Black Flag

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Who fancies a new world?

The global fight against cuts is getting interesting

Editorial

Welcome to issue 234 of Black Flag. As usual this issue provides a diverse selection of writings from the libertarian-left.

Within our own milieu we continue to provide a non-sectarian class-struggle and internationalist forum.

This issue includes contributions from the Anarchist Federation and Solfed, as well as featuring material on organisations as diverse as the Italian USI and the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation of yesteryear.

Content wise, we have attempted to strike a balance of contemporary and historical; theory and analysis; history and literary review.

Current themes include an overview of the riots that swept Britain this summer; a critical look at the anti-cuts movement; the Spanish Indignados and the struggle of Italian health workers.

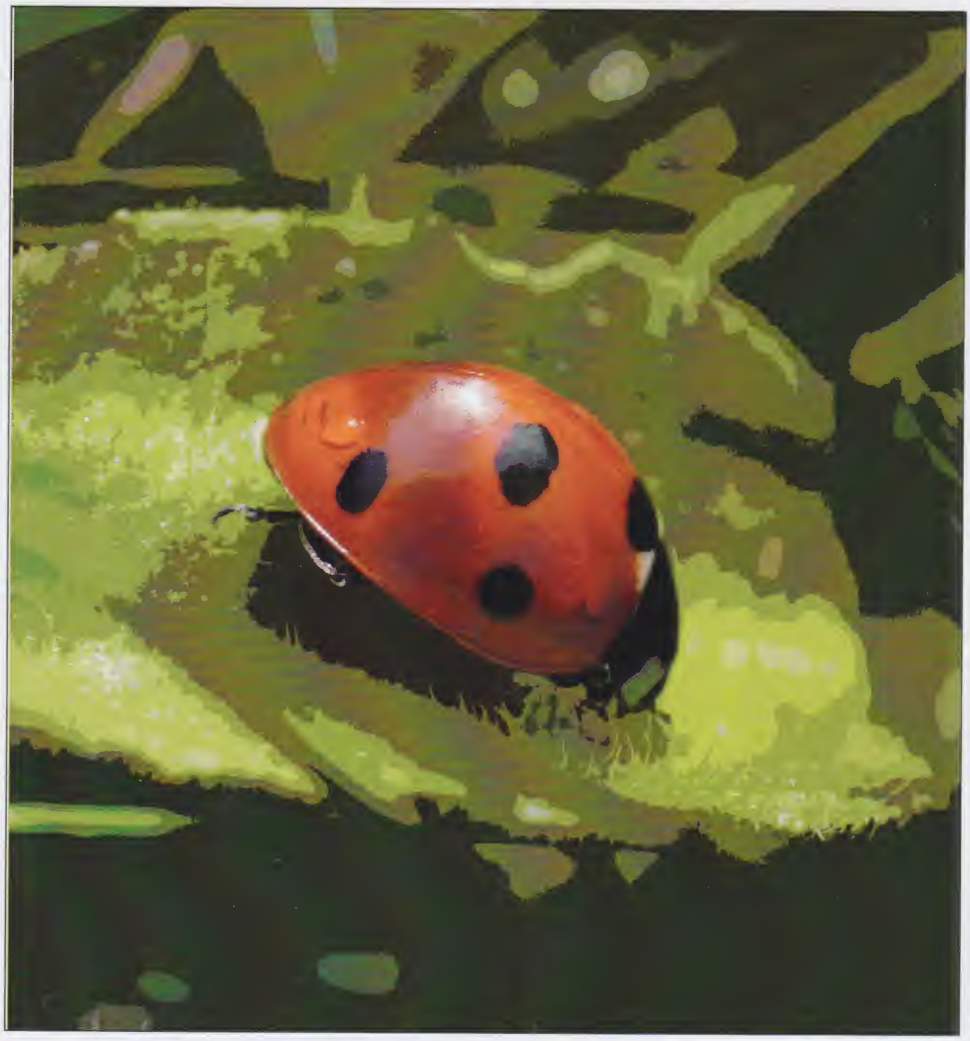
As always we acknowledge significant anniversaries; the most important being the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War and revolution, as well as less well-known ones, such as the Invergordon naval mutiny and the 90th anniversary of the APCF.

A photo celebration of the so called Battle of Cable Street is also included to mark the day when thousands of workers mobilised to stop Oswald Moseley and his fascist goons marching through the East End of London.

Other features include our regular Breathing Utopia slot, where we look at various professions of today and speculate how they would figure in a post-revolutionary society – this issue we examine graphic design.

We also include theoretical input on federalism and mandates – not forgetting reviews of some of the latest titles from the radical press. (Apologies go out to the reviewers whose work has been held over to the next issue for reasons of space).

But with all this, a word of caution. As a small collective, we are likely to struggle next year if we don't get some new faces on editorial and distribution. If you like what you see, get involved and we'll see where we can go...



Reality bites: Clarity is in short supply in the markets, as everything that was solid turns to dust. Our revolutionary ladybird will not be deterred however. Picture: Anya Brennan

sub editor

You are much needed.
Our usual layout and text-subbing volunteer will be unavailable for the May edition.
If you can do a job, it will keep Black Flag running as a bi-annual.
If you can't, it probably won't.
40 pages every six months ain't hard, email us at blackflagmag@yahoo.com

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Ethos

Black Flag is 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.

The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

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Camden Locked: Looting in north London Picture: Hughepaul

Between August 6th and 10th this year Britain witnessed almost unprecedented levels of intense and ferocious rioting and looting on the streets of its cities, triggered initially by the police execution of a young man called Mark Duggan.

At times the authorities struggled to control the unfolding events, frequently retreating in disarray. It was most widespread in London and to a lesser degree in the cities of Manchester and Birmingham, although many other towns and cities across the UK registered minor disturbances. Armoured cars, riot police and mounted charges were utilised, with the use of water cannon and plastic bullets authorised and on standby. There were even calls to bring in the army.

The intensity of this uprising culminated in an over-kill response by the authorities which resulted in over 3,000 arrests made nationally, over 2,000 of these in London. Followed by ludicrous "setting an example" custodial sentences for those convicted of serious crimes like stealing a bottle of water. Five people lost their lives (six if you include Duggan) in incidents either directly or indirectly related to the disturbances.

It is not the intention of Black Flag to put its own slant, interpretation or analysis into the equation, but to present an overview from a libertarian communist perspective, based on the statements issued by groups and individuals situated in London at the time of the riots, of what happened and of some of the implications and lessons of those five memorable days in the summer of 2011 that face us as revolutionaries. The three statements chosen are reproduced in their entirety.

Solidarity Federation

One of the first statements issued during the riots was by the North London Local of influential anarcho-syndicalist organisation Solfed, UK section of the IWA international:

"Over the last few days, riots have caused significant damage to parts of London, to shop-fronts, homes and cars. On the left, we hear the ever-present cry that poverty has caused this. On the right, that gangsters and anti-social elements are taking advantage of tragedy. Both are true. The looting and riots seen over the past number of days are a complex phenomenon and contain many currents.

"It is no accident that the riots are happening now, as the support nets for Britain's disenfranchised are dragged away and people are left to fall into the abyss, beaten as they fall by the batons of the Metropolitan Police. But there should be no excuses for the burning of homes, the terrorising of working people. Whoever did such things has no cause for support.

"The fury of the estates is what it is, ugly and uncontrolled. But not unpredictable. Britain has hidden away its social problems for decades, corralled them with a brutal picket of armed men. Growing up in the estates often means never leaving them, unless it's in the back of a police van. In the 1980s, these same problems led to Toxteth. In the '90s, contributed to the Poll Tax riots. And now we have them again - because the problems are not only still there, they're getting worse.

"Police harassment and brutality are part of everyday life in estates all around the UK. Barely-liveable benefits systems have decayed and been withdrawn. In Hackney, the street-level support workers who came from the estates and knew the kids, could work with them in their troubles have been told they will no longer be paid. Rent is rising and state-sponsored jobs which used to bring money into the area are being cut back in the name of a shift to unpaid "big society" roles. People who always had very little now have nothing. Nothing to lose.

"And the media's own role in all of should not be discounted. For all the talk of the "peaceful protest" that preceded events in Tottenham, the media wouldn't have touched the story if all that happened was a vigil outside a police station. Police violence and protests against it happen all the time. It's only when the other side responds with violence (on legitimate targets or not) that the media feels the need to give it any sort of coverage.

"So there should be no shock that people living lives of poverty and violence have at last gone to war. It should be no shock that people are looting plasma screen TVs that will pay for a couple of months' rent and leaving books they can't sell on the shelves. For many, this is the only form of economic redistribution they will see in the coming years as they continue a fruitless search for jobs.

"Much has been made of the fact that the rioters were attacking "their own

Britain Riots

communities." But riots don't occur within a social vacuum. Riots in the eighties tended to be directed in a more targeted way; avoiding innocents and focusing on targets more representative of class and race oppression: police, police stations, and shops. What's happened since the eighties? Consecutive governments have gone to great lengths to destroy any sort of notion of working class solidarity and identity. Is it any surprise, then, that these rioters turn on other members of our class?

"The Solidarity Federation is based in resistance through workplace struggle. We are not involved in the looting and unlike the knee-jerk right or even the sympathetic-but-condemnatory commentators from the left, we will not condemn or condone those we don't know for taking back some of the wealth they have been denied all their lives.

"But as revolutionaries, we cannot condone attacks on working people, on the innocent. Burning out shops with homes above them, people's transport to work, muggings and the like are an attack on our own and should be resisted as strongly as any other measure from government "austerity" politics, to price-gouging landlords, to bosses intent on stealing our labour. Tonight and for as long as it takes, people should band together to defend themselves when such violence threatens homes and communities.

"We believe that the legitimate anger of the rioters can be far more powerful if it is directed in a collective, democratic way and seeks not to victimise other workers, but to create a world free of the exploitation and inequality inherent to capitalism."

Alarm

Another prominent London based anarchist group, the All London Anarchist Revolutionary Movement (Alarm) also issued a prompt statement:

"Since last Saturday, a situation has escalated around the UK, with eruptions of long-repressed anger in most major cities. Whilst this anger may have certainly, at times, taken on forms that we disapprove of, we all know where this anger comes from. We are all suffering at the moment. Trying to make ends meet can be a living nightmare – benefits, jobs and healthcare going down the drain whilst the cost of housing and living rises sharply. Not to mention systematic police harassment on our streets, daily injustice and deaths in police custody.

"For those right at the bottom of the pile, the young and unemployed, it seems like everything they were brought up on was false. The promise of easy credit, easy access to consumer goods, an education and social support. All this just disappears into smoke when the rich decide we don't deserve it anymore; when they are desperate to save their system from the consequences of their own greed.

"We condemn:

"The police, the political elite and the media for creating an atmosphere of fear, justifying greater state repression.

"The opportunism of the EDL/BNP and other far right groups

"We refuse to condemn:

"People who looted high street chain stores, pawn shops, betting shops, banks and other symbols of capitalism.

"People who attacked the police, police property, courts, probation services and other symbols of the state.

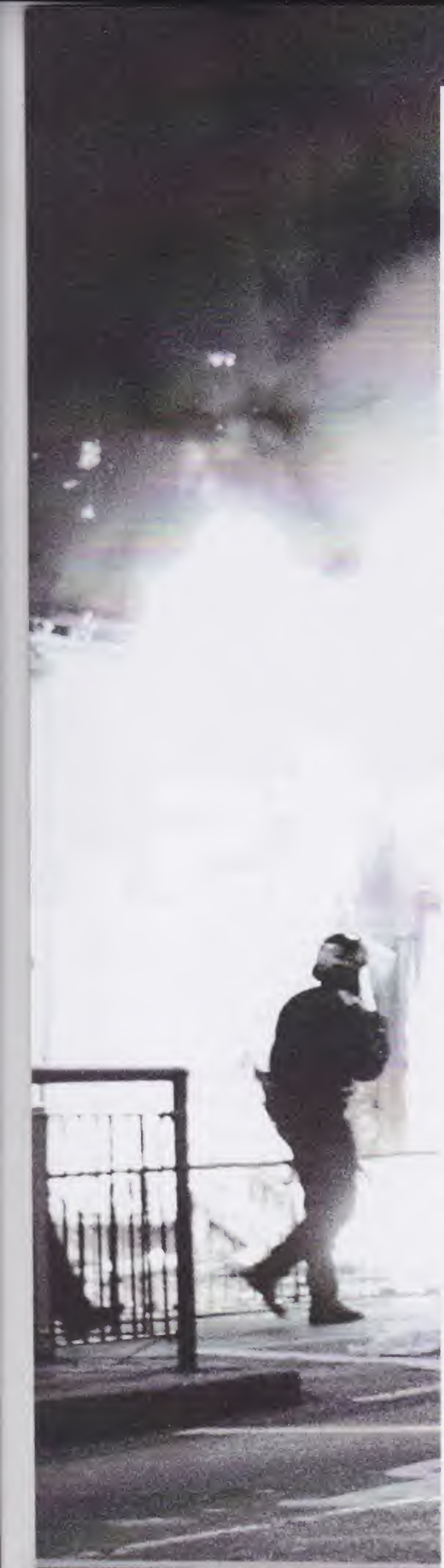
"We are inspired by:

"All the people who stood up for each other in the face of attack by the police and other violent gangs

"The communities that stood outside preventing arson to neighbouring flats, houses and locally-owned businesses.

"But whilst we are categorically against the arson of homes, the muggings and the burglaries, are we really surprised this is happening? Here is a whole generation brought up on Thatcherism and Blairism – two ideologies that totally glorify individualism and ruthless competition. That have gone out of their way to destroy working class solidarity and colonise our areas with wealthy young professionals. That place those who trample on their communities for their own personal gain up on pedestals. These ideologies have BRED gangster behaviour amongst the poor and the only way we can counter such behaviour is by rebuilding our community spirit NOW, in spite of these doctrines, out of the ashes of this rebellion.

"We are also categorically against any notion that greater police powers are a



Camden Locked: Looting in north London Picture: Hughepaul

remedy to this situation, that the violence of the state and of capitalism is somehow preferable to the violence of those in our communities. Even if it was preferable, it would solve nothing – the problem here is inequality and injustice.

"Only we can bring about equality and justice; working together to advance our collective interests. We believe that when we build strong communities, we have a better chance of fighting back and winning. When we assemble to support each other through the difficulties of recession, instead of hiding away in our homes. When we get on the streets to defend our communities from any kind of attack. When we strike against our bosses instead of taking it on the chin. When we allocate resources for the benefit of the many and not the few. When we organise to take back what is rightfully ours instead of submitting to the thieves in Westminster and the City. When we target the rich and the state and not each other.

"Whilst the riots may have taken their toll on our communities, there is no turning back now. We cannot wish them away. The screams of our youth have been heard; its time we turned them into the battle cries of our class."

Ian Bone

When it comes to situations like this, veteran anarchist and prolific blogger Ian Bone is also never short of a word or two:

"The scale of destruction in London is more like the Los Angeles riots than anything previously seen in the UK. The pity is that the only areas that seemed to have escaped destruction are the very rich ones but when people rise up the outcomes are never neatly packaged. People fight where they are and with whatever they can lay their hands on. The ferocity of a long repressed rage has shocked me who only a few days ago was writing 'when will our class ever wake up and fight back.'

"Thankfully no one has been killed or seriously injured and despite the howls of hypocritical outrage from our political class tomorrow it is property that has been hit – and as we all know property is theft. But it is only by luck that no one has been killed and tonight it's clear that unlike the other nights there has been anti-social behaviour with random attacks on people in the streets and setting fire to houses and flats and small shops often in a reckless way and random cars attacked and many people frightened and scared. This is fucking shit and out of order and to be opposed wherever it occurs. This will not unite our class but divide it – but it's happened and we can not wish it away.

"We live in an absurdly unjust society where we will see tomorrow our privileged Oxbridge and privately educated leaders fly home from their Tuscan holiday villas to condemn those at the bottom of the shitpile of capitalism. This will be grotesque. The Bullingdon bullies and toffs of the Chipping Norton set – with the Milibands no different in the privilege stakes – have no idea that life is like for those who have been rioting.

"Social mobility in Britain is non-existent – you can not rise up. The political class controls all aspects of our society and owns all of the land. The bankers get millions while someone who loots a mobile phone will get a long jail sentence.It is a grotesque absurd society – no wonder the explosion when it comes is viscerally ferocious. My own belief is that this day will mark the end of the rioting – all passion spent. We will then have to be strong because to speak positively of the rioting will be difficult in the face of the welter of reaction to come.

"While all the political class will outdo each other in condemnation it will not be the time for us to duck below the parapet. The rioters will revert back to silence. The daily mail will incite the 'decent' working class to ally with the frightened middle class and demand retribution. The witch hunts will begin. The voices of reaction will dominate again but in a way they never dared before.

"But everything has changed. The police can only operate by consent. Yesterday that consent was withdrawn and they and the government were powerless. They could no longer call the shots. The rioters were the ones with the power. They will now lie low but they will know they can exercise that power collectively again. Maybe during the Olympics. Maybe sooner. But they will rise again. The Tuscan villas will no longer be immune from the sound of class anger. Things are never going to be the same. WE ARE MANY AND THOSE CUNTS ARE FEW.

"That we now know."

Whatever interpretations and hair-splitting one chooses to make from these statements issued from the libertarian-communist camp, and indeed, the more thought-through theoretical revolutionary and sociological texts written after the event, one thing is pertinently clear from a revolutionary and class struggle perspective; the exploitative, degrading, repressive and divisive economic system of capitalism has to go.

Examples cited of acts of random violence against fellow workers and the burning of workers' homes (in some cases with them still inside) reinforces a lack of class solidarity, and just how fragmented the working class actually is. This is no surprise as the ruling class has governed by divide and rule tactics for centuries.

It would be wrong to see the riots in themselves as a form of struggle against the state and capital. They were an understandable expression of rage; of anger, dispair and hopelessness against that system. It is the task of revolutionaries to build and organise around this dynamic. The riots were a by-product of capitalism, a sign of its crisis and decay. A system in its death thralls.

"Capitalism has to go!" Yes, capitalism has to go. Such an ambitious demand can only be realised by workers taking control of their own lives, be it in the workplace or community. (For my own part, through the creation of workers' assemblies and workers' councils). The priority of such an embryonic movement must encompass the raising of class consciousness, confidence building, awareness and empowerment. A movement with a vision of a better world – a free communist society.

By Ade Dimmick

Analysis: How we can learn from recent activity around the movement against austerity

Across the UK and the world governments are implementing massive cuts to social services for the working class, drastically increasing the burden on the poorest in society. This article looks at various approaches within the anti-cuts movement, examining what we think is effective and why, and what approaches we do not support. It draws on conversation and ideas from the Anarchist Federation's recent National Conference in Liverpool.

Dealing with the Left

As the struggle against cuts has progressed from the first student uprisings, the Left has become more aggressive in co-opting the movement and rerouting it for its own aims, mostly recruitment. The Left and the trade unions are able to command large numbers but they squander this on ineffective actions like A-to-B marches on Saturdays (marching past an empty City Council building), rallies, candle-lighting, petition-signing etc. They call good attendance at these events a great victory and assure their membership that they are making progress while cuts proceed apace.

In Bristol anarchists from the Solidarity Federation, the AF and the Industrial Workers of the World have been a large part of the local anti-cuts alliance. Socialist groups participating mostly neutralised each other and the Labour Party remains barred from participating in any official capacity.

This has meant anarchist ideas have had quite a bit of influence but unions are now pushing for Labour's inclusion. Bristol found that affiliated smaller groups based on neighbourhoods or on specific topics have been able to get more done than the citywide group.

In Nottingham, socialists are using Save Our Services to push trade union activity and an A-to-B march that they are organising. We need to be aware of the tendency of the Left, including small socialist factions, to channel energy into ineffective tactics like these which do nothing to actually challenge the system or inconvenience those making the cuts, but are instead designed to increase socialist influence. Large groups run by trade unions are not usually the most effective for all their numbers – they must work with the police and are bound by legal constraints.

In Lincoln, the Socialist Party tried to set up an anti-cuts group but then spent all of their time on the recent elections and the group collapsed. Sensibly, no one is interested in working with people who can't focus on anything except gaining council seats. The failure of an anti-cuts group however doesn't make it easier to try to organise a new one.

In Liverpool, there is a large Liverpool Against the Cuts group that the Anarchist Federation and the Solidarity Federation had been involved in, along with various Trotskyist groups, but as more people got involved the Trades Union Council jumped in and starting packing the central committee so it could set the agenda. New members are now getting the reformist TUC message and it is difficult for other ideas to be heard within this setting.

In Manchester a broad group called Occupy Manchester, including No Borders, activists involved in a local social centre, and the SWP has been organising an occupation of a city square near the 2011 Conservative Party conference. The AF has been pushing for more focus on the practicalities of a successful occupation of public space and less on ideas for entertainment. A Spanish comrade brought up ideas from the recent occupations in Spain [see page 12] and argued for specific space to discuss ideas.

