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FIFTY PENCE

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction"

Blaise Pascal

OUR PRAYING (MANTIS) POLITICIANS

ALL THEY WANT IS TO KEEP US ON OUR KNEES!

"Mantis: any carnivorous typically green insect of warm and tropical regions having a long body and large eyes and resting with the first pair of legs raised as if in prayer. Also called **praying mantis** (Greek = prophet) alluding to its praying posture" – from *Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*.

The latest electoral gimmick is that most of our politicians say their prayers every night before going to bed – alone, with their wives, or with their mistresses, or with their fantasies and their latest sleaze bank statement.

The media are exploiting it for all they are worth, and the various religious denominations are making sure they won't be left out. Indeed, the Catholic Cardinal Hume has given his vote to Mr and Mrs Tony Blair, but the Anglicans now have confessions from Paddy Ashdown for the Liberals and any number for the New Labour lot that every night they too are on their knees praying for ... *presumably to be re-elected next time!*

We trust no politicians, without exception, because they want the power to run our lives for us. In so doing they remove personal and community responsibility, and power. Equally important, government makes too many of us imagine that war and peace, the economy, pollution and the environment, health, transport and other vital public services *are not our concern – others are looking after them*. And the *others* know best. In a capitalist system this is not true.

Anarchists are the only political propagandists today who oppose not only the so-called democratic parliamentary system *but equally the capitalist system*. The politicians, Tory, Liberal and 'New' Labour, are just *arguing over the single currency for the EU, and not about the capitalist system, which produces the 40-30-30 society*. And so long as we have 'democratic' governments, the 40% will never escape from the ghetto of poverty and the top 30% will fight to the last City banker to keep their investments pristine and profitable. And the 30% in-between will fight

hard to keep where they are and the New Labour 'praying' shadow ministers are daily wooing them as they at the same time seek to distance themselves from their traditional creators and financiers, the trade unions.

Critics of anarchism argue that we are idealists who are not really living in the world as it is. On the contrary, it is *because* we live and observe and sometimes are the victims of that world, as it is, that we are anarchists and cannot accept the privileges and the injustices which are part and parcel of a society corrupt at all levels. You have only to read the millionaire press (the only one we have in the 'democratic' world) to realise this. Every technological advancement (?) is accompanied by a capitalist racket (the Internet, for instance).

Self-styled *realists* tell us we should

opt – or vote – for the 'lesser evil', but surely have they not realised that this is what people have been doing for goodness knows how long, and they have landed up with a new, praying-nightly, Labour Party (with one or two Tory converts) but without a clue as to how to curb the multinationals and transnationals who are just playing the world money markets at will and cocking a snook at all governments. After all, they come and go, whereas the multinationals and the transnationals go on forever.

Anarchists, we repeat, are the only politically and economically minded members of the revolutionary left who say that nothing will change in the tormented, unequal and dangerous world we now live in if there are not enough people determined to destroy the capitalist system and replace it with one that is based on human needs produced by willing, free and equal human beings.

STARVE THE BEGGARS: OFFICIAL

According to the *Washington Post*, you can now, in 'liberal' San Francisco, be jailed for feeding the homeless. A *Washington Post* report refers to one Robert Kahn who apparently was more of a nuisance in jail than outside, where he had been feeding the homeless without a permit. That was the crime for which he got sixty days in jail, where it was said he made more of a nuisance of himself than outside! So much so that they released him after one month.

But, as the *Washington Post* reminds its readers, in or out, that:

"Mr Kahn is a reminder to San Franciscans of a complex problem that simultaneously mars the city's sophisticated image and weighs on its conscience: homelessness.

Wherever one turns, men and women are lying in the gutter."

There are women and men lying in the gutter throughout 'prosperous' Europe.

Society in general blames them, and not the capitalist society which is concerned only with production for profit and unconcerned with everyone having the right to the basic necessities of life.

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and much more...

— ANARCHIST COMMENTS IN BRIEF —
**CHEATING ON TAXES:
 IS IT REVOLUTIONARY?**

Living in a capitalist world and accepting services from it, I have never considered it a revolutionary action to cheat the tax inspector (but for which I have been publicly denounced by the late – and for me unlamented – Albert Meltzer whose will disclosed assets not exceeding £145,000, the main beneficiaries being one Simon McKeown and Stuart Christie, the latter being the author of the gushing obituaries in the capitalist press).

To my mind the most revolutionaries can do within a capitalist society is to oblige governments to tax “the rich till the pips squeak” – as one former Labour Chancellor suggested, but didn’t implement. And obviously they can only do this with the only real power they have: their labour, and through organised labour power. Which makes it quite clear that Blair’s New Labour Party, which makes a point of disassociating itself from the unions, has no intention of threatening the bosses.

If Blair and Co want more money for public services – education, health, etc. – where can they get it other than by taxing the rich mercilessly (and incidentally this also would require a ban on the export of capital, which was the case before 1979 when Thatcher came to office).

The capitalist left cannot escape this dilemma. If you are not prepared to fight to destroy the capitalist system, and at the same time want all the reasonable services that make the purely material existence tolerable, then you must raise the means by taxation and, above all, tax the rich. At present the maximum of 40% is ludicrous when there are people like Sainsbury with inflated salaries and ownership of millions of shares which make (they don’t ‘earn’ it) more than £20 million a year. Even knocking off 40% (which is now the maximum) he is left with more than £12 million to play about with!

**THE MIDDLE CLASS
 SMUGGLERS**

I’m sure that followers of Sir James Goldsmith’s Referendum Party are also predominant among what my local daily headlines as “the day trip smugglers” who “carry home a fortune on tobacco road”. According to the Wine & Spirit Association the Exchequer is losing £573 million a year in excise and VAT because of consumers crossing the Channel to avoid British excise on alcohol.

So far as the tobacco racket is concerned, London’s *Evening Standard* claims that two Belgian villages have “reinvented themselves as the twin hubs of a £500 million a year twilight industry – tobacco smuggling”.

What I would like to ask is why the government is so concerned about the petty fraudsters who are claiming benefit and doing a bit of moonlighting, but are just looking away at the

massive cross-Channel racket which gives an advantage to the ferries (they offer tax free tobacco and spirits which the Eurostar train cannot, for some reason or other), but it is also good business for Sainsbury and Tesco, who have opened up in Calais.

Needless to say, the brewers are bellyaching. But apart from their concern for a loss of business and profits socially, there is a strong argument for closing this tax loophole. Don’t attack me, you real ‘revolutionaries’, for appearing to support a tax on booze and tobacco. Of course I do, because in a capitalist world who pays for research and treatment for cancer and all the ailments that stem from drink (and I am a drinker) if not the taxpayer?

**THE FISHING
 INDUSTRY RACKET**

I cannot avoid returning to this problem as the European Union warns against over-fishing the ever-depleted fish stocks, and the ever-arrogant British government declaring that they will ignore any rulings from Europe.

Not only has the British government not used funds supplied by the European Union to take boats out of commission, but in fact British tonnage has increased. That’s point number one. But the government has also been bellyaching about Spanish boats registered in this country (see *Freedom*, editorials on 13th January, 10th February and 20th July, and this column on 24th February and 19th October) and the fish being sold in Spain. Why? The answer is quite a simple one: namely that the British fishermen are selling their quotas to the ‘foreigners’ and sitting back and enjoying the proceeds. And not just to the Spaniards. The latest news is that the Dutch have been buying up the fish quotas of our Grimsby fishermen on a big scale! Indeed, more than half the Grimsby trawler fleet is now in Dutch hands. *The Guardian* report (17th October) puts it quite clearly: “Licences granted to British vessels under the European Union system of dividing stocks between member states have been sold to such an extent that the bulk of Grimsby-caught fish is now landed in Holland.”

The British fishermen, needless to say, justify their action on the “virtual impossibility of finding capital in Britain to commission or maintain new boats” which has “driven them to trade their EU licences” (*Guardian*).

The Dutch make it quite clear that nobody was forced to sell their quotas. One Dutch producer in the port of Urk, where effective ownership of much of Grimsby’s fleet is now concentrated, pointed out that they have invested some £20 million in buying British licences.

Let’s hear what the Grimsby and fishing bosses, as well as the British government, have to say!

