

Flo Replies

IN reply to the points made in letters in your March issue that I was being complacent, and defending a woman's right simply to be exploited because I criticised the burning of sex shops in Leeds last year. I do think these actions reflect a general problem amongst nearly all shades of 'left' opinion from socialists to feminists and to anarchists in the UK — that is, their lack of interest in what people actually do and think, as distinct from what our ideologies state they ought to do and think. We all seem to fit into the smug intellectual grin when faced with something we don't agree with, given half the chance, although we might look a little prettier than your cartoon.

There is 'more than one view' as the article from FACT in your last issue pointed out, but I don't think this only applies to feminism. The point I was trying to get at in the article was, just because we have an ideal, belief or set of principles which we call anarchism or feminism or socialism or even conservatism for that matter, does not mean we can claim some 'right' to impose our belief on everybody else, whether they like it or not — as I think the women in Leeds did by their actions in this particular instance.

I have always thought the aim of anarchism and feminism was to liberate people, or women, to make things better, so that they could make their own choices instead of being told what to do — not make things worse for them. This does mean that, when we put our theories into practice, we are accountable for the consequences of our actions. This accountability therefore, does lie, not only in the correctness of our beliefs, theories or ideals, but also in the effects of our practical actions upon the lives of people around us — in Leeds the effects of the burnings upon women, many of whom were raided, busted for other 'crimes', and beaten up by the police until those who carried out the action owned up, which at least won them peoples' respect. The effects upon the sex industry workers may in fact never be known but porn still goes on, now behind closed and fortified doors and often guarded by security thugs.

Sometimes it's easy to see the results of actions but sometimes it isn't. A lot of people don't even bother looking, and there seems to be a tendency amongst radicals to ignore the difficult question of their own accountability, while demanding it for everybody else, and to issue continuing tirades against people and the way they go about their lives. At the same time what is ignored is the positive way people, given what they have to put up with, (their daily family, economic and emotional problems, racism and

discrimination and so on) can and have to deal with everyday life. In our analysis of what is wrong with the world, we seem to be only emphasising the divisive aspects of society such as racism or sexism, and very little that is positive or creative about human relations emerges as a basis for building much needed alternatives.

I don't know all the answers myself either, but if anarchism and feminism are to help create alternatives to exploitation the theory, practice and action have to take account of peoples' wants or needs and be able to fulfill them, or allow fulfilment, rather than like every other political ideology or system, impose a set of ideas and rules upon them. Flo

Anarchism and Class

ACCORDING to my dictionary, the word 'anarchy' is derived from the Greek 'anarkhos', meaning without a ruler. Consistent with this, anarchists have always opposed all hierarchies and the coercive power of the state which underpins them. Our critique is essentially a very simple one and may be summarised thus:

The presence of power wielded by all rulers is disruptive of community; the re-establishment of community is reliant upon the dissolution of power and the hierarchies it gives rise to.

Given this very clear approach, I wonder why many anarchists seem willing to use the concept of class, which especially nowadays is difficult if not impossible to define. The sociologists wrangle interminably over different versions, which stem essentially from Marx and Weber.

In Marxism, ones membership of either the bourgeois or proletarian class is determined by ones ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. Simple. It is a 'model' of society which broadly fitted the 19th Century industrial capitalism, and the reason why it fitted was the then absence of the plethora of technical and bureaucratic hierarchies with which we are now familiar. Max Weber's later analysis of society was more complex. Although he acknowledged ownership as a very important economic class determinate, this was also related to social status and lifestyle; a highly subjective matter. Generally, it is in this fashion that most people, if they are aware of 'class', perceive it. It is a long way from Marx's clinical economic definition.

Now, when anarchists use the concept of class in their critique, they are beset with the same problem of its definition as the sociologists. I feel that such problems are neatly avoided by our simple and still relevant critique of hierarchy and power. It is worth pointing out that the scrupu-

lous Weber has this to say: 'Classes, status groups, and parties are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community.' (my emphasis). Modern sociologists, not surprisingly, tend to be careful to leave this aspect of Weber very much alone. They would, wouldn't they! The fact that society is now divided into continuous chains of order givers and order takers, does not undermine the validity of the anarchist analysis one jot. Indeed, it only demonstrates its flexibility, and shows the underlying error of the Marxist analysis, which has its roots in economic criteria only.

To get back to the here and now, one wonders for instance what criteria *Class War* use to determine 'class'. Does my ownership of a house in a leafy suburb make my windows their legitimate targets? I would like to know. Furthermore, it follows that anarchists who accept the concept of class as a tool for understanding society must presumably accept the notion of themselves being classified . . .

To finish on a personal note. I am content only with the use of a human classification as a recognition of the difference between my species characteristics and those of others on the planet. I strongly resent being dumped into any 'class' analysis of human society, and particularly if someone else's analysis is going to make me a target in their war.