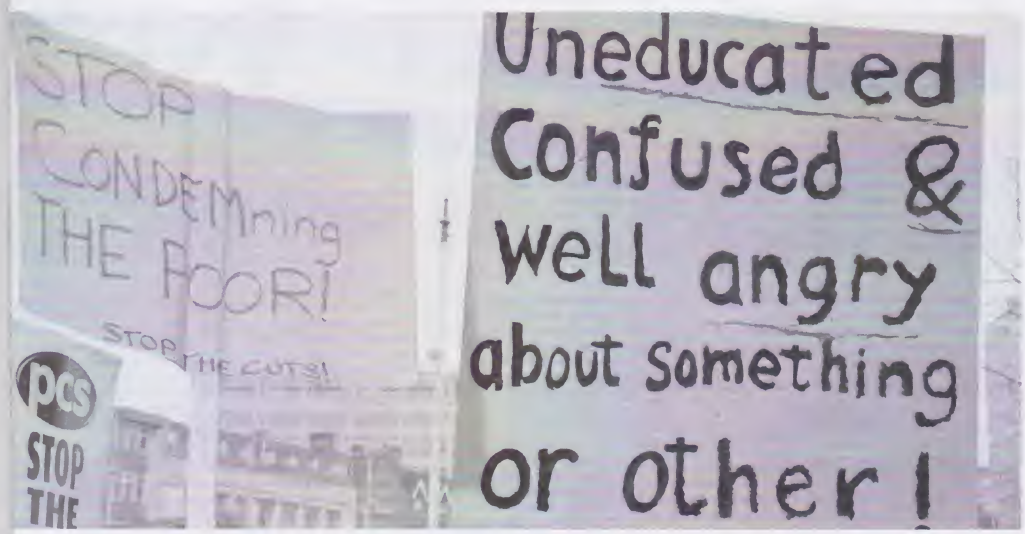
An obsession with lobbying powerful people is a hallmark of Left organising, hence campaigns like that of 38 Degrees, which is trying to raise £20,000 to oppose Andrew Lansley's butchering of the NHS in

the House of Lords.

They want to spend this astounding sum having their "legal experts" brief the Lords, setting up an "Email-a-Lord" tool on the internet and mailing letters to all 788 peers of the realm. This lobbying makes everyone involved completely passive and provides no challenge to the incredibly anti-democratic system in which we ask a bunch of rich people to take our needs into account when they make decisions, please.

How can anarchists confront the trade unions and Left reformists and recruiters within the anti-cuts movement? Ideas proposed within the AF include:

1. Using larger groups as an opportunity to challenge hierarchical organising and promote direct democracy. Speaking out against central committees and ineffective actions. Working within broad coalitions openly as anarchists and pushing a class-based analysis that is inclusive of service users as well as workers.
2. Using meetings overwhelmed by Trotskyists and the Left as a chance to distribute propaganda.
3. Where numbers allow, organising effective actions separately and not involving the Left except as individuals willing to work within anarchist principles.



Bad signs: Big numbers haven't meant effective action

Our experience of effective action

Without being defeatist, it is important to acknowledge that the anti-cuts movement is one in which it is difficult to claim victories. A campaign to save a local library or school may be successful, but then result in cuts to other social services in the area. Social services provided by the state are always under threat, and anarchists work towards a society where there is no authoritarian state controlling distribution of resources. However, we also support the working class in fighting for a better life now, which certainly includes struggles to maintain and improve social services.

In some cases, the anti-cuts struggle may not result in any concrete victories, but will have contributed to the confidence of participants and the radicalisation of the working class. This is crucial progress and should not be dismissed.

It was this latter form of victory that the Free Hetherington occupation experienced at Glasgow University. Although the "concessions" won from management were mostly hollow, things that were happening anyway, or easy for management to give, the participants in the longest-running student occupation in recent UK history gained valuable experience organising themselves and served as a useful lightning rod for class struggle in Glasgow.

In Bristol the biggest anti-cuts fight is for social care. Bristol is cutting charity funding and closing homes for the elderly while decimating budgets for home care. A lot of services want to fight to keep their daycentres. Bristol and District Anti-cuts Alliance has been encouraging people to go and listen to people in their local daycentres, and the Anarchist Federation has taken up this suggestion.

A list of all the different services that were set to be cut in the city has been useful to those who are keen to work with others rather than to be in competition for scraps of funding from the council. At one daycare centre, staff members indicated that they and some more radical service users would be up for confrontational tactics like disrupting council meetings. Anarchists in Bristol ran a successful meeting for these service users and staff to talk about how best to oppose cuts.

In London, local campaigns have successfully saved libraries and in Nottingham, a non-trade-union organised campaign managed to keep a daycare centre for terminally ill patients open. The service-users, along with a local anarchist who volunteers at the daycare centre, started the campaign. The workers were mostly too afraid to oppose their bosses. The trade unions cannot engage with this kind of action as they prioritise trying to get workers (or more often union bureaucrats) to act. Hayward House was saved and patients have been given letters of apology from the NHS.

Although one-day strikes like June 30th are not effective in of themselves (how could they be? The unions know it and that's why they allow them), they do provide a context for workplace discussion and confidence-building, and as a tactic co-ordinated strike action provides a real threat to the ruling class. Of course it would be even more threatening if it extended beyond a single day and began to include wildcat and solidarity action. November 30th will provide another opportunity to try to push locally for more.

Implications for strategy

Given all this, what would a practical anti-cuts strategy would look like? Here is one three-stage approach that we came up with:

1. A common analysis, as a national organisation, on cuts and austerity measures as a phenomenon. The AF's analysis is based on the premise that recessions and economic crises are a natural, integral part of capitalism and that they work to the benefit of capital. They are currently being used as an excuse for cuts to state services, to increase privatisation and private profits and to further weaken the working class. It includes a critique of the Left and their traditional responses to cuts.
2. Principles derived from this common analysis: We support non-hierarchical organisation and direct democracy in the anti-cuts movement. We want to be on the offensive rather than the defensive, not just calling for a return to previous services but pushing for better services for all, for more, rather than settling for less. We are not negotiating for compromise with the state. We push for more radical actions that provide a real confrontation with the capitalist system and the state.
3. Application by local groups of these principles. This is where we can be flexible according to circumstances, and where we should be informed by others' experiences from the two previous sections of this article.

A Two-Prong Application

The application of principles and analysis should contain two prongs:

1. Propaganda, including protest. Propaganda is intended to speak to the working class, and effective protest serves a double function of demonstrating the possibility of resistance to the working class and also threatening/disrupting the activities of the ruling class.
2. Furthering economic, social and student struggles, workplace organisation or community groups. This would include organising as claimants and the unemployed to refuse scab labour.

This article is not intended to pioneer any exciting new theories, it is simply a summary of our current activity on the anti-cuts front and what we have noticed about the UK anti-cuts movement. We hope it will spark conversation and serve as at least a useful reference for groups looking to increase anti-cuts activity.

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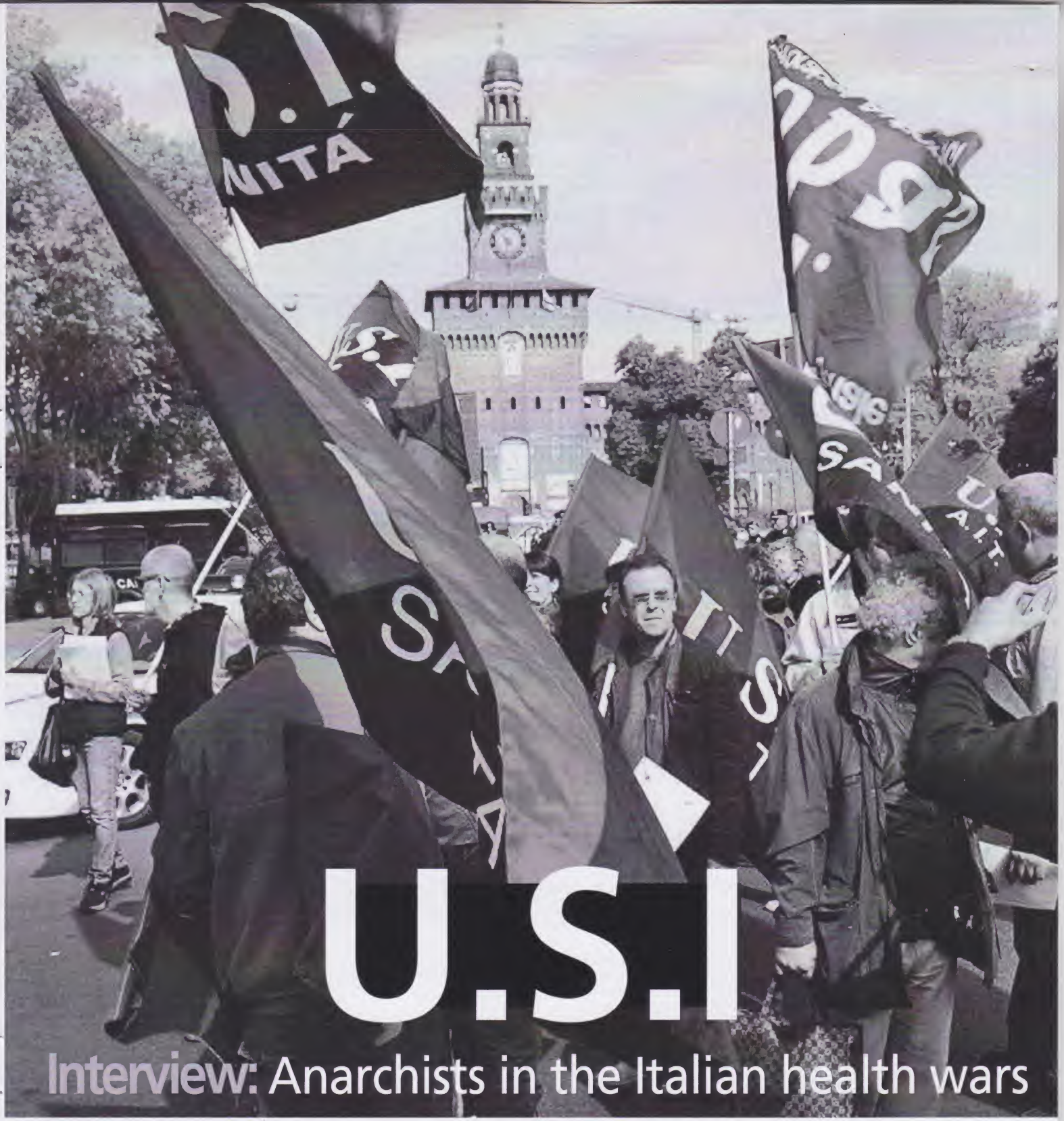


Interview: Anarchists in the Italian health wars

North London Solidarity Federation member Ed Goddard interviews Angelo, a health worker and member of USI (the anarcho-syndicalist group's Italian sister-section), about the situation facing workers in Italian healthcare as well as their response to it.

What are the main problems facing health workers in Italy?

Health workers are suffering from the effects of the changes that took place in the mid-1990s with the introduction of the DRG (a system of payment-by-activity for hospitals) and the privatisation of the healthcare system.

This, besides expanding the private sector, has led all hospital administrations to try to make more cost savings. The costs are represented primarily by wages and their reduction leads to an increase in workload, outsourcing, increasing precariousness in contracts etc.

So staffing, that is the number of workers in a single operation unit (department, ward, diagnostics etc), is one of the sites of discontent and where possible, organising.

In theory there are some basic operating guidelines which the hospitals should respect, but these are so ineffective that management often use fewer staff than required. One ongoing battle is to bring this number up to these base levels. The health companies prefer to use overtime work because it costs less.

Against a 15% or 30% increase in wages, they save themselves money on the "13th month" bonus[1], severance pay and the various rights that generally cost (like paid leave, for example).

Another site of discontent is wages. A fraction of wages (called "range progression and other entries") depends on company negotiation. Individual health-care companies try in part to peg them to profits so we always need to have big mobilisations to get pay increases. Other problems regard shifts and workplace security.

In addition, a series of non-core services are put up for tender for private companies in competition with each other. In this context – further worsened by attempts to reduce usage of equipment or provide

unnecessary but profitable services to patients (as shown by the trial of directors of a Milanese hospital has confirmed) – the struggle to protect working conditions in the healthcare sector is interlinked with the defence of the quality of service provided to patients.

How militant are health workers in Italy in comparison with workers in other industries?

To respond to this question, something needs to be said first. Healthcare, being an essential service, is subject to laws on the right to strike. There are two main laws that essentially aim to impede strike action. Before calling a strike, you need to go through conciliation in the prefecture[2]. Then you must choose a date when it's possible to call one, paying attention to a series of clauses that limit the days available.

This makes mobilisation difficult because these laws include heavy penalities for organisations that don't respect them. That said, however, we have the right to call an assembly at work and still get paid for up to 12 hours annually and outside working hours there are no limits for pickets, demonstrations, leafletting and any other activity suggested by your imagination.

The concept of militant is difficult to define. There are hospitals with a good number of workers involved in union activity and others where there are some difficulties. In general, I would say that in Milan, but also other cities like Trieste, now for years, USI-Health is strong. For some time, USI-Health has been growing in other areas of Italy, like Tuscany, Parma and Modena.

Recently, there have been some big strikes from the General Confederation of Labour (CGIL, a trade union grouping influenced by the Communist Party), for example, on January 28th. What has the reaction of USI been?

The strike on the January 28th was not called by CGIL but only by FIOM, the metalworkers' union within CGIL, even though FIOM asked the CGIL to call a general strike.

That strike was part of a particular moment in an attack from the bosses, not only on FIOM but to national contracts generally, against the existence of unions and workers' rights. This strike followed the agreement at car giant Fiat that saw a retreat from workers' victories.

As USI we decided to call a general strike on the same day, we thought that it was necessary to be present in a strike against the bosses. To call for a general strike would have meant that workers from all industries (also CGIL members) could respond to a general attack, not leaving this task only to metalworkers.

Sadly all the other base unions[3] paid more attention to the logic of acronyms than of class solidarity and in not supporting it they missed an opportunity to spread and strengthen a struggle that could have unified us on some issues.

Afterwards, there was a strike by one of the big base unions and another the month after by a second one. As USI we decided not to participate in either of these strikes as they seemed aimed at only establishing the identity of the union organisation and nothing else.

We went back on this decision only after the war in Libya to call a strike against it on the same day that CUB[4] had called a strike, April 16th. It must be said that CUB afterwards inserted something against the war (at the time that the strike was called the war in Libya hadn't started yet). The attendance of demonstrations in different cities was good even if not huge.

In the end, CGIL decided to call a general strike on May 6th over issues which had prompted calls for a strike in January. We considered it a fake strike to open negotiations that we had no interest in. We had other things to do. Nobody remembers that strike even though it was about something that could contribute to new rules of representation and negotiation that certainly won't be better than the current ones.

Pedigree: USI activists meet during its first iteration in the 20th century

What are the activities of USI-Milano in health-care?

Some unions in hospitals make newspapers, like Il Paolaccio in San Paolo Hospital, which is definitely the most regular and Il Fontanone in San Raffaele Hospital. Also, leaflets, bulletins, emails, assemblies of members and non-members, opening sections around the city, gathering in the union rooms in individual hospitals, cultural and/or educational initiatives in the USI offices around the city. We are in the process of getting (after the summer) somewhere in the city where we will have a good space for USI-Health as well.

How are USI different from other unions that are active in healthcare?

In healthcare, beyond the main union federations (CGIL, CISL, UIL) there are other groups such as base unions and also unions for specific job categories.

The differences with the main union federations are the same as the ones you find in other sectors. With the craft/job category unions they are also in this case immense; these unions defend a trade, like for example only nurses or only technicians.

They defend themselves at the expense of others.

USI-Health obviously wants all workers to be united beyond the specifics of being a health worker. We strive to reduce the salary

differences between high and low categories of workers.

USI is the only union to not have a hierarchy or full-timers that advance their careers inside the unions and end up deciding its direction, handing down decisions on things that concern workers. In USI, decisions are made by the workers.

No-one would dare to make a decision and have others adapt to it. Maybe a discussion ends up tiring us out, but we decide together on both the objective and the strategy to achieve it.

In Italy, many (I would say all) base unions have had the same leader for many years, often in the end seeing themselves associated with the acronym (so we have the CUB of Tiboni, COBAS of Bernocchi, UNICOBAS of D'Errico and this way it continues).

At each USI Congress (every three years) we replace all the official posts, there are no people who hold a post for life (we leave this to the Pope!) and the secretary acts for the organisation as a whole for the years he is in charge but his position is like that of anyone else. Nobody involved in USI is paid, all the work is done voluntarily; the posts are a burden not at all positions of command.

With base unions, some struggles see us fighting side by side for shared goals and ideals. But the substantial differences are in our organisation being horizontal and not top-down, in the value given to workers' assemblies, in being independent from any party strategy and in the centrality of workers' direct action instead of political or institutional mediation.

Factfile: USI-AIT

Unione Sindacale Italiana

- Founded in 1912 in Modena, USI has been the main anarcho-syndicalist group in Italy for nearly a century and is the Italian section of the International Workers' Association (IWA, or AIT in Spanish).
- It drew much of its early inspiration from libertarian elements in the First International and the country's general strike of 1904, organising from a strong base in the struggles of agricultural workers, metallurgists and miners.
- Explosive early expansion saw membership reach 101,000 at its 1913 congress and over 300,000 at its third congress in 1919 in Parma.
- The rise of fascism in opposition its own shop-floor strength alongside souring relations with the "red" unions attached to the Soviet-run Profintern became increasingly troubling as the union entered the 1920s and the union found itself being decimated by assassinations and fascist violence even as it joined the newly-founded IWA.
- The union was largely destroyed when Mussolini came to power and it was outlawed in 1926, though it operated underground and in exile afterwards.
- After the Second World War, it was folded into the CGIL union, only being refounded in 1953 when it was mainly focussed in Genoa and Tuscany.
- A revival occurred in the 1960s as a new wave of militant trade unionism swept through the country, with USI playing a substantial agitational role and forming strong links with the emerging base unions. However a succession of state attacks including anti-communist witch-hunts and the murder of activist Giuseppe Pinelli in 1969 (the inspiration for Dario Fo's famed play Death of an Anarchist) undermined this progress.
- Growth wasn't to start again until 1977. The union's base at this stage was largely in Rome and Genoa, but despite difficult circumstances in the 1980s new branches were added through the period and in the late 1980s it came into its own, picking up enough influence to play a key role in the 1991 general strike against the Iraq war.
- However its numbers, which reached 2,500 over this period, proved difficult to integrate and the union split in 1995 between USI-Rome and everywhere else. While USI-Rome continues to use the initials AIT, it is no longer part of the international (the official Rome section is now known as USI-Prato Carnico).
- Today it maintains a strong base in Milan and Genoa alongside branches in more than 20 other Italian towns and cities.

Web: usi-ait.org

Tell us about some campaigns in healthcare that USI-Milano have participated in.

Currently the national contract, though it has expired, has been frozen by the government until 2013.

A struggle near San Paolo Hospital finished at the end of May, with many twists like the managers signing an agreement for a pay increase then leaving immediately after and the agreement not being applied. In this struggle there was a strike, various assemblies, demonstrations and pickets in the hospital, all with firm participation from the USI-Health section and joined by a lot of people.

A similar struggle is now underway at San Carlo Hospital. There was a strike against the war in Libya on April 16th there and they had a strong picket with a stall and leafletting.

And last October an agreement was won at San Raffaele Hospital after an industrial dispute lasting almost a year in which there were assemblies (both general and of individual departments), pickets (one also at night), occupations of management offices, a strike, demonstrations both inside and outside the hospital and leafletting.

As part of the agreement there will be two pay increases, one in December 2010 and the other in January 2013. And a new entry has also been introduced in the pay cheque, consisting of a percentage of the turnover (not the profits) of the hospital divided equally between all the workers – that means that every worker will get the same amount.

> "USI is the only union to not have a hierarchy or full-timers that advance their careers inside the unions"
>
> Angelo, USI Milano

USI is the biggest union at San Raffaele. The struggle that brought about the agreement was supported mainly by USI and USB[5], the other unions were mild and thought that the aims were too high.

During an assembly of all workers, a union functionary (one of those that works for the union but is paid by the company) for the mainstream UIL said he couldn't sign because a USI militant was fixated on the fact that the increase should be the same for everybody rather than scaled (generally, those higher up the scale take the most, those lower down the least), hoping to turn the higher categories against him. Then all these people signed the agreement anyway.

So USI and USB organised the struggle, the assemblies, the pickets, the occupations and the strike with the sporadic involvement of other unions. On the strike day, the CGIL was not present and some of its delegates were at work.

At the moment at San Raffaele, a problem has exploded related to the financial crisis. The managers have managed really badly and created a hole of around €1 billion.

Even though we don't think that, in the short term, they can touch the jobs of long term workers, we are worried about the possible redundancies of precarious workers, those in outsourced companies and the consequences for the contracts of all. On this issue, there have already been some mobilisations.

By Ed Goddard

References

1. In Italy, in certain types of contracts, workers receive an extra month's wages as a bonus at the end of the year
2. 'La prefettura' is an organ of local government that deals with a variety of issues, including industrial mediation.
3. "Base unions" refers to smaller unions that originated in Italy's widespread independent workplace assemblies of the 1960s-70s. Today they are usually more linked to social movements outside the workplace than the traditional unions.
4. The Basic Unitary Confederation was formed in 1991 and currently claims around 100,000 members in 22 towns and cities.
5. Unione Sindicale di Base – a base union

INDIGNADOS

Analysis: The Spanish protests open a door for real change

At around 6pm on Sunday May 15th, 2011, approximately 1,000 activists marched the short distance from Plaza de Cibeles to Puerta de Sol, the historic centre of Madrid. As instructed by the principle organisers Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now: DRY), they did not carry flags or banners to identifying any party or trade union.

They eventually arrived under a DRY banner declaring they were not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers. Like at the end of many anti-capitalist demonstrations they held a rally denouncing the problems that were afflicting the country. Fatefully, around 200 of them decided to camp there, ostensibly until Spain's municipal elections a week later.

This small encampment was an obvious inconvenience to the authorities. The regional government had only just finished refurbishing Sol at a cost of many millions of euros, and it was back to working as the main hub for visitors to the city.

The small number of occupiers managed to "take the square" from Monday morning, until the early hours of the next day. At 5am on the Tuesday, agents from the national and municipal police forces evicted them, arresting one young man, and refusing the other activists re-entry to the square. At this point, with the exception of the left-wing newspaper Publico, events in Madrid and in the other dozens of cities where small numbers had answered DRY's call were still off the media's radar.

As news of the eviction circulated, through word of mouth and through social networks, activists fixed 8pm as the time to take back the square. No one really expected what came next.