Libertarian



PENNY FOR THE GUY

This photograph is taken from the *Freedom Press* title *A Weekend Photographer’s Notebook* by Vernon Richards (ISBN 0 900384 87 5, £6.95 post free inland).

**‘SLUMMING’ IN A KING’S
 CROSS PENTHOUSE!**

It was amusing in more ways than one to hear electronics engineer and inventor Clive Sinclair on the *Celebrity Choice* programme on the radio telling his interviewer that he didn’t necessarily use or feel he needed any of the wide range of calculators, miniature television sets and personal computers which he had helped to develop. The great man – whose name for most of us is linked to the three-wheeled ‘personal transport’ vehicle powered by a washing machine motor and rechargeable batteries, and which was a flop – further surprised listeners by declaring that the mobile phone was not for him.

Freedom maintained long ago that it was the ‘badge of slavery’, except for disabled people for whom it could be a life-saver. But Sir Clive is no wage-slave, and if he gets a mention here it’s because the picture of the simple-life man (with good musical taste, in my humble opinion) was hit on the head by a feature article in *The Independent* (‘Tabloid’, 10th October) describing with photographs his new King’s Cross penthouse. I quote from the blurb: “When he bought in, the loft was derelict. Then the architects move in and built a three-bedroomed apartment housing his office, two kitchens, two bathrooms, a study and a glass-walled sitting room.” When asked “And the cost?” Sir Clive, the simple-lifer, replied: “I will only say it was somewhere in the region of £750,000.”

His interviewer, Rosie Millard, is at pains to point out that in spite of the elegance of the £750,000-plus penthouse, “its location is not exactly salubrious. Indeed it backs onto one of Britain’s most notorious red-light areas on one side, and onto one of its largest rave clubs on the other.”

When asked to comment on the suitability of his new neighbourhood, Sir Clive could only say that “I like the communications around here”. His interviewer thought it “a somewhat unconventional answer” but hastened to add “but then Sir Clive is hardly a conventional bloke”.

Surely an unconventional reply from Sir Clive should have been ‘I want to go slumming. I have had enough of my cramped conditions in a Mayfair flat’.

And apart from the ‘cramped conditions’ and the titled neighbours (Thatcher gave him his in 1983) one learns from the interview that “his life was on hold and his furniture in storage, due to complicated antics with various women and to the sale of his vast family houses in Chelsea and Cambridge.”

The rich really do make you feel sorry for them, don’t they? They are always trying to present themselves as simple-lifers if only they hadn’t so many responsibilities, duties and the rest. It’s all bullshit. They want the limelight and the lolly to provide the luxury, and with it power. **VR**



We warned them. We told them until we were blue in the face that the Job Seeker's Act would lead to violence in the dole-houses of England.

Within days of the introduction of the JSA the Manchester *Metro News* reports: "Job Centre staff in Stockport are demanding better protection at work – after a brutal assault on a colleague." Staff are saying the controversial introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance leaves them wide open to attack.

The dole employee was taken to hospital and treated for cuts to his face and mouth. He is too upset to speak of his experience, and hadn't returned to work a week later. His face was punched by a claimant who was distressed about being told to take a low-paid job.

This assault at Marple Job Centre came in a week in which the police twice had to be called to another dole centre, Wellesley House in Stockport, to remove distressed claimants. Steve Scott, the CPSA union spokesman for Greater Manchester, said: "Management... are quite happy to see their staff assaulted."

BLOOD ON THE DOLE-HOUSE FLOOR

The Employment Service claim a security guard has been brought in to Wellesley House and surveillance cameras fitted to coincide with the introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance.

A man has been charged with assault over the incident at Marple Job Centre.

GROUNDSWELL: THE VOICE OF THE POOR

The blood on the dole-house floor is no surprise to anarchists and Groundswell supporters, but the Employment Service briefing to managers admits that Groundswell and anarchists anti-JSA campaigns have not been violent. The Employment Service briefing states: "The campaign has not so far, involved physical violence against individuals and we have no reason to believe it will do so."

The Scottish national press has been full of reports on the Groundswell campaign against the Act, which some opponents say "is designed to save £70 million over the next year and will lead to 70,000 claimants losing their benefits" (see *The Glasgow Herald*, 7th October 1996). *The Sunday Post*, front page, in August described Groundswell as "a shadowy group" whose "membership includes anarchists, New Age travellers and anti-road campaigners."

Last month a feature in *The Herald* declared: "Guerrilla campaign threatens office safety as unemployed face cuts in payments". The report added: "Job Centres have been out on alert to expect a wave of attacks on 'A' Day – when the new Job Seeker's Allowance is introduced."

Groundswell's response has been a sober

and sensible one of restrained direct action – only targeting known bullies and bosses inside the Employment Service; occupying the most notorious Job Centres and Employment Service property.

Without Groundswell and the 'Three Strikes' to channel the discontent of the poor, random violence would be the only option for those claimants who are already calling for the burning down of the dole offices.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AS MUCH USE AS 'CHOCOLATE FIREGUARD'

Keith Wylie, representative of the Public Tax and Commerce Union, criticised the Employment Service: "Our members aren't happy about the JSA, but they are Crown servants and must carry out the wishes of Parliament. They work in open offices and the measures to protect them are as much use as a chocolate fireguard."

This is what we have been saying in *Freedom* for months. The Employment Service talk of protecting staff is a sick sham.

Direct Actionist

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE – LEAK – LEAK – LEAK – LEAK – LEAK

WILL 'A' DAY BRING A IN THE UK?

Signs are that the Employment Service bosses are running scared. Two recent internal memos advising dole managers what to do in the face of anti-JSA protests by claimant groups suggest a regime ruled by fear. Both Job Centre local managers and district managers were briefed more than two weeks before 'A' Day, 7th October, when the Job Seeker's Act was introduced.

The 'leaked' internal document below shows

a system of administration riddled with fear and panic, with reports in the press of Job Centres in Belfast being closed down with staff threatened with death for implementing the JSA, and some staff at dole offices in the north of England coming out and asking to sign petitions against the Act. These northern lassies say that since the Act came in at the beginning of the month, they have been getting two violent threats a day.

Groundswell, which the Employment Service describes as "apparently a loose coalition of claimants and other groups", is identified in the internal memos as the most serious threat. Clearly the Groundswell occupations of Job Centres, the 'Three Strikes' strategy against dole bullies and the 'Dole Bully Hotlines' have captured the imagination of the Employment Service top brass.

These documents, together with earlier leaks,

and on-the-spot observation inside the Job Centres, indicate a system in disarray, rent with distrust and disintegration. In Spain, it used to be said, the Civil Guard was the recruiting sergeant for the anarchist movement. In Britain the recruiting sergeants for the libertarian left seem to be the dole staff bullies, and the brutes in the bureaucracy of the Employment Service.

Unemployed Activist

PROTESTS BY SOME CLAIMANTS' GROUPS: QUESTION AND ANSWER BRIEF

1. What should managers do if there is a demonstration outside their office?

Call the police as soon as there is information that the demonstration is going to happen so that they can arrange for ES employees and premises to be protected. Other action will depend upon the nature of the demonstration and whether it remains outside the office or spills on to ES premises, but could include:

- switching off computer terminals to prevent access;
- locking cabinets;
- noting any damage to premises and equipment;
- note the physical characteristics of those responsible to help the police with identification;
- evacuating public areas if you feel people are at risk.

ES people should not involve themselves in any physical (or verbal) confrontations with demonstrators.

2. What if demonstrators get into the offices?

Take the action at 1. above. Call the police immediately to remove the demonstrators from the premises. Do not attempt to engage in any physical or verbal confrontation or to remove the demonstrators yourself.

3. What measures should individuals take to protect themselves and colleagues?

- never give anyone a colleague's home address or telephone number – no matter how plausible the request;
- take care with handling abusive letters – if a threatening letter is received, handle it as little as possible so that the police can check for fingerprints. Put it and its envelope in a file and pass it to the line manager;
- tell the manager immediately if a threat is received and discuss the sensible steps which can be taken for additional protection;
- do not allow anyone to enter a non-public area unless they can show they have legitimate business there.

4. What is the policy on name badges? People are concerned that giving their full name could lead to protesters finding out their home address and telephone number.

