minutes and Stan was made to accept the undertaking. The Judge was then handed a letter from Brian Lomas and Roy Mills, saying that they could not accept the undertaking. He called them to the front and asked them if they fully understood the implications of this letter, and did they know that he could now send them to prison. They said they did, and assured him that they knew what they were doing. After saying something about going to the Crown Office and arranging a hearing he told them that he didn't want to hear any more about it, and told them to go away. They have now gone back to the Hostel."

The Judge told Mr. Mills and Mr. Lomas (whose letter to the Court was also published in FREEDOM for 13.11.65) that they could only withdraw the undertaking through a properly listed hearing in the High Court. Meanwhile, on November 17th police were called to the meeting of the Kent County Council at Maidstone, to eject demonstrators who broke into the meeting and questioned councillors about the evictions at King Hill.

On November 19th Mr. Mills and Mr. Lomas appeared in the High Court to withdraw their undertakings. The Judge adjourned the case until the afternoon when he offered them a modified version of the undertaking with a clause saying that they should be allowed to visit their families outside the prescribed hours with the written consent of the warden. This, they refused to accept, and Mr. Justice Lawton committed them to prison for contempt of court. They were taken to Brixton Prison. At the hearing, Mr. Mills told the Judge that he was the father of six children. He felt, he said, that the situation at King Hill was as if they were being punished, and that their homelessness was being treated as a crime.

There, at the time of going to press, the matter stands. Donations for legal aid for the King Hill families should be sent to Dr. Don Bannister, 27 Meadow Walk, Wilmington, near Dartford, Kent.



# Homelessness: the situation today

JOHN ELLERBY

ANARCHISM AS A SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY is concerned with popular initiative rather than on that of "the authorities". Nowhere is it harder to find aspects of social life where ordinary people can break in on and influence the situation than in housing. We have sought, in several previous issues of ANARCHY, to explore the possibilities and limitations of popular intervention in the social scandal of homelessness. In ANARCHY 24, on "Housing and Helplessness" we analysed the significance of the post-war squatters' movement—far and away the most significant example of such intervention. In ANARCHY 26, Brian Richardson wrote about the relationship between public activity over the bomb and over other social issues like housing, illustrating this with the example of the London Committee of 100's demonstration at Newington Lodge, the County Council Reception Centre in London. In ANARCHY 35, on "House and Home", we discussed the significance of the demonstration over the Cobb eviction in Paddington, and in ANARCHY 37 J. D. Gilbert-Rolfe described the action taken over an eviction in Tunbridge Wells, action which brought enough publicity and public interest to ensure that someone was sufficiently concerned to make a home for the evicted family. Brian Richardson's story in this issue is of the families in the King Hill Reception Centre at West Mallin in Kent. Richardson confesses his uncomfortable awareness of the limitations of humanitarian action, but in the general situation of public and private apathy, such action is self-justifying.

\*

Audrey Harvey has worked for the last ten years in a Citizens' Advice Bureau in a poor London borough, and in the course of dealing with many thousands of problems and inquiries, has learned a great deal more than most of us about what it means to be defenceless and poor. In 1957, the year of the Rent Act, she wrote the first of many articles in the *New Statesman* which, with detailed description and factual case-histories, opened the eyes of many well-housed people to the plight of the homeless in London, and in 1960 she wrote a pamphlet *Casualties of the Welfare State* (published by the Fabian Society, though the author explained that she was not a Fabian nor a Labour Party member, but "a radical in search of a party"). This essay was part of that barrage of criticism and exposure which helped to destroy the post-war myth of the Welfare State.

She wrote in the autumn of 1964 a Penguin Special, *Tenants in*

*Danger* (Penguin Books, 3s.), which is in essence a guidebook for tenants to the tricks, deception, intimidation and swindles which the Rent Act virtually invited their landlords to practise on them in the urban jungle. These became hot news because of the accidental revelations of the Rachman property scandals in 1963; but the "wicked landlord", as Audrey Harvey reminds us, is a permanent feature of the landscape of private property. He "has never really disappeared (he is called 'unscrupulous' now), nor could he be expected to do so. For property is inseparable from power, and rented property is inseparable from power over other people's lives, and that sort of power tends to have a most unfortunate effect on the person who wields it, as anyone knows who has ever let a house."