The police eviction inspired rebellion. By Tuesday night, activists had re-established the camp, and that night, as every night between the eviction and the municipal elections the following Sunday there were massive demonstration that packed the square and prevented further evictions. The camp became a massive democratic free-for-all, with advertising hoardings and the new underground station being used to hang thousands of homemade messages outraged at the craven behaviour of the Spanish ruling class. "15M" and the "Indignados" were on the lips of every media outlet, and every politician.

What seemed so remarkable to the Establishment was how a small group of activists had managed to get so many people out in support of their cause, without any of the usual means for mobilising people. No trade unions and no political party had had any role.

Explanations for such an unprecedented event ranged from the hard right - that the protesters were the usual suspects, crusties, trained by ETA, "anti-system" anarchists – to the fairly obvious, that a country with 40% youth unemployment and fairly shameful levels of political corruption should expect such protests.

To begin with, even Esperanza Aguirre, the Governor of the Madrid region and hate figure for the Left, agreed with the demonstrators, stating that the movement seemed like a "a heterogeneous movement, which is fairly logically unhappy." She would later change her tune as it dawned on the main political parties that they couldn't co-opt the movement on the street, moving to insinuating that 15M were simply communists and anarchists.

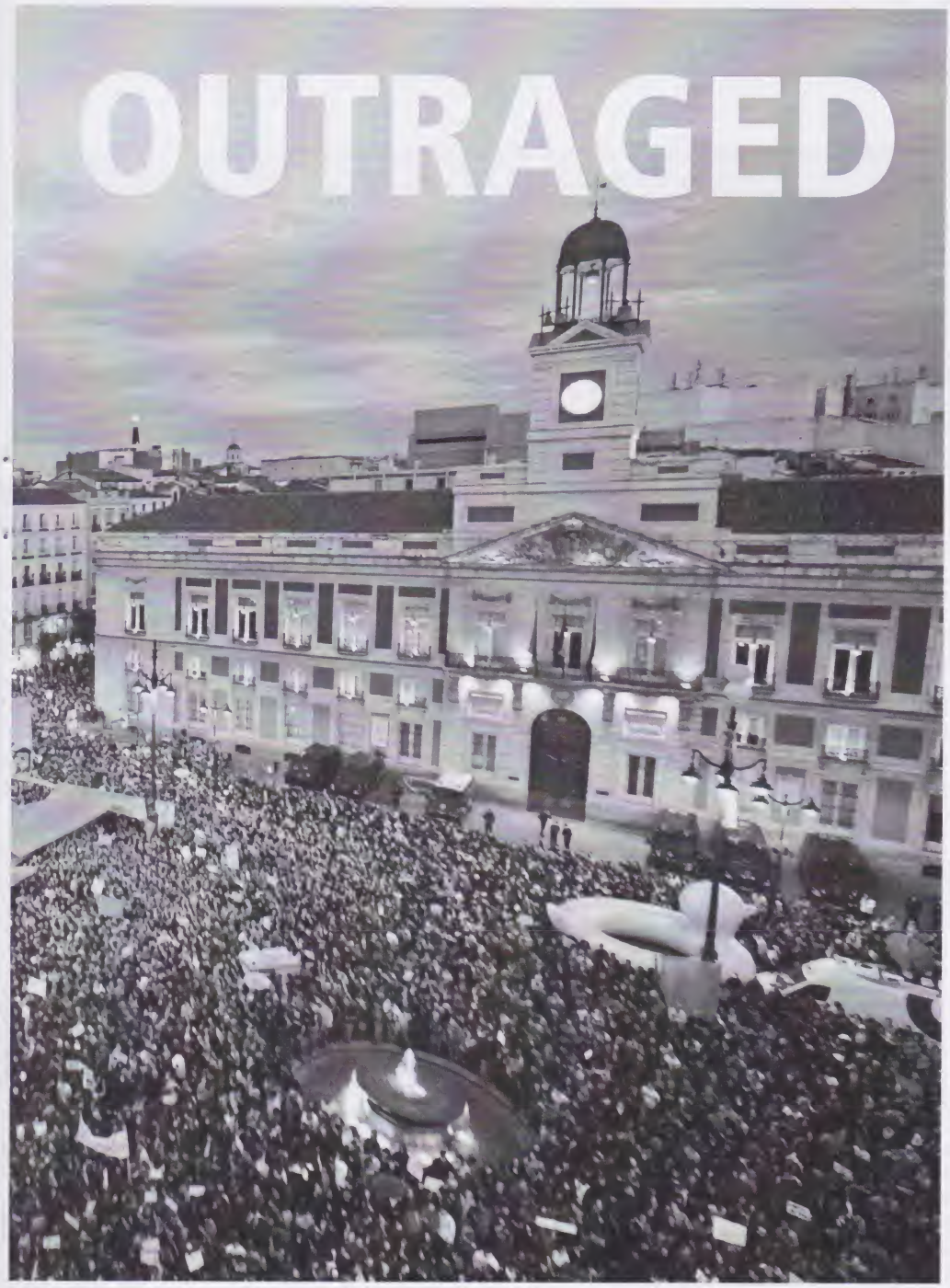
As the occupation dragged on and the media began to draw conclusions as to what they were doing there the narrative shifted from sympathy to defence of the old two-party state. If you weren't for the PSOE or the PP, then you must, logically, be for nothing at all.

Well, we knew clearly what they were against, because they said so, they were against a political system that strengthened the dominant political parties, they were against privatisations and the attacks on workers' rights that were stripping away job security, decent wages and pension rights, against the utter impunity with which politicians were stealing public money, and an end to a government which tailored every single policy toward calming the markets.

In mass assemblies the occupants of Sol put forward simple proposals, reforms that would combat political corruption, that would improve job security, reduce unemployment, open the political system up, combat housing shortages, prevent people being evicted from their homes. Other proposals came forward for defending public services, controlling the financial sector and its influence over the country. Inevitably these proposals died without any serious public discussion as they were dismissed as impractical or more often as the same tired old leftism.

As the Partido Popular romped home in the elections that Sunday, demonstrators and activists had to start thinking what they should do next as the prospect of a party modelled on Cameron's Tories taking power within a year loomed (PP will, barring a miracle, do so on November 22nd). After mobilising unprecedented numbers of people the movement had to go somewhere practical, or waste all its energies on gestures of defiance.

In the days following the first demonstrations, the movement in Madrid expanded out into two dozen neighbourhood assemblies. These assemblies, run on



radical democratic principles, incorporated many of the methods of their anti-globalisation predecessors such as the often ridiculed hand signals, consensus decision making, turn rules etc. Attracting several hundred participants in various locations across the city, they set about establishing schedules for regular meetings to turn them into authentic community groups fit to struggle for the population of their areas.

Shortly afterwards, 15M spawned the "STOP DESAHUCIOS" movement, aimed at preventing evictions. Spain's mortgage laws enable banks not only to repossess people's houses but also maintain the debt afterwards. As a result of 15M's capacity to mobilise activists, dozens of evictions have been prevented across the country. Such a deviation is appropriate, as the initial mobilisation had strong links with a housing rights campaign some five years ago called "V for Vivienda" for which some activists are still facing prison sentences.

Despite the movement's origins in Madrid, 15M has also had a big impact in the Catalan capital of Barcelona. The May 22nd Municipal elections were also a big win for the conservative Catalan nationalists Convergence i Unio (CIU). New Catalan President Artur Mas immediately set about enacting his programme of massive cuts to social and health services. Massive protests erupted, with Catalan health workers blocking roads, activists occupying Plaza Catalunya, and much to the outrage of the press and politicians, blockading the Catalan parliament, resulting in the abandonment of the session and the indignity of politicians having to be helicoptered in to avoid facing the public's rage.

More recently, the same networks have also been used to mobilise people in support of MareaVerde, a strike campaign by Madrid teachers aimed at preventing Esperanza Aguirre raising teachers' hours by 10% – a move that may result in thousands of redundancies.

Tens of thousands have been out to support the teachers, with activists harassing municipal politicians all over the city to drive their message home. An issue that the PP felt that it had political backing for suddenly blew up in their face as citizens showed support for overworked and averagely paid teachers.

Although it might be tempting to ascribe the development of the movement to Spain's traditional attraction to anarchist ideas, those groups that self-identify as anarchist seem, whether or not by design, to have limited formal presence, although CNT statements have expressed broad support and militants have been involved. Certainly the protests have involved people far beyond the radical milieu that anarchist groups have previously been able to influence.

In doing so, 15M perhaps shares some of the problems of perhaps the most comparative event in this country, UK Uncut. Since the bulk of the people organised have come into the movement via online social networks, for many people this medium is their principle link to the rebellion.

This primarily has the effect of creating an organisation with the capacity to put people on the streets, but without a very firm social basis. There are no workplace 15M groups and unless the neighbourhood assemblies can make progress, no community groups either. As a result, although activists can use the network to support other people's struggles, they can't initiate them very easily.

Another side effect of this mode of organising is that 15M is an alliance of people of incredibly diverse, even contradictory views. The group's proposals read like a classic list of transitional demands, a list of reforms that are designed more to expose the utter absurdity of two governing parties both run from Brussels on the whims of the financial class than something that can ever be enacted. In attempting to appeal to broad disillusionment with the political class, and operating through direct democratic assemblies, 15M has struggled to define exactly what it's for.

I suspect that the legacy of 15M is not directly going to be a substantial change to the Spanish state or capitalism. The ties between the core activists and the bulk of participants are too weak to persist over time without specific goals to reach for. Like UK Uncut it will most likely run out of steam, as they run out of messages to get across. That might not be a terrible thing, there's not a high enough level of organisation or structure to make it very effective for direct class struggle, and its obsession with non-violence and legality could also be a potential problem long-term.

Whatever its limitations however 15M as a campaign against has been an incredible, unprecedented success. It is a long time since a mass movement has managed to place the conduct of the entire ruling class under public scrutiny.

The Sol camp managed to turn the routine of municipal elections into a general questioning of what the political class was for and whether or not it could really claim to represent us. It is to be hoped that their protest has, at the very least, set down a marker in that sense and left a door open for others to walk through.

By Jack Ray

Breathing Utopia: After the revolution...

What does graphic design encompass for you?

It could have a socially useful role but I think that at the moment there's little opportunity to work on projects that are socially constructive.

It's very difficult to get a job for one, in graphic design, and I think that a lot of those jobs are obviously working in the commercial context, and more often than not that is selling something to someone. I mean basically you're making it look as pretty as possible.

I read a quote the other day I think it's really kind of apt, a guy called Jeffrey Keedy who was a 1980s contributor to Emigre maagzine. He said that graphic design is greasing the wheels of capitalism with style and taste. And I think that a lot of what you have to do on a day-to-day basis is that.

And its funny because there's people like Tibor Kalman who had this very like acerbic style and he did attack people who worked like that, designers who he thought were morally dubious.

But he was the one who did the united colours of Benetton ads, and obviously he was trying to raise awareness of issues regarding race, gender equality, things like AIDs and stuff in the '80s. He was kind of trying to push that, but he was pushing it through Benetton.

So all those beautiful photographs, he's art directing them but he's building Benetton's brand through that. It's like he's injecting this social responsibility into it and then at the same time they're kind of recuperating it immediately. It's like a symbiotic ... a parasitic relationship.

But at its best anything you read, a graphic designer's had their hand on it, whether its setting the text, designing the type ... the back of a medicine bottle or communicating pictorially to people who can't read – it might be something like that which is very serious.

I think that when you're informing someone, or you're engaging someone or even when you're entertaining someone, in a visual manner, you could often say that a lot of that could be – in a way its design.

Could you say a bit about how the industry works?

From the 1980s onwards the idea of a single designer who is seen as shaping the work has been dead, in a way.

As an analogy, when you go to a restaurant you think of this creative process, but mostly it's other people just doing what the head chef says – as a worker you're not making the recipes, or going out and finding the products and saying how you'll do things.

The food chain for us is Creative, who comes up with ideas and passes it on to the Designer who makes it look good, who moves it on to the Art Worker, who prepares it for whatever context it needs to go in, and progressively through that ladder the pay scale drops.

Wide remit: Graphic design from the last 100 years, alongside the Sabon typeface

And even though you'll speak to each other within that process you'll be working in your own department, which is very alienating.

You get someone else's idea and just pass it on for someone else to finish it.

There's a clear sense of class structure, even architecturally people at the top work at the top in glass boxes, basically, we work in the middle on desks etc and people on the bottom do the art working and there isn't much contact between them.

In a smaller studio you do get more of a say but there's more pressure, there's more work, there's less pay and everyone's fighting over the scraps, it's harder to get those better jobs.

If you're talking about graphic design it's so fragmented and broad it's hard to summarise, from my own experience there's lots of different agencies out there, 99% of them are looking for bigger clients than they already have – in commercial practice there's little room to do anything else.

So how do you think things might change in a post-revolutionary society?

I think half of it would just collapse. A lot of how graphic design is seen now is that it basically serves capitalism; it serves whoever has the most money and pays for the briefs. Part of graphic design is born out of this industrial revolution and where would it go?

But I think the way people work, and a lot of them are very creative people; they would want to channel that creativity. The people would want to communicate and the desire would still be there. How that would find its form is a very tough question but I think that the need to communicate and engage and inform and educate, that would stay consistent.

And I think that people who can do that visually, with clarity and coherence will always be needed, whether that's through laying out newspapers, setting books. Where you've got a lot of people coming

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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JOB 5: GRAPHIC DESIGN

We talk to an industry professional about things would look, post-revolution

together in open systems of design, the fact it's not a profession would lead to more people getting involved.

A lot of design now is identity and branding, a very top-down thing where designers come along and say "we can make your product look like this."

But in a different context there would be this opportunity for it to be other way around, where if there's not these deadlines and constraints you can research things more and say, take something people want to make clearer and do it properly rather than just coming along and stripping out everything that's genuinely interesting and unique about an area or a group of people.

It'd be a very different relationship with a client – at the moment it's all "what am I getting out of it" but if you're both working together and want it to be fucking brilliant, that's different.

You can work with them over a longer period of time and develop something that's organic and natural to the way they think. You might not even need a professional to do it, you could just have someone to advise on the technical aspects and help people to do it themselves.

So the productive process is going to continue, people are still going to need shoes and road signs and architecture etc...

Yeah and with that if you buy a new pair of shoes, now you'd have an advert for that, a box which fits with the advert, a really coherent set of values and visual icons and cues that make up the brand and a lot of that's not needed ... but in that post-revolutionary context I'd still like to know where it came from.

The idea of branding, well you brand a cow don't you. I like the idea of the story behind what something is, that the shoes I'm getting are not made by someone who's being made to do it. If someone's spent their life doing it and take pride in the job, taking his time to source the leather, he's a real craftsman, then I want the box I'm presenting them in to look its best, and if I'm receiving them I want to know what it is, not the sense you get now that you consume the good because of the brand.

Obviously today intellectual property law (IP) is a major factor in design, how do you think things would change if it was dismantled?

I think a lot of graphic designers don't come up with new ideas in the sense of they have them out there and people say "that's their idea."

People do this sort of thing to satisfy themselves – for me, finding the solution to something, be it a visual message or whatever and I think it's perfect, that's what satisfies me – that's why I'm a graphic designer, just knowing that something's right.

I think that regardless of any kind of IP or whatever structure is in place you can't get rid of that and a lot of people have this egotistical thing of "well I'll put it on a blog" and I'll get my work out there so that people can see it," but a lot of that is actually needed to find more work to sustain themselves to keep going to find better clients and better projects.

And I can understand that – if you come up with lots of good ideas you'll get better work, but this idea of IP is kind of clinging onto that, you want your IP rights because you want to get your next job. I think if there wasn't that pressure of "my ideas have to be good or I get kicked out the studio, my flat" ... okay that's a bit simplistic, but it's the idea that without your ideas you don't have anything that we'd be free of.

It'd be great to think you could have the chance to come up with ideas without that pressure, you'd have the opportunity to really create collectively with other designers, without saying "this is yours and this is mine," you're just improving on things constantly.

To be honest that's what most designers actually do anyway whether they admit it or not. They go online and they find ideas and try and improve on it, then they sell it off as an original thing.

It's just a point of numerous sources and collective inspiration – there's no lightning bolt which just comes out of the sky and just hits you.

You're always relying on the history and tradition of graphic design, everything that's gone before you. Imagine if you could use all of that as your palette, that you could use anything without really worrying "is this too close to that," it opens the scope for creativity. It's a better way to work.

Interview by Rob Ray & Gemma S

Boldly going nowhere fast

In conversation with the Italian designer Massimo Vignelli, US graphics legend Milton Glaser once called his friend out on a core pretension of the creative industries, that a strong design ethic is a force for good in wider corporate society: "If you could convince the bank that by virtue of more elegant typography they would be more honest in their dealings with the public, that would be something."

Glaser, best known for his rainbow-haired Bob Dylan poster, is notoriously anti-ideological in his approach to design and wandering around this year's London Design Week, his self-aware line sticks in the head.

The best of the exhibits was a curious one at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which featured a collection of "subversive" designs from the 1920s up. Notable in the early examples picked was an idea that mass industry would improve the lives of all and undermine class boundaries, but as time goes by the exhibition's idea of subversion becomes more and more rooted in esoterica that challenged only the design community's own sense of aesthetic value.

By the '90s, it has to be bulked out with a grab-bag of activist designs including the flier that got Helen Steel and David Morris into their infamous libel fight with McDonalds in the '90s and early '00s – good stuff, but hardly an example of the creative industries genuinely thinking in challenging ways.

The exhibit helped frame a paucity of imagination which characterised so much of the work which was on display elsewhere.

Design week is billed as a celebration of the best of British creativity, but little was on display which wasn't destined for a corporate home (and thus often clever but bland as hell to avoid offending buttoned-down executives) or priced far beyond the reach of the average person. Some of it was fun, or frivolous, but all had an eye on maintaining a feel of exclusivity and the vast majority of the work on display continued a longstanding trend of hard edges, of black and white minimalism which seems clunky and out of touch with the fiery times we live in.

In this it seemed that design week itself was mildly fraudulent, pretending its participants were part of a plan to lift the aesthetic of our daily lives when in fact it was simply an overgrown craft sale for the upper echelons. Certainly the clientele were resolutely well-off, with areas like The Tramshed or The Dock (there can be only one) acting as playtime for a variety of cut glass accents and business suits looking for something to top off their office decor.

Under the surface of the design work itself too is a queasy feeling that as costs squeeze ever tighter and luxury becomes ever further removed from the masses' everyday experience we are going backwards, with desperate attempts being made to make things look nice while cutting material costs to the bone – or finding arenas in which to hyper-exploit workers.

A good example of this manifested in an exhibit by designer John Reeves, which managed to be simultaneously exclusive and engage in some serious cost-cutting – it may be the first time I've actually been told by someone who employs people in Vietnam that "people say sweatshop labour is bad but they're glad of the jobs" while praising the workers' intricate craft skills.

In many ways it seems London Design Week has forthrightly captured the line "you can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig." It's a world away from the First Things First manifesto published by (among others) Adbusters in 2000 which demanded that graphic artists begin to take a sense of responsibility for their work and its impact:

"Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design."

By Rob Ray

Concept fart: Furniture on show for London Design week and the 'subversive' V&A exhibit

History: Liz Willis looks at the self-managed 1931 Invergordon mutiny against naval cutbacks

Financial crisis, national (coalition) government imposing a programme of drastic cuts in wages, supposedly forced on them by the state of the world economy, and insisting on the need for public-sector workers to accept a lowering of living standards, extending even to the armed forces, in the national interest... The year was 1931.

All in the Same Boat?

When the schedule of Depression-era pay cuts emerged it turned out that the most devastating effects would be felt by those at the bottom of the social pile, the lowest paid and the unemployed. Nowhere was the inequality more blatant than in the Royal Navy, whose "lower deck" (non-officers) had already been subject to a reduction in rates for new entrants since 1925.

Men serving before that date had been assured they would stay on the higher 1919 rates (won after agitation), but this guarantee was now written off. Seamen and stokers were faced, at three weeks' notice, with having to adjust to a daily rate of 3 shillings instead of 4 shillings. (equivalent to around £7.50 instead of £10 today taking inflation into account).

Officers' pay was to be reduced too, but by a much smaller amount, proportionately. For many sailors, especially those with families and commitments such as hire purchase payments, this would entail actual poverty.

A Fleet Order posted on ships' notice boards on the morning of Sunday 13 September hit the sailors with the realisation of what the cuts due to take effect on 1 October would mean, as they did the maths themselves without benefit of any spin from Senior Officers. Nor was it lost on them that the guff about the urgent action in an immediate crisis did not square with the inclusion of their pensions – a long-term saving at best – in the cuts programme.

Leaders, who needs them?

Not being daft, they knew cuts were in the offing; there had been speculation in the newspapers and a 'buzz' about how bad they might be. On some ships there was an opportunity to hear more details on the wireless, in advance of the Admiralty notice. It would have been surprising if the threat to their pay had not been a hot topic for sailors both on the way up north and among those with shore leave on Saturday 12th.

While later allegations about illegal meetings, left-wing agitprop, and a subversive plot being developed in advance seem to be largely invented, a feeling in the air to the effect that something should be done about it if their fears were borne out is more than likely. Even if they had been through a training based on discipline and obedience, many were recruited from industrial areas with experience of labour activism, and some had already been in the Navy at a time of previous agitation over pay. They knew too that they were not alone in wanting to resist the cuts.

Whether or not the idea of a mass meeting had already been canvassed the day before, a plan to hold one on shore as soon as possible was the immediate collective response. 'On that Sunday morning the whole Atlantic Fleet was ready for action, without instigation from any quarter.' (Wincott p.90)

There was a big meeting (estimated 600 ratings) in the canteen, with a succession of speakers. The more far-out ideas, such as marching to London, did not find favour; instead the plan emerged for a concerted strike. That this would amount to mutiny must have been self-evident but for many there seemed to be no other option. The outcome was a determination to take action, spread the word on board, and have another meeting next day with as many as possible attending. The fleet was due to begin its exercises at sea on Tuesday 15th.