Managers have discretion to allow people to display only their first name and job title on their badge if they have real concerns about revealing their surnames. Managers will be sympathetic to genuine requests to change name badges.

5. If people want their telephone number to be ex-directory, will the ES pay?

There is usually no charge for removing a telephone number from the directory, although there may be a charge to change the number. Managers can authorise payment from the local budget if people have reasonable grounds to think they are at risk. However, it needs to be remembered that going ex-directory would be an ineffective way of concealing personal details in the run-up to 'A' Day as it may be some considerable time before a new directory is issued.

6. Should the names of any ES people go on letters to clients?

If people have concerns about signing correspondence which carries unwelcome news, they are free to use the name of their manager. All letters from Sector Adjudication are already sent in the name of the office manager.

7. Won't that put Business Managers at risk?

It is not feasible to conceal the name of the Business Manager. This information will already be widely available in the local community. In addition, the Government's Charter Initiative requires that the manager's name is displayed in Job Centres.

8. Why do individual members of staff have to sign the Jobseeker's Agreements?

It is a legal requirement that, to be valid, the Jobseeker's Agreement should be signed by both the claimants and the ES member of staff agreeing it. This comes towards the end of the New Jobseeker interview which is not expected to be a point of confrontation.

9. Will the ES compensate people if their property is damaged as a result of this campaign?

If personal property is damaged, claims should first be pursued through the individual's own insurance. If this fails, and it can be shown that the damage was caused as the result of their work, the ES can consider a compensation claim depending on the circumstances of each case.

10. What if cars are damaged on ES premises?

You should be extra vigilant about security on ES premises, including any open area around buildings. If an incident does occur it should be reported on an incident report form and to the police. Anybody who believes themselves to be at particular risk of this form of harassment should be advised not to park their car on ES premises if doing so would make it more likely that their car may be damaged.

11. Can people be compensated if they are injured?

The campaign has not, so far, involved physical violence against individuals and we have no reason to believe it will do so. However, in certain cases claims may be made under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. In addition, compensation may be available under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority if a successful prosecution is brought.

12. Should clients who photograph staff in the office be interviewed?

Under normal circumstances managers would be likely to interview the client about their behaviour and/or send a warning letter, and managers may wish to take this action in these cases. In view of the organised nature of this campaign, the police should be notified of any such incident. They should be encouraged to take it seriously. Always complete an incident report.

13. What legal action can be taken if a photograph is taken and displayed?

Intentional harassment of an individual can now be classified as an assault and action can be taken against those carrying out the assault. Naturally, it is not always possible to identify those responsible. Where it is possible the police should first be asked to take action. If they will not do so, managers can ask Regional Personnel Section to consider a prosecution by ES. Legal procedures differ in Scotland; personnel should be asked to advise.

14. What can be done about people standing outside the office issuing leaflets?

People have a right to campaign peacefully and to issue leaflets in public places. They do not have a right to obstruct people going about their lawful business or to harass anyone. If this is happening, managers should report the incidents to the police.

15. What can be done if people are accosted outside the office, e.g. in a pub?

Anyone who is harassed outside the office in connection with their work should first report the incident to the police and persuade them to take action against the individual. ES will consider taking legal action if the police will not act. ES solicitors will need full details of any incidents; individuals should complete incident report forms (send them to Regional Personnel via their line manager) in all cases.

16. Some of the protesters' leaflets show that they are very well informed about ES procedures. Where do they get this information from?

There is some evidence that the protesters have been briefed on ES operational procedures and have received copies of internal communications. This is a clear case of breach of trust by one or a very small number of individuals. Where they are identified, disciplinary action will be taken against people who have chosen to co-operate with groups whose aim is to intimidate or threaten ES people.

17. How long do we expect this to go on?

It is impossible to say, but we should be extra vigilant from now on, particularly during the introduction of the JSA. The greatest risk is likely to be on 'A' Day itself.

18. What is the role of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS)?

The EAS has been informed of the campaign and is ready to help when needed... Should there be an incident where a particular office is targeted, EAS offers an immediate group trauma service... Managers are welcome to discuss ways in which they can handle the effects of the campaign with the EAS.

19. What is being done centrally to co-ordinate information and deal with the police?

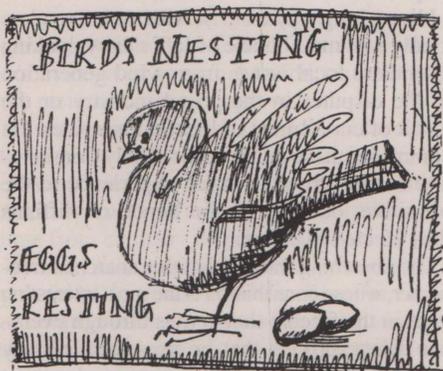
Regions and Head Office have built up contacts with the police and alerted them to the campaign; their advice and support has been sought. Each region has already set up a helpline which you can ring for guidance and advice. ES will press for prosecution in any identified cases of intimidation, assault or damages.

(from an internal document to district managers)

GUINNESS: BREWERS OF DESTRUCTION

As mentioned in the last issue of *Freedom*, the rumour that the disreputable firm of Guinness will evict the inhabitants of the Wandsworth 'eco-village' had become a reality in the early hours of 15th October 1996.

Thirteen acres of communal endeavour were destroyed in just about six hours. All the edifices were razed to the ground. Anybody walking past today will see the land made derelict again. All this under a legal pretext of a piece of paper issued in the High Court. Guinness have shown themselves expert manipulators of the property system and their board of directors are what I categorise as 'commercial brigands' who have earned their right to apply for the medal for outstanding stupidity.



Reconstruction of a painting by Emily Johns, destroyed (?) at Wandsworth, 12th October 1996.

To have seen what happened is to have seen the holocaust in its preliminary stages. Here was the Balkans brought to the banks of the silver-flowing Thames (or some other pollutant). The old word 'pogrom', transmuted to ethnic cleansing, was even on the lips of the fluffy police, all four hundred of them, as they watched the hired riot police (oh, it's not us, it's them) assault the peaceful inhabitants and assist the two hundred bailiffs hired by Guinness to evict the people from their homes, which they have built since the occupation started on 5th May. All the beautiful gardens and nature reserves then were bulldozed, including the communal building.

To talk about the destruction of Bosnian villages in this context is painfully relevant. Not only were the homes destroyed, but everything in the... Nobody was allowed to rescue anything. The police assured people that their 'belongings' would be put in a container. The following day all was under mounds of earth, burnt, bulldozed, and the barren ground patrolled by security pulled out of the labour exchange for a few days 'work'.

The press were there, many of them working for Guinness or the authorities, who made sure that neither television nor the world's press and their photographers were witness to the action or inside the gates of the site during the eviction. Because of the scant reporting most people here and abroad still do not know the extent of blind destruction which took place. While the police watched impotently, the mature plane trees around the perimeter were cut down ('Land is Ours' leaflet, Tuesday



The banner on the gantry at Wandsworth eco-village by the Thames

15th October 1996) which was heartrending.

It is too early to draw any sane conclusions. Here was an anarchist society in the making, under great stress, and they have created a thing of beauty, which by Keatsian definition is 'a joy forever'.

In many respects I agree with George Monbiot of the Land is Ours campaign, that as such we have come out of this sorry mess with honour, even dignity. Whatever happened in the end, it bodes well for the future of anarchism, both in idea and practice.

This is not the place to discuss all that has been learnt. A shabby piece of paper issued in the High Court ultimately triumphed over

natural justice and the common ability of the people. The buildings (surely Anya and Brendan have built architecturally outstanding structures which this land has not seen or equalled for the past four thousand years) made communal life a pleasure and the stars above visible.

One day we shall win, comrades, but for me even to have lived among anarchists in good fellowship, even for a few weeks, have given me strength for the days to come.

Guinness may have erased the ground momentarily, but something that was planted there on 5th May will survive them.

John Rety

RECLAIM THE STREETS

Eco-warriors were joined by Liverpool dockers as Manchester's Oxford Road was closed to traffic for the afternoon on Saturday 19th October. Four hundred people gathered as a sound system kicked off and activists hung banners across the street and rolled out carpets over the tarmac. Passers-by were handed leaflets headed: "Look! There in the road - is it a protest? Is it a street party? Yes, it's Reclaim the Streets 4".

