

different backgrounds during the 1950s and early 1960s. Unlike the majority of the GAAR, the magazine group turned away from a stress on organisation towards a more spontaneous approach. Unlike Socialisme ou Barbarie however, little of their writing was published in the English language and so their pioneering attempts to 'rejuvenate' anarchism are almost unknown outside France. Perhaps the most infamous associate of Noir et Rouge was Daniel Cohn—Bendit. 'Danny the Red', who would play a role as spokesperson for the May events in France. Noir et Rouge, like SOB, and the Situationists (see below) had an important influence on the build-up to May 68 and the events themselves, despite the limited circulation of their ideas and publications. Something worth remembering when plodding on with our activities and propaganda.

Gruppi Anarchici d'Azione Proletaria

In post-war Italy, anarchists influenced by the Platformist tradition and by the critical Marxism of the German communist Karl Korsch emerged. They opposed the direction of the large synthesist organisation, the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), which was beginning to reject class analysis in favour of a vague humanistic version of anarchism. Unlike the French Platformists, the Italians decided to split off from the FAI and form their own organisation. The Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action (GAAP) in 1949/50. They emphasised the need for a rigorous political approach, an engagement with Marxism, and defended the class basis of anarchism. Much of their energy was engaged in the struggle against Stalinism, in the shape of the massive Italian Communist Party. On an international level they called for the opening of a revolutionary 'Third Front' against American and Soviet imperialism and were part of the short-lived Libertarian Communist International alongside comrades in France and Spain. Isolated from traditional anarchism and ultimately marginalised by Stalinism in a period of low class struggle, the GAAP eventually merged with Azione Comunista, a confederation of dissident Trotskyist, Bordigist and former Communist Party militants, from which they were after a short time effectively expelled. This led to the group's disintegration.

Hungary 1956

The Hungarian uprising of 1956 came as a breath of fresh air against the stink of Stalinism and had repercussions world-wide, inspiring many socialists of the post-war generation to question not only the validity of 'actually existing socialism' but to ask "what is the content of socialism?" The thesis of Socialisme ou Barbarie concerning the anti-bureaucratic nature of authentic socialism seemed acutely relevant. The group itself took the view that: "... over the coming years, all significant questions will be condensed into one: are you for or against the action and the program of the Hungarian workers?" So what exactly was the Hungarian Revolution and why was it such a turning point? Hungary in 1956 was under the government of Imre Nagy, a watered-down Stalinist entrusted by Moscow to 'liberalise' Hungary to put a secure lid on social discontent. Despite his 'reforms', the system of exploitation in the name of socialism continued to engender opposition. On 23rd October 1956, following a mobilisation in the capital, Budapest, by students demanding moderate reform, some of a 200,000 crowd of demonstrators attacked the state radio station and so began the Hungarian revolt. If students and intellectuals had provided the spark, it was the working class who carried the flame and made sure that the arrival of Soviet tanks was met with fierce resistance. Over the next few days a wave of insurrectionary fervour enveloped Hungary as workers left their factories and offices to take part in assaults upon the headquarters of the local 'red bourgeoisie' and their secret police. Workers' councils emerged in every industrial centre, effectively taking power at all levels. These councils coordinated at a local and regional level and attempted to realise a form of workers' control in the workplaces. The 'programme' of the workers' councils varied from area to area but nowhere did they call for the reintroduction of free market capitalism. The limitations of their form of workers' control never had time to show themselves as the Hungarian revolution, failing to spread beyond its national borders, essentially succumbed to the military might of the Soviet army. The experience of the councils, which developed spontaneously, without the leadership of any vanguard party and which within a matter of days took responsibility for production, distribution and communication on a national level had an enormous impact on those in the revolutionary movement willing to see past Stalinist lies about an attempted 'capitalist restoration' by 'nationalists'. Whatever the limitations of the councils programme, the fact that the working class had once more shown its capacity for autonomous action was an inspiration for those fighting for working class self-organisation.