Mrs. Harvey hopes that her book "may serve as some sort of record of what tenants of private landlords could and did suffer during what have so far been the blackest seven years in their post-war history: from 1957 to 1964", and certainly if unearthed a hundred years from now by a social historian, it will cause the same horrified amazement as we feel when reading of the enormities of the factory system in the early nineteenth century. The scholar will turn from the bland pronouncements of successive Housing Ministers and the apologetics of property owners to Mrs. Harvey's book and will have to admit that she, rather than they, is the unimpeachable witness, whose testimony convinces.

"And when, recently, the chairman of the National Federation of Property Owners maintained that private landlords do, in fact, provide a public service—and that this ought to be much more gratefully acknowledged by government and public alike—the occasion was not an altogether happy one: he had just suffered a compulsory purchase order on twenty of his East London blocks of flats because the rents charged had been found excessive and repairs had not been done."

*Tenants in Danger*, is not, however, intended as a historical record, but as a weapon for the defenceless. Part of their defencelessness is the fact that they are bewildered and ill-informed, and Mrs. Harvey consequently begins with a chapter on how to get advice and information, following this with another on "how to detect and defeat trickery", a detailed list of danger signs, and chapters on the repairs racket, furnished accommodation, misjudgments and misconceptions, landlords under compulsion. There are also comments, forecasts and suggestions. She concludes that the wicked landlord

"... is not to be exterminated by any superficial means. Put controls on him and he will find ways of slithering round at least some of them. Resist him defensively and he will still get his way with the tenant who is too old or ill or afraid to do anything but give in. Build more houses and he will still turn what remains of the so-called free market into an even blacker one than he has already done. As long as the soil and climate are right for him, as they have been now for so long, his money will buy him acceptance. He will continue to exist—and so will homeless families—as long as land and rented houses remain in private hands."



Since *Tenants in Danger* was written the Labour Government has taken office, and Mr. Richard Crossman, as Minister of Housing, has inherited from his Conservative predecessors a legacy which, apart from the Rent Act, includes the dismantling of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act with its abortive provision for ending speculation in land values, and the running down of municipal house-building for rent in favour of private house-building for sale.

The first action in this field taken by the new government was the Protection from Eviction Act, which provides that a landlord cannot evict a tenant without the consent of the county court, which, if it gives him an order for possession, may grant the tenant a period of grace of up to twelve months as well as specifying the rent to be paid.

No sooner had this Act come into force than really unscrupulous landlords discovered that they could flout it with impunity. It had been seen, Audrey Harvey commented last month, "such is the legal innocence of some welfare officers, as a gilt-edged panacea. 'No one can be evicted now!' they cried in astonishment when told that an eight-strong family and its telly was even then reposing on the pavement. 'Oh, but the police will put them back', they were certain—long after the police had elected not to recognise summary eviction as a crime."

The intention of the new Rent Act, which became law in November, was, according to Labour's election manifesto, to "end further decontrol and restore security of tenure to those in already decontrolled flats and houses" and to "provide machinery for settling rents on a fair basis".

To frame such legislation, especially to cover all circumstances of furnished letting, is an incredibly complicated task, made even harder by the difficulty of establishing a concept of a "fair" rent, and of coping with the proliferation of tribunals and arbitration boards involved. To make it proof against the wiles of landlords and speculators is impossible.

The Act in its final form bears all the marks of these difficulties, and as Audrey Harvey again commented recently (in *The Guardian* for 9.11.65): "Mr. Crossman is trying to please both sides; and the result is a series of compromises some of which have brought him more bouquets from the progenitors of the 1957 Rent Act than from his own party. That millions of people will gain the protection of the Courts must not for one moment be forgotten or undervalued. But the profit motive must always bedevil landlord and tenant relationships, and legislation never changed anyone's heart."

