"How Revolutions must not be made" and the alternative

As in the 1960s, the upsurge in anarchist activism has resulted in a similar upsurge in classic anarchist titles being produced by mainstream publishers. A new generation of radicals are becoming interested in anarchism and a new generation of capitalists want to make money from them. This is a positive side-effect of the prominence we have achieved in the news reporting of the anti-capitalist movement. Hopefully these new radicals will take the opportunity to learn from some old ones, particularly as these books are so good.

After a few decades of being out of print, Emma Goldman’s classic account of her experiences in Lenin’s Russia has been reprinted. In addition, a valuable collection of essays by the anarchist Nestor Makhno has been reprinted. Formally known as “Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets,” this book has been renamed simply “Anarchism.”

Kropotkin’s work is simply indispensable reading.

Continuing the classics discussed in this column, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” “The Spirit of Revolt,” “Revolutionary Government,” “Anarchist Morality” and “An Appeal to the Young” are all better collections of works in one volume is impossible to find. For those interested in communist anarchism, this is the place to start.

Of particular interest in the light of the Goldman reprint is Kropotkin’s comments in the Russian Revolution. The book includes Kropotkin’s “Letter to the Workers of Western Europe” and a post-1917 post-script to his essay “Anarchist-Communism.” He reiterates the key idea of anarchism, that a revolution will only succeed if the working masses, through their own organizations, organize their own affairs directly as the only means of achieving socialism and freedom. As he puts it, “we are hearing in Russia how to reintroduce communism.”

The essays in this book indicate the only Goldman’s book is a different, but equally important, work. The leading anarchist in America at the time, he recounts the experiences which forced him to reconsider his support for the Bolsheviks and which led to his final break with Lenin’s regime. Like many anarchists outside Russia in 1917, Goldman had defended the Bolshevik revolution wholeheartedly. Deported alongside Alexander Berkman from the US in December 1919 as being a dangerous subversive, she arrived in revolutionary Russia the following month. Williams lists in this book, the only state to principles, she and Berkman hoped for the best of the oxygenated, revolutionary government. What they discovered soon made them realize their anti-socialism in the face of Bolshevik party dictatorship and bureaucracy. In the workplaces, they discovered that the workers had new bosses. In the prisons, they discovered that radicals had new guards. In society as a whole, they discovered that the autocracy of the Tsar had been replaced by the autocracy of the Bolshevik Central Committee. It took slightly longer for one-man management to be applied there than in the factories.

Goldman had not "come to Russia expecting to find anarchism realized." Such idealism was alien to her (although that has not stopped Leninists from saying the opposite). Rather, she expected to see "the beginning of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought." She was aware that revolutions were difficult, involving "destruction" and "violence." That Russia was not perfect was not the source of her opposition to Bolshevism. Rather, she was the fact that "the Russian people have been locked out of" their own revolution and that the Bolshevik state used "the sword and the gun to keep the people out." As a revolutionary, she refused: "to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party." Her break with Bolshevism took time.

She, like Berkman, retained the rationalism that modern Bolsheviks repeat to this day. She justified Bolshevik authoritarianism in terms of the blockade by the imperialist powers, in terms of the civil war, in terms of the economic collapse these events caused. It took the crushing of the Kornilov Rebellion in March 1921 to finally convince them that these "objective" factors simply could not explain what had happened to the revolution. The civil war had ended, but Bolshevik authoritarianism and state capitalism remained. She could no longer blind herself to the obvious.

Goldman’s opposition to Bolshevism flowed from her politics. Rather than refuse her anarchism, the Russian Revolution confirmed it. Anarchists had long argued that a revolution would provoke economic disruption, unemployment, etc. (see Kropotkin’s "Conquest of Bread"). Similarly, anarchists have never been so stupid to think a revolution does not need
editorial

Welcome to issue 324 of Black Flag. You will find the usual mix of articles, interviews and reviews. Whether it is on the Zapatista's or the Miner's strike, we hope you will find something of interest. We also have interviews with anarchists from Argentina, Ireland and South Africa. May Day saw our Irish comrades in Newcastle at the end of a particularly mad anti-anarchist media onslaught. We found out what they had been up to. We have also included a lengthy interview with comrades from South Africa, people who don't get much coverage in the Western anarchist press. We also have a longer than usual reviews section, the bulk of which is a review and critique of the Scottish Socialist Party's libertarian-sounding social democratic ideas.

Now the bad news. This (is possibly?) probably the last one for a while. This is not due to lack of people interested in buying it. Far from it. The magazine is still as popular as it used to be. The sad fact is that unless more people get involved this issue of Black Flag will be the last. This should come as no surprise. The last few issues have asked people to get involved, with no avail. We had hoped that seeing these appeals for help and the fact that our plans to go back to quarterly have not materialized would have made some people think about helping out but no volunteers have come forward.

Obviously, we don't want to do this as we all think that Black Flag is a good resource for the movement. However, if we are simply producing another commodity which is passively consumed by others then it seems pointless. Particularly as the members of the collective have pressing personal commitments which make it difficult to give the magazine the time it deserves, especially if we want it to be more than annual, if it is to now.

So here is the situation. Unless you get involved then it simply will not happen. An anarchist magazine can survive only if the wider movement takes an active interest in it. The movement in the UK is not as healthy as it is in some countries, but surely it is big and active enough to support a magazine like Black Flag? Now that Freedom has become an anarchist paper again, it would make sense to complement it with a quarterly magazine which contains longer, more in-depth, articles and analysis that Freedom cannot handle.

It seems sense to keep Black Flag going. It can potentially be a resource which can be used by anarchists to discuss issues and ideas in more depth and it has a reputation for quality that many other anarchist journals enjoy. A quarterly magazine which complements a fortnightly newspaper would be a massive boost to the British anarchist movement going without saying. It would show a serious move away from the world rather than just many people in the pub.

If this appeals, what can you do to help? We are looking for people who can commit to handing out, distributing, finances, editing, typing, mailing, and so on. As well as producing copy we need people to help with the administrative side of the magazine. As far as writing goes, we don't need essays or long articles (although those are always welcome, we can be daunting for new writers). We need reports on demos, actions and events as well as reviews of books, CDs, DVDs and so on. Currently, the editorial meetings are geographically based in and around London. However, if you have email you can get involved. If you want to help, we will find a way to include you.

Will Black Flag continue? Ultimately, it is up to you.

For a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

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Yer Year Of Our Lives
20 years since the great coal strike of 1984/85

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1984/85 miners strike, arguably the most important working class struggle of the twentieth century. Some have seen the miners strike of 1984 and the subsequent general strike as a greater potential for revolutionary movement. I wouldn't argue with that, for a brief period the state and the miners took on the workers during the strike for class solidarity. But the moment was short lived, in its revolutionary potential anyway, for the miners it was to last 9 bitter, brutal and isolation filled months.

Friday 4th May 1984, however, posed a far greater physical challenge to the miners in law and order, in terms of confrontations and mass movement of workers taking to the streets to challenge the miners' action. In terms of mass and police control (at least initially) and the involvement of the whole community, the offensive by the mining and coalfields and sometimes the children, establishment of miners support groups across industry and the labour movement, the whole mobilization of solidarity support and the mobilization of the miners, 84 was far more an actual movement, politicking vast numbers of people, both within and without the pit communities. (Of course 26 had its moments, derailing the Flying Scotsman, the alternative by anything we pulled off in 84 for example).

Women and little girls had worked in some coalfields, but by the 1980s were prevented from travelling from underground lode, pit bow women came into the 1960s). It carries with it, its own culture, its own view of history and how that has impacted upon the miners. Many of the younger generation who weren't, they were talking actually about the impact and perceptions of struggles which had gone before. The effect of this was to ensure mining communities were highly politically, with deep class perspectives and socialist traditions. It had been scarred ten years earlier the Heath government broke back on the miners strike, and twelve years since then had wreaked his incomes policy. So the miners and their families entered this struggle well aware of the scale of the challenge being mounted. Although some had taken some convincing at first, by March 84 few were unaware that Thatcher was moving in to smash the social power of the miners by breaking their union in a all or nothing confrontation.

Almost universally the 'left' has cited the decentralised nature of the NUM as a cause of the miners' defeat. This is a strange view indeed, without the semi-autonomy of the miners areas, the strike in 1984 could never have happened. Behind the view is a notion that some how the miners could simply been ordered out on strike by a national leadership running a campaign. They would never have worn that, which is part why the Rea Old Area structure and strong branch autonomy remained.

Ever since Thatcher was elected it was clear her whole strategy at home would depend on being able to heavily defeat the miners. Most had responded to this prospectively by staying out of sight and hoping she wouldn't notice them, with the miners she and her party had long planned to take them on as a preliminary to her whole social and economic vision. The miners had to be fought and defeated (most will perhaps...)

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Anarcha-Syndicalists
Anarchist Classicists
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A Year of Our Lives
20 years since the great coal strike of 1984/85

David Douglass

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1984/85 miners' strike, arguably the most important working class struggle of the twentieth century. Some have seen the miners strike of 1926 and the subsequent general strike as a greater potential for revolutionary movement. I wouldn't argue with that, for a brief period the state and the minions of the Trade Union movement held their breath, while the trade unions mobilised on the streets and the militancy took up position while workers fought the call for class solidarity. But the moment was short lived, in its revolutionary potential anyways, for the miners it was to last 9 bitter, brutal and, in many cases, fatal months.
The 1945 movement, however, posed a far greater physical challenge to the Guardians of law and order, in terms of commuting a mass movement of workers taking to the streets to challenge control by the state. In terms of rank and file control (at least initially) and involvement of the whole community, the offensive by the women of the coalfields and sometimes the children, establishment of miners support groups across industry and the labour movement, the world wide mobilisation of solidarity support and, most importantly, 84 was far more an actual movement, politicising vast numbers of people, both within and without the pit communities. (Of course, 26 had its moments, detailing the Flying Scotsman, its own version of history and how that has impacted upon the mining communities. When weren't they talking actually, about the impact and perceptions of struggles which had gone before. The effect of this, was to ensure mining communities were already highly politicised, with deep class perspectives and socialist traditions. It has been far more ten years earlier than the Heath government broke its back on the miners strike, and twelve years since they had wrecked its incomes policy. So the miners and their families entered this struggle well aware of the scale of the challenge being mounted. Although some had taken some convincing at first, by March 84 few were unaware that Thatcher was moving in to smash the social power of the miners by breaking their union in all or nothing confrontation.

Almost universally the 'left' has cited the decentralised nature of the NUS as a justification for this strange view indeed, without the semi-autonomy of the miners areas, the strike in 1984 could never have happened. Behind the view is a notion that some how the miners could simply be ordered out on strike by a national leadership running a nationalisation. They would never have won that, which is in part why the old Area structure and strong branch autonomies remained.

Ever since Thatcher was elected it was clear her whole strategy at home would depend on being able to heavily defeat the miners. Most had responded to this perspective by staying out of sight and hoping she wouldn't notice them, with the miners she and her party would have to go long planned to take them on as a prelude to her whole social and economic agenda. This had to be fought and defeated (most will perhaps

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Freedom
The Pit communities were 'closed' communities in the sense that, mining isn't a trade you just come to out of the blue. It is a profession passed on father to son, in many cases for generations. Miners spoke on public platforms during the strike of "the struggle of our fathers and grandfathers" most academics assumed they were talking figuratively, but they
be aware of the Mycen Plan and Rielley Commission, standing firm on following the defeat of Heath to take on and defeat the miners in the future, using scab drivers, mass policing, an anti-strike movement and support for a nuclear alternative. A steady game of chess had been utilized by this formation for three years prior to the outbreak of the strike. The union leadership had been trying to forge a strategy which would take the miners as a national body into conflict with this government, on our terms, but it had failed. Failed because although the miners were a brilliant bunch, and would fight on wages and conditions when they felt particularly aggrieved, they had never really been too arsed about fighting pit closures. Hundreds had closed over the preceding twenty years, the failure to fight that was only partially due to the collaboration of NUM leaders, the other was down to the ambivalent attitude of the miners to pit work.

We didn't actually like the pit, we didn't actually like working on a god awful shift, in cramped dust and heat and cramped and wet conditions. True we were all proud to be miners, but that didn't mean we liked working down the mine. So fighting for jobs, especially those jobs generational pit folk, albeit 'on the other side'. What the bosses of the Coal Board hadn't realised was that this whole strategy was aimed at destroying the NCB as an organisation, and with it, most of them. For a time it looked as though the NCB would concentrate on taking out 'capacity' (shutting pits) in areas where they figured they could get away with it, Durham, Northumberland, Scotland, Wales, Bank and ferry efforts to generate a major fight back on closures in those areas failed to move, with great results. Bettermen. Polmara in Scotland, Bear Park in Durham, Lewis Merveth in South Wales all had tried to demonstrate the need for solidarity action and a national stand. At Lewis Merveth pickets had started to be deployed around the country. At Hatfield Main in Doncaster the Women's Support Group was founded to lobby for support for closure action for Lewis Merveth and others had been voted to strike. The Doncaster panel was calling for a national union at all. Those things were worth fighting for. Again an area strike was called by pit delegates and at mass meetings throughout the coalfields endorsed at the idea. The miners had shown the NCB that there were thousands of hands, although there had also been a successful battle in Yorkshire. The Yorkshire Area three years earlier. Again the NCB could continue its selective surgery without confrontation.

That was not the strategy however, and under Thatcher's orders, MacGregor was called in because Thatcher didn't trust the NCB to do the scale of closure and conduct the fight to the finish with the NCB. The US imported underground throw down the gauntlet in Yorkshire, Cortonwood would close in days, what are you going to do about it? The Yorkshire miners as a whole had been very reluctant to fight for miners elsewhere, it must be said, but now the challenge was at home, and it was clear this was a fight, initially for 50,000 jobs and 50 pits, but also whether or not the remaining mining employed in Doncaster coalfield in support, but other parts of Yorkshire were hostile. The South Wales Area came out in mass and the strike was endorsed under rule 41 by the National Executive Committee, the way it was open for South Wales to then picket out and call for support from the other areas. However the demand for a national ballot was acceded to and following the usual press propaganda war, a winning of half left, and murder, the vote was lost by 61%. The NCB could continue its selective surgery without confrontation.

Sexual stereotyping, attitudes to gays, religious groups, everything which had been taken for granted was now no longer taken for granted.
be aware of the Mycen Plan and Riddle's Committee, which set out to reduce the number of miners and to increase the efficiency of the mines. This was a complex strategy that aimed to reduce the cost of production and improve the safety of the miners. The plan was based on the idea of creating larger, more efficient mines that could produce more coal at a lower cost. This was achieved by closing smaller, less efficient mines and consolidating the remaining ones. The plan was controversial and met with resistance from the miners, who saw it as a threat to their jobs and livelihoods. However, the plan was eventually implemented and was seen as a turning point in the coal industry. It marked the beginning of a new era of coal mining in Britain, marked by improved safety and efficiency.
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THE MINING COMMUNITY ADVICE CENTRE HAS NO FUNDING AND OPERATES PURELY ON VOLUNTARY DONATIONS.

Victory was within grasp, could we feel it and taste it.

Thatcher and MacGregor have both admitted as much.

Oddly, support or outright acclaim.

For a time, the pickets spreading out in brilliant manoeuvres from coalfield to coalfield and pit to pit, rolled all in front of them, the sheer buoyancy of confidence of the pickets won over by far and away the bulk of the doubletake in coalfield after coalfield. Even in Solidarity started to come through strongly on the railways, and among the seamen. Some power in this movement to realise that our jobs were literally their jobs too and took blocking actions. Thatcher's reaction was the shifting of a de facto national police force which would be given its head to do anything it had to stop the pickets.

counter-violence is now legendary, but what it did was open up political ideas on class violence, on counter-violence, and the justification for armed struggle. The IRA, for example, only lost sympathy during the strike when they failed to kill Thatcher and her cabinet. The killing of hardline taxi drivers death in Wales was seen and justified almost everywhere as a legitimate act which had simply gone wrong, a casualty in a war which had already claimed two of our pickets without much fuss in the press.
The hypocrisy over Libyan financial assistance for the strikers, when Thatcher was pouring extra oil in from every desperate country in the world, all were education in the real class divide in world events.

Across the world, working people mobilised in solidarity with the British miners and their families.

in Nottingham trying to break the unions and the strike, but it would have robbed them of their legitimacy, and by some of the edge off the excuses put forward by either unions showing only lukewarm support. in Nottingham miners where only a minority, perhaps a third actually actively supported the strike, men refused to cross picket lines and were, if not in trouble, at least went home without too much fuss. Getting tough, and to break up picket lines. The police were signed up as the NCB's own security firm to ensure scabs got to work on time and in one piece regardless of numbers and costs. Roadblocks, and curfew were imposed and the striking villages were announced as occupied with occupying police force. Government strategies were then based around getting at least one scab into every pit in Britain. In Yorkshire, this would be the major diversion, along with the Orgreave plant. Those police second from top would stop the pickets in Nottingham and allow the scabs to work and coal to be produced. The bitterness of escalating violence and strike, collecting money and donating flowers to the nice policemen only to discover if you don't need cool minds, you don't need coal mine HQs and blocks of offices, and finally joined the miners on the police line. The scabbing steel workers in Scotland Wales and Yorkshire, all closed down and dead and buried. Sacked mercury lorry drivers spreading strike breaking, from the miners through the dockers, the print workers, through animal activists, through nuclear campaigners and preserving ever destruction of social communities and solidarity and companions.