The crowd was entertained by fire-eaters, street theatre and local band Stalker. A police presence hovered around, but there were no arrests and the event stayed good natured. The leaflets explained what the action was about: "Reclaim the Streets offers an alternative to car culture. We believe that non-violent direct action in defence of the environment is everyone's duty. We shall defy laws which attack free assembly. We shall not sit back and allow our city and our planet to be destroyed."

Reclaim the Streets actions have happened before. The new development was the support from a party of forty sacked dockers - returning the favour after the weekend of 28th/29th/30th September in Liverpool when Reclaim the Streets activists joined the dockers' march and occupied the roof of the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company office building. This followed an action in London in August when Reclaim the Streets held a critical mass cycle ride in support of striking Underground workers, meeting up in Trafalgar Square and disrupting traffic around Westminster, Downing Street and Whitehall. In Britain at least this kind of alliance between workers and environmental activists is fairly new.

On 17th October the Manchester Dockers' Support Group held a public meeting with speakers from striking rail and postal workers, the sacked dockers, Women of the Waterfront and Reclaim the Streets. What came over from this, and from other recent meetings, is how impressed the dockers are with the support they've had from environmental and direct action activists.

Perhaps this isn't so surprising. The dockers have received plenty of active support from

unions abroad, but very little from unions at home. It looks like their own union, the TGWU, may now have stopped all payments to the hardship fund. The general assumption is that Bill Morris, the TGWU and the International Transport Workers' Federation are trying to stitch up a deal with the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company over their heads. The support given by Reclaim the Streets and Reclaim the Future has simply been more genuine and a lot more impressive.

The dockers have a record of opposing the transport of toxic waste and other environmentally damaging cargoes through the Port of Liverpool. They are also unemployed, like many of the other activists, and share many of the same problems, the introduction of the Job Seekers Allowance included. After all, whether you're on a picket line or a motorway protest, you can't do much if you've got to go down to the Job Club every morning.

Further joint actions by Reclaim the Streets and the dockers are rumoured - obviously they can't be fully publicised in advance. Watch this space for updates and news.

On Sunday 20th October Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine woke up to the sight of protesters against open-cast coal mining excavating the back garden of his Northamptonshire mansion. The environmental activists, road protesters and former miners were prospecting for coal in support of their planning application to mine one million tonnes from Heseltine's 200-acre estate.

The 'site inspection' coincided with the fourth anniversary of Heseltine's announcement of the pit closure programme - which opened the way for a boom in open-cast mining. Heseltine said he would "fiercely oppose" the planning application on his own land. Steve Parry of the Anti-Opencast group said: "We welcome Mr Heseltine's opposition to open-cast mining in this beautiful area, but we would like to see him oppose it elsewhere, on public land in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and other areas."

JH

DAD'S ARMY DARES TO DEFEND WELFARE STATE

Every Englishman loves a loser! Charlie Chaplin, Mickey Mouse, our heart goes out to them. The smallest, the weakest, no one loves the losing side more than the anarchist.

That's why I allowed myself to be recruited to the People's March to Save the Welfare State. But as Alec McFaddon, its leader, told the civic reception at the start of the march in Hull, in the end I had to stay at home because I couldn't find anyone to look after my goats.

Mr McFaddon has a strong sense of leadership - much like Captain Mainwaring in *Dad's Army*. He was in the Communist Party before he joined the Socialist Labour Party. He has never really forgiven me for putting my goats before the welfare state.

'GET YOUR SHIRT OFF'

From Hull onwards it seems to have been downhill all the way. To Barnsley to hear Arthur Scargill proclaim his vision, thence to Huddersfield where a vehicle broke down, all civic dignitaries and small-time celebrities gracing town halls and municipal centres. Seemingly an endless stream of talking heads going on, and on, and on. From Michael Hindley MEP in Huddersfield to Ken Coates MEP in the Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, eternally tiresome, tedious and talkative. The marchers, mostly unemployed, bore it well.

No civic reception in Ashton, where the Labour Council, run by Roy Oldham, claimed it "could not justify the cost". Instead the marchers were put up with the help of Tameside Unemployed Workers Alliance.

The pop festival in Bury was rained off. Two job centres were occupied by the marchers - one at Bolton, another near Preston. In Huddersfield the anarchists who greeted the marchers soon got tired of listening to the politicians' speeches and went and occupied

the Job Centre. But not before McFaddon had ordered me to take my 'Save the Welfare State' shirt off first, for letting him down over the goats.

'WISH YOU WERE HERE' ... with the laughing man and the the lumpen bourgeoisie!

Ultimately the march ended up on the promenade at Blackpool and the Labour Party Conference. Better the Tories we know than the Tories we don't, one might conclude. More sensible still to go and watch the laughing man on the pleasure beach.

What will remain with me are the remarks of some of the footballers in the five-a-side contest at the Bury Festival, which took place despite the rain: "What's it all in aid of?" said one. "Don't know" replied another. "Well, it didn't cost us owt" added a third.

The British working class looks to others to do their fighting for them. Dad's Army, Groundswell, the trades councils, Reclaim the Streets - the great British public will be there, just so long as there is 'summat for nowt'.

England is becoming a country in which a lumpen proletariat is ruled over by an increasingly lumpen bourgeoisie.

Northern Worker

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— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

LARRY'S LOCAL

I felt enormous agreement with Larry Gambone's remarks (19th October) on anarchists and the local newspaper. He writes from Canada, and may be surprised by my impression that the quality of reporting in both major newspapers and local ones there is rather better than in the English press. Since he cites me as one of the handful of anarchists who from time to time write for the mainstream media, I should add that, not liking the feeling of rejection, I have never written there unless asked.

It is exactly like show-biz: Don't ring us, we'll ring you. And the trouble is that they invariably want an instant short, sharp piece on a topic whose sheer complexities you have been pondering for years. And what is worse, they want it sent by fax, or of course e-mail, within 24 hours, as they assume that everybody who is anybody has the same access to the expensive communication systems that they enjoy.

Unpublished novelists and poets always complain bitterly that publication depends not on what you know but who you know, and I'm afraid they are right. But the professionals of the newspaper, magazine and publishing industry are themselves so insecure in their jobs that whoever you know is likely to have been fired by the time you have something you think that they might accept.

My favourite mainstream weekly was *New Society*, and I gladly wrote for it for years and was one of those contributors to be given a slot when it was absorbed into *New Statesman and Society* (my experience is described in my 'Notes of an Anarchist Columnist' in *The Raven*, number 22). But this year, with the change in ownership and editor, I was, like most other contributors, dropped in a one-minute telephone call. I miss not only the money but also access to a readership that would never be persuaded to buy an anarchist

newspaper. As Orwell pointed out long ago, for most of its history the *New Statesman* excluded non-Marxist or non-Labour Party versions of socialism.

A visit to any newsagent will tell you that what the public actually buys is specialist journals about gardening, motoring, house and home, sex, popular music and so on. I wish there were anarchist writers with particular enthusiasms and knowledge to contribute columns to magazines of that kind. Maybe there actually are?

But there are points to add to Larry's toe-hold in the local paper. Market research, both in North America and in Britain, shows that the local press is far more *intensively* read than the mainstream press. What proportion of your national newspaper do you actually read? Studies of patterns of readership show that some people turn first, not to the news, but to the obituaries, or to the letter page, or to the columnists. Larry has done brilliantly to establish himself as the science correspondent in his local paper, and I am sure he would have been equally effective if he had won the music or gardening slot, but they were probably already occupied. There are many ways of implanting an anarchist message.

Having thus patronised Larry Gambone, I have to confess that where I live we actually have a regional *daily* paper, and at one stage I several times submitted unsolicited articles to it, displaying what I thought was immense local knowledge. None of them ever got published. The paper actually has an excellent regular correspondent on environmental issues, and he once confessed to me that half the stuff he submits never gets printed.

But let me repeat Larry's wise advice: "If you have a sense of humour you are in. Leftist clichés, self-righteousness and PC are definitely out. No one wants ideology pumped at them (this is the reason the leftist press has so few readers). What you have going for you is the fact that most people dislike the government, the bureaucrats and the corporations. They want more control over their lives, and if you can discuss these matters without being labelled an ideologue or a crank then you can encourage people to go in a libertarian direction."

