



**THE ANARCHISTS  
IN LONDON 1935-1955  
Albert Meltzer**



# ABOUT OURSELVES

Anarchist publishing has been established in Britain for over a century. There were early Anarchist papers such as Ambrose Cuddon's *Cosmopolitan Review*, *The Anarchist*, *The Thunderer*, and so on, before the founding of *Freedom* in 1886 by Mrs. C.M. Wilson and Peter Kropotkin. The Anarchist period of *The Commonwealth* must also be remembered, and the real founder of international anarchism in this country (though not the first anarchist), Frank Kitz. With the turn of the century came many other papers, *The Voice of Labour*, *Solidarity*, *The Anarchist* and their associated presses.

One of the longest to run was *Freedom* and *Freedom Press* which published an unbroken series of well printed pamphlets on anarchism, as well as a monthly paper, until 1928. It was revived in 1939, publishing *War Commentary* and a new series of anarchist pamphlets; and by a new group (1944 to the present) with the present *Freedom*.

The Black Flag Group - including some who had been involved in the second period of *Freedom Press*, in the Anarcho-Syndicalist Committee, publishing *The Syndicalist*; in the Syndicalist Workers Federation, publishing *Direct Action*; and in the Cuddon's Group, publishing the up-dated version of *Cuddon's Cosmopolitan Review*, forming a cross section of the anarchist movement in general and a representative selection of the revolutionary wing in particular - established its paper *Black Flag* in 1970.

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THE  
ANARCHISTS  
In  
LONDON

1935-1955

ALBERT MELTZER

**THE ANARCHISTS IN LONDON, 1935-1955**  
A personal memoir by Albert Meltzer

Dedicated to the memory of my closest friends  
and comrades in the movement now dead:

Mat Kavanagh  
Frank Leech  
Marie-Louise Berneri  
M.P.T. Acharya  
Jack Mason  
Albert Grace  
Fay Stewart  
Dorothy Speed  
Alf Rosenbaum

and Mahmood and Jamal Hussein (murdered in  
the cause of freedom), with so many Spaniards.



Et in Orcadia ego

*First published 1976 by Cienfuegos Press Ltd.,  
Box A, "Over The Water", Sanday, Orkney Islands.  
(Correspondence only)  
Typeset by Marigold.*

ISBN 0-904564-12-6

Cover illustrations by Flavio Costantini

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The author (1935)



# FOREWORD

The propaganda machinery of the State, both press and university alike, have given many reasons for the continuance of anarchism as an organised movement, often falsely presenting it as a re-emergence. Their assertions range from the absurdities of the pornographic and politically illiterate newspapermen who seldom know the difference between anarchism and its most bitter enemies — and treating its existence in an open-eyed fashion as a significant admission of some presumed guilt — to the more profound absurdities of the academics, usually tracing it to some obscure Canadian professor or point to some development within the cloistered world of the universities, with which it has little to do.

To find out the facts about anything relevant in our modern labour history one has to turn to someone who has taken part in the struggle and these memoirs about the developments in British anarchism will no doubt become an indispensable source book for anyone interested in the history of revolutionary libertarian ideas in Britain. There are many books which deal with the anarchist movement up to and around the first world war, and no doubt many more will yet be written as anarchism has progressed within my day, but I am certain that few will be written with the insight, wit and sense of commitment as that contained within the present volume.

Albert Meltzer has already enumerated some of the actions of anarchism in the revolutionary struggles of the present time in his previous work "The International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement: First of May Group", and for further background this present work — actually written some ten years before, though set aside — has been looked forward to with eagerness. Many anarchists in this country feel they know more about organised anarchism in Spain, Italy or Russia say, than in Britain. No doubt, however, that although it was more relevant as a social force in those countries, that is not to say it was in no way relevant here.

In addition to the present work, Albert Meltzer is now working on another, dealing with the soldiers' councils in Cairo in the immediate post-war period. This, taken together with the present work and "The International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement: First of May Group", will throw considerable light on the significance of contemporary British anarchism for the inspiration of libertarian revolutionaries, few of whom are aware of the tradition of class-struggle anarchism simply because it has not been presented to them before.

Though the British working class movement has become submerged in parliamentarism and Statism, it was not always so, and I knew many elderly comrades in Glasgow and the West of Scotland who were totally committed to the tradition of direct action and anti-statism among the working class.

Albert Meltzer is by no means the "last of the Mohicans," there are a few left, but mostly much older. However, more than anyone else I know of, he has been for forty years a link between native anarchism and the international movement, and between the changing generations. He has always been an activist and never — to all appearances at any rate — disheartened by the lack of progress, setbacks or disasters. At present Albert is particularly active within the Anarchist Black Cross — as many prisoners will testify — and in producing the monthly anarchist paper, "Black Flag" both of which commitments take up all his spare time and the better part of his wages as a printworker in Fleet Street.

If any one man stands out in the recent history of British anarchism, as a tireless propagandist of the libertarian ideal, an inspiration to a new generation of anarchists, totally committed to a degree of selflessness I have never come across before and a very merry person to boot, that man, for me at least, is Albert Meltzer.

*Stuart Christie*

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*Stuart Christie.*



*Let them turn to the bottle  
the Yogi and the rope,  
some of them go to Uncle Joe,  
some of them to the Pope –*

*one by one grown prosperous  
of excellent intent  
they set their names on the payroll  
of God and Government;*

*one is turned evangelist,  
another is turned Knight:  
let them go wherever they wish –  
we will stay and fight.*

*I may come to the light at last  
as others have come there:  
I think they will not put my bones  
in Moscow's Red Square:*

*I can turn both my coat and mind  
as well as any man –  
I think they will not put my head  
towards the Vatican.*

*All fierce beasts grow corpulent,  
mature and come to hand.  
Lions lie down with sheepskin wolves –  
we will see them damned.*

Alex Comfort: "Maturity" from  
Haste to the Wedding

*Pues quien vence sin contrarlo  
Pues quien vence sin contrario  
no puede decir que vence.  
Calderon*

*Verloner Posten in dem Freiheitskriege.  
Hielt ich seit dreissig Jahren, treulich aus.  
Heinrich Heine*

# THE BACKGROUND OF THE MOVEMENT

Before the First World War, the British Anarchist movement received a great deal of attention by the Press (although most of it was highly inaccurate). Many social historians looking over newspaper files do not always appreciate how much is omitted or falsified. They see only the blacks and whites and a selected range of greys. Movements can be obliterated entirely (as much as nations) — they reappear to the surprise of the superficial historian.

Those who studied the social movements of the nineteenth century could not fail to understand the contribution of Anarchism to modern socialist theory yet, even to this day, an illiterate newspaperman will refer to "people calling themselves anarchists or "self-styled anarchists" (always avoiding the capital letter) for fear of a libel action, since, while not understanding the meaning of Anarchism, he fears the worst!

The pejorative use of the word "anarchist" as a synonym for "criminal" (though in fact most criminals, certainly in this country, are highly conservative in political outlook) goes back to the early twentieth century and derives from the French and Italian movements fighting against oppression. In regard to Russia, opinion in this country had largely been on the side of those using individual attempts against despotism (the Tsarist regime, like that of Abdul Hamid, was described as "despotism tempered by assassination"), until the Entente Cordiale with Russia, when the Russian Anarchists were relegated to the status of the Irish Republicans! Up to this day, some British newspapermen have not progressed beyond this interpretation\*, but it is not taken seriously at all by the public. When Colin Jordan, with a handful of followers, appeared in public in Nazi-type uniforms, he was taken seriously; and his movement faced enormous publicity as well as violent demonstrations from the public who assumed that the few supporters he had might introduce a regime of terror similar to Hitler's; however, Anarchists can hold demonstrations, meetings and so on, without let or hindrance so far as the public are concerned receiving, on the whole, respectful attention. If the public believed that they were, for instance, assassins of royalty — a fact which would not be determined by their numerical strength or weakness — would they not receive some hostile receptions sometimes from the many Court admirers? But they never do. It is not that they take the Anarchists seriously, but that they do not take the Press seriously (on which the latter might well reflect).

It cannot, however, be denied that individual terrorism has its appeal when one is faced with mass terrorism. I could never understand, as a schoolboy, why if the First World War were to be blamed on "one man, the Kaiser", it was so right to let millions die, and so wrong to take any action against that man. When the Communists insisted that van der Lubbe was an idiot or a Nazi spy because he wanted to blow up the Reichstag, I wondered what was so wrong with blowing it up, other than the fact that Hitler did not appear to be in it at the time. When I came to read Bartolomeo Vanzetti's letters, I realised for the first time that there was an Anarchist philosophy in its own right. Vanzetti appeared to be saying that government was unnecessary. I readily understood that various organs of Government were unnecessary — that one could dispense with the Army, the Police Force, the Civil Service, the Judiciary, or the Church. None of them, it seemed to me, were an essential part

\* A German Anarchist once pointed out to me that this misuse of the word saved him from death in a concentration camp: he persuaded the commandant that he was merely a criminal and not a political, a fact confirmed by the dictionary which stated baldly: Anarchist, der - Straussenrauber. Some English dictionaries have equally misleading meanings — one notes that often the dictionaries are still using turn-of-the-century definitions, so that "communism" means, in effect, Christian communism and utopianism, whereas "socialist" means State control of everything, or in the modern sense, communism. Those dictionaries which state that "anarchists" are agents of disorder give interesting definitions of "fascist" — usually, a supporter of Mussolini! — or "Nazi" but fail to mention that on any bright Spring morning in Buchenwald, between morning parade and the dinner break, the "national socialist" was able to kill as many people per five minutes as the Anarchists did in forty years of individual terrorism against despots in high places.

of society, some of them were disastrous graftings upon society. Nor could any of their functions, once dispensed with, be performed by any of the others. Surely the absence of the whole of the State machinery could not be mere chaos, as the dictionaries insisted. But not all the dictionaries. The exception made up for all the others. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, in its scholarly 1911 edition in a contribution written by Peter Kropotkin, made it clear that Anarchism meant the absence of all the organs of Government, and that this was a free society.