Yes we will cheer when Thatcher kicks the bucket, but it's the whole sinking system she fought for and defended which needs to go to the grave with her. That would be a lasting legacy for the pit communities of 8485.

At the end of the day, the miners at Drummond, who admitted could union non dockers and coal to steel lorry, and in the process smashed their own dock labour scheme, and most of their jobs nationwide. The power station workers who scabbed very badly, and ultimately saw two thirds of their own jobs go with the closure of the coal fired stations. The coal miners in the NUM of northern cities had worked through all the charge and picked battles at their gates. The blackening miners in Nottingham and Leicester, thrown on the scrap heap and their pits closed, and communities decayed. The armes of female office workers, whose wages and conditions came from being part of the white collar section of the NUM. Whose allegiances and indefatigable opposition has ensured that the NUM's working right through the
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Just think of what we could have meant in political terms, in class terms in social terms, coming at the end of a such a poltical crunch. Class forces had determined their national conference decisions, we would have won hands down.

At the end of the day, the dockers at Middlesbrough, who allowed us union to load coal onto local coal lorries, and in the process smashed their own dock labour scheme, and most of their jobs nationwide. The power station workers who scabbed very little, and ultimately saw two thirds of their own jobs go with the closure of the coal fired stations. The coal pickers in Nottingham and Leicester, thrown on the scrap heap and their pits closed, and communities decimated. The armies of female office workers, whose wages and conditions came from being part of the white collar section of the NUM. Whose allegiances and self opinion had kept them working right through the strike, collecting money and donating flowers to the nice policemen only to discover if you didn't need cold money, you didn't need coal mine HOs and blocks of officers, and finally joined the miners... on the dole queue. The scabbing steel workers in Scotland Wales and Yorkshire, all closed down and died and bowed. Scab railway lorry drivers spreading strike breaking, scabbing through the docks, through the miners, and the pit workers, through animal activists, through nuclear campaigners and preserving ever destruction of the pit communities.

Certainly it was a fight we had no choice but to undertake, a battle the whole of this nation forget, and one we certainly didn't deserve to lose, for these ordinary folk, not trained soldiers or wild eyed zealots, had laid everything flesh and blood and even life could offer on the line. They had no more to give. Visit the former pit communities today and you will still see the result of what they did. This all however leads me to think of it, visit almost anywhere in Britain and you will see what's happened, that although we think of it, it's gone.

We will never forget who were our friends and who were our enemies in that war, nor the need to start seriously looking for the means of taking our revenge. Yes we will cheer when Thatcher kicks the bucket, but it's the whole sinking system she fought for and defended which needs to go to the grave with her. That would be a lasting legacy for the pit communities of 8485.
ZAPATISTAS PUT AUTONOMY INTO PRACTICE

Last year the Zapatista movement of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico initiated several important new developments in the self-management of their 1,000 autonomous municipalities. 5,000 Zapatistas and thousands of supporters gathered in Oventic, Chiapas on the 5-6 August 2003 to celebrate a major step forward in the Zapatista’s struggle for autonomy. The previous few weeks saw the rebel issue several communiques of major importance: “it is possible to govern and to govern ourselves without the parasite that calls itself government.”

Following the gullets of the Indigenous Law on Race and Culture, “the EZLN has decided to completely suspend any ties with the Mexican federal government and the political parties, and the Zapatistas have reaffirmed that autonomy is their primary means of governing.”

Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (the MAREIS) now accessible via multimedia Chiapas, http://chiapas.indymedia.org, transmitting from stop a Colima deep in rebel territory. DJ Marcus spun an eclectic blend of disks, from Creeds, Stills, Nash and Young’s “Ohio” to the Zapatista’s Hymn, via Mexican ranchero music.

"NOW IS THE MOMENT:" Comandante Emílie’s speech at Oventic in August against a powerful flow for people's autonomy, in a traditionally patriarchal culture.

"It is no longer the moment to be silent or to humiliate ourselves in front of men, not to ask them for the forms of respecting us. Now is the moment for acting on our own and for making men respect our rights. Because, if we don’t do so, one day we’re going to die, and in ten to new, men and women, to act and to carry on, in order to build our autonomy and to move it forward.”

One of the most fascinating of the recent Zapatista communiques was that by Marcos entitled "CHAPAS: The Thirteenth Stele Part Four: A History" (www.indymedia.org/en/200307272402.html). "Now is the time to put the autonomy of the indigenous peoples into practice and to act on it throughout the entire country of Mexico. No one needs to ask the indigenous Mexican women to organise themselves so that, together, we can exercise authority and practice our rights which we deserve as women.”

The August event inaugurated five assemblies of “good government” in Zapatista rebel territory, bringing an end to the 5 ‘Agreements’, set up between 1994 and 1996. "You are in autonomous rebel Zapatista territory: here the people govern, and the government obey," read the sign at the entrance to the town of Oventic. A festive atmosphere prevailed, with the speeches by the Comandantes of the EZLN’s General Command, and the introductions of the Autonomous Councils, interspersed with basketball tournaments and dancing late into the night.

Delegates from each of the 30 Zapatista autonomous municipalities will comprise their organizational position within the EZLN.”

"GOVERNING BY OBEDIENCE" The next communiqué: "CHAPAS: The Thirteenth Stele Part Six: A Good Government: the protection of justice; community health; education; housing; land; work; food; commerce; information and culture, and local movement. Perhaps a new long-argued.

Of course, as Marcos himself admits, the Zapatista autonomous communities are not utopian, and elements of bureaucracy and hierarchy exist, but from what we know the tendency is towards more power residing in the hands of the indigenous peasant peoples at local level.

I can think of no better way to finish than to quote Comandante Emílie who concluded the Zapatista communiqué on the Global Day of Resistance against the September WTO summit at Cancun thus: "And these have been our words, and what follows is dancing and struggling.

Viva world resistance! Viva world rebellion! Viva the poor peoples of the world!"

For up-to-date info about the situation in Chiapas, go to http://chiapas.indymedia.org published in Spanish and English, and also see the Zapatista news on www.indymedia.org.uk The Zapatista solidarity groups in Edinburgh (www.indymedia.org.uk/edinchaps@yahoocom) and London www.campaignzapatistas.co.uk welcome involvement.

Kipil de invariable solidarity work with the people who management of drinking water systems in Zapatista communities. See www.kipiibout.com and contact kipiibout@edenmail.com
Last year the Zapatista movement of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico initiated some important new developments in the self-management of their 1,000 autonomous municipalities. 5,000 Zapatistas and thousands of supporters gathered in Oventic, Chiapas on the 5-10 August 2001 to celebrate a major step forward in the Zapatistas' struggle for autonomy. The previous few weeks had seen the rebels issue several communiques of major importance: "it is possible to govern and to govern ourselves without the parasite that calls itself government.

Following the guttering of the indigenous Law on Race and Culture, "the EZLN has decided to completely suspend any activity with the Mexican federal government and the political parties, and the Zapatistas have reaffirmed that this is their primary means of struggle," declared Comandante Engel. (www.indymedia.org/ en/2003/07/27402.html)

"Now is the time to put the autonomy of the indigenous peoples into practice and to act on it throughout the entire territory of Mexico. No one needs to ask for permission to form their autonomous municipalities," declared Comandante Engel. "In the same way," she continued, "we are rejecting all indigenous Mexican women to organise themselves so that, together, we can exercise autonomy and practice our rights which we deserve as women.

The August event inaugurated five assemblies of "good government" in Zapatista territory, bringing us up to 5 'Agreements', set up between 1994 and 1996. You are in autonomous rebel Zapatista territory, here the people govern, and the government obeys," read a sign at the entrance to the Town Hall of Oventic. A festive atmosphere prevailed, with the speeches of the Community Representatives of the EZLN's General Command, and the introductions of the Autonomous Municipalities, interspersed with basketball tournaments and dancing late into the night.

Delegates from each of the 30 Zapatista autonomous municipalities will comprise the five assemblies of 'good government' summarized here.

"And these have been our words, and what follows is dancing and struggling. Viva world resistance! Viva world rebellion! Viva the poor peoples of the world!"

The Zapatistas have declared their support at the world level for the EZLN, for people of Iraq and for all those struggles in resistance against the power of money.

The Zapatistas Autonomous Municipalities (the MARED) will act as the representative body and the autonomous municipalities will act as the collective voice of the EZLN, and we are proud to say that it has been led by the communities themselves.

What I mean by this is that the EZLN's autonomic structure is to some extent "commodified" a real community democracy and self-governance. The EZLN was, in a manner of speaking, one of the "undemocratic" elements in a relationship of direct community democracy (another anti-democratic element is the Church, but that's a matter for another paper).

When the Autonomous Municipalities began operating, self-governance did not move just from the local to the regional, it also emerged (always naturally) from the "shadow" of the military structure. The EZLN does not intervene at all in the determination or removal of autonomous authorities, and it has limited itself to only pointing out that, given that the EZLN, by principle, is not fighting for the taking of power, none of the autonomous command or members of the Communal Resistance Autonomous Committee can occupy a position of authority in the communal command or members of the Communal Resistance Autonomous Committee. Those who decide to participate in the autonomous government must definitively resign from their organizational position within the EZLN.


"In order to see, see that, in rebel Zapatista lands, governing is by obeying, the 'Good Government Assemblies' will be formed on August 9, 2003. They shall be formed in the 'Caracoles', with one assembly for each rebel region, and will be formed by 2 or 3 delegates from each one of the Autonomous Councils of that region. The following will continue to be the exclusive government functions of the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities: the provision of justice; community health; education; housing, land; work; food; commerce; communal production and culture, and local movement...Perhaps a new world is being built...

While naturally anarchists and libertarian communists bulk at the term 'government', whether 'good' or 'bad', we need to look beyond the superficiality of the words used. It is arguable that the Zapatista concept of 'governing by obeying', and their practice of 'consultas' whereby major decisions are referred back to the grass-roots village level for the final decision, are in practice very similar to the concept of 're-called mandated delegates' and 'the administration of things' which anarchists and libertarian communists have
"If the aggression is globalised then the resistance needs to be globalised."

In June and July of 2001, two Argentinean women found the UK to talk about the wave of social change which is sweeping through their country. Graciela and Nelia talked about the Piquetero movement, which has seen unemployed workers taking control of over 200 factories, and organizing direct democracy through neighbourhood assemblies.

The movement had been using road blockades in resistance to the neo-liberal reforms which are tearing many Argentinians unemployed.

The tour was organized by the Argentinean Autonomist Project (AAP), an group which seeks to educate people around the world about the struggles in Argentina.

I met up with Graciela at the Glasgow event, to find out more.

How did you become involved with the AAP?

Graciela: I was an activist in Argentina for many years. After the dictatorship, from 1984 onwards, I was a human rights activist, a student in solidarity with the "destituyentes" (those affected by the excesses of the military regime). I was a Trotskyist at some point and that is how the Trotskyist party was really hierarchical and corrupt. I started making a decision to organize against the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and all that stuff. So, we started organizing a non-hierarchical organization, with many other people who were coming from similar experiences with parties.

I met a group that was doing performances in the street, and I started incorporating the little performing building with those performances. I started making them bigger, and fighting against the puppet world.

But in 1994, I left Argentina to go to work with a big street theatre company, Bread and Puppet Theater of the USA, and I worked with them for quite a few years. At the same time I was going down to Argentina to organise with other nonprofits, with the mothers and children of the Disappeared.

Finally, when the assemblies started in Argentina, I had no money whatsoever, so I couldn't go back at that point. It was very frustrating for me in December 2001 to be in Germany just watching on TV. Then I went with Bread and Puppet Theater to organize a protest against the G8 in Calgary. I heard, because a friend phoned me, that the cops had killed a woman in a road blockade in Argentina. So I went back to Argentina and I helped organize a big puppet theatre thing to protect the kid that was really protesting. After that I decided I needed to devote a lot more time to the struggle in Argentina, because there were many autonomous organisations, and I felt that this was a good time to do some organizing. So that's how I started organizing with the AAP.

How important is it that the movement is non-hierarchical? What have been the benefits of organizing in this way?

I think it's very important, because during the 70s all our organizations were extremely hierarchical, and some of them even militaristic. I think that because of these issues they separated themselves from the people. So, the repression started [the organisations] on their own, and people didn't feel they were represented by them. They let whatever was happening to them, happen.

So now that we are organizing in a non-hierarchical, horizontal way, we have no leaders, and it will be a lot more difficult to stop us now... One of the organizers was killed on June 26th 2002. Maybe in a normal sense you would think that he was a leader, because he was very committed to the struggle and he was very involved... Well, his disappearances - and the repression - were harmful for us, and it had a huge impact on the organisation - it did not leave a hole. Immediately somebody else came, and we kept on going.

Obviously the piqueteros have been very successful. What are the practical aspects of organizing in a non-hierarchical way, in a movement that has so many people involved?

G: It takes a lot of meetings! It's not very dynamic sometimes, it takes a lot of time. People need to allow a lot of time for discussions and re-discussions. I think that's how I started organizing with the AAP.

How do you think your movement connects to other struggles worldwide, and in South America?

G: There's links with the landless peasants of Brazil, with some other organizations in South America and in Latin America. I don't think that there's as much communication as there should be. We're struggling with that.

What do you think of the leftist governments in Brazil and Venezuela? Do you think there's any chance of working with hierarchical leftist movements in other countries?

G: Personally I do not trust that kind of political system. I think we're doing some roadblocks and organizing in the neighbourhoods. Now it's been smashed out.

More than repression or repression, what is the movement that we are getting empowered enough? They rely on the guys still for some of the stuff. Like I was present one day that there was a discussion amongst the workers where one of the women said, "We want to be in the talks to close the press." The guys said, "Well, which one of you is going to talk?" Many of them wanted to come, but I think that it was the women who didn't go on the roadblocks, then the guys telling them to shut up.

There is some sexism, but I would say that in the autonomous movement it's not blatant at all. It's something that people problematize and discuss and think about.

How do you see the piqueteros contribute to the struggles worldwide, and in South America?

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What do you think of the leftist governments in Brazil and Venezuela? Do you think there's any chance of working with hierarchical leftist movements in other countries?

G: Unfortunately we haven't had a chance to really get to work there. Our presentations usually last two hours, and people are so interested in what we say that we never have a chance to learn what the other guy is doing.

So far, I wouldn't be able to say what I really think about them. They've been very strong, very cooperative and in solidarity with us, but I haven't seen the work that they're doing.

What are your hopes for the future of the movement in Argentina?

G: I hope that it will be able to grow and expand. That the struggle will be given to us, which is not certain... I hope that we'll keep on working the way we are, and that we'll be able to reach more people.

Finally, how can people in the UK contribute to solidarity to the piqueteros?

G: I think the best way to offer solidarity is to organize big role to play in the around your own needs. Because the problems of the unemployed in Argentina are the problems that will have all over the world. The movement affects everyone of us, and if it's not hitting too hard here now, it's going to hit really hard in the near future. If the aggression is globalized then the resistance needs to be globalized.
“If the aggression is globalized then the resistance needs to be globalized.”

In June and July of 2003, two Argentinian women faced the UK to talk about the wave of social change which is sweeping across their country. Graciela and Nela talked about the Piquetero movement, which has seen unemployed workers taking control of over 200 factories, and organizing a direct democracy through neighbourhood assemblies. The movement has linked the organised road blockades in resistance to the neo-liberal reforms which are leaving many Argentines unemployed.

The tour was organized by the Autonomous Project (AP), a group which seeks to educate people worldwide about the struggles in Argentina.

I met up with Graciela at the Glasgow event, to find out more.

How did you become involved with the AP?

Graciela: I was an activist in Argentina for many years. After the dictatorship, from 1984 onwards, I was a human rights activist, a student in solidarity with the G2 in Calgary. I heard, because a friend phoned me, that friends of my friend had been killed in a road blockade in Argentina. So I went back to Argentina and I helped organise a big puppet theatre thing to protest the killing of these two comrades. After that I decided I needed to devote a lot more time to the struggle in Argentina, because there were many autonomous organisations, and I felt that this was a good time to do some organising. So that’s how I came to be involved.

How important is it that the movement is non-hierarchical? What have been the benefits of organising in this way?

Graciela: It’s very important, because during the 70s all our organisations were extremely hierarchical, and sponse of them even militariist. It is because this that because of these issues they separated (laissez-faire) of the people. So the repression started [the organisations] on their own, and people didn’t feel that they were represented by them... they let whatever was happening to them, happen.

So new that we are organising in a non-hierarchical, horizontal way, we have no leaders, and it will be a lot more difficult to stop us now... One of the organisers was killed on June 26th 2002. Maybe in a normal sense you would think that he was a leader, because he was very committed to the struggle and he was very informative... Well, his disapperance - the CHS has discussed it. That’s where we try to coordinate the different movements, because there are so many different movements. It is a lot of work keeping it non-hierarchical.

Obviously the piqueteras have been very successful. What are the practical aspects of organising in a non-hierarchical way, in a movement that has so many people involved?