Solidarity

Three years later in Britain, a current developed, under the influence of Socialisme ou Barbarie, which broke with Trotskyism (in this case the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy). Originally called Socialism Reaffirmed, the group would become known as Solidarity and exist in one form or another for almost 30 years. Although initially seeing itself as a Marxist group critical of the Bolshevik heritage, it soon developed its own character as a 'national organisation' of libertarian socialists. In 1961 it published an English translation of the key statement of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group and consequently published much of the writing of Castoriadis (under the pen name Paul Cardan), including his post-1964 work. Like Castoriadis, Solidarity defended the need for workers' self-management of production and of society, but not all those involved in the organisation fully accepted his notion of the new revolutionary 'subject' being "order takers" rather than proletarians. The Situationist International (see below) suggested that, thanks to Solidarity's translator, the group received Castoriadis' work "... like the light that arrives on Earth from stars that have already long burned out" and were unaware that the founder of Socialisme ou Barbarie had long since died, politically speaking. Although the Anarchist Federation generally rejects the term 'self-management' with all its ambiguity, it is obvious that many people within Solidarity interpreted the term as meaning the end of production for sale or exchange. Whatever Solidarity's

weaknesses (not least their fairly lax attitude to maintaining an international organisation and their lack of political direction after they effectively split around 1980). Solidarity was involved in important revolutionary activity and publishing for at least 20 of its 30 years, producing a wealth of literature defending a coherent vision of libertarian socialism that was unavailable elsewhere. Compared to many of the 'class struggle' anarchists in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, they developed a consistent body of politics that recognised the need for working class self-organisation outside social democratic and Leninist models.

The Situationist International

The Situationist International was formed in 1957, from the unification of three avant-garde artistic/cultural groups. For the first five years of its existence, its main theoretical focus was on developing a critique of art, culture, town planning and anything else that they considered worth critiquing. Only in 1962, did the group - which, although numerically small, was geographically spread across Europe (based mainly in France) - really develop a political perspective based on salvaging what was authentically revolutionary from the history and practice of the workers' movement. Much of their early political orientation was influenced by Socialisme ou Barbarie, and, like that group, their ambition was to help in the creation of a 'new revolutionary movement' based upon the proletariat of the 'industrial advanced countries'. By the time the situationists had formulated their positions, Socialisme ou Barbarie had, however, lost hope in the proletariat and had lost any dynamic presence in revolutionary political life (see above). One major problem with any appraisal of the Situationist International is the legacy left by some of their followers and interpreters (known sometimes as Pro-Situs), which leaves them looking like disgruntled, destructive intellectuals with very little positive contribution to make. Actually, judged on their own writings and record of activity, they were far from the 'arty misfits' their opponents would like to paint them. The situationists took Marx's conception of alienation and applied it to society as a whole rather than just to the world of work. They argued that alienated labour was central to existence in all aspects of daily life, as proletarians were confronted by their own alienation at every turn about. In culture, sport, sexuality, education, pseudo-rebellion, everything that could be turned into a commodity had been. This society of mediated images, of 'spectacle' could only be swept away by a proletarian revolution and the realisation of "generalised self-management", which for the situationists meant the abolition of wage labour and the state: "The only reason the situationists do not call themselves communists is so as not to be confused with the cadres of pro-Soviet or pro-Chinese anti-worker bureaucracies." [Italian section of the SI, 1969] So, by their actions should they be judged. In the May 1968 events in Paris the situationists, their comrades and allies were faced with a real-life revolutionary situation. Did they cut the mustard? Find out next time.

In the Tradition - Part 3

Our serial on the political influences of the AF continues with a look at France '68

This is part three of In The Tradition, a roughly chronological outline of the various political events, movements and ideas which have influenced the development of the Anarchist Federation.

We left off last time having looked at currents which emerged during the 1960s, particularly the British-based *Solidarity* and the Situationist International (see Organise! #53). Both of these groups were to see in the events in France of May-June 1968, confirmation of their argument that a modern revolution would be one which would develop through the autonomous activity of millions of 'ordinary' people and a revolution against the official 'representatives' of the working class; the unions, labour and communist parties.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of the bourgeois media, 'May '68' has been reduced to a 'student revolt' centred entirely on Paris and in particular the occupied Sorbonne University, which involved some barricade building, some fighting with the police and a load of hot air. The modern media enjoys pointing to the subsequent political trajectories of various participants, notably the 'spokesperson' Daniel Cohn-Bendit, then a libertarian communist, now a NATO supporting Green MP, as proof that the events had no long lasting effect, were just an outburst of youthful exuberance by the children of the bourgeoisie etc.