He also asks for news of anarchists already writing for local papers. The intriguing British example is the poet Jeff Cloves (one of the editors of the Freedom Press anthology of twentieth century anarchist poetry, *Visions of Poesy*). He is probably too modest or too busy to write about his own use of the local paper. Well over a decade ago his immense knowledge of the unofficial history of his particular patch won him a weekly column called 'Snorbens Diary' in *The Review*, the local paper in his home town of St Albans, Hertfordshire.

He used it to contrast real issues with official policies, and was not easily dismissed, as he knows more about the place than his critics and his employers (since for most professional journalists the local press is regarded simply as a stepping-stone into the national press).

By the end of the 1980s, the property boom had ensured that Jeff was homeless. As he put it in his column: "After 24 years I found that I could no longer afford to live in Snorbens. Thatcherism had failed me, I thought – or maybe I've failed it." Every reader learned

that the favourite columnist was too poor to live in the town.

Not only that, *The Review* itself was changed to meet the new slimmed-down Britain, and became, like the papers in North America described by Larry, a give-away paper pushed through every letterbox and relying solely on its advertising revenue. Cloves was fired from his slot. He was invited to write a shorter column for less money. As he put it, he "slunk back to the warmth of the drastically depopulated newsroom" to do a brief item called 'Up the Town' which, he claimed, "allowed me to dramatise the follies and foibles of Snorbens in a way the sham-objectivity of 'Snorbens Diary' denied."

But then the miracle happened. Readers actually *missed* his column and asked to have him back. He was reinstated, finding that "the awesome power of my writing was revealed as in a miracle". He upset the property advertisers, but had built up his own readership. It was a remarkable achievement.

I live a long way from St Albans, but readers kindly sent me a bundle of Jeff's diary, looking at endless local issues from wind generation to the disputes in the postal industry or the result of curtailment of local rail services. He comments on the failure of his solidly Conservative readers to relate daily experience to the primitive ideology of the bunch of ruffians they elected to office.

The absorbing thing about this anarchist freebooter, whose contribution is the most interesting item in the freebie that comes through everyone's letterbox, is that he uses local history and local experience to remind readers that they really are members of a geographical area with communal interests that need to be defended.

The experience of Jeff Cloves is a wholehearted endorsement of the point of view that Larry Gambone expressed.

Colin Ward

A WORKING ALTERNATIVE TO THE COURT SYSTEM

Within the past couple of decades various Amerindian groups in the United States and Canada have experimented with a community justice system in which elders of the community assess the behaviour of a presumed wrongdoer within their community and assign penalties as well as attempting amelioration. Major or capital crimes are not dealt with and penalties never involve jail sentences. In one noted case in Canada a man was exiled to an uninhabited island for a year. This system operates parallel to the regular courts as an alternative to them.

Recently the idea has been adopted in a few small western Canadian non-Indian communities. Incidentally, we are accustomed to thinking that in the relation between Amerindians and Euro-Americans it is the former who always adopt the customs of the latter. Here is a case where the reverse is true.

In Stony Plain, Alberta, residents have for the last year run an alternative court system with no ties to the existing 'justice' system. They have tried 26 cases, most of which involve young first offenders accused of theft, vandalism and similar misdeeds. There have been a few adult cases, including impaired driving and narcotic trafficking.

People in Stony Plain were dissatisfied with the court system and believed they were overloaded. Thus they established their separate justice committee composed of from three to six volunteers from the community. They work in closed hearings with the offender and the police are not privy to any information from the hearings.

Neither judges nor crown prosecutors recognise the committee and lawyers disapprove of it because they lose business with such an arrangement. At the same time, the police seem to approve since they frequently refer offenders to the committee. Offenders also find it more helpful than the

courts since committee members take the time to guide them through their problem.

Those who appear before the committee must plead guilt to the alleged offence and if there is a victim that person must agree to the offender going before the committee.

The kinds of sentences meted out include community service, fines, letters of apology and essays. An impaired driver had to turn his licence in to the police every weekend for six months. Individuals may also be referred to professionals for assistance. All offenders sign a letter of intent between themselves and the committee. This lays out the conditions of the sentence. If one does not comply the case is referred to the police and the courts. Of twenty cases, two have not complied.

There is some evidence that such committees as this one in Stony Plain are able to resolve quite difficult cases. In one example, from a small town in Manitoba, there was an inter-generational sexual abuse problem which involved 48 people. Over several years the community attempted a healing process. Of the 48, five were eventually incarcerated and two others re-offended.

In addition to communities, corporations too are increasingly avoiding the courts by resorting to independent mediators to resolve conflict.

From an anarchist point of view the community justice system as presently operated clearly has its drawbacks. It relies on the courts and the police to deal with those few who do not comply and it should function more in a mediator-ameliorator role than in a sentencing and punishing one. But at least it seems to be a step in the right direction. Euro-Americans could learn a bit more about benign political systems from their Amerindian neighbours.

Harold Barclay

MYTHS AND LESSONS

One myth of the Russian Revolution is that of a growing people's revolution falling foul of Lenin's *coup d'état*. In the myth Lenin was inspired by a malevolent authoritarian Marx bent on frustrating the libertarian Bakunin and introducing a centralising state based on so-called 'Marxist principles'. The truth is rather more complicated. It usually is. In fact Lenin's structuring of Soviet society was based on the Kaiser's Germany in World War One, and his *coup* was a bloody short-cut that owed more to Bakunin (or Nechaev) than Marx. The myth was always simplistic, was misleading about the complexity of Bakunin's ideas, misrepresented Marx, and was of little help to those interested in the history of ideas or in finding out what really happened in Russia. For Bolshevism, as Orlando Figes points out in his new book¹ was a very Russian thing. "Its belief in militant action, its insistence, contrary to the tenets of Hegel and Marx, that a revolution could jump over the contingencies of history, placed it firmly in the Russian messianic tradition".

There had been much more intellectual intercourse between Marx and Bakunin than the standard myth allows. Bakunin had translated sections of *Capital* into Russian while Marx continued to read Bakunin even after the bust up over the International; the notes in his copy of *Statism and Anarchism* indicate that Bakunin's ideas exerted a considerable influence on Marx. Contrary to the myth promulgated by both anarchists and marxists it is relatively easy to draw an anarchist line of thought from Marx's writing (his behaviour was something else), while Bakunin (at some points and certainly while under Nechaev's spell) embraced the idea of a secret revolutionary party bound by total obedience to a revolutionary dictator. Reams have been written about what is the 'real Marx' but the paradoxical nature of Bakunin's various positions is less often discussed. It does not detract from the percipience of

Bakunin's diagnosis of state worship to note that in the *Catechism of the Revolution* period he was advocating the very methods whose malevolent effects he condemned, and that Lenin was to institute.

"Here" writes Paul Avrich "was a nobleman who yearned for a peasant revolt, a libertarian with an irresistible urge to dominate others, an intellectual with a powerful anti-intellectual streak ... (preaching) ... unrestrained liberty while spinning from his brain a whole network of secret organisations and demanding from his followers unconditional obedience to his will."

Lenin was influenced directly by Bakunin. Indeed Maximoff describes Bakunin as one of the intellectual forbears of Lenin's party, while Paul Avrich notes that Lenin put forward a series of specifically Bakuninist propositions in the *April Theses*. It is not unreasonable to see the Bolshevik hi-jacking of the revolution as Bakuninist *putsch*. Certainly at that stage it owed little to Marx – hence the complaints by orthodox Marxists like Goldenberg that Lenin had become an anarchist! If Bakunin was to envisage and condemn the course of Lenin's take-over he also, in his Nechaevian mode, provided much of its intellectual springboard.

This is the background of Orlando Figes's epic new history *A People's Tragedy*. He starts his account in 1891 when the famine crisis set the population on a conflict course with the tsarist autocracy. It ends eight hundred and twenty four pages later with the death of Lenin "when the revolution had come full circle and the basic institutions, if not all the practices, of the Stalinist regime were in place".

Figes's main line of argument appears to be that the concentration on 1917 made the options appear more limited than they were. "It was not inevitable", he maintains, "that the revolution should have ended in a Bolshevik dictatorship". He sees less authoritarian

Talking to Architects: ten lectures
by Colin Ward
published by Freedom Press, £5.00*

It is a very good thing that Colin Ward is *Talking to Architects*. They need a good talking to and he is well qualified to do it for, as well as being an engaging speaker and author of many books on the human environment, he has spent a large part of his life working among professional architects and planners.