Graciela: It takes a lot of meetings! It’s not very dynamic sometimes, it takes a lot of time. People need to allow a lot of time for discussions and re-discussions.

I think the biggest challenge is all the old things that keep coming up. People are raised in a capitalistic system, so although they might want to change, still, many times, very, very, very, many times, things come up, individual things. It’s very important for us to allow time to discuss all the issues. So any project that is done in the neighbourhoods is because more than the road blockades is the organisation of the people, the CHS organisations that all the micro-enterprises where the CHS and the workers had to do the work, that was an enormous amount of money.

It’s not fast! Is there any hierarchy of the organisations? Do you have smaller local groups who send representatives to a central group? Or is it completely horizontal?

Graciela: There are organisations and groups in every neighbourhood where we are organising. And then there’s what we call the “Coordinating Chair”. People who go to this Chair have discussions and then bring back to the assemblies what the Chair has discussed. There’s where we try to coordinate the different movements, because there are so many different movements. It is a lot of work keeping it non-hierarchical.

Have you ever come across sexism or other discrimination movements in other countries?

Graciela: Particularly the Trotskyist parties had a really nasty attitude towards [the organisations], and they destroyed many of the popular assemblies because they thought that they were going to be right wing! So they would come with long lists of things that people had to do for, and if they didn’t then they thought that they were done. So that introduced a brutal amount of stress in the organisations and lowered the amount of people that participated. People that didn’t have political experience just didn’t want to deal with that, basically. So a lot of people left due to this.

In the piquetero movement, in the unemployed workers movement, there are huge organisations of Trotskyists and although there are Trotskyist organisations... the Communist Party also has representation there. Even worse than that, the Peronists have a lot, and the in some groups the Communist Party and the Peronists are even in a lot of representation.

So there are some of us who are organised autonomously and some who are still organising in the old ways. How do you think the Internet and Indymedia played in blocking people’s ideas of what’s going on?

Graciela: I would say that Indymedia was key in helping to write our struggles ourselves... that people that are not within the movement do access it and don’t even know that Indymedia exists. But it was very important for us as a movement to have Indymedia there. Many times I think people didn’t think ever would be the case, because the Indymedia photographers were there and the cops fell exposed by them.

What is the role of women in the piquetero movement?

Graciela: We have, I think, 10% of the people involved in the movement, which is very much they can progress towards social change. I know of people who are very interested in this process, but I personally am not very moved by it.

On the Piquetero Tour, you were able to educate people about what’s going on in Argentina. Do artists have a big role to play in the piquetero movement and the AAP? What other methods have you used to educate people through entertainment?

Graciela: The autonomous movement is very interested in different ways of telling the story. There’s a lot of forms that are being used, mixed with music, with pictures, with the whole city, they have made it possible that people will come up with huge explanations, just to get the message across, they can tell the people that this is the story.

What do you think of the leftist governments in Brazil and Venezuela? Do you think there’s any chance of working with hierarchical leftist movements in other countries?

Graciela: I personally do not trust that kind of political system. Women who were doing road blockades and organising in the neighbourhoods. Now it’s all turned out. More than discrimination occurs, what occurs is that the movement is not very empowered enough. They rely on the guys still for some of the stuff. I was present one day that there was a discussion amongst there where one of the women said, “We want to be the ones to talk to the press.”

The guys said, “Well, which one of you is going to talk?” And more and more of them wanted it. I think that this just made the more the problem of the woman who doesn’t go out and fight that space, then the guys telling them to shut up.

There is some sexism, but I would say that in the autonomous movement it’s not blatant at all. It’s something that people problematise and discuss and think about.

How is your movement connected to other struggles worldwide, and in South Americas?

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Mayday in Dublin

This year saw an EU summit in Dublin. It fell on May Day. Irish anarchists, organised against it. Black Flag interview one of the organisers of the march against the EU summit. A member of the Workers Solidarity Movement, he is speaking here in a personal capacity. More information on the protests can be found at indymedia.ie and strugglewseurope.org.

Q. Could you give a short introduction to anarchism in Ireland in the past few years?

The police opened up with the water cannon that they had borrowed from the PSNI (RUC). This was the first time water cannon had been used in Ireland.

Q. How did you organise the group attacks?

We set up a media group with four or five activists, including some spokespeople and a smaller number of others to help with background work. This was intended anyway but we meant we could quite quickly start applying to the various press and community papers the story about the march was being planned in the papers. As many of these were ridiculous ("Anarchist army plans bloodbath in Ireland") over time this worked in our favour as people began to support us because of the growing libertarian movement. But this element should not be exaggerated, the state would have seen the republican movement in the 1970s and 1980s as much, much greater threat.

We were able to get articles into many of the newspapers and live appearances on both national radio and TV to put across our position. Probably most importantly about a week before the march we were on the "Late, Late Show" a TV chat show that almost everyone watches (even if no one admits to it). On the simplest level allowing people to see what an anarchist actually looked like made a lot of the media fair stories ("Anarchists plan a bog roll attack with 16,000") seem ridiculous.

As well as counter-protests this also enabled us to briefly explain what anarchists actually stood for and to get across that we were protesting at EU policies rather than either the existence or expansion of the EU. Of course many papers and journalists remained hostile to us but the stuff we were writing contrasted to sharply with the stuff people could read and hear elsewhere that it became very obvious to most of the population that the water cannon were lying. This produced a large positive reaction towards us by those who recognised and rejected the lies for what they were.

Q. Was the May Day media Madonna an isolated case?

We faced a very much weaker version of the same sort of stuff in the run up to our attempted March 1st direct action at Shannon Airport during the Iraq war. In that case we failed to get our media attack together until the last moment and this had a very damaging effect on the number who turned out. We had 300 at Shannon, we had well over 3,000 marching on the EU summit.

Q. What about the state, how did you respond to the protests?

In the 90s had it panic-stricken and the media revealed a de facto ban on one of our events, the march on the EU summit. Basically they revealed they had ordered the Gardaí (police) to attack anyone attempting to march or assembly point and that the riot squad would occupy the assembly point in case anyone made it that far. In the fortnight beforehand they also carried on a low-level campaign of harassment of DGN activists seeking to publicise the event. Over 3 days every day to door listing session we organised was stopped by police who demanded to know the names and addresses of those taking part. This led once we were refusing to give this information (we could have been arrested but were not) and because we were fetching details of any harassment to gardaí. I don’t think anything was published but on live shows as the people mentioned it and the Gardai press office had to field queries on this.

Q. How did the left respond to the media hysteria? Was there much solidarity or was it the usual opportunistic attacks?

The organised left were pretty useless as the Green, Labour and Socialist Party. Basically the media was carrying on an anti-anarchist witch hunt complete with "exposes" of some of our spokespeople ("The anarchist leader who teaches our kids by day"). The left "responded" by suggesting that many anarchists would want to part in the protests! Obviously they felt that everyone except anarchists should have the right to protest! As might be expected the SWP were the worst, they went so far as to announce on radio that our march was cancelled and that everyone should go on their own.

Q. What happened on May Day itself?

There were several events but the one that attracted the most attention was the banned march. Basically we announced a new 10pm start and a new route. Several thousand people turned up and we asked them whether we should just protest at the ban there or defy it and march on Farnsfile. Overwhelmingly people wanted to march (as we expected) so we set off.

We actually covered about 6 of the 10km before the Gardaí managed to form a solid enough barrier to stop us. As DGN had advertised a non-violent march we stopped some 100m from this police line. A section of the march then broke away to try and push through the police line, which most of the participants followed. Those who remained with the DGN banners formed up to prevent them being cut off and so that we could march back into the city centre together once their attempted break through had been repelled. We had always made clear that we respected the choices of other groups.

As there were two water cannons and thousands of riot police waiting for those trying to push through it was clear that the attempt would fail but it was good they made the pain by trying to do so. The police opened up with the water cannon that they had borrowed from the PSNI (RUC). This was the first time water cannon had been used in Ireland. Riot police also blocked protesters as they pushed them back down the road and a number of broken windows resulted.

We then marched into town as a block with the riot police and water...
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Q. Can you give a short introduction to anarchism in Ireland in the past few years?

Basically the libertarian movement has seen a major breakthrough in Ireland over the last three or so years. The basis of this has been a series of very broad libertarian island wide meetings under the title of the ‘Grassroots Gathering’ out of which numerous actions have now been organised. In the last few months we have seen the emergence of city based networks linked to this. The Mayday protest was organised by one of these, the Dublin Grassroots Network.

Q. Can you summarise the main aims of your Mayday protests?

To expose the current policies of the EU as racist, militaristic and attacking working people. The actual forms of the actions were secondary to this but their main aim was to get as many ordinary people as possible out on the streets.

Q. What was organised?

There were eight separate actions each aiming at highlighting specific aspects of the EU. These ranged from a Critical Mass bicycle ride to no borders street theatre to marching on the EUsummit so a Reclaim the Streets party. More detail on all of these can be found on our website.

Q. How were they organised? Did anarchists in Ireland work together?

They were organised by the Dublin Grassroots Network which includes most if not all anarchists active in Dublin. Libertarian groups from other cities helped organise specific aspects like food or simply travelled to Dublin to help out over the weekend.

Each event was taken on by a small group of DGN which fed back into a number of publicly advertised DGN assemblies. This meant the details of each event could be kept somewhat secret while involving a larger number in the organising work. Not of course foolproof and were ‘infiltrated’ by journalists who ended up打听ng out our leaflets.

Q. Irish Indymedia gave a flavour of the anti-war tactics the media was peddling. It made the London hysteria seem tame. Why do you think the media did it?

Anarchism in Ireland is a real threat to capitalism.

I wish we were! The reason for the media hype was clearly to frighten people away from the protests. There are probably several reasons for this and one would be the threat of the growing libertarian movement. But this element should not be exaggerated, the state would have seen the republican movement in the 1970’s and 1980’s as a much, much greater threat. We have grown by but we are still only a few hundred rather loosely organised activists and a lot of much smaller and more tightly organised anarchist groups.

Q. How did your group respond to the attacks?

We set up a media group with four or five of us to get spokespeople and a similar number of others to help with background work. This was intended anyway but meant we could quite quickly start applying to the various panic stories the government were planting in the press. As many of these were ridiculous (‘Anarchist army plans bloodbath in Ireland’) over time this worked in our favour as people began to support us because of the way we were being treated.

We were able to get articles into many of the newspapers and live appearances on both national radio and TV to put our position clear. Most importantly between the front of the march we were on the ‘Late, Late Show’ a TV chat show that almost everyone watches (even if no one admits to it). On the simplest level allowing people to see what an anarchist actually looked like made a lot of the media fear stories (‘Anarchists plan gas attack that will kill 10,000’) seem ridiculous.

As well as countering the hype this also enabled us to briefly explain what anarchists actually stood for and to get across that we were protesting against EU policies rather than either the existence or expansion of the EU. Of course many papers and journalists remained hostile to us but the stuff we were writing contrasted to sharply with the stuff people could read and read elsewhere that it became very obvious to most of the population that they were lying. This produced a large positive reaction towards us by those who recognised and rejected the lies for what they were.

Q. Were the May Day media madness an isolated case?

We faced a very much weaker version of the same sort of stuff in the run up to our attempted March 1st direct action at Shannon Airport during the Iraq war. In that case we failed to get our media act together until the last minute and this had a very damaging effect on the number who turned out. We had 300 at Shannon, we had well over 3,000 marching on the EU summit.

Q. What about the state, how did it respond to the protests?

In the 90s, had there been panicking and we had the media reveal a de cero ban on one of our events, the march on the EU summit. Basically they revealed they had ordered the Gardaí (police) to attack anyone attempting to reach our assembly point and that the riot squad would occupy the assembly point in case anyone made it that far.

In the fortnight beforehand they also carried out a low level campaign of harassment of DGN activists seeking to publicise the event. Over 3 days every door to door leafletting session we organised was stopped by police who demanded to know the names and addresses of those taking part. This ended once we were refusing to give this information (we could have been arrested but were not) and because we were feeding details of all harassment to journalists. I don’t think anything was published but live shows as the poster people mentioned it and the Gardaí press office had to field queries on this.

Q. How did the left respond to the media hysteria? Where were much solidarity or was it the usual opportunistic attacks?

The organised left were pretty useless as were the trade unions and Labour Party. Basically the media was carrying on an anti-anarchist witch hunt complete with ‘exposes’ of some of our spokespeople (the anarchist leader should just protest at the ban there or defy it and march on Pearse). Overwhelmingly people wanted to march (as we expected) so we set off.

We actually covered about 6 of the 9km before the Gardaí managed to form a solid enough barrier to stop us. As DGN had advertised a non violent march we stopped some 100km from this police line. A section of the march then broke away to try and push through the police line, which most of the participants followed. Those who remained with the DGN banners formed up to prevent them being cut off and so that we could march back into the city centre together once their attempted break through had been repelled. We had always made clear that we respected the choices of either groups cannong launching limited attacks on our rear that were obviously designed to panic us into a rout so they could send in snatch squads. However although some people defending the rear were arrested we did manage to march all the way back into town as a single bloc.

Q. Did the media have a negative impact on the May Day protests in terms of numbers? What about state repression?

No. The smear campaign was so crude that it resulted in a lot of sympathy for us. Getting people onto the media meant that we could announce details of many of our events. Finally the attempted ban on the march meant that in the 24 hours before the protest our new assembly point and time was one of the first news items on many TV and radio shows.

The police opened up with the water cannon that they had borrowed from the PSNI (RUC). This was the first time water cannon had been used in Ireland.
State repression appeared to have a small effect at first in making some activists reluctant to engage in further public activity. But we still managed to distribute the 50,000 leaflets we had printed explaining the present. And it clearly backed fire as it meant that many people came out to defend our freedom to protest. The state repression is not however over. Over 30 were arrested and many have been denied bail by a court specially set up to try them despite the fact they are facing very minor charges. Rights now DNQ are working on their defence and ensuring that all charges are dropped.

Q. Has the May Day protests and hyper increased interest in anarchism?

You although as yet we don’t know how long lasting this will be. Beyond this interest through the social mainstream is small. Many people who choose to take part in a libertarian organisation or an event will mostly have had a positive impression of its doings.

Q. What lessons did you gain from the experience?

Don’t be afraid of using the media, it is a question of getting accurate articles published but of getting schemes to inform the public so that they can be led to support the cause. We’ve got to use the mass media to inform the public of the cause.

Q. What about the strikes and hyper in Ireland planning to do next?

In the short term we will be active in mobilising a no vote to a ministerial referendum being held June 11. After this George Bush is in Ireland for an EU summit at the end of June and we are already mobilising to disrupt this. A busy month is ahead.

Q. And what about next year’s May Day?

I don’t think we should get too hung up on always publishing some sort of a report on May Day. Apart from anything else this can be seen to be those outside the movement that this is all we are about. But I’m sure we will continue to do the same and we are going to be more active.

Q. Has the media commented on how free the pre-May Day hope was?

It would be more accurate to say that the media was not commented on how free the pre-May Day hope was. Some continue to run ludicrous stories and journalists who do the opposite in the industrial action somebodies stopped their work. A minority of the many published articles that we could almost have written ourselves. Indeed one journalist who was the water run over joined in the chants of 'f**k the police' as we marched back into Dublin.

There is little point in imagining you can win all or even most of the corporate media over. What you can do in some cases is get enough counter information into the media so that many people become aware that the scare articles are just that and stop taking them at face value.

Q. What now? What are anarchists in Ireland planning to do next?

Under the same conditions of the state in industrial action. The fact that so many workers have been willing to take action to win and protect their occupations without wildcats is particularly welcome. It is interesting that the state has not done a single person who has taken unofficial action. As Bob Crow general secretary of the RMT said "Why bother with ballots - where does it get us?" This may change. If industrial action continues to rise the state will intervene to control it and most of the major disputes (fire fighters, civil servants and university lecturers) are being fought with the state working with them. Efforts by New Labour to keep public sector pay rises below inflation (the trigger for the civil service dispute) and introduce so called modernisation means it likely that the public sector will see further unrest in the coming years.

Much has been made of the general secretaries of Bob Crow, Tony Woodley of the TCG, Mark Serwotka of the public service union PCS and the rest of the "awkward squad" anarchists warn not to trust leaders. Trade union leaders sit at the top of the hierarchical structures running substantially more than their members. For all his militancy, for example, Serwotka has only called for a two day strike amongst civil servants hoping that this would be an improvement on the negotiated settlement. Crowe called off a tube strike in the run-up to Christmas in support of a sacked driver and union activist. While better than what came before the awkward squad still performed on the day. The strike day actions and work to rules are preferred to all out strikes.

Malta and sundry anarchists in Iceland planning to do next?

The last two years have seen an impressive up turn in industrial militancy amongst workers. While official statistics are not available it seems likely that 2003 will top 2002's ten year high for days lost to industrial action. I am told that the workforce now belongs to a union and half of those in work have belonged to a union in their life. 1973-74 57% of the workforce was a member of a union (membership actually peaked the following year). Currently in the private sector just 19% of workers belong to unions (80% in the public sector)

This is not to be pessimistic. It took the state nearly two decades, mass unemployment, the defeat of the miners and the most restrictive anti-union legislation in Europe (kept in place by New Labour) to push the union movement to its modern low point. It will take time for the labour movement to recover its strength, but recovering it does appear to be. What is encouraging is that this recovery is being led from the shop floor. To borrow a phrase of Kepton a spirit of rebellion is building amongst workers which should help lay the foundations of increased class consciousness.