I began reading Kropotkin at school, before I came into contact with Anarchists. So little did I know of Anarchism at the time that, reading a newspaper reference to Josiah Wedgwood as an Anarchist, and not knowing that he was a Member of Parliament, I wrote to him asking if a movement existed in England. (The article was, of course, using the word as newspapermen sometimes do, in describing, say, Chaplin, or Priestley — to suggest that they are against authority, though the same newspapermen will use the word as a synonym for criminal). Mr. Wedgwood wrote back on House of Commons notepaper saying that everyone who wished him well should be in the Labour Party. I only knew of him, at the time, in connection with Staffordshire pottery — I certainly did not wish him all that well, and the correspondence ceased.

The Labour Party at the time (1935) stank to high heaven. Trotsky once "foresaw" that all that stood between the British Labour Party and the social revolution was the leadership of Macdonald, Snowden, Thomas and Co. The latter had since gone over to the Tories, but the L.P. was worse than ever. The Independent Labour Party had broken with it, and gone out on a limb under Maxton in favour of revolutionary socialism, but it did not need much perception to realise that (as George Padmore later said of it) its theories were in advance of its membership: it spoke of revolutionary socialism, but its membership was the old social-democratic-pacifist element which, while admittedly to the left of the Labour Party steered an uneasy course between Parliamentary reformism and the dictatorship of the Communist Party. Beyond the I.L.P. there was a vague and undefined socialistic body of opinion, then extremely strong though unknown to most people outside what was still "the working-class movement", to which I shall refer for convenience as "the outside left" (though it was never known as this). Many of them supported the I.L.P. but there was also the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the anti-Parliamentary Communists ("Spartacists" or "Council Communists"), and many former members of the British Socialist Party and the Social-Democrat Federation who had not gone over to the Communist Party but kept alive a pre-war socialistic tradition. In the "outside left" the Anarchists formed at least a significant part. It is true that few, if any, recruits came to them (or any of these groupings) between the Armistice and before the mid-thirties. The glamour of the Russian Revolution captured almost an entire generation. This was truest of all as regards the Anarchists, who had suffered a serious setback in regard to the apparent revolutionary initiative passing to the Marxist-Leninists, at the same time as the depression meant that the Anarcho-Syndicalist labour movements lost strength to the Social-Democrats (people became more afraid for their jobs) and the movement still felt the defection of some well-known Anarchists during the war, even Kropotkin, which had been followed by a period when some of the best-known agitators (such as Malatesta and Berkman) were silenced whilst a quietistic and almost social-democratic group of "Anarchist" theoreticians (Rocker, Shapiro, Souchy) became better known.

In order to understand the contemporary Anarchist movement it is necessary to reflect that because of this lapse of a generation, the movement when I came to it in 1935 consisted largely of old men and women, most of whom are now dead or retired out of sheer old age. As a result there are few in the movement who date back to the thirties. Hence the

preponderance of youth in the movement once again (whilst the Communist Party is an aging movement). When I first came along, post-war slumps had hit the movement and a surprising number had emigrated. The few under-forties were mostly sons and daughters of militants. Coming to the movement whilst still at school, I was often introduced to a meeting as "perhaps the youngest comrade here" to a group in their mid-fifties. One of the first things I was told by a Stalinist critic was that she "could understand some old fogey who had tried everything and gone through everything being an Anarchist, but not a youngster". Today, our critics can understand some young fly-by-night being an Anarchist but not someone approaching middle-age responsibility. (One never wins!). Recently I was introduced to a meeting as being perhaps the *oldest* present, a privilege I would gladly have forgone.

Up to the period of the First World War, the London movement, although small, had been extremely vigorous and an integral part of the "working-class movement". It was supported by a somewhat larger, if floating, immigrant movement, many of whom left the country either voluntarily or because of deportation. The comparative immunity granted to political exiles in pre-war days (despite the constant plotting of Tsarist agents to discredit Russian exiles, hence a massive bribery of police and use of agents-provocateurs) meant that London was a centre of international revolutionary activity and thought, something which Lord Palmerston had thought "only added to England's greatness" and which Herbert Morrison later thought "only caused unnecessary trouble for the police". The foreign section of the Anarchist Movement in London by the early thirties was only a remnant of this movement.

In a survey carried out for a mooted Federation of Groups (about 1933) by Espero White (daughter of one of the "settlers" at Whiteway, Stroud, which had been planned as a utopian colony), there were about 500 Anarchists in the whole country.

But of course this figure relates to the actual committed few who formed groups, subscribed to newspapers and so on and may be taken to represent the hard core. There were a far greater number who sympathised with anarchism and would no doubt have described themselves as anarchists, but who had, chiefly by reason of their trade union activities, engaged in a wider (but less defined) movement. A particularly good example is the movement in South Wales, which as it persisted longer than the corresponding movement in other parts of the country, I have dealt with in an appendix. There are no doubt other movements – in Liverpool, Birmingham, the North-East and so on – but only the scantiest of information is available. In Glasgow, where both the committed movement and the wider libertarian movement within the Labour movement, lasted longer and was more influential, it ran parallel with London. I have added an appendix in this case too.

It is certainly curious that the figure of 500 is the exact figure given thirty years later by George Thayer in his "British Political Fringe"\*. Perhaps it is a nice, easy malleable number. Some journalists would give a figure running into thousands (being incapable of distinguishing between Anarchists and Marxists).

There is no way of telling since there is no "census": one that applied in 1935 was that it was reckoned that someone was still "active" if they subscribed to a dinner once a year. The first I recall was at the old Food Reform Restaurant, where we collected £10 for the Russian political prisoners, and Emma Goldman said vigorously but with a certain uncharacteristic understatement, since they numbered some thousands, was good but not good enough.

At that time Emma Goldman dominated a good deal of such activity as was known to the general public. She had retained, in the limited circle that knew her, her United States reputation of "the notorious, insistent, enigmatical Emma Goldman". Deported both from the U.S. and from Russia, she was almost, in those days, in retirement. Whenever she visited London (which by reason of her having acquired British nationality by a *mariage de convenance* with a Welsh comrade, Jim Colton\*, was the only field open to her) she called together a clique of her old admirers and friends, most of whom, being foreign born, were out of touch with the current movement, certainly locally, together with a sprinkling of the old timers "who knew Kropotkin", and agitate for the Anarchist movement

to undertake this or that activity. She never understood that none of those present at such meetings were active in the movement or could speak for it; indeed (surprising as it seems today), some of them were actually members of the Labour Party or even the Communist Party, who had not dared to tell her so (so great a sway did she hold over her old admirers). Indeed, one regular attendee was a Conservative.

The Anarchist movement was not entirely bound up with the Emma Goldman movement, which by its nature did not have any effect; indeed, later it harmed our activity during the Spanish War and cancelled out much of the contribution that might have been made by this tireless propagandist. The main activities of importance in 1935 were in the unemployed workers' movement. At that time most political parties recommended State intervention as the cure for unemployment, unless they recommended no action at all. From the Fascists to the Communists, from the "Rooseveltian New Dealers" to the apostles of Social Credit, from the "New Party" to the Labour Party, all advocated public works, employment camps and the like. Nobody of the left opposed this for fear of being linked with those who advocated no action on unemployment (as being a healthy aspect); the introduction by the government of training schemes, work camps etc., meant that the Anarchists were the only active opposers of State intervention. Debarred from trade union activity (which was then almost a standstill because of the slump, and in any case in decline after the failure of the General Strike) militants found it possible to organise amongst the unemployed, and this was accentuated by the fact that many of the old Anarchist militants were unemployed (they were the first to go). The anti-State views of the Anarchists formed a justification for, and pointed ways of increasing, unemployed discontent. The main groups were in Shepherd's Bush and Camden Town, which accounted for (or was the result of) the high percentage of Irish in our ranks. McCartney, in South London, organised a strong militant group which used direct action in matters of pay and subsistence, and opposing work camps. On one occasion they even succeeded in blocking the work of the local council until they agreed to make certain jobs available. One of the active members of McCartney's group, Albert Grace, was later active in the docks and electrical industry and was one of the founders of *The Syndicalist*, later. McCartney wrote an interesting pamphlet on his reminiscences of pre-war London, entitled "The French Cooks' Syndicate" (this was not his original title), an amusing and informative account of struggles in the catering trade. George Orwell wrote a preface which was published by Freedom Press some ten years later.

Our main speaker in Hyde Park was Len Harvey (not the boxer) who had been, as a merchant seaman, one of the first British tourists to visit Soviet Russia. He told us of one of his shipmates, an ardent young Communist, who denied that prostitution still existed in Russia, since it would have disappeared with other vestiges of capitalism. His companions, who had been accosted by waterfront ladies from the moment of landing, just laughed.

A true Communist, this shipmate could not accept the evidence of his own eyes when it conflicted with Marxist theory, and asked the Intourist guide for an explanation. "These are former princesses who cannot acclimatise to the Revolution", she explained. When he repeated this story, the sailors gave hoots of laughter at the thought of those bedraggled whores being former princesses. But the Communist was adamant, there was no other explanation to fit the "facts". (When Len Harvey repeated that story on the platform in Hyde Park, a member of the C.P. protested to the police, asking for the speaker to be removed "for obscenity"\*).

Another of our speakers, though settled in Southend where he was a more regular speaker, was Mat Kavanagh. He had been active in the Anarchist movement since his youth, in Liverpool, Ireland, and up and down the country. It was mainly due to his efforts that the Anarchist movement was kept alive during the difficult period between 1914 and 1935, when he still had much to give the movement. His recollections of little-known working-class figures in the labour and Anarchist movements were always a source of great interest to the new generation, who could only spot fleeting references in histories to such men as Frank Kitz, Sam Mainwaring, George Barrett and so on (all of whom belong to the period 1900-35). A fragment of these recollections appeared in "Freedom".

Amongst the "old brigade" of Anarchists still alive and active in 1935, there were several who remembered the historic founding of "Freedom"

\* "The British Political Fringe", George Thayer, Anthony Blond Ltd., London, 1965.