What is he talking to them about? This is not just a collection of scoldings for the widespread architectural outrages we see all around us. The first two paragraphs of the first of the ten lectures do declare firmly "that we have an architecture of alienation", that the ideological foundations of the modern movement were "elitist or crudely mechanistic" and that the bureaucratic systems of East and West have "subverted the human aspirations of architects, turning the professionals either into computers producing packages or prima donnas producing jewellery". The rest of the book is devoted to giving friendly advice on how matters might be improved.

On what principles does Colin Ward base his advice? On good anarchist principles, of course, of which he has such a comprehensive grasp. He can cite such good examples and quote from so many respected allies.

It is one of the many pleasant surprises of the book to be 'reminded' (Colin Ward always courteously assumes his readers to be as well informed as he is) of the great number of architects and planners of anarchist persuasion who have tried, often successfully, to create alternatives to the architecture of alienation. The very Town & Country Planning movement itself was largely founded by them. Nowadays there is widespread suspicion of 'planners', but this is because the ideas of these pioneers

TALKING TO ARCHITECTS



have been taken over by authoritarians, perverted, turned on their heads and used to plan against us.

What has been forgotten (or deliberately neglected) is that in those early days of the Garden City movement, Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes and Frederic Osborn devised a planning scenario in which the people planned, did the planning and the community that adopted it reaped the benefits of the plan, including the financial one. A by-product of a well-planned environment in which a community prospers is that the land becomes more valuable. Ian McHarg remonstrates this very graphically in his book *Design with*

Nature (a source that I am surprised Colin Ward does not quote from). Howard and his followers insisted that this affluence should belong to the community of citizens from whose cooperative efforts it stemmed. Under the present government-imposed system, the enormous increase in land values that results from planning decisions on land use (and misuse!) and the provision of public services at the public expense is either picked up by private speculators or gathered into the central government coffers.

Hence the disillusionment felt about the only partially successful New Towns, and the need

for Colin Ward's lecture 'Why the British Don't Talk About New Towns Any More', delivered to the International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design. Robbed of their financial stake and defrauded by the pretence of 'public participation' which turns out to be merely a dressing put on top-down plans prepared by government professionals, people feel cheated. They do not feel the environment formed by new buildings and the spaces round and between them are truly theirs, so they do not give them loving care and attention. They become alienated from instead of a creative part of it.

Colin Ward points out how different things are when the dwellers are in control. He devotes a lecture in admiration of the late Walter Segal (who became my hero too when Colin Ward introduced us over two decades ago) and notes the success which came to him towards the end of his life when he devoted himself entirely to self-build. No way of spending your time and energy could be more anarchistic than designing and building your own family home.

This is my particular hobby-horse: I have rather lost patience with architects not engaged in it, but Colin Ward does not restrict himself only to self-build when *Talking to Architects*. Acknowledging the role of professional designers, he warns them against the temptation of narcissism and the arrogance of 'making their own statement' however absurd the result may be from the user's point of view. To help his readers grapple with this shortcoming to which architects are so prone, Colin Ward draws our attention to the current of thought undammed by Stewart Brand in his remarkable book *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built*, which has predictably ruffled a few architectural feathers.

Unlike the broad scatter of his previous subject from which he compiled the *Whole Earth Catalog*, this later book of Brand's has a single theme, a central argument that is set down with remorseless logic. It is a discomfiting read for those professionals in the building industry (and I have been one) who focus their efforts on creating an exquisitely detailed building of precisely arranged spaces, perfect at the moment of completion, but never subsequently; because too little concern was shown for what happens next - which is a period of adaptation often very disappointing for everyone.

In his two most recent 'talks to architects', Colin Ward reminds us of those who call for "long life, loose fit, low energy" architecture, where as Brand says "every building should, from the day it is begun, have the capacity to be endlessly adapted to meet the needs of its users".

These needs, for Colin Ward, include those of the poor world, and the poor segments of the rich world; women (as Kropotkin indicated, "half the population has always been excluded from housing policy"); and finally the need for ecological sustainability.

But the main political demand Colin Ward sums up in the final four words of his book: "the principle of dweller control".

Brian Richardson

OF THE REVOLUTION

possibilities at a number of stages and roots their failure in political culture and social history. But he is also at pains to present the peasants, the workers, the soldiers, the national minorities as participants in the upheavals, not as simple victims. "This was a people's tragedy but it was a tragedy they helped to make. The Russian people were trapped by the tyranny of their own history."

For it is misleading to talk of *the* Russian Revolution. Here was a whole complex of different revolutions in which millions of individual tragedies were involved. Figes tries to explain those tragedies and in this process demolishes right and left wing myths of necessity. Anarchists will not, for example, find his account of the Kronstadt revolt and its suppression unconvincing, while he writes of Nestor Makhno with more sympathy than I've found in other general histories. But here and throughout this book the emphasis is on the terrifying and unbelievable human cost of the events he describes. It is not a comfortable read. However much time and general knowledge have given us an overall awareness of the horrors of this period, the piling up of the detail becomes agonising - perhaps only a young man could have written it - most of us become squeamish with age. It is not just the atrocities committed by every side, or the deaths through fighting, famine, murder and torture that appals. It is the sheer scale of the horror.

"At the risk of appearing callous" writes the author in his preface, "the easiest way to convey the revolution's scope is to list the ways in which it wasted human life: tens of thousands were killed by the bombs and bullets of the revolutionaries and at least an equal number by the repressions of the tsarist regime, before 1917; thousands died in the street fighting of that year; hundreds of thousands from the Terror of the Reds - and an equal number from the Terror of the Whites, if one counts the victims of their

pogroms against the Jews - during the years that followed; more than a million perished in the fighting of the civil war, including civilians in the rear; and yet more people died from hunger, cold and disease than from all these put together." Of course such enormous figures lose meaning. What gives them meaning here is the attention to detail in the body of the book and his evident sympathy for people caught in the turmoil of making history.

Like any history this one doubtless contains its solecisms and its mistakes. I can only say that none of them obtruded on my notice. Anarchists will not like the author's conclusions where he argues a sort of modernisation\ social democratic alternative. However each reader can draw his own conclusions. Acceptance of the author's main narrative thrust does not mean that his conclusions must be swallowed unthinkingly. Yet as a one-volume history of these years the book is the best I've yet seen. The necessary abstractions are there but do not hide the individuals who constitute that reality. The detail is there but is part of a well proportioned general picture of the chaotic and confusing piling up of events.

Anyone reading this book will surely agree that revolutions are unlikely to result in the sort of society anarchists would like to see. But there is a chilling lesson for the present too. Take this passage:

"The civil liberties and parliamentary rights extracted from the Tsar in 1905 were successively withdrawn by the autocracy once the revolutionary danger passed ... workers deprived of the right to defend their class interest through legal parties and trade unions were forced into a revolutionary underground ... the ordinary peasant did not feel he was subject to the regime's laws ..."

I hope all those politicians who've been so busy dismantling the post war consensus read that passage and see, as Figes does, that the single most important cause of the Russian

Revolutions was the stupidity of the autocracy. For in the very different position of present day Britain the same reactionary processes are in operation. The same juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, conspicuous consumption and near starvation, one law for the rich and another for the poor. Most of the revolts described in this book were not de Tocqueville's 'revolution of rising expectations' but were more akin to what the poet Kenneth Patchen described as "a desperate fight against what we know are hopeless odds". The increasing economic polarisation of our time could well end in a conflagration in spite of the stolidity of the *lumpen bourgeoisie* and the social democratic institutions that Dr Figes values so highly.

It needs a strong stomach to read parts of this book and despair is likely to get in the way at times. But it should be read by all of us, and read particularly closely by those who talk glibly of the need for revolution. I have written elsewhere that revolutions may be necessary, may be inevitable, may be the only way. But they are never desirable. Their authoritarian nature, and the dreadful suffering detailed in this book, should make all anarchists distinctly sceptical.

John Pilgrim

1. *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891-1924* by Orlando Figes (Cape, 1996, £20.00).