Social Revolution continues to haunt capitalism

The reality of the events of May-June, "the greatest revolutionary movement in France since the Paris Commune" (International Situationists, September 1969) is very different. Although the actions of the students provided a detonator, the actual social explosion was manifested in the largest wildcat strike in history, the occupation of workplaces across the country and the proof, if proof were needed, that the spectre of social revolution continues to haunt capitalism.

Superficially, the insurgence of May 1968 appears to have come out of nowhere. In France and in Europe generally, class struggle was at a low-ebb; there appeared a massive depoliticisation, particularly amongst young people and prospects for any movement for revolutionary change seemed particularly remote.

year. University, but particularly high school, students were involved in struggles which echoed those of the French students mobilisations.

This wave of struggle gave birth to many organisations, both at the level of the factories and in the broader social milieu, the most notable being Lotta Continua (The Continuing Struggle) and Autonomia Operaia (Workers Autonomy). The anti-union nature of the struggles also gave rise to what became the theory and activity of 'workers autonomy' (not synonymous with the organisation of the same name), which the new organisations attempted to relate to. Workers were taking their struggles on to the streets, using imaginative direct actions. Occupations of city centres and sieges of municipal buildings continued throughout the 1970s.

Restructuring

Struggles in Italy also took place around the prisons, which from the early 1970s were increasingly home to revolutionary militants, often culminating in massive demonstrations and prison riots. The period of heightened class struggles heralded in 1968 underwent a transformation as a new employers offensive, based upon the desire to avoid the emerging economic crisis, involved a technological restructuring of industry and the end of the 'workers fortresses' of the massive plants. On a political level, the Communist Party was increasingly integrated into the state structures in return for its complicity in this restructuring. This integration of the Communist Party was in part responsible for the emergence of urban armed struggle in the mid-70s.

Armed struggle

Indeed, in Italy, the 1970s were defined by two aspects. Firstly, a level of militancy amongst a large number of workers both employed and unemployed which manifested itself in autonomous struggle both in the factories and on a territorial basis and which arguably reached its high point in the 'movement of '77'. Secondly, the "armed struggle for communism" carried out by several Leninist groups which, when not actually state sponsored contributed nothing to the actual class struggles which they claimed to somehow 'lead'. The activities of the latter, which left the working class as spectators to their own 'liberation', tend to overshadow the actual content of the class struggles that took place and any revolutionary potential.

And in 'socialist' Poland...

The strikes and occupations were echoed in the proletarian insurgency in Poland in 1970-1, when workers responded to 'socialist' austerity measures with their very own May '68 (only in December and January!) burning down the ruling Stalinist party headquarters to the tune of the Internationale. In areas of the country the working class was effectively master of the situation. As in France, and indeed Italy, the working class balked at 'going the whole hog' but exhibited a need and desire to, if only temporarily, go beyond all forms of representation and to develop an *autonomous* activity. And all this without the leadership of the self-proclaimed vanguards....

The May-June events in France were the clearest confirmation that only a *mass social revolution* which stretched to every sector of exploited humanity could end the chaos of capitalism.

New Left, Platformism, Wildcat

The New Left

The 'New Left' which emerged in the 1960s attempted to distinguish itself from the old left of the established Communist parties, social democracy, Labourism and Stalinised socialism in general. It embraced the so-called 'Second wave' of feminism, sexual liberation and homosexual equality. Alongside antiracism, all these ideas seem mainstream today but to the old left even 40 years ago they were new and startling ideas. Certainly the notion of women's liberation and of racial equality had been present since the birth of socialism, but rarely were they seen as central to the revolutionary project. Superficially, much of the New Left appeared genuinely libertarian, genuinely interested in a truly social revolution. In reality, much of the New Left was tied closely to either Leninism (quite often Maoist or Trotskyist) or to more openly reformist currents of thought. The New Left may have rejected the worst excesses of Stalinism but generally fell short of making any critique of top-down versions of socialism and in many ways copied the failed politics of the past, not least in their willingness to support anything that moved including every 'national liberation' racket that emerged.