\* See her book "Living My Life"; and the more recent "Rebel in Paradise" by Richard Drinnon. A (very) fictional account of her life was written by Ethel Mannin in "Red Rose"; a more realistic account in "Women and the Revolution" by the same author.

\* So much has the climate changed, even within the last ten years, that it now seems incredible that the police used to take careful notes of what speakers said in case they were "obscene" or "offensive", and even the word "bloody" could lead to arrest and a fine; even imprisonment. On one occasion professional orator Bonar Thompson protested, without avail, that in speaking of "bloody revolution", he was not swearing! (This must be incomprehensible to Americans).



in 1886 by Peter Kropotkin, Mrs. C.M. Wilson and others. Tom Keell, who had been its active publisher and printer during most of its working life (it had then ceased publication) was living in retirement in Whiteway Colony, to which we have referred as originally having been planned as a colony, of which the title-deeds had been burned, and which had originally been run on free communistic lines. There are several reasons given for its failure to continue, one of the most interesting having been given to me by Max White, who lived there for some time, namely, that as the children increased, the capacity decreased: either the "colonists" had to go and work in the outside world, or they could not have families. "Colonies" in isolation were economically impractical.\* Keell still distributed the old Freedom Press pamphlets which had been issued whilst the old (almost historic) printshop in Ossulston Street, Somers Town, was operative. In the absence of a "Freedom" but for an occasional "Freedom Bulletin" from Whiteway, the Chalk Farm Group, consisting of George Cores, J.R. Humphreys, a former railwayman, and Len Harvey, issued another paper, also called "Freedom", which was ultimately merged in the Glasgow paper "Solidarity" (which ceased publication in 1936 out of solidarity with "Spain and the World").

Some of the comrades then active went back even farther than "Freedom". For instance, Ambrose Barker actually remembered the first Anarchist paper, the *Cosmopolitan Review*, published by Ambrose Gaston Cuddon as a result of which the first initiatives for the First International came about. Taking advantage of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (as reactionaries warned the Prince Consort would be the case!). English workers in Cuddon's Radical Reformers Group approached French mechanics coming over for the Exhibition, with a view to certain types of common action. This group, too, invited Michael Bakunin to London. Ambrose Barker's companion, Ella Twynan, lived until recently, active in the secularist movement. (She presented Ambrose Barker's unpublished memoirs to a research group. These, like George Core's unpublished memoirs offer an interesting background to the working-class movement. Those of Mat Kavanagh were irretrievably lost).

The connection with the Continent had been maintained unbroken with the "immigrant movement" to which I have referred. The most militant was the Italian movement, which had always flourished in London (indeed, most of the Anarchist movements of the world have had some connections with Italy). It carried on an active propaganda against Mussolini, including propaganda by "deed", and in this connection, during the thirties, the *Daily Telegraph*, then ardently pro-fascist, had protested vigorously at the fact that a certain London Italian businessman was organising plots against the head of a friendly State, Il Duce, and that he was helping to finance a "murderous gang" who planned to overthrow fascism by removing its head. The businessman in question, a prominent member of the Anarchist group, brought an action for libel against the *Daily Telegraph* (against the principles of Anarchism, it is true, and also against reason, since in fact what they said was, whilst libellous and damaging, undoubtedly correct). It had the mortification of paying out several thousands of pounds which was diverted to further the work against il Duce and Italian Fascism.

Throughout the years of Fascism, Anarchist groups in England and America kept in touch with the struggle against Mussolini; although written off by socialists as "a dead movement", they appeared everywhere in Italy after Mussolini fell. It is noteworthy that one of the older militants, Corio, was actively concerned in the anti-imperialist struggle, and came to found the "New Times and Ethiopia News" together with Sylvia Pankhurst (daughter of the Suffragette pioneer and herself an active Suffragist for years until she moved to anti-Parliamentary Communism and the East London "Workers' Dreadnought").\* The paper later moved over to wholehearted support of Haile Selassie. Their son, Dr. Richard Pankhurst, became a distinguished economist in the Ethiopian service.

There had been, prior to World War I, a Yiddish-speaking anarchist movement amongst the Jews of East London (cf. Rudolf Rocker, "The London Years"). This had achieved a major success in its day but had long since disappeared (due partly to the disintegration of working-class Jewry, certainly to the disappearance of Yiddish as a language, and partly to emigration). The belief expressed by Herbert Read (in a preface to the same book) that it influenced the *kibbutzim* of Israel, is entirely fanciful. At all times this

movement had been larger than the militants who organised it: a few determined Anarchists had influenced a very large mass of workers at the "submerged" level and under. The trend to trade unionism of this movement was not only overtaken by orthodox trade unionism, but also by the possibilities of entering the lower ranks of capitalism afforded by the garment trade in its curious post-war ramifications. There had been a paper, the "Workers' Friend", and a club concerned with it (in which it is alleged Peter the Painter had come to paint scenery – one suggested reason for his nickname). At regular reunions, held until the sixties by its last secretary, E. Michaels, some of the veterans of this movement would come and exchange reminiscences though they themselves had long since left it for other parties. It tended to be regarded rather as some ex-servicemen regard the British Legion, a sort of haven of refuge from the present (once a year) and a glorification of the past to which there is no intention of returning.

The bulk of the Anarchists in the Jewish Labour movement were of Russian origin and in most cases the men returned to Russia at the time of the revolution, expecting to send for the women later – who had stayed to look after the children meanwhile. When most of the militants had perished, the women remained – a feature of Anarchist meetings in the East End in the 20's and 30's was the number of elderly Russian-Jewish women. It was something of a setback to the Young Communist League, then growing in influence, to find occasionally in the thirties that its members faced not merely the hostile criticism of a grandfather or father from a conservative or orthodox religious standpoint, but the "ultra-left" criticism of a grandmother or great-aunt.

There had been a small German movement in this country (which once published "Freiheit") but this largely disappeared, with individual exceptions, in the first World War. Only a handful of emigres from the German movement came to England in the Hitler years, partly because of government policy, but several prominent members of the Spartacist movement, including former seamen who had taken part in the Wilhelmshaven Revolt, came to London.\*

Most French comrades became completely integrated with the English-speaking movement, retaining no connections with France. There were one or two survivors of the Commune who lingered into the thirties, and many who left France during the police persecutions of the nineties (it must be remembered that the so-called individual terrorism of those days was a mild response to incredible police brutality including firing squads for Communards); even more came as a result of declining military service. I can remember only Stenzlitz, Dobny, Fitzmaurice. Many people alive then had known Louise Michel. The first lecture I ever gave on Anarchism was based on a book about the Commune and I took it for granted that the writer (a professor, no less) knew what he was talking about when he said that Louise Michel died in exile in New Caledonia. Almost all the audience remembered her! She had organised classes for the Kanakas in New Caledonia, and after the amnesty entered a new life of rebellion in Paris. It is somewhat of an irony that they have now named a Metro Station after her, since most of her activity was "underground". Louise Michel the Communard is now respectably remembered, if not Louise Michel the Anarchist.

Alexander Berkman paid one fleeting visit to England. But his active days were over. He was living in the South of France, and became tired of being a burden on others, committing suicide in 1936 – only a few weeks before the Spanish struggle in which he would gladly have plunged. In his London visit (January 1936) he spoke on Anarcho-Syndicalism, a term then coming to be used to distinguish a particular form of syndicalism. Recently, a student writing a doctorate thesis on Anarcho-Syndicalism informed me that he spent a vast amount of time looking up references to find where this term (as distinct from Anarchism and Syndicalism) was coined. His references were French, Russian, Spanish and Italian – he might be pardoned for not looking up Welsh references. The first to use it was Sam Mainwaring (sen.) of South Wales. It was, in fact, the English Syndicalist movement of Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and others, that had first used the term "Syndicalism" to mean something other than Trade Unionism – a term with which it is synonymous in the Latin languages.

The French unions were formed by men who wanted workers' power and sought to get it from unionism, whereas the English unions were formed, or at least influenced by parliamentarians. Thus there came to be a distinction between the French idea of Syndicalism and the English idea of Trade Unionism.

\* cf. Nellie Shaw: "Whiteway, a colony on the Cotswolds".

† Revived in 1965 as an Anarchist literary and satirical magazine by Ted Kavanagh (no relation to Mat).

\* cf. N. Lenin, "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder", in which he specifically denounces Sylvia Pankhurst, William Gallagher and others.

\* cf. "The Wilhelmshaven Revolt", Icarus, Simian Publications, 1975.



When the English "Syndicalists" formulated their programme – onwards from trade unionism – this distinction became clear. Syndicalism became a policy in its own right – signifying industrial unionism as well as workers' control. At this point, to distinguish the more libertarian form of Anarchist Syndicalism, Sam Mainwaring used the term "Anarcho-Syndicalist" (which was later used in France to distinguish between orthodox, and later increasingly parliamentary, "syndicalism" and revolutionary syndicalism, all of which was called "anarcho-syndicalist" at that time).

This Syndicalist movement, which must be treated separately from the Anarchist movement, spread to Australia and other countries. It was influenced by the American Industrial Workers of the World. It must be understood, for instance when reading Malatesta, Vanzetti, and so on, that when they refer to syndicalism they are not necessarily talking about anarcho-syndicalism – and their references to anarchists within the syndicalist movements sometimes refers to Continental Syndicalism, or Trade Unionism, in its parliamentary form; sometimes to its original more libertarian form; and sometimes to Anarcho-Syndicalism. (Some pedantic illiterates often bring in at this point Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* which has as much bearing on either syndicalist movement as Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, and was scarcely heard of in any of these movements, but which is important insofar as it "proves" a point: namely that syndicalism is working-class Messianism! – which, of course, is the criticism levelled against it by those who do not understand it, and in consequence, sometimes accepted by those who think they do).