Anarchists, while critical of reformist trade unions, support working class struggle and insist that the role of the state in industrial action. The fact that so many workers have been willing to take action to win and protect their occupations is particularly welcome. It is interesting that the state has not done a single person who has taken unofficial action. As Bob Crow general secretary of the RMT said "Why bother with ballots - where does it get us?" This may change. If industrial action continues to rise the state will intervene to control it and most of the major disputes (fire fighters, civil servants and university lecturers) are being fought with the state working with them. Efforts by New Labour to keep public sector pay rises below inflation (the trigger for the civil service dispute) and introduce so called modernisation means it likely that the public sector will see further unrest in the coming years.

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State repression appeared to have a small effect at first in making some activists reluctant to engage in further public activity. But we still managed to distribute the 50,000 leaflets we had printed explaining the protest. And it clearly backfired as it meant that many people came out to defend our freedom to protest.

The state repression is not however over. Over 30 were arrested and many have been denied bail by a court specially set up to try them despite the fact they are facing very minor charges. Right now DGN are working on their release and are demanding that all charges are dropped.

Q. Has the May Day protests and hunger increased interest in anarchism?

You as anarchist or do you think that the May Day hunger strikes were the result of the police trying to control people's enthusiasm and force them into submission? How has the May Day protest gone?

Q. What was on the minds of the anarchists in Ireland planning to do next?

In the short term we will be active in mobilising a no vote to a motion referendum being held June 11th. After this George Bush is in Ireland for an EU summit at the end of June and we are already mobilising to disrupt this. A busy month ahead.

Q. What about next year's May Day?

I don't think we should get too hung up on always pushing some sort of spectacle on May Day. Apart from anything else this can just seem to those outside the movement that we are all about image. But said I'm sure we will continue to do the same things as last year and organise our own events like RTS.

But I think in the longer term the real question is how do we build movement in mobilising around the global issues of the Iraq war and the EU into mobilising around local issues in the workplace and the community. Building a real movement that can withstand state repression over the longer period requires this.

Q. Has the media commented on how wrong its pre-May Day hype was?

It would be more accurate to say that the media first published a report on May Day and has remained focussed since. Some continue to run luridous stories and in fact the mass media operation somehow stopped their worst predictions coming true. A minority of the articles published that we could almost have written ourselves. Indeed one journalist who was on the water outside repeatedly joined in the chants of "f**k the police" as we marched back into the city.

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Sucking the Golden Egg
A platformist response to "post-anarchist"

by Peter Kropotkin
ZACF, southern Africa

Convoy: The following is a response by the sabotage anarchist collective "Platform" to an article by Steve Newman entitled "Anarchism and the politics of revolution".

In the midst of the establishment's persistent refusal to understand anarchism, of its constant attempts to ridicule and attack a bunch of violent utopians; in the face of continual misrepresentations by the Marxists, of their efforts to portray us as a petty-bourgeois movement that rejects organisation and can never be truly revolutionary; in the face of all this systematic misunderstanding and refusal to engage, it is a relief to encounter a piece of criticism that makes serious attempt to understand what anarchism is about, some of these points, offers (mostly) coherent and as (far as I know) logical arguments, and at a level at least attempts to present itself as making constructive proposals. Nevertheless, I wish to argue that Steve Newman's article "Anarchism and the Politics of Revolution" is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of anarchism, and that its proposals amount to a rejection of the real point of our movement.

It will not surprise the reader to learn that Newman's article belongs to the post-anarchist stream, which is often so disappointing. What one should say is the "post-ism" tradition generally, since he identifies his proposals as "post-anarchism". He draws extensively on Foucault (although the main source of his criticism is Nietzsche) and, in the best fragments-post-ist manner ends up explicitly rejecting a general movement to change society, and implicitly rejecting any general theoretical social criticism as well. In place of his writings suffer from the obscurity characteristic of postmodernist work, but he is not nearly as bad as some others. In short, his article is a good example of the theoretical and practical inadequacy of post-ism.

Newman illustrates his view of plain understanding it always annoys me how drastically they have been misinterpreted, while the same ones I once criticized for regarding the obvious. Again, we know that Bakunin and Kropotkin have made serious errors, but these does not invalidate the tradition of anarchism which they founded. Even if they were guilty of everything Bakunin and Kropotkin can be accused of, what is new is that this view from Kropotkin that "the natural and essential principle of human society is mutual aid, and that man is naturally cooperative, sociable and altruistic, rather than competitive and egoistic. On the other hand, he is subsequently notes that Bakunin identifies these elements as signs of a contradiction in anarchism, thought, or perhaps an inherent inhuman; that is, that the falsity of something that underlines our whole perspective of human nature, and with it our entire political approach. Newman also notes that rather working with the society to the State - and sorting the State as the derivative of economic relations - anarchists work from the State to society" is a caricature of our approach. After all, anarchists since Bakunin have attacked private property, capitalism and the bourgeoisie as forcibly as we have attacked the state. If we do not usually accept simple economic determinism of the Marxists kind, we do generally hold that the state and imperialism are central, and I would want to claim, as I think we should most anarchists, that the relationship works in both directions. Newman alludes to Bakunin's correct prediction that the establishment of a Marxist state would not be able to transform the revolutionaries into a new ruling class; we would be driven back to the only instance of state power giving rise to class oppression; but we must also recognize that a ruling class does not need a state to hold on to power, and we can present numerous instances of states acting in the immediate economic interests of the bourgeoisie. It is for these reasons that class struggle, contra Newman, is central to anarchist theory - and even more central to anarchist practice.

Newman, then, is incorrect in denying the importance of the class distinction in anarchism theory. It is certainly true that the state/society distinction also plays an important role, particularly in Kropotkin, there is even a grain of truth in the claim that a distinction in human subjectivity. We do maintain that the capacity for mutual aid and solidarity, and the love of freedom, are important elements, and that anarchists manifest themselves spontaneously in a great variety of circumstances: forms of organization, and the like. It seems to me that Bakunin's position is that the individual often emerge among people without any background in our ideas. But I see no evidence that ever made this the sole basis of our resistance. We believe that the class struggle and the organization of struggles are the way we can find the oppressed to resist their oppressors; that this struggle itself produces the opposition to the state, for it is a necessary means of revolutionary change, and enables them to build in their organs of struggle the forms and conditions necessary for later development, that struggle itself contributes to the development of subjectivity; in short, that the class resistance is rooted both in subjectivity and in objective conditions.
Sucking the Golden Egg
A platformist response to "post-anarchism"

by "Peter Kropotkin"
ZACF, southern Africa

Conrad: The following is a response by the sabotage anarchist communist International Workingmen's Association for an article by Steve Newman entitled "Anarchism and the politics of identity".

In the midst of the establishment's persistent refusal to understand anarchism, of its constant attempts to see it as a bunch of violent loutards, in the face of continual misrepresentations by the Marxists, of their efforts to portray us as a petty-bourgeois movement that rejects organisation and can never be truly revolutionary, in the face of all this systematic misunderstanding and refusal to engage, it is a relief to encounter a piece of criticism that makes some attempt to understand what anarchism is about, some of our good points, offers (mostly) coherent and (as far as I know) logical arguments and at least attempts to present itself as making constructive proposals. Unfortunately, I wish to argue that Steve Newman's article 'Anarchism and the Politics of Representation' is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of anarchism, and that its proposals amount to a rejection of the real point of our movement.

It will not surprise the reader to learn that Newman's article belongs to the postmodernist camp, and, in the best fragmentary post-modernist manner ends up explicitly rejecting a general movement to change society, and implicitly rejecting any general theoretical social criticism as well. In place of writing such a social and theoretically inclined critique as is characteristic of do-gooding anarchist groups, he inverts the key idea of his article in the article itself as a whole is a critical analysis of the theoretical and practical inadequacy of post-modernism.

Newman illustrates his view of plain understanding it always amazes me how drastically they have been misunderstood, but I feel otherwise about the question. One should say the 'post-it' tradition generally, since he identifies his proposals as 'post-anarchism'. He draws extensively on Foucault (although the main source of his criticism is Nietzsche) and, in the best fragmentary post-modernist manner ends up explicitly rejecting a general movement to change society, and implicitly rejecting any general theoretical social criticism as well. In place of writing such a social and theoretically inclined critique as is characteristic of do-gooding anarchist groups, he inverts the key idea of his article in the article itself as a whole is a critical analysis of the theoretical and practical inadequacy of post-modernism.

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ions. To say otherwise is a travesty of our theories; even worse, it is a travesty of our praxis and a travesty of the actual and potential struggle of millions. And so, the point is not that rejection of political power can only lead to a failure to understand it. Their charge is somewhat misguided, in some way more so than Newman, but at least they attempt to find an example to support their case. Their primary reference is to the Spanish anarchists of 1836, when several prominent anarchists accepted higher government positions instead of recognizing the Popular Front government as an oppressor and a class enemy. The Marxists like to claim that this step was somehow a consequence of anarchist principles, of "antimilitarist misreadings of the state" or some such. Of course if anarchists had joined a 'workers' government' controlled by Lenin it would have been totally different matter! Notice the entry into government was a blatant violation of anarchist principles, and was recognized as such by more committed anarchists both at the time and afterwards. But the Marxists convened is really no more nonsensical than Newman's interpretation.

Notice that I refer to the Spanish anarchists. Our solution to this was not destroyed, and even though we struggled it was ultimately defeated. The point is that all the Russian Revolutions did consist simply in the destruction of the state. In Spain, workers seized factories, took over the means of production, established councils and councils were established for self-defence, and production was at least partly reconstructed in the basis of mutual aid. Although this happened in a short period (mostly late 1936, after which reactionary forces took the offensive) it was a product of decades of struggle and preparation. Such has been anarchist practice in every revolution where we played a major part: in Ukraine, in Mexico, in Manchuria. Such has been the aim of our practice in the many movements that have never yet come close to victory. And such is not only our practice but our theory as well. To take just one example, Kropotkin in The Conquest of Bread devotes almost as much emphasis to the rebuilding of social production as to the actual defeat of the oppressor. And we have always emphasised that this process begins long before the revolution. The bottom-up, grassroots organisation of these forces, "controlled by the workers themselves", is intended as the key

antidote to a re-emergence of oppression and domination, of state and power and capital.

Not that we necessarily see revolution as automatically opening the door to a perfect society free from power and struggle. The real question is: how can we use the revolutionary moment to destroy the state because, in real life, in history, it is almost always oppressive. If there is metaphysics involved in an abstract or conceptually political aspect - the view that we can get on without the state - but even then we can be a long way before we are happy.

Newman and other critics like to portray us as being too naive, as sitting in a misguided discussion of the state. They claim that this is simply a question of the state. The Marxists claim that the state can be a significant issue. But we don't want to be distracted or have to deal with understandings of the state or the state. We don't want to do this, and that against an "anti-theoretical" or "particularist" claim the state is the world, and in both cases really just as theoretical and abstract as any of our views.

Let me try to illustrate our state, not only in the struggle against the state but also in the struggle against the state. Newman writes about our struggles, by means of a simple analogy. Many men have been into the prison, many have been to court, many have been to jail, all for the same reasons. This wastes time, and affects the life of every person in the course of its rise to power. It is necessary for us to view it (1904 only a bourgeois revolution.)

Newman might now report that I have given away too much. What, he might ask, is the point of revolutionary anarchism, if the human nature is essentially and only co-operative, and without the view of the revolutionary destruction of the state will usher in a perfect society, where human nature can be fully realised? And if not for the sake of the perfect society, why are we so determined to destroy the state in the first place? He might now again throw at us the question we have already discussed, from Foucault, that "Assemblages like the State are based on understanding and can only be as easily turned against the institution they form the basis of." But such a reply overlooks the point of anarchism as well as of human society in general. Some anarchists have, indeed, made deep attacks on the state, or posed the question, "Why do we need government anyway? But this sort of approach, while not without value, is not the core of the anarchist critique of the state because in real life, in history, it is almost always oppressive. If there is metaphysics involved in an abstract or conceptually political aspect - the view that we can get on without the state - but even then we can be a long way before we are happy.

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Newman and other critics like to portray us as being too naive, as sitting in a misguided discussion of the state. They claim that this is simply a question of the state. The Marxists claim that the state can be a significant issue. But we don't want to be distracted or have to deal with understandings of the state or the state. We don't want to do this, and that against an "anti-theoretical" or "particularist" claim the state is the world, and in both cases really just as theoretical and abstract as any of our views.

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tions. To say otherwise is a travesty of our theories; even worse, it is a travesty of our lives. Such a rejection of political power can only lead to a failure to understand it. Their charge is not a viable one, in some way more so than Neuman, but at least they attempt to find an example to support their case. Their favorite reference is to the Spanish revolution of 1936, when several prominent anarchists accepted high government positions instead of recognizing the Popular Front government as an oppressor and a class enemy. The Marxists claim that this step was a consequence of anarchist principles, of anarchist misunderstanding of the state or some such. Of course if anarchists had joined a ‘workers’ government’ controlled by Lenin it would have been a totally different matter! Nonsense. The entry into government was a blatant violation of anarchist principles, and was recognized as such by more committed anarchists both at the time and afterwards. But the Marxists misconceive is really no more nonsensical than Neuman’s interpretation.

Notice that I refer to the Spanish revolution, even though the state was not destroyed, and even though our struggle was ultimately defeated. The point is that revolutions do not consist simply in the destruction of the state. In Spain workers seized factories, insisted on workers’ control, and other measures were established for self-defence, and production was at least partly reconstructed on a basis of mutual aid. Although this happened in a short period (mostly late 1936, after which reactionary forces took the offensive) it was a product of decades of struggle and preparation. Such has been anarchist practice in every revolution where we have played a major part: in Ukraine, in Mexico, in Manchuria. Such has been the aim of our practice in the many movements that have never yet come close to revolution. And such is not only our practice but our theory as well. To take just one example, Koprinkov in The Conquest of Bread devotes at least as much emphasis to the rebuilding of society and production as to the actual defeat of the oppressor. And we have always emphasized that this cannot begin with the defeat of the state, but is integral to the way we organize our forces of struggle long before the revolution. The bottom-line, grassroots organisation of these forces, “controlled by the workers themselves”, is intended as the key attitude to a re-emergence of opposition and domination, of state and society.

Not that we necessarily see revolution as automatically opening the door to a perfect society free from power and class distinction, but the revolution assures that we have the possibility of destroying with power the power of the oppressor. To fight against the revolution means to accept the domination of the state, and in the struggle to achieve revolution we overcome the obstacles to its ultimate victory. Despite this, Neuman and other critics like to portray us, as if we were engaged in discussions about linear theoretical considerations, as if we would only want to talk discursively about general theoretical questions, and never to focus on the particular, but where can Freeman be wrong? On the contrary, an example of the unstable power relations on which the state is based. The state is the dominant force in the state, and we don’t want it to happen again. They are often violent and have many destructive features, but can also have valuable consequences. I do not think many people would want to deny that we are being oppressed today, even if the system that emerged as a result of the revolution is the system we are now fighting against. This does not mean that we accept the Marxist view that the rise of capitalism was inevitable and necessary. We do not believe that the Marxist view is correct, and we can see that many people of all classes have a stake in the struggle. We must now turn to the task of deciding the course of action.

Let me try to illustrate our view of the state, and Neuman’s reaction to it. Neuman argues about our struggles, by means of a single analogy. Many men have begun to take part in our practice. We consider important for people in the state to strive for a better society. In many cases, the state does not provide, and if we do, then we are not fighting against each other. We see this as a positive, living, loving relationship. It is also known that the people who come up against the state have always done so. The revolution is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a new society.

Newman might now unwittingly suggest that I have given away too much. What, then, might we ask, is the point of revolutionary practice? The point is that human nature is essentially good and only co-operative, and without the state, the true cooperation of the human will be possible. In other words, what is the point of the revolution? Is it not the case that the revolution is the basis of all society? That is why we must continue to fight against the state, and we do so because we believe in the state. We see the state as a threat to our freedom, to our ability to live as we wish, and to the possibility of a better society. And we are committed to that struggle.

Neuman’s claim that the main focus of the anarchist revolution is the destruction of political power. It is necessarily a claim that is also necessarily an attack on our theories and our lives. This attack is based on a misunderstanding of what we mean by the destruction of political power. The destruction of political power is not the same as the destruction of the state. The state is not the only form of power. There are many other forms of power, such as the power of economic relations, the power of ideology, and the power of the dominant culture. The destruction of political power is the destruction of these other forms of power as well.

The respect of Neuman or some other theories. But it is not only at least as important in the current period as it was in the past. We must not lose sight of the fact that the state is not the only form of power. There are many other forms of power, such as the power of economic relations, the power of ideology, and the power of the dominant culture. The destruction of political power is the destruction of these other forms of power as well.

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Anarchy in Southern Africa

First, perhaps you could say something about yourself and the organisation you are part of.