It is of little surprise then that many of the leading lights of the New Left were to re-appear in the last 35 years as thoroughly establishment figures, academics and media-gurus.

So, a balance sheet of the effect of the New Left shows that although it managed to bring up crucial questions, about what liberation must involve, which had remained marginal for many years, it was unable to give any answers.

So what of the libertarians?

The events in France in 1968 (see In the Tradition pt.3) had given anarchist and other revolutionary movements both a big surprise and a great deal of attention. In the period of the early 1970s anarchist, libertarian Marxist, council and left communist group emerged across Europe in a wave of interest amongst young workers and students for methods of understanding and changing the world around them. The anarchist movement at this time had been at a particularly low ebb, having never recovered from the eclipse of the movement during the 1930s- 1940s. Certainly small currents still existed (see In the Tradition pt. 3) and some of these had attempted to renovate and bring forward new ideas. However, much of what passed for a movement was firmly embedded in a happier past and found it difficult to relate to the 'youth revolt' of the late 60s. In the French events of '68 the 'official' anarchists had played an essentially marginal role.

So, much re-inventing of the wheel took place in the early 1970s.

British Platformism

1970 saw Britain's first Platformist group, with the forming of the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists (ORA). Although this organisation signified a break with the chaotic synthesist approach to anarchism hitherto employed in post-war Britain, much of its politics seemed to echo the Trotskyist left. Eventually a large part of the organisation ended up joining the Trotskyist camp itself. Subsequent Platformist-orientated anarcho-communist groups, such as the Anarchist Workers Association (AWA) and the short-lived Libertarian Communist Group also displayed Leninist and reformist tendencies that would eventually see their abandoning libertarian politics. But the legacy of these groups was important for two reasons. One, they had, prior to their degeneration, established a bridgehead against the dominant tendencies within British anarchism, notably individualism and anti-organisationalism. And secondly they showed later militants how not to create consistently revolutionary organisations (a lesson unfortunately lost upon the Anarchist Workers Group of the 1980s/90s.).

Around the same period of the mid to late 1970s other tendencies also began to emerge, notably from an unlikely source - the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). This party, celebrating its centenary in 2004, defends a particular, and indeed consistent, version of Marxism that refuses any compromise with 'reformism' or struggles around bread and butter issues, instead organising to 'make socialists' through propaganda and to contest elections. Some younger members within the SPGB had begun to question the timeless orthodoxies of the party. These critical elements began to come together in a discussion circle which quickly realised that the way forward did not lie within the monolithic atmosphere of the party.

In the mid seventies this faction found itself outside the party. Calling itself 'Libertarian Communism' it attempted to reassess much of the politics outlined in In The Tradition parts 1-3 whilst remaining in the framework of a Marxist analysis. After changing it's name to Social Revolution this group joined the libertarian socialist group Solidarity (see In the tradition pt.2), before embracing an unorthodox councilism in the early 1980s as the group Wildcat. Wildcat, based mainly in the North West of England, was amongst a very few currents that actually attempted to creatively advance communist political theory in the 1980s.

Democracy

People involved with Wildcat and Workers Playtime, a left communist journal in London, amongst others, were involved in discussions on the nature of democracy and the fetishization of decision-making processes. Of course, communists have always rejected representative democracy in its classical liberal democratic-parliamentarian form, but now the content, not just the form of democracy was being questioned. Sometimes this took a consciously vanguardist tone, but besides the rhetoric there were serious questions raised about the need for working class militants to push ahead with action, regardless of the outcome of ballots, shows of hands etc. These questions were, partially at least, emerging because of the practical struggles that were taking place in the British coalfields during the 1984-85 miners strike. The capitalist media and sections of the left and far left were insisting that the National Union of Mineworkers should have held a ballot in order to have brought into the strike thousands of scabbing Nottinghamshire miners.

Communists began to talk of a need for the revolutionary minorities of the working class to, when necessary, to ignore 'majority' decisions and to find ways of organising in an egalitarian way without fetishising the atomising nature of democratic decision-making. These ideas were really a reflection of how workers in struggle (particularly the Hit Squads of the Miners Strike) have to operate in order to be effective.