In the German and Scandinavian countries, where the labour movement tended towards trade unionism, the term "Syndicalist" was still used – and can be to this day – to denote anarcho-syndicalism; in France and Italy, it became rapidly necessary to distinguish between "reformist" and "revolutionary" syndicalism, and the latter and anarcho-syndicalism. The term was first used, however, by Sam Mainwaring to explain the difference between an organisation like the Spanish C.N.T. (National Confederation of Labour) and the "Triple Alliance" movement in Britain around 1912. Sam Mainwaring was a fluent Welsh speaker and libertarian agitator. He died long before my time, but his work was carried on by his nephew (of the same name) Sam Mainwaring (jun.)\* visited London occasionally, notably when the Syndicalist Propaganda League was formed in January 1936 by McCartney, A.B. Sugg, and Stenzlite. It did not get off the ground but remained a propaganda organisation. Much of our efforts in those days seemed to be taken up with the need of combatting the Communist Party. It was necessary to fight the "Russian Revolution over again" as it were, as however much we might not want to discuss Russia and Russia alone, so many working-class militants were turning to Lenin's conception of Communism. Other critics of Communism appeared from within the Communist ranks: the battles between Stalinists and Trotskyists were being fought out. From then on the Stalinists dismissed us as petty-bourgeois! We considered, as Mat Kavanagh once put it succinctly: "The working-class here has some other jobs to do than decide which of two rival gangsters is to rule in the Kremlin".



Lilian Wolfe with husband Tom Keell and son Tom, in the grounds of Harlech Castle, 1917.

\* He was present at the 1936 Miners' Conference when they declared they were giving full aid to the Spanish Struggle; and he protested that, according to a bulletin he had received direct from Barcelona that very morning the Spanish miners' union had stated that they had received not one peseta for arms, medical aid nor anything else from the U.K. The union leaders were furious and puzzled. It had not occurred to them, Socialist bureaucrats and fellow-travelling Communists alike, that this Spanish miners'

union, being anarcho-syndicalist, was specifically boycotted by the Popular Front organisations collecting money for Spain. "You apparently do collect for Spain," he retorted to their insistence that they had sent money. "But for everyone except the miners!" The conference not unnaturally backed him and the platform promised to look into the matter, but if they did, nothing came of it, so far as I know.

# THE MID-THIRTIES

One of the faults that might have been charged against the Anarchist movement after the First World War was the tendency (to which it has often subsequently reverted) to cultivate every garden but its own. Anarchists, perhaps despairing of making their own movement effective, inclined to permeate other movements such as the anti-imperialist, anti-militarist, industrial and unemployed movements, such as were not inconsistent with their aims. This ensured that they remained a minority. Many of the movements were grateful for the participation of individual anarchists, but they resolutely refused to take the movement, as such, seriously, except for the constant testimony of the Anarchists against dictatorship and repression in Russia, which often resulted in noisy Communist (and Labour Party) interruptions of meetings. I have on several occasions since the War, when the Labour Party has become professionally anti-Communist, pointed out that the Labour leaders who either cold-shouldered or led a vigorous attack against such people as Emma Goldman in this campaign included such people as George Lansbury, Ernest Benn, Walter Citrine (until the mid-thirties), and others not thought of as "Left".

The comparative success of the movement amongst the unemployed has not been recorded elsewhere. (Most of the contemporary records rely heavily on C.P. sources). The idea of labour camps was stigmatised as making the unemployed prisoners of war of the State machine. This is a phrase again due, I think, to Mat Kavanagh, which echoed round the country, and helped to destroy the whole notion as *Lilliburlero* "whistled a king out of four kingdoms". To be sure no amount of action could find jobs where some existed, though on one occasion, at Hammersmith, it was undoubtedly the persistent nuisance value of the group that caused every one of its members to be found jobs. (This caused some heart-burning as to whether such tactics were justified — "had one jumped the queue?" as it were — but in fact the lesson was learned by many others). One of the tactics constantly urged was that of battling against the Means Test. It is surprising how many unemployed filled in the Means Test papers truthfully. "This was a direct assault by superior force upon the sub-living standards of those chosen for victims of the State", as one leaflet put it (I quote here from memory only). "Why should these victims respond with the exact truth? — why not with just sufficient truth to enable the old standards at least to be preserved?" Most of the rigorous measures taken against the unemployed were based on information given to the inquisitors. Even those who opposed the Means Test never pointed out how it could be sabotaged. We did.

There was even at one time a "Tramp's Union", in which Bill Gape was a central figure, and I think also, Tom Brown.\* Those who think that the Hippies are a new phenomenon should have heard the philosophy lucidly expressed by this brilliant speaker (notwithstanding his illiteracy — he was born before general education reached the country). A patriarchal type figure, with a flowing white beard, he went up and down the country speaking on Anarchism. He would not take collections when he spoke on Anarchism though he sold literature. "When I come to beg I do it as a professional; but there are no professional Anarchists," he would say. When I knew him he was already nearly a centenarian. During the Jubilee celebrations a hostile crowd tried to drag him from Tower Hill, where he was speaking. "What, you fools," he cried magnificently. "You think me a traitor to the King and you drag me away from the Tower? You have no sense of class loyalty but at least have a sense of historical fitness". A joke he told against himself was lecturing a group of tramps on the historical non-authenticity of Jesus. Afterwards, an old tramp came to him and said, "That was a beautiful sermon, Mr. Brown. You beat these bleedin' Sally Wads every time."

When Tom came back from his travels to London, he would report, sometimes over-optimistically, on the number of groups he had found. He insisted

ed that on one occasion he spoke to fifteen Freedom Groups in the course of one week; but in order to do so he had to cover the entire British Isles. The name "Freedom Group" has been lifted (without acknowledgement) by Mr. Edward Martell in recent years. It was used consistently since the paper "Freedom" was founded in 1886 in the English Anarchist movement to denote the group around the paper "Freedom" (when the paper was revived in 1944 the name used was "Freedom Press Group"), but more often to describe the many libertarian groups as distinct from anarchist groups — i.e. an anarchist group was one consisting of active anarchists, a "Freedom Group" tended to an open forum of lectures of more or less related causes but anarchistic in the main.

At one of the first Freedom Group meetings I attended we welcomed a Chinese comrade who had come to Europe especially to collect new anarchist literature for translation. The group in Shanghai had published a paper for years, even during the dictatorship, but they had few intellectual theorists and were anxious for new material to translate instead of older works. Everything by Kropotkin was in print in Chinese! Under the chairmanship of Harry J. Jones, we collected material for a new work in Chinese and prepared a summary of Anarchist ideas and principles, which our comrade translated. This is used to this day as a textbook by the illegal Anarchist movement in Mao's China.

In the trade union movement (prior to 1914) at least one Anarchist had attained a high position, namely John Turner, who became secretary of the shop assistants' union (some others, such as the Lawthers, ceased to be Anarchists on attaining position). Turner tried to reconcile his anarchism with a purely trade union position. It is true that his original activity took place before the unions, and his in particular (it was a particularly sweated trade), had degenerated into their later stage, but he remained in office though the union became increasingly reformist. The situation developed into farce in that he had constantly to decline the offer of a parliamentary seat, the refusal of which was deemed by his friends to be a test of his Anarchism. Besides him, there still remained in 1935 (and still extant until during the Second World War, when most of them died off) a group of "Trade Union Anarchists" of whom the most typical was George Cores. He was a likeable old man personally, a typical "Edwardian" proletarian who had moved beyond pure and simple trade unionism under the influence of Kropotkin, and was not prepared for parliamentary socialism nor exactly against it either. ("Our separated bretheren", one might say). The most telling criticism of people such as Cores was that they were not really Anarchists but advanced Liberals. In the early days of the movement some had rendered great service. In the early 1900's, one faced hostile crowds if one attacked the monarchy, or religion, or even referred to sex. John Turner had been deported from the U.S.A.

The tradition of Malatesta was well upheld in the activity at Hyde Park and elsewhere. Malatesta had held regular meetings at Finsbury Park which remained an open forum until the Second World War.\* It is interesting to recall that pre-World War II meetings were by no means confined to Hyde Park and on the contrary, every London park had its recognised meeting place, in addition to which there were a huge number of regular sites at which meetings were held, some by tradition or custom assigned to particular political groupings, others which were invariably used by religious revivalists, and some which were generally open forums. "Speakers Corner", or "Spouters' Corner", was not just the Marble Arch end of Hyde Park.

\* An old Tottenham barber who was a constant heckler at Finsbury Park meetings, every Saturday for forty years, (a forgotten species) gave me many interesting anecdotes of Malatesta, whom he remembered well but for one instance; the instance makes me reluctant to use any of his reminiscences. He confused Malatesta with Mussolini! He claimed he knew "Mussolini" well "when he was a red-hot Anarchist" and spoke at Finsbury Park. Mussolini was never an Anarchist nor in England. The description otherwise fitted Malatesta perfectly. (He was an electrician; small of stature; etc.). Malatesta did, furthermore, speak at Finsbury Park. I trust that the shades of both Italians, nationality being about all they had in common, forgave him.

\* Not to be confused with Tom Brown, author of "Trade Unionism or Syndicalism", or Tom W. Brown, to both of whom I shall refer later.



The encroachment of parking space, the increasing volume of noise and volume of traffic, the harassment of the police (always there) and finally political indifference, has killed off most of these sites. After years of hostility to Hyde Park speaking, when the Government finally killed it off for all serious purposes by the new car park and the erection of tunnels and channels, it also finally recognised it! On the new underground entrances appeared the official direction – "To Speakers' Corner". A belated recognition of the fact that official British propaganda for overseas invariably over the years cited Hyde Park as an instance of our love of free speech, and how anyone could get up and say what he liked and nobody would interfere with him (providing he was not obscene, no undue heckling began, he did not sell literature or announce it was being sold at the gates and above all, that the audience did not take him seriously). At a meeting of the then existing Tolstoy Group, Wood Green, the police insisted on knowing Mr. Tolstoy's address, and on being told that he was a Russian, the policeman nodded his head sagely, as if to confirm his worst suspicions.