The only real hope of success would be in a vast increase in the stock of dwellings available for rent at prices which an ordinary working man—let alone the old and ill—can afford. The number of houses rented privately is steadily diminishing—it is invariably the poorest, oldest and most inadequately equipped of all kinds of housing, and virtually no new houses or flats are being privately built for rent. As a result of the last Rent Act, large numbers of houses which used to be let at working-class rents are now being sold at middle-class

freehold prices. All this means that if electoral promises are to be fulfilled, an enormous low-rent housing programme must be initiated: and there is little sign of this on anything like the scale required.

Mr. Crossman's Housing Plan is due for publication after this issue of *ANARCHY* goes to press. He is known to propose a "target" by 1970 of 250,000 houses a year built privately for sale and 250,000 built by local authorities for rent. Is there any sign of a re-allocation of national resources to meet this aim?

As things stand, local authorities have great financial problems because of the effect of interest rates on the cost of house-building. The rate at which loans are made by the Public Works Loans Board is fixed by the Bank Rate, which was kept at a (by present standards) low level until, when the Conservatives took office in 1951, the manipulation of Bank Rate became an instrument of economic policy. At the RIBA Conference in 1963, Mr. Womersley, then City Architect for Sheffield, produced figures to show that the economic rent of a house was made up to 17% for the cost of building, 3% for the cost of land, 15% on rates, 12% on maintenance, and 53% on servicing the loans. But instead of making cheap money available for housing, one of the first acts of the Labour Government, in dealing with the latest financial crisis, was the standard Tory measure of pushing up Bank Rate to 7%. When visiting Leeds on January 13th, Mr. Crossman was told that the increase would cost Leeds Corporation £500,000 a year and had caused them to defer their £3½ million development scheme, but all he had to say was that "local authorities are going to face these difficulties".

During Labour's years out of office, part of its programme was for the municipalisation of urban rented housing, a proposal which was unattractive, especially to those floating voters in marginal constituencies upon whom electoral success ultimately depends, and was quietly dropped before the last general election; yet it is evident from Mrs. Harvey's conclusions that nothing short of this will solve the problems of private landlordism and exploited tenants. She points out that the restrictions on personal liberty that people fear if they are to "live under the council" are trivial compared with those frequently imposed by private landlord. "No council tenant ever gets notice to quit because his wife is expecting a baby". At the same time she points to the need for an "ombudsman" for council tenants since "too great bureaucratic power is always dangerous and the insolence of office is a very dreadful thing".

Much more attractive to anarchist eyes is the idea of an enormous growth of housing associations and housing co-operatives. Why, in comparison with most other European countries, do these provide such an infinitesimal proportion of housing in this country? The answer is that as things stand someone wealthy enough to rent a housing society house or flat would be someone paying income tax at a rate that would make it more financially attractive for him to become an owner-occupier with a twenty-year mortgage and claim tax-relief on it. The only thing that would get the housing society movement off the ground in this country would be tax-relief and low-interest loans. Writing in the



*Housing Review*, Mr. Crossman declares that home ownership must not be forced on people, particularly young married couples who may have difficulty in finding the money for a mortgage, and he calls for a proper balance between houses for sale and those for rent. If he means this, and after all exactly the same platitudes were spouted by the Tory ministers before him, he must bully the Chancellor to grant these two concessions to housing societies and local authorities.

Mr. Crossman has, in fact, specifically stated that he does not propose to introduce low-interest loans for housing.

The situation, so far as housing associations are concerned, remains exactly as it was when described in the article "What Hope for Housing Societies?" in ANARCHY 23, with the exception that the previous government, in its last year of office, set up the Housing Corporation, with Sir Caspar John as its chairman, to finance house-building for cost-rent housing societies and co-ownership housing societies. There is no indication that the Housing Corporation is going to have any more success in clearing the way for more housing associations and housing co-operatives for low-income families than the National Federation of Housing Societies has had with the pilot scheme which preceded the setting-up of the Corporation.