Part 5: Miners' Strike, Class War, Social Ecology & Greens, COBAS

We finished part Four with a brief look at the Miners Strike of 1984-1985 and the impact this brutal struggle had upon the revolutionary movement. The strike showed the combativity, the fierce intelligence and the practical capability of an historic section of the working class, the mineworkers and their friends and families. It also showed the severe limitations of trade unionism and of the left and the weakness of the revolutionary libertarian movement.

Demanding the impossible?

of the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers repeatedly called for solidarity action from other union leaderships, inevitably, no avail.

Sections of the Leninist left either called for increases in mass picketing (SWP) or for the Trades Union Congress to call a General Strike (Militant, WRP). The former 'tactic' was shown to be, on its own, a dead end at Orgreave where the massed miners were battered and dispersed in cossack style by mounted police. The second tactic was merely reflective of the bankruptcy of Trotskyism, most of whose partisans could think no further than calling upon the bureaucrats to show a lead, or to workers to "come through the experience" of demanding the impossible from that bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, rank and file NUM members, their families, friends and supporters were organising Hit Squads to target scabs and their supporters and to defend their communities. The traditions of Trade Union practice still held most miners back from reaching out to other sectors of the working class directly, not via the bureaucracies of the official union structures. This widening of the struggle would not have guaranteed victory, but its failure to emerge condemned the struggle to defeat.

The anarchist response

The anarchist and libertarian communist movement responded to the strike in fractured way, reflecting the fractured nature of that movement.

Although libertarians added to the numbers on picket lines, at demonstrations and in general support work, there was little co-ordinated activity and a very limited amount of serious analysis. Small collectives such as the London Workers Group (an open group of councilists, anarchists, autonomists etc.) the Wildcat group in Manchester and Careless Talk group in Staffordshire were amongst a minority who attempted to address the issues (such as the need to criticise the NUM and the need for the struggle to be spread by workers themselves) that were being ignored elsewhere.

Class War

One group, which emerged during the Miners Strike, and which was to subsequently have a considerable impact upon the libertarian movement in Britain and beyond, was Class War. The Class War group and its eponymous tabloid-style newspaper had its origin amongst working class anarchists living in South Wales and London. Annoyed and frustrated with what they saw as the clear lack of dynamism and general irrelevance of the anarchist 'scene' in Britain at the period, they adopted a populist and highly activist approach. The emergence of this group, which developed a nominally national federal structure in 1986, sent a shock wave through the anarchist 'scene', which at that time, with rare exception, was under the influence of pacifism, moralistic exclusivist lifestyle 'politics' and/or individualism.

Class War, not surprisingly, emphasised a populist version of class struggle anarchism, promoting working class compatibility, focussing on community rather than workplace struggles. Their practical activity in the first years of their existence, other than the production and distribution of the newspaper, involved headline-grabbing heckling and public harassment of various (highly deserving) left figures. After a period of inventive, but inevitably less than successful 'stunts' such as the 'Bash the Rich' events, the new federation looked more seriously at their political development.

This period of intense discussion culminated in the production of a book titled 'Unfinished Business: the politics of Class War' (1992) which attempted to outline a new and distinct politics that distanced itself if not from the anarchist tradition, then at least from the present anarchist milieu. Simultaneously the book, somewhat unconvincingly, embraced a libertarian take on Marxism. Although a considerable section of Class War rejected much of the Unfinished Business thesis, the book itself was at least a serious attempt to both renovate libertarian thought and to address the issue of class at the end of the 20th century. In doing so it borrowed heavily from the politics of the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists (see part 2 of In the Tradition).

Regardless of the book, the actual Class War Federation, however, continued to be a synthesis of Platformist anarchism, autonomist Marxism, council communism and various other tendencies, all painted in populist colours. This created an ongoing tension in the organisation, which, though it contained a certain dynamic, inevitably led to an inconsistency in political line with regard to fundamentals such as the nature of the trade unions and national liberation struggles.

After a decade of trying to extricate itself from what it described as the "anarchist ghetto" the Class War Federation eventually dissolved itself after a final edition of the paper styled 'An open letter to the revolutionary movement' where they stated that "After almost 15 years of sometimes intense and frantic activity, Class War is still tiny in number and, as far as many in the organisation are concerned, going nowhere". A small rump of militants continued the organisation, which decided to describe itself as explicitly anarchist communist, though maintaining a populist and increasingly counter-cultural perspective.