As the situation of the thirties grew more intense, the political activity reflected in Hyde Park and elsewhere grew. Of the "outside left" speakers, undoubtedly one of the best ever to speak in the Park, in my estimation, was Tony Turner, of the Socialist Party of Great Britain who, despite (or perhaps, because of) some theatrical mannerisms spoke with decisive wit and at least as clear a logic as his fixed doctrines would permit. The Trots originally had an extremely clever team – Gerry Bradley, Starkey Jackson, and (for more cheerful banter) Dick Webster, who kept large audiences listening despite bitter and sometimes violent attacks by the Stalinists. The International Socialist platform (which had secretly, an anti-parliamentarian standpoint on the lines of the old Workers' Dreadnought, but avoided either supporting or criticising the C.P. on the grounds "there were greater enemies") had an enthusiastic following. The Freethought platform was active in many parts of London: Len Ebury, an able speaker, was still going strong in the early 70's. Bonar Thompson represented the "professionals". Originally he had been an Anarchist and suffered imprisonment in the First World War. Later, as a professional speaker (a precarious enough way of life; most speakers were voluntary and their collections did not cover the cost of hiring the platform, when they held any) he became (like John Barrymore in his old days, as I once pointed out to him, to his delight) a caricature of his old self in his days of greatness. For the record, I must mention that I once saw, in his old age, in poverty, neglected and forgotten, trying to speak in Hyde Park, the former Messiah of the Negro race, the "black Chaim Weizmann", Marcus Garvey. No sooner did he speak than George Padmore ran up to the platform and, within a few inches of his nose, began hurling insults at him. The insults were, I am sure, wholly justified; but here was a sad end to the man who once made the white Southern U.S.A. tremble! (Padmore at this time was still in the Communist Party).

The C.P. were often represented at Hyde Park, the Fascists only at demonstrations. Sir Oswald Mosley now sues for libel almost everybody who describes him as having been a Fascist. It is true that he was never so much a fascist as a fool. But with the example of Italy before them, people felt justified in taking even fools at their face value. The British Union of Fascists was then holding monster demonstrations. It was attracting support from many who had been repelled by the Communist Party and yet been attracted by the idea that the "State must intervene" which is what every single discussion of alleviating unemployment came down to. Those who imagine that "violence" is something peculiar to the younger generation and tut-tut about the activities of the "Bovver-boys" obviously did not know or have forgotten the mid-thirties, when violence was a common occurrence at political meetings and in the streets. What is not always realised is that where the Fascists had made inroads, the political climate changed completely. It ceased to be a question of arguing, as it always had been up to then; it became a question of one's fists. Many have blamed the Communist Party for this. Nobody could be more opposed to the C.P. than myself, but the truth is that they had always tried to avoid street violence for years, so far as England was concerned (the "battles for the street" that took place on the Continent did not take place here) because they thought that the English working-class would not stand for it, and that the English ruling-class would use every weapon to combat it, including the Army. Such violence was first introduced by the early (upper-class type) Fascists, against the General Strike, and later for the "defence" (from heckling) of Conservative meetings. When the British Union of Fascists began, it became an everyday occurrence. The C.P. was so obviously not the aggressor at first that it gained support from those who wanted to combat fascism. (Later it became essential to the survival of C.P. activity that "fascist provocation" should continue, and if necessary be fostered).

At our Anarchist meetings we tried to avoid any such manifestations which would have meant nothing. (We could scarcely have won the battle for the street anyway). We were invariably drawn into anti-fascist activity but always insisted that "the basic enemy is capitalism which produces fascism". To some extent we tried to avoid isolationist sectarianism by giving support to others, at least of the "outside left", attacked by fascists.\*

The stronghold of Mosley was then Bethnal Green, and was the only one he obtained in Great Britain. Whole streets at one time were "fascist" and he could go down there on warm nights and strut at playing dictators. (He far preferred doing this to building up his organisation or mixing with his own kind). People would give the salute out of windows. Kids used to play at "Jews" and "Blackshirts" in the schools, instead of cowboys and Indians (and "Jews" would often include those who came from the ghetto district, Whitechapel, whether Jews or not). It is odd to reflect that much of this psychosis was built up by working-class Jews in such instances as the famous "Battle of Cable Street", when a barricade was erected to prevent Mosley's march next day into the Jewish proletarian quarter. Fenner Brockway, then secretary of the I.L.P., persuaded the Home Secretary to divert the march "to avoid bloodshed". Supporters of the C.P. had been active in putting the East End almost on a war footing though they were not responsible for the famous Cable Street 'barricades' but jumped, in this instance, on the bandwagon. The delight that followed this diversion ("they shall not pass") was almost as great as if a major victory had been won over fascism. Yet next day, several clothing factories had to stop work while women rushed out with scissors, bricks and kitchen implements to "defend the schools", because of a rumour (quite possibly inspired by the C.P.) that the Blackshirts had, in revenge, marched back, now that the barricades were down, and planned to massacre the children! It should be remembered in fairness to those mothers that they were often kept up at night for hours, while loudspeakers blared outside in the streets as they vainly tried to get their children to bed, with echoes of the sort of thing that was happening in Germany. It was highly trying to the nerves in a slum area, and Mosley (who at no time molested a middle-class area with radio loudspeakers, but concentrated on those that were proletarian and largely Jewish) richly deserved the post-war frustration he suffered due to his never having been able to live this reputation down, despite libel actions, and despite the fact that many of his own class would have welcomed him back in the fold had they not feared to associate with him so long as they possessed any political ambitions whatever.

On one occasion (in the very earliest period of the Spanish struggle) we got well tangled up with the Fascists, at Highbury Corner. Our speaker, Jack Mason, found himself hurtled through the air when the platform was toppled over by some ardent admirers of General Franco. The next day, at Medina Road Labour Exchange, Jack was waiting in the queue when he saw the main person concerned coming in. Jack went over to him, there was an argument, the whole queue joined in, and the Fascist ran off. They then discovered that he was a local employer and the only one taking on staff that day anyway, which was quite important then. "Never mind, lads," said Jack, in his usual deadpan fashion. "He probably only wanted you for slave labour in Germany".



Oswald Mosley strutting about London

\* Thus avoiding the extreme sectarianism of the S.P.G.B. On one occasion, during the First World War, a patriotic crowd attacked a "peace" meeting addressed by Lansbury and others. One of the S.P.G.B. leaders who was present in the audience solely to listen and no doubt sell literature afterwards, jumped up onto the platform to prevent some "jingoes" beating Lansbury up. He was expelled "for appearing on a reformist platform" contrary to the doctrines of the S.P.G.B. laid down at its foundation and never altered. It was this same person who, later asked how someone like him who knew the S.P.G.B. principles unaltered from its inception, could go over to the C.P. and desert the movement he had grown up with, cried contemptuously: "It's not a movement, it's a bloody monument!"

# THE SPANISH STRUGGLE

When the Spanish struggle began in July, 1936, our movement found itself the focus of interest at least amongst that limited minority which understood what was going on in Spain, and that it was not merely a military rebellion against a democratic government nor an aspect of "Fascism v. Communism".\* Our first open-air meeting was at Paddington, the first to be held in London for some time outside Hyde Park or Clapham Common, and the attempt to start a series of "mass meetings". It seemed an ideal "pitch"; especially as a crowd of two or three hundred gathered within minutes of the platform going up. What we did not know was that this was a regular B.U.F. pitch, and this was their regular crowd. The bulk of the "anti-Fascists" who came to heckle disappeared when they found it was not Sir Oswald or Jeffrey Hamm but "only" on the Spanish Revolution, and we were left with a mob of hostile Fascists. Some of them departed when their meeting opened on the street corner next to ours, but the remainder stayed on, convinced we had deliberately "stolen their pitch". (This was a favourite trick in those days, and we were capable of doing it; but it so happens this was purely an accident!). I opened the meeting for the main speaker, Mat Kavanagh, and some toughs in the audience began throwing pieces of mud. Mat, an old tactician, passed up the advice, "Go on talking". Suddenly, an old lady (whom I did not know, one of the old comrades of the pre-war struggle) belted one of the Fascists over the head with her umbrella, crying indignantly, "A young boy has taken the trouble to explain to you that a free society is being built and all you can do is to throw dirt". About six of them grabbed at her, at which a dozen Irish labourers (actually only in the audience waiting for the nearby pub to open) waded in indignantly on our side and threw them out of our meeting, perhaps a shade too effectively, since the whole audience disappeared in a twinkling. Our allies came over and shook hands, saying, "Good for you Ma," and adding the somewhat surprising, "We won't let these dirty bastards get away with burning churches over here," indicating that they had perhaps got their lines crossed somewhere.

The meeting was symptomatic of many lively ones in the early summer of 1936. The direct participation by Anarchists in the Spanish struggle proved a great stimulus to our movement here, though one must discount the suggestion sometimes made by superficial commentators that this alone created the movement here by a wave of the wand. Had there been no movement here, nobody could have known anything of the contribution made by Anarchists in that struggle nor of the libertarian nature of the revolution. Many of our comrades volunteered for Spain, as did, of course, large numbers of the left everywhere. But when the C.N.T. was contacted (and it was extremely difficult to make direct contact in the early days, though their bulletin began to arrive shortly after commencement of hostilities\*) it

\* Contemporary newspaper accounts are of surprisingly little use. There was a "boy-cott of silence" against the Anarchists only occasionally broken - e.g. the "Daily Express", warning the Labour Party against opposing Franco, stated "let us assure the Socialist Party here that the Anarchists are not 'revolutionaries' of the Ramsey MacDonald or even former Ramsey MacDonald school. They are bitter, earnest, sincere, real revolutionaries". But they did not go on to reveal much about them! The "Star" carried pictures of the funeral of Durruti referring to him as a "great patriot" (!) A lengthy reply from an Anarchist puzzled them no end. They stated, "As we see the Spanish situation, those who want the libertarian revolution and those who want the democratic Republic have joined forces". Not a very succinct summary. Mr. Attlee, visiting Spain, was asked by a representative of the C.N.T. why it did not receive support from the T.U.C. since he had assured them that British labour was with the Spanish struggle, and Mr. Attlee explained that "little was known" of the C.N.T. in England; on his return, he did not add to that little piece. For an assessment of the role of the Anarchists, one must turn to an extensive library of books on the Spanish Civil War, from every conceivable angle pro and contra, and ignore the useless English Press files.

