

ORGANISE!

For Revolutionary Anarchism

80

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The SWP

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Organise!

The magazine of the
Anarchist Federation

Issue 80 - Summer 2013

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers.

We aim to produce Organise! twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first? Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our aims and principles can leave much open to debate.

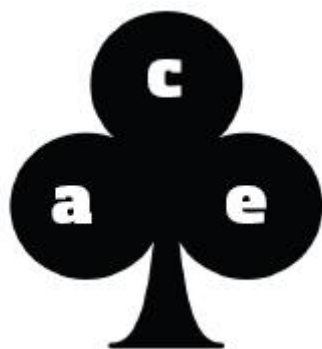
As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from our readers and spur debate on.

For the next issue of Organise! Please send all contributions to the address on the right. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc. Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at organise@afed.org.uk

What goes in Organise!

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has written the article and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!



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Margaret Thatcher politely died just in time for us to commemorate her life appropriately, in the 80th issue of *Organise!* We will speak ill of the dead, and go to press in the hope that the celebrations that began on Monday 8th carry on, showing the extent of contempt for Thatcher throughout the British working class.

The world we now live in is more dangerous, corrupt, unequal, oppressive and impoverished because of her particular legacy. From the start of her leadership in 1979, she turned up the heat internationally to put Britain 'back on the map'. She built up its military capability in the 1980s and established Britain's place in the Cold War, so that a generation grew up in fear of a nuclear conflict with the USSR. In 1982, by 'defending' the Falklands with immense firepower (which included the notorious sinking of the *Belgrano*), she heralded in an era in which Britain has gone to war at the drop of a hat. She supported the Apartheid regime in South Africa, was best pals with the Chilean dictator general Pinochet and was hated

not least in Northern Ireland, where working class people were brutalised and murdered under the divide-and-conquer approach to domestic dissent. Her racist policies supported the rise of the far-right in Britain, and black and white youth were forced to fight the police in the riots of 1980 onwards (especially 1981): an

These battles were not, of course, lost without a fight and hugely important acts of bravery and inspiring solidarity. But the only major working class victory in the Thatcher period was the struggle against the Poll Tax. This ideological class-based attack took place in the context of the dismantling and destroying things tradition-

Editorial

What's in the latest *Organise!*

explosion of anger at what inner-city life had become. She passed the first anti-gay legislation for 100 years, known as 'Clause 28'. In economic and industrial terms, key focal points of working class militancy were attacked in ways that were openly divisive and smashed much confidence in our class. The Miners, who struck in 1984-5, were tragically defeated, as were the Wapping print-workers in 1986 (Murdoch, please die soon as well).

ally understood as social property: the major industries, public services, jobs and welfare. The abolition of the Poll Tax was announced in 1991. The power of opposition to the tax in Scotland since 1987 had quickly spread to England and Wales by amazing feats of working class solidarity, organisation and a willingness to take to the streets and fight. The Poll Tax riot of 1990 and smaller, but very serious, local disturbances were not organised by anarchists, as the state, the press and some left parties claimed (as though we could pull that off!), but neither did they come out of nowhere. In fact, for a time, it seemed that the working class could win.

This is not to suggest that things were great before Thatcher; 'old' Labour was an example of how not to share out common resources. And afterwards, 'New' Labour set about completing her legacy with their Thatcherite-Labourism, paving the way for the current cabinet's unrelenting attacks on our class. As anarchists



we clearly understand, and all this demonstrates, there is no hope except in a class-based revolutionary solution. But whilst all politicians are the enemy of the working class, some do more damage to us than others, and rightly we rejoice in the demise of those we have most to despise.

If it seems strange to some people that others would happily dance on the grave of a long-senile old lady, it's because we are still her victims, after all this time. Although her death doesn't alter the challenges we face, even small boosts in our confidence at this point in the class struggle are vital. If there is some sense of closure about the past as a result of giving her a raucous and disrespectful send off, we have to shake off the hangover and use these couple of weeks as an opportunity to talk to our work-mates, friends, family, everybody about new beginnings and new possibilities. But first, let's Party!

Is there anything useful for us to say about her legacy? Anything that the AF can say that can add to what is being written elsewhere? Perhaps it is that, thinking back on the Thatcher years, 1979-1990, four kinds of Anarchism were (re-)born in Britain, as a unique and specific response to the political shape Britain was taking.

First, the anti-militarist anarcho-punks of the late 1970s-1980s came from the wider punk movement to rail against an, admittedly, rather abstracted and individually-experienced 'system'. Their politics got better, and the movement approached collective, if not class-based responses to issues such as sexism and milita-

rism, in particular. It became one of the back-bones of the anti-nuclear movement, and its de-centralised but hard-core legacy extended into the environmental and anti-capitalist movements of today. Several books of varying quality have been written about this movement recently, and its significance should not be overlooked.

Secondly, the 1980s also saw the growth of locally-focused 'synthesist' anarchist groups in major UK towns, sometimes linking up regionally. Whilst unable to develop much theoretically, or even to agree about much at all aside from opposition to states and to the military infrastructure, these groups carried within them a legacy of disillusionment as workers in the mainstream Labour movement. At the same time as supporting strikers on picket lines, they warned about the dangers of the authoritarian left and of back-sliding tendencies in trade union leadership and were proved correct several times. There was an associated upsurge in local anarchist papers around local issues, and a renewed interest in anarchist media as a result. This led to regionally-based anarchists taking stock of tensions in London, between what looked from the outside to be the 'individualist-beardy' anarchism of Freedom newspaper and the 'hit-it-til-it-breaks' anarchism of Black Flag and Crowbar. Surely anarchism was more than rows at the London Anarchist Bookfair, established in 1983, between beardy old men and squatters, the former unable to leave the 1960s and the latter the 1970s?

Thirdly, female anarchists in particular observed two things. One,

dammit, Thatcher wasn't even doing anything for women! Two, both the established, London-based tendencies and the new regional groupings, tended to be dominated by older men with informal power and a certain rugged individualism. It was difficult to grow intellectually in their company and female comrades tended to do a lot of listening rather than speaking. Anarcha-feminists began to rattle established anarchism, by at times organising on a women-only basis and by openly picking fights with macho-tendencies. As other articles in this issue of Organise! show, feminists in the movement, male and female, rather took our eye off the ball after the 1980s. This was arguably because until



more recently, anarcha-feminism did not have a class-based analysis. As such, it rather rested on its laurels when, post-Thatcher, things did seem to improve for women at work and at home (but they hadn't really and, let's face it, a lot of ex-striking miners' wives did indeed return to the kitchen).

Finally, by far the most significant development of British anarchism under Thatcher was the discovery of a fresh kind of class-based anarchism, with the formation of the Anarchist Communist Federation (now Anarchist Federation) and the formalising of Class War

as a national federation, both in 1986. There had been a revival of British anarcho-syndicalism when the Direct Action Movement was formed, in the year Thatcher came to power, but it was male-dominated and rather workplace obsessed, feeling like a relic from the past to the younger and more socially-orientated anarchism. Influenced more by a theoretically precise, if aloof and unapproachable, left-communist milieu, Class War and the A(C)F, although very different in style and appeal - the former uniquely British and of its day, and the latter rooted more securely in the historical European anarchist-communist tradition - came of age in Thatcher's Britain.

That was all a long time ago. We haven't been successful. Thatcherism has dominated British political life down the decades and provided the perfect launch-pad for the new attacks on welfare, most beginning just one week before she died, and so quite possibly leaving a smirk on that rigid face that could never manage a smile. April sees further destruction of welfare as a social

wage, including the 'Bedroom Tax', abolition of the Disability Living Allowance in favour of a new benefit where people will be tested, Council Tax going into local control with a 10% cut which will be passed on to benefits claimants, a limit on benefit and tax credit increases to 1% a year so they will not be in line with inflation, and an overall benefits cap as the Government seeks to introduce Universal Credit later this year. Along with all this access to legal aid has been slashed which will make it very hard for working class people to contest employment cases. As well as the welfare reforms, the way health-care is administered was changed on 1st April with reorganisation of purchasing across the NHS which will include an expected expansion of private provision.

In this issue of Organise! we also discuss ways that anarchism has structured itself and envisages structures which can transform society. We look at idea of the 'commune' as a basic unit of revolutionary organisation, and at Platformism and other forms of anarchism in Latin America.

We review the highly-significant publication by the Solidarity Federation: *Fighting for Ourselves*. Appropriately, this May Day issue brings you also a review of the Haymarket Scrapbook, launched to mark the 125th anniversary of the execution of the Haymarket martyrs. Also, we review the Kate Sharpley Library and Aotearoa Workers' Solidarity Movement publication about Werner Droe-scher.

This issue also reflects the fact that whilst the working class as a whole is under attack, some groups face additional levels of oppression and disadvantage. At points of extreme economic crisis, women's and minority struggles can get submerged within the attacks we all face. Those additional layers of oppression are less immediate to those not experiencing them. And when those not experiencing them (usually white, heterosexual, able male-bodied) are the most heavily represented in setting the agenda for political struggle, we need structural ways to make sure that other oppressions are to the fore in our thought and activity nonetheless. We need, as anarchists, to have a theoretical analysis of how and why oppressions intersect with class struggle that goes well beyond the traditional tacked-on clauses about women, racial minorities, LGBTQ and disabled people in our terms of reference. It is not the case that most anarchists still think these struggles 'less important' or something that should be subordinated to class struggle and resolved at some later time, but as a movement we lack a theoretical model for how to address this adequately. As such, we offer an article on 'Privilege Theory and Intersectional-



ity'; an analysis that is exciting much of the AF at the moment and which we are trying to apply to our practice as anarchists, although the concept itself and its terminology is not ours.

Privilege theory helps us understand why the 'good intentions' of political activists are not enough to ensure respect and safety for each other. In this issue of *Organise!* we address in particular the right of female-bodied comrades to feel safe from sexual-predation within the movement. It is clear that society in general is still ridden with rape apologia. It took courage for people to come forward and speak about Jimmy Savile, but apparently no one will take action until a high-ranking perpetrator dies and can no longer face the consequences. This means that sexual assault was considered as acceptable on the day before he died as it was in the sexist hey-day of the 1970s and 80s, when the popular media degraded women routinely and Legs & Co. on Top of the Pops was "something nice for the dads". The anarchy-feminists described above railed against it because of the attitudes that lay behind it but were told it was "just a bit of fun". Much has been achieved within our movement. It is far less common to hear that there are "two sides" to a sexual assault than it used to be. When *Le Monde Libertaire* (the journal of the French Anarchist Federation) recently published what amounted to an apologia for rape, it was instantly met with horror within the FA itself and from other organisations. But anarchists do still say these things and evidently some will still print them. These attitudes and the thought-processes they



encourage have never gone away. Although they are arguably less prevalent within the anarchist movement than in wider society, women continue to experience sexual assault and sexual predation within our movement.

We cannot "wish this away". We discuss this in our articles on Safer Spaces and on the recent SWP bust-up. The assumption of good feminist analysis on the part of men is clearly not enough to keep us safe. As such, anarchist-run events and places are rapidly beginning to adopt 'safer spaces' policies and to actively do what seems paradoxical to anarchists: to identify and exclude specific people because they have been named by survivors as perpetrators. This MUST be done because if it is not, women who feel vulnerable in general or afraid of specific people will stay away from events or resolve things in other ways or without community support. Just as most anarchists would now respect the wishes of a rape victim who wanted to go to the police for her own protection and that of others, organisers of anarchist events have to take the lead from women wanting to act

to prevent rape in the first place. Anarchist women are being raped and assaulted by men who call themselves anarchists. We have to deal with it and introduce Safer Spaces and women's and female-identified caucuses at events and in organisations. Otherwise we cannot feel confident of making a better job of our internal accountability than the SWP has. Rape still gets perpetrated and covered up, and even accepted, where there is no structure in place to stop it this.

Finally, we have an article related to the recent info-tour by the Belarusians of the International of Anarchist Federations and Anarchist Black Cross in Belarus, the 15 UK-leg of which was organised by the Anarchist Federation. The highly successful tour took in France, Italy, Germany, Spain and UK, to raise awareness and seek solidarity for five anarchists being held prisoner by the Belarusian state.

The Socialist Workers Party: Why it's all Gone Wrong

The recent conferences of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have seen its membership confront the Party's governing Central Committee in an unprecedented fashion. In tandem with this, a series of leaked documents, and the explicit critiques of outgoing and expelled members, have left the SWP's internal machinations subject to scrutiny by both its bitter rivals and long-standing opponents. One of the largest factions outside of electoral politics in Britain, the self-styled Party of 'peace, justice, equality, and socialism' (SWP, 2013b), now finds itself rapidly losing members and on the defensive. There is wider political relevance to the episode. Not only does it show how

ment, opposition to student fees and trade union activity generally, the SWP, and its various 'front' groups, have a high profile. As a result, there has been widespread media coverage of its recent turmoil; the Guardian describes it as "the UK's most prominent far-left organisation" (Malik and Cohen, 2013). With such accolades applying to a membership estimated at approximately 2,000, the least that can be said is that the SWP punches above its weight in the political stakes. Yet the energy and passion of its members and organisers faces dissolution. In the aftermath of what was surely a trau-

calling for its rejection (Ibid.; Newman, 2013c). In effect, the Party determined that nothing would be done about a complaint of sexual violence levelled at a senior figure, with no explanation given.

Unsatisfied members soon formed a faction called 'In Defence of Our Party' (IDOP). It was both the largest, and the only irregular, faction in the Party's history (Newman, 2013b). They demanded an open discussion within the Party to inform a

Socialist Worker

democratic processes can be used to manage rather than to support dissent, it also shows how utopian ideals can construct a culture which then subverts them. This is something which must be addressed at all levels and within all forms of organising that claim to be revolutionary (including those calling themselves anarchist).

The SWP is certainly one of the most visible and active explicitly self-proclaimed revolutionary groups in the UK. Due to a good street presence, an orientation to recruitment and propaganda and involvement in prominent campaigns such as the anti-war move-

matic Party process, there is a real risk that disillusioned activists will disappear from activity.

At the core of the conflict is an allegation of rape, brought formally in September last year and dating back to 2008, by a female party member against a former Central Committee member and current full-timer. This was investigated internally by the Party's Disputes Committee, and its findings presented to a tense meeting at the regular January conference (Newman, 2013a). The Disputes Committee's position amounted to 'not proven', whilst explicitly not disputing the testimony of the alleged victim. It was only narrowly endorsed by Conference, despite a ban on the distribution of texts

review of its disciplinary process, whilst seeking assurances that no action would be taken against dissenting Party members. IDOP also called for the immediate removal of the Central Committee member accused of rape from "any paid or representative roles in our party or united front work for the foreseeable future" ('SU Editors', 2013). Although it contradicts the party line established at Conference concerning the rape allegation, what is remarkable in IDOP's declaration is its expressed faith in both the Party's internal democracy and its capacity to evolve. The decision to form a faction should also be considered in light of an incident prior to the January conference. The incident saw four members expelled when a private deliberation over challenging the Disputes Committee's

findings was leaked to the Central Committee (Newman, 2012). This too had represented a show of open defiance, and was a direct challenge to the Party leadership, including criticism of the Party's supposedly 'democratic' culture ('SU Editors', 2013).

IDOP's proposals were presented to the SWP's National Committee (NC) in early February, where they were rejected by a ratio of votes exceeding 4:1 against (Newman, 2013b). Despite, or perhaps bolstered by this show of Party discipline, the Central Committee then called a Special Conference for March 10th, with the remit to "reaffirm the decisions of January's conference and the NC, resolve recent debates, clarify some elements of the constitution and move the party forwards" in the face of IDOP's "extraordinarily unpolitical" factionalism (Ibid.).

At this point, it is useful to consider the extent of the control afforded to the Central Committee over the business of the organisation. Essentially every aspect, from the formation of branches to the appointment of senior party members, is subject to the scrutiny of the Central Committee. Further to this, the Committee has summary powers over democratic process in branches and districts, including the representative basis on which delegates are sent to Conference and elected to the National Committee. In this context, it is not difficult to see how the latter, a fifty-member body whose decisions are ostensibly binding upon the Central Committee, becomes merely an executive tool, primarily charged with "assist[ing] the Central Committee in providing leadership for the Party" (SWP,

2009).

It follows from this that SWP conferences have to be carefully stage-managed. Meetings of the Party's "supreme policy-making body" are preceded by a three-month period during which the Central Committee meets with members through district 'aggregates' (whose composition they have also determined) in order to highlight, and hopefully assuage, any potential points of contention (SWP, 2009). Faction formation and submissions are also restricted by precedent to this period.



Comrade Delta AKA Martin Smith

The process of Conference itself is determined and overseen by a body appointed by the Central Committee and subject to the provision that Party officials and staff have automatic speaking rights (Ibid.). The March Special Conference enjoyed all of the above, whilst allowing only one month for debate and the submission of motions. Considering the gerrymandering and control of Party process and communication available to the Central Committee, it is remarkable that fully half of the motions to Special Conference were against its position (SWP, 2013a).