But no discussion of international libertarian thought in the last 20 years can ignore the legacy of Class War. Class War, which in part at least was inspired by the experience of punk in the 1970s, breathed new life into the anarchist body-politic and brought a fresh, fiercely combative vision of revolutionary politics. This vision, which burned brightly for a

short time, influenced many young working class militants, new to politics. Their irreverent approach shook up a complacent libertarian milieu. And, if nothing else, their emphasis on an antagonistic and emphatically class politics being central to libertarian revolution, helped return anarchism to its working class roots.

A different direction?

If a group like Class War distinguished itself in its emphasis on class, then other libertarian currents were developing ideas which appeared to be moving in a different direction, that of prioritising the struggle against the environmental destruction of the planet.

Although libertarians such as Peter Kropotkin, Edward Carpenter and William Morris, were amongst the first people anywhere to address issues of environment and human scale economics, much of the productivism and technophilia of capitalist ideology was shared by early socialists, anarchists included.

This failure to address the alienating and environment destroying nature of unfettered economic 'progress' was evident in the brutal industrialisation of the so-called socialist nations. The supporters of the Soviet Union and its satellites sang the praises of the latest super-dam or the newest tractor production figures. But it was reflective of the lack of environmental awareness generally, that many of those who saw the 'existing socialist' nations for what they were, namely state capitalist dictatorships, failed to recognise the grotesque nature of the productivist ideology they reflected.

Social ecology

A revolutionary anti-capitalist understanding of green politics was slow in developing. 'Ecology' was equated with the 'conservationism' of the past which more often than not, hankered after a pre-industrial golden age and hid a reactionary agenda. It was not until the work of Murray Bookchin, and his book 'Our Synthetic Environment' (1962) that a social ecology would begin to emerge based upon a revolutionary humanism. This perspective was most forcefully argued in the 1982 work 'The Ecology of Freedom'.

At the centre of social ecology was the realisation that the productivist nature of capitalism was wrapped up in hierarchical social relations as much as in the need for capital to constantly expand. So this productivism and the desire to dominate the earth are contained also within socialist ideologies, particularly Marxism which also defend hierarchical social relations. Even before the emergence of Primitivism or Deep Ecology, Bookchin realised the danger of an ecological understanding that was based upon a misanthropic, anti-humanist ideology.

"In utopia man no more returns to his ancestral immediacy with nature than anarcho-communism returns to primitive communism. Whether now or in the future, human relationships with nature are mediated by science, technology and knowledge. But whether science, technology and knowledge will improve nature to its own benefit will depend upon man's ability to improve his social condition. Either revolution will create an ecological society, with new ecotechnologies and ecocommunities, or humanity and the natural world as we know it today will perish." (Post-scarcity anarchism, 1970).

Bookchin's vision of a massively decentralised, stateless and classless society which rationally utilises technology in order to both save the planet and to save humanity remains a minority current within mainstream green thought and organisation. On the one hand, reformist green parties and pressure groups remain entirely within the camp of a kinder, gentler capitalism, whilst on the other Primitivist and post-primitivist groups prefer to rage against civilisation itself whilst following an equally reformist trajectory.

There is much to criticise in Bookchin's arguments. His rejection of the working class as motor force of revolutionary transformation, his support for a 'libertarian municipalism' which tends to equate to electoralism etc. But his arguments on the need for a liberatory technology and an anti-hierarchical praxis have certainly influenced the Anarchist Federation and even some of his ostensible critics in the ecological resistance.

Green revolution

In the early 1990s, much of the cross fertilization between libertarian communist and green thought found organisational form in Britain with the journal Green Revolution: a revolutionary newspaper working for ecological survival, human liberation and direct action. Though short-lived, Green Revolution attempted an eclectic, but coherent approach, embracing "...an unbroken tradition of struggle". This tradition included the Diggers of the English Civil War, William Morris and the Marxist Rosa Luxemburg. It called for a "Green and libertarian critique of Marxism" and understood that "The war against the planet is a class war". Green Revolution was caught revolutionary potential in social ecology.