\* The C.N.T. - F.A.I. (Boletín de Información) appeared regularly from start to finish; it was produced in several languages and affords an interesting source of documentation to anyone studying the Civil War. I have no knowledge of where files are now available; my own files were seized, amongst numerous other documents, by Scotland Yard in 1944 and never returned.

specifically refuted the fact that it wanted foreign volunteers. It did not mind a small token number just for show (and even then only used them for foreign propaganda; most of those in its propaganda section were Germans or Russians, with one Scottish radio announcer, Ethel MacDonald, who had been active in Glasgow) but its viewpoint was that, with the support of several million Spanish workers, it did not need foreign volunteers; what they were sorely and desperately in need of was friends abroad, especially those who could take some sort of action, and the idea of "depopulating" any possible source of militant support filled them with the utmost dismay.

Notwithstanding some of the C.P. claims, and other glamourising of the International Brigade, the truth is that only the C.P. with its lack of support in Spain, felt that it would be a psychological boost to them. They did not want to rely too openly on Russian backing. The Brigade was a powerful shot in the arm to them. At one period, the C.N.T. and U.G.T. together tried to damp down the enthusiasm of foreign volunteers, owing to the influx of Communist controlled police. "Find them something to do for Spain", they urged. Unfortunately, 1936 was still a period of both unemployment and fascism, and refugees from German and Italian controlled countries had nowhere else to go, unemployed nothing else to do; even the C.N.T. was obliged to form one or two foreign brigades, German and Italian in particular, since these volunteers could not go home. But even the C.P. did not allow its members in key industrial positions volunteer for the International Brigade.

So far as our movement in London was concerned, it was a frustration that we were not wanted in Spain and yet not powerful to act decisively on behalf of Spain, even in a small way. "Bring the attention of the working class to Spain", they urged, when everyone in the country was talking about the King and Mrs Simpson. Fortunately, we were able to pull off one magnificent stroke, in circumstances beneficially farcical.

A comrade from the Chalk Farm Group, Alf Rosenbaum, ran a one man cut-make-and-trim tailoring workshop in an attic in Soho Square. The rest of the building was occupied by a gigantic corporation of worldwide fame, which had spread over from next door.

Alf had been active in the movement as a boy in Poland, and in England. He had been active in the campaign for Russian prisoners throughout the '20's. When the Spanish War broke out, he was approached by one of the Spanish delegates who came over (I think it was Blasco Velazquez) to organise a purchase of arms from Czechoslovakia. Vasquez had been invited to a meeting of the Freedom Group, held at Rosenbaum's workshop, and had been impressed by the fact that it appeared to belong to this vast commercial building (owing to the lease they had been unable to take the attic which possibly would have been of little use to them in any case). Here was an impressive address from which to buy arms.

The only arms which the Spanish Republic could obtain at all were paid for with gold, and came from Russia. These went to the official Republican forces and remained under C.P. control, and were furthermore, often "seconds" if not scrap metal. (The idiocy of not seizing the gold was apparent). Mexico sold arms to the Spanish Republic, without political concessions, which were serviceable and less costly. These, too, went to the Republican command though not necessarily to the Communists. The C.N.T. - F.A.I. urgently wanted to buy arms since they were deliberately starved of arms by the Republic, which then blamed them if their sectors were weak. In particular, the Saragossa front was a key issue. Had they liberated Saragossa, a town as anarchistic as Barcelona, there would have been certain success over Franco and for the social revolution. They loyally sent troops to the Madrid front - had they only been as "uncontrollable" as they were accused of being, they would have gone all out to capture Saragossa and ignored Madrid if necessary (which the Republican command would have had to defend itself, and could have done). Communist treachery could not have gone so far had it been faced with Barcelona Saragossa, but this was not to be. The Non-Intervention Pact forbade any



one to buy arms for Spain, ostensibly for either side; in practice, Hitler and Mussolini supplied Franco, while France, under the Socialist Leon Blum, observed the pact together with Britain. The Czechs were prepared to sell arms if the money was there, but in practice it appeared that only arms for General Franco got through, since Czech shipments had to come through German territory.

Using the name of a certain great commercial concern in vain, therefore (but directing replies to Mr. Rosenbaum the arms purchasing agent on the top floor) Vasquez placed large orders with the Czechs for arms to be sold to "General Franco" from Hamburg by an Irish ship. It was "unfortunate" that the ship happened to be calling at Bilbao and the arms were seized by the C.N.T. A similar mishap occurring three times, the Czechs finally cancelled shipments and informed the Non-Intervention authorities. A Special Branch officer called at the impressive building, and discovered to his horror that, as he put it, "a little Jew tailor has been making fools of us" — the operative word being *us*, since the National Government was not supposed to be pro-Franco.

About five of us were threatened with prosecution but nothing came of it (perhaps this was because we had "made fools of them") though it took years to live the matter down. As I will relate a decade later it was still thrown up at me. An amusing sequel is that a year afterwards, Alf Rosenbaum received, to his surprise, a substantial cheque from the Czech arms firm, whose bureaucracy was no more efficient than any other. This was his commission and included a bonus as having topped a target figure! Although Alf actually had the bailiff in his workshop at the time, he scrupulously refused to touch the money. He would have torn up the cheque but was persuaded to devote it to other purposes. (It helped to finance the showing of the film "Fury over Spain").

Directly as a result of this episode, we got into contact with Captain J.R. White of Ladysmith, and himself a former Army officer. He had later become a Republican (though a strong Protestant) and helped to drill Connolly's Citizen Army for Easter Week, 1916. He remained a strong nationalist and republican, but fierce anti-Catholic, (accentuated by a personal clash with the Church which had interfered in his domestic life). When the Spanish War broke out, he took a mixed brigade of Republicans, Socialists and Communists to Spain. They took part in several actions in Spain, but of course one they particularly relished was on the docks at Dublin, when they clashed with the *other* Irish Brigade (under General Duffy) which went to fight for Franco. (Years later, in a Cairo prison, I was discussing Spain with a cellmate who said he had been a member of the Irish Brigade...we exchanged names and places and became suspicious that neither seemed to know anything of those mentioned by the other... until we both simultaneously became aware by geographical reference that we were talking about opposite sides...an awkward silence ensued).

White was highly delighted with the success of the Soho Square scheme, its audacity appealing to his sense of humour. He shortly became extremely critical of Communist Party tactics in Spain, from the military point of view (their political scheming was disastrous, and those who even today still seek like Claud Cockburn, to excuse their attitudes on the ground that "it was essential to win the war," are talking nonsense; they had their way all round; and they lost the war) as well as from the political. When the C.N.T. asked him to disband the Irish Brigade, as a "thin end of the wedge" against the other International Brigades, which served no ultimately useful purpose and were become a loaded propaganda weapon, he did so; and returned to England to speak at meetings on behalf of the Spanish struggle.

By this time the C.N.T. — F.A.I. had started a London Bureau, which was in effect Emma Goldman, with the assistance of Ralph Barr as secretary. Barr had been active in the unemployed struggles, and was at the time secretary of the Hammersmith Freedom Group.

The C.N.T. — F.A.I. Bureau began a series of meetings throughout the country, in which Emma co-operated with the local militants (to do her credit, once she met them, she preferred them to her admirers!) though it was entirely the decision of the Bureau to hold meetings in many cases in co-operation with the I.L.P. and to select speakers "from as wide a field as possible", which in practice meant getting a few I.L.P. speakers who in the main were no more "well known" than Emma Goldman herself. Emma was in fact not an excellent speaker (despite her earlier successes in the U.S.A. as a lecturer, for which I cannot account — I only knew her in her old age), she was not well-known

and she had an unerring faculty for picking unknown "celebrities". (On one occasion, through the good offices of show business friends, I was able to induce a dumb, politically unconscious starlet, whose name was almost a household word to agree to turn up at a concert Emma was organising. But Emma turned her down flat. "Who is this stupid woman?" she demanded).

It was in fact a great pity that Emma did not have the opportunity of serving the Spanish cause in the U.S.A., but she could not return there, the deportation order served on her in 1920 still being in force. There she was well known and in turn well understood her audiences. Eventually, when the Spanish War was over, she packed her bags and went to Canada. The newspapers gave her headline treatment and her meetings were packed. It was the sheer dead weight of the Barcelona foreign propaganda branch of the C.N.T. — F.A.I. that kept her in England. It now included the whole of the reformists: Shapiro, Souchy and others. (Oddly, Emma herself, though "one of them" in most ways, never compromised as they did; even as the "ambassador" for the C.N.T. — F.A.I. she did not support the compromises made). To them Emma was irreplaceable in London. What was never understood was that if their London Bureau had any sort of activity at all, it was despite its existence and not because of it. Its own ventures were amateur. It invited Quaker speakers and canvassed Christian pacifist addresses to come to a meeting on behalf of relief funds for Spain, and then scolded them for not sending Arms. At a peak of achievement, Emma managed to get Paul Robeson to head the bill for her at a special concert at the Victoria Palace, and then slammed into him in the dressing-room because of his support for Stalin. Robeson patted her shoulder and calmed her down. He was bigger than his Stalinism.

Ralph Barr (who is a little unfairly treated in Ethel Mannin's "Red Rose" as "Charlie Banes", in which the most convincing character is "Mary Thane", or Ethel Mannin herself) was well aware of the problems involved in a "dual movement" being created, that of the militant Anarchist movement from which he had come, and that created by the C.N.T. — F.A.I. — or more properly, by its foreign propaganda department, solidly in the hands of the old reformist wing of Souchy etc. — which would invariably be made up of the "Emma-Goldmanites" who, committed as they were to various political parties, would be of little ultimate use other than in humanitarian fund-raising. Unlike Emma Goldman who knew few people outside her circle, he was aware that the only activities worthwhile would come entirely spontaneously and from outside the C.N.T. — F.A.I. London Bureau, or Committee. It is easy to sneer at "spontaneity", a theory which can be taken to extremes, but this did not happen.