Jay Freeman

Language Games

WHAT people in the real world want is obviously and forever the aim of anarchism. And plain and simple language — preferably a lot plainer and simpler than that used by Pat Murtagh (Letters, May) — is the way to achieve it.

But we have to recognise that our language is shaped not only by ourselves according to our needs and desires but largely by those at the top of the cultural heap. There are experiences in this society for which we have no names; only when they receive expression in the words of those who feel them can they be identified and acted upon.

Words are powerful and dangerous and we must have them on our side. They are there to be used but where our language fails to name our thoughts we are free to invent and adapt. After all, anarchism is about challenging structures, and whether we call the inevitable challenge to language mutilation or reclamation depends on the depth of our commitment to revolutionary change.

How will we ever know what we want in the real world while our 'reality' is defined for us by those who would perpetuate injustices?

Sadie Plant

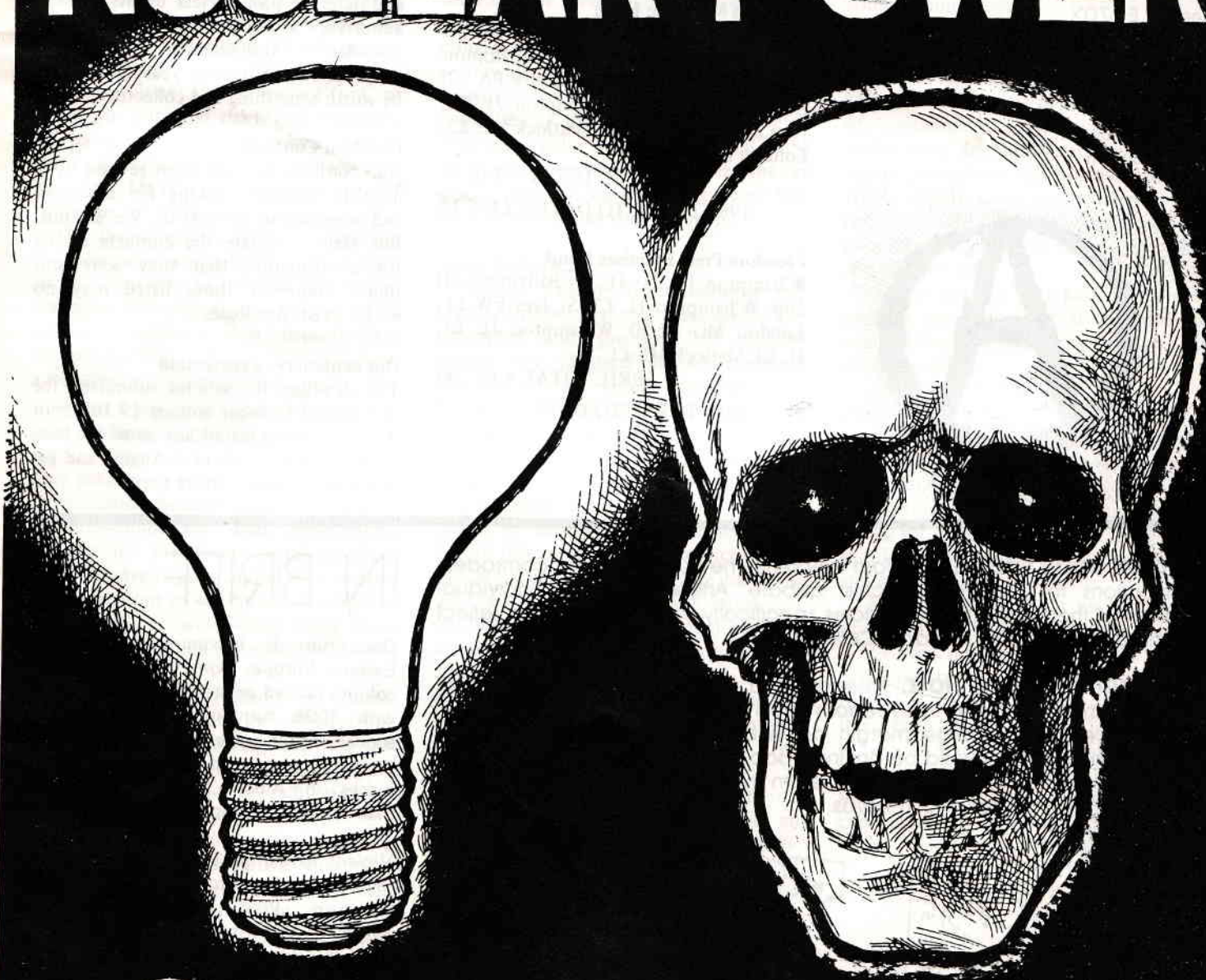
FREEDOM

1886 : CENTENARY YEAR : 1986

ANARCHIST MONTHLY

VOL 47 No 5 JUNE 75p

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