The collapse of 'communism'

The end of 'existing socialism' with the death of the Soviet Union and the other state capitalist dictatorships was wel-

comed by libertarian communists, not least those few who lived in those countries. Hopes were artificially high that the possibility of a new working class movement for a self-managed socialism would emerge, somehow, from the wreckage of these societies. But, although a blossoming of libertarian and anti-capitalist groups, newspapers etc. was almost immediate, the reality was that, instability, ethnic conflict and massive attacks upon working class living conditions were the norm across the former 'Socialist' states as private capitalism arrived.

For the Stalinist left across the world the 'collapse of communism' created crisis and deepened schisms. But the Trotskyist left also felt the effects. The Workers States, however degenerated or deformed, were for them still examples of non-capitalist societies. Their collapse left them in an awkward situation.

For those who considered these so-called Workers States as variants of capitalist societies, however, their demise also had a strangely negative impact. Certainly we had no illusion that our God had failed, but the relentless trumpeting of the 'End of Communism' and by extension, of all collective solutions to the problems posed by capitalism, by the bourgeoisie was demoralising. "Look at what happens when you have a revolution. Dictatorship and unfreedom inevitably follows!" harped the ruling class, "Give up now!". As no wave of resistance to the new reign of free market economics seemed to be forthcoming from the working class of the former Soviet Bloc, the early nineties looked bleak.

The return of working class self-organisation

The defeat of the miners strike was an enormous blow to working class confidence. The subsequent unsuccessful struggles in British industry such as those of the print workers at Warrington and Wapping, along with the general run-down of manufacturing, left many feeling despondent. The community based struggle against the Poll Tax in the late 1980s-early 1990s, whilst inspiring, did not signal the beginnings of a new working class combativity. By 1996, the Liverpool Dockers' fight appeared like a struggle from another era. And, despite the efforts of the Dockers to internationalise the struggle and to seek new allies in the direct action oriented movements such as Reclaim the Streets, the dead hand of the Transport and General Workers Union ensured defeat.

Autonomous struggle?

In parts of Europe during the period of 1986 until the mid-nineties, new developments in the class struggle were taking place. As everywhere, working class living conditions were under attack and as everywhere, the Trade Unions were desperately trying to maintain their negotiating positions and to control any autonomous struggle.

In Italy, self-organised co-ordinations of workers began to emerge during 1985, particularly amongst teachers, railway workers and metalworkers. These co-ordinations were outside the existing union and, where the traditional unions existed, quickly entered into conflict with them. Although different names were used in different industries and regions, the movement became known as the COBAS movement (from Committees of the Base) and used mass assemblies, recallable delegates and militant tactics to conduct their struggles. The political complexion of the movement was diverse and included various elements from the old Workers Autonomy movement of the 1970s, as well as Trotskyists, anarchists and others. Mostly its strength lay in mobilising those workers who were fed-up with the response of the established unions to attacks upon their sectors.

Although the COBAS movement was a positive example of self-organisation, it suffered from sectionalism and the desire of some of its activists to become a new trade union, a little more left and a little less bureaucratic than the traditional ones. In February 1991 the COBAS, alongside the anarcho-sindicalist union, the USI, organised a self-managed general strike against the Gulf War, which involved 200,000 people. This initiative brought more people out far more than the combined membership of the committees and USI put together.

A year later a formal organisation, the CUB (United rank and file confederation) was established, uniting workers across various sectors. This 'alternative' union is today one of several in Italy, including the UniCobas, which has an explicitly libertarian perspective. These organisations have developed their own bureaucratic practices and operate somewhere between a political group, a trade union and their original role as a tool of liaison and co-ordinated struggle.

France: echoes of 1968?

In France during the early 1990s a similar development took place as workers in the health service, transport workers, posties, workers in the car industry, the airports and elsewhere began to self-organise. They established independent Liaison Committees which attempted to co-ordinate activity in their sectors. These Committees were constantly having to out manoeuvre the various established trade unions, themselves competing for recognition and advantage. Wildcat strikes involving lorry drivers, nurses and care workers, brought thousands of self-organised workers out. When these struggles died down, some following more success than others, the independent Committees tended not to establish themselves, as in Italy, as permanent structures. Many of those involved in these strikes in 1990-1992 were subsequently involved in the mass strike wave of the Hot Autumn of 1995. Public sector workers responded to proposed attacks upon social security, pensions and the public budget with a series of strikes, mass demonstrations and occupations. With echoes of 1968 (see In The Tradition part 2) at times this took on an almost insurrectional character with

pitched battles between coal miners and police, the occupation of public buildings and barricades rising in towns and cities across the country. Eventually, with union help, the most active groups of workers, such as the rail workers, were isolated and the struggles petered out.