The most intelligent suggestion as to what then should have been done came from Frank Leech of Glasgow; I should label him, and Mat Kavanagh, as the two men most responsible for the evolution of the Anarchist movement in the thirties, coming just after (in time) Tom Keell and George Barrett. Frank Leech's suggestion was that the C.N.T. — F.A.I. London Bureau should take on another name, and devote itself purely to humanitarian fund-raising, at which Emma Goldman would have been adept, and in which she could rely on her "influential" friends. It was only necessary to refer to the labour unions of Spain, the libertarian forces, and so on; it was not necessary to stress that they were anarchistic; the C.P. in appealing for funds for its own organisations always referred to them as "democratic", "republican" or "anti-fascist" but made sure that such funds never went to the relief of dependants or medical aid for members of the labour unions taking the brunt of the struggle. Surely those unions were entitled to appeal on their own behalf? Later, and too late, the C.N.T. saw the point of this policy and initiated the "S.I.A." (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity).

Frank's point then was that the Anarchists here should and could take the initiative in making the work of the Spanish Revolution known; and to press for action on behalf of Spain. This was beyond the abilities of the C.N.T. — F.A.I. London Bureau; a fact which I personally felt should be known in Barcelona. I accordingly wrote to the secretary of the C.N.T. in Barcelona, in the grand offices they then had in the Via Buenaventura Durruti (formerly, and — alas — subsequently the Via Layetana), a complaint he passed on, no doubt in all innocence, to Souchy, who of course informed Emma of this snake in the grass. Emma's admirers from her periphery of the movement had fits at this temerity — I must even now laugh when I think of the meeting at which a copy of this letter was produced and the astonished faces on some of the old gang. One in particular, a Mr. Sutton (actually a member of the Liberal Party!) was so outraged that he tried to defend me — pointing out that it must be a forgery. Later, when the Communists were smuggling out the gold reserves of the Republic, on Franco's victory, Souchy, a devoted bureaucrat to the end, could only think of smuggling out his precious documents, one of which was this letter.

Proving Frank Leech's point about "spontaneity" there appeared unherald-

\* He dealt with it extensively in his memoirs, part of which he once read at a meeting. I cannot trace whether they have been published yet.

His pamphlet, "The Meaning of Anarchism", indicates I think fairly clearly that he never really became an Anarchist; he perhaps accepted that some organs of the State could disappear. He remained more or less in agreement with the Anarchists whilst their activity was purely anti-Fascist.

ed and unannounced in November 1936 the first issue of "Spain and the World". It began as a purely individual reaction to the events in Spain by an English engineering student, who had previously had no connection with the Anarchist movement (although his father E. Recchioni, had been an Italian Anarchist). Its appearance was first related to the London Committee's meetings some weeks after it had already appeared, and it was enthusiastically received, but the entire work of editing, writing, proof-reading and preparing generally (as well as of its finance) remained that of the young editor, Vero Recchioni (anglice Vernon Richards). Although there were other anarchist publications going, they ceased publication on the appearance of "Spain and the World", if only because it was immeasurably in advance technically of anything that had been seen for some years (a standard which was to become one set by its editor for a long time). Support and encouragement came from Tom Keell. He had been waiting for many years to find a group with nationwide support that could take over the distribution of Freedom Press pamphlets, which had remained in print a long time (and many of which were preserved in stereo). Hence the appearance of "Spain and the World" gave birth to Freedom Press Distributors which, while not publishing in its own right, reissued the pamphlets and literary heritage of the movement of 1900-30. The period 1930-36 had been barren of new literature or even reprints.

Vernon Richards has since written that his main encouragement came from Tom Keel and Max Sartin (editor of the New York Italian paper *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*). "Spain and the World" had an international circulation from the very beginning, in particular in the United States. In its early issues appeared articles from some of the old guard still extant, such as Max Nettlau, Pierre Ramus (who wrote anonymously), Emma Goldman. It was one of Vernon Richards' personal idiosyncrasies that he did not seek even the minor publicity attached to signing his name not only when "Spain and the World" first appeared, but for a generation afterwards. Various pseudonyms were used as imprints and signatures to articles. The effort of bringing out a paper singlehanded while still studying may seem incredible, but over the following three decades, it was seldom that he did not continue to be either entirely or partially responsible for the production of his paper, purely as a spare time activity. Later he became associated with Marie-Louise Berneri, who came from Paris to join him as his companion. She was a daughter of the Italian militant Camillo Berneri, editor of *Guerra di Classe* in Paris, later in Barcelona, who was active for years in the anti-Fascist struggle, first against Mussolini, then against Franco. He contributed some philosophical works to the Anarchist movement, but his daughter's contribution to the movement was far greater than her published theoretical works would indicate, chiefly as a clarifier of ideas, which was the major contribution of the English-speaking movement to the anarchist philosophy.

Marie-Louise was one of the most ardent critics of the compromises made in Spain, and her association with "Spain and the World" ensured that it did not fall into line with the general policy of the C.N.T. London Bureau. Camillo Berneri was, in Spain, a critic of Federica Montseny (his criticism was published in "Spain and the World") and the ill-fated policy of collaboration with the Government. An uncompromising opponent of the Stalinists, he was ultimately murdered by them during the May events in Catalonia, in 1937. The "tragic week in May" was the supplement of an extra supplement in "Spain and the World" containing the official C.N.T. apologia for its restraint in the face of Communist provocation. It is interesting to note, in regard to the May events, that an activist minority of Anarchists, protesting against the compromises and seeking a return to anarchist methods of struggle rather than incorporation with an increasingly militaristic struggle, calling themselves "Amigos de Durruti". The original "Friends of Durruti" was formed in London in January 1937, taking the name of this outstanding figure in the Spanish struggle, for a group seeking an activist policy on behalf of Spain. (It may be noted, as a footnote for the art historian, that its meetings were held in the basement flat of Mark Gertler, in Highbury).\* I was the secretary of this group; which later was formed into two groups, one in Paris, the other in London. The taking of the name by the Barcelona group was, of course, in no way connected. It is interesting however to note that in a controversy in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1965 it was suggested that the Friends of Durruti were responsible for the murder of Durruti! Had I felt disposed to take a libel action, this would have been as good a time as any that has ever presented itself. I contented myself with dignified protests in its letter columns.

\* Gertler became an Anarchist under the influence of the Spanish Revolution to which he was possibly introduced by Herbert Read. He said on one occasion that if the movement there was defeated, he would commit suicide. He did in fact commit suicide, but the reason has been glossed over by the art historians who prefer to dwell on his years in the "Bloomsbury Set".

It may be said that the events in May, 1937, made the first sharp and clear distinction between those who supported anarchism and the revolution in Spain, and those who merely supported "anti-fascism but more of it". Emma Goldman's meetings became much livelier as the Communist attacks upon the revolution in Spain meant that once more anarchists faced hostile C.P. audiences (though this time it was the C.P. attacking the Anarchists rather than the Anarchists criticising the Russian dictators!). During the early days of the Spanish Revolution, the British Communists had refrained from attacking the Anarchists too violently. Writers such as Ralph Bates, or Ramon Sender, had written novels which showed the Anarchists as the main body of the Spanish working class. Those International Brigadiers who went over could not but acknowledge that whatever criticisms they might have of the anarchists, these were only criticisms of the Spanish working class. They could not both glorify them and attack them, so they agreed, "The Anarchists are doing a lot for Spain" in private conversations, but shook their heads over the poor peasant mentality that still permitted freedom to raise its ugly head. What could they say when anyone complained: "If only the German Communists had shown as much fight?" Amongst the Popular Front audiences there was an uneasy feeling that maybe the Anarchists were the better anti-Fascists. I recall one conversation with a C.P. couple - "The Anarchists are cut-throats!" cried the husband in horror. His wife asked however, "But if it's the Fascists' throats they are cutting?" to which he nodded agreement. After 1937, when the Communists came out openly on the side of counter-revolution in Spain and attacked, from within the Republican lines, the workers' collectives and militias, the C.P. line naturally changed and they lumped the Anarchists together with the "trotskyist" and Poumists. Whereas we had once faced hostile fascist audiences over Spain, we now faced hostile C.P. and Fascist mixed audiences.

To one meeting in South London we invited Emma Goldman to speak. She brought along her usual supporting "stars", when she faces suddenly the hostile shrieks from the audience, someone (obviously a fascist) shouted at her that she ought to go back to Russia. "So", she cried. "This is typical Stalinist perfidy. When a Russian is prepared to bow down to Stalin, he is worshipped. But when a Russian is against Stalin, they cry out, down with the Russians, send them back to Russia! And why do they want Emma Goldman in Russia? Because when they get her there they will kill her!" This was a most effective reply, wires crossed or not, which silenced the lot (except Ethel Mannin, who was in the chair, and whispered across frantically, "He's a Fascist, not a Communist" as if it mattered).

These meetings, held by Emma as "Ambassador for Catalonia" (as she was sometimes jokingly called; actually the accredited representative of the C.N.T. - F.A.I.), were usually an alliance with the I.L.P., which did not please most Anarchists. The charge of "sectarianism" was of course made, but many of us felt that the I.L.P. merely basked in the glory of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. for its own electoral possibilities, such as they were, and meant absolutely nothing to English audiences. Where it could hold good meetings was in Scotland, but even Emma realised that the Scottish Anarchists were able to command far larger audiences without the encumbrance of Maxton, McGovern, etc.

Several books at this time began to deal with Anarchism - those on the Spanish Civil War could hardly avoid it. Secker and Warburg commissioned Rudolf Rocker to write "Anarcho-Syndicalism", a useful book (later brought out in a cheap edition by Freedom Press), though its heavy style made one wonder how the author obtained so high a literary reputation. It was possibly written directly into English rather than translated from German.