In the event, the Central Committee achieved a resounding victory. As its representative system saw split caucuses returning solidly-loyal delegates, the Central Committee's main motion to Conference was backed by 77% of voters (Thomas, 2013). This disbanded IDOP, condemned internal dissent, decried the poor politics of its student organisation (which had been a key contributor to IDOP), began a process of making the Disciplinary Committee entirely rather than largely unaccountable and reaffirmed the con-

tested decisions of the previous conference (Ibid.). Their second motion, which amended the Constitution to limit both factions and Special Conferences in the future, was also passed "overwhelmingly" (Ibid.). Mass resignations and defections inevitably followed Conference, demonstrating the extent of principled dissent in the Party and the intractability of the leadership (Seymour, 2013).

Where does the authoritarian practice evident in these processes come from, and how does it serve the SWP's ultimate declared goal: global revolution leading to

a new society of world socialism, a world of “peace, equality, justice”, and workers’ control (SWP, 2013b)? The Party maintains that this machinery is necessary to challenge the existing structures of power, as manifested in “wealth, [the] media, courts, and the military” (Ibid.). By offering a disciplined framework of

fight of competing interests as a fair contest of ideas, democratic centralism posits its ideals as a remote outcome of its current business, to decorate its activities but not inform them. As such, the notion of the future free society and its values gain the distant allure of the Kingdom of Heaven, whilst having all of the practical

it. But in itself, this rarely drives people from Socialist parties. This is because the doctrine of why ‘democracy’ should be tempered with ‘centralism’ is actively expounded within them (not least as an ill-informed argument against anarchism).

In this case it has led to rape denial and to a bolstering of support at the top level for the perpetrator. This is an abuse too far for many in the Party, perhaps not least because it comes at a point when institutionalised abuse is at least beginning to be exposed and condemned within the sort of organisations that liberal democracy fosters (the BBC, The Liberal Democrats, mainstream religious organisations, and local authority-run children’s homes). The SWP leadership could scarcely have chosen a worse way through this crisis. The scale of revolt represented anything from about a third to half of its membership being attached to the IDOP faction (650 members in a party of about 1400-2000). A fair cross-section of the party was mobilized. In fact, it took real determination on the part of the leadership to evade what was probably the easier option: to engage with the malcontents on some level other than alternating between being dismissive and belligerent. We suggest, therefore, that their chosen approach has more to do with the structure of organisations like the SWP. We invite those ex-members to consider whether the actions of the SWP’s Central Committee are an aberration within the party-political Left, or whether the opportunities for abuse of power are embedded within the supposedly ‘democratic’ structures at the top level of centralist organisations.



Alex Callinicos SWP Leader

theoretical and tactical unity, the combined strength of the proletariat can be yoked to the “ideas and strategies that can overthrow capitalism entirely” (Ibid.). The Party’s model for attaining this goal is “democratic centralism”.

To understand how the SWP sees democratic centralism, it is helpful to think of it as almost the inverse of mainstream “liberal democracy”. The latter supposedly draws in a plurality of perspectives and charts a ‘least-worst’ course between them; democratic centralism measures all input against its core positions and expects disciplined realignment to these for the purpose of political expediency (SWP, 2009). In both cases, neither democracy nor idealism is served. Whilst liberal democracy misrepresents the mismatched, mixed-weight, fixed

political impact of wallpaper. That is to say, denying low-ranking women in the Party protection against sexual violence on the part of Central Committee members is politically expedient, and hushing it up and driving objection underground is necessary for unity under Capitalism.

The two models – democratic centralism and liberal democracy – theoretically allow space for dissent but rarely, if ever, to the extent that it could topple the key beneficiaries of power. This is the political status quo dominating both “liberal” and “centralist” democratic life. Those benefiting from that power are able to use the same formal structures against those that they are supposed to represent - those who have apparently given a leadership its legitimacy by voting for

March 2013 ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

BULLETIN

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to defeat and all lost their jobs.

A setback snatched from the jaws of victory not by the trade union bureaucracy but by the indiscipline and individualism of a leading party member.

Lessons learnt.

What happened here is that two comrades, from very different generations using very different media tools, made unilateral and entirely individual decisions to make something public.

Neither of them contacted the party members involved in leading these two campaigns. It was just their individual decision. In their heads they did have that right to make that decision. For each of them it was a "matter of judgement". They got the judgement wrong this time (sorry), but it was their call to make that judgement. And in that they were and are both entirely wrong. The class fights collectively not individually and this applies to the decision to make things public, just as it applies to going on strike.

What these two examples show is that indiscipline and individualism do hurt the workers movement. Not in a theoretical way, but in a practical working class losing your job sort of way.

Trotsky on party discipline

Trotsky criticised this individualism in his debate with "democratic" opponents in the American Trotskyist movement in 1940. He criticises opponents for wanting "an ideal party democracy which would secure forever and for everybody the possibility of saying and doing whatever popped into his head"

The whole text is worth reading and is completely relevant to the situation our party now finds itself in:-

"The Petty-Bourgeoisie and Centralism ...you seek an ideal party democracy which would secure forever and for everybody the possibility of saying and doing whatever popped into his head, and which would insure the party against bureaucratic degeneration. You overlook a trifle, namely, that the party is not an arena for the assertion of free individuality, but an instrument of the proletarian revolution; that only a victorious revolution is capable of preventing the degeneration not only of the party but of the proletariat itself and of modern civilization as a whole.

<http://tinyurl.com/cznpjaj>

Socialist Workers Party, 2013b, "Where We Stand", SWP Online

Privilege Theory and Intersectionality

Aims and definitions

The purpose of this paper is to outline a class struggle anarchist analysis of Privilege Theory. Many of us feel “privilege” is a useful term for discussing oppressions that go beyond economic class. It can help us to understand how these oppressions affect our social relations and the intersections of our struggles within the economic working class. It is written by members of the women’s caucus of the Anarchist Federation. It does not represent all our views and is part of an ongoing discussion within the federation.

What we mean by privilege
What do we mean – and what do we not mean – by privilege? Privilege implies that wherever there is a system of oppression (such as capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity) there is an oppressed group and also a privileged group, who benefit from the oppressions that this system puts in place¹. The privileged group do not have to be active supporters of the system of oppression, or even aware of it, in order to benefit from it. They benefit from being viewed as the norm and providing for their needs being seen as what is naturally done, while the oppressed group is considered the “other”, and their needs are “special considerations”. Sometimes the privileged group benefits from the system in obvious, material ways, such as when women are expected to do most or all of the housework, and male partners benefit from their unpaid labour. At other times the benefits are more subtle and invisible and involve certain pressures being

taken off a privileged group and focused on others, for example black and Asian youths being 28% more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white youths². The point here is not that police harassment doesn’t happen to white youths or that being working class or a white European immigrant doesn’t also mean you’re more likely to face harassment; the point is that a disproportionate number of black and Asian people are targeted in comparison to white people, and the result of this is that if you are carrying drugs and you are white, then all other things being equal, you are much more likely to get away with it than if you were black. In the UK, white people are also less likely to be arrested or jailed or to be the victim of a personal crime³. Black people currently face even greater unemployment in the UK than they do in the USA⁴. The point of quoting this is not to suggest we want a society in which people of all races and ethnicities face equal disadvantage – we want to create a society in which nobody faces these disadvantages – but part of getting there is acknowledging how systems of oppression work. This means recognising that, if black and ethnic minority groups are more likely to face these disadvantages, then by simple maths, white people are less likely to face them. That means they have an advantage, a privilege, including the privilege of not needing to be aware of the extent of the problem.

A privileged group may also, in some ways, be oppressed by the expectations of the system that privileges them; for example men

under patriarchy are expected to not show weakness or emotion and are mistrusted as carers. However, men are not oppressed by patriarchy for being men; they are oppressed in these ways because it is necessary in order to maintain women’s oppression. For women to see themselves as weak, irrational and suited only to caring roles, they must believe that men are stronger, less emotional and incapable of caring for those who need it. For these reasons, men showing weakness, emotion and a capacity for caring labour are punished by patriarchy for letting the side down and giving women the opportunity to challenge their oppression.

It makes sense that where there is an oppressed group, there is a privileged group, because systems of oppression wouldn’t last long if nobody benefited from them. It is crucial to understand that members of the privileged group of any of these systems may also be oppressed by any of the others, and this is what allows struggles to be divided and revolutionary activity crushed. We are divided, socially and politically, by a lack of awareness of our privileges and how they are used to set our interests against each other and break our solidarity.

The term “privilege” has a complex relationship with class struggle, and to understand why, we need to look at some of the differences and confusions between economic and social class. Social class describes the cultural identities of working class, middle class and upper class. These identities, much like those built on gender or race, are socially constructed,

created by a society based on its prejudices and expectations of people in those categories. Economic class is different: It describes the economic working and ruling classes, as defined by Marx. It functions through capitalism and is based on the ownership of material resources, regardless of your personal identity or social status. This is why a wealthy, knighted capitalist like Alan Sugar can describe himself as a "working class boy made good". He is clearly not working class if we look at it economically, but he clings to that social identity in the belief that it in some way justifies or excuses the exploitation within his business empire. He confuses social and economic class in order to identify himself with an oppressed group (the social working class) and so deny his own significant privilege (as part of the economic ruling class). Being part of the ruling class of capitalism makes it impossible to support struggles against that system. This is because, unlike any other privileged group, the ruling class are directly responsible for the very exploitation they would be claiming to oppose.

This doesn't make economic class a "primary" oppression, or the others "secondary", but it does mean that resistance in economic class struggle takes different forms and has slightly different aims to struggles based on cultural identities. For example, we aim to end capitalism through a revolution in which the working class seize the means of production from the ruling class and create an anarchist communist society in which there is no ruling class. For the other struggles mentioned, this doesn't quite work the same way; we can't

force men to give up their maleness, or white people to give up their whiteness, or send them all to the guillotine and reclaim their power and privilege as if it were a resource that they were hoarding. Instead we need to take apart and understand the systems that tend to concentrate power and resources in the hands of the culturally privileged and question the very concepts of gender, sexuality, race etc. that are used to build the identities that divide us.

A large part of the resentment of the term "privilege" within class struggle movements comes from trying to make a direct comparison with ruling class privilege, which doesn't quite work. Somebody born into a family who owns a chain of supermarkets or factories can, when they inherit their fortune, forgo it; they can collectivise their empire and give it to the workers and work in it themselves for the same share of the profits as everybody else. Capitalists can, if they choose, give up their privilege. This makes it OK for us to think of them as bad people if they don't and justifies taking it from them by force in a revolutionary situation. Men, white people, straight people, cisgendered people etc., can't give up their privilege - no matter how much they may want to. It is forced on them by a system they cannot opt out of, or choose to stop benefiting from. This comparison with ruling class privilege makes many feel as if they're being accused of hoarding something they're not entitled to, that they're being blamed for this and asked to feel guilty or undergo some kind of endless penance to be given absolution for their privilege. This is not the case. Guilt isn't useful, aware-

ness and thoughtful action are. If you take nothing else away from this document, take this: You are not responsible for the system that gives you your privilege, only for how you respond to it. The privileged (apart from the ruling class) have a vital role to play in the struggle against the systems that privilege them - it's just not a leadership role.

Answering objections to privilege

So if they didn't choose it and there's nothing they can do about it, why describe people as "Privileged"? Isn't it enough to talk about racism, sexism, homophobia etc. without having to call white, male and straight people something that offends them? If it's just the terminology you object to, be aware that radical black activists, feminists, queer activists and disabled activists widely use the term privilege. Oppressed groups need to lead the struggles to end their oppressions, and that means these oppressed groups get to define the struggle and the terms we use to talk about it. It is, on one level, simply not up to class struggle groups made up of a majority of white males to tell people of colour and women what words are useful in the struggles against white supremacy and patriarchy. If you dislike the term but agree with the concept, then it would show practical solidarity to leave your personal discomfort out of the argument, accept that the terminology has been chosen and start using the same term as those at the forefront of these struggles.

Another common objection to the concept of privilege is that it

makes a cultural status out of the lack of an oppression. You could say that not facing systematic prejudice for your skin colour isn't a privilege, it's how things should be for everyone. To face racism is the aberration; to not face it should be the default experience. The problem is, if not experiencing oppression is the default experience, then experiencing the oppression puts you outside the default experience, in a special category, which in turn makes a lot of the oppression invisible. To talk about privilege reveals what is normal to those without the oppression, yet cannot be taken for granted by those with it. To talk about homophobia alone may reveal the existence of prejudices – stereotypes about how gay men and lesbian women behave perhaps, or violence targeted against people for their sexuality. It's unusual to find an anarchist who won't condemn these things. To talk about straight privilege, however, shows the other side of the system, the invisible side: what behaviour is considered "typical" for straight people? There isn't one – straight isn't treated like a sexual category, it is treated like the absence of "gay". You don't have to worry about whether you come across as "too straight" when you're going to a job interview, whether your straight friends will think you're denying your straightness if you don't dress or talk straight enough, whether your gay friends will be uncomfortable if you take them to a straight club or if they'll embarrass you by saying something ignorant about getting hit on by somebody of the opposite sex. This analysis goes beyond worries about discrimination or prejudice to the very heart of what we consider normal

and neutral, what we consider different and other, what needs explaining, what's taken as read – the prejudices in favour of being straight aren't recognisable as prejudices, because they're built into our very perceptions of what is the default way to be.

It's useful to see this, because when we look at oppressions in isolation, we tend to attribute them to personal or societal prejudice, a homophobic law that can be repealed or a racial discrimination that can be legislated against. Alone, terms like "racism", "sexism" and "ablism" don't describe how oppression is woven into the fabric of a society and is a normal part of life, rather than an easily isolated stain on society that can be removed without trace, leaving the fabric intact.⁵

Privilege theory is systematic. It explains why removing prejudice and discrimination isn't enough to remove oppression. It shows how society itself needs to be ordered differently. When people talk about being "colour-blind" in relation to race, they think it means they're not racist, but it usually means that they think they can safely ignore differences of background and life experience due to race and expect that the priorities and world views of everybody should be the same as those of white people, which they consider to be "normal". It means they think they don't have to listen to people who are trying to explain why a situation is different for them. They want difference to go away, so that everybody can be equal, yet by trying to ignore difference they are reinforcing it. Recognising privilege means recognising that differences of experience exist which we may

not be aware of. It means being willing to listen when people tell us about how their experience differs from ours. It means trying to conceive of a new "normal" that we can bring about through a differently structured society, instead of erasing experiences that don't fit into our privileged concept of "normal".

Intersectionality and Kyriarchy

Kyriarchy is the concept of combined systems of oppression; the idea that capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, theocracy and other systems that we don't necessarily have names for are all connected, influencing and supporting each other. The word "kyriarchy" is also a handy verbal shortcut that saves having to list all the systems of oppression every time you want to explain this concept. It means everybody who's fighting oppression of any kind is fighting the same war; we just fight it on a myriad of different fronts.

Intersectionality is the idea that we are all privileged by some of these systems and oppressed by others, and that, because those systems affect one another, our oppressions and privileges intersect. This means that we each experience oppression in ways specific to our particular combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, disability, age etc. ^{6 7}

Class struggle analyses tend to mark out capitalism as separate from the other systems in kyriarchy. As explained above, capitalism operates differently from systems of oppression based on identity or culture, but it would

be too simplistic to dismiss these oppressions as secondary or as mere aspects of capitalism. Patriarchy, in particular, existed long before modern industrial capitalism and, there's evidence to suggest, before the invention of money itself⁸, and it's not difficult to imagine a post-capitalist society in which oppressive gender roles still hold true⁹. As anarchists are opposed to all systems of oppression, we recognise that fighting capitalism alone is not enough and that other oppressions won't melt away "after the revolution". If we want a post-revolutionary society free of all oppression, we need all the oppressed to have an equal role in creating it, and that means listening to experiences of oppression that we don't share and working to understand how each system operates: in isolation, in relation to capitalism and other systems of oppression and as part of kyriarchy.¹⁰

We're used to talking about sexism or racism as divisive of the working class. Kyriarchy allows us to get away from the primacy of class, while keeping it very much in the picture. Just as sexism and racism divide class struggle, capitalism and racism divide gender struggles, and sexism and capitalism divide race struggles. All systems of oppression divide the struggles against all the other systems that they intersect with. This is because we find our loyalties divided by our own particular combinations of privilege and oppression, and we prioritise the struggles we see as primary, to the detriment of others and to the detriment of solidarity. This is why the Anarchist Federation's 3rd Aim & Principle¹¹ cautions against cross-class alliances, but we should be avoiding campaigns

that forward the cause of any oppressed group against the interests of any other - not just class. That doesn't mean that every campaign has to forward the cause of every single struggle equally, but it does mean that we need to be aware of how our privileges can blind us to the oppressions we could be ignorantly walking all over in our campaigns. We have to consider a whole lot more than class struggle when we think about whether a campaign is moving us forwards or backwards as anarchists. Being able to analyse and point out how systems of oppression intersect is vital, as hitting these systems of oppression at their intersections can be our most effective way of uniting struggles and building solidarity across a number of ideological fronts.