On Monday the canteen overflowed so that the meeting migrated to a sports ground where speeches could be made from the top of a shed. By now the point at issue, Fred Copeman recalled, was not whether but exactly when to strike. The decision was to ignore the first call to "turn to" the next

day, and then for each ship's company to gather on the forecastle. All sections of the lower deck were to be involved, including the contingents of Royal Marines who were there to keep order, but each man's participation was to be voluntary, with no intimidation.

The meeting broke up in a mood of collective determination and solidarity, reportedly expressed in singing of the Red Flag. By this time a realisation that something was going on had percolated to the Commander-in-Chief on the spot. He initially reported to the Admiralty that a "slight disturbance" which "might be reported in an exaggerated form by the press" which was still being investigated.

Shipshape and Mutiny fashion

In an impressive display of dispersed solidarity the sailors on almost all the ships proceeded to strike, as cheering from one to another passed on the message that things were going to plan, such as it was. Only on the Devonshire did a popular captain succeed in persuading the intending strikers to change their minds – and oddly enough this is the only recollection of the mutiny which makes it to a book of oral history about the Navy. (Le Breton in Arthur, ed.)

In some respects it was more of a work-in. Essential tasks were carried out done to keep daily life running smoothly and safely.

Watch was still kept, but in such a way that no individual took the whole of his normal turn and cooks were considered better able to support the strikers by continuing to feed the men than otherwise. Kenneth Edwards referred wonderingly to all necessary work being continued by the men of their own free will: "None of this was done in response to orders." (p.264)

The fact that events took a similar course on so many different ships was later taken to confirm the Red Plot theory. But this was due to the same conditions producing the same result. George Hill, who typed the mutineers' manifesto, confirmed that there was no "lead ship" as such, no overall leader – and that any such was ruled out. (Quoted in Carew, p.161). Copeman saw it as "A simple affair, worked out in the simple way that comes natural to sailors" using common sense. (ibid. p.163)

Officers, Admirals, Sea Lords and government were soon to realise how little they could do. The Commander-in-Chief, Rear Admiral Tomkinson, urged the need for a quick decision, advising that the only way to resolve the situation was to announce some concession over the cuts and frankly arguing the justice of the men's case.

With the worst will in the world, it was hard afterwards to find heinous deeds with which to tax the sailors. According to Edwards, some young men and boys joined the mutineers "in a spirit of sheer hooliganism" on two ships in particular and indulged in such bloodthirsty acts as attempting to loot the bookstall. The spectre of the "chaos of gang warfare" thus evoked was supposedly exorcised by urgent precautions, i.e. putting revolvers and ammunition out of their way. (No-one suggests the mutineers made any attempt to arm themselves). Nevertheless he concludes this was, "as a whole, one of the most orderly mutinies in history," due entirely to the men's restraint, under their own discipline. (p.264)

The King's Most Loyal Mutineers

The tone of reasonableness was maintained in the Manifesto produced on HMS Norfolk, reportedly drafted by Len Wincott. This statement was sent round the fleet by boat, and round the world through press reports. Not the most revolutionary of proclamations: radicals may be inclined to deplore its profession of "loyalty" while understanding the motives behind that.

We, the loyal subjects of His Majesty the King, do hereby present to My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty our representations to implore them to amend the drastic cuts in pay that have been inflicted upon the lowest paid man of the lower deck.

It is evident to all concerned that this cut is the forerunner of tragedy, misery and immorality amongst the families of the lower deck, and unless we can be guaranteed a written agreement from the Admiralty, confirmed by Parliament, stating that our pay will be revised, we are still to remain as one unit, refusing to serve under the new rate of pay.

Men are quite willing to accept a cut, which they, the men, consider in reason.

(The allusion to 'immorality' evokes the fear that women faced with financial ruin would turn to prostitution.)

They had to hold out for two days until after much fretting and fuming in Whitehall and the Cabinet Office the Admiralty issued a statement agreeing to a review of the new pay scales and promising no victimisation. Characteristically they wound up with a threat, but this could not disguise the fact that the mutineers had gained their stated objective. Exercises were cancelled and the order was for ships of the Fleet to proceed to their home ports.

The Daily Herald reported next day that it took a lot of persuasion before the men decided to resume normal working. They had misgivings, well-founded as it turned out, about the supposed guarantee of no reprisals. In the end, however, all the ships did leave the Firth on Thursday September 17th.

The Hunt for Red September

The refusal to obey orders, flouting their authority, maddened the rulers of the King's Navy, irrespective of the justice of the strikers' case or how they behaved under the direction of themselves alone.

And it was for this that some of them at least were going to have to pay, one way or another. Revenge was not the only motive for seeking out the ring-leaders they assumed

> Although the mutiny was not, in the minds of those who took part in it, political, I could not fail to be affected
>
> Fred Copeman

had to exist, and trying to put a stop to their influence and if possible their Navy careers. Naval Intelligence got busy before the home ports were reached.

It was the perceived danger of a general mutiny, this time with the added strength and support of the home ports, that prompted the final Cabinet decision and announcement that no pay cut of over 10% would apply to the Services, teachers or police. Crisis or not, the money could miraculously be found; other economies would be made. Also, on Monday 21st September Britain came off the gold standard, a measure attributed to the effects on financial markets worldwide of the shock-waves from Invergordon. After all the Navy was there to guarantee the impregnability and permanence of Empire...

To find out how such a thing as mutiny could have happened and prevent its renewal Special Branch men infested the home ports; constables noted conversations in pubs and dogged footsteps; ratings were interrogated and officers asked to report on exactly what had happened and who was responsible. Both Wincott and Edwards bring out the absurdity of these goings-on and suggest the men being questioned or having drinks bought for them by dodgy strangers were having a laugh when they played up to the obsessive search for sinister seditious tendencies.

There were serious consequences when Reds were eventually found under the bed, prominent Communist Party members George Allison and W G Shepherd having been lured to it in a crude entrapment plot using an informer. These two were charged under the Incitement to Mutiny Act and sentenced to 18 months and three years' penal servitude respectively in November 1931 for trying to spread communism among sailors. Naturally enough the Party had tried to get in on the act when news of the mutiny got around, and were to make much of it in their propaganda for years to come. Everyone in a position to know, from within or outside the party, rejects the idea that the Communist Party actually had anything to do with the Invergordon events (e.g. Jacobs, 1978) .

We can't hang them from the yardarm, but...

It turned out to be no easy task to identify instigators or subversive elements among the sailors themselves. Eventually lists were drawn up, and large numbers of men were transferred and dispersed; Three dozen were kept on a punitive "training course" until the end of the Secret Service investigation, which could have brought a court martial for some if the desired results had been obtained.

Failing that, 24 were dismissed, the traditional formula being Discharge to Shore: Services No Longer Required. Because no-one was supposed to be disciplined for the two days' strike, the pretext was their "conduct since the Invergordon incident." On that basis any protests, arguments or appeals were rejected out of hand, as decisions were 2not based on what happened at Invergordon."

In Fred Copeman and Len Wincott the country lost two sailors and international communism gained two recruits. For each of them, with their chosen career path closed, the Communist Party was a source of support and comradeship. Copeman's chances of alternative employment were scuppered by the Admiralty's responding to enquiries from the National Association for Employment of Regular Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen and from the Economic League (Lancs. & Cheshire) by describing him as discharged "for continuing conduct subversive of discipline after the Fleet left Invergordon" and as "understood to have been acting in the interests of" the communists. (File ADM 178/113) He became better known for his part in the Spanish Civil War than for the mutiny.

Wincott was inescapably identified with the latter. In the next two-and-a-half years he was followed everywhere, his movements and activities logged, addresses and contacts noted, mail intercepted, private letters copied and commented on for the files, speeches transcribed. He worked for the International Labour Defence, a Communist Party front organisation which published his pamphlet Spirit of Invergordon and was a party activist in Stepney. In spring 1934 he moved to the USSR (later spending a long time in a labour camp as a 'British spy'), only returning in 1974 to promote his autobiography. By then Admiralty files had been released under the 30-year rule so that he was able to refute their version of events, but his personal security files were closed for much longer.

As well as the close observation of the spooks, Wincott's contribution to the mutiny earned him the posthumous distinction of an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB) as "naval agitator and expatriate."

Shipshape: A mutinous boat, Len Wincott and left, Fred Copeman in Spain

Remembering September 1931

Despite the widely divergent political views of different commentators, and their disagreements on anecdotal detail, there is a remarkable unanimity on some key points:

- Rightness of the case against the cuts, and absence of any other means of resisting them.
- Spontaneous nature of the strike, uninfluenced by political parties and with no leaders or instigators other than those whose temperaments and talents brought them to the fore.
- Solidity of "lower deck" support for the action throughout the Fleet.
- Collective organisation and decision-making maintaining essential services and doing work considered useful with no reference to orders from on high.
- Lack of violence or even serious animosity towards officers, who simply became irrelevant in their order-giving capacity, and refusal to react to threats and bluster from those higher up.

Although, at a guess, there can be little sign of the spirit of Invergordon in the present-day Navy, there may still be hope for something of it to survive, or be revived, in other arenas of struggle.

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By Liz Willis

The rise of the C

This year is the 75th anniversary of the Spanish revolution. To acknowledge what is probably the most important, and arguably controversial, chapter in libertarian communist history, Stuart Christie examines some of the criticisms levelled while acknowledging the sacrifice made by thousands of workers in the struggle for social revolution.

Within the Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements there were three distinct points of view on the question of war and revolution. The first, probably the majority view, was that the war would be over in a matter of weeks, after all, a few days had been enough to rout the army in Barcelona and other industrial centres, and that the social revolution and libertarian communism was an inseparable aspect of the struggle against economic and social oppression. Thus, the movement should proceed immediately to socialise the factories, the land and their communities.

The second position was that held by members of the regional, national and peninsular committees of the CNT-FAI, the so-called "notables" – office holders such as such as Horacio Prieto, Mariano Rodriguez, Federica Montseny, Diego Abad de Santillan, García Oliver, etc. They anticipated a lengthy war and opposed implementing libertarian communism until the war was won. They opted instead for compromising alliances with the bourgeois Republican, Catalanist and Stalinist parties.

The third body of opinion, a minority one held by militants such as Durruti, Camillo Berneri, Jaime Balius and so on (and one which I incidentally agree with) also anticipated a lengthy war because of the involvement of Germany and Italy — but held that war and revolution were inseparable.

Only a libertarian revolution could finally destroy fascism because to do so meant destroying the state, since fascism only means a certain mode of the state where class collaboration is forced rather than voluntary.

My main contention is, briefly, that between July 21 and the end of August 1936, the so-called notables of the CNT-FAI regional, national and peninsular committees abandoned all pretence of being revolutionary organs.

Instead, they constituted a vested interest structure that served, primarily, to apply the brakes to the spontaneous revolutionary activity of the union rank and file and to repress the revolutionary activists of the Libertarian Youth, the confederal defence cadres, the action groups and affinity groups such as the Friends of Durruti.

They promoted "anti-fascist unity" and state power at the expense of anarchist principles and values, and imposed the hegemony of the Catalan CNT–FAI leadership over the local revolutionary committees and the general assemblies, not only of Catalonia, but of Aragón as well particularly the Regional Defence Council of Aragón. Their principal aim being to perpetuate their power base, even at the expense of the revolutionary anarchist principles and values that had inspired the largest mass labour union in Spanish history.

For them the instrumental means had become the organisational end. Not only that; they were now part of a state that was increasingly dominated not just by reformist, welfarist, egalitarian social democrats, but by the agents of Soviet communism, anarchism's deadliest enemy

The notables' careers as anarchists were over — they were now counter-revolutionaries.

Barcelona, 1936

When the army's Barcelona garrison moved out of their barracks at 4.30am on July 19th the military lacked an essential ingredient for success, surprise!

The Regional Defence Committee of the CNT and the Anarchist Groups' Liaison Commission had had precise information as to the date of the military rising since the 13th. Within minutes, factory and ships' sirens were wailing their pre-arranged signal to the 300 or so CNT defence cadres waiting on the streets. They had also organised two mobile command centres, which were quickly on site at their pre-arranged strategic vantage points.

Despite having been presented with evidence that advanced preparations for a military rising were under way, neither President Luis Companys of the Catalan Government nor Prime Minister Casares Quiroga trusted the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, and refused to authorise the distribution of arms to a mass labour union whose stated objective was libertarian communism.

The prospect of unleashing a social revolution by arming the people was, to the Republican bourgeoisie, more catastrophic than the alternative scenario of a military coup and fascism.

Barcelona police chief Federico Escofet for example was perfectly happy to arm the mainly reformist UGT union members, but as he explained:

'To arm the CNT represented an immediate or later danger for the Republican regime in Catalonia of EQUAL danger for its existence as the military rebellion. Companys and I agreed on the necessity of NOT distributing the arms, because the CNT–FAI was the dominant force."

Escofet did everything in his power to prevent the militants getting their hands on the weapons in the San Andrés arsenal. To this end he sent a company of loyal Civil Guard to defend the place, but they arrived too late. By that time the barracks had already been invaded and ransacked by workers.

This was probably the first pivotal event that transformed what the military hoped would be a straightforward pronunciamento into a rebellion, and then into a social revolution.

It was the moment when political power shifted, albeit briefy, from the Generalitat Palace to the union branches and to the local revolutionary committees.

Next morning, July 20th, Escofet reported to President Companys that the rebellion had been put down, to which Companys replied, somewhat acidly, that it was all very well but the situation was still chaotic with armed and uncontrollable mobs rampaging through the streets.

Escofet threw the ball back into the politician's court:

"Mr President, I undertook to dominate the military revolt in Barcelona and I have done this. But an authority requires the means of coercion to make itself obeyed, and these means do not exist today. As a

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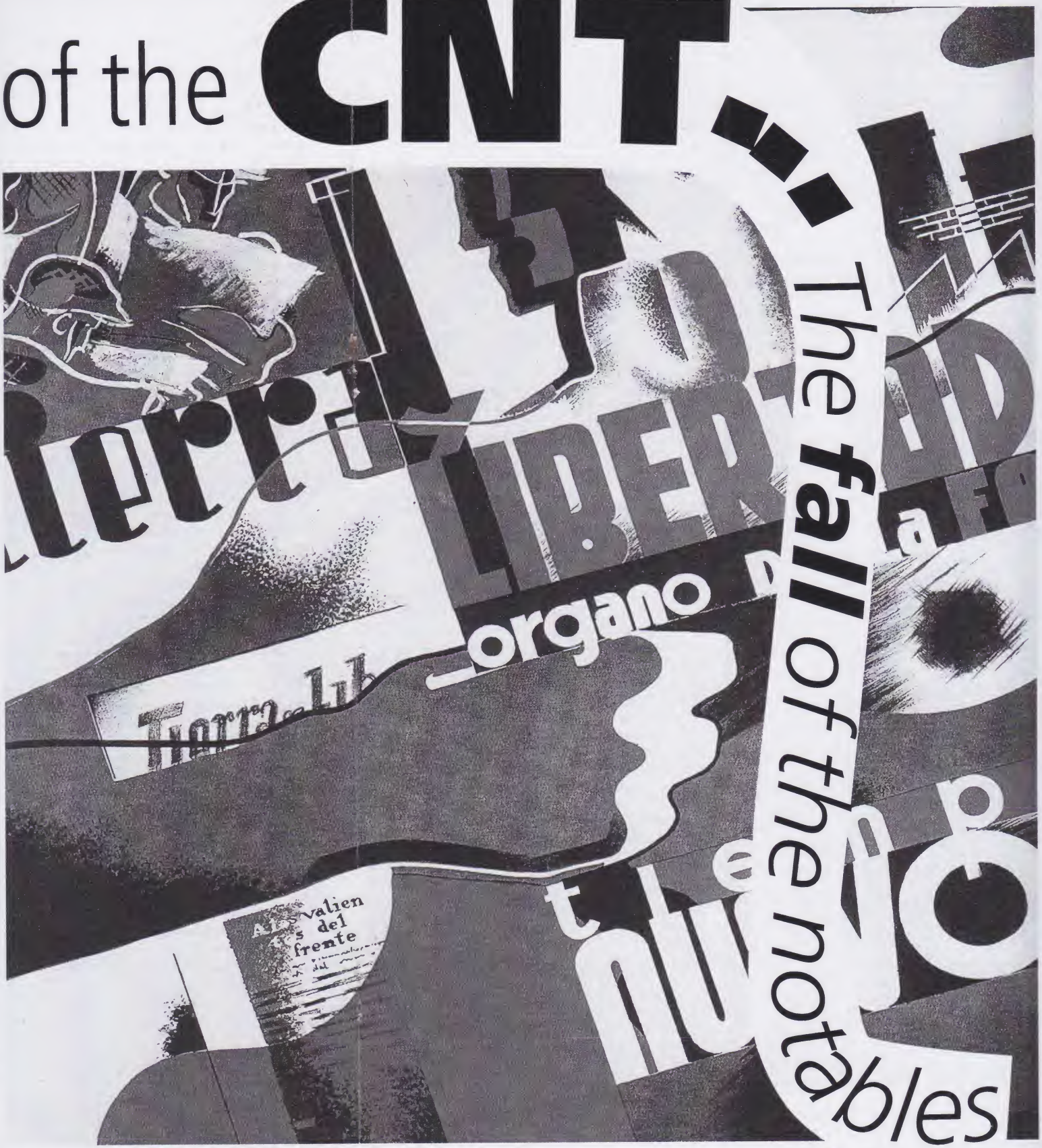

The fall of the notables

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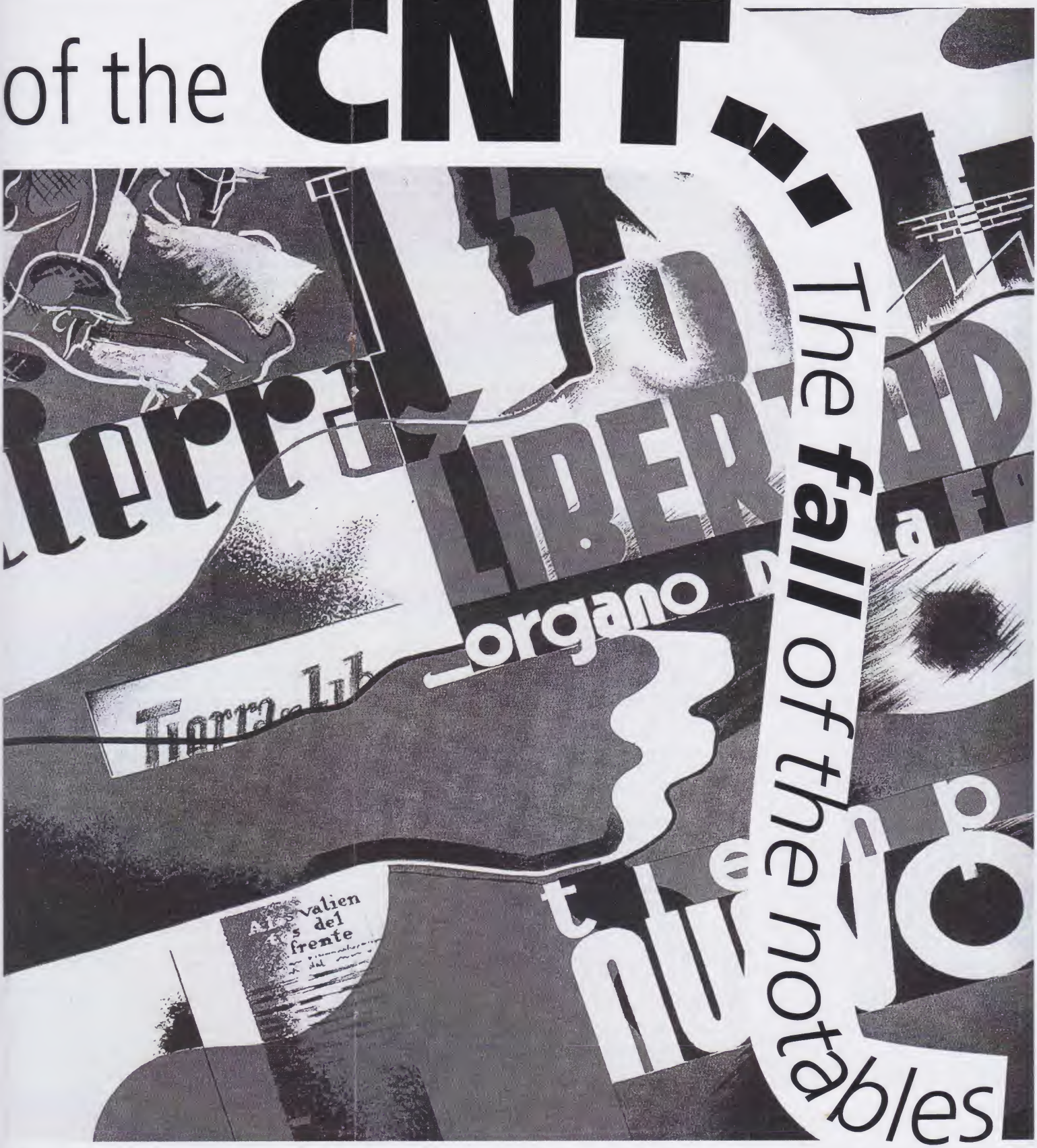
As Escofet foresaw the notables, overtaken by events, were as surprised as the politicians at the overnight shift in power. Having extolled the organisational virtues of the working class throughout their lives as militants, now that the workers were breaking their chains and that the dream was becoming a reality by a revolutionary process which threatened to make their role superfluous, they began having second thoughts, openly doubting the people's ability to administer their own lives in their own interests.