Nor is there any sign that the Labour Government has any more positive policies than the last one for coping with the "drift to the south-east" which adds to the problems of the south without solving those of the north. During his election campaign, Mr. George Brown said that the Labour Government would scrap the *South-East Study*, which the Conservatives accepted as a basis for policy, and would adopt new and dynamic policies for developing the north-east of England and Scotland, luring industry away from the London area. We have not been told what these proposals are, and it is reported that Parliament will be asked to accept a report on the south-east essentially the same as that of the last government.

We believe in popular action rather than government action, and in a situation in which people have surrendered their initiative to government, the best substitute for popular action is popular pressure. As Bruce Kenrick, chairman of the Notting Hill Housing Trust, put it in a broadcast last summer, "At one time this country accepted slavery, illiteracy, child labour in the mines and in the chimneys, until a minority took the imaginative leap to see the necessity to abolish them. This we must do with housing: slash through the complexities of rent bill piled on rent bill. The world of housing legislation is a jungle—a jungle that demands ruthless war-time measures aimed not only at rationalization of the law but at other related needs such as halting the drift to the south-east, where the famine of housing is worst, and aimed too at a massive building programme which is not afraid to turn the ship-yards of the north into centres for building houses—for a man on the Clyde who can put bathrooms into liners can also put bathrooms into prefabricated homes. But one of the most potent forms of pressure is, surely, direct action. There are few things which encourage a political party to take action more than seeing private

individuals doing successfully what the party itself ought to do."

We would prefer, of course, that direct action should supersede action by political parties. Failing that, we need militant agitation.

The militancy which developed on the question of housing rackets when Labour was in opposition should not be allowed to evaporate simply because the Labour Party is in office. We need, as Mrs. Harvey would point out, a strengthening of services like the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, free, non-political and independent of State control, to help people overcome their ignorance of their rights. We need, as she pleads in *Tenants in Danger*, the innumerable people who read the book and are able to explain to the bewildered victims of racketeers what they can do, to become watchdogs for the exploited. We need a great barrage of sustained and informed public criticism and protest.

Six years ago I heard a most fearful sound. I took it for the screaming of an animal but it came from a woman. The scene was a derelict remand home in which the LCC temporarily parked homeless mothers and children, but not their fathers. The woman was lying face downwards on a bed and beating her fists into the pillow. Her children, one of them a baby, had just been taken away from her and scattered in various distant institutions. And she was to be turned out that night—for the excellent administrative reason that the family's time-ration had run out. This practice was soon afterwards relinquished by the LCC but not by dozens of lesser authorities. In Kent it has caused the victims to defend themselves with fire extinguishers, but this is exceptional. "We usually find they go quietly," a welfare officer smugly told me the other day. "We get them to see our difficulties."

Naturally these exist—grand hotels have them too—but that officer belonged to one of the new London boroughs which have taken over welfare from the LCC, and I had hoped—naively it now seems—that more liberal attitudes would have been part of the inheritance.

During the interval before the takeover it was pretty generally expected that the boroughs would be arranging to accommodate the homeless on their own home ground, since this was to be the paramount advantage. For a time the new departments, hastily scraped together, short of experienced staff, and with the homeless already congregating on their doorsteps, were incommunicado. But the real situation began to become clear. The awful truth eventually leaked out. There were still only two reception centres for the whole of central London: the hygienic new one or tolerable new one at Hackney where fathers had been admitted by the LCC, and the notorious Newington Lodge where they were still banned. But now there was a difference. The boroughs in which these centres stood had to be paid to admit outsiders. The others therefore tightened up their regulations.

The LCC in its time had been tough enough, heaven knows, about returning ejected wives to violent husbands and dispatching families to resentful relatives in distant counties. But it did recognise a notice to quit as a certificate of incipient homelessness and liked to know of it in time to make a friendly, fact-finding visit. The most hard-pressed of the boroughs, however, soon made it known that families under notice, no matter how desperate, were not even to approach them until the moment that notice ran out.

—AUDREY HARVEY: *Still Homeless in London* (New Statesman 5.11.65).



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