Some examples:

In the early 1800s, there were several strikes of male textile workers against women being employed at their factories because their poorer pay allowed them to undercut male workers¹². The intersection of capitalism and patriarchy meant that women were oppressed by capitalists as both workers and women (being exploited for lower pay than men), and by men as both women and workers (kept in the domestic sphere, doing even lower paid work). When changing conditions (mechanisation) made it too difficult to restrict women to their traditional work roles, unions finally saw reason and campaigned across the intersection, allowing women to join the unions and campaigning for their pay to be raised.

From the 70s to the present day,

certain strands of radical feminism have refused to accept the validity of trans* struggles, keeping trans women out of women's spaces (see the controversies over Radfem 2012 and some of the workshops at Women Up North 2012 over their "women born women" policies). The outcome of this is as above: the most oppressed get the shitty end of both sticks (in this case cisnormativity and patriarchy), with feminism, the movement that is supposed to be at the forefront of fighting the oppression that affects both parties (patriarchy) failing at one of its sharpest intersections. This also led to the fracturing of the feminist movement and stagnation of theory through failure to communicate with trans* activists, whose priorities and struggles have such a massive crossover with feminism. One positive that's come out of these recent examples is the joining together of feminist and trans* activist groups to challenge the entry policy of Radfem 2012. This is leading to more communication, solidarity and the possibility of joint actions between these groups.

The above examples mean that thinking about our privileges and oppressions is essential: for organising together; for recognising where other struggles intersect with our own and what our role should be in those situations; where our experiences will be useful and where they will be disruptive; where we should be listening carefully and where we can contribute constructively. Acknowledging privilege in this situation means acknowledging that it's not just the responsibility of the oppressed group to challenge the system that oppresses them,

it's everybody's responsibility, because being part of a privileged group doesn't make you neutral, it means you're facing an advantage. That said, when we join the struggle against our own advantages, we need to remember that it isn't about duty or guilt or altruism, because all our struggles are all connected. The more we can make alliances over the oppressions that have been used to divide us, the more we can unite against the forces that exploit us all. None of us can do it alone.

The myth of the "Oppression Olympics"

The parallels that are drawn between the Black and women's movements can always turn into an 11-plus: who is more exploited? Our purpose here is not parallels. We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are seeking to break down the power relations among us on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital. For no man can represent us as women any more than whites can speak about and themselves end the Black experience. Nor do we seek to convince men of our feminism. Ultimately they will be "convinced" by our power. We offer them what we offer the most privileged women: power over their enemies. The price is an end to their privilege over us.¹³

To say that somebody has white privilege isn't to suggest that they can't also have a whole host of other oppressions. To say that somebody suffers oppression by patriarchy doesn't mean they can't also have a lot of other privileges. There is no points system

for working out how privileged or oppressed you are in relation to somebody else, and no point in trying to do so. The only way that privilege or oppression makes your contributions to a struggle more or less valid is through that struggle's relevance to your lived experience.

A black, disabled working class lesbian may not necessarily have had a harder life than a white, able-bodied working class straight cis-man, but she will have a much greater understanding of the intersections between class, race, disability, gender and sexuality. The point isn't that, as the most oppressed in the room, she should lead the discussion; it's that her experience gives her insights he won't have on the relevant points of struggle: the demands that will be most effective, the bosses who represent the biggest problem, the best places and times to hold meetings or how to phrase a callout for a mass meeting so that it will appeal to a wider range of people; ways of dealing with issues that will very probably not occur to anybody whose oppression is along fewer intersections. He should be listening to her, not because she is more oppressed than him (though she may well be), but because it is vital to the struggle that she is heard, and because the prejudices that society has conditioned into us, and that still affect the most socially aware of us, continue to make it more difficult for her to be heard, for us to hear her.

Some would argue that governments, public bodies and corporations have been known to use arguments like these to put forward or promote particular

people into positions of power or responsibility, either as a well-meaning attempt to ensure that oppressed groups are represented or as a cynical exercise in tokenism to improve their public image. This serves the state and capital by encouraging people to believe that they are represented, and that their most effective opportunities for change will come through supporting or petitioning these representatives. This is what we mean by cross-class alliances in the 3rd A&P, and obviously we oppose the idea that, for instance, a woman Prime Minister will be likely to do anything more for working class women than a male Prime Minister will do for working class men. It should be remembered that privilege theory is not a movement in itself but an analysis used by a diverse range of movements, liberal and radical, reformist and revolutionary. By the same token, the rhetoric of solidarity and class unity is used by leftists to gain power for themselves, even as we use those same concepts to fight the power structures they use. The fact that some people will use the idea of privilege to promote themselves as community leaders and reformist electoral candidates doesn't mean that that's the core reasoning or inevitable outcome of privilege theory. For us, as class struggle anarchists, the identities imposed on us by kyriarchy and the politics that go with them are about uniting in struggle against all oppression, not entrenching social constructs, congratulating ourselves on how aware we are, claiming special rights according to our background or biology and certainly not creating ranked hierarchies of the most oppressed to put forward for tokenistic positions of power.

In the AF, we already acknowledge in our Aims and Principles the necessity of autonomous struggle for people in oppressed groups; but rather than analyse why this is necessary, we only warn against cross-class alliances within their struggles. The unspoken reason why it is necessary for them to organise independently is privilege. Any reason you can think of why it might be necessary, is down to privilege: the possible presence of abusers; the potential of experiences of oppression being misunderstood, mistrusted, dismissed or requiring a huge amount of explanation before they are accepted and the meeting can move onto actions around them; even internalised feelings of inferiority are triggered by our own awareness of the presence of members of the privileged group. This may not be their fault, but it is due to the existence of systems that privilege them. The reason we need to organise autonomously is that we need to be free of the presence of privilege to speak freely. After speaking freely, we can identify and work to change the conditions that prevented us from doing so before – breaking down the influence of those systems on ourselves and lessening the privilege of others in their relations with us – but the speaking freely has to come first.

To equate talk of “privilege” with liberalism, electoralism and cross-class struggles is to deny oppressed groups the space and the language to identify their experiences of oppression and so effectively organise against the systems that oppress them. If we acknowledge that these organising spaces are necessary, and that

it is possible for them to function without engaging in liberalism and cross-class struggles, then we must acknowledge that privilege theory does not, of necessity, lead to liberalism and cross-class struggles. It may do so when it is used by liberals and reformists but not when used by revolutionary class struggle anarchists. Privilege theory doesn't come with compulsory liberalism any more than the idea of class struggle comes with compulsory Leninism.

The class struggle analysis of privilege

This may all seem, at first, to make class struggle just one struggle among many, but the unique way in which ruling class privilege operates provides an overarching context for all the other systems. While any system can be used as a “context” for any other, depending on which intersections we're looking at, capitalism is particularly important, because those privileged within it have overt control over resources, rather than just a default cultural status of normalcy. They are necessarily active oppressors, and cannot be passive or unwilling recipients of the benefits of others' oppression. The ruling class and the working class have opposing interests, while the privileged and oppressed groups of other systems only have differing interests, which differ less as the influence of those systems is reduced.

This doesn't make economic class a primary oppression or the others secondary, because our oppressions and privileges intersect. If women's issues were considered secondary to class issues, this would imply that work-

ing class men's issues were more important than those of working class women. Economic class is not so much the primary struggle as the all-encompassing struggle. Issues that only face queer people in the ruling class (such as a member of an aristocratic family having to remain in the closet and marry for the sake of the family line) are not secondary to our concerns but completely irrelevant, because they are among the few oppressions that truly will melt away after the revolution, when there is no ruling class to enforce them on itself. We may condemn racism, sexism, homophobia and general snobbery shown by members of the ruling class to one another, but we don't have common cause in struggle with those suffering these, even those with whom we share a cultural identity, because they remain our direct and active oppressors.

When we try to apply this across other intersections than economic class, we don't see concerns that are irrelevant to all but the privileged group, but we do find that the limited perspective of privileged activists gives campaigns an overly narrow focus. For instance, overwhelmingly white, middle class feminist organisations of the 60s and 70s have been criticised by women of colour and disabled women for focusing solely on the legalisation of abortion at a time when Puerto-Rican women and disabled women faced forced sterilisation, and many women lacked access to essential services during pregnancy and childbirth. Although the availability of abortion certainly wasn't irrelevant to these women, the campaigns failed to also consider the affordability of

abortion and completely ignored the concerns of women being denied the right to have a child. Most feminist groups now tend to talk about “reproductive rights” rather than “abortion rights” and demand free or affordable family planning services that include abortion, contraception, sexual health screening, antenatal and post-natal care, issues relevant to women of all backgrounds.¹⁴

We have to challenge ourselves to look out for campaigns that, due to the privilege of those who initiate them, lack awareness of how an issue differs across intersections. We need to broaden out our own campaigns to include the perspectives of all those affected by the issues we cover. This will allow us to bring more issues together, gather greater solidarity, fight more oppressions and build a movement that can challenge the whole of kyriarchy, which is the only way to ever defeat any part of it, including capitalism.

Notes

1 “A common form of blindness to privilege is that women and people of colour are often described as being treated unequally, but men and whites are not. This... is logically impossible. Unequal simply means ‘not equal,’ which describes those who receive less than their fair share and those who receive more. But there can’t be a short end of the stick without a long end, because it’s the longness of the long end that makes the short end short. To pretend otherwise makes privilege and those who receive it invisible.” Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference* (2006).

2 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16552489>, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jun/12/police-stop-and-search-black-people> (statistics not available for Scotland)

3 <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/mojstats/stats-race-cjs-2010.pdf>

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/13/black-people-unemployed-britain-us>

5 “While it is important that individuals work to transform their consciousness, striving to be anti-racist, it is important for us to remember that the struggle to end white supremacy is a struggle to change a system, a structure...For our efforts to end white supremacy to be truly effective, individual struggle to change consciousness must be fundamentally linked to collective effort to transform those structures that reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy.” bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, 1995

6 <http://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/05/15/straight-white-male-the-lowest-difficulty-settingthere-is/>

7 Intersectionality as a term and an idea has been developed by, among others: Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Leslie McCall, if you are interested in further reading.

8 Graeber’s ‘Debt: The First 5,000 Years’ suggests that young women were used in some pre-money societies as an early form of currency or debt tally.

9 See the chapter with all the

beautiful and sexually available house-keeping-cleaning-serving women in William Morris’ utopia *News from Nowhere*.

10 One anarchist analysis of intersectionality: <http://libcom.org/library/refusing-waitanarchism-intersectionality>.

11 “We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.” <http://www.afed.org.uk/organisation/aims-and-principles.html>

12 See Chapter 7 of *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* by Anna Clark.

13 Selma James, ‘Sex, Race and Class’ 1975

14 Links to these examples are on these posts at the Angry Black Woman blog: <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2010/02/26/reproductive-justice-linkspam-a-starting-point/>, <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2008/04/14/poc-and-the-politics-of-medical-research/>

The Fundamental Requirement for Organised Safer Space

This article will be a very basic introduction to the foundations of safer spaces, community accountability and transformational justice that arise from elements present from the very inception of anarchism as a political philosophy. These concepts are responses to verbal, physical and sexual abuse that have always been present within radical communities and continue to present a challenge to this day. As such this article will touch on all forms of abuse from problematic language through to rape and physical violence. An example of one such policy can be seen at <http://bit.ly/1207uq8>

I am writing this from my perspective as a white trans*, queer, able-bodied individual who was socialised as a straight, cis-gendered male. My role within some of the struggles I will describe is one of support when it is called for. Safer spaces thinking has come about through survivors of abuse determining the form that their struggle must take and the ways in which they wish to receive support. For every person who has been able to speak out there are hundreds of thousands that could not. We should remember that while the voices we hear may seem few, they carry with them a truth that, if ignored, will render any attempts towards social revolution a futile gesture.

Rape Culture

Looking at the world today we

can see that it is full of prejudice. Gender, sexuality, age, physical ability, social class, skin colour and being part of a specific ethnic group are all used as excuses for society undertaking and accepting a catalogue of abuses against people. They can be subtle, such as in cases where a speaker is ignored or not taken seriously, or can be as blatant as a murder taking place in front of a crowd and not one person present stepping forward as a witness. We have all been socialised not to rock the boat; to partake in acts of oppression and also receive abuse as a matter of course; to ignore or minimise those people who need our support; to put on trial those who seek justice; to internalise the blame when we have been abused, if we even allow ourselves to recognise the issue at all. While these cultural norms can be seen wherever oppression takes place, I would argue that one of the most pervasive and widespread of these affecting all our radical spaces today are carried over from our dominant culture's acceptance of rape and sexual violence.

We are constantly surrounded by language and images that validate and perpetuate rape. Everything, from the comedy we are expected to enjoy through to the legal framework imposed upon us by the state, is predisposed to rape being something that is just part of life. Rape is minimised within our culture to the point that when someone sits at a computer

and posts up stupid messages on Facebook with another's log-in, they are linguistically presented as being of the same level of injustice and abuse as having been sexually assaulted. Sure, if we put people on the spot they would rate rape as being far worse than posting a message to embarrass a friend, but this is just one small example out of an overarching pervasive system of misogynistic language, objectification, belittlement and trivialisation. This leads us to the point where rape is not only ignored as normal but can also be encouraged and celebrated by those around us. Don't believe me? Type "Steubenville rape" into your search engine of choice, and then keep in mind I can find hundreds of examples like this from the past year alone.

The truth about sexual violence is constantly hidden behind myths that attack those who have survived such violence and protect the perpetrators of such abuse from scrutiny. The idea is that a perpetrator is going to be a stranger, loner or fringe acquaintance comes up time-and-time again. Rapists are perpetually characterised as monsters or some unthinking instinct-driven beasts. Both of these stereotypes are rarely the case. A rapist can be anyone you know. They can be your best friend. They can be nice person that seems like the salt of the earth. They can be an otherwise good comrade. They are not a sex-crazed maniac who always stands out in a crowd, but

instead they are someone who is looking to exert control through sexual violence, usually in very private settings, over someone they know well. They can use reason to convince those they attack that it is a one-off or that it wasn't their fault. This ties in with the false idea is that cases of rape are always clear and obvious – that a man has overpowered a woman in some way in the pursuit of sex and the survivor is immediately clear about what has occurred. While this can be the case, it is not the only way. Those with experiences that fall outside of this black & white narrative often find themselves maligned or under suspicion. Questions are raised about why the survivor “let it happen” or “didn't speak up sooner”. No thought is given to the full spectrum of typical responses to a threatening situation. This may be the familiar fight or flight, but could also lead to the lesser known freeze, submit or attach response. Our culture turns this all around and starts to ask what the survivor did, that could have invited being raped. Were they inebriated? Wearing “inappropriate clothing”? Had they not taken steps such as carrying a whistle or something to protect themselves with? Did they act in a way that caused the perpetrator to act the way they did? Had they had sex with the perpetrator in the past? Let's be entirely clear – nothing causes rape apart from a rapist.

These myths all act to empower perpetrators of abuse and disempower the survivor. They lead those who have survived abuse to question their own judgement about a situation, placing blame on themselves for the actions

of another. They cause crippling feelings of shame and guilt in those who need to reach out for our solidarity and support. At the same time they cause those structures built supposedly to help the survivor, to be anything from unreceptive through to providing outright hostility.

Similar myths and misguided beliefs also surround other groups that suffer oppression, to undertake the same cycle of pinning blame on those being abused. You have to have a keen eye for mainstream media to see how pervasive the misinformation and hatred it helps perpetuate is. As I write this piece, it emerges that a large factor in the recent suicide of Lucy Meadows was the Daily Mail's decision to publish a hate-filled personal attack on her. Examples such as this are merely the public tip of a massive iceberg.

Radical Spaces, Revolutionary Solutions

As anarchists, we should work to make ourselves aware of these systems of oppression and how they intersect, listening to the experiences of those who have been oppressed and lending them support in the struggles that they face. We should also be critical of the systems of response that we hold over from the world at large and look to prefigure the world we would hope to live in. We should also be realistic about the resources and abilities we have to hand. When we provide spaces, be they gatherings in physical space or virtual forums of discussion, we must recognise the responsibility we have to make all that use the space aware, that

in order to be accepted in this particular community there will be certain behaviours we require and others that we will not tolerate. At the same time we may have additional requirements, or even state, that someone is unwelcome within our spaces, in order to allow the community as a whole to feel safe. Far from being authoritarian, this is a prefigurative step towards realising the concept of Free Association, where individuals and communities have a directly democratic say in who they allow into their space and how people are expected to behave whilst there.