Despite their threats of social revolution earlier that summer in response to the much-talked-about rightist coup, the "influential militants" who met on July 20th concluded that the "objective conditions for social revolution" were not right. The military rebellion that had been unleashed, although it had triggered the revolutionary

The fall of the CNT notables



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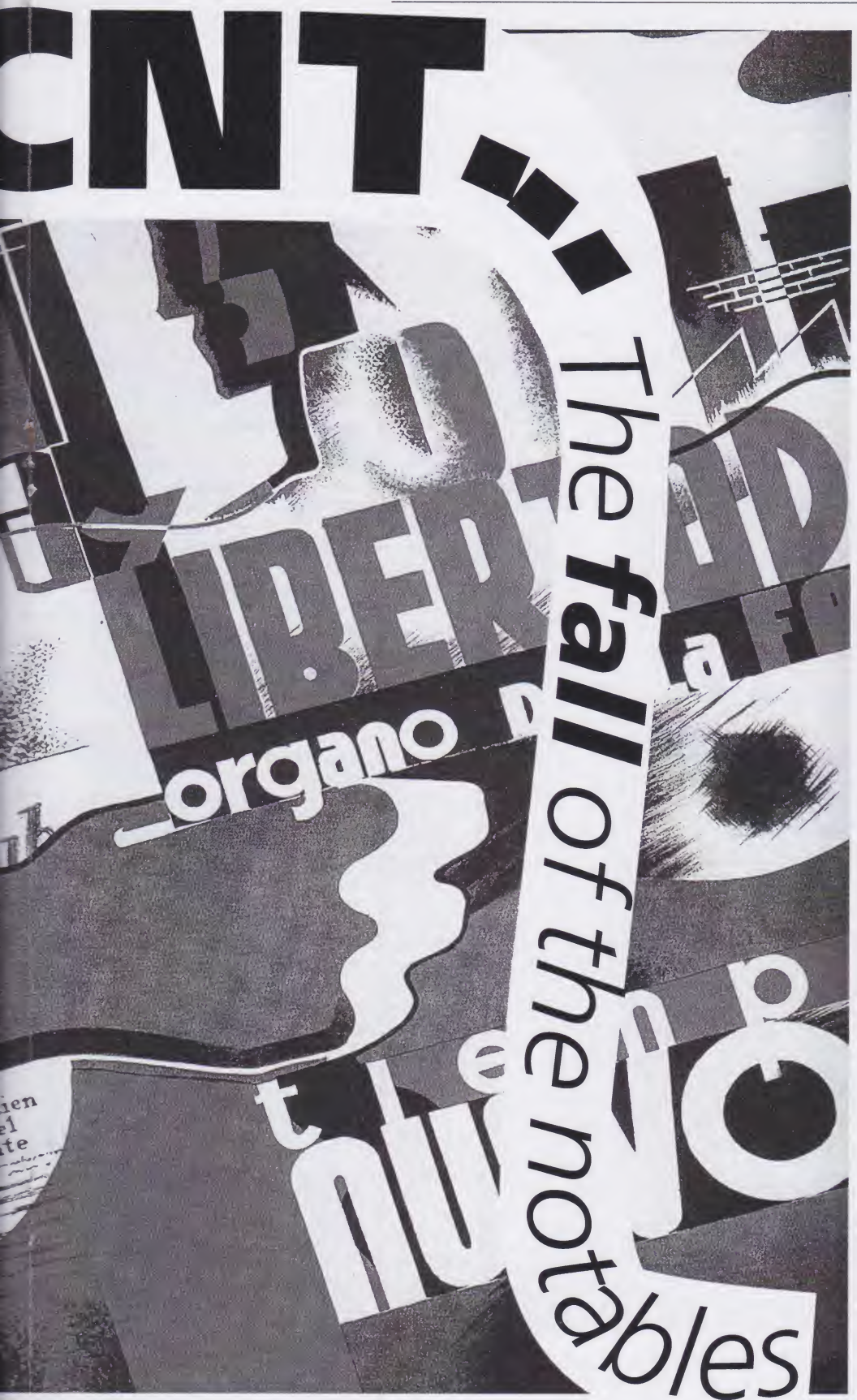

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Despite their threats of social revolution earlier that summer in response to the much-talked-about rightist coup, the "influential militants" who met on July 20th concluded that the "objective conditions for social revolution" were not right. The military rebellion that had been unleashed, although it had triggered the revolutionary situation, would be the chief obstacle to the consolidation of the revolution, and would ultimately destroy it.

The higher committees of the CNT–FAI–FIJL in Catalonia were, therefore, caught on the horns of a dilemma — social revolution or bourgeois democracy.

They either committed themselves to the social revolution regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism or, whether through fear of fascism or fear of the people, they abandoned their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster and become part of the bourgeois state in the hope that after the defeat of fascism it would undergo a transition and become a genuinely humane organ of power that operated in the interests of the people.

Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly pyrrhic victory, the Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.

But what the notables failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism was not theirs to make.

The anarchists had performed their task as the pathfinders and shock troops of the revolution. They had implanted the ideas, and helped create the necessary environment in which those ideas and practices could be nourished and flourish.

But it was beyond their brief or their abilities to put anarchism into practice – that was a task only the people themselves could perform.

Nor did the CNT–FAI leadership take on board the fact that the movement of July 19th had acquired a political direction of its own. On their own initiative the CNT rank and file along with other union militants had, with the collapse of state power, superseded their individual partisan identities and been welded into genuinely popular revolutionary committees controlling their respective neighbourhoods.

They were the natural organisms of the revolution – the direct expression of popular power.

By failing to supplant the "legitimate" political element within the state, the military had provoked the collapse of state power. It was the people in arms – led by the union defence committees – who had resisted the reactionaries wresting the initiative from the government and thereby depriving its rule of either legitimacy or effect.

In the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the fascist coup a dual power situation existed, a popular power against a collapsed centralised political and union power now in total eclipse although tragically, not for long.

From the very first moment, therefore, the higher committees of the CNT-FAI set aside traditional anarcho-syndicalist reliance on the creative spirit of the people and their capacity for self-organisation.

By imposing their leadership, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres, preventing them from

developing and proving themselves as an efficient and viable means of coordinating communications, defence and provisioning.

They also prevented the local revolutionary committees from integrating with each other to form a regional, provincial and national federal network that would facilitate the revolutionary task of social and economic reconstruction.

This process involved many complex factors — psychological as well as political.

Particularly powerful were the close ties of loyalty and the moral imperatives of solidarity that bound the individual CNT rank and file militants to the organisation, which made them hesitate to express public disagreement with the leadership in a time of crisis.

Equally the sharp break with normal democratic union procedures – due to the "circumstances" of war, governmental collaboration and the need for "antifascist unity" – led to the higher committees ruling in the 'interests' of the base. What had been moral authority became coercive authority.

Large numbers of particularly seasoned militants also "marched in the direction of gunfire" and were too busy fighting the fascists to fight counter-revolution of any colour in the rear. This surely explains a lot.

Militants delegated by their district committees to go to the new CNT headquarters for news and advice on behalf of those local committees were cherry-picked and arbitrarily co-opted into the centralised union apparatus.

The person principally responsible for this disastrous policy was the clownish and criminally incompetent Mariano Vázquez, the recently-appointed CNT Regional Secretary and member of the FAI Peninsular committee:

"Your place is here, not in the Locals" was how he greeted suitable militants who came in search of news.

Anarchist members of the union tended not to get involved in the intermediatory functions of the CNT in order to avoid the inevitable tension between their role as revolutionaries and union officials, whose job it is to defend the moral and economic interests of the workers.

At the union elections earlier that year for the post of Catalan Regional Secretary, most votes went to Marcos Alcón but he turned it down, as did Francesc Esgleas, the second choice, which left the door open for the third candidate, "Marianet," Mariano Vazquez. His name according to García Oliver had originally been put forward as a joke by comrades from the building workers' union. The result of this "joke" was that he was elected Regional Secretary on the basis of just four votes – an indication of the amount of confidence he inspired among his fellow workers.

If Marianet's nomination was a joke it was one that was to have tragic consequences. His career as Catalan Regional Secretary and, later, National Secretary of the CNT was catastrophic. The building worker turned administrator is a prime example of the lengths to which people in public life will go when they abandon principles for expediency. He and others were putty in the hands of Negrín and the Stalinists and by 1938 he was arguing for the opening of negotiations with Franco.

Conclusion

There's lots that can be said about the mistakes that were made, and how the revolutionary process in Spain was derailed between July 1936 and August 1937. The most perceptive contemporary analysis, in my view, was that of the Friends of Durruti group of rank and file activists originating from the Durruti Column.

Since the early Spring of 1937 this "conscious minority" was the only organised section within the anarchist movement to publicly challenge the ever-deepening embroilment of the CNT–FAI notables in governmental collaboration, and urge a return to the revolutionary spirit of the summer of 1936. The Friends of Durruti saw that the real purpose behind the changes was to justify and perpetuate collaboration.

The Friends argued that the CNT–FAI notables had gone so far down the governmental road that they had become part of the problem.

To withdraw from government would have been a public admission that their actions to date had been destructive and negative. They had no choice but to see collaboration through to the bitter end.

"The lesson has been in vain. During the course of the past year it has become clear that it is not possible to share revolutionary responsibility with the petite-bourgeoisie and with those parties which although they claim the label 'Marxist' are self-evidently appendages of the deskocracy. But common sense has yet to have its way in our ranks...

"It is truly deplorable that certain comrades with a long history in the anarchist movement have yet to grasp the reason why the anarchist groups have been able to work feats of such colossal importance which may be equalled but cannot possibly be outdone.

And it defies understanding that entering once again a period of oppression there is this wish to tear up the formula which has opened up so many possibilities to the struggles waged by the proletariat of this peninsula."

By the end of August 1937, with the break up of the Council of Aragón the last stronghold of anarchist practice, the Spanish revolution was over. The Friends of Durruti were too late.

Having surrendered their political, military and economic power to their own leaders they had seen these leaders acquiesce to the systematic dismantling of their achievements, the terrorising, imprisonment and murder of their militants, and the perversion of their aspirations for a free society out of all identifiable shape.

With nothing left to fight for it was only a matter of time before the will to resist collapsed, taking with it the Second Republic and that institutionalised monstrosity which had grown out of what had once been a great working class association – the CNT-FAI.

By Stuart Christie

ON FEDERALISM

Radical Reprint: Shawn Wilbur's translation of anarchist thinker James Guillaume's 1871 work

The true character of the revolution that was accomplished at Paris commence has been outlined in so marked a fashion that you, even the minds most unfamiliar with political theories, can now perceive it clearly.

The revolution of Paris is federalist.

The Parisian people want to have the liberty to organise themselves as they intend, without the rest of France having to mix in Parisian affairs; and at the same time, they renounce on their side all interference in the affairs of the departments, by urging them each to organise as their please, in the fullness of communal autonomy.

The different organisations which would be in this way freely constituted could then freely federate in order to mutually guarantee their rights and their independence.

It is important not to confuse federalism as it is understood by the Paris Commune with the so-called federalism which exists in Switzerland and in the United States of America.

Switzerland is simply a federative State, and that word alone already expresses all the differences between these two systems. Switzerland is a State, that is, it is a national unity; and, as a result, despite the federative appearance, sovereignty there is attributed to the nation in its ensemble. The cantons, instead of being considered as distinct individualities and absolute sovereigns, are supposed to be only fractions of a whole which is called the Swiss nation.

A canton does not have the free disposition of itself: it can indeed, to a certain degree, manage its own affairs; but it does not possess true autonomy, its legislative faculties are limited by the federal constitution; and that federal constitution is not a contract, in the true sense of the word; it has not been accepted individually by each of the parties: it has been imposed on the cantons by the vote of a majority.

A canton does not have the right to terminate the federal contract; it is forbidden from leaving the federation; it is even forbidden, as we see at this moment in the affairs of the Tessin, to divide in order to form new cantons. The least political or socialist movement, a strike for example, can bring federal troops into the canton.

Thus, federation, in Switzerland, is only in the words. It is not federation which is the true name of the Swiss system, it is decentralisation. Switzerland realises closely the system that had been established in France by the constitution of 1791, and that the Assembly of Versailles, "inspired by the great principles of 1789," proposes to restore in order to seem to give in to federalist aspirations.

Federalism, in the sense given to it by the Paris Commune, and that was given to it many years ago by the great socialist Proudhon, who first scientifically outlined the theory — federalism is above all the negation of the nation and the State.

For federalism, there is no more nation, no more national or territorial unity. There is only an agglomeration of federated communes, an agglomeration which has for its determining principle only the interests of the contracting parties, and which consequently has no regard for the questions of nationalism or of territory.

There is equally no more State, no more central power superior to the groups and imposing it them its authority: there is only the collective force resulting from the federation of the groups, and that collective force, which acts to maintenance and guarantee of the federal contract — a true synallagmatic contract this time, stipulated individually by each of the parties — this collective force, we say, can never become something prior and superior to the federated groups, something analogous to what the State is today to society and to the communes. The centralised and national State thus no longer exists and the Communes enjoying the fullness of their independence, there is truly an-archy, absence of central authority.

But let us not believe that after having suppressed the States and nationalism, federalism leads to absolute individualism, to isolation, to egoism. No, federalism is socialist, and for it solidarity is inseparable from liberty. The communes, while remaining absolutely autonomous, feel themselves, by the force of things, in solidarity; and, without sacrificing any of their liberty, or, to put it better, to better assure their liberty, they unite themselves tightly by federative contracts, where they stipulate all that which touches their common interests: the large public services, the exchange of products, the guarantee of individual rights, and mutual aid in case of any aggression.

Let the French people, awakened finally by their misfortune, open their eyes to the light of truth: let them be in 1871 the initiators of the Federalist and Social Republic, as they were in 1793 the proclaimers of the rights of men; and in Europe, preserved from the gothic restoration with which the German Empire threatens it, will shine in a near future the days of liberty and equality.

By James Guillaume

The coalition is continuing the grand tradition of all governments in ignoring their manifestos, free to break their solemn pre-election pledges and vote as they like – all in the interests of capital.

The Lib Dems are just the latest of a long line of politicians who say one thing during elections and then do the opposite once in office. The Tories are imposing another top-down reorganisation of the NHS in England in order to privatise it after proclaiming the NHS was safe in their hands in the election. In America, Republican governors are trying to strip unionised workers of their rights – after failing to mention any of this in their election.

Nothing resembles a monarchy more than centralised democracy for "the representatives, once elected, are the masters; all the rest obey. They are subjects, to be governed and to be taxed." A nation as one unit picking its rulers every few years is no democracy. Their laws are "spider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in the hands of the government."

The coalition's innovation is to do this with cries of "fairness" (in order to level working class people down) and "we are all in it together" (while cutting corporation tax and planning to reduce the top-rate of tax for high earners).

Is there an alternative to a system which reduces liberty to the ability to pick rulers every four or five years?

The Nature of the State

First, we need to understand what the state is and why it is structured as it.

For the early anarchist philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon the state "rests on this hypothesis: that a people, that the collective being which we call society, cannot govern itself, think, act, express itself, unaided."

The reason for this thinking and its attendant hierarchies is based in its role. "In a society based on the principle of inequality of conditions," Proudhon argued, government is "a system of insurance for the class which exploits and owns against that which is exploited and owns nothing." It is "inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat." For if the people did govern themselves then it is unlikely they would tolerate economic rule by the capitalist class.

The logic of anarchists being against the state then is because it is an instrument of class rule, a social structure organised to ensure centralised, hierarchical top-down power and the exclusion of the people. We "deny the state" because we "affirm, on the contrary, that the people, that society, that the mass, can and ought to govern itself by itself" and "we affirm that which the founders of States have never believed in, the personality and autonomy of the masses." So "no establishment of authority, no organisation of the collective force from without, is henceforth possible for us ... the only way to organise democratic government is to abolish government."

To be free we need to end the state and the capitalist system it protects. Yet how do we organise social life without a state? We cannot live isolated lives, nor can we all assemble to discuss large-scale issues and problems. Anarchist theory provides an answer to how we co-ordinate joint activity – decentralisation requires federalism. Federalism aim to replace representative democracy with self-managed associations federated by means of mandated and recallable delegates – governing ourselves.

Proudhon and the 1848 Revolution

The argument that genuine self-government necessitates mandating and recalling delegates was first raised within the socialist movement by Proudhon. In March 1848, in his second pamphlet of the 1848 revolution he argued that mandating and recalling elected people was essential for genuine social self-government:

"In the end, we are all voters; we can choose the most worthy.

"We can do more; we can follow them step-by-step in their legislative acts and their votes; we will make them transmit our arguments and our documents; we will suggest our will to them, and when we are discontented, we will recall and dismiss them.

"The choice of talents, the imperative mandate, and permanent revocability are the most immediate and incontestable consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable program of all democracy."

He noted that few democrats actually embraced this position, something which has not changed since. Proudhon was, for a time, an elected representative and this confirmed his critique of the state:

"Since I first set foot on this parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in contact with the masses: by absorbing myself in my legislative work, I had completely lost view of current affairs. I knew nothing about the national workshop situation, government policy or the intrigues going on within the assembly.

One has to experience this isolation called a national assembly to understand how the men who are the most completely ignorant of the state of a country are nearly always those who represent it ... Most of my colleagues on the left and the extreme Left were in the same state of mental perplexity and ignorance of daily reality.

We only talked about the national workshops with a kind of dread: because the fear of the people is the evil of all those who belong to authority: for power, the people are the enemy."

Proudhon's collaborator Charles-François Chevé summarised the ideas in this circle in his Socialist Catechism. It is a remarkably succinct discussion of the issue. Following Proudhon, Chevé argued that "the imperative mandate" was "the fundamental condition of all elective representation" and it by necessity meant the "permanent right of revocation of the elected by the electors."

Theory: As the coalition dumps the manifestos which brought it power, we discuss mandates

Without these sovereignty could not exist for "it is the sovereign who obeys his delegates, the leader his agents, the electors their representatives, the master his employees; and sovereignty is no more than the puerile and derisory faculty of writing, every three or four years, some names on a bit of paper, and cast it in a box."

Bakunin and the Paris Commune

In subsequent years the revolutionary anarchist Michael Bakunin would continue in the path Proudhon forged. Like the French anarchist he argued for a decentralised, federated communal socialism based on delegate rather than representative democracy:

"The Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council ... [made up of] delegates ... invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.

"Thus organised, the Communal Council will be able to choose separate executive committees from among its membership for each branch of the Commune's revolutionary administration ... all provinces, communes and associations ... [will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of these deputies invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the universality of the Revolution ... will emerge triumphant.

"Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation."

These ideas were not for some future revolution. They had to be applied now, in the labour movement. The construction workers' union, argued Bakunin, "simply left all decision-making to their committees" and in "this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership." To combat this bureaucracy, the union "sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings." In "these popular assemblies" the issues were "amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed." Elected delegates would report "regularly to the membership" and be subject to "instant recall."

Bakunin's vision of a federation of workers' councils based on mandated and recallable delegates dates from 1868. It

Picture: Clifford Harper

makes a mockery of Lenin's claims, trotted out to this day by his followers, that while Marxists see the need for an "organisation of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune" anarchists "have a very vague idea of what the proletariat will put in its place"

In reality, anarchists had a very firm idea of how a free socialist system would be organised – decades before Lenin saw the importance of soviets in 1917 and years before the Paris Commune of 1871.

Marx, for his part, wrote one of his best works on the revolt: The Civil War in France. The Commune "was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms" and the "rough sketch of national organisation" produced by the Communards specified a federation of communes based on delegates "at any time revocable and bound by the mandat imperatif (formal instructions) of his constituents."

These ideas obviously reflect the ideas Proudhon and his colleagues had raised over 20 years previously. This is unsurprising, given that his followers (the Mutualists) played a key part in the 1871 revolt (indeed, the "rough sketch" was written by a Mutualist).

Yet even if we ignore, as Marx did, the Mutualists, the Commune's libertarian ideas can be seen if we compare Proudhon's arguments from 1848 and Marx's reporting 23 years later, where we find Marx proclaiming the Commune "was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time."

It is important when reading Marx's The Civil War in France to understand that much of it is simply reporting. He may have been agreeing with the actions of the Communards, but that does not change the awkward fact that he is not presenting his notions of social organisation but rather summarising the actions of people heavily influenced by his arch rival Proudhon. This means that when Marxists point to that work as evidence for Marxism's "democratic essence" it misses the point – it is a libertarian-infused work because it is describing a libertarian-infused revolt.

A Marxist aside

The Paris Commune brought the contradictions of the Marxist attacks on anarchism to the surface. Engels attacked anarchists for holding federalist positions yet praised the 1871 revolution when it implement exactly the same ideas. For example, in his deeply inaccurate diatribe "The Bakuninists at Work", he was keen to distort the issue dismissing "so-called principles of anarchy, free federation of independent groups." Compare this to his praise for the Paris Commune which, he gushed, refuted Blanquist notions when it "appealed to [the provinces] to form a free federation of all French Communes ... a national organisation which for the first time was really created by the nation itself."

Both Marx and Engels praised the Commune for implementing binding mandates yet this did not stop Engels attacking anarchist support for them as being part of Bakunin's plans to control the IWMA. For "a secret society," he argued, "there is nothing more convenient than the imperative mandate" as all its members vote one way, while the others will "contradict one another." Without these mandates, "the common sense of the independent delegates will swiftly unite them in a common party against the party of the secret society."

Obviously the notion that delegates from a group should reflect the wishes of that group was lost on Engels. He even questioned the utility of this system for "if all electors gave their delegates imperative mandates concerning all points in the agenda, meetings and debates of the delegates would be superfluous."