Early in 1937 the Anarcho-Syndicalist Union was formed. It in the main inherited the membership of the Hammersmith Freedom Group, and met in the Goldhawk Mews offices of the C.N.T. - F.A.I. London Committee. The aim was to form specifically an anarcho-syndicalist union. There was already in existence the Syndicalist Propaganda League, which had been working towards this end, and which considered it premature to announce that an industrial union had been formed, which of course was indisputable. The old argument of minority syndicalist movements arose (does one announce that one has a syndicalist movement in being *before* having backing in the workshop, in the hope of getting it, or not?)\* Its aims and

\* An oddity was that the A.S.U. applied for membership of the International Workers' Association, which was supposed to be a union of anarcho-syndicalist unions; its application was rejected, on the grounds that it was merely a propagandist body, and not bona fide industrial, in a letter signed by Soucliy soi-disant secretary of the German F.A.S. (in 1937!). After the war when the S.W.F. was formed, with a far smaller membership, the I.W.M.A. had perforce changed its views on the subject, having scarcely any "bona fide" industrial unions left, and accepted it as an affiliate. It stayed such when the membership was down to two.



principles were published in an extremely badly written pamphlet, illustrated with diagrams to explain decentralisation.

The membership of the A.S.U. grew very rapidly; partly because of the industrial activities, particularly by Alex and Etta White in Dagenham, and had its one and only industrial dispute at Lyon's Cadby Hall; more particularly because of the public to which it was introduced by the sales of "Spain and the World". The immense propaganda effort made by Frank Leech and others in Glasgow — in a burst that went from 1936 to about 1950 — also had its repercussions. Although the Glasgow group at that time was active (it had become the Anarchist — Communist Federation, following the secession of the Anarchists from the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, a council communist movement built up by Guy Aldred, of whom more later), it dropped its paper, "Solidarity", in order to support "Spain and the World", and with the drift south, the industrial activities were supported by many Scots engineers. It must however be admitted that the opportunities held by the A.S.U. at that time were lost, for which several reasons may be adduced, one being the absorption of many activities by the C.N.T. — F.A.I. London Bureau. The unemployed movement, in which we had many active supporters, still remained the field of success rather than the factory floor.

The initiative in the London group for dropping many superfluous papers came from Leah Feldman, who had been active in the anarchist movement since her early days in Russia and had participated in the Makhnovist movement during the Revolution. She had also built up a federation of supporters in Palestine, subsequently returning to London and Glasgow, working as a fur machinist, and constantly active up to the time of writing despite encroaching blindness. There were some pangs at the "slaughter of the innocents" when the various small papers disappeared, particularly in regard to "Freedom", which had been first published in London in 1886, founded by Kropotkin and others. When Keell had retired, he had nobody to whom to hand over the editorship, and occasionally published a "Freedom Bulletin". There had of more recent times been a new "Freedom" (sometimes denied by chroniclers of the movement as being in "the canon"), published in Chalk Farm by Harvey, Humphrey, Cores and others, which survived several years, but was now a sorry shadow (being incorporated with two other papers). Freedom Press, which had gone to Whiteway, returned to life as Freedom Press Distributors, an outlet for the pamphlets published over the years by Freedom Press of which it still retained in stereos.

One activity which came to life again at this time were the weekly lecture meetings which had virtually ceased in the early thirties. The Freedom Group (in this context, the group that had published "Freedom" in Chalk Farm) began them again in the old Emily Davison Rooms in High Holborn (now taken over by a skyscraper). The series introduced a variety of speakers, including Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, F.A. Ridley, Dinah Stock, Herbert Read, and no less distinguished hecklers than Krishna Menon and the (self-styled) King of Poland. Later the series was interrupted for a year or so, and resumed in 1941 (since which they have become a regular feature of London life, having been held persistently for 25 years Sunday after Sunday with audiences ranging from nought to one hundred).

Our outdoor meetings were then run by Tom Williams, Patrick Monks and myself; I have not since spoken outdoors. Pat Monks was the originator of many original banners for demonstrations.

In addition to our propaganda work, and the larger meetings, selling of "Spain and the World" and similar activities took up much time considering the voluntary and inevitably part-time nature of the movement, but there was some industrial work undertaken, particularly amongst the busmen. In addition, individual anarchists were constantly called on for the sort of work that the M.P. is believed to undertake — individual cases against landlords etc. At one meeting, I recall McCartney saying "We ought never to be discouraged by the fewness of our numbers; I look on us here as delegates from all over London, even though we can't call on lawyers like the C.P." (An allusion to the C.P. gift for utilising its legal brains in hardship cases). "Ah," said Mat Kavanagh. "They come to us when they're in the wrong as far as the State's concerned, and know the bloody lawyers are no use!"

Among women comrades active in this period, one must mention Clara Cole, a veteran of the suffragette movement (and widow of the cartoonist Gilbert Cole) who supported us vigorously in the Spanish, and anti-war struggles. Janet Grove (resident in the Forest of Dean, and particularly active in the cause of the gypsies) often came up to give a hand at meetings.

At one meeting in the Conway Hall in 1937 we heard an entirely new speaker, quite different from the "name" speakers at an Emma Goldman meeting, who spoke directly from the factory floor: Tom Brown (not the "old" Tom Brown, though he is so now). It was the first time he spoke in London (being a newcomer to London, if not to the movement, having been a syndicalist for many years previously in Durham). He had a fine commonsense delivery and spoke

wittily and logically. Many of Emma's meetings had failed in the sense that while calling passionately for action to help Spain, they made no clear lead other than to make a purely political appeal for arms or medical supplies. The National Government had no intention of lifting the arms embargo and no resolutions would make it do so. Tom Brown's case was a logically argued one for industrial action, which dismayed the I.L.P. politicians at the meeting.

A great deal of humanitarian support was raised for Spain by Emma Goldman's campaign ("Spain and the World" formed an orphan's colony in Spain, and Basque children coming to England were cared for at Street, in a joint venture by the C.N.T. and the I.L.P.) but its ultimate objectives were in the main merely to attract people purely on the basis of their repugnance to Fascism — all very well in its way, but the C.P. did that sort of thing much better — and much more dishonestly. For years the C.P. desperately helped to build up Mosley's popularity simply to show itself as the only alternative. They shamelessly advertised his meetings for years ("all out to Ridley Road to stop Mosley" — otherwise he would have had no crowd!) To us as anarchists this was a "Dutch auction" in which we wanted no part. "Anti-Fascists" of this sort who came into the A.S.U. finally outnumbered Anarchists, and the A.S.U. collapsed by the Anarchists walking out of it. The ultimate absurdity of this "anti-fascist" line is seen today in the sort of pressure group that wants obscure fascists jailed or laws passed against racial discrimination (as if this will prevent it), and give major publicity to the tiniest fascist rally. We could do with some rabid anti anarchists of like calibre.

Notwithstanding what I have said about "pure anti-fascism", and I think the informed reader will know what I mean, we were actively concerned with fascism in the thirties, quite apart from the Spanish struggle. One of the most satisfying, and least understood, was the one we undertook to meet them on their own ground. Our "anti-fascists" were sceptical if not slanderous. How could one go to the fascists unless one went over to them? Were they not all thugs, paid hoodlums, etc? Actually they were not! There was the upper crust around Mosley from the ranks of Wealth, and there were the paid thugs who flapped around the ex-service type that played at being officers while they were the "men". A hangover from World War I was the number of people who had been officers and never got over it. Almost all the fascist movements were people who had never recovered from the war years and still wanted to play at soldiers. World War II left fewer of the type.

There was also a small but growing number whose views on fascism were conditioned by the fact that all the parties stank and Mosley promised "action", "action" and more "action". The fascists recruited from politically virgin territory, as we also wanted to do. The Trotskyists (who were just becoming prominent in London) solely recruited from the Communist Party. We found that in Clapham, a big inroad had been made by the Fascists, who had fewer hoodlums there than they had perforce had to recruit in the East End, and made better strides without them moreover, they did not plug anti-Semitism there (which had they known it, was a political burden to them, associating them irrevocably with Hitler). We set out to cover the fascist meetings and talk anarchism, not just anti-fascism.

I must admit to having been taken aback once when I was told by one former fascist that as a result of listening to me he was no longer a supporter of Mosley — my consternation came when he added in all seriousness that he was now an orthodox conservative. This was however not the only result of our South London endeavours. Quite a large group did in fact come over to us (though it must be confessed that most of them subsequently drifted away from the movement). We certainly checked the growth of the fascist movement amongst working class youth, at all events. The anarchist groups that were formed in Clapham and Streatham were originally formed by Tom (Paddy) Burke, Bill Maguire and myself; later Ralph Mills, an exceptionally keen organiser, and G.R. Nunn (an active worker for the movement until joining the army).

I found it curious that the Trotskyists attacked us particularly bitterly for this, claiming it proved our dilettante approach, a favourite word of theirs in those days. Most Trots I met then, and even up to the present, invariably greeted one with the fascist salute jocularly, as an allusion to the fact that the C.P. was denouncing them as Trotsky-fascists. I always found this embarrassing, and I would have thought it a sure proof of dilettantism, though even more to the point was their attitude that the demand for arms for Spain was merely a way of "deluding the Spanish workers". They were opposed to such a demand, which would have been understandable on pacifistic grounds, but scarcely on the grounds of those who put "the defence of the Soviet Union" amongst their party aims. The Trotskyists carried on an incessant campaign against "Stalinism" but did not like anyone to criticise the Stalinists but themselves. Hence they

refused to let fascists see their literature. When, in Wood Green during the meetings there held by all factions, fascists came asking for our literature, we gladly gave them or sold them it, but the Trots especially armed themselves with copies of the Daily Worker. They were prepared to let the fascists have the Worker, but not their own literature which admittedly was one entire criticism of the C.P. Whatever may be said by the Trotskyists today, at no time during the Spanish Revolution did they support the Spanish

struggle. Their main activity in this country, indeed their only activity, was criticism of the Communist Party (fair enough, of course) but, bitterly opposed as I always was to the C.P. I must confess to feeling more in sympathy with the C.P. worker who tried to help the Spanish struggle — although I knew his party was betraying the struggle inside Spain — than with the Trot with the "correct Marxist analysis" who would not lift a finger for Spain but only attacked the C.P.

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# Freedom

ANARCHIST FORTNIGHTLY

"The State rests on the slavery of labour. If labour becomes free, the State is lost."

MAX STIRNER

Vol. 8 No. 21

18th October, 1947

Twopence

## Reaction Brought Up-to-Date

### Comments on the Conservative Conference

THE subject-matter of the Tory Conference at Brighton was the development of