At the moment the most common attempt to make out spaces safer than the world at large is to create a “safer spaces policy”. This is often a list of principles that we hope everyone using a space will adhere to and behaviours that are expected in our spaces. Unfortunately, turning our spaces into something safer than the world around them takes far more than a goodwill wish-list of things we hope predatory individuals will or won't do. Just as laws do nothing to deter crime; simply having a code of conduct on the door of your event is pretty redundant if not accompanied by procedures of what to do *when* (not *if*) someone contravenes it. What is required, to paraphrase Errico Malatesta, is organisation, organisation and more organisation. This comes in many different forms:

Open and Clear Processes for Everyone

In first aid there are processes that are drilled into medics so that when an emergency situation

arises, they are able to put most of their emotion and panic to one side and ensure that the situation is properly handled. The same principle can be found in the preparation and organisation required to make our spaces safer. When someone acts in a way contrary to the “notice on the door”, there needs to be a clear set of instructions upon what course of action is open to someone who has survived abuse, to someone who has witnessed oppressive behaviour and to those it is being reported to.

Having a clear set of principles about how we will act, as well as an open account of the processes and procedures that everyone maintaining the space is trained to follow when a problem occurs, means that everybody involved has their expectations set as to what will happen when the issue of abuse occurs. Survivors can be put more at ease and feel like order can be found in an emotionally chaotic situation, as they will know before even raising an issue what will happen. Those of us maintaining a space will have documentation to both help us move forward in a way that will protect the community at large, while holding us back from taking any rash actions that would disempower a survivor or in themselves be abusive. For those who may possibly be perpetrators of abuse, it shows up-front what to expect and explains why certain action may be required from each person involved.

Multiple processes will be required to deal with all the different types of abuse that can be reported. For example, how we handle reports of physical vio-

Organise!

lence will differ greatly from how we are expected to deal with a case of someone using a slur in conversation. No process is set in stone as each case is unique, however the most common eventualities can be covered, and our processes can be reviewed after the fact to include better practices as we develop and share them.

Survivor-Focus and Community Accountability Processes

The world at large treats abuses in very different ways. When someone comes forward to report that something has been stolen from them, our first reaction isn't to question whether this has happened or not. We accept the claim on face value and then work from that point on. The same is not true in cases of sexual violence. While investigation into number of false accusations in these fields shows time and time again that it is extremely rare for an accusation to be made without basis, the typical initial reaction of the dominant culture is to deny or discount the survivor's account of what happened and attempt to minimise or erase the abusive behaviour. If this cannot be done, it attacks those who have been able to stand up and search for justice; people coming to us for help and support are put on trial. When we do believe the person, we often perpetuate the removal of agency they have suffered by storming off to deal with the problem ourselves, heedless of what the survivor needs or wants from us.

Almost universally, our spaces do not have at hand the ability to investigate truth or guilt behind most claims of sexual violence or severe abuse. However, we do

have the ability to take claims of abuse seriously and look at implementing strategies to protect our communities. When we do nothing in the name of “not taking sides” or because we appeal to the concept of being “innocent until proven guilty”, the implicit message we broadcast to those surviving oppression is that any claims of abusive behaviour are unimportant to the running of our spaces, that the claim might as well be a lie for all we care and that we have no interest in making our spaces welcoming to those who may feel threatened by a possibly abusive character.

By taking a focus on listening to the needs of the survivors of abuse and basing our actions upon empowering their choices, we are going a small step towards keeping the agency that assault can remove in their hands. We are also working to make sure that everyone that is coming into our spaces is being held to a high level of accountability, in terms of the required and prohibited behaviours that have been communicated in advance. We are often not able to say whether someone is innocent or guilty, instead we are looking at what actions are required to ensure everyone coming into our spaces feels safe.

Education & Socialisation

When we decide that we are anarchists, we are not suddenly and mystically absolved of all the ills and prejudices that society has instilled in us. It takes a lot of work to ensure that the ideals we profess and the actions we undertake are aligned. To this end, we can be open to criticism of our patterns of behaviour and listen to

those people and collectives who have been in a position to have survived abuse and want to guide our communities towards a better way of handling future problems. The clear creation of processes is part of that; discussion about incorporation of new ideas and situations where the process will be implemented, while imperfect, is needed to keep things fresh and reflexive. We should also look at the language we use and be open to changing it away from phrases that survivors advise are oppressive.

Through use of education, we can inoculate those coming into our spaces against undertaking or accepting abuse and on the correct way to act when a problem becomes apparent. When someone complains about our actions, we need to train ourselves to hold back the reflexive defence mechanisms society has taught us and instead take some time to critically evaluate the situation. We must recognise that it is not the place of the person complaining to educate us about our abusive behaviours; it is our duty to seek out forms of education and take the best practices learned back into our spaces. If someone who has suffered oppression first hand is in a position to offer commentary upon what form our processes should take, their advice will often be invaluable. Anarchist praxis has for a long time said that an oppressed group must lead their struggle; when someone warns you that you are acting in an abusive fashion then they are doing just that. We need to listen.

The Strawman Army

When matters of safer spaces come up, there is often a flood of arguments about why these concepts should be ignored. In my experience, those making these arguments are almost always white, able-bodied, cis-gendered men and not people from the groups being oppressed (coincidentally often the strongest voices calling for implementation of safer spaces processes). Most of these responses do not even address the actual safer spaces thinking being called for but instead attack the misconceptions and misunderstanding that an individual has heard second-hand or created in their own mind. We can all be guilty of this at one time or another, so I would like to take a moment to run through the common list of arguments against safer spaces policies, burning any straw men to the ground and clearing up any confusion or misunderstanding that has arisen:

“Isn’t this all just asking for trouble?”

Preparing for the problems that permeate the world over is not asking for trouble; it is making a realistic assessment of what could happen and putting in place sensible structures to handle abuse as it comes to light. If we see an increase in problems after putting processes in place and having them used in a responsible way, then we shouldn’t be asking if the structures created the problem but why we were not aware of these problems before they were put in place.

“We’ve never had a problem before!”

Correction: we have never been made aware of any problems before. This is possibly because we don’t appear to take matters any more seriously than the dominant culture, due to our lack of solid survivor-focused community accountability processes. Even if there have been no problems up to now, that isn’t to say one won’t happen in the future; if we have to work out what to do in the heat of the moment our actions will be worse than if we had a well thought out - if imperfect - policy.

“Safer spaces policies are flawed.”

Yes, they often are. This isn’t a reason not to have one. It is a reason to have one, and share best practice with others who are doing the same. We are trying to grow a better world in the shell of the old; not everything will be right first time. Not having a clear procedural policy is far more flawed.

“We are not responsible for others’ actions in this space.”

Correct – they are responsible for their actions, but you we responsible for making them aware of what is required to freely associate within our space. We are also responsible for our actions when someone else decides to break from these codes of conduct, and so it is best to have a guide to what we should be doing and to have practised our responses in advance.

“Surely everyone can all act like grown-ups...”

Grown-ups rape. Grown-ups fight. Grown-ups oppress and exploit and abuse. The problem isn't with people not acting like grown-ups; the problem is with our communities not having a different approach to the world around us. If we are serious about creating social revolution, then we need to work on the structures and organisational methods that entails, not throw them out.

“If there is a problem I'll deal with it. Simple.”

Sure, if there is a fight or violent assault happening right in front of one of us, it is something we will want to break up. I've yet to see a safer spaces process that doesn't allow for this in some way. However, if by dealing with the problem we are further removing the agency from the survivor, then we are not causing social change but becoming another facet of the problem. Also without a process to rely on, others will be forced to take this same line of reasoning and take direct action to remove those seen as unsafe from our spaces.

“We're all equal here already.”

Lifestylists putting their fingers in their ears can just bog right off. Please. Their communes are rife with sexual abuse and informal hierarchies of oppression. In fact, our radical spaces can be worse than the dominant society, because we can frown on survivors who feel the need to involve the state. Shame on those who

feel this is acceptable: to malign someone for engaging with state services which, at present, we cannot provide ourselves. By pretending that we have magically left the problems of the world behind, we simply doom ourselves to repeat its mistakes over. What is needed is acknowledgement of the problematic behaviours we have been taught and an effort to listen to those who have been oppressed as to what is required to solve problems in our communities.

“By excluding someone you are restricting another's freedom.”

Known abusers being allowed into our spaces is exclusionary of others – by making no choice and taking no action when matters of abuse are raised, we are in fact making the choice to enforce our dominant society and back the abuser.

“This isn't anarchism.”

I would argue that this is part of the prefiguration of free association which is one of the very strongest concepts within anarchism. It is the structured move away from a society based upon conceptions of state-imposed law. It is a directly democratic non-hierarchical means of acting within our communities. If this isn't anarchism then what is?

“Why did no one tell me about these problems before?”

Implicit in this question is the idea that if someone doesn't see it with their own eyes it may be a

lie. People in an oppressed group may not want to share their oppression with everyone; they may not feel safe doing so. By putting in place these structures we are not only saying we are safe to approach but that we are willing to leave the reigns of the struggle in the hands of those affected. See also the response to claiming to not having any problems before.

“What if someone gets falsely accused?”

Well, first up, thanks to the response that is normally received, false accusations of rape or sexual assault are rare. But let's humour this for a minute - a case of sexual assault is reported and we have two options being put on the table for how to handle it, each with a downside. The first is a system where we focus on the survivor making the claim and put in place structures that protect the community as a whole. The downside of this is that we may inconvenience or exclude one individual while we look into actions that may lead to them re-integrating with the community. The second approach means that in lieu of definitive proof, we just let things carry on as normal. The downside here is that a likely predatory or abusive individual is allowed free reign within our spaces, while those who feel unsafe are driven away. If we go for option two after thinking that over then well done – we're all arseholes.

“We aren't equipped for this. Some of these things are just too complex for us to handle.”

I agree some problems will be too big for us to effectively handle. In other instances the survivor may not have trust in our structures and will call upon the aid of the state. By putting the focus on the needs of the survivor we should also be supporting them in times where they feel the need to involve the police in these matters. They have the biggest gang in town, and all the good-will and solidarity in the world may not provide what a survivor of abuse requires. Support and respect a survivor in this choice. One day we will feel ready to deal with these problems and others will feel ready to put their faith in us to do so; let's start small and work our way up.

“Who are we to determine guilt? Doesn't this unfairly place blame on the accused perpetrator?”

In most cases we don't determine guilt or innocence – we simply don't have the means or knowledge to do that. What we are able to do is act in a way that ensures that our spaces are made safer for everyone who wishes to use them. I see this as the responsibility that comes with opening up a space for others to use.

“Isn't this just a set of rules that will eventually be broken?”

No. The expected behaviour may be the most widely read and distributed part of the policy, but it is far from the bulk of it; an organised safer space also includes the processes which will be used to guide any report of abuse.

(Just for the record, every single

one of those comments has been presented to me in all seriousness, often by otherwise sound comrades)

Towards a Future of Transformative Justice

The practice of organised safer space is not something that has been developed in an isolated theoretical bubble. It has come about through thousands of groups looking at ways to explain the problems they have worked on solving in their own communities and then spread the best practices they could on to others. Seminal in this work was “Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies” by a collective of women of colour from Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA). The ideas outlined in this work can be seen to be that basis for much of what is going into action throughout our social centres, bookfairs, groups and internet forums today. Safer spaces collectives have sprung up to provide advice and help to other groups around about them. Organisations that do not demonstrate that they are taking the problems of oppressed groups seriously are likely to find that they will be boycotted, sidelined or unable to grow beyond a mainly white, mainly able-bodied, mainly straight, mainly cis-gendered, mainly male audience, as those providing spaces that do lend the support being requested, rise up to the challenge and take their place.

While the initial aim of safer spaces processes is to provide survivor-led community ac-

countability, we know that a lot of the paths we take will have to be corrected and refined as we go. As we learn from these mistakes, our theory can become better at reflecting the realities of oppression and abuse and understanding how it works. As these theories become better, the structures we build from them will also be better suited to responding to oppression, in a strong and resilient fashion. Organised safer space is not a magical land, perfect in every way. We need to be aware that pitfalls could form from our thinking and acknowledge any unexpected difficulties before we can overcome them.

As this cycle of improved theory based on action and improved action based on theory, this leadership of ideas, carries on, we will be able to move beyond simply protecting our communities and begin taking steps towards implementing a form of justice that can someday reintegrate perpetrators of abuse back into our spaces. While the processes and requirements that our communities and, more importantly, the survivors of abuse require may not always be met within a lifetime, we should not close the door automatically. As was mentioned before, perpetrators of the most horrific acts in our society are not usually wild beasts or monsters; they are humans, and as anarchists we should look towards their well-being, just never at the expense of another.

Teddy bears and Anarchy: Political Prisoners, Freedom of Speech & State Repression in Europe's Last Dictatorship

On 24th March, despite the frost, lack of publicity and preventive arrests of opposition activists in the days before the protest, about 2,000 people marched through the centre of the Belarusian capital, Minsk. Many participants had portraits of arrested anarchists Dzmitry Dashkevich, Mikalaj Statkevich, Mikalaj Autukovich and Ales Bialatski.

They were commemorating Freedom Day, the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of the first, short-lived independent Belarusian state. State special forces detained demonstrators who were carrying portraits of political prisoners; activists say about ten opposition supporters and independent journalists were detained during a protest march. Several activists were arrested on the eve of the action, and there were detentions in other regions too where protests had not been granted permission (in Belarus gathering without a permit is illegal). This is just the latest episode in a long history of state repression, forced labour and blocks on freedom of speech in the country which is referred to as "Europe's last dictatorship".

Belarusian anti-authoritarian activists; Ihar Alinevich, Mikalai Dziadok, Artsiom Prakapenka, Pavel Syramolatau, Aliaksandr Frantskievich, Jauhen Vas'kovich were sentenced to three to eight years in prison for a series of attacks on state and capital sym-

bols. In October 2011 they were amongst 350 people acknowledged as 'political prisoners' by rights-watch organisations. This improved their chances to be freed, as the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, faces pressure from the EU to free all political prisoners. Lukashenko has stated that he will free only those who write a petition for pardon, admitting their guilt and asking him personally for mercy.

and gaps in the receipt of letters, solitary confinement, transfer to a penal facility with a 'special regime'.

The anarchist federations that met together at the IAF Congress in St. Imier, Switzerland strongly oppose the fact that our comrades are now being traded for benefits from the EU and condemn the pressure that they have been experiencing. We call on everybody to protest against



President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko

Five of the remaining imprisoned activists have refused to sign, whilst another signed it under pressure but remains in prison. All the remaining 'political prisoners' are under pressure from the prison authorities to sign. Methods to attempt to force them to do so include; transfers to other penal institutions, preventing food supplies coming in, preventing and limiting visits from relatives, denying phone calls, delays

these tortures and demand the immediate liberation of all political prisoners of Belarus, including anarchists and democracy campaigners.

More recently, despite the welcome release of Pavel Syramolatau in September 2012, 5 comrades supported by the Anarchist Black Cross are still in Belarusian jails facing years of incarceration since being convicted of a range of crimes in 2011.



Artsiom Prakapenka was sent down for an attack on the KGB headquarters in Bobruisk, in solidarity with anarchists arrested in 2010. He faces 7 years.

Jauhen Vaskovich faces the same, being convicted of the same crime.

Ihar Alinevich faces 8 years, convicted of attacking the Russian embassy in Minsk in solidarity with Russian anarchists arrested in the high-profile Khimki case. He was also convicted of arson at the Belarusbank and attack on the 'Shangri La' casino. He denies all of these charges but was kidnapped by plain clothed cops when in Moscow and extradited to Belarus illegally. He was also sentenced for participation in an anti-militarist demonstration near the headquarters of the General Staff in Minsk.

Aliaksandr Frantskievich was sentenced to three years for participation in an attack on the (state controlled) Trade Union Federation building and for computer hacking. Despite having serious health problems he is still being held in a pre-trial facility.

Mikalai Dziadok was also found

guilty of the attacks on the 'Shangri La' and trade union building, and participation in the anti-militarist demo, and was sentenced to 4.5 years after being held illegally. He too denies charges against him.

The criminal damage for which these comrades were sentenced amounts to only a few hundred dollars in each case. They are being in especially harsh conditions, reflective of their noncompliance.

These convictions form part of an ideologically driven repression of anarchists in Belarus. They follow the revitalisation of Belarusian anarchism in the past few years. Unlike in some other ex-Soviet Union countries and other modern dictatorships, anarchists do not form a minor part of a dissident prison population consisting of the usual pro-democracy and anti-corruption activists. They in fact make up just under half of the 'political' prisoners in Belarus. This is partly because it is possible to have sentences revoked if you admit your guilt and write to the state asking forgiveness, which the five will not do.