What such events point to is that even in a period where the ruling class seems to have extinguished the spirit of revolt and any vision of a better world, the basic contradictions of capitalism create resistance. Likewise, the stranglehold of bureaucrats and officials is challenged by the innate creativity of the mass of working people, time and time again.

In the tradition?

The In the Tradition series has attempted to draw the very briefest outline of the ideas, people and events that have influenced the development of the modern libertarian communist movement. Most of the events have allowed us insights into how people attempt to practically solve the problems of organisation and struggle. Many have been inspirational and we have learned most from the activity of (extra)ordinary people trying to understand and change their world.

The Anarchist Federation accepts no guru, no theoretical God or master. We think no libertarian group or individual should. But we reject anti-intellectualism and ahistorical approaches, both of which are far too common amongst anarchists. Neither do we favour an eclecticism that simply borrows from here and there without critical appreciation. We hope that readers will seek out for themselves the thinkers, groups and movements that we have talked about. We hope that readers will take the time to contact us, demanding to know why we haven't covered x, y and z! So many important events and theories haven't made it into the parts, perhaps we should have started work on a book several years ago!

But, in a period such as our own, when libertarian revolutionary movements are growing in areas where they had never existed until the last 20 years, then the need for an engagement with where we have been is central to any understanding of where we are going in the future. We hope that In the Tradition has made a small contribution to making that engagement possible.

THE END (for now!).

Anarchist Communism in Britain

In this article we take a look at the development of Anarchist Communism in Britain since the late 19th century. In the first section we deal with the early days of the Socialist League and of William Morris. In the second part we look at the grouping around Sylvia Pankhurst and at the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation and Guy Aldred. In the third part we look at the groupings of the 70s, the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, the Anarchist Workers Association, the Anarchist Communist Association and the Libertarian Communist Group. An article on the first ten years of the Anarchist Communist Federation, appearing in this issue of Organise!, ties in with this series.

PART 1. THE FOUNDING YEARS

The working class activists Frank Kitz and Joe Lane provided a link between the old Chartist movement, Owenism, the British section of the First International, the free speech fights of the 1870s and the newly emergent socialism of the 1880s. Lane developed anti-state ideas early on, even before he came to call himself a socialist in 1881. A real powerhouse of an activist, he set up the Homerton Social Democratic Club in that year and attended the international Social Revolutionary and Anarchist Congress as its delegate. Kitz also attended as delegate from the Rose Street Club. Kitz met the German Anarchists Johann Most and Victor Dave there and was deeply influenced by them. With the help of Ambrose Barker, who was based in Stratford in east London, Lane and Kitz launched the Labour Emancipation League. The LEL was in many ways an organisation that represented the transition of radical ideas from Chartism to revolutionary socialism. The demands for universal adult suffrage, freedom of speech, free administration of justice, etc, sat alongside the demand for the expropriation of the capitalist class. The main role of the LEL was that it was to offer a forum for discussion and education amongst advanced workers in London, with 7 branches in East London and regular open-air meetings in Millwall, Clerkenwell, Stratford and on the Mile End Waste. Nevertheless, anti-parliamentarism was already developing in the LEL.

The LEL succeeded in moving the Democratic Federation of Hyndman over to more radical positions. The intellectual and artist William Morris had recently joined this group and Lane was to have an important influence on him for several years. The organisation changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation. The autocracy and authoritarianism of Hyndman repulsed many members and a split took place in 1884. Morris, Belfort Bax, Eleanor Marx (Karl Marx's daughter) Edward Aveling and most of the LEL left to form the Socialist League. The League itself contained both anti-parliamentarians and supporters of parliamentary action, who had been united by their opposition to Hyndman. A draft parliamentarist constitution inspired by Engels was rejected, but the divisions continued. One of the results of this was Lane's Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto, which had originally been a policy statement that had been rejected by the