This interview was done with Sh. And St. of the Dublin-based Zambian Action Group (ZAG), Jonathan Payne of the regional Anarchist Black Cross (ABC), who is the ZAG's acting international secretary, and Michael Schmidt of the Johannesburg-based Biko Media Collective (BMC) who is the ZAG's acting international secretary. Joe and Sh. are also involved with Zabala Books (ZB), while Michael Schmidt is involved with the ABC. The Collectives are members of the third generation of the ZACF. Some of them, like ZB, originated as underground collectives a decade ago in the twilight of apartheid.

Does it involve blacks and whites? What class/social background is the typical member?

The Federation's groups are made up of both blacks and whites who are either unemployed or students. Current membership is purely racially divided between black and white, but there are far more black people living in "squatter camps" and townships who have expressed a greater interest in anarchism than white people living in suburbs. A typical member would be in their early 20s, casually employed and we expect female membership to be our primary project. Their project would be to work towards the establishment of a new society that is free of aggression, segregation, and -most of all- anarchy.

There has been much of an African Anarchist tradition over time.

Long under the whip of hyper-external colonial regimes, the development of the entire spectrum of left-wing political organisations in Africa has been delayed or frustrated. While the late 1990s was a good starting point, the collapse of the Union of South Africa and apartheid in 1994 led to the development of a new political liberation. In the first case, it was only countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and the UK where the modernist colonialist ideologies were ended. In the second case, it was only countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and the UK where the modernist colonialist ideologies were ended.

The greatest popular interest we experience in the poor communities where we work and where many of us live is not so much in the expression of anarchism (anti-politics), but in its practical application... To put it simply: our practice is our strength and our attraction.

The book is good in describing the anarchic elements of some traditional African societies that existed before the late 1930s. It is also a good starting point but is limited because the anarchic movement has only really resurfaced in Africa with the exception of the Awareness League (ALU) just prior to the book being published, and the societies of a number of African countries have been dramatically across the continent since then. The collapse of apartheid and the end that brought to cross-border conflicts in Namibia, Angola and Mozambique in particular, the defeat of the old US client regime like the Zairian (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and proxy forces (like UNITA in Angola), and the exit of dictators like Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Hjangil Kim Il-sung in North Korea means that a Cold War in Africa is now impossible.

But the reign of the DRC by transnational corporations, under the cover of military conflict between the client states, and the exposure of the fraud of electoral politics through the corruption of new "democratic" regimes like that of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the last-ditch scrab-dressed-ear-thong stance of "socialist" dictators like Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe are key tensions high. Adding to this is the slow sub-imperialism of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and his neo-liberal "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) which is a modern re-adaptation of the colonial-style regime that has re-adapted a new form of an African style of the old colonial-style regime.

The concept of "African socialism" is defined by a series of "natural"-so-called liberation leaders like Kwanza Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Ian Smith. Today, the SADCC on behalf of the "socialist" states has largely abandoned this style of "socialism" in favour of market-oriented reforms. This is a totally different approach to the old WSPC's open door,"if you're interested, you're in" policy that contributed to its ideological and practical weakness. The greatest popular interest we experience in the poor communities where we work is not so much in the expression of anarchism (anti-politics), but in its practical application: trans-national, and international direct action movements, and the direct application of the concept of "socialism" in the form of guerrilla warfare, the direct application of the concept of "socialism" in the form of guerrilla warfare. We find that people who take initiative, work hard, stand by their promises and fight for the rights of others. It is on this basis alone that we have any audience at all.

Is there much interest in Anarchism in Southern Africa? Has this been reflected in the size and influence of your organisations?

We have definitely been growing in interest in Southern Africa. This is reflected in the size of the ZACF which is now a major player in the region. We are more concerned with spreading anarchism to the people, and the development of the Awareness League (ALU) just prior to the book being published, and the societies of a number of African countries have been dramatically across the continent since then. The collapse of apartheid and the
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First, perhaps you could say something about yourself and the organisation you are part of?

This interview was done with Sh. And Sh. of the Dakar-based Zabalah Action Group (ZAG), Jonathan Pryn of the regional Anarchist Black Cross (ABC), who is the ZAG acting national secretary, and Michael Schmidt of the Johannesburg-based Bikah Media College (BMC) who is the ZAG acting international secretary. Joe and Sh. are also involved with Zabalah (ZB), while Michael is involved with the ABC. The collectives we are members of are among the founding collectives of the ZAF. Some of them, like ZB, originated as underground collectives a decade ago in the twilight of anarchism.

Does it involve blacks and whites? What class/social background is the typical member?

The Federation's groups are made up of both blacks and whites who are majority Welling black and white, while there are far more black people living in "squatter camps" and townships who have expressed a greater interest in anarchism than white people living in suburbs. A typical member would be in their early 20s, casually employed and uncertain. We expect female membership to climb as our community projects prove their worth and we develop an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-oppression agenda.

Has there been much of an African Anarchist tradition? 

Long under the whip of hyper-expansionist colonial regimes, the development of the entire spectrum of left-wing organisations in Southern Africa has been delayed mostly to the late or very narrow development of an industrial working class in a haphazard country- and secondly to the development of national liberation struggles. In the first case, it was only countries such as South Africa, Algeria and Egypt where colonialism established significant settler populations. Many of these countries continued in their post-independence to serve as theocratic states, with the exception of Namibia, Angola and Mozambique.

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The then-Portuguese colony of Mozam- bique, where it appears that an anarchistic social and political movement flourished in the 1970s, is the complete absence of a dominant communist party. The situation in the other main Portuguese-speaking country of Angola is likely to have been similar (a possible contributing factor to the lack of a red-black post-colonial flag), but this is an untested hypothesis.

Two factors contributed to the decay of the "first wave" of revolutionary syndicalism in Southern Africa. Firstly, as with other Anglophone countries (former British colonies), the lack of a specific anarchists on the continent crumbled revolutionary syndicalist organisations in meeting the challenges of the 1990s. To the exception of the Awareness League (AL) in Angola, the IWW and IWU began to spread as far afield as Zambia and Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s.

Is there much interest in Anarchism in Southern Africa? Is it reflected in the size and influence of your organisations?

The book is good in describing the anarchistic elements of some traditional African societies that existed before the late 1930s. This is a good starting point but it is limited because the anarchist movement has only really resur- med in Africa (with the exception of the Awareness League) since the book was published, and the soci-opolitical challenges of the 1990s has dramatically affected the continent since then. The collapse of apartheid and the end that brought to close-border conflicts in Namibia, Angola and Mozambique in particular, the defeat of the old US client regimes like the Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and pro-Soviets like UNITA in Angola, and the exit of dictators like Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Haing Mbatia of Malawi has brought the Cold War in Africa to an end.

But the range of the DRC by trans- national corporations, under the cover of military conflict between the confed- eracy of the Fronts of National Resistance for the new Democratic regimes like that of Zaire and the rebellions of the opposed regimes in Angola, Zaire and the last-ditch entrenched-standing of "socialist" regimes like Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, where key- man is still high. Adding to this is the smooth sub-imperialism of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and his neo- liberal "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) that will in some way be a new wave of imperialism on the continent. The greatest strength of the book "African Anarchism" is its critique of the notion that was African socialism and of the current obstacles - and opportunities - presented for the development of anarchism by the indigenous and white colonial regimes of Southern Africa. Thus, we are engaging with a new wave of anarcho-ism in Southern Africa, and more recently the African Federation of the Workers Solidarity Federation (WSF) in South Africa, and more recently the African Federation of the Workers Solidarity Movement (AWSM) of Zambia, which is the closest thing we have to an anti-imperialist movement.

Is there any interest in Anarchism in Southern Africa? Is it reflected in the size and influence of your organisations?

There has definitely been a growing interest in anarchist organisations in Southern Africa recently. But this interest is not yet reflected in the size of the ZAF, which is still small and un organised. We are more concerned with spreading anarchist ideas and politics than building an organisation. The approach of the ZAG has taken towards membership is that it recruits on a by-invita- tion basis and operates on the principle of building an organisation for probably at least a year within the social movements, those we know are convoluted and activated anarchists.

This is a totally different approach to the old WSF's "open door" if you're interested, you're in policy that contributed to its ideological and practical weakness.

The greatest popular interest we experience in the poor communities where we work (and where many of us live) is not so much in the expression of anarchist (anti-political), but in its practical application: non-sectarian, horizontal, direct-democratic community projects like food gardens and book- and- soul lending. This is an important step to a new anarchism: to the power of human beings, of the community organisations. As a structured organisation, we remain a tiny body; a very active, creative, player in the radical and progressive social movements that are growing up around 2000.

Has there been a materialising movement in Southern Africa? Or did the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe play a greater role? Or was it a case of better political coming out on top?

The term "Afri- can socialism" is defined by the orthodox social-liberation leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Ian Le Fammable. Are you thinking of that is good starting place to find out more about African Anarchism and its history?

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syndicalist mass organisations, the continent has not proven a rich province for the revival of anti-authoritarian mass organisations. Where they have arisen, it has perhaps been only in part because of the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of the validity of "socialism," and perhaps more because of specific local conditions: in Sierra Leone, it was the plightful working conditions in the diamond mines that gave rise to the IWU section there; while in Nigeria, left opposition to military rule helped forge the Awareness League. In South Africa, the legitimacy crisis of the reformist SA Communist Party (SACP) and the erosion of workers' support by nationalist-led liberation have helped spur interest in anarchism. But levels of interest and involvement in anarchism on the continent are extremely low (by comparison to Latin America or Eastern Europe, for example) and should not be overestimated. The "best politics" has yet to even gain a significant foothold, let alone come out on top.

How does the 'liberated' South Africa look now? Has the ending of Apartheid seen any major changes?

There are significant structural, legal, economic, political and social changes, which make it clear that many black inhabitants mean very little has changed in real terms. The societal boundaries in services, which have been created by the neo-liberal GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) economic policy of the ANC, which is a home-grown structural adjustment programme that even outpaced the IMF and World Bank, are as much a part of life today's general election. Even over racial laws, those that are class-based, are still in place, and provide the basis of the business, in fact, have ensured that the black majority remains landless, being reduced tenants on their own country.

The country's protectivist economies, reinforced by sanctions isolation - has been replaced by a massive foreign trade that has allowed cheap imports to flood the country, leading to the loss of some 1–2 million jobs. The one sector that has not been bailed out by foreign investment is agriculture, which has allowed cheap imports to flood the country, leading to the loss of some 1–2 million jobs. The one sector that has not been bailed out by foreign investment is agriculture, which, due to the collapse of the white economy, is now being emblematic of the economy as a whole.

The ANC leadership has embraced the neo-liberalism that has meant stupenduous wealth for some 300 black dynastic families in the making of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange that represents "black empowerment." It was Mandela's Sonny lister-Nelson Mandela's term that the ANC shut down its quasi-socialist pretexts (the Redistribution and Development Programme, RDP) and instead wholeheartedly embraced GEAR. It is hard to see what this has accomplished. It has produced a number of white farmers who are criminally and not politically motivated, Right-wing vigilantism and murder has become a problem, both with the black/white.

Spots of the Leopard (Mangosvina) a Magoni from the modem period of the political confusion in the Western Cape, but both seem to be quite petty crimes. The main thing to recognise is that the mainstream right-wingers, both white and black, are now all in partnership in the neo-liberal project. So for many black, coloured, and Asian farmers in the state has a history of marginalisation, joblessness, poverty, malnutrition and unemployment, and perhaps even deeper.

The ANC has been the government for a white now. What are they up to? Have they been the same party? The "New Labour" in introducing neo-liberal reforms under a "socialist" label.

You have hit the nail on the head. The ANC remains a member of the Socialist International, the President Thabo Mbeki is a self-declared Thatcherrite. The ANC still talks at its public rallies of its "national democratic revolution" and in the broad-based market fundamentalism. It has faced on public demonstrations at home - and cooled up to nationalisation talk in the Natal, Limpopo and Northern provinces and opposition.

The ANC leadership has become the government, which currently has no mandate for the murder of the ANC, and is the main factor in the crisis of the ANC. It is a fact that the ANC will have to face the challenge of an increasing number of black workers and employees, who don't like the direction the party is taking, with a decision to be taken on one issue or another.

The ANC leadership has embraced the neo-liberalism that has meant stupendous wealth for some 300 black dynastic families in the making of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange that represents "black empowerment." It was Mandela's Sonny lister-Nelson Mandela's term that the ANC shut down its quasi-socialist pretexts (the Redistribution and Development Programme, RDP) and instead wholeheartedly embraced GEAR. It is hard to see what this has accomplished. It has produced a number of white farmers who are criminally and not politically motivated, Right-wing vigilantism and murder has become a problem, both with the black/white.

The most important lesson is to put your muscle where your mouth is. In the current climate of political uncertainty, it is vital that the ANC leadership is confronted with the reality that the ANC is not the party of the black masses that it pretends to be. The ANC has to make a clear choice between being a genuine anticolonial movement or becoming a part of the ruling class.

The top leadership of the ANC must take immediate action to reverse the situation. The ANC must repudiate the policies of GEAR, which have led to the depoliticisation of the black economy and the destruction of the ANC's working-class base. The ANC must also take action to address the pressing social issues that have been ignored under GEAR, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

In addition to this, the forced amalgamation of COSATU's more radical and powerful unions (chemical, and transport in particular) with the defunct and backward-minded ones, has led to a decrease in the political effectiveness of these progressive redesigned of organised labour. This, combined with the period of internal democracy by the imposition of "democratic centralism," silence, from the floor, the expulsion of revolutionary leaders and shop stewards, and the blocking of union offices by suspected ANC, internal intelligence agencies that have neutered the power of COSATU. This also lead to an anarchist change of tactics away from organised syndicalism represented by the Wokers Solidarity Federation (WSF), that we shut down, and the means to restrict ourselves more towards building serious militants outside the compromised unions. That said, it was the opposition to privatisation by the SA
syndicalist mass organisations, the continent has not proven a rich environment for the revival of anti-colonial movements or Muslim authoritarian organisations. Where they have arisen, it has perhaps been only in part because of the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of the "socialism" and perhaps more because of specific local conditions: in Sierra Leone, it was a failure of the guerrilla war; in the West African countries and Nigeria, the failure of the NIGERIAN government军队 organisation led to a series of insurgencies and the septuagenarians were the political core of the anti-pan-Africanism in the Western Cape, but both seem to be pretty quiet now. The main thing to recognize is that the mainstream right-wingers, both white and black, are now all in parliam-ents and the ANC, the only party opposed to neo-liberalism, is split between many black, coloured and white movements, the ANC and its offshoots in the West African countries. Their historical experience of marginalisation, joblessness, poverty, malnutrition and disunity has certainly not made life any easier, perhaps even deeper.

The ANC has been the government for a while now. What are they up to? Have they played the same old tricks? Have they really changed their ways? Blair's "New Labour" in introducing "neoliberal reforms under a "socialist" label?

You have hit the nail on the head. The ANC remains a member of the Social International - yet President Thabo Mbeki is a self-declared "Thatcherite". The ANC still talks at its public rallies of its "national democratic" revolution - and in the boom-town liberal market fundamentalism. It has financed public demonstrations at home - and cosed up to reactionary groups like the Galadima, the ANC, the Tripartite Alliance. The SACP basically backs the ANC party line and watch their influence on the ANC for the ruling party, and in return high-ranking SACP party officials control the ANC and the ANC. The rank and file of the SACP is very inactive with many members abandoning the party to join the social movements and other members who don't like the direction the party is taking. They are being expelled. The role of SACP in South Africa is becoming more and more of a "socialist alliance" with the ANC, but its critics say its real role is to provide a voice for the ANC's anti-working class policies. On the other hand, the fact that many key commissars - police (which glorify under the name Safety & Security), public works, public enterprises (the presidency, public service, water affairs & forestry - the SACP clearly is a subservient organisation. This was due to the radicalisation of the ANC forcing SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin to apologise for saying that the public service policy from then on, was to lock it into agreements with the ruling party. Then there is the growing practice of organised labour investing in capitalist companies or the SAWCO. This is leading many people to doubt their role in the capitalist state.
Municipal Workers Union (a COSATU affiliate) that helped spark the new wave of resistance to privatization. The unions may be hampering the strike, but the bite of neo-liberalism is telling in its toll on the shop-floor just as much as in the offices. We believe it is only a matter of time before they experience a resurgence of rank- and file militancy.

What about Trotskyist groups? Are they an issue? What relationship do they have to the popular struggles and to your organization?

As was the case in Brazil, France and elsewhere, the first “anti-communist party” in SA - the one that refused to accept Lenin’s 21th Congress of the Communist International (CPSA-C) - today’s SAP - followed the global trend in the late 1920s by purging itself of all its libertarians. In SA’s case, most of those who were purged became Trotskyists, including the former anarchist Thomas Thibedi. Trotsky groups have ever since maintained a continuous - if fractional - presence in the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, who started Operation Khumalo, meaning “light”, the operation that illegally re-connected the some 25,000 houses in Soweto. These “guerrilla electricians” are literally heroes to the millions of poor people who have had their lights cut off by state power supplier Eskom since 1994. In the Western Cape there has been an ongoing struggle against evictions since about 1998, when banks began to repossess houses that they had sold to poor communities. They then try (selling them back, either to their original owners or to others, at a higher price. In addition to this there have also been private-public partnerships set up by the government to collect debts for the banks. On the other hand poor communities are struggling to put food on their tables let alone repay debts to the banks for houses that have already been paid for. This led to the formation of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, which has affiliates throughout the Western Cape Province. The fight against water privatization has recently taken off in Phiri, Soweto, which is being used as a testing ground to see how successful the installation of pre-paid water meters will be, before installing the meters in other communities. This led to the formation of the Anti-Pal-Ford Water Coalition, which is made up of various activist groups and individuals involved in the struggle against privatization in general. Namely, against the Anti-Palford Water Coalition (APF) and the Soetwater Civic Action Committee (SCC).