The Belarusian ABC has campaigned consistently for them

to be released and, in the immediate term, for them to be allowed visits, medication, letters and literature, and raises money for solicitors' fees and to buy the comrades' food. Supported by the International of Anarchist Federations (IFA-IAF) they have recently completed a tour of France, Italy, Germany, Spain and UK, to raise awareness and spark further solidarity. The latter have a good chance of success because Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko has expressed a desire for the country to be allowed to join the E.U. There are rumours that this may be considered if human rights in the country are addressed.

For More information and to Help visit the Belarus ABC and Anarchist Federation websites



The Idea of the Commune in Anarchist Practice

“The basic social and economic cell of the anarchist society is the free, independent commune”. (A. Grachev, quoted by Paul Avrich, The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution).

“The communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself. They will trust the free organization of food supply and production to free groups of workers which will federate with like groups in other cities and villages not through the medium of a communal parliament but directly, to accomplish their aim”. (Kropotkin, The Paris Commune).

Anarchist communism developed from the workers movement, within the first mass organisation of the working class, the First International or International Workers Association. It had its roots in the communist current that had developed during the French Revolution, with Babeuf and Sylvain Marechal, and then with the communist banquets of Belleville, a working class neighbourhood of Paris in 1840, and then with Cabet and Wilhelm Weitling. In cross-pollination with the libertarian current that emerged among the most advanced French workers in the First International, themselves in contact with the Russian Bakunin who had developed similar ideas to them, it mutated into the idea

of anarchist communism, which appears to have simultaneously emerged among French exiles in Switzerland, within the Swiss Jura Federation of the First International itself, and in the Italian section of the International. French workers like Dumartheray and Italian intellectuals like Covelli appear to have assisted in its birth, but it was eagerly taken up by those who had been close to Bakunin in the International, people like Malatesta, Costa, Cafiero and Brousse, by Elisee Reclus and by latecomers like Kropotkin. This development would most likely have happened anyway, but it was the epochal events of the Paris Commune of 1871 that really left their mark on the birth of anarchist communism as an idea. The Paris Commune meant different things to Marx and his followers than to the current that had begun to define itself as anarchist. To the first current it meant the worker’s state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. To the latter it meant free federation of a system of communes and the abolition of State and Government. Kropotkin was well aware of the shortcomings of the Paris Commune, writing:

“The Commune of 1871 could not be any more than a first sketch. Born at the end of a war, surrounded by two armies ready to give a hand in crushing the people, it dared not declare itself openly socialist and proceeded neither to the expropriation of capital nor to the organization of

work nor even to a general inventory of the city’s resources. Nor did it break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it adumbrated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of Communes. But it is certain that if the Commune of Paris had lived a few months longer, the strength of events would have forced it towards these two revolutions.” (Kropotkin, Words of a Rebel).

In the article he wrote on the Paris Commune in 1880, Kropotkin expands on the concept of the commune as the essential and basic unit of the social revolution, in a characteristically optimistic fashion:

“The next rising of communes will not be merely a “communal” movement. Those who still think that independent, local self-governing bodies must be first established and that these must try to make economic reforms within their own localities are being carried along by the further development of the popular spirit, at least in France. The communes of the next revolution will proclaim and establish their independence by direct socialist revolutionary action, abolishing private property. When the revolutionary situation ripens, which may happen any day, and governments are swept away by the people, when the bourgeois camp, which only exists

by state protection, is thus thrown into disorder, the insurgent people will not wait until some new government decrees, in its marvellous wisdom, a few economic reforms.

They will not wait to expropriate the holders of social capital by a decree, which necessarily would remain a dead letter if not accomplished in fact by the workers



themselves. They will take possession on the spot and establish their rights by utilising it without delay. They will organise themselves in the workshops to continue the work, but what they will produce will be what is wanted by the masses, not what gives the highest profit to employers. They will exchange their hovels for healthy dwellings in the houses of the rich; they will organize themselves to turn to immediate use the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the bourgeoisie”.

Paul Brousse had dwelt on the ideas of the Commune as the essential unit of the revolution in an earlier number of articles in 1873, called *Le Socialisme Pratique* (Practical Socialism). He saw the Commune as the “vehicle of revolution”. The Commune, of course, was already the basic unit of French governmental administration but increasingly became

to be used in a different sense by anarchists. So the Communes on a local level would be seized through revolution involving the majority of the working class, according to Brousse. “The autonomous Commune, there you have the means, but not the ends”, that being a far sweeping revolution. At the annual Congress of the Jura Federation in 1875, the anarchist Schwitzguelbel advanced the idea of the Federation of Communes, contrasting it with the idea of the workers’ State. With these ideas Brousse, Schwitzguelbel and Kropotkin were expanding on the statement of

Bakunin who in his writing on the Paris Commune proclaimed: “I believe that equality must be established in the world by the spontaneous organisation of labour and the collective ownership of property by freely organised producers’ associations and by the equally spontaneous federation of communes, to replace the domineering paternalistic State.” Thus, whilst the organisation of workers within the workplaces always remained a major concern of the anarchists, certainly from it developing as a current within the First International and carrying on with the establishment of libertarian workers’ organisation in Spain and other countries as a direct consequence of developments within the International, the idea of the Commune as the revolutionary vehicle was the central concern of those anarchists. This communal idea was seen as the most viable way of organising the whole of the oppressed and not just in the workplaces. It would be the means of expression of the mass of the oppressed, whether workers in large or small factories, women, the unemployed, the youth, the old, and it would as be as efficacious in the countryside among the peasantry and the agrarian workers as it would be among the urban masses. The organisation of workers in the workplace was seen as an extremely valuable adjunct to that, but it was not as yet seen as a substitute for the idea of the Commune. The idea of the Commune meant obviously a communal organisation of life which would unite the interests of the mass of the working class, not just those sections actually employed in factories and workshops. In his *Ideas on Social Organisation* written in 1876, the

close friend of Bakunin, James Guillaume expanded on the nature of communal organisation in both countryside and city. The idea of the Commune met with approval at the 1880 congress of the Jura Federation, which drafted a statement including the following: "The ideas set out regarding the Commune are open to the interpretation that it is a matter of replacing the current form of State with a more restricted form, to wit, the Commune. We seek the elimination of every form of State, general or restricted, and the Commune is, as far as we are concerned, only the synthetic expression of the organic form of free human associations."

In another document drafted at the same congress the functions of the Commune were defined:

"What are to be the powers of the Commune? Upkeep of all social wealth; monitoring usage of various capital elements-subsoil, land, buildings, tools and raw materials- by the trades bodies; oversight of labour organisation, insofar as general interests are concerned; organising exchange and, eventually, distribution and consumption of products; maintenance of highways, buildings, thoroughfares and public gardens; organising insurance against all accidents; health service; security service; local statistics; organising the maintenance, training and education of children; sponsoring the arts, sciences, discoveries and applications. We also want this local life in these different spheres of activity to be free, like the organisation of a trade; free organisation of individuals, groups and neighbourhoods alike, to meet the various local services we have

enumerated."

Whilst the idea of anarchist communism and the Federation of Communes as the principal revolutionary vehicle remained central to anarchist ideas in the 1880s, in other ways the anarchist movement made a number of serious mistakes, not least those originally advanced by those like Kropotkin and others from the days of the First International. These erroneous ideas were engendered by the following

1. The climate of repression reigning throughout Europe and the United States
2. The bullying tactics used by social democrats like Jaures, Hyndman, Millerand, Bebel, Liebknecht and Eleanor Marx to physically exclude anarchists and libertarian socialists from the Socialist Congresses of the 1880s.
3. An increasingly narrow interpretation of the idea and tactic of Propaganda by the Deed. Originally used to mean exemplary action by a small group of revolutionaries to illustrate tactics of direct action and/or spark revolutionary movements in a situation that was ripe for revolution (as seen by anarchists in southern Italy for example), it soon came to mean attentats and assassinations of individual members of the ruling classes, whether they be from the monarchy or from government
4. A move away from the organisation developed in the International towards small and sometimes secret groups organised through affinity of friendship and political conviction.

This created isolation from the mass of the working class (though it should be emphasised that the bulk of the anarchist movement at that time was composed of advanced workers). Thus Kropotkin could say in 1880: "Permanent revolt in speech, writing, by the dagger and the gun, or by dynamite...anything suits us that is alien to legality", although he always dissociated himself from the extremely narrow definition by Brousse of the idea of propaganda by the deed as defined as individual acts of terrorism. In addition he is referring not just to the conditions prevailing in Western Europe but those within the autocratic regime of Tsarist Russia where different tactics might be called for. Whatever, in the long run these concepts brought down further repression on the anarchist movement, with the execution and imprisonment and exile of many of the most courageous militants. Kropotkin was able to see the dead end of isolation that the anarchist movement was marching into and had the presence of mind to make various corrective statements.

Kropotkin was to pen a series of articles in 1890 where he stated "that one must be with the people, who no longer want isolated acts, but want men (sic) of action inside their ranks". He cautioned against "the illusion that one can defeat the coalition of exploiters with a few pounds of explosives" and proposed a turn to agitation in mass movements.

It was in response, on the one hand, to the trade unions under the tutelage of parliamentarian and legalistic social democratic parties, and on the other to the small anarchist affinity group

prone to attentats that a new tendency arose within the anarchist movement. This was anarcho-syndicalism, as pioneered by French activists like Pelloutier and Monatte.

Kropotkin himself pointed out that the strategy of agitating among associations of workers based in the workplace went back to some of the tactics used by Bakuninists within the First international, in Switzerland, Italy and Spain, and traced the birth of French anarcho-syndicalism back to Bakuninist tactics.

Anarcho-syndicalist unions were seen as operating in two ways, on one hand defending the interests of the workers in the here and now, through fighting for better pay and conditions, and on the other hand providing the organisation for a coming free society. As one of the chief propagandists of anarcho-syndicalism, Rudolf Rocker, put it: "According to the syndicalist view, the trade union, the syndicate, is the unified organisation of labour and has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life after the pattern of socialism" (Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism).

One of the key concepts of anarcho-syndicalism, apart from anti-parliamentarism and direct action, was the General Strike. This moved from being one weapon among several that the working class could use both in everyday struggle and in times of revolutionary upheaval, to the main means of bringing about the social revolution and the ensu-

ing free society. Indeed, it can be seen that it became a key plank in the programme of the German anarcho-syndicalist Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschland (FAUD) as a substitute for insurrection and armed revolution and as a direct result of the defeat of the German Revolution of 1918. In fact, a specifically pacifist discourse around the idea of the General Strike was pushed by the main leading lights within the FAUD like Rocker, although it had its internal opponents like Karl Roche and among the youth, who refused to reject the use of revolutionary violence.

Thus, to a lesser or greater extent within the different anarcho-syndicalist organisations, and according to local conditions, the General Strike came to be seen as a substitute for insurrection and head on conflict with the State, whereas the idea of the Commune was always intimately associated with revolutionary upheaval.

Kropotkin, Malatesta and other veterans of the anarchist movement recognized the potential of anarcho-syndicalist unions in organising workers and in seizing the means of production. On the other hand they were wary about the dangers of reformism within the syndicalist movement. Kropotkin recognised that: "Since the great struggle for which we prepare ourselves, is an essentially economic struggle, it is on the economic ground that our agitation has to take place". However whilst welcoming such organisation he put equal emphasis on the idea of the Commune. Saying "It is necessarily under the banner of the independence of the municipal and agricultural communes

that the next revolutions will be made. It is also in the independent communes that socialist tendencies are inevitably going to appear. It is there that the first outlines of the new society will be sketched out..."

At the international anarchist congress of 1907 in Amsterdam, Pierre Monatte argued that syndicalism was "sufficient unto itself". Malatesta responded that whilst he had always been involved with working class politics such struggles were a means to an end, and that to see the general strike as a "panacea for all ills" was "pure utopia". Malatesta agreed that the anarchist movement had, in the decade of the 1880s, isolated itself from the working class movement, but now it was going to another extreme and losing itself in a syndicalist movement open to reformism, bureaucratisation and opportunism. Malatesta attacked the idea of the General Strike in these terms:

"Now, let us move on to the general strike. As far as I am concerned, I accept the principle and promote it as much as I can, and have done so for several years. The general strike has always struck me as an excellent means to set off the social revolution. However, let us take care to avoid falling under the dangerous illusion that the general strike can make the revolution superfluous. We are expected to believe that by suddenly halting production the workers will starve the bourgeoisie into submission within a few days. Personally speaking, I can think of nothing more absurd. The first to starve to death during a general strike will not be the bourgeoisie who have all the accumulated produce at their dis-

posal, but the workers, who only have their labour to live on.

“The general strike as it is described to us is a pure utopia. Either the workers, starving after three days of striking, will go back to work with his tail between his legs and we add yet another defeat to the list, or he will decide to take the products into his own hands by force. And who will try to stop him? Soldiers, gendarmes, the bourgeoisie itself, and the whole matter will be necessarily decided with rifles and bombs. It will be an insurrection and victory will lie with the strongest.

“So then, let us prepare for this inevitable insurrection instead of limiting ourselves to exalting the general strike as if it were a panacea for all evils.”

Jean Grave was to add that “syndicalism can- and must –be self-sufficient in its struggle against exploitation by the employers, but it cannot pretend to be able to solve the social problem by itself”.

Murray Bookchin had deeply flawed criticisms of anarcho-syndicalism, in the way he interpreted the proletariat in a narrow way as the industrial working class. He often hurled the accusation of “vulgar Marxism” at his opponents, when he was just as guilty of that offence in his understanding of what constitutes the proletariat. However sometimes his salvos hit home as can partially be seen in the following:

“The authentic locus of anarchists in the past was the commune or municipality, not the factory, which was generally conceived as only part of a broader communal structure, not its decisive compo-

nent. Syndicalism, to the extent that it narrowed this broader outlook by singling out the proletariat and its industrial environment as its locus, also crucially narrowed the more sweeping social and moral landscape that traditional anarchism had created. In large part this ideological retreat reflected the rise of the factory system in the closing years of the last century in France and Spain, but it also echoed the ascendancy of a particularly vulgar form of economistic Marxism (Marx, to his credit, did not place much stock in trade unionism), to which many naive anarchists and non-political trade unionists succumbed. After the Revolution by Abad de Santillan, one of the movers and shakers of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, reflects this shift toward a pragmatic economism in such a way that makes his views almost indistinguishable from those of the Spanish socialists - and, of course, that brought him into collusion with the Catalan government, literally one of the grave-diggers of Spanish anarchism.” (Deep Ecology, Anarcho-Syndicalism and the future of Anarchist Thought).

Bookchin goes on to make the sweeping and ludicrous statement that “Syndicalism - be it anarcho-syndicalism or its less libertarian variants - has probably done more to denature the ethical content of anarchism than any other single factor in the history of the movement, apart from anarchism’s largely marginal and ineffectual individualist tendencies.” Bookchin’s lack of judgement in conflating the class struggle anarchist politics of anarcho-syndicalism with the deeply destructive individualist anarchist current does him no favours. At

a time when clarity of thought is what was needed in reconstructing a serious revolutionary anarchist politics, Bookchin’s powers of reason failed. His adventures with libertarian municipalism, and then his renunciation of anarchism and his adoption of “communalism” tells against him on this score. Bookchin is correct in his understanding of the



de-emphasising of the idea of the Commune, but on much else he is off the mark. One of his more lucid works, *The Spanish Anarchists 1868-1936*, deals with greater precision on syndicalism:

“Syndicalism, to be sure, has many shortcomings, but its Marxian critics were no position to point them out because they were shared by Socialist parties as well. In modelling themselves structurally on the bourgeois economy, the syndicalist unions tended to become the organisational counterparts of the very centralized apparatus they professed to oppose. By pleading the need to deal effectively with the tightly knit bourgeoisie and state machinery, reformist leaders in

syndicalist unions often had little difficulty in shifting organisational control from the bottom to the top. Many older anarchists were mindful of these dangers and felt uncomfortable with syndicalist doctrines. Errico Malatesta, fearing the emergence of a bureaucracy in the new union movement, warned that "the official is to the working class a danger only comparable to that provided by the parliamentarian; both lead to corruption and from corruption to death is but a short step". These Anarchists saw in syndicalism a shift in focus from the commune to the trade union, from all of the oppressed to the industrial proletariat alone, from the streets to the factories and, in emphasis at least, from insurrection to general strike."

So what of the idea of the Commune in the present period? Anarchist Communism was the principal current within anarchism between 1880 and 1920, and it remained so beyond that period in places like Bulgaria and Japan. The post-war revival of anarchism involved a resurrection of anarchist communist ideas, and of course it has been an advocate of the Idea of the Commune in the last few decades.