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NICARAGUA

"State regulation of the economy was justified in times of war, but in peacetime things are different and a return of socialist tendencies is not even contemplated" – Alávro Fiallos

Alávro Fiallos is perhaps the Peter Mendelson of Nicaraguan politics. As a spin doctor it is his job to engineer an electoral success for the Sandinistas in the October elections and it would seem from the above that his thinking is going along Blairite lines. It was seventeen years ago now when the Sandinistas marched into power having forced the Somoza dictatorship out of office and nearly seven years since they were voted out of office by an electorate that had been bled by the USA with its support of the Contra fighters. US policy has certainly paid off. It was demonstrated – in stark terms – that those who would buck the trends of capital would be forced to see the light and if necessary violence would be used to ensure the correct outcome.

Today – whatever their past – the Sandinistas wish to make it clear that they simply want power and don't want to rock the boat in any way. Again Seor Fiallos assures the world community that, "a Sandinista government will obey the rules of the free market and give foreign investors a warm welcome," and continue the policies of structural adjustment as demanded by the IMF. Further, they have chosen a landowner, Juan Manuel Caldera, as Mr Ortega's running mate in an attempt to overturn their image as opponents of the private sector. Washington replies with cautious approval of this new convert to economic liberalism, "The US is prepared to have a productive relationship with whatever government takes office in 1997, as long as it is elected in free and fair elections and then exercises power democratically," we are told and we note well the final phrase which will prove the operative factor if things get out of hand.

LA PINATA

However, these welcoming overtones from Big Brother are not necessarily shared by the Nicaraguan electorate who are not so happy with the Sandinistas and who seemingly see

FOCUS ON ... LATIN AMERICA

— PART ONE —

more clearly the underlying reasons for the Sandinista hunger for power. As they try to gain public confidence the Sandinistas are dogged by the issue of *la pinata* – an allusion to the fact that during the transition period to the Chamorra regime in 1989 the Sandinista leadership helped themselves to a bit of dosh and some social wealth. Jacinto Suarez – second in the responsibility ranks for International affairs for the Sandinistas – tries to justify this self-given golden handshake. He considers it justified for the Sandinistas to have their own television station, radio station and daily news-paper to ensure their voice is heard. But if that is acceptable then one really must add in the benefits received by those high up in the Sandinista echelons – a new 'workers aristocracy'.

Those who have done well are numbered conservatively at some 200 whilst others put the figure four times higher. Commenting on this a sociologist, Oscar Antonio Vargas, says that he "is thinking ... of those who not only helped themselves to a house – a legitimate way to protect oneself for the future – but who also got a second one on the coast, then a third along with 600 *manzanas* of land and 800 head of cattle". This new Sandinista aristocracy is now well integrated into the top 5% of the population in terms of wealth and seemingly had little problem coming to terms with the Chamorra regime and its programme of privatisation, deregulation and economic liberalism and the subsequent social hardship which attends it.

The Sandinistas play on the fears of a return to Somoza type politics with their main opponent Arnoldo Alemán well linked in with the mafia style anti-Cuban types from Miami. We wouldn't want to underestimate these fears but the post reality of the elections will depend more on coming to terms with the policies of the IMF and the World Bank rather

than any ghost of Samoza. Here the reality is clear and looks certain to be unaffected by the election results.

Asian capital from countries like Taiwan and South Korea are among the main factors in the Nicaraguan economy. The main production is in the textile sector which benefits from export quotas with the USA. The *maquillas* (factories located in the Free Economic Zones) have created some 7,000 jobs which might be considered not so bad a thing in a country with some 80% of the workforce either un- or under-employed. But the usual factors come up pretty quick. As usual whilst playing lip service to 'market forces' the state has certainly made the investors welcome with the usual kinds of tax exemption and the \$1,000,000 investment made in infrastructure. This is where they spend their money rather than on the 80% of peasant farmers who can't get credit which has resulted in 250,000 hectares of pasture without any cattle on it and a situation in the Masaya region where 50% of the land is uncultivated. Instead of building up the economy Nicaragua prefers the downhill path of the export market where according to the world bank in 1995 50% of the domestic economy was accounted for by imports. Nicaragua – in the past – was a net exporter of basic agricultural products now she is an importer. No financial help for the farmers has resulted in production going abroad – notably to Costa Rica.

One can show no surprise therefore at those who choose to work in the Asian factories despite the conditions. Salaries are only 45% of the national average (for those who actually get a salary). No unions and appalling work conditions. The usual story – we will spare you the repetition.

And it continues in the rural areas where 60% live in dire poverty and according to the world bank 80% of households have no water

and 30% no electricity.

For sure the Sandinista record was better. They spent more on health, they spent more on education, but one can't put the blame at the door of the Chamorra regime who simply bowed to the realities of monetarist policies imposed on the country by the international financial organisations. The USA under Reagan made it clear that they had no choice. Now the Sandinistas have also seen the light.

SOURCES:

Financial Times, 2nd October 1996

Financial Times, 9th October 1996

Le Monde Diplomatique, October 1996

NEWS FROM THE BRAZILIAN ANARCHIST NEWS AGENCY GUATEMALA

Dear M,

I hope you are well and still shouting loudly for Freedom. Thanks for your reply to my letter, I hope that we can stay in contact and a thousand thank yous for the anarchist material you sent me.

Here in Guatemala there is no real anarchist movement although there are many groupings of a leftist nature promoted above all at the University of Guatemala where I am a student.

It is a while since I last wrote to anarchist comrades in South America on behalf of my fellow musicians and friends who have the same fighting spirit as myself, we are trying to form a movement here as always with its roots in anarchism although with a strong ideological bent. In order to achieve this people like you have helped us on the road. To do this has not been easy among rock music lovers, because they are divided and the bands do not collaborate and prefer to delve into the rubbish of Satanism rather than focus on social questions. Not all of them of course but Punk bands are few are far between and we do not have many followers. Here the main bands for one grouping are Trash and Black and Death and yet another group are into grunge. For this reason we find ourselves forced to play in a style which is ill defined but the lyrics are still the same: protest. I am no Satanist nor of any other religious persuasion, for me religion is simply one more way to enslave the mind, religion is rubbish.

Central America is 100% conservative and this is largely due to the fact that the church has great power comparable to that of the military, for this reason it is hard to break with the old ways. The rockers have destroyed a lot but have chosen the wrong road of Satanism. Thus, here, although elsewhere the anarchist movement has been flowering for decades, we have hardly begun.

I know that in Brazil the police kill and beat up the children in the street. Here it is the same story although it is the army which massacres peasants and indigenous people. In the 80s thousands of small farmers were massacred, thrown off their lands and became the victims of the worse humiliations a human being can suffer. In those days the government was in the hands of the military, today, supposedly, we have a democratically elected government, but there is no justice, nothing has changed and for that reason I am trying to do something about it. I am trying to find a conscience in the young people who continue to drug their minds with the commercial rubbish they send us from North America and who prefer to dress as Michael Jackson rather than draw on the rich ethnic roots of our ancient culture which were well developed in the whole of the continent well before the arrival of the Europeans.

As you can see our roads are running parallel, I believe in anarchism but only one flag: Freedom.

Please carry on this correspondence and if you can help us find our way we will be very grateful.

XXXXX

Part Two will include Argentina, Venezuela and a major feature on 'Counter-Insurgency, State Terror and the School of the Americas'.

NIPPON SUNSET

After four years of economic stagnation, growth in the Japanese economy this year is predicted to be around the 2.5% figure. However, this is no reason to celebrate. Once again – as is so often the refrain these days – it is the public debt which Japan would dearly love to lose.

The Japanese economy is still to be respected, accounting as it does for some 17% of global GDP and 65% of the Asia Pacific region. Last year the top ten world banks were all Japanese with the US bank Citicorp only reaching 26th position. Even unemployment levels are envied, affecting some 3.5% according to contested official figures.

The underlying problems are, however, a little more complex. Japan has huge public debt even putting the US in second place here. If the debt is spread out then every inhabitant would be responsible for some \$65,000.

In Europe – as is well known – the Maastricht agreement is demanding a 3% limit on such debt. By using similar criteria it is estimated that last year Japan hit 7.6%. The government has made no sign of being willing to take measures to redress the balance.

High growth seems no solution – partly due to a satiated market for traditional Japanese goods. Other realities enter the equation: an ageing population, industries relocating to cheaper neighbours, the problems faced by industry due to a strong currency...