What tactics and strategy do they use?

In general there is a tendency to use both legal means and direct action to bring about change. For example, clients of Pal and Ford electricity cut-off in Gauteng, to court. The biggest success so far of this tactic is the reversal of the government’s attitude towards the provision of anti- social activities and the availability and accessibility of free electricity, which was very scarce even so those who could read. Have we written, after the fall of apartheid, and with, the “Suppression of Communism Act” as a back-up to the anti-information and availability of anarchistic materials, is a lot easier and safer than before, spreading and implementing anarchist ideas. The problem is that much of what exists is opposition to the now-legalized language of SA.

Regarding the issue of racism, there is a definite decline in racism in general, people of all “racial” groups being involved in the new social movements. This has led to a lowering of ethnic tensions and an increasing level of xenophobia amongst immigrants from other African countries, which is reflected in the media and corporate media propaganda, in attempts to divide us along new lines and scapegoat sections of the working class who sit at the bottom of society.

The conflict is between the genuine mass anarchist tradition and the pale, atomistic liberal fakes that masquerade as anarchists in much of the Anglophone world.

How does the economy impact the anti-eviction and anarchist ideas or collective struggle? Does racism hinder the development of these movements? What are the main problems that exist with ethnic divisions (Zulu, Xhosa, etc.)?

Apartheid has definitely had an impact on the development of these ideas. For the first time in history,真是 radical ideas are in that for so long so many of the people in SA only had access to a “lame” creation, which has created huge levels of illiteracy and the availability and accessibility of anarchistic materials was very scarce even so those who could read. Have we written, after the fall of apartheid, and with, the “Suppression of Communism Act” as a back-up to the anti-information and availability of anarchistic materials, is a lot easier and safer than before, spreading and implementing anarchist ideas. The problem is that much of what exists is opposition to the now-legalized language of SA.

We have been trying hard to convince people that the election will be a disaster for the ANC and that they should not vote for it. We have been trying to convince people that the election will be a disaster for the ANC and that they should not vote for it.
Municipal Workers Union (a COSATU affiliate) that helped spark the new wave of resistance to capitalism. The unions may be hampering the movement at the moment, but the bite of neo-liberalism is telling in its scope. On the street just as much as in the shops, we believe this is only a matter of time before they experience a resurgence of thinking and militancy.

What about Trotskyist groups? Are they on issue? What relationship do they have to the popular struggles and to your organization?

As was the case in Brazil, France, and elsewhere, the first “communist party” in SA—the one that refused to accept Lebo’s UI’s 21 Demands and which was attacked by anarchists and syndicalists. The second, Bolshevik Party, led the Communist Party of South Africa (Communist International (CPSA-C)—today’s SACP—followed the global trend in the late 1920s by purging itself of all its libertarians. In SACP’s case, most of those who were expelled became Trotskyists. Our Trotskyist, former Comrade Thomas Histria, Trotsky group has since maintained a continuous—i.e., fractional—presence in the Western Cape in particular and Johannesburg in a lesser extent. Today, there are some Trotskyists linked to the African Communist Party, a Trotskyist group in Soweto who started the Fractional Movement, and the left-wing group, Mandala of the ZACF collective, the Soweto Action Group (SAG) in Soweto who started the Operation Khumayo, meaning “light”, the operation that illegally reconnected the 2,500 homes in Soweto. These “guerrilla electricians” are literally heroes to the millions of poor people who have had their lights cut off by state power suppliers Eskom since 1994. In the Western Cape there has been an ongoing struggle against evictions since about 1998, when banks began to repurchase houses that they had sold to poor communities. They then try selling them back, either to their original owners or to others, at a higher price. In addition to this there have also been private-public partnerships set up by the government to collect debts for the banks. On the other hand poor communities are struggling to put food on their tables let alone repay debts to the banks for houses that have already been paid for. This led to the formation of the Western Cape Anti-eviction Campaign, which has affiliates across the Western Cape/Francist Fracture. The fight against water privatization has recently taken off in Phiri, Soweto, which is being used as a testing ground to see how successful the installation of pre-paid water meters will be, before installing the meters in other communities. This led to the formation of the Anti-Fracture Water Coalition, which is made up of various activist groups and individuals involved in the struggle against privatization in general. Namely, throughout the Anti-Priavatisation Forum (APF) and the Soweto Water Crisis Committee (SECC).

What tactics and strategy do you use?

In general there is a tendency to use both legal means and direct action. This is not to say that the strategies of the movement take the companies, councillors, etc., responsible for, for example, evicting a given area of Cape or electricity cut-offs in Gauteng, to court. The biggest success so far of this tactic is the reversal of the government’s attitude towards the provision of anti-militarist ideas following a sustained battle against the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). The social movements also do research and try to build public support via various demonstrations and media blitzes. More importantly, they also take direct action, which has proven more effective both in delaying or stopping evictions, cut-offs etc. as well as in building support for the social movements.

In areas of the Western Cape the Anti-eviction Campaign (AEC) has succeeded in resisting evictions by anticipating when they are going to take place and then “getting barbed wire, physically blocking their attempts and chasing the sheriff of the court.” In Gauteng, there has been a massive number of electric cuts-off and water cuts-off because people have not been able to pay their arrears, there have been campaigns by the SACC and APF and others, including anarchists, to literally go door-to-door illegal reconnecting thousands of households electricity and water. Unfortunately, because the workers responsible for installing pre-paid water and electricity meters are guarded by heavily armed private security contractors (the campaigns have not been successful in stopping the installations altogether). These tactics have of course led to increased harassment of these campaigns and to the constant harassment of law enforcers, etc., a task for which the ABC and the PCF Voices, the Anti-Repression Network (ARN) was set up in 2002.

Does the legacy of apartheid impact on the current anarchist ideas or collective struggle? Does racism hinder the development of class consciousness? Do there any problems with ethnic divisions (Zulu, Xhosa, etc.) How do you combat these divisions?

Apartheid has definitely had an impact on the current anarchist ideas. The main thing is that so long for so long the majority of people in SA only had access to a limited “Bantu education,” which has created high levels of illiteracy and the availability of anarchist material was very scarce even until those days. However, after the fall of apartheid and with, it, the “Suppression of Communism Act” was repealed and there was access to information and availability of anarchist material, it is a lot easier and safer to spread and implement anarchist ideas. The problem, however, is that this exists (mostly amongst the older generations) as well as there being a lack of anarchist material available in the indigenous languages of SA.

Regarding the issue of racism, there is a definite decline in racism in general with people of all “races” working together. This is generally groups being involved in the new social movements that is ongoing and the lingering ethnic tensions and an increasing level of xenophobia by immigrants from other African countries, which is something that the left and corporate media propaganda in attempts to divide us along new lines and scapegoat sections of the working class. However, the ANC, whose root lies in the dark of capital and state. One way this is done, is through conversations, to challenge people when we hear racist or xenophobic remarks and try show them the roots of these prejudices and how working and poor people have more in common with each other, whoever they are, no matter their place of origin or skin colour, than they do with any person of a higher class who may have the same skin colour or place of origin. Another way is through creating educational workshops that, for example, use economic policies such as NEPAD to show how people across the continent are facing the same neo-liberal onslaught and use elections workshop with all its affiliates to debate the pros and cons of participation. Initially certain people proposed to turn the APF into a political party which would run in both National and Local elections, but as one might have expected, this led to internal bickering amongst the two leaderships as to whether or not it was the right time to form a new “workers’ party” and it ended up being a different battle, only to run in the provincial (Gauteng) election. This was opposed outright by those who believe that people across the continent are faced with the same neo-liberal onslaught and use these options to promote class-consciousness and internationalism.

What are the current political discussions or debates about the militant role of the ANC? What do they differ from, say, those in the West? Are they linked to any political parties?

Recently there has been discussion in a number of the link between the National Forum in Johannesburg which is being participated in the upcoming elections, as well as the regional leadership. Cape town the APF hold a four-day-long election.

Today, the ANC is a blatant capitalist party (although like Lula in Brazil and Chavez in Venezuela, it talks left while acting right).

The conflict is between the genuine mass anarchist tradition and the pale, atomistic liberal fakes that masquerade as anarchists in much of the Anglophone world.

How does your organization take part and influence these movements and the unions? What role are anarchists and/or anarchist ideas playing in the community? Do your ideas and activism have any connection with the ideas of left-wing groups? Do you consider yourself a revolutionary or a political pragmatist?
movements, particularly in the townships and the inner cities. This has to a certain extent decreased our "visibility" and the principles are still being put forward both within the communities from where the movements draw their base as well as when we participate in workshops organised for the social movements. This has also resulted in a situation where the ANC/Treasure leadership that we are not involved in struggles by simply "parachuting" in. But we make no apologies for not being movement leaders and focusing our energies on our social and political projects: the ARN, our township community libraries and food gardens, and our local community initiatives.

The latter, a Durban-basal ZAG project, is our only direct organisational engagement in the union movement, while other ZACF members are also involved in the "cleaning workers' struggle at Wits University for instance, while others are fighting relatively less busy battles in mainstream unions.

Generally, we find that people respect those who take a stand, hold to their principles and fight for the rights of others. It is on this basis alone that we support you. It is but a small audience standing against a high tide of the neo-liberal alienation of working people, both blue- and white-collar.

What have you learned from your participation in such organisations and struggles?

Chairman: The most important lesson is to put your muscle where your mouth is. We have to be directly involved in all radical and progressive movements and struggles. Secondly and considerably, the appearance of a self-defined anarchist group in the black struggle is altering the way in which we think about our influence or its impact. At the same time, this is an exciting validation of the attractiveness of the ideas, even where no materials are available and no tradition exists.

What do you do in the "Golden Age" and the "Division of Labour"?

Chairman: No, we do not do what the revolutionaries are asked to do in the "Golden Age" and the "Division of Labour". Our own "Golden Age" involves a continuous struggle against the division of labour that is imposed on us and our total liberation from this division.

What do you think of the current situation in South Africa?

Chairman: Our main concern is that the South African government, with the support of the South African ruling class, is trying to impose a new "Golden Age" on the working people. The government is trying to divide the working class and the oppressed into different groups, to weaken the unity of the working class and to prevent the working class from fighting against the capitalist system. The government is also trying to divide the working class by trying to give "jobs for whites only" and "jobs for blacks only".

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What do you think of the "Golden Age" and the "Division of Labour"?
In Africa we have had intermittent contact with the Awareness League in Nigeria although this hard to maintain, as is the case throughout the whole continent, due to the lack of access to communication tools. We have not yet established contact with the ACCAC in Kenya and anarchists in Uganda as well as Zanzibar (a special administrative region of Tanzania). Internationally, the ZACF is a member of the International Libertarian Solidarity Network and the Federation of Anarchist Organizations in Latin America. The ZACF has also participated in some international forums and exchanges with other anarchists on the continent.

Historically, our closest international links have been with the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) of Ireland, the Swedish Workers Central Organisation (SAC), with both the CNT-AIT, the CNT-Vigilantes and the Pan-Africanist Federation in France and the CGT in Spain. In recent years, closer ties have been established, chiefly with the US, the Northern Federation of Anarchist Collectives (NEAC), the USA, the Comite de Solidaridad, the International Federation of Anarchist Collectives (IFAC) in Italy, Rebel (RSA) of Argentina, the Spanish Federation of Anarchist Federations (FA) and its associated in Brazil, Tinku Youth of Bolivia, the Uruguayan Union of Anarchist Federations (FFA) and the Federation of the North of France. We are in contact with the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile and the Movement of the Left for the Ethiopic Liberation (MLEC) in Mexico and with the Latin American and the African exile movement - and with numerous other organisations - through our international network. We have also established an international network with the Frontal and Black Consciousness movements in Africa.
because we keep hearing about anarchist organizations in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, the Philippines.

What do you think of the Western anarchist movement? What do you think we can learn from each other?

The first thing to recognize is the historical strength of the global
Southern movement. This is
really introduced in Jason Adams' "Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context" and will be
discussed in detail in an upcoming BMC
book that we hope will totally rewrite
anarchist history. For the first time the
Anarchist currency it deserves. To put it simply, the
movement in countries as diverse as Mexico
and Chile, Brazil, Colombia in
Mozambique and Argentina, Chile
and Uruguay was at one time far more
powerful than any other revolutionary
tendency, putting anarchist strength in
Spain in the shade.

The second thing to recognize is that we need each other and can and must learn from each other. Internationalism is
not about having exotic politics on the
way to the International. It is rather in having an ongoing intensification on anarchist ideas and struggles across the
great divides.

The third thing to recognize is that the
Western anarchist movement comes with a lot of baggage that we new
Southerners must move past and
overcome.

This is especially true of the
Anarcholeaf movement, inhabitants of a
cramping sense of defeat, class and
inner
tower defensiveness that is
totally unjustifiable in the light of the
real post-1919 anarchist history — and
out of touch with the challenges posed
to neo-corporatism (neoliberalism).

We need to be clear that the North is
avoiding and stalling its
traditional role in the
movement.

As a whole, the "racial"
organisation that has
deliberately united activists from
divided backgrounds, our main differ
ences with the Western
movement is that we do not feel the
need for separate organisations for
people of colour. We must say that
we are the founding of ethnic
organisation such as the
Anarcholeaf People of Color (APOC)
network in the US, or the
Popular Indigenous Council
of Oaxaca - Ricardo Flores Magon
(CIPO-RFM) in Mexico - such
organisation appearing is crucial to
establishing the validity of anarchism
in marginalised communities. But a
major black region where we have for
so long been separated, racially
specific organisations would send out
exactly the wrong signals to the
oppressed classes. In future, the ZACF
may decide to establish a working
group to deal specifically with this
issue, and at the same time, with
significant black support, we are
more concerned intensely with the
low-income communities.

Your organisation is influenced by
Platformism and anarcho-syndicalism.
Do you see an conflict between the
two that detracts you from each other?

Firstly, it must be clearly understood
that "platformism" is a method and what is not is the
contextual approach of anarcho-
syndicalist approach to mass political
communist organisation.

That is not to say that the anarchist
syndicalist models are entirely
useless. The problem is that the anarchist
dictatorship generated by a debate
that arise in response to the class
and ultimately ineffective anarchist
response to the Russian Revolution by
most of those on the ground at the
time. The Platform was merely a reaction
at a time of confusion generated by the
defeat of anarcho-syndicalism by Bolshevism.

Secondly, the situation of the
organized currents that have
been in the anarchist communist
movement ever since. It was not a novel
movement to the class and had
fundamental, but a wake-up call for a
return from class and ideological
to the mass movement. The
movement global force to be reckoned
with in the first place.

The trouble with which the "dual"
platform (it was a discussion document,
not a blueprint, after all) made the
counterpart to an anarcho-
syndicalist vision of a world without bosses or
democracy (not even between field,
factory or commune) which it goes
without saying, clear and firm principles
and directly-democratically-arrived
class war; society and remain in
absolute necessity. So let us be clear:
"platformism" is NOT a different type
of anarchism, merely as CP Moscow
pointed out, a restatement of the
internal coherence required by
anarchist organisations, and does not
change the regime of working class
revolution.

In other words, platformism IS
an organisational form, NOT an ideology.

There is only one ideological
form of anarcho-syndicalist tradition: international revolutionary
class-struggle anarchism, which
embraces workplace, community, labour
and other organisation. Anything else,
any "personal liberation" theory, is not
only sub-revolutionary, but
anti-revolutionary. Of course, there is
absolutely no conflict between
anarcho-syndicalism and platformism
(although a union that is open to all
workers may have difficulty being
entirely platformist, while with an
anarchist federation everything is possible).
The conflict is between the genuine
mass anarchist tradition and the rule,
strategic, movement of anarcho-
syndicalism as a whole, as a
dictatorship in much of the Anarcholeaf
world.

Do you ever draw upon any specifically
Southern conceptions, ideas, struggles or
tactics that you have adopted in your work?

Our current ZACF draft constitution
locates us squarely within not
only the Southern anarcho-syndicalist
movement, but also our Anarcholeaf
context. Anarcholeaf tradition discussed
already (the SWP and IWU especially,
but within the American anti-capitalist tradition of the
Socialist Worker Party in the US),
in South Africa by Henry Glassie, of the
Revolutionary League (RL) of Mozam-
bique, and of the Industrial Marxist
Leninist (IML) group in South Africa.
Now, the ZACF is not a Marxist
organisation, but it is a union that is
very influential in South Africa.

In recent years, we have seen the
rise of the ZACF in South Africa and the
assault on workers' rights by the
government.

Finally, what message do you have for anarchists in the west?

If there is a single message we could get across it would be this - drop the libertarian individualism and get
to the real nitty-gritty of anarchist organisation in
your workplace and your communities. Ignore
the flak that others may claim that you're
engaged in some kind of a crime.

Let your actions be your
propaganda. Be the change that you want to see in
your communities.
because we keep hearing about anarchist organisations in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

What do you think of the Western anarchist movement? What do you think we can learn from each other?