Trotskyists regularly pay lip-service to the Commune and the imperative mandate today. Chris Harman of the SWP argued that the "whole experience of the workers' movement internationally teaches that only by regular elections, combined with the right of recall by shop-floor meetings can rank-and-file delegates be made really responsible to those who elect them." (Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe, pp. 238-9)

Harman fails to note that it was Proudhon and Bakunin, not Marx, who first recognised the importance of recall and argued for it in the workers' movement. He also does not square his words with Bolshevik practice (such as packing, gerrymandering and disbanding soviets with non-Bolshevik majorities) which rejected this experience once they were in power. Or, for that matter, Trotsky's 1936 summary that the "revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party" is "an objective necessity."

Conclusions

Lenin argued that what the proletariat will put in that state's place "is suggested by the highly instructive material furnished by the Paris Commune." Yet anarchists had been advocating these ideas before 1871 and their ideas had directly influenced the revolt. So it is fair to say that it was Marx, not the world, who had "at last discovered" the political form "under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour" in 1871. The French working class had been aware of the necessity for a decentralised federation of communes based on mandated and recallable delegates since at least 1848.

As Peter Kropotkin was to note, "the principles of anarchism" had "their origin, not in theoretic speculations, but in the deeds of the Great French Revolution" and "the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."

Proudhon and Bakunin were, in a sense, just repeating ideas already current in radical working class circles. Yet this should not be used to diminish their contributions nor their early recognition of the importance of these concepts. Particularly as everyday statism confirms our critique and life confirms our alternative.

The pressing question of how we get from here (capitalism) to there (anarchy) will be discussed in a subsequent article.

By Iain McKay

The organised.

History: 90 years on from its founding, we look at the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation

This year celebrates the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, a unique and innovative British class struggle and internationalist revolutionary organisation.

The APCF was founded in Easter 1921 and continued for some 20 years before reorganising under different names (The Workers' Revolutionary League and The Workers' Open Forum). It lasted until the 1960s, but 1921-1941 remains its main period of activity.

The origins of the APCF lie in a desperate attempt to unite the remaining anti-parliamentary groups in Britain in opposition to the newly formed and pro-parliamentary Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Prior to 1921, to be a revolutionary communist you were almost by definition deemed to be an "anti-parliamentarian," for reliance on parliamentary action was seen as an irrelevance. The burgeoning revolutionary movement had grown out of a long series of struggles, beginning with the pre-war labour unrest, through the anti-war resistance, and on through the post-war industrial battles. In all of these, revolutionaries had learned the hard lesson that a movement based on parliamentary action or official trade union methods was a blind alley, and that they had to rely on their own activity.

For many, the industrial organisation of the workers whether in workers' committees or industrial unions was seen as the way to defeat capitalism and to give a glimpse of the new socialist society they were trying to build.

The October Russian Revolution was seen as a vindication and practical example of this ideal, with the revolution viewed in sovietist and councillist terms rather than the centralised and disciplined party and state.

With the formation of the CPGB it quickly became clear that unity was being forged not through direct action and anti-parliamentary struggle, but through its opposite – a centralised party, favouring participation in parliament and affiliation to the Labour Party. A tactical use of parliament, exposing its bankruptcy, was supposed to advance the workers towards communism.

These arguments, with Lenin's authority and the CPGB's financial and organisational clout, led many to join the Party. If no alternative unity of revolutionary groups could be formed, the whole anti-parliamentary movement would be liquidated.

At the same time as the Communist Unity Conventions which were to lead to the formation of the CPGB, a number of anti-parliamentary initiatives to create an alternative communist organisation were underway.

The Communist League, the most important of these, was established in 1919. It had its own paper, The Communist, and held conferences to thrash out points of dispute. But though there was much fine discussion no action was forthcoming, and the Communist League disappeared later that year.

By 1920 what was left of the anti-parliamentary movement was centred around Guy Aldred and his paper The Spur. Aldred hoped to create a communist federation out of the few remaining communist and anarchist groups.

This initiative was overwhelmingly based in Scotland – primarily Glasgow – and early in 1920 Aldred's group, the Glasgow Anarchist Group, issued a manifesto putting forward a proposal for a communist federation. To re-emphasise the need for unity with other communists the group renamed itself "The Glasgow Communist Group" in May 1920. At the 1921 Easter Conference of Scottish

anti-parliamentary groups a Scottish Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed. This was broadened into the UK-wide Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation.

The history of the APCF can be conveniently divided into two periods of activity.

1921-1933

The APCF's beginnings were difficult to say the least. Guy Aldred and two other members of the Glasgow Communist Group were in jail, Aldred convicted on a charge of sedition – advocating violence and popular disaffection in The Red Commune – and sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

Instrumental: Guy Aldred

This was widely seen as a classic example of class justice or, according to William Gallagher, "White Terror." Aldred's resistance and that of his comrades was applauded by all sections of the labour and socialist movement and gained much respect for their principled and eloquent defence.

Also in The Red Commune support was given to Aldred's "Sinn Fein" policy, which was to be one of the defining ideas of this first period of APCF activity. It was put into practice in Aldred's candidature for the parliamentary seat of Shettleston in October 1922.

For an anti-parliamentary communist to be standing for parliament seemed contradictory and Aldred faced accusations of inconsistency and hypocrisy from within the APCF (especially from its pure anarchist elements) as well as from the wider socialist movement, most notably Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers Socialist Federation.

Aldred however maintained that there was no inconsistency. The key distinction was that, like Sinn Fein, Aldred pledged not to take his seat if elected – candidature meant an opportunity to place anti-parliamentary communism before a wider audience:

"All electioneering exposes the weakness of parliamentary action. It stifles the revolutionary idea and denies principle... For this reason I repudiate parliament. I pledge myself not to sit in the capitalist assembly at Westminster. I undertake, if returned, to represent the workers outside of parliament, in the streets, and in the struggles without parliament, that are greater than parliament. I stand for the complete and final overthrow of the present social system."

Another passage indicates a further vital field of activity for the APCF in the 1920s. Aldred noted:

"The place to represent the worker is where the worker suffers and assembles. It is the street-corner, the home, the factory and the dock."

It should be remembered that street-corner oratory was vitally important to the socialist movement at this time. The street-corner meeting was the main way the socialist message was disseminated. The meetings themselves were surprisingly widespread through large cities like Glasgow and at particularly active times such as 1918-20, or during the Spanish Civil War when they were held every night. Before the introduction of television and widespread access to radio, the street-corner meeting was the only way most workers could get access to new ideas and philosophies. It was also the main place where the printed word was disseminated in pamphlets and papers.

Given this, one of the main socialist activities was defence of the right to open-air meetings in the street or park, for if they were curtailed the movement would be extinguished. Consequently when, in 1924, a ban on public meetings on Glasgow Green was enforced, it was resisted by the APCF. Arrests and imprisonments followed, but Aldred's legal skills resulted in halting the threat.

The conflict was renewed in 1931 when speakers on Glasgow Green were arrested, while in addition traditional street-corner speaking sites were outlawed when new traffic lights were erected. Battles with the police ensued.

Things quickly deteriorated on the streets – according to one observer, "The city is in a terror trap. The boys are smashing windows and stealing in nearly every street. They are playing merry hell."

The APCF was the main body defending these sites, and set up a Council of Action in 1931 to defend free speech. Again, Aldred's forensic skills led to the scrapping of the offending bye-law, but new restrictions on public speaking were put in their place.

To galvanise public opinion against this, Aldred suggested conducting a referendum by standing in every ward at the forthcoming municipal elections. Again, ballot box activity for the pursuit of anti-parliamentary ends aroused controversy. Although Aldred defended himself on what he saw as sound anti-parliamentary principle (not taking his seat if elected), the APCF membership would not countenance it. After a hostile meeting where Aldred presented his proposal, and a subsequent meeting where he was censured for contributing an article to a Nationalist paper (MacDiarmid's Free Man) Aldred resigned from the APCF in 1933.

There was some farcical brinkmanship in all this, each side expecting the other to give way and, at the next meeting, some form of reconciliation to be found, with motions of censure or resignation being withdrawn. But that didn't happen, and Aldred was effectively evicted from the APCF headquarters, Bakunin House.

He went on to form the Workers' Open Forum and, in 1934, the United Socialist Movement, later claiming that "As a virile organisation the APCF ceased to exist in 1933." However, probably much to his surprise, the APCF continued.

1933-1941

The organisation then moved to Commerce Street, Willie McDougall's printing premises, and it was largely McDougall who kept the APCF alive and active until 1941. By this time Willie had already spent a lifetime in the Glasgow anarchist movement, his activity dating from before the First World War.

Like Aldred, he had been arrested and jailed during the War for refusing to obey military orders; but he had successfully escaped from Dartmoor and resumed anarchist activity in Glasgow. He was a founder member of the APCF, and took part in the free speech fight for Glasgow Green.

Unlike Aldred, Willie never saw himself as a major thinker or leader. His main aim was to provide the infrastructure for a libertarian socialist movement to flourish and this is what the APCF became – a base for a wide range of libertarian anti-statist and anti-capitalist individuals to come together to discuss and disseminate their views.

Lacking a party line, the APCF nevertheless had a number of aims and principles, first published in 1935 as an afterword to their pamphlets, which was later amplified into Principles and tactics of the APCF, published in Solidarity in 1939 and reprinted in 1944.

Central to these aims and principles was an attempt to synthesise the best of anarchism and marxism into an "anarcho-Marxian" movement. This synthesis can be seen as a British form of council communism, with its rejection of parliament and the official trade union movement in favour of revolutionary direct action focussed on the creation of "workers' all-in soviets or Councils of Action."

The APCF's most significant contribution to the movements of the 1930s and '40s was the dissemination of anti-parliamentary and left communist ideas through its publications. The first of these was the pamphlet The bourgeois role of Bolshevism (1935), quickly followed by two Rosa Luxembourg texts entitled Leninism or Marxism. Both were seminal texts which introduced the council communist or left communist critique of the Russian Revolution to a British audience. Their importance can be gauged by the fact that they have been reprinted by differing groups many times since, and still repay study today.

The publication marked the beginnings of a limited but fruitful relationship between the US council communists and the APCF. The APCF sold International Council Correspondence and its successor, Living

Marxism, and reprinted some of their seminal articles in its own journals. Without this the ideas of Pannekoek, Mattick and others would have been largely unknown to the British left until their rediscovery in the '60s.

McDougall and his comrades also printed pamphlets for a wide variety of left groups, including some of the early Trotsky literature in the '30s when publishers for such material were few and far between. In addition, despite enormous difficulties with funding and distribution, McDougall managed to publish a series of papers beginning in 1936 with Advance, which merged with Freedom to become in turn The Fighting Call, The Workers' Free Wress, and finally and most importantly, Solidarity from 1938 to 1945.

They were especially important during the Spanish Civil War to provide a focus of support for the CNT-FAI against the communist machine. This became a matter of urgency when funds were needed to send Ethel MacDonald (for the USM) and Jenny Patrick (for the APCF) out to Spain to work in the CNT's Barcelona Information Bureau. Willie McDougall and the APCF were then pressed into action to publish the special editions of the Barcelona Bulletin and The Workers' Free Press.

This displayed an encouraging measure of co-operation between Aldred's USM and McDougall's APCF. Unfortunately relations within the APCF were not so civil. Some of the anarchists there, most notably Frank Leech, thought the APCF's response to the Spanish Civil War was "too Marxist."

Leech had been a member of the APCF in its earlier years, but had drifted away. He came back in 1936 and wanted to move the APCF closer to the anarchist position on Spain embodied by the London Freedom group and Emma Goldman.

Eventually this led him to leave the APCF, taking with him a number of anarchist members. They formed the anti-parliamentary Volunteers and soon after, in 1937, the Glasgow Anarchist-Communist Federation. In a period requiring maximum unity to support the Spanish anarchists, there were now three competing groups.

While the remains of the APCF and the USM had co-operative arrangements (selling each other's literature, sharing the USM's Bakunin Hall and speakers' sites) there was constant war with Leech's group.

With Aldred this became a more and more poisonous conflict which even the respected Captain White was unable to mediate. With Willie and the APCF things weren't much better. The APCF were excluded by the ACF from joint platforms, and when the ACF poached the APCF's star speaker, James Kennedy, Willie saw this as an attempt to "crush him out."

Despite these setbacks the APCF continued its propaganda work and its meetings were ultimately successful via the establishment of the Workers' Open Forum in 1942. This, however, was strictly speaking after the APCF had ceased to exist. It changed its name to the Workers' Revolutionary League in 1941, on the grounds that the anti-parliamentary designation was increasingly being used in fascist propaganda, and hence "having served its purpose ... should now be discarded".

The WRL continued at least until 1945, but the Workers' Open Forum, the true heir of the libertarian non-sectarian spirit of the APCF, carried on into the '60s, providing an outlet for the expression of anti-parliamentarism well into the second half of the twentieth century.

In the words of Dugie Mackay of the WRL and WOF, speaking in 1940, "anti-parliamentarism must now become a positive force ... The workers, sold by the Labour Party and Trade Union leaders, will require to act on their own. Our work, then, is the building up among the workers the knowledge of their own dignity; of their own individual worth; of their own right to control industry without having to maintain a host of useless bureaucrats, whether capitalist or socialist. Knowledge plus Necessity equals Action: this is the message of the social revolution."

Struggling: Glasgow Anarchists in 1915

By Bob Jones

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OIL AND GREED

Review: Raz Chaoten welcomes a book which takes some of the sheen off Bolivarian promises

Venezuela: Revolution as Spectacle
by Rafael Uzcátegui, translated by Chaz Bufe
Paperback. 200pp
£12.50
ISBN: 978-1-884365-77-5
Pub: See Sharp Press (2011)

Rafael Uzcátegui has a bone to pick with Leftists (and even some anarchists like Noam Chomsky and Michael Albert), for their support of the government that he has been fighting for over ten years.

This is the government of Hugo Chavez, the charismatic exponent of "21st Century Socialism" and leader of what has been described as the "Pink Tide" that has swept through many Latin American countries in recent years. Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil now have Leftist governments, which to greater or lesser degrees are all influenced by Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution."

If you ask most people of the Left around the world about Venezuela, you will be told that there is a Socialist Revolution going on there.

You will probably be told that Hugo Chavez is standing up to US imperialism and challenging the power of transnational capital by nationalising oil reserves. You may even be told that real participatory democracy exists there: that workers control their own factories and people's assemblies run their own communities.

For those of you reading this article who will not feel convinced to go out and get Uzcátegui's book there's one key fact you should grasp: Bolivarian Socialism is BS – Bull Shit.

But I encourage you to read the book, not least because it makes the point far more eloquently and convincingly than I've just done.

In fact I want you to read it so much that I'm going to give you all my criticisms of it first, just so you end the article feeling like you want to read it. Sneaky, eh?

In fact this is fitting, as the book starts badly and only gets better towards the end. The first two important sections, which make up the first half, are overloaded with facts, figures, lengthy quotes and specific details which are often fairly boring, and this all combines to make the overall arguments in these chapters quite hard to follow.

Only in the second half does a consistent narrative and logical chain of argument seem to develop.

This is unfortunate, and not only because it may put some people off.

It is also unfortunate because these sections make powerful and crucially important points, and the very fact that they are so detailed is testament to what must have been years of painstaking research and analysis by Uzcátegui.

With his extensive use of quotations, statistics and references from a wide range of sources, Uzcátegui seems desperate to be taken seriously and not merely dismissed as an anarchist crackpot shouting unsubstantiated rubbish.

This is most likely because, as the book describes, opposition to the Bolivarian regime of any form is generally dismissed as right-wing propaganda by supporters of Chavez.

As someone who has travelled and met activists in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, I myself am somewhat familiar with the Orwellian nature of "21st Century Socialism."

I have seen malnourished homeless people begging underneath signs that declare: "the Revolution is marching on" and

heard tales of students and indigenous people attacked with bullets and teargas by their "socialist" governments' police for demonstrating against privatisation.

But these experiences pale into insignificance as a condemnation of Bolivarian Socialism compared with the wealth of knowledge possessed by Uzcátegui. He has been editor of the well-respected independent anarchist newspaper El Libertario since 1995 and the chief investigator of one of Venezuela's biggest human rights organisations (PROVEA) since 2006.

The first main section in the book is prefaced by the following brilliant quotation from Raoul Vaneigem's Situationist classic The Revolution of Everyday Life:

"Those who speak of revolution and class struggle without alluding explicitly to daily life, without understanding what's subversive in love and what's positive in the refusal of duties, have a cadaver in the mouth."

Uzcátegui transforms this from a somewhat romantic sentiment into a powerful materialist critique of the "Bolivarian Revolution." The reader is bombarded with a huge mass of information which more than convincingly makes the point that under Chavez "daily life" for most Venezuelans has gotten a hell of a lot worse than it was before the "revolution."

This is based on well-sourced information on several indicators such as crime rates, fear for personal safety, access to education, healthcare and jobs, cost of living and others.

Basically, the argument goes, if this was really a people's revolution, we would expect the opposite. If we accept Vaneigem's logic, this section is the most important in undermining Chavez's claims to revolutionary legitimacy.

He then moves on somewhat disjointedly to a completely different topic, but one which some would consider equally important - oil. This section (the "Devil's Excrement") is complicated, but Venezuela is one of the world's biggest oil-exporting countries and this fact has shaped its society and history more than anything else.

There is a widespread belief amongst Leftists around the world that Hugo Chavez is a socialist because he has nationalised the oil industry and used the profits for the benefit of the people. Uzcátegui shows that this is a complete myth.

In fact almost the opposite is true. The oil industry was already nationalised, decades before Chavez came to power, and Chavez has opened it up to the influence of foreign capital.

This has been done through "mixed enterprise" schemes with transnational oil companies such as Chevron and BP, not known for their socialist credentials.

Uzcátegui explains how in the case of the oil industry, as with other industries such as the construction of massive infrastructural projects, Chavez has been a champion of capitalist globalisation to the detriment of the environment and indigenous people's rights.

The fact that he has managed to do so despite claiming to be a socialist anti-imperialist is perhaps the most shockingly Orwellian aspect of his rule, especially as his claims have been believed by so many around the world.

The remainder of the book explains how Chavez cannot even be understood as a social-democrat, let alone a revolutionary socialist and is merely a populist in the tradition of many other leaders throughout Venezuelan and Latin American history. In proving this point Uzcátegui takes us on a historical journey through Venezuelan politics, including an inspiring account of the birth of autonomous social movements in the 1990s after a nationwide popular uprising in 1989 known as the "Caracazo."

He shows how Chavez's movement did not organically emerge from these social movements but rather opportunistically adopted their demands to get himself into power before almost completely co-opting them.

As an authoritarian populist with a socialist rhetoric Chavez has polarised public opinion and used underhand, repressive techniques to silence criticism.

The overall picture that Uzcátegui paints of life under Chavez is bleak to say the least. But his reflections on the nature of autonomy and the challenges that lie ahead for Venezuela's anarchists are thought-provoking, inspiring and at times even beautiful.

Much of the rest of the analysis he uses throughout the book is credited to other people, often with lengthy quotations, which to me is a sign of a remarkable intellectual humility. He doesn't want you to think he's a genius coming up with original ideas all by himself, but instead wants to turn you on to the writers who have influenced him.

The most obvious example of this is Guy Debord, who's book The Society of the Spectacle, another Situationist classic, inspired Uzcátegui's title. But there are many others.

Even more striking than his promotion of little-known theorists who inspired him are the lengths he goes to make the voices of even less well-known Venezualan revolutionaries heard. In this he is amazingly non-sectarian, always giving the anarchist opinion last, almost as an afterthought. This underlies the severity of political repression in Venezuela, as the many of people interviewed are socialists and Marxists who were once supportive of the regime but who have turned their back on it.

The overall picture of this story, though not the specific details, will be familiar to those who have studied the history of the Russian anarchists and non-Bolshevik socialists after the October Revolution. Those of them that escaped from the Soviet Union and fled to other countries were faced with an outside world that had an oversimplified and false view of what has going on there. The writings of Emma Goldman, Peter Arshinov, Alexander Berkman and others on the Bolshivik Revolution were a warning to the revolutionaries of the world not to fall into the same trap.

In this sense Uzcátegui is an heir to their legacy, as his book will serve as a warning to our generation of the perils of "21st century socialism." The reason that Leftists around the world talk so much BS about Bolivarian Socialism is not just because they want it to be true.

It's also because they want to convince others that it's true, in order that they might say "vote for us and we'll do the same here." Many voters in other Latin American countries have fallen for this, and I have seen with my own eyes the awful consequences, that mirror the Venezuelan experience.

> Chavez has been a champion of capitalist globalisation to the detriment of the environment and indigenous people

If we don't want to live under an authoritarian state-capitalism that hides itself behind a spectacle of Revolutionary Socialism, we must warn others that the claims of Leftist state socialists are false. Luckily for us, they don't really have that many claims going for them anymore: everyone knows that China and Cuba are not places we want to emulate. But many are still confused about Venezuela, and the other Bolivarian Socialist countries.

This book is a powerful weapon against that bullshit, and therefore in the struggle for genuine socialism, which is of course, anarchy.

By Raz Chaoten

Remember the

Review: Nick Heath's work on the forgotten war for liberty against the Bolsheviks and Whites

The Third Revolution? Peasant and worker resistance to the Bolshevik Government
by Nick Heath
ISBN: 978-1-873605-95-0
£3
Pub: Kate Sharpley Library (2010)

This is a useful little pamphlet, giving as it does a short introduction to various rebellions against Bolshevik dictatorship by the proclaimed "ruling class" of that regime, workers and peasants.

Peasant revolts in Siberia, the Don, Kuban, Ukraine and elsewhere are discussed, most of which took place in 1920-1. Interestingly, the leaders of these revolts were usually former Red Army officers. None were as politically sophisticated as the Ukrainian Makhnovist movement, although most raised the demand for direct soviet democracy rather than the Constituent Assembly (the Antonovschina in Tambov being an exception).

Those revolts that remained were sympathetic to the demands of the Kronstadt rebels, a group of elite naval forces which formed the physical vanguard of the revolution in Russia in 1918 and fought the subsequent establishment of the Bolshevik dictatorship on libertarian grounds.