It seems that over the last year or so, the Idea of the Commune is being taken up by other groups and currents. We can see this in the recent statements of The Commune group, where they say on their Facebook page:

"The case for local communes: The focus shouldn't just be on a 'Party' and electoral politics. Vast numbers of people instinctively know that so-called 'representative' democracy is nothing of the

sort, but most, understandably, can't see any alternative. They know the system screws them every which way. Hence the danger of over-focusing on electoral politics is you come across as another group of wannabe's wanting power. In this pursuit of votes the temptation will be to moderate the message because of a hostile media, falling into the Syriza trap of looking to be a credible government presiding over a less harsh form of capitalism - a bit of nationalisation here & there, a bit of redistribution, but still capitalism.

"What is needed is to present an alternative system rather than an alternative party. That means building an alternative system now. Not vote for us who believe in an alternative system and when we get power, then we'll give it to you. Building an alternative system now is like the Occupy movement, or the structure of the IOPS website. It is direct democracy now. Giving people an equal say in decision-making now. Not another group of politicians, however well intentioned, separated from the people.

"We can do this through facebook. Already the Commune has local Commune groups, not just in Britain but also in places like Cairo. These can be opened up to all who want the common ownership of the means of production rather than the private ownership. The embryonic 21st century on-line Soviets, or councils, or assemblies, or whatever people want to call them. We've gone for the name communes after the Paris Commune of 1871. The hope is that as they attract enough people they meet regularly and become a parallel system of power eventu-

ally challenging and supplanting the capitalist political institutions. Being facebook, this can be done internationally and take on its own momentum."

It can be also seen in the recent meetings where Occupy London, International Organization for a Participatory Society, Anti-Capitalist initiative and various anarchists in the London area held "cross-movement" assemblies:

"The people's assembly model for organising and decision making was discussed. Most participants felt that the people's assembly model could help to facilitate new forms of social relations and organising. But it was also pointed out that assemblies may not always be appropriate, for example when working in communities with already established processes of their own. Here, some thought, perhaps introducing participatory / horizontal processes gradually into already existing community forums may be a more conducive way of engaging practically and effectively in grassroots struggles, without fetishising certain methods of coming to decisions.

"This led to participants questioning what practical outcomes could emerge from the "Becoming Catalysts" assemblies' space. After several proposals and much deliberation, we reached strong agreement that the "Becoming Catalysts" assemblies had the potential to bring different groups together, share information on lessons learned and organise support for local action, among other things."

Of course all of these developments involve consciously po-

litical groupings and there are problems with the politics of some of those involved. A number of grouplets meeting together is of little value unless real social movements and struggles can be related to. In this respect the developments in Barnet over the last year are interesting. Here locally based people fighting cuts built an effective alliance with activists from Occupy and others, using tactics of direct action. The local campaign rightly sees that the privatisation being pushed through by the Council, the attack on the NHS, the setting up of academies and free schools, and the attacks on postal workers and fire stations are interlinked.

The opportunity could exist for local assemblies, Communes, call them what you will, to develop in this time of increasing austerity and cuts. The danger always exists for sabotage or cooption by the Labour Party or by various vanguardist groups, but the strength of a movement can be gauged by how strenuously such moves are resisted. The much advertised Peoples' Assembly, with a leadership of Labour and Green Party MPs, trade union bureaucrats and leftist celebrities, backed by the likes of vanguardist outfits like the Coalition of Resistance etc, which holds a rally this summer, is a graphic example of what must be avoided at all costs.

In this time of greyness and media-peddled notions that nothing can be done to counter austerity, any developments towards direct decision making and attempts at new forms of organisation on the communal model should be encouraged. As anarchist communists we should engage in any such processes and not be afraid to engage with, cooperate and indeed debate with other currents and tendencies within what could be embryos of new forms of social organisation.

Review:

Platformism in Latin America:

The Uruguayan Example

The Federacion Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU): crisis, armed struggle and dictatorship, 1967-1985. Texts by Juan Carlos Mechoso, Jaime Prieto, Hugo Cores and others translated and edited by Paul Sharkey. 50 pages. Kate Sharpley Library. £3.00

The forerunner to the Anarchist Federation - The Libertarian Communist Discussion Group - was founded in 1985-6 in an attempt to renew the short lived tradition of Platformism that had developed in Britain in the early 1970s – the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, succeeded by the Anarchist Workers Association and then the Libertarian Communist Group and the Anarchist Communist Association. The evolution of the LCDG into the Anarchist Communist Federation, which then became today's Anarchist Federation, involved a critique of Platformism. The

current of Platformism within international anarchism is based on The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists. The 1926 text drafted by Russian and Ukrainian and Polish anarchists

was an attempt to understand why the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist movements met with failure in the Russian Revolution of 1917. For us three main theses developed in the Platform



and supported by Platformism remain relevant for the Anarchist Federation of today. They can be summed up as Federalism, Collective Responsibility and Tactical and Theoretical Unity. These should be seen as the building blocks of a specific anarchist communist organisation, something else that was insisted upon by the Platform. However the Anarchist Federation was clear that its political positions could not be solely based on insights gained in the 1920s. In tandem with this was awareness of the need to incorporate other theoretical gains and innovations developed in the decades since 1926. In addition the AF was critical of the practice and theoretical evolution of at least some of the groups and organisations that were or are part of the actually existing Platformist current.

The Uruguayan experience documented in this pamphlet illustrates the trajectory that one such Platformist group took. The longest existing and perhaps strongest Platformist organisation in Latin America is the Federacion Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU) of Uruguay. This pamphlet describes a key period in its existence; one that was marked by the death of a large number of its militants, shot down or tortured to death by the dictatorship that had emerged in Uruguay. Just as important, it sketches out the direction that the FAU took in its accommodation to Stalinism, towards the politics of a broad front and indeed to the development of a political party.

Unlike other countries in South America, Uruguay was known as a stronghold of bourgeois democracy and social reform. Under its President Battle y Ordonez,

a whole raft of legislation was introduced in the mid 1910s. He separated Church from State, banned crucifixes in hospitals, removed references to God and the Bible from public oaths, gave widespread rights to unions and political parties and organisations, brought in the eight hour day and universal suffrage, introduced unemployment benefits, legalised divorce, created more high schools, promised and practiced no residency laws against exiled anarchists and other radicals, opened universities to women, led a campaign to take away the control of industry and



land from foreign capitalists (the British capitalists had huge influence in Uruguay) and nationalised private monopolies. This disoriented some elements within the fairly strong anarchist movement in Uruguay.

Between 1948 and 1954 the working class in Uruguay was comparatively well off, with good conditions and pay, in a country presided over by a ruling class with a liberal outlook. This all changed between 1955 and 1959, with an increasing cost of living. Inflation began to rise sharply and strike waves broke out; a wage

freeze was introduced. The Army broke strikes, and emergency laws were introduced. The excuse for this was the supposed threat from the leftist guerillas of the Tupamaros but in reality to repress the agitation in the workplaces. The FAU was set up in 1956. Militants within it like Juan Carlos Mechoso began to agitate for the creation of a specific anarchist organization, as opposed to the anarcho-syndicalists who thought that work in the unions was enough to bring out radical social change. At first the FAU had been an alliance of different anarchist currents; from the anarcho-syndicalists through to those who believed in setting up anarchist communities in the here and now and traditional anarchist communists on to the group around Mechoso, Gerardo Gatti and Leon Duarte.

Controversy had already arisen in the international movement over the increasingly reformist ideas of Rudolf Rocker. One of the pioneers of anarcho-syndicalism, he had taken a principled stand against the First World War and was interned in England as a result. However by 1945, after his support for the Allies in WW2, Rocker began to reject class-based notions of anarchism, moving in an increasingly liberal direction. In this he had the support of other German anarchists like Augustin Souchy and elements within the Spanish CNT in exile like Abad de Santillan. Nevertheless it was people like Souchy who adopted a critical approach to the Cuban Revolution, along with the Cuban anarchists themselves, who directly experienced repression from the Castro regime. Within the FAU itself, there was intense debate over the Castro regime between 1961 and



1965, with Mechoso, Gatti and co. supporting the Cuban regime. This led to a split in the FAU in late 1963 with the Gatti/Duarte/Mechoso faction retaining the FAU name and symbols, affirming the class struggle nature of anarchism but also giving critical support to Cuba. The FAU now began to incorporate elements from different currents of Marxism, calling for a synthesis between Marxism and anarchism, whilst referring to Poulantzas and Althusser and later Gramsci. It increasingly broke with the anarcho-syndicalists by moving from the need for a specific anarchist organization, to talk of a Party. It set up the Student-Worker Resistance (ROE), which was meant to be a broad class struggle front and began to seek out alliances with the Tupamaros and other leftists. As a result many students influenced by 'revolutionary Marxism' began to join the ROE, accelerating the move away from anarchism. The writings of Che Guevara became popular and influential within this broad movement. The FAU established its own armed wing, OPR-33, in the late 1960s.

Juan María Bordaberry came to power in 1971 and gave increasing powers to the Army in the

fight against the Tupamaros. In 1973 political parties were banned, congress was closed down, public meetings were banned and constitutional rights were suspended. The employers dropped their liberal outlook and banned the National Workers' Convention (CNT), which federated many unions, when it called a general strike. Wages were driven down by 35% and inflation rose by 80%.

There was an increasing spiral of repression and counter-attack by the FAU/OPR-33 and many militants lost their lives in gun battles. By 1974 the US security forces launched Operation Condor in collaboration with the dictatorships now reigning in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay. Uruguayan and Argentinian security forces worked in tandem to kidnap FAU militants and many were imprisoned in a torture camp, where after many months of terrible agonies, they were murdered. Gatti, Duarte and Alberto Mechoso (Juan Carlos's brother) were among those murdered. OPR-33 was seen as to be firmly under the control of the FAU and was meant to relate its actions to the workers movement in Uruguay itself. However, in the final analysis its actions had the same effect as those armed

groups influenced by Castroism. FAU/OPR-33 lost a large number of militants. At the same time Gatti had pioneered the setting up of the People's Victory Party (PVP) whilst in exile in Buenos Aires in 1975, along with Ruben Prieto, Pablo Anzalone and others. The PVP was a heterodox mixture of anarchism and Castroism/Guevarism.

The deaths of Gatti and co accelerated the move of the PVP away from anarchism. It participated in the creation of the Broad Front-Frente Amplio – a coalition of over a dozen political groupings as well as unions and community groups and in 1980 began to take part in its electoral activities. Today it is just another leftist parliamentary party.

What was left of the FAU re-established its structures in 1986 after the fall of the dictatorship. It remains active in work in the unions and the neighbourhoods. As one French observer noted: "The FAU, like a number of other organisations, fell headlong into the political cracks opened up by the Cuban revolution and backed it for years, even if it had become plain that that revolution was turning into a bureaucratic dictatorship and even after Cuban

anarchists had been rounded up and executed...The FAU eventually distanced itself from that betrayed revolution and withdrew its support from it, though it does not appear to mean that it is prepared to risk blunt criticism of the current Cuban regime". This observer notes a sympathy from the leftist FARC guerillas in Colombia and the Guevarist MRTA in Peru, putting the anti-imperialism of the FAU down as underpinning this sympathy "which is very probably bound up with a lack of critical information about such authoritarian movements".

The pamphlet raises a number of key questions

1. Why did a reformist current

develop within the international anarcho-syndicalist movement in the post-World War Two situation?

2. Why has Platformism as a current been prone to moving towards leftism? (uncritical support for Castroism, evolving into silence on the Cuban situation and unwillingness to openly attack the regime there, support for fronts with leftists like the ROE)

3. Why has Platformism been prone to a temptation towards the development of political parties and towards electoralism? (The PVP in Uruguay, the electoral adventure of the Federation Communiste Libertaire of France in 1956 etc)

These questions need to be looked at, examined, considered and debated in the present period. We need to learn from our mistakes, learn from them in a coherent way and incorporate them into a theory and practice that is informed by an analysis strengthened by a satisfactory answer to these questions. We need to strive for unity of all the libertarian forces, recognising our similarities and fighting for collective and unitary practice at both an international and regional level. At the same time we have to recognise our differences and encourage a debate that can overcome these differences if possible.

Anarchism in Latin America

The following is an adaptation of a the text of a presentation given by Nelson Mendez, member of the editorial collective of El Libertario, an anarchist paper and group in Venezuela, at the International Anarchist Congress at St Imier in Switzerland in August 2012

I'll try to give here, a comprehensive introduction to the history, characteristics and prospects of anarchism on our continent. For this, I will consider four historical moments:

1) The 19th century: its European origins and its implantation in Latin America

2) The first third of the 20th century: the rise of anarcho-syndicalism and the libertarian presence in social struggles, political dynamics and cultural and intellectual scene on the continent.

3) Its reflux and its virtual disappearance from the 1930s to the early 1990s.

4) From the end of the 20th century to the 21st century: hope for a resurgence, faced with the challenges of new realities and the test of the potential of the libertarian idea.

This timeline does not seek to establish the exact sequence of what happened in our countries, because circumstances were different in each of them. For this reason, the perspective must be adjusted to each specific context.

A major obstacle to the knowledge of anarchism on the continent is the silence imposed by the official historians, whether positivist, liberal or Marxist. Fortunately, there is a preceding text of extraordinary value; the preface entitled "Latin American Anarchism", written by Angel Cap-

pelletti in 1990, for the anthology Anarchism in Latin America. European origins and roots During the 1870s and the 1880s, whilst the Anti-Authoritarian International was being born, anarchism arrived in Latin America and gradually adapted and took root in this new reality. We must first of all bear in mind how large sectors of the oppressed identified the libertarian positions with egalitarian and collectivist traditions which, for many indigenous peoples, Aztec or Inca, were present before European imperialism and who for people of African descent were present before their enslavement.

The effort towards the "acclimatisation" of anarchism occurred very early. It was reflected in the "Escuela del Rayo y el Socialismo" in Mexico, Enrique Roig San Martin and the newspaper *El Productor* in Cuba, Manuel González Prada in Peru and the unrest in the Río de la Plata region, where

Uruguayan and Argentinean sections of the International were founded with a markedly anarchist orientation.

Anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian struggles.

With the 1900s came the birth of the FOA and then the FORA in Argentina, the FORU in Uruguay, the Operária Confederação Brasileira, the Federación Regional Obrera Paraguaya; indomitable libertarian union activity in Cuba and persistent illegal propaganda of the Mexican Liberal Party of Ricardo Flores Magon to organize workers. These were all signs that show how anarcho-syndicalism converted into the most popular expression (but not the only) of anarchist ideas and praxis in Latin America during the first third of the last century.

All official interpretations from the right and the authoritarian left have ignored, downplayed and distorted the deep traces of anarcho-syndicalism in the social history of Latin America. Cappelletti opposes himself to this based on documented references for each country, later expanded in quantity and quality through valuable and profound historical surveys. Some examples: *Biófilo Panclasta El Eterno Prisionero* (1992) by Colectivo Alas de Xue Colombia; *El anarquismo in Cuba* (2000) by Frank Fernández; *Magonismo: Utopia y revolución, 1910-1913* (2005) by Ruben Trejo; *Historia do anarquismo do Brasil* (2006-2009), two volumes compiled by Rafael Deminicis, Daniel Reis and Carlos Addor; *La Choleidad antiestatal. El movimiento en el anarcosindicalismo Obrero Boliviano* (2010) by Huascar Rodríguez; the content of web pages of the group JD Gómez Rojas of

Chile and the Anarchist Archives of Peru.

During the first decades of the 20th century and even before there was, in Latin America an explosion of experiments, tests and proposals to pave the way for the immediate construction of the free world proposed by Anarchism: self-managed cooperatives, solidarity and mutual aid funds, schools freed from ecclesiastical and State tutelage, experiences of community life, publishing efforts, non-profit, independent projects of cultural creation and dissemination. It is not surprising that a large number of artists and intellectuals felt attracted to a way of thinking and doing that proposed in lively manner, breaking the suffocating conservatism that governed society at the time.

At the dawn of the 20th century there developed on the continent an anarchist theory adapted to the specific features of our reality. Latin American Anarchism did not wait for the light to come from Europe, it gave new and coherent answers to questions such as oppression, racism and brutality suffered by peasants and indigenous peoples; the aggressive advance of external imperialist capitalism associated with the local semi-feudal reactionary cultural hegemony of the Catholic Church; the exploitation of women. It was to make a socio-political movement resolutely rational and modern that anarchism sought to achieve its objectives.

Decline and virtual disappearance

According to Cappelletti, there three reasons for the decline of Latin American anarchism from the 1930s and 1940s. I would add

a fourth, which complements them.