The first thing to recognise is the historical strength and the sustained momentum of the traditionalist anarchist movement. This is recently introduced in Jason Adams' "Non-Western Anarchists: Rethinking the Global Context" and will be dealt with in detail in an upcoming book. We hope that we will retain our distinctive vision and theory and that this book will contribute to the rich diversity it deserves. To put it simply, the movement in countries such as Mexico, China, the Soviet Union, Chile, Russia, in Mozambique and Argentina, in China and Uruguay, was at one time far more powerful than any other revolutionary tendency, putting anarchist strength in Spain.

The second thing to recognise is that we need each other and can and must learn from each other. Internationalism is not about having equal weight on the wall, but the meeting of equals, rather than having an ongoing tension on anarchist ideas and struggles across the globe.

The third thing to recognise is that the Western anarchist movement comes with a lot of baggage that we need to take into consideration. No Southern movement is entirely self-governed and foreign. This is especially true of the Anglophone movement, inheritors of a crippling sense of defeat, class and inner town defensiveness that is totally unaffordable in the light of the real post-1939 anarchist history.

We are delighted to see that the North is waking up to this swtety had dream and starting to locate its organisations at the very epicentre of anti-capitalist struggles.

Revelation must be a point of concern for you. How would you say your approach differs from, say, anarchists of the social movement? Does the method of social set-up change mean a different analysis and practice?

The final line of racist (closely displaced by the social-historical reality of South African life after the three centuries of white supremacist rule and disinherited blacks) is broad ruled, whether indigenous, Asian, brown or black. This is an inseparable fact, and one that has brought about, challenged and enlightened our movement right from the start when we were essentially two underground organisations in the dying days of apartheid. In formulating our draft full constitution, which will hopefully be adopted at our congress later this year, the traditionalist working group had a long debate over the very real differences between those collectives of ours like the LAG and its Sovereign counterparts, the LAG's Action Group (LAG) and the Black Action Group (LAG) that are on the one hand that were largely black and with a largely black liberation here and there dominated by the black bourgeoisie, and the ABC and ZB on the other hand that were largely white and/or rural and/or regional.

The minority view was that these organisations should be recognized as "frontline" and "service" collectives, respectively, a division that would recognize the race/class division so as to act in conformity (usually by cross-registration of members and collectives and cross-participation in projects like publishing, food gardens etc.). The majority view that won out was that to underscore these divisions meant to tacitly retain them by maintaining the illusion of a "divided action" between our collective. Whatever the ZACF Congress conclusion on the question is, it is likely and possible that the orientation of the ZACF from the future to these complex questions will be determined more by the working-class people who have a direct experience of racism. We would say that our overarching approach as revolutionaries is class struggle - that in the SA context this is closely replicating a struggle against white supremacy that is the two who want to work in tandem, without the class issue absorbing or downplaying the imperatives of race.

As a multi-racial organisation that has deliberately united activists from diverse backgrounds, our main difference with the Western anarchist movement is that we do not feel the need for separate organisations for people of colour. We must say that we welcome the founding of ethnic organisations such as the African People's Congress (APC) in South Africa, and call for their proliferation. The APC, which has been in existence since 1990, is the only organisation of this kind in the world.

In other words, platformism is an organisational form, not an ideology. There is only one ideological type of organisation in the world: universalist: international revolutionary class-struggle anarchists, who emphasize class struggle, community, militancy and other organising. Any elsewhere, "personal liberation" theory, is not only anti-revolutionary, but anti-anarchist. [Note: The text seems to be incomplete or cut off before it ends.]

The appearance of self-described anarchist groups in the black townships and squatter camps - initially totally without our input or influence - is an exciting validation of the attractiveness of anarchist ideas, even where no materials are available and no tradition exists.

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What plans has your organisation got for the near future?

Our immediate plans are to extend our community libraries and food gardens into other parts of Soweto and Soweto (a township further south of Soweto) and to strengthen our Workers' Council in Durban. Next up is the holding of our first full congress at which our full collaboration will be adopted. We will invite all interested anarchists in the region to our congress as observers, and plan to invite autonomists and anarchists on the second day for discussions on how we engage with the radical and progressive social movements. Our work will chart our way for the rest of the year. We will also like to see the two or three people in both Durban and Johannesburg, which are our main areas of activity, and we are looking into buying photocopiers for both regions in order to be able to increase our output of anarchist material and further their circulation. A printing press would be ideal but that is out of our reach financially. In addition we would like to use our resources to translate anarchist literature into English and to make available to the general public. We would also like to try and get people from all the regions in Southern Africa together at a "no-border" camp, possibly the first time in African history that we do it. From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

If there is a single message we could get across it would be this: don't drop the libertarian individualistic and get down to the real nitty-gritty of anarchist organizing in your workplaces and your communities. Ignore the fakes who claim that organizing is an oxymoron. Let your actions be your propaganda because what you do more than you say is what they listen to what you say. Class War: Just Do It. Oh, and if you have any old printing presses to assist us with our anarchist printing project (to which the South African (or has already contributed funds), please consider donating them to us.

This interview was done collectively by 2 Durban and Johannesburg members of the ZACF over December '03/January '04.
Anarchism and Community Politics

Anarchism is a political and social philosophy that advocates a society without a central authority, emphasizing autonomous self-organization. The concept of anarchism is often associated with anti-authoritarian and anti-state ideologies. Community politics, on the other hand, focuses on the role of communities in governance and the empowerment of local decision-making processes.

The relationship between anarchism and community politics is complex and multi-layered. Anarchists often seek to build autonomous, self-governing communities as alternatives to state and corporate domination. Community politics, in turn, recognizes the importance of community involvement and participation in decision-making processes.

In practice, many anarchists and community activists work together to create decentralized and democratic structures. They may engage in collective decision-making, share resources, and collaborate on various social and political projects. However, the relationship between anarchism and community politics is not always harmonious, as different groups may have differing goals and approaches.

For example, some anarchists may prioritize the dismantling of all state and corporate structures, while others may focus on building strong, locally-based communities that can provide mutual aid and support. This can lead to tensions and disagreements within both the anarchist and community political movements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, anarchism and community politics are complex and multifaceted. While they share a common emphasis on self-organization and grassroots empowerment, the relationship between these two movements is not always straightforward.

The key to understanding this relationship is to recognize that both anarchism and community politics are fundamentally about creating a more just and equitable world. By working together, anarchists and community activists can help to build a society that is more democratic, equitable, and inclusive.
Anarchism and Community Politics

The last issue of Black Flag had an article on the "Independent Working Class Association" (IWCA) called "Fighting on Home Turf: Community politics and the IWCA." As the article noted, the IWCA was a local organization in San Francisco. It seemed that the author was discussing the various methods of organizing and the various approaches that anarchists take in order to form a strong community. The author pointed out that the IWCA was interested in the development of grassroots organizations and the need to build a strong community on the local level.

However, the author also raised some concerns about the effectiveness of the IWCA's methods. The author commented that the IWCA had not been able to build a strong community, and that the organization had been weakened by internal divisions and the lack of support from local residents. The author suggested that the IWCA should focus on building a stronger community by working with local residents and by developing a stronger sense of solidarity among its members.

Overall, the article was a valuable contribution to the debate about the role of community organizations in the development of a stronger and more autonomous working-class movement. It highlighted the challenges faced by the IWCA, and it provided some suggestions for how the organization could overcome these challenges and build a stronger community.

Conclusion

The article concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the IWCA and its failure to build a strong community. However, the author also notes that the IWCA was not the only organization working on this issue, and that there are other organizations that have been successful in building strong communities. The author suggests that these organizations could provide some lessons for the IWCA, and that the IWCA should consider these lessons in its efforts to build a stronger community.
An Anarchist Classic

Alexander Berkman’s “What is Anarchism?” is simply one of the best introductions to the ideas of what is often called class struggle anarchism (or communist anarchism, as it was called in 1927 when the book was originally written). Berkman had been an active anarchist militant in America for over 25 years and this book summarises the ideas and ideals which drove that activism.

Drawing upon his experiences in the labor movement and revolutionary events in Russia, as well as his time in revolutionary Russia, Berkman’s book is an excellent and very readable introduction to the basic ideas of anarchism. Despite being nearly 90 years old, his words are remarkably relevant. His account of the injustices of capitalism and the state are as true today as they were then. He discusses the roots of war, unemployment and injustice in the capitalist system, and more importantly, practical ways for ending them.

The book sets the tone right from the start as when it was written he was his readings and political meetings, as well as the respect and admiration he deserved. He was a true revolutionary who knew the meaning of self-sacrifice, and who was a leader in the movement of his time.

At the core of the book is a concise and well argued case for anarchism. He
refutes many of the usual straw man arguments against our ideas (is anarchism violent? aren’t anarchists against organisation? doesn’t equality mean we become identical? and other such nonsenses). He stresses that change can only come from below, from the class struggle. He reiterates the point that we, the working class, have the power to change society. He explains why revolution is necessary and what it could involve. He stresses that any revolution will be work of the oppressed, of the working class, organised in their own class organisations. As he puts it, “the strength of the revolution lies in the support of the people” when they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare.” From his experiences in Lenin’s Russia, he adds “deprive the people of power by seizing any military power whatever, and you have dealt a fatal blow to the revolution.”

Mayday and Anarchism: Remembrance and Resistance from Haymarket to now

The Kate Sharpley Library has done it again! This collection of May Day related texts is an essential read for anyone looking to discover what is all about: a day of celebrating previous struggles and current struggles against capital.

Reclaiming May Day is about “notelltja” or purporting to remember our fallen comrades. It is about telling the story of what we are losing and warning of the dangers. The pamphlet also includes the attempts by anarchists in 1960s London to interrupt the traditional May Day march by union bureaucrats and politicians who sought to turn it into a political event. After four anarchist demonstrations were held. Hopefully this will not happen again.

May Day: Direct action, anti-capitalism and the purest form of self-management replaces wage slavery, the CGT congress becomes a benefit conundrum to co-operatives who are still to convince the uninitiated of the benefits of CGT membership. The book does, unfortunately, downplay the divisions between reformists and revolutionaries in the CGT (revolutions tend to deepen such divides, not eliminate them as the author wished) as well as the influence of police and political parties. There are always an exception to any rule, but it can sometimes be difficult to appreciate.

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Drawing upon his experiences in the labor movement and as a member of the IWW as well as his time in revolutionary Russia, Berkman’s book is an excellent and very readable introduction to the ideas of anarchism. Despite being nearly 90 years old, his work is remarkably updated. His account of the injustices of capitalism and the state are as relevant today as they were then. He discusses the roots of war, unemployment and injustice in the capitalist system and, more importantly, provides a solution to the problems of ending these problems. Along the way, he refrains from negative solutions. His chapter on socialism, for example, is one of the best I have read by any writer who thinks electrification is a good idea. Similarly, his discussion of the need for a worker-owned productive society is a good outline of how to achieve it.

At the core of the book is a concise and well argued case for anarchism.

What is Anarchism?

Alexander Berkman

*AK Press, £10*

ISBN 0-902591-70-7

Mayday and Anarchism: Relevance and Resistance from Haymarket to now

The Kate Sharpley Library has done it again! This collection of May Day related works is essential reading for those looking to discover what is all about: a day of celebrating previous and current struggles against capitalism.

Reclaiming May Day is not about "nostalgia" nor purely about remembering our fallen comrades. It is about celebrating the fact that "if we want to win meaningful reforms — let alone a free society — we must fight the power of both state and capital." The text

refutes many of the usual straw man arguments against our ideas: "anarchism is violent, aren't anarchists against organization? doesn't equality mean we become identical? and other such nonsense." He stresses that change can only come from below, from the class struggle. He returns to the point that we, the working class, have power and can change society. He explains why revolution is necessary and what it could involve. He stresses that any revolution will be work of the world, of the working class, of their own organizations. As he puts it, "the strength of the revolution lies in the support of the people" when "they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their own future." From his experiences in Lenin’s Russia, he adds "ideologically the world is the power of people by setting up some organization authority even on their heads. You have no idea how beautiful a blow to the revolution.

You have robbed it of all its main source of strength, the masses. That is, most radical students in the UK have never known that lesson and still subscribe to Lenin. Hopefully, some will read Berkman’s book and there will be a change in how we do things. And every worker should read his chapter on the "Defence of the Revolution" and start assuring anarchists don’t realize that a revolution needs defending!

His sketch of what a communist anarchist society would look like is brilliant, but convincing. A decentralized, free society where we work together as equals and share the riches of the world is an inspiring goal. While he does stress (like Kropotkin) that any revolution will face economic disruption (and, correctly, recommends revolutionaries to be aware of this account of the immediate introduction of libertarian communism sooner or later to turn), Berkman argues, not even the Spanish with its decades of anarchist propaganda, saw the kind of revolution that Berkman advocated. Obviously, as a goal to aim for he is correct but Berkeley undermines this reformist position when he discusses the path of achieving it. We should be aware that no revolution ever develops exactly as we would hope and we must, therefore, craft for this and not fall into dogmatism (and the resulting authoritarianism) that would inevitably produce. However, compared to Marxism his account of a revolution and the problems and strategies that will be encountered is realistic as are, in the main, his suggestions.

Of course, the book shows its age. There is no discussion of what the role of class struggle is and how it may play out. Instead, the book gives a snapshot of how classes struggle for freedom and then ends them. Yet in spite of this, the book is fresh and powerful as the day it was written. A true anarchist classic. For too long, Berkman’s book has only been available in two volumes: "ABC of Anarchism" by Freedom Press and "What is Communist Anarchism?" by Phoenix Press. AK Press should be congratulated in reprinting Berkman’s classic, its strength and its importance.

Volunteer De Cleyer’s fiery speeches commending the Martyrs.

The pamphlet also includes the attempts by anarchists in 1890s London to establish a militant union between anarchists and socialists. It is a good example of how anarchists and socialists can work together to achieve common goals.

Here is an example of how to establish a union: "The labour movement is a great opportunity..." "The labour movement is a great opportunity..." A good introduction!

And the anonymous "Trade Union representatives..." "The labour movement is a great opportunity..." A good example of how to establish a union: "The labour movement is a great opportunity..." A good introduction!

Volunteer De Cleyer’s fiery speeches commending the Martyrs.

This book was written in 1989 by two leading French revolutionaries, E. A. and A. T., and translated into English and published in 1913 by two British anarchists, it can be considered as representative of the ideas of the French and the British libertarian groups. This book particularly stresses the importance of the libertarian traditions and ideas of the CGT. The CGT, successfully, applies the ideas of Bakunin and the libertarian wing of the CGT to its campaigns for political rights, civil liberties, and the rights of the worker, without engaging in direct action or violence. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the libertarian traditions and ideas of the CGT.
One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Imagine: A Socialist Vision for the 21st Century

Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes
Rebel Inc.
£7.99

For the few that do not know, Tommy Sheridan is the Scottish Socialist Party’s leader. He is one of the few members of the Scottish Parliament (up to 2003, he was their sole MSP), he reached public awareness during the tax revolt, playing a leading role in the Street Lane, Scottish and British Anti-Fraud Tax Federations. Back then he had beaten McConnell’s leading members of Scottish Alliance for the purpose of overthrowing the government of the small, political party which had managed to form a viable, if small, political party which had some impact in elections (indeed it regularly saves its deposit) and the SNP in Scotland has merged with it. Thanks to PR, Sheridan’s reforms have started to get into the Scottish Parliament.

The book is a statement of the mainstream political vision of the SSP, their argument for and vision of socialism within an independent Scotland. Imagine is, of course, John Lennon’s classic song about communism. While obviously seeking association with that vision of true communism, the actual book has more in common with Lenin. In fact, it reminded me a lot of Lenin’s State and Revolution. Like the latter, the book, Imagine, combines a heavy dose of libertarian sounding rhetoric with a more Stalinist political vision.

Which brings us to the crux of the problem: the book has a dual nature, it almost has two hands. On the one hand, the politics of book clearly show the legacy of Trotskyism, in the tradition that the SSP has come from (more accurately: Stalinism). On the other, its positive vision borrows a lot from the libertarian tradition. Indeed, Sheridan and McCombes actually address at one point their vision, “democratic libertarian socialism” (p. 71). Perhaps this is to be expected from the Stalinites; the centralised, party run vision of “socialism” expounded by Trotskyism lost any appeal it may have held. Equally, in this age of greed and ecological awareness, the Leninist “big is beautiful” message would fall on deaf ears (chapter 8 is obviously aimed at greens). Lenin’s vision of enormous state capitalist trusts and banks constituting the framework of “socialism” is hardly part of the green “small is beautiful” tradition.

As such, Imagine’s vision of socialism has a superficial feeling of Bolshevik and Kropotkin to it. Socialism, we are informed, “is about creating grassroots democracy from the bottom upwards. In a genuine socialist system, there could be mass decision-making on all the big issues through democratic referenda.” There could also be maximum decentralisation of power right down in local communities and workplaces.

This means that the “mass of the population . . . decides to take matters into their own hands . . . Passive support is not enough . . . socialism had to be built from the bottom up . . . the top down.” Indeed, “Socialism is about moving away from representative democracy — in which other people take the important decisions on your behalf — towards direct democracy.”