The pamphlet, fittingly, ends with a short biography of Anatoli Lamanov, editor of Kronstadt's Izvestia magazine and populariser of the term "third revolution" in its pages during the 1921 rebellion.

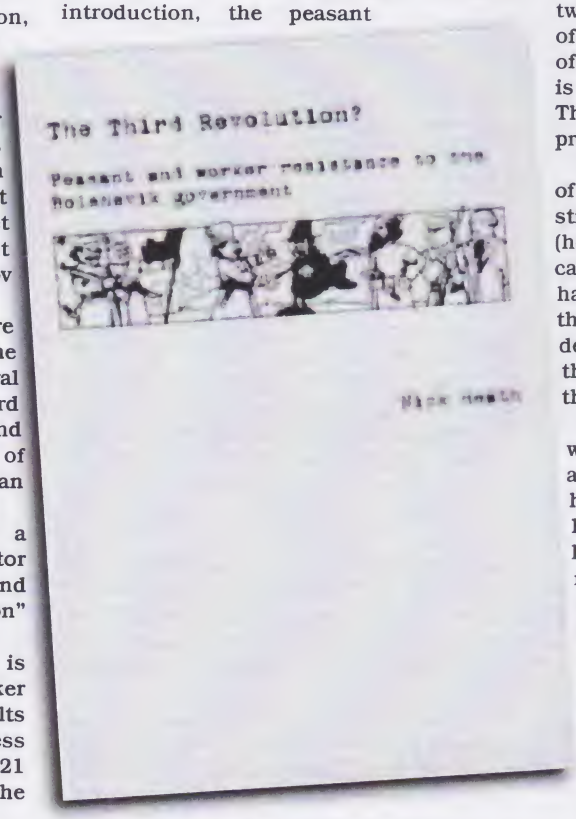
It is fair to say that the pamphlet is far more on peasant rather than worker resistance. The section "Workers' Revolts against the Bolshevik regime" is short, less than a page, and concentrates on the 1921 strike wave in Petrograd which inspired the Kronstadt rebellion.

While there is information on workers' struggles under the Bolsheviks, it is scattered through many books. Jonathan Aves' excellent Workers Against Lenin is the most focused on this important subject but that concentrates on the 1920-2 period. Section H.6.3 of An Anarchist FAQ documents worker resistance to the Bolsheviks which started in the spring of 1918 and continued throughout the civil war period.

This makes modern-day Bolshevik apologists' claims that the working class had disappeared or become atomised (so necessitating party dictatorship) hard to take seriously. Similarly, Bolshevik authoritarianism started before the civil war broke out in late May 1918 (for example, Bolshevik attacks on anarchists started in April 1918, not June as the pamphlet states).

Leninist ideology as well as difficult objective circumstances played its part in the degeneration of the revolution – particularly when the impact of that ideology made these circumstances far worse. This can be seen from Bolshevik policies against the peasantry.

As Heath notes in his excellent introduction, the peasant



revolts were driven by the (usually brutal) seizure of crops by the state. A key problem with Bolshevism was its notion (like Marx in The Poverty of Philosophy) that individual exchange equals capitalism. If there were something the Bolsheviks hated more than the bourgeoisie, it was the petit-bourgeois. This can be seen from Lenin's praise for big business and willingness to place ex-owners/managers into positions of power in the new "socialist" industrial hierarchy while, at the same time, crushing any attempt by the peasants to come to the towns and cities to sell their crops.

Given that the state food procurement agencies were incompetent (as Heath notes, seized crops often rotted in train sidings as the centralised structure did not know where they were) this was particularly harmful as workers did not get enough food to survive from official sources.

It alienated the peasants, harmed food production and diverted resources to stopping attempts at trade. Luckily for the Bolsheviks, the Whites made no attempt to hide their desire to restore the landlords and so made them slightly more appealing to the bulk of the peasantry.

Ideology played its part. Marxism has two somewhat contradictory definitions of capitalism. The first is in volume one of Capital and stresses that capitalism is marked by wage-labour, not exchange. This implies that exploitation happens in production.

The second can be found in The Poverty of Philosophy (and elsewhere) and this stresses that the market itself is the problem (hence oxymorons like "self-managed capitalism"). This implies that exploitation happens in exchange. Like most Marxists, the Bolsheviks subscribed to the second definition and singularly failed to recognise that peasants exchanging the product of their labour is not capitalistic.

It also did not help that the Bolsheviks were completely ignorant of village life and so exaggerated the number of farmers hiring wage-workers before 1917 (the kulaks). They also failed to recognise the levelling effects of the revolution which reduced the small number of kulaks even more. Instead of listening to the Left-SRs (who did have a base in both peasantry and workers) they implemented an ideologically-driven policy of "poor peasant committees" which were a disaster and soon ended (once the damage was done).

These committees did, though, have the advantage of allowing the Bolsheviks to pack the 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets, denying the Left-SRs their majority, but that is another story.

Heath, as a communist-anarchist, addresses the issue of the frequent calls for trade raised by workers and peasants. He rightly places these demands into their social context, namely as a response to Bolshevik mismanagement and the recognition that peasants made up the vast bulk of the Russian working class.

He rightly argues that the peasants and workers "were not in favour of a free market but of a more equitable and harmonious system of distributions and exchange" and so the demands were "similar to demands of workers for better pay and conditions."

black rebels

He does admit that there is "an ambiguity here that cannot fully be resolved" and is right to argue that "when the masses go into struggle a fully revolutionary programme rarely emerges at once. All revolutions contain contradictions within them."

As Heath would be the first to agree, communism cannot be imposed and if a revolution breaks out in a country dominated by peasants who seek to exchange their goods then that must be taken into account.

Ultimately, revolutions rarely unfold as revolutionaries desire and workers in revolt often make what to revolutionaries seem like mistakes. However these mistakes can be fixed or transcended at later stages by the masses themselves – unlike ideologically correct ones imposed from above, as the Bolsheviks with their Marxist confusion over what defines capitalism.

The modern-day Leninist apologist would argue that it was the breakdown of the urban economy which forced the Bolsheviks into the key policy of what is now termed "war communism" but was then just "communism" - the forced seizure of grain from the peasants.

This defence of Bolshevism is premised on the false assumption that Bolshevik industrial policy was unproblematic. While the revolution did see a massive economic problems (which, incidentally, confirmed Kropotkin's arguments in Conquest of Bread and elsewhere), Bolshevik prejudices in favour of centralisation and utilising state-capitalist institutions and against workers' self-management all contributed to making the drop in industrial production fall worse (see section H.6.2 of An Anarchist FAQ).

The pressing need was (as Kropotkin stressed) for decentralisation, local knowledge and mass participation, all of which was alien to Bolshevik ideology.

As Heath notes, the massive revolt of early 1921 forced the Bolsheviks to acknowledge reality to some degree and introduce the NEP. This, the pamphlet states, restored not only exchange but capitalism – unlike the peasant rebels and the Kronstadt sailors, it was not against the employment of wage-labour.

This partial concession to popular economic demands was not met by any concessions to popular political demands for genuine soviet democracy, freedom of speech, assembly, press and so forth. A step back from "war communism" economically was acceptable in order to secure (to quote Trotsky from 1927) "the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."

It must be noted that Bolshevik actions cannot be fully explained nor understood unless you realise that by late 1918 they had concluded that party dictatorship was an essential aspect of any successful revolution. Zinoviev, for example, was not shy in proclaiming it to the Communist International in 1920 while Trotsky was still wittering away about the "objective necessity" of "the party dictatorship" in 1937.

Rebels: Leading Makhnovists (above) and a poster from Kronstadt (below)

So political ideology played its part, particularly in the vision of socialism (centralised planning), perspectives on the peasantry, the role of the party and the vanguard's (self-proclaimed) embodiment of proletarian aspirations.

Such discussions are difficult to condense and such issues are somewhat outside the scope of the pamphlet. Given its aim, namely indicating peasant and worker resistance to the Bolsheviks, it does it task well.

It gives a taste of popular movements during the Russian Revolution, movements which could have been the base of a socialist alternative to Bolshevik state-capitalism. It leaves you wanting to find out more and that raises an issue, namely that references are not as full as they could be.

Giving a reference of "in Skirda" makes it difficult to track them down, particularly when it's the original French edition being pointed to! It would have been helpful to give page numbers to the AK Press translation in such cases.

Still, such issues are minor. As a pamphlet it can be nothing else than an introduction to these revolts. In this it achieves its aim well.

By Iain McKay

Nostradamus of

Review: Christie Books' colourful offering showcases one of the great texts of its time

A Critique of State Socialism
£12
ISBN: 978-1-873976-45-6
by Michael Bakunin and Richard Warren
Pub: Christie Books

In science, the validity of a theory is generally proven by its predictive abilities. A theory suggests certain outcomes and if those predictions come to be then it becomes accepted as valid.

Strangely, while proclaiming it to be "scientific socialism," Marxists refuse to apply that criteria to their movement – wisely, for Marxism has simply proven Bakunin's analysis of it correct. Against Marx, he argued firstly that socialists standing for election would produce reformism, not revolution, and, secondly, that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be simply a dictatorship over the proletariat. Both came to pass.

If the left were actually scientific, Marxism would be dead and those few left would be viewed like creationists or, at best, defenders of Lamarckism. Sadly, though, Marxists eschew Marx's materialism and scientific pretensions in favour of confirming his passing remark that history repeats itself, first time as tragedy and second time as farce. So we find Marxists continuing to advocate participation in elections and the so-called workers' state as if the last 150-odd years have never happened. A truly farcical situation.

While Marxists ignore it, the awkward fact is that Bakunin was right. This makes A Critique of State Socialism a very welcome reprint, albeit an extremely expensive one. Originally published by Cienfuegos Press in 1981, I fondly remember getting the B Books 1986 reprint when I just became an anarchist in 1988. It combines extracts from Bakunin's critique of Marx and other state socialists with wonderfully witty illustrations by Richard Warren. Joe King provides an excellent short introduction to Bakunin's life and ideas.

Do not be put-off by the extremely dated cover (the New Labour Party and SDP being stooges of a Soviet invasion of a revolutionary Britain which Thatcher had fled in 1984!) this comic is a masterpiece of relevant political polemic. Bakunin's analysis of socialism, both libertarian and authoritarian, is combined with wonderful cartoons by Warren Richards and appropriate actual quotes from the likes of Marx, Engels and Lenin to illustrate Bakunin's arguments. Bakunin's words, it should be noted, come from different sources – 1867's Federalism, Socialism and Anti-Theologism (on the history of socialism) and 1873's Statism and Anarchy (on Marxism). Humour is well used to underline the serious points being made.

It starts with Bakunin sketching the origins of socialism, starting with French Revolution, then moves onto the conspiracies of Baboeuf and Blanqui ("So where are the masses?" "Maybe we kept the conspiracy too secret...?") before passing through the (highly regulated) visions of utopians like Fourier and Saint-Simon

("Fancy sneaking out to the pub tonight?" asks one bored member of a Fourierist perfect community). This account is short and the bulk of the book, rightly, deals with Marx and Lenin.

There is such a wealth of material it is difficult to summarise. Warren's pictures showing the differences between peaceful socialists ("we'll have to do it bit by bit so you may not notice it to begin with..."), revolutionary state socialists ("of course, we'll have to give the orders for a while...") and anarchists ("admittedly, it might take a long time for this to happen...') is my personal favourite. This is closely followed by his skilful summary of how easy it could be for Lenin to rationalise centralisation of power from the proclaimed dictatorship of the workers and peasants, via the party, to his own (and, sadly, it does echo actual Bolshevik rationales). It would also be remiss not to mention Warren's contrast between Lenin in 1917 and after, utilising his actual quotes (along with the suggestion that Lenin got his 1917 visions from Bakunin and Kropotkin!).

However, pointing out just one page amidst so many wonderful ones is hard – as can be seen. Ironically, given the devastating nature of this critique it could be argued that Warren gives the Trotskyists an easy time of it. He concentrates on Lenin, so there is no quoting of Trotsky's arguments for party dictatorship. Given that these span two decades and were expressed before, during and after the rise of Stalin this is a rich source of embarrassing quotes Warren could have utilised – and libertarians really should be aware of! Similarly, Trotsky's classic Terrorism and Communism is also good for quotes but is not used here.

As well as critique, the libertarian alternative is also presented. Proudhon is covered in two pages although I have to object to Proudhon's mutualism being described as having "the individual, not the collective, as the basic social unit" (Bakunin is quoted, correctly, stating that "Proudhon's socialism was based upon individual and collective freedom"). Makhno and his struggle against white and red dictatorship gets three pages, followed by one on Kronstadt.

The Spanish Revolution gets three pages and it sums up the CNT's mistake well ("We didn't seize political power. But neither did we destroy it"). Zapata in Mexico, Hungary 56 and other revolts against Stalinism rightfully get mentions.

Of course, as with any short critique, much is left out. For example, it does not mention directly that Bakunin recognised the necessity of organising a federated militia to defend a revolution but the account of the Makhnovists should indicate this to anybody with basic common sense. Similarly, while Bakunin is quoted speculating that the peasantry might be "subjected" to a "new domination" by the proletariat when it is "the ruling class" it helps immensely to know that when Bakunin wrote this in 1873 the proletariat was very much the minority of the working classes in Western Europe (as it was in 1917 in Russia). So to call for, as Marx did, for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" was to argue for rule by a minority, not the majority.

political thought

Moreover, this quote does distract slightly from the real focus and power of Bakunin's critique, namely that even the proletariat would be ruled by a few party leaders under this statist regime – because of the nature of state structures. As Joe King summarises, "Bakunin understood that government is the means by which a minority rules" based on "the concentration of authority in a few hands." The state had to be abolished to "place power in the hands of the masses through their own federation of voluntary organisations." As Bakunin argued, the so-called workers' state would be "a ridiculous contradiction" as the state "will always be an institution of domination and exploitation" of the many by the few. When "the whole people govern" then "there can be no State" and so anarchists urge "the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards."

The die-hard Leninist will not let this excellent little book dent his faith. Much muttering while be voiced on how Warren ignores the "objective circumstances" facing the Bolsheviks – civil war, economic collapse, isolation and so forth. Ironically, this Leninist fixation on "objective circumstances" results in a strange irony – downplaying the importance of Leninist ideology.

Logically, this determinism means that the ideas of the leading Bolsheviks made no impact on the revolution. A strange position to take, to proclaim that you should become a Leninist while also maintaining that your ideology was irrelevant during an apparently "successful" revolution. Still, such contradiction is hardly rare – they also maintain that civil war and economic disruption caused the degeneration of Leninism while Lenin himself proclaimed both were inevitable aspects of a revolution!

Worse, the awkward fact is that Bolshevik authoritarianism started before the outbreak of the civil war. The Bolsheviks were producing executives above the soviets, creating the Cheka, gerrymandering and disbanding soviets, imposing one-man management, repressing strikes and opposition socialists/anarchists, etc. long before revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion in late May 1918.

Moreover, Bolshevik ideology and vision of socialism as centralised state-planning made the economic crisis worse and destroyed the socialistic tendencies that existed (by, for example, preferring Tsarist state-capitalist economic structures over the factory committees). And so on. In short, ideas matter – particularly the ideology of the ruling elite as this will impact on the decisions made and structures favoured.

The notion that Bolshevik ideology and the centralised top-down structures their ideology preferred had no impact of the development of the revolution simply cannot be maintained once you know the facts. Admittedly, all this would be hard to squeeze into comic format – it is hard enough to summarise in text form (see section H of An Anarchist FAQ for details). Suffice to say, this book gives you a taster to the subject matter – and does so in a memorable and extremely enjoyable manner.

Critique: Bakunin and his wife Antonia

Finally, this does not mean we reject everything Marx wrote – Bakunin was, after all, very complementary about Marx's critique of capitalism. It just means that Marx got more wrong than right and that libertarians, not limited by calling our ideas after a dead-guy with a beard, are in a position to appreciate this and incorporate his better ideas in our theories. Just as we do with the likes of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin.

We are also better placed to appreciate the contributions of others to the socialist project and see when Marx appropriated their ideas into his own (usually, as with Proudhon, without mentioning the source – but that is another issue).

So, all in all, a classic polemic which every anarchist should have in order to give to any new recruit to or disillusioned member of a Leninist Party – although it is so good you may not get it back again! The only negative against it is its price – £12 seems excessive for the size of the book. However, if you can afford it then please buy it (alternatively, it would make an excellent present to give or receive!) as you will not be disappointed.

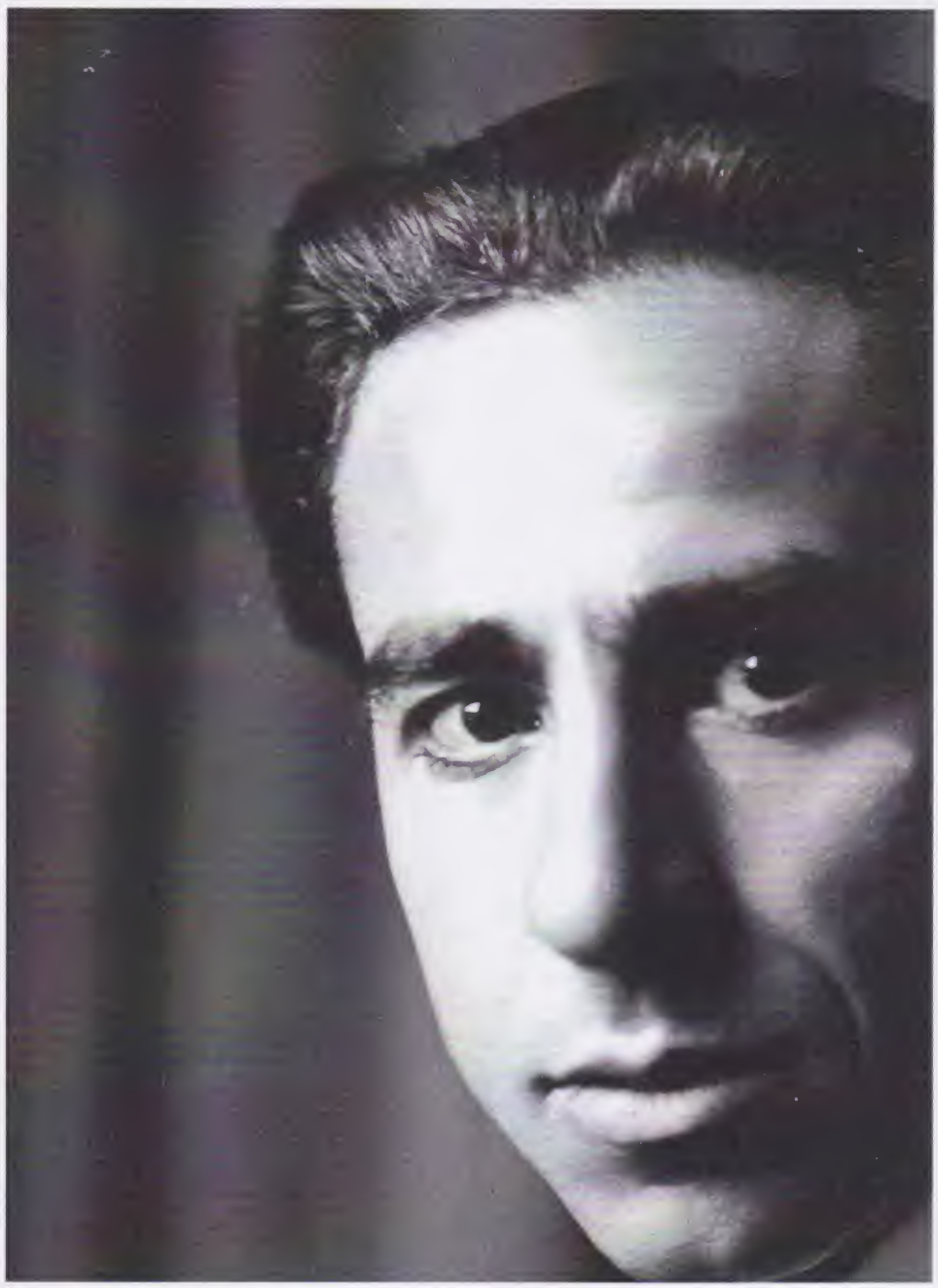
By Iain McKay

Hob's Choice

Welcome once again to our pamphlet review feature. Groups and individuals are invited to submit recently published pamphlets for a mini-review. Each review will include publishing details, content summary and occasional comment.

In this issue thanks go out to the Kate Sharpley Library, Socialist Libertarians and the Solidarity Federation, for kindly sending in their publications.

This edition of Hob's Choice has a definite Iberian flavour, which couldn't be more appropriate as this year is the 75th anniversary of the Spanish civil war and revolution. Keep up the good work comrades.



Theory & Practice Series

T&P #1 Workmates: Direct action workplace organising on the London Underground. May 2011.
T&P #2 Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real: From shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control. May 2011.
A5 format. 20 & 28pp. Price £1.50 each.
www.solfed.org.uk

This is a relatively new series of pamphlets put out by SolFed, to "both document interesting accounts from workers in struggle, as well as attempts to draw the theoretical lessons from them". Both pamphlets are an admirable contribution to this.

#1 looks at workers struggle against London Underground and the Public-Private Partnership scheme in the late '90s. Workmates was open to all workers, both unionised and non-unionised. Workmates was organised through recallable delegates and councils with a mandate from mass meetings of members.

Workmates ran in parallel with the 'official' union, the RMT. However, RMT reps became, probably for the first time, delegates in the real sense of the word and were utilised by Workmates via the councils, should they be needed to approach management to organise , say, a meeting in work time. Workmates worked along the principles of workers' control and direct action.

The pamphlet looks at both the successes and failures of the Workmates Collective.

Highly recommended.