TRADE AND THE BANKING SYSTEM

Japan's trade surplus fell by 37.7% in July compared with the same period a year ago, the finance ministry announced in September. The continuing contraction of the politically sensitive trade surplus came on the back of a solid growth in imports that outpaced the recovery in exports. The strength of personal computer imports highlights

the extent to which many Japanese manufacturers have shifted production overseas. Companies are moving factories offshore to countries with cheaper labour, then bringing the goods back into Japan, also boosting import figures (*Financial Times*, 20th August).

Even the banking system is far from what it seems at first glance. Moody's – a US firm – only gave one Japanese bank a 'B' rating in 1995, three got a 'C', 26 a 'D' and three hit the 'E' grade. In October 1995 the countries banking system as a whole got a 'D' making it the only OECD country to be on a par with China, Mexico and Brazil.

Indeed 1995 was a bad year with one bank going under leaving 1,500 billion yen of unrecoverable debt, almost all of it due to irresponsible speculation in the 1980s property market. Then it was revealed that the New York subsidiary of Daiwa (19th in the global ranking) had 'lost' \$1.1 billion with many of its directors being charged with fraud and covering up serious misdemeanours so that the bank had to completely cease operations in the US.

Yet it took until September 1995 for the Japanese government to take any notice of losses in another sector: the *Jussen* – again property speculators. During the 80s they had been building golf courses and leisure centres. Today they are paying the price with some 50% of their loans deemed unrecoverable.

But as further problems became apparent the Japanese government came to the rescue on 18th June this year by including 685 billion yen in the budget to save these establishments and further demands are being considered.

In such a murky atmosphere it is hard to see how far the rot has spread but the authorities are speaking of a figure around 40,000 billion yen although other 'well informed' observers have more than doubled the figure. K. Curtis, the Asian

sector VP of Deutsche Bank Capital Markets speaks of the 'virtual bankruptcy' of the Nippon banking system.

THE CRAZY EIGHTIES

The root of it all lies in the crazy '80s when land prices doubled, then tripled, leading some to say that on paper the rent value of Tokyo was three times that of the built up areas of the US with the Imperial palace being of more value than California... then the bubble burst and the economy went into recession as the property market went through the floor.

The bursting of the property market bubble has still a way to travel through a fragile banking system before all its effects are felt. Since the end of the property boom in 1992, average prices have tumbled 47%, according to the National Tax Administration Agency. "If the current falling trend continues, it will increase bad loans and could shake the basis of Japan's financial system" warned Mr Shinichiro Takagi, acting head of the Real Estate Companies Association of Japan (*Financial Times*, 20th August).

"Some property deals are being done at levels as low as 90% below those at the peak, and the average index has not caught up with the actual prices yet," said Ms Keiko Otsuki, property analyst at brokers UBS Securities in Tokyo.

The land price fall will also hurt the government plan to raise money by disposing of property formerly owned by Japan National Railways.

Property lending has long formed a substantial proportion of the total lending of most Japanese financial institutions. Among the leading commercial, trust and long term credit banks, it accounts for a quarter to a third of total lending.

The average price of a square metre of land at the beginning of this year was Y192,000 (£1,150), down 13.5% from a year earlier. By region, Tokyo led the list with the average property value falling 16.7%. Osaka followed with a 16% drop. A Japanese recovery is still a distant horizon.

A Lesson for Anarchists

Dear *Freedom*,
Steve Booth ('Refusal' in *Freedom* on 21st September 1996) attempts to create a 'positive alternative'. Yet some of his attitudes show him more attached to the system than he thinks. I mean his contempt for the ordinary person, the "apathetic masses" with their cars and mortgages and "shallow culture". For these so-called masses he would substitute a host of "small activist groups". In attempting to develop a new anarchism, Steve has returned to the old authoritarianism, a kind of back-door Bolshevism. His attitudes are elitist and elitism is a key element in the authoritarian world-view.

You can't reduce the average person to clichés about mortgages and apathy, they are far more complex than that. And if you got to know them, rather than hanging around in your smug leftist counter-culture, you'd discover they don't like the government and the corporations much more than you do.

If anarchists remain dedicated to small groups, the movement will remain on the margins, and deservedly so. In my opinion, what we should be doing is orienting anarchism towards

those 'ordinary' people. Seventy years ago millions of them belonged to anarcho-syndicalist unions, people far less educated, coming out of a culture vastly more authoritarian and repressive than today. Why? Because the anarchists of the day were workers themselves, spoke the workers' language and spoke to their needs.

Brian Morris in his review of Rudolf Bahro's ideological journey has a lesson for anarchists. Bahro became obsessed with ecology to the point where he pushed democracy aside. It is necessary to keep the essential aspect of anarchism always at the forefront. This essence is liberty. Forget even momentarily about liberty and you can slide into authoritarianism. When people hyphenate anarchism with something else (as in anarcho-communism, eco-anarchism, etc.), when push comes to shove, they tend to forget the anarchist bit. Put ecology ahead of freedom and you can become an eco-fascist. Put class struggle ahead of freedom and you become a Bolshevik, as did many World War One-era anarchists. Put feminism ahead of liberty and you become a feminazi.

Larry Gambone

Solidarity Federation

Dear Editors,
It was a shame that the report in *Freedom* (5th October) on the Northern Anarchist Network (NAN) conference was clouded with muddled analysis and an unwarranted attack on Manchester Solidarity Federation (SF).

What is so curious in Manchester Solidarity Federation's wish for the NAN to "be a political organisation" - i.e. anarchist - not "a clique for whatever campaign is on the stage" - i.e. open to all and any individual or organisation that we happen to find ourselves alongside in opposing this, that or the other? If NAN is to remain anarchist, then it clearly has to be of anarchists, or make the choice to call itself the Northern Lefty-Campaign Group!

Speaking as a long-time member of the SF Transport Worker Network, whilst Manchester SF's activity might not be high profile or involve blowing their trumpets in these pages, it is way off mark to label it as 'monastic'. What of their members' consistent work in the transport sector, particularly at British Rail, one member and numerous other militants paid the ultimate price for maintaining the most militant branch in the country by losing their jobs in a co-ordinated BR set-up, after years of industrial action and fighting the union hierarchy. Not to speak of much other work in the transport sector both fighting management/union collusion and fomenting grassroots disputes and resistance. Additionally there is their work in the SF's Education Workers' Network.

But then none of this seems to be of much interest to some, or hold much glamour or excitement. The net result being that the labour movement is left to the marxists and reformists, with the exception of the anarcho-syndicalist Solidarity Federation.

In view of the work they take on, the fact that they have no unemployed members, it appears understandable that Manchester SF

have not been at the forefront of fighting the JSA or indulged in throwing about empty policies on it (*à la* SWP) as some people demand. Whereas in Norfolk & Norwich the SF branch having several members on the dole has distributed numerous leaflets, held demos, and got involved with many other people on it, as well as its other areas of work.

Pascal C

Norwich & Norfolk Solidarity Federation, Solidarity Centre, Room 13, Muspole Workshops, Muspole Street, Norwich NR3 1QD

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Dear Editors,
Our paths diverge. Please cancel my subscriptions to *Freedom* and *The Raven* with immediate effect.

Alan Grant

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**Telephone for further details
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- 1996 PROGRAMME -

1st November Food Not Bombs (illustrated talk by Keith McHenry of San Fransisco Food Not Bombs Group including a video)

8th November General discussion

15th November Vacant slot

22nd November General discussion

29th November Vacant slot

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Anyone interested in giving a talk or leading a discussion, please contact Peter Neville at the meetings, or at 4 Copper Beeches, Witham Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 4AW, giving subject and prospective dates and we will do our best to accommodate. **Peter Neville**

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number 33

on

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Thursday 6th November at 8pm REMEMBERING REVOLUTION!

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution and the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution against Stalinism, as well as the seventieth anniversary of the British General Strike. We look at the experiences of these events and the lessons to be drawn from them, both in terms of what revolutionaries should do, and how the left and the trade unions have been a major obstacle to the successful carrying out of the revolutionary task. But we do not intend to dwell on the past. We very much feel that far from being at the end of history, revolutionary movements, and indeed revolutions, will re-emerge in the coming decades.

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