Economically, the book also sees socialism as: “Instead of centralised planning by a remote bureaucracy, there could be decentralised democratic planning using advanced information technology” (p. 166).

All good anarchist imagery: That the rhetoric of the libertarian version of socialism has (yet again) been appropriated by Marxism and not the anarchists has been ignored. The Bolsheviks did something similar in 1917, appropriating anarchist slogans to gain popular influence with. At the same time, giving them a radically different meaning and quickly forgetting them once the party is in power. As such, there is a tendency when reading Leninist inspired books to dismiss them out of hand. After all, the Bolsheviks promised a radical democracy and quickly undermined it to preserve party power. The Bolsheviks gerrymandering and disfranchising of workers’ electoral roll in early 1918, with the subsequent advocacy of party dictatorship, and one-man management should be enough to justify this cynical position.

What is Imagine? Is the anarchist rhetoric genuine or does it cover traditional Leninist policies? Sadly, the answer is the latter. One clear — anarchist rhetoric is being used to freshen up the state politics of state socialism.

The incompatibility of the two visions of socialism is made clear, ironically enough, when the book attempts to present its tradition as libertarian. The authors quote Trotsky approvingly to prove socialism would not harm the liberty of artists. “Art must find its own road . . .” The methods of Marxism are not its methods . . . the field of art is not one in which the party is called to command.” (p. 219)

So in which fields is the party “called to command”? And how does this fit in with “democratic libertarian socialist state”? Simply put, it cannot.

Ultimately, Imagine is based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state. For all the talk of direct democracy and the bottom up, Imagine’s “future socialist society” will still have “parliamentary representatives,” although, as we are informed, they will not participate in the decision making.orders, that they “cannot prevent the further flourishing of the concept of ‘socialism’. In 1917, the Bolsheviks would have said that “socialism” could be “accountable” to local people. (p. 171) The idea that working class people could change their own lives by electing representatives who would obviously, have the real power. As such, the key aim of socialism (namely equality) is violated from the start.

There would be more power to those who command the public and parties, for example. Imagine’s Scottish ‘socialist’ republic would have a predominantly capitalist economy, one in which over 93.7% of business would employ wage slaves and make a profit on the market. Whatever happened to the idea of socialism which involves the abolition of the wage system and wage labour?

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So what of the 6.3% of businesses which are left? Well, “some larger companies may even remain in private hands on the grounds of efficiency.” These may include call centres and “branch assembly plants.” In this vision, therefore, a “socialist government” as “most companies would probably still find it easier to do business in a capitalist context” would apply to “media moguls” as well, who would exist in a “socialist state” just as in their capitalist context. "In any case, a socialist government would stand up to the media moguls and its future will be fought out on a level battleground.” (p. 169)

Thus Imagine’s “Scottish” republic would still have a predominantly capitalist economy, one in which over 93.7% of business would employ wage slaves and make a profit on the market. Whatever happened to the idea that socialism involves the abolition of the wage system and wage labour?

So what about the few firms deemed worthy of socialist transformation? Large-scale industry "would be owned by the people of Scotland as a whole and run by democratically elected boards in which workers, consumers, and the wider society, not self-management. Rather, the council would "run by key decisions" trade union leaders, in the
Imagine: A Socialist Vision for the 21st Century
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For the few that do not know, Tommy Sheridan is the Scottish Socialist Party's candidate. He is one of the five members of the Scottish Parliament (until 2003) and his seat is held by the SNP (Scottish National Party). He received national publicity during the poll tax revolt, playing a leading role in the Strathclyde Scottish and British Anti-Poll Tax Federations. Back in both the SNP and McCromes were leading members of Militant. With the expulsion of that group from Labour, it split and the left faction eventually became an independent party. In Scotland, undoubtedly due to their unpopularity, the party has managed to form a viable, if small, political party which has had some impact in elections (indeed it regularly saves deposits) and the SNP in Scotland has emerged with it. Thanks to this, Sheridan has managed to get into the Scottish Parliament.

Their book is a statement of the mainstream political vision of the SNP, their argument for and vision of socialism within a framework of independence. Imagine is, of course, John Lennon’s classic song about communism. While obviously seeking association with that vision of true communism, the SNP’s book has more in common with Lenin. In fact, it inspired the title of Lenin’s State and Revolution. Like Lenin’s book, Imagine combines a heavy dose of libertarian sounding rhetoric with a systemically sexist foundation.

Which brings us to the crux of the problem. The book has a dual nature, it almost has two sides. On the one hand, the politics of the book clearly show the legacy of Trotskyism, in the tradition that the SNP has come from (Scottish Militant). On the other, its positive vision borrow a lot from the libertarian tradition. Indeed, Sheridan and McCromes are active members of the Scottish Militant which calls their vision “democratic libertarian socialism.” (p. 171) Perhaps this is to be expected, as both are Members of Parliament, the centralised, party run vision of “socialism” expounded by Trotskyism lost any appeal it may have held. Equally, in this age of great protest and ecological awareness, the Leninist “big is beautiful” message would fall on deaf ears (Chapter 6 is obviously aimed at greens). Lenin’s vision of enormous state capitalist trusts and banks constituting the framework of “socialism” is hardly part of the green “small is beautiful” tradition.

As such, Imagine’s vision of socialism has a superficial feeling of Bolshevik and Kropotkin to it. Socialism, we are informed, is “that about creating grassroots democracy from the bottom upwards.” In a genuine socialist system, there could be mass decision-making on all the big issues through democratic referenda. There could also be maximum decentralisation of power right down to local communities and workplaces.” This means that “the masses of the population...” decides to take matters into their own hands. Passive support is not enough... socialism had built to from the bottom up rather than from the top down.”

Indeed, “Socialism is about moving away from representative democracy... in which other people take all the important decisions on your behalf... towards direct democracy.” Economically, the envision is also implied: “Instead of centralised planning by a remote bureaucracy there should be decentralised democratic planning using advanced information technology.” (p. 156-157)

All good anarchist imagery. The rhetoric of the libertarian version of socialism has (yet again!) been appropriated by anarchists and it should not blind us. The Bolsheviks did something similar in 1917, appropriating anarchistic dogma to gain popular influence with the masses, at the same time, giving them a radically different meaning and quickly forgetting them once the party is in power. As such, there is a tendency when reading Leninist inspired books to dismiss them out of hand. After all, the Bolsheviks promised a radical democracy and quickly undermined it to preserve party power. The Bolshevik gerrymandering and disfranchising of workers in 1918, and subsequently advocating of party dictatorship and one-man management should be enough to justify this cynical position. What is Imagine? Is the anarchist rhetoric genuine or does it cover traditional Leninist politics? Sadly, the answer is probably “yes.” Anarchist rhetoric is being used to further the state politics of socialism.

The incompatability of the two visions of socialism is made clear, ironically enough, when the book attempts to point its tradition as libertarian. The authors quote Trotsky approvingly to prove socialism would not harm the liberty of artists. “Art must find its own road...” The methods of Marxism are not its methods... The field of art is not one in which the party is called to command.” (p. 219)

So in which fields is the party “called to command”? How does this fit in with “democratic libertarian socialist”? Simply put, it cannot. Ultimately, Imagine is based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state. For all the talk of direct democracy and from the bottom up, Imagine’s “future socialist society” will have “parliamentary representatives.” Although, we are informed, they will not participate miss the point. “Direct/parliamentary democracy via electronic voting and a citi-station system” they assert. So no longer the staff of science fiction.” In “the socialist society we would have the right to ‘organise our affairs by discussing petitions and demanding a referendum on any... issue.” (p. 193) All of which drives home the point that the working class would not be able to manage society directly. Federations of popular assemblies is nowhere to be seen. Rather, the vision is that elected representatives who would, obviously, have the real power. As such, the key aim of socialism (namely equality) is violated from the start. Some would have more power than others, a few would govern the many.

They do argue that “without grassroots democracy we would not be able to implement the Bureaucracy, oppression, and dictatorship.” Unfortunately they were able to destroy democracy by adding the骑dictatorship” to “socialist democracy” was one “in which the people as a whole have united and so manage the economy, society, and the state.” (p. 168) Having “utopian” does not mean “in the people” actually run society directly, rather it means the opposite, namely that “the people simply designate their rulers who actually run it.

It is for this reason that anarchists think it naive and combine representative institutions with directly democratically elected socialism. Like direct democracy, the two do mix. Either the organs of popular self-management (such as co-ops, trade unions, worker’s committees) are in power or the representatives (a handful of people) are. To blur this issue by giving the same “representative democracy” with real participation in decision making means failing to understand the dynamics of socialism. Instead of representative structures, anarchists argue for popular assemblies to be linked by “networks” of mass democracy, recallable delegates. Assemblies at every level would elect action committees, as well as making decisions but these would have strong mandates and perform an administrative role.

Imagine’s attempts to inject some managing society — but they can “petition” those who do (namely the “managers and administrators”) would make “routine decisions” which are “externally delegated.” The “callout office” to the “socialist society,” that “callout office” that will allow “direct democracy to flourish for the first time in history” was to be “independent from any party.” (p. 57) They have more to do “direct democracy” than organisational reform, everything else is a “hijacked” by the representatives. Isolated individuals saying yes or no is not much better than the former, individuals putting a cross on a bit of paper. Tribed society was based on community discussion and decision making, as we were the more recent.

For example of real direct democracy which flourished during the French, Spanish and the other revolutions. The power rests in popular assemblies, in other words, the votes of individuals separated each other. Referenda are utterly compatible with that model (organised by the representatives, the government, and capitalism) as can be seen from numerous capitalist countries. Once the people are sufficiently satisfied with self-management, the people organised into assemblies to discuss and debate their own affairs directly. While minority rule can happily co-exist with referenda, it can’t do so with popular assemblies. This is why the callout office was not deemed necessary. (p. 190-191)

While Sheridan and McCromes are for worker’s clubs, they would be democratically run, with elected workers’ councils.” This vision is, cloes to traditional anarchism, it also falls well short of socialism. There would be a mixed economy based on state and municipally owned workplaces, cooperatives. They aimed to “shrink the state to a minimum” (through cheap loans and other incentives), plus “public” sections. These private sections would be “generalised production” rather than “private”

The first would be small businesses employing "less than ten people." We are informed these would thrive because they would "compete with each other on a level playing field." So, according to Imagine, the local businesses will be the future of the Scottish businesses will still be wage slaves in Scottish socialism. (p. 191)

So Imagine’s Scottish ‘socialist’ republic would have a predominantly capitalist economy, one in which over 93.7% of business would employ wage slaves and make a profit on the market. Whatever occurred to the idea that socialism involves the abolition of the wage system and wage labour? What about the few firms deemed worthy of socialist transformation? Large-scale industry could obviously be owned by the people of Scotland as a whole and run by democratically elected boards in which workers, consumers, and the wider society, all would be represented.” (pp. 190-191)

While Sheridan and McCromes are for worker’s clubs, they would be democratically run, with elected workers’ councils.” This vision is, as close to traditional anarchism, it also falls well short of socialism. Rather the council would “manage the economy directly,” make the state, in the
Imagine is based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state.

In the dark
They quote Tony Benn on how Trotsky was "the Soviet Union's first dissident." Surely they must know that the first "dissident" in the Soviet Union were the anarchists, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries imprisoned and shot by Trotsky and Lenin's political police from early 1918 onwards. Equally, what state that most journalists have "no understanding of who Lenin Trotsky really was, or what he stood for." Sheridan and McCombs make no comment on his support, in power, for policies which were identical to those which many socialists condemn as Stalinist. Indeed, they assert that Trotsky "defended" a "new social democratic" style of government. In fact, they consistently advocated a free trade dictatorship. Therefore, the historical truth is that the Russian Revolution was based on the basis of socialist democracy they would like to claim it. Significantly, they stress that "for socialists... democracy is not an optional extra... Socialism without free elections, without free trade unions, without free speech, is not socialism." (p. 131) If so, Trotsky's policies were not socialist.

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While condemning Stalinism, they remain strangely silent about Lenin and Trotsky's authoritarian policies.

Sheridan and McCombs are urging us to "imagine" a new version of social democracy rather than any real form of revolutionary socialism.

Simply a modern restatement of social democracy, the idea that socialism will come about through voting socialism at elections. Sheridan and McCombs are urging us to "imagine" a new version of social democracy rather than any real form of revolutionary socialism. The history of the past 100 years is that "the forces of democratic socialism" have swept to power in a general election, perhaps within an "independent social" (2010 or 2015). (p. 146)

Clearly, the politics of Imagine are based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state.
Imagine therefore achieves the impossible. It unites Lenin and Lenin — by making both spin in their graves!

In summary, Imagine is a step forward in the sense that the imagery it involves is libertarian sounding. It is no coincidence that they dwell more on the Spanish revolution than the Russian. The highly centralized, party-run, top-down Leninism scheme inspires few visual images, whereas the bottom-up, free market Leninism is more appealing. The fact that the text is no longer Lenin is not a coincidence.

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In summary, Imagine is a step forward in the sense that the imagery it involves is libertarian sounding. It is no coincidence that they dwell more on the Spanish Civil War than the Russian. The highly centralized, party run, top-down Leninism scheme inspires few theories. As the break with Leninism is not apparent, they may want to “imagine” a socialist society, but they fail. Secondly, for Imagine socialism comes via the ballot box. As such, this is a retreat from Lenin back to Marx at his worst. It forgets the last 130 years and resurrects social democracy in its original form. The idea that the current state has been squashed in simply rising, is the idea that the framework of the socialist society is created from the combat organisations of the working class forged in the class struggle. Imagine therefore achieves the impossible. It unites Lenin and Lenin by making both spin in their graves!
“How Revolutions must not be made”
—and the alternative

As in the 1960s, the upsurge in anarchist activism has resulted in a similar upsurge in classic anarchist titles being produced by mainstream publishers. A new generation of radicals are becoming interested in anarchism and a new generation of capitalists want to make money from them! This is a positive side-effect of the prominence we have achieved in the news reporting of the anti-capitalist movement. Hopefully these new radicals will take the opportunity to learn from some old ones, particularly as these books are so good.

After a few decades of being out of print, Emma Goldman’s classic account of her experiences in Lenin’s Russia has been reprinted. In addition, a valuable collection of essays by the anarchist (forty-odd words named Prince) has been reprinted. Formally known as “Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets” it has been renamed simply “Anarchism.” For those unfamiliar with Kropotkin’s work, it is simply indispensable reading. Containing such classics as (the abridged) “Modern Science and Anarchism,” “The Spirit of Revolt,” “Revolutionary Government,” “Anarchist Morality” and “An Appeal to the Young.” A better collection of works in one volume is impossible to find. For those interested in communist anarchism, this is the place to start.

Of particular interest in the light of the Goldman reprint are Kropotkin’s comments on the Russian Revolution. The book includes Kropotkin’s “Letter to the Workers of Western Europe” and a post-1917 postscript to his essay “Anarchist-Communism.” He reiterates the key idea of anarchism, that a revolution will only succeed if the working masses, through their own organisations, organise their own affairs directly as the only means of achieving socialism and freedom. As he put it, “We are learning in Russia how to get back to the state.” The essays in this book indicate the only
good chance for revolution. Goldman’s book is a different, but equally important, work. The leading anarchist in America at the time, he recounts the experiences which forced her to reconsider her support for the Bolsheviks and which led to her final break with Lenin’s régime. Like many anarchists outside Russia in 1917, Goldman had defended the Bolshevik revolution wholeheartedly. Depicted alongside Alexander Berkman from the US, in December 1919 as a “dangerous subversive” she arrived in revolutionary Russia the following month. Willing to put aside their anti-state principles, she and Berkman hoped for the best of that oxymoron, “revolutionary government.” What they discovered soon made them rethink their anti-state in the face of Bolshevik party dictatorship and bureaucracy. In the workplaces, they discovered that the workers had new bosses. In the prisons, they discovered that radicals had new guards. In society as a whole, they discovered that the

acruacy of the Tsar had been replaced by the autonomy of the Bolshevik Central Committee (it took slightly longer for one-man management to be applied there than in the factories!). Goldman had not “come to Russia expecting to find anarchism repressed.” Such idealism was alien to her (although that has not stopped Lenin, the opposite).

Rather, she expected to see the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought. She was aware that revolutions were difficult, involving “destruction” and “violence.” That Russia was not perfect was not the source of her opposition to Bolshevism. Rather, it was the fact that the “Russian people have been hoodwinked” of their own revolution and that the Bolshevik state used “the sword and the gun to keep the people out.” As a revolutionary she refused “to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party.”

Her break with Bolshevism took time.

She, like Berkman, repeated the revitalisation of modern anarchism, both parties to this day. She justified Bolshevist authoritarianism in terms of the blockades by the imperialist powers in terms of the civil war, in terms of the economic collapse these events caused. It took the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 to finally convince them that these “objective” factors simply could not explain what had happened to the revolution. The civil war had ended, but Bolshevik authoritism and state capitalism remained. She could no longer blind herself to the obvious.

Goldman’s opposition to Bolshevism flowed from her politics. Rather than refuse her anarchism, the Russian Revolution confirmed it. Anarchists had long argued that a revolution would provide economic disruption, unemployment, etc. (see Kropotkin’s “Conquest of Bread”). Similarly, anarchists have never been so stupid to think a revolution does not need