1. The authoritarian wave that swept through Latin America: Machado and Batista in Cuba, Vargas in Brazil, Uriburu in Argentina, Terra in Uruguay, et a sinister et cetera in other countries.
2. The foundation of the Communist Parties on the continent, and their relative growth (in some cases at the expense of anarchism) had much to do with the "revolutionary prestige" of the Soviet Union; which controlled and supported them in their role as the international instruments of state policy.
3. The emergence of populist nationalist currents (Apra in Peru, PRI in Mexico, Peronism, Acción Democrática in Venezuela, Batllism¹ in Uruguay, etc.) which, with the support of emerging agents of power, were able to spread a reformist pro-State vaguely patriotic ideology.
4. The defeat of the Spanish Revolution and its effects in terms of crisis and decline for Latin American anarchism.

The survival even of groups, publications and anarchist initiatives was difficult. Certainly, Latin American anarchism of the late 1930s to about 1990 has not disappeared but in too many places it seems to have disappeared without a trace or survived only through a few aged spokespeople of the idea. The arrival of a large number of Spanish exiles scattered across Latin America after 1939 could not change this trend. To make matters worse, Marxism-Leninism claimed in 1961 by the leaders of the insurrection that has been called the

Cuban Revolution appeared to many as the only way to carry out revolutionary and progressive changes in our continent; a faith claimed within branches of radical populist nationalism (e.g. MIR in Venezuela, Peru and Bolivia) or by Catholic grassroots activism, including liberation theology, which merged seamlessly with Marxism. Isolation meant that a part of the anarchist movement turned to an abstract of nostalgia for a glorious past, whilst another part of the movement advocated rapprochement with Marxism (e.g. refusing to criticize Fidel Castro, assuming the ambiguous discourse on "national liberation" and / or adopting Guevarist-militarist myths around the armed struggle).

Reasons for hope for a revival

The Soviet Union's collapse and failures of authoritarian Marxism in our countries have furnished "politically correct" alibis for all opportunism. With the collapse of the certainties in force during the previous decades, libertarian ideas and practices won a rehearing, if not showing an immediate growth. Some external influences made themselves felt sometimes, when it was clear that in the rest of the world, it was the libertarian camp which provided the revival of social struggles, collective organization to bypass the obsolete Leninist model, or the definition of revolutionary proposals. Today, throughout Latin America, a growing number of activists, young critics, women, indigenous people, students, workers and intellectually curious people are coming to anarchism with an unprecedented interest. Around 1995-1996, became a means of contact, exchange and dissemination of anarchism as it favours models of horizontal relations,

of non-hierarchical coordination and of action through networks, always anarchist practices.

The past twenty years have seen what I would call at a pinch the return of Latin American anarchism: the growth of periodical publications (printed as well as virtual); renewed efforts to distribute libertarian books and pamphlets, whether classic or recent; the continuing birth of collectives and spaces of libertarian inspiration (even in areas with no previous anarchist presence); many creative expressions of cyber activism; the rebirth of anarchist activism, symbols and proposals in the social struggle; direct and specific interventions in the most diverse cultural areas, art, theatre, music, literature and socio-historical thought and research. All this somehow evokes the libertarian continental panorama of a century ago but it lacks the primacy of approach and of anarcho-syndicalist action that existed at that time.

Present difficulties

It would be a disaster for our movement if it could not define the autonomous course that was our strength in the past; it must avoid isolation and not dilute its objectives. Since the 1930s and 1940s, Latin American anarchism faces a challenge: how to oppose the demagogic nationalist populism, whose varieties in mutation are still dominant players on the political scene? The current wave of "progressive governments" is the new mask of the old enemy, which it is vital to fight by giving appropriate, practical and theoretically coherent responses. As evidence of the urgency of this challenge, the confusion and persistent damage that anar-

chism has suffered for not having faced this, we are now stuck with "anarcho-Chavists" in Venezuela; as if the unfortunate parodies of "anarcho-Peronism" of "anarcho-Battlisme" in Uruguay, and "anarcho-Castroism" were not enough.

I emphasize that which I believe to be essential for the return of Anarchism to be firmly rooted: we must consolidate anarchy as a viable and constructive tool for autonomous social struggles today, in a revolutionary perspective. No doubt the current renaissance in Latin America has its roots in processes of mass culture such as punk, in efforts to revitalize an audience for libertarian ideas and in political processes such as the emergence of the neo-Zapatistas since 1994 and the movement against globalization after Seattle in 1999. However, if these processes have subsequently been able to maintain themselves, it is because in many ways, they are in line with collective demands and conflicts. Although they are not as strong and broad as we would like them to be, these links exist and provide opportunities to us that would be unforgivable to miss. I share the assertion that anarchism will be social action or it will not be. To associate or subordinate such action to exemplary acts, to prophecy, to attempts at "days of rage" or "free lifestyle" is a pretext for isolating oneself in an anarchism turned towards purely intellectual pleasure or simply an aesthetic anarchism; it would be to condemn our idea to sterility and inertia.

1. See review here in Organise! of Kate Sharpley Library pamphlet on Uruguay.

Fighting for Ourselves: Anarcho-syndicalism and the class struggle.

Solidarity Federation. 2012. 121pp.

Since its publication in October of last year, *Fighting for Ourselves* has been the subject of much discussion and deserved interest in the broad libertarian left. The book constitutes the first major exposition of the political perspectives of the British section of the International Workers Association since *Winning the Class War*, their previous attempt at providing such an outline in 1991.

The book attempts to give an historical overview of the workers' movement, in what it describes as its 'mainstream' and 'radical' forms, before describing the phenomenon of 20th Century anarcho-syndicalism through the experience of three unions in Germany, Spain and Argentina. Indeed, the bulk of the book is taken up with history; only the last 17 pages focussing on present day anarcho-syndicalism and specifically the Solidarity Federation's (SolFed) strategy for moving from being a 'simple political propaganda organisation' to a 'revolutionary union' (p.94). The historical section contains justification for why the SolFed believe that their particular version of anarcho-syndicalism has both universal and particular (or local) application.

Before considering the historical precedents that have helped SolFed formulate its present perspectives, the book outlines its understanding of the nature of unionism itself, in the chapter 'The Mainstream Workers Movement'. At the centre of this is the



Book Reviews

notion of a difference between a union as simply an 'association of workers', which can take many forms, and what they describe as its 'representative' function. They argue that these two possible roles have become merged in the form of mass trade unions, which act as mediators between the membership and capital. This, it is argued, has tended to mirror the consciousness of the membership, which is not anti-capitalist.

Subsequently, the structure which proceeds from this representative role and which accepts the legitimacy of capitalism becomes a break on any potential rank and file initiative that should emerge. The bureaucratic and class collaborationist unions of the TUC are the result of this. The alternative offered is a union that maintains the associational form but does not involve itself in representation. In some senses, the SolFed

idea of what constitutes this associational unionism has parallels with the Anarchist Federation's espousal of Worker's Resistance Groups.

The book subsequently deals with 'radical currents' within the historic workers' movement that developed differing perspectives to the mainstream (social democratic or reformist) labour organisations: specifically anarchism, syndicalism and council communism. The discussion of anarchism, although relatively brief, is interesting and partially echoes the traditional anarcho-syndicalist criticisms of those anarchists who questioned the fusion of anarchism and syndicalism (the very meaning of anarcho-syndicalism, of course). Whilst considering the SolFed as within the anarchist or libertarian communist tradition, *Fighting for Ourselves* sees many faults within that tradition. Notable is a claimed 'lack of focus primarily on the labour movement' (p. 31) within the early anarchist communist movement. Presumably, this is a comment on the failure of anarchist communists such as Kropotkin to abandon the idea of the commune as the essential model of revolutionary transformation (see article elsewhere in this issue of *Organise!*) in favour of the workers' unions, but as this is not made explicit we cannot be sure.

Malatesta's well-known 1907 conflict with the revolutionary syndicalist Monatte is also discussed. In this, the former criticised the latter's belief that a politically neutral syndicalism alone could bring about social revolution. Malatesta also argued against establishing purely anarchist unions but for the necessity of anarchist

involvement in the labour movement. Although the authors dismiss this as an attempt to keep the anarchist movement 'pure', the international experience of those anarchists who do involve themselves in the labour movement without advocating the fusion of anarchism and unionism suggests their motivation is far from a fear of 'dirty hands'.

This section also looks at the



Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, the sadly controversial document published in 1926 by exiled Russian and Ukrainian anarchists, which argues for a specific anarchist communist organisation based on theoretical and tactical unity. The Platform informs the practice of both ourselves in the Anarchist Federation and others in the international anarchist movement, such as those around the website/network *Anarkismo*. Interestingly, *Fighting for Ourselves* does not reject the essential political premise of the Platform. This is certainly a welcome development from SolFed, who have historically tended to regard Platformism as a form of anarcho-Leninism. The authors rather focus on the attitude of the Platform to syndicalism. The Platform did not reject anarchist unions per se but,

written in a period where large syndicalist unions still played a significant part in the international labour movement, considered organised intervention in these as the priority for anarchists.

Fighting for Ourselves then turns to syndicalism itself, considering the first mass 'revolutionary' syndicalist union, the French CGT, and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The former's rapid growth and the relatively conciliatory approach of the French state and capital in the 1910s are used as an explanation of its transformation, from an ostensibly revolutionary union into one that would support the First World War. However, although anarchists and others of the extreme left were indeed swamped by the influx of hundreds of thousands of new members, the call to defend the French nation was supported by a majority of the union's militants – many anarchists included. The lesson that the book appears to take from the experience of the CGT is that its main failure was its 'apolitical' nature, which led to its rapid growth and therefore reformism.

From its brief outline of the rise and fall of the IWW, it is obvious that the SolFed perceive limitations in the tendency of the 'Wobblies' to look to create One Big Union and thereby potentially dilute the revolutionary small politics of its preamble. The IWW was (and indeed still is to some extent) eclectic in the makeup of its rank and file, with Marxists, anarchists, syndicalists and others working amongst a membership that was mostly politically unaligned and attracted to the union through its inclusive solidarity and effectiveness. However, it is also obvious that SolFed are influ-

enced by the Solidarity and Direct Unionism of the present day IWW in the United States and Canada, which we shall look at later.

If *Fighting for Ourselves* pleasantly surprises on the Platform, then its engagement with the experience of Council Communism is revelatory. It is stated that Council Communism – a form of anti-Leninist Marxism that emerged from the revolutionary upheavals in Germany in the period 1918-1923

the anarcho-syndicalist union is permanent and engages in workplace activity beyond the dissemination of propaganda, whereas Council Communist ‘unions’, of the 1920s and early 1930s, saw themselves as essentially temporary formations, bringing together convinced communists in workplaces for educational and propaganda purposes.

Finally in the historical section, the authors look at three anarcho-syndicalist antecedents they

learn from and perhaps adapt to contemporary circumstances. Certainly the three unions demonstrate definite diversity amongst historical anarcho-syndicalists.

The FORA was essentially a minority (though still mass) union of ideologically committed anti-industrialist anarchist communists engaged in a brutal struggle against semi-feudal bosses. The FAUD had been formed dur-



– arrived at ‘some similar political and organisational conclusions to anarchism and syndicalism’ (p.45), and empathy is expressed for the tendency within Council Communism that favoured a ‘unitary’ workers’ association that dispensed with any separate political organisation. However, whilst this seems to echo the anarcho-syndicalist idea of creating political-economic unions, the essential difference that *Fighting for Ourselves* claims is that

consider of particular importance to the development of their own vision of a ‘unitary’ or ‘political-economic’ unionism: the Regional Workers Federation of Argentina (FORA); the Free Workers Union of Germany (the FAUD) and the National Confederation of Labour of Spain (CNT). Whilst the authors state that they cannot ‘pluck’ any of those unions from history as a ‘ready-made blueprint’, they do see them providing models that modern anarcho-syndicalists can

ing the German revolution and constituted a small but vibrant part of both the libertarian left and the broader radical labour movement. The authors suggest that FAUD was greatly sustained during the decade following the final defeat of the German revolution through its cultural and political work, which if anything they underplay – as the union declined as an economic organisation it actually grew as a workers’ cultural-educational-social

association – until its destruction under the Nazi regime.

Finally they turn to the most legendary of anarcho-syndicalist unions: the CNT, which the authors describe as a ‘contradictory amalgamation of syndicalist union and anarchist organisation’ (p. 55) – a situation which they argue led to the eventual compromises the union made with the bourgeois state under the Popular Front in 1936. They suggest that the union was simultaneously not syndicalist enough (i.e. not preventing a bureaucracy) and not anarchist enough (i.e. failing to ‘smash the state’ when it had the opportunity in Catalonia). This is certainly a controversial interpretation.

So what does the history lesson in anarcho-syndicalism bring to the theory and practice of the Solidarity Federation? This is not made very explicit but it can be guessed at: From the FOR A, they seem to take the idea that a union committed to an overtly anarchist communist perspective can still be a mass organisation given the right circumstances. From the FAUD, they perhaps conclude that a strong cultural-educational-social role is important, not least because it can sustain an organisation through difficult times. From the CNT, they suggest that a successful union requires an organic unification of the political (anarchism) and the economic (syndicalism), which requires a complete identification of the two.

Fighting for Ourselves brings us up to date with discussion of the period from the Second World War to the present, covering the post-war social democratic settlement and the brief period

of relative social and industrial peace, broken internationally by the May 1968 events in France and the Hot Autumn of workers struggles in Italy the following year. At home, the Winter of Discontent is seen as the turning point where capitalism began to shed the niceties of social partnership with the trade unions and neoliberalism began to massively restructure whilst launching wave



after wave of assaults on working class living standards, which have only intensified in the period of recession since 2008.

The final chapter, ‘Anarcho-syndicalism in the 21st century’, attempts to put forward SolFed’s vision for the here and now. This part of the book most closely resembles their Winning the Class War pamphlet. It might be useful to begin with what the authors actually reject as ways forward. These include attempts to reform the existing trade unions; to function as a ‘political organisation of anarchists’; involvement in union rank and file movements; recruiting workers into the revolutionary union as a priority; and seeing the anarcho-syndicalist union as a ‘monolithic organisation’. Let’s look at these individually to see where there may be a commonality between SolFed and ourselves.

With their argument that attempts to transform the existing trade unions into revolutionary workers organisations are a waste of time and energy, we are in full agreement. Neither organisation will be spending any time capturing leadership positions in the TUC unions or attempting to build reform caucuses when we could be building rank and file confidence and autonomy.

The Anarchist Federation believes that building a political organisation of anarchists is one of our central tasks; one that is active in all spheres of working class life, including the cultural and social, as well as ‘economic’. However, it is obvious that this is also what SolFed have themselves built, albeit with the desire to become something else. It is hard indeed, not to regard our SolFed comrades as anarchist communists in their working clothes. Whether they continue as a political organisation or transform into the political-economic association remains to be seen; although we are convinced of their sincerity in this aim.

Like the SolFed, we also have great reservations about the various predominantly Leninist dominated union rank and files and left caucuses, and see little point in putting energy into endless debates with left activists when we could be talking directly to other workers. That said, some rank and file initiatives that are not party fronts do have the involvement of both SolFed and Anarchist Federation militants (for example the Civil Service Rank and File); and we should perhaps consider how we can work together to encourage their continued vibrancy and autonomy.

Related to this is the continued engagement of SolFed members in the revolutionary unionist/syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World, in which many Anarchist Federation members are also active. The model of unionism in the IWW in the UK may at times lean more towards the representative one, but the dominant model remains 'Solidarity Unionism' – a variety of which, known as Direct Unionism, has obviously been an influence upon SolFed.

The SolFed's approach of not opening up their Industrial Networks to militants unwilling to join SolFed itself, which can be seen as an attempt to prevent the dilution of their politics, is on one level understandable. On the other hand, if the organisation is to make the desired transition from propaganda group to revo-

lutionary union, outside of any large scale resurgence of class struggle, then its intention not to prioritise recruitment of workers into that union begs the question of how far they can go along the route from political to political-economic association.

SolFed's acknowledgment that not all libertarian (nor indeed, working class) activity can take place within the confines of the anarcho-syndicalist union is welcome. Although other, broader struggles, are mentioned in *Fighting for Ourselves*, it is plain that their orientation is essentially towards the workplace. Despite that focus of struggle remaining pivotal, the fight against capitalism, the state and hierarchy does not end at the call centre car park.

Fighting for Ourselves has set out

the vision of the Solidarity Federation, providing a substantial historical context, with a definite internal consistency. The question now is how this perspective will be applied in practice. The authors make clear that they see this as a case of trial and error, and that they are far from even organising workplace branches, never mind the insurrectionary general strike. As the revolutionary union movement that SolFed want to see emerge remains at the speculative stage, it prevents them (and us!) from ascertaining whether their particular model of non-representative unionism is realisable. What is certain is that their attempts to put the model into practice over the next years will be watched with supportive anticipation.