#2 follows on in the tradition of workers control and independent working class organisation, focussing on the threatened closure of shipyards of Puerto Real, Spain in 1987 and picking up once again in 2004 with similar struggles.

The CNT, the Spanish sister organisation of SolFed, was actively involved in these struggles, which involved both workplace and community.

The pamphlet, as well as giving a historical overview to the struggle, contains interviews with workers involved in the struggle. Again, highly recommended.

Kate Sharpley Library

Valeriano Orobón Fernández: Towards the Barricades
by Salvador Cano Carrillo. Translated by Paul Sharkey.
2011.
A5 format. 30pp.
BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX. www.katesharpleylibrary.net

Another historical and biographical translation from KSL. Fernández was a pre-revolution anarcho-syndicalist activist and an influential member of the CNT.

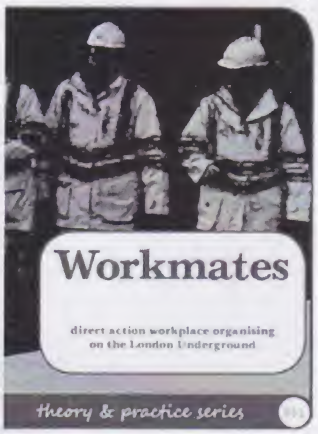
He died of TB at the age of 35, weeks before the revolution. In the years leading up to the revolution he advocated a working alliance with the UGT. He is perhaps best known for penning the great anarchist anthem, A las barricadas!

Anarchism in Galicia: Organisation, Resistance and Women in the Underground. Essays by Eliseo Fernández, Antón Briallos and Carmen Blanco.
Edited and translated by Paul Sharkey.
A5 format. 60pp.
BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX. www.katesharpleylibrary.net

As the title suggests this pamphlet is three essays on the history of the Galacian anarchist movement. Essay 1, 'The FAI in Galicia' looks at the anarchist movement before the foundation of the FAI in 1927 and goes on to look at its involvement with the FAI and the CNT; Essay 2, 'Vigo 1936'records the battle in the streets agawwinst the fascists. It also looks at the history and fate of the Vigo anarchist movement, before, during and after the Spanish Civil War.

In addition it includes a fairly comprehensive biography of comrades

The printed word and the art of radical pamphleteering must be kept alive. It is a revolutionary tradition that cannot be allowed to die



Readers: Clockwise from left, Orobon Fernandez, SolFed's Workmates pamphlet, our front page for Liz Willis' work on the history of history and Anarchism in Galicia

actually involved in the struggle; Essay 3,'The Anarchist Homes of Libertarian Women' describes the remarkable courage of anarchist women who provided safe houses for other militants on the run from the authorities.

Many paid a dreadful price for their bravery; imprisonment, torture and murder.

The same women were also instrumental in the rebuilding of the anarchist movement in Galacia, after it was almost totally decimated by the fascist revolt in 1936.

Socialist Libertarians/Gorter Press/Radical History Network

The New World: Perspectives on workers control in revolutionary Spain 1936 – 1939
by Alan Woodward. 2011.
A5 format. 74pp. Price £3.
c/o 87 Grove Park Road, London N15 4SL.

Hob's Choice cannot do justice in a mini-review of what I consider to be an important work by Black Flag writer Alan Woodward. Perhaps an overview will suffice for the time being. Alan writes, "To add to the mountain of publications on the Spanish revolution requires some justification.

"Mine is that the enormous variation and scope of the workers activity in these years, and a look at the political responsibility for the overall failure from an independent socialist libertarian viewpoint, has not yet been provided."

He adds that "the Spanish revolution is the strongest attempt so far by the working class to build a new world." He starts by setting the scene by providing an introductory framework to the political situation in Spain at the time and then proceeds to analyse workers control, self-management and councils and the organisational and political positives and negatives.

He concludes by acknowledging that he has no doubt set himself up for criticism from both authoritarian and libertarian left alike with his views (Woodward courting controversy? Never!).

I would suggest that class-struggle anarchists pick up a copy of this booklet and take up Alan's challenge to "write your criticism and publish." The next issue of Black Flag will have a longer and more comprehensive review.

What is Libertarian History
by Liz Willis. June 2011.
A5 format. 10pp. Price 99p.
radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.com

This rather slim pamphlet is the original unedited version of an article that appeared in Black Flag 232 and 233.

Liz writes on the history of historians, or indeed the history of history itself from a libertarian socialist perspective! An interesting read.

By Ade Dimmick

Review Reply: Class War Classix

Thanks for the review and comments on the Anti Fascist, Workers Committee, and Putting Socialism into Practice Class War Classix pamphlets in BF issue 233. I would like to clarify a few points of what is being attempted though, as I felt the review asked these questions.

Firstly, the argument for the next "Red Anarchism" arises because what has gone before is clearly not enough, indeed parts of the movement are one sided and not the "many sided" vantage point we need.

Sticking to those terms is not possible as it is no longer good enough, if it ever was, thus we need to experiment and build ideas suitable "for the time of now" and the middle 21st century with mass purchase rather than self-identifying and self-selecting carriers of a holy grail.

Secondly, I was not arguing for an attempt to rebuild old forms of popular frontism.

Like all of these publishing projects, they are attempts to think our way forward more practically and effectively, and certainly more realistically. In this case, despite a clear argument for an informal popular front with wider and informed political popular front organising, it is written off "because we could be manipulated and exploited!" Doh!

Politics is only pure in books, you have to get your hands dirty working with others who are not like you or there is no way forward – the do nothing position is de facto support for the status quo.

If it is a Left party, then we have to be there and try to keep things open from a working class perspective, otherwise they rule without opposition. If it is the state I say I look forward to the day when we are important enough for 'the attempt' to manipulate us to be made.

Finally, the working class movement should be aware of many things, and all its own history is one of them. The Putting Socialism Into Practice pamphlets speaks of a time when the discussion was of open & broad working class politics. We should be deeply uncomfortable with positions that effectively deny knowledge, by denying that texts are "worth publishing."

Differences and contradictions are the essence of progressive working class political development, nothing politically relevant can emerge without a broad and inclusive base.

By Trevor Bark

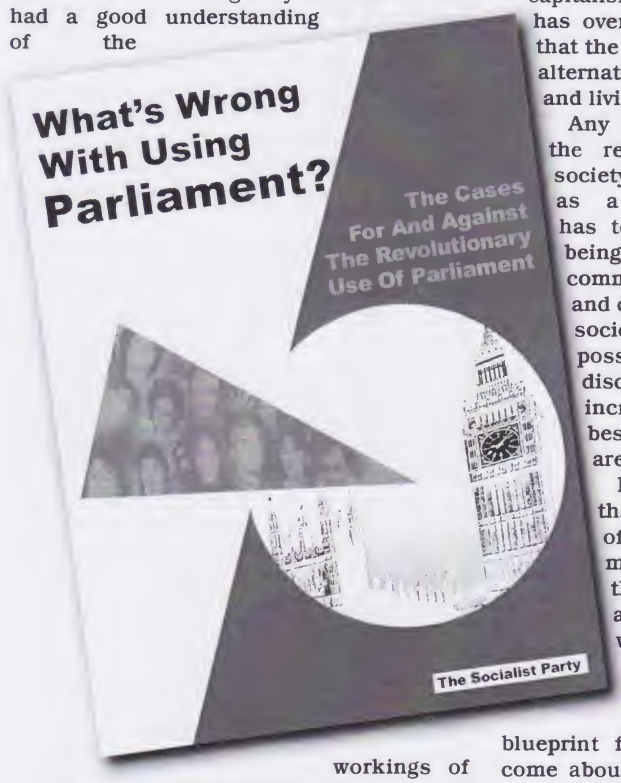
Review reply: What's wrong with using Parliament?

Good to see that you gave the recent SPGB pamphlet What's Wrong With Using Parliament? a review in your last edition.

My take on the review as one individual in the SPGB.

It seems ironic that the review should start with a romantic nod in the direction of William Morris (pictured, right) when one of the things that Morris is well known for was his passion for "making Socialists", something the SPGB rightly or wrongly is often simplistically ridiculed for.

In essence Morris's socialist "propagandising" was about making sure that there was a strong body of socialists who had a good understanding of the workings of capitalism and a clear understanding of the components of a society in contrast to it. He happened to call this socialism, as does the SPGB and it rested on the belief that there needed to be a mass of opinion in favour of it as a classless, stateless, moneyless society.



If people start to believe in the possibility of a future society beyond the market and the state then it seems to me that it is a sensible option to cover all bases and rob any ounce of legitimacy that the capitalist class (including leftist would-be managers with their own statist dreams) will try to bestow upon themselves. The icing on the cake is that we don't allow them that privilege and that we would be in parliament as rebels. Of course this implies a mass of anti-capitalist opinion outside parliament of which those elected would be the mandated delegates.

We can all pick and choose our favourite quotes from folks from the past, one of mine is from Alexander Berkman where he says that:

"Our social institutions are founded on certain ideas and as long as these are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."

In other words, the big holding power that capitalism in more "developed" countries has over many is in peoples' heads in that the majority believe that there is no alternative or/and that they are "free" and living in a "democratic" society.

Any process that has as its aim the revolutionary transformation of society has to have a future vision as a realisable possibility. This has to increasingly gain ground by being articulated in workplaces, the community, shops, pubs, in the arts and culture in general. As that future society gains ground as a tangible possibility then the conversation, discussion and plans will be increasingly enthused about how best to organise and adapt in all areas to meet society's needs.

Ironically it is in the countries that appear to have a semblance of democracy that seem to be the most stable in capitalist terms for the reasons stated by Berkman above. So if that's the case what's wrong with using the platform offered by parliament to call their bluff?

The SPGB doesn't have a blueprint for how a future society may come about but isn't it wise to minimise as many risks and therefore violence that States which, if left at the disposal of those who currently control it via their own "delegates" could more easily be deployed against the development of a new society?

What was probably most offensive about the review is the final paragraph where the reviewer sites the SPGB "slap bang in the middle of the Marxist vanguard groups whose characteristics it shares – authoritarian structure, party chauvinism and so on." One of the reasons I joined the SPGB was because I didn't like the de facto personality-dominated politics that often crept into groups that deemed themselves to be "anarchist", with little or no structure to get the "personalities" to come down from their privileged positions. I felt that the SPGB was actually more "anarchist" than the anarchists if it can be understood that an important part of my "anarchism" was that I believed this meant allowing for the widest conception of democracy sensible/

possible to suit the needs of society.

Ultimately, what socialist conscious workers decide to do will be for them to decide. If they decide that parliament is an irrelevance then they will ignore it. On the other hand if they see that to ignore it could be dangerous and also has potential then they will make use of that potential.

I'd originally written a much larger response that was too long to print for the magazine but will be made available.

Much else can be said in response to the "eccentric" review.

By Stair

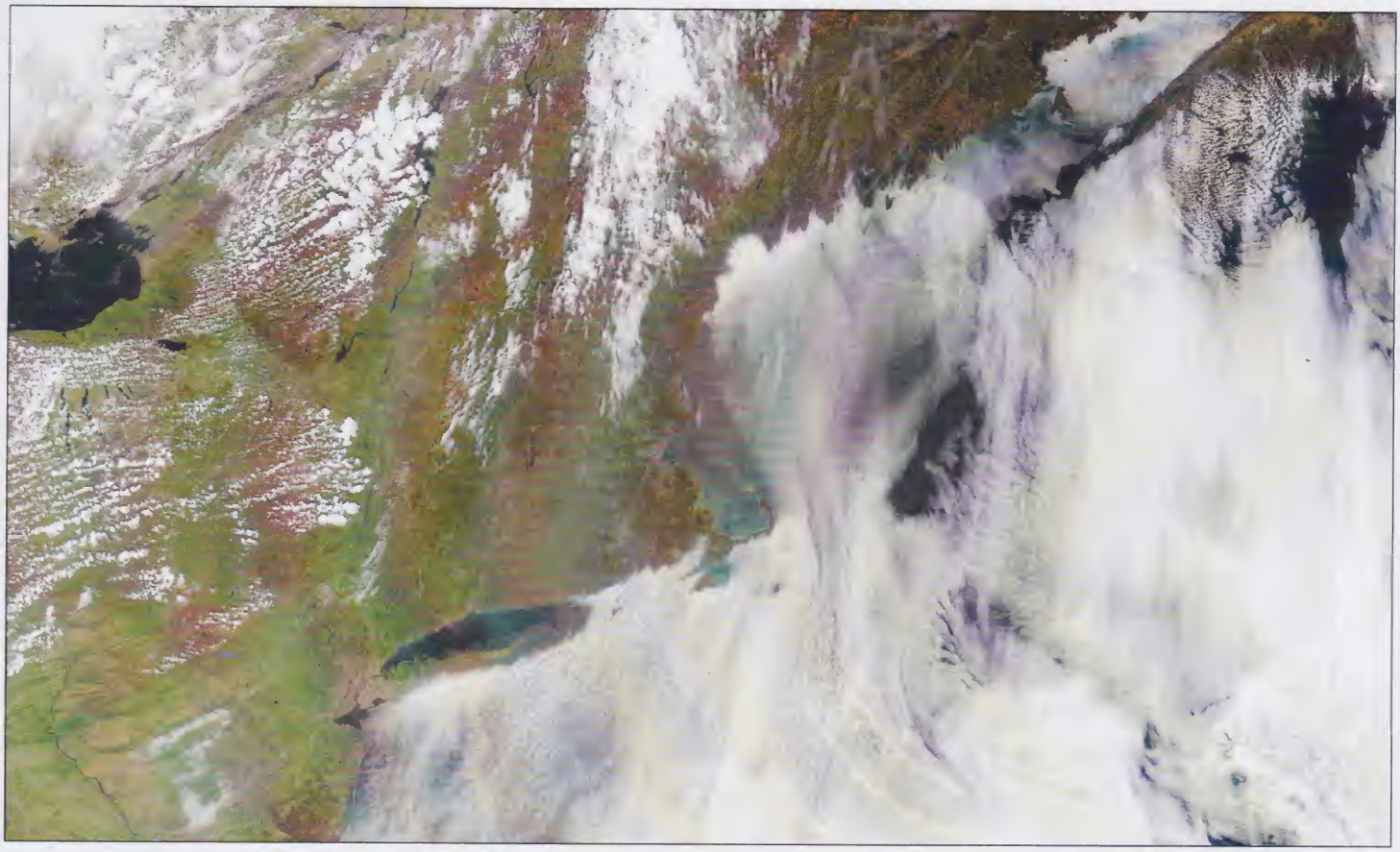
Last Line

Having read the reply to my reviw of the SPGB booklet on parliament, I feel the debate is becoming increasingly inward looking. So I will just say that my attitude to that organisation is conditioned by my experience.

This is that I get around to many industrial disputes and have done so for 50 years but I cannot remember anyone on a picket line saying they were SPGB, nor that organisation issuing leaflets on the dispute or anything to do with the promotion of workers' control.

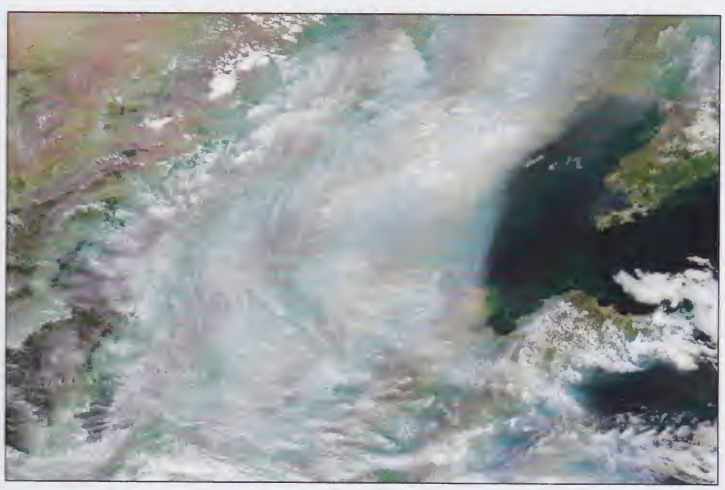
I do remember countless occassions where the SPGB has been involved in standing for parliament and that seems to me to express their priorities. They are becoming more irrelevant as time and events occur.

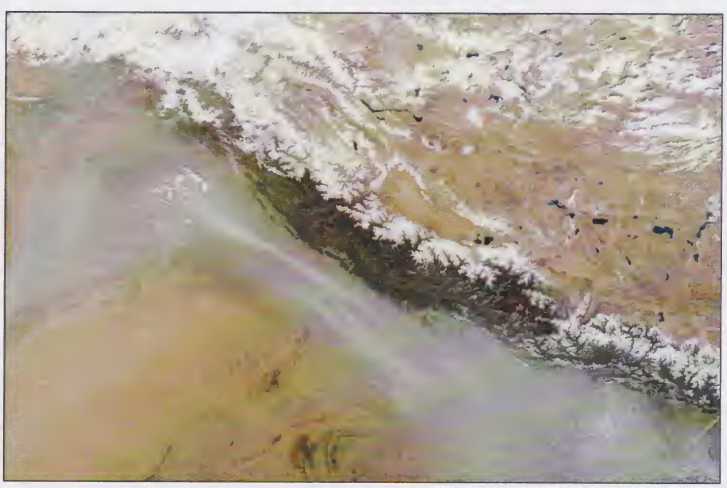
By Alan Woodward

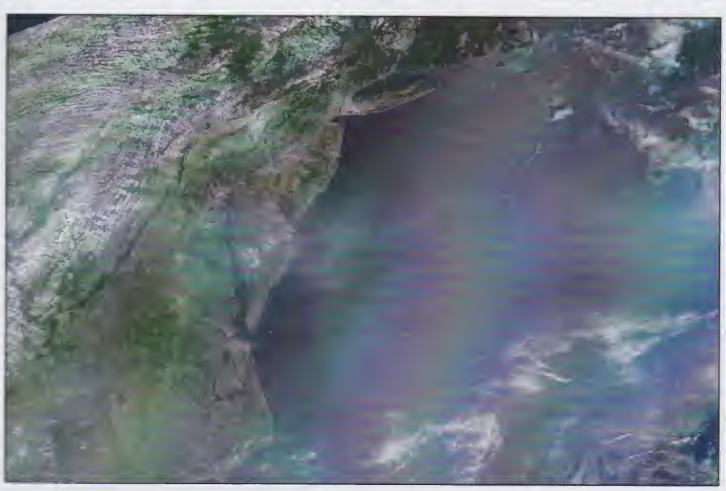


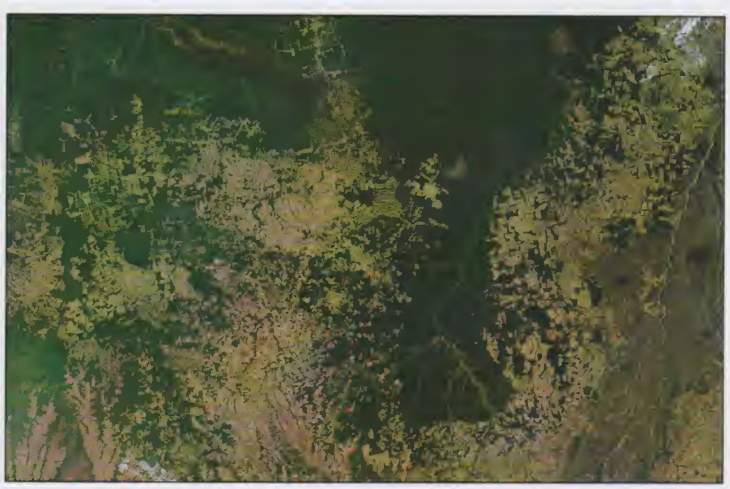
Global problem: Above,trails left by ships exhausts in the clouds off the United States. Below, haze clings to the foot of the Himalyas, light and dark green showing deforestation in Brazil, pollution covering the Atlantic Ocean and pollution sweeping down the coast of China

In colour: Our pollution









Cable Street, October 4th, 1936: I saw Fenner Brockway [a bigwig in the Independent Labour Party] looking very excited. Later I learned he telephoned the Home Secretary to warn him of possible bloodshed, and the Home Secretary contacted the police and they called the Mosley march off and they went back. No way would the Mosleyites have proceeded without their police guard.
– Abert Meltzer

[illegible]

The rise of the CNT

The fall of the notables

[illegible]

Next morning, July 20th, Escofet reported to President Companys that the rebellion had been put down, to which Companys replied, somewhat acidly, that it was all very well but the situation was still chaotic with armed and uncontrollable mobs rampaging through the streets.

Escofet threw the ball back into the politician's court:

"Mr President, I undertook to dominate the military revolt in Barcelona and I have done this. But an authority requires the means of coercion to make itself obeyed, and these means do not exist today. As a result, there is no authority. And I, my dear President, do not know how to perform miracles for the moment we are all overcome by the situation including the leaders of the CNT. The only solution, Mr President is to contain the situation politically without minimising our respective authorities."

As Escofet foresaw the notables, overtaken by events, were as surprised as the politicians at the overnight shift in power. Having extolled the organisational virtues of the working class throughout their lives as militants, now that the workers were breaking their chains and that the dream was becoming a reality by a revolutionary process which threatened to make their role superfluous, they began having second thoughts, openly doubting the people's ability to administer their own lives in their own interests.

Despite their threats of social revolution earlier that summer in response to the much-talked-about rightist coup, the "influential militants" who met on July 20th concluded that the "objective conditions for social revolution" were not right. The military rebellion that had been unleashed, although it had triggered the revolutionary situation, would be the chief obstacle to the consolidation of the revolution, and would ultimately destroy it.

[illegible]

They were the natural organisms of the revolution – the direct expression of popular power.

[illegible]

From the very first moment, therefore, the higher committees of the CNT-FAI set aside traditional anarcho-syndicalist reliance on the creative spirit of the people and their capacity for self-organisation.

By imposing their leadership, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres, preventing them from