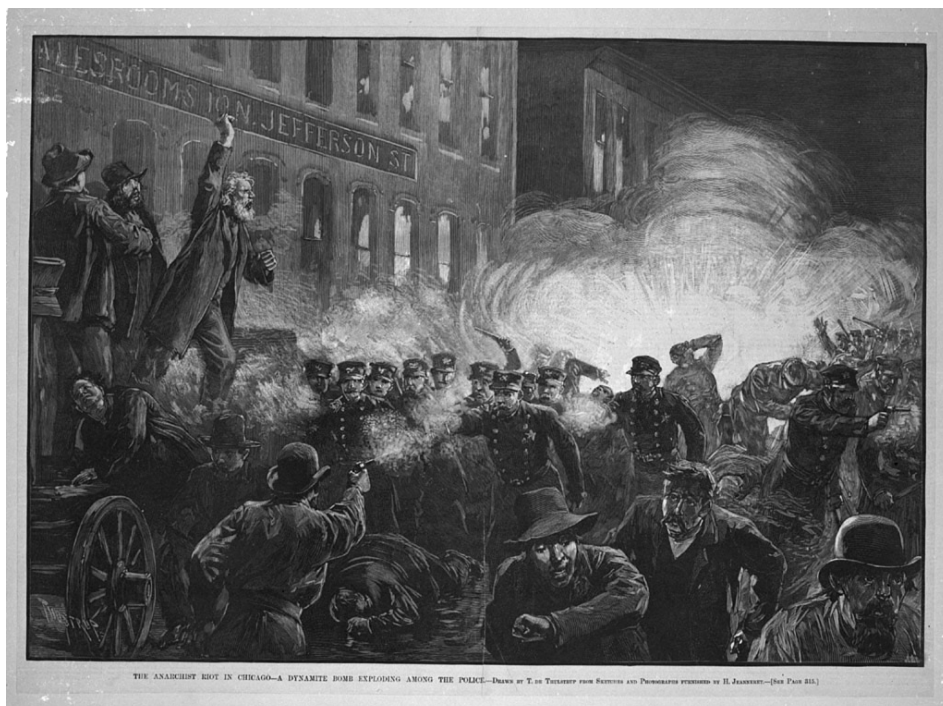
Haymarket Scrapbook.

Edited by Franklin Rosemont and David Roediger.

266 pages. Charles H. Kerr Publishing/AK Press.

£18.95

In 1886 the Statue of Liberty was erected in New York. In the same year in another great city of the United States, Chicago, four anarchists were hanged whilst another cheated the noose by killing himself. These anarchists were not hanged for murder - in which they had had no part whatsoever - but for their devotion to their ideas and their important role in mobilising the working class in Chicago for the fight for the eight hour day and eventually for social revolution. The American press in a concerted and united campaign whipped up prejudice against



THE ANARCHIST RIOT IN CHICAGO—A DYNAMITE BOMB EXPLODES AMONG THE POLICE.—DUNN BY T. DE TULLOCH FOR BARNES AND PENNELLERS PRINTED BY H. JOHNSON—(SEE PAGE 212.)

the anarchists and ghoulishly gloated over their executions. May Day was designated as a holiday for these martyrs and as a celebration of the struggle of the working class on an international level for emancipation and liberation.

This book is a lavishly illustrated tribute to these fallen anarchists- Albert Parsons, Louis Lingg, August Spies, Adolph Fischer, George Engel – and to their comrades- Oscar Neebe, Samuel Fielden, and Michael Schwab- who spent long years in prison as a result of the decisions of the kangaroo court. These last three are buried alongside their murdered brothers in the Waldheim

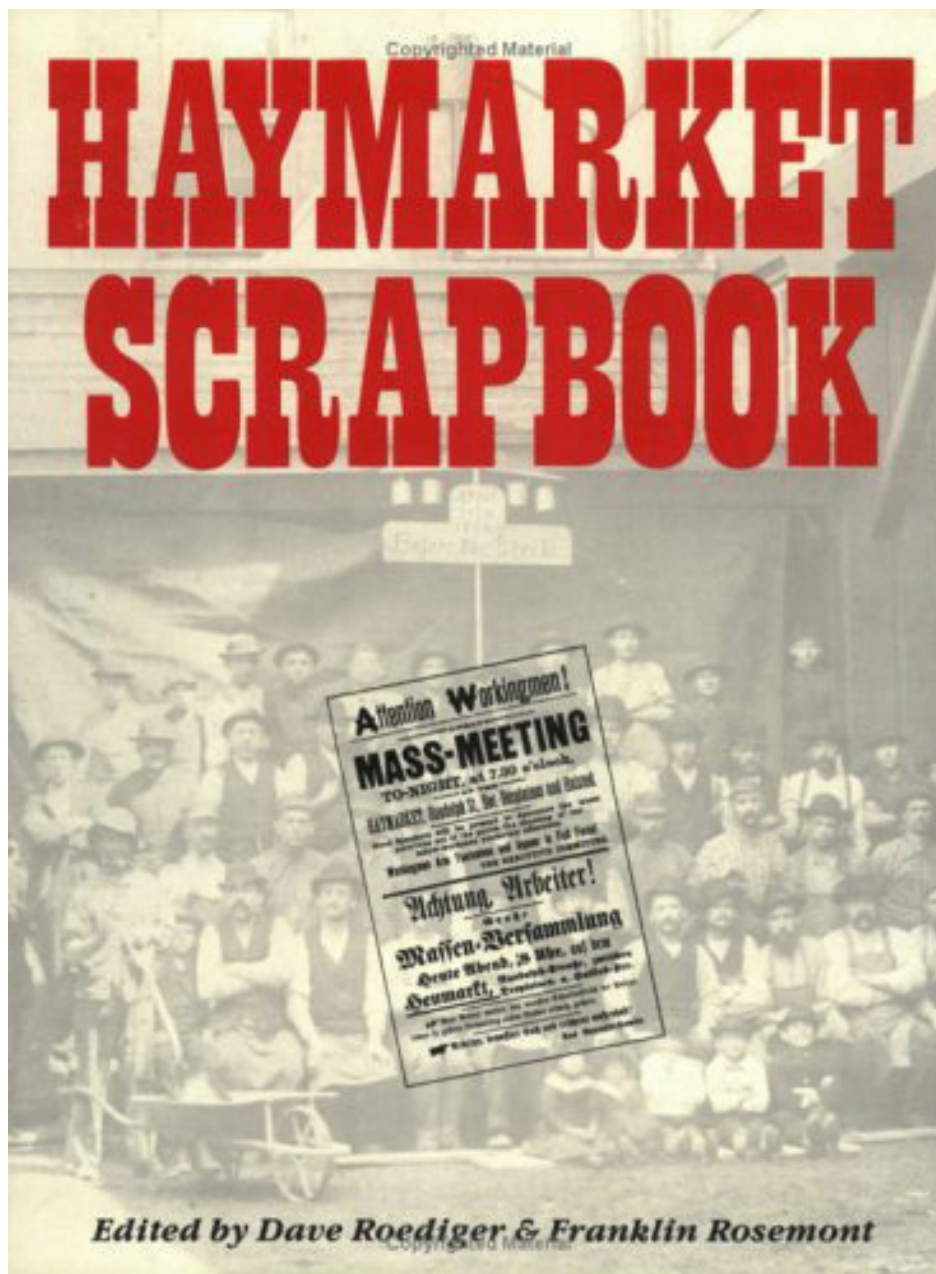
cemetery in Chicago.

The book is a revised edition of the one that appeared in 1986 to commemorate the centennial of the judicial murders. These editions owe much to the work of Franklin Rosemont and his comrade Penelope. As such, while this book gives much space to the martyred anarchists and those of the same beliefs who sprang to their support, like Voltairine de Cleyre, Piotr Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Johann Most, it also makes room for radical historians like the late Paul Avrich and Richard Drinnon; writers and poets like the great realist novelist Nelson Algren, author of *A Walk on the Wild Side*

and *The Man With The Golden Arm*; members of the Industrial Workers of the World; as well as socialists, communists and progressive reformers. As Ron Sakolsky remarks at the end of the book; “this roster was not merely a catalogue of politically-correct inclusivity, but a many-headed hydra of subversive texts and incendiary salvos aimed at the heart of the dominant order”. Franklin Rosemont himself contributed articles on the passionate young anarchist Louis Lingg, on Algren, on the great working class philosopher Dietzgen and an extremely entertaining, eloquent and well-informed piece on “The Image of the Anarchist in Popular Culture”; in which he wrestles the caricature of the bearded, wild-eyed, bomb throwing madman to the ground. Practically the only spoiler in this rich anthology is the limp and woolly foreword by Peter Linebaugh. His ramblings encompass Aneurin Bevan, “non-aligned” nations, Franz Fanon and Obama in a confection of incoherence only redeemed by his observation: “class consciousness is the knowledge that emancipation is ours. Class struggle is the fight for it, the fight to be a class and then the fight to abolish the class system.”

Buried right by the Chicago Martyrs and their memorial are other anarchists like De Cleyre, Goldman, Lucy Parsons, Boris Yelensky, the founder of the original Anarchist Black Cross, as well as supporters like Dietzgen. A little further away is the grave of Franklin Rosemont, who died in 2009. He would have been very proud.

“Anarchists, as well as all other thinking people, claim that in the present society a great number of people are deprived of a decent existence. We demand the





reinstallation of the disinherited! Is this a crime? Are we therefore dangerous criminals, whose lives should be taken in the interests of the common good society?"

Adolph Fischer

"Anarchism is order without

government. We anarchists say that anarchism will be the natural outgrowth of universal co-operation (communism). We say that when poverty has vanished and education is the common property of the people, that then

reason will reign supreme. We say that crime will belong to the past and that the misdeeds of erring brothers can be righted by other means than those of today. Most of the crimes of our days are engendered directly by the system of today, the system which creates ignorance and misery". Michael Schwab "Yet we shouldn't be sad, nor should we grieve our dead. We should express our respect and vindicate our love for them. If anyone reading this feels tears welling in their eyes, they should listen to the song sung by A. R. Parsons, one of our dead, as he approached the scaffold. "Come not to my grave with your mournings... Cease your sorrowful bell; I am well!" Ba Jin, one of China's foremost novelists, anarchist

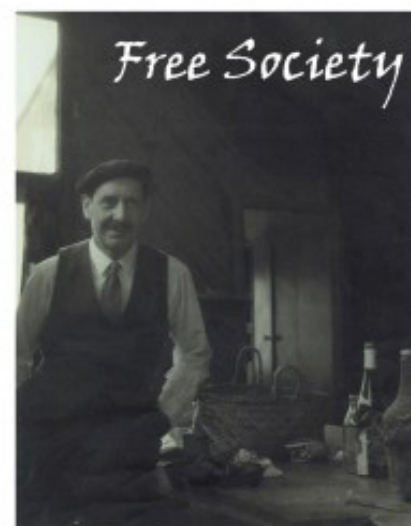
Free Society; a German exile in revolutionary Spain. Werner Driescher. Kate Sharpley Library and Aotearoa Workers' Solidarity movement, 30 pages. £3.00

Werner Driescher was born in Germany in 1911. However, he found Spain a far more inviting place than Nazi German and he gratefully accepted a job in Tossa de Mar as a private tutor to German hoteliers. Here he began an affair with a young English woman, Greville Texidor. Relatively "non-political", he was swept up in the social revolution in Spain in response to the attempted Francoist coup. He joined a column of the dissident Marxist party the POUM. One day, whilst visiting the anarchist Durruti column, he and other members of the POUM militia were so impressed by its

revolutionary spirit and organisation that they decided to go over to it. Soon he was joined by Greville, who had volunteered for the militia, and they fought on the front together.

Werner wrote that "experiencing the communal life of the Anarchists, I reached more and more the conclusion that a communal life free from authoritarian direction was possible, even if the group was large". His admiration for anarchist ways of organisation increasingly grew with each new exposure to them.

After fighting on the front, Werner and Greville moved to



A German exile in revolutionary Spain by Werner Driescher, Introduction by Farrell Cleary

London where they engaged in solidarity work with British anarchists in support of the Spanish. Returning again to Spain, they took part in work for the Aid for Spain Committee and support for refugees. They became aware of the sabotage of the Spanish revolution by the Communists.

The pair eventually ended up in England again where they married, but with the outbreak of the World War they were interned as enemy aliens. After being released on appeal, they moved to New Zealand. There they raised two children, eventually moving to Australia. Greville wrote a novel about her experiences as an anarchist militia woman, which

has remained unpublished but will apparently appear soon. They returned to Catalonia where they lived until 1960. There, they learned of the death of thousands upon thousands of anarchists murdered by the Franco regime. By now a rift appeared in their relationship and they parted.

Greville moved to Australia where she took her own life in 1962, whilst Werner returned to New Zealand. He remained attached to anarchist ideas until his death in 1978. This little pamphlet describes an episode in the Spanish revolution in Werner's words, and an exciting period in the lives of Greville and Werner.

There is an introduction by Farrell

Cleary offering a sketch of Werner's life and a selection of material from Werner's unpublished English autobiography which covers his time in Spain, "The Spanish Civil War and the Anarchists" and the Aragon Front. It also includes a series of notes that were published in the Wellington University Student newspaper, *Salient*, which summarises a talk he gave at the Victorian University of Wellington for the Anarchist Association in 1963.

Letters

Dear Organise!

I enjoyed reading your articles on the Occupy movement in the winter 2012 issue, especially about how Occupy is influenced by reformist thinkers like Collins, Kortzen and Rifkin. However, whilst the article mentions *Adbusters* as being one of the initiators of the Occupy movement, it failed to go into the actual political stand of the *Adbusters* group.

I am afraid this is all too obvious in their very glossy magazine of the same name. In the most recent issue (Jan-Feb 2013), we might get a first impression that they are thoroughly against capitalism. Reading on, however, we are treated to statements like "Can we keep money circulating without derivatives and usury"; "Construct a global market regime in which the price of every product tells the ecological truth"; "Kill off corporations that break the public trust". In other words, some corporations are okay if they don't break "the public trust"; it's fine to have a market system if it's ecologically sound; and money is fine if not contaminated by derivatives and lending. Elsewhere we have suggestions for a "24-hour stock ownership rule" and that old chestnut "a Robin Hood tax on all speculative financial transactions".

In addition we have lengthy quotes from a new

ideologue, Franco Berardi, who counterposes action in "the cybersphere, in the algorithms of financial control, in the quantitative analyses that undergird trading, and so on". Yes, and so on. Berardi rejects strikes, occupations and demonstrations on one hand and on the other "violent riots or bank bombings". He is an advocate of "new forms of exchange: like time banks, new forms of currency, community currency and so on". Yes, once again and so on. For in the warp and woof of this magazine, like unappetising raisins and nuts in a Fruit and Nut bar of ethical capitalism, are apologies for the veil as a form of liberation, and pretentious tosh like rights for inanimate objects—"Rocks, gutter trash, sheep tracks, bottle caps and bacteria"!

Yes, *Adbusters* have been an advocate of capitalism with a smiling face since its inception. What it now appears to be doing in the aftermath of the collapse of Occupy!, is to become an advocate of the so-called new forms of exchange, whilst arguing for quietism and against direct action. As to whether other elements that made up the Occupy movement are radicalising or can be radicalised remains a moot question.

R. A. London

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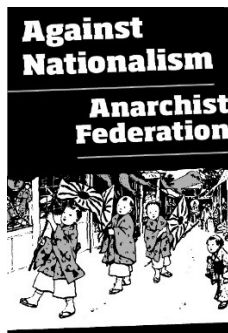


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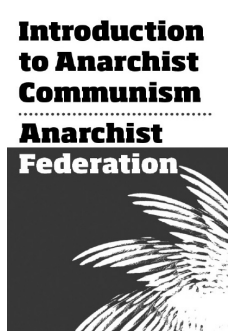


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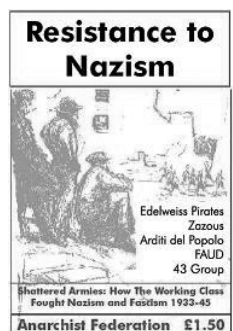


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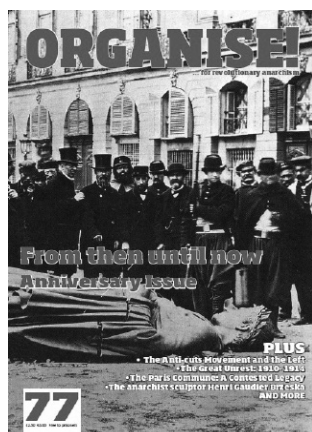
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John Crump

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Aims & Principles

of the Anarchist Federation

1 The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3 We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot

play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

10 We oppose organised religion and cults and hold to a materialist analysis of capitalist society. We, the working class, can change society through our own efforts. Worshipping an unprovable spiritual realm, or believing in a religious unity between classes, mystifies or suppresses such self-emancipation / liberation. We reject any notion that people can be liberated through some kind of supernatural force. We work towards a society where religion is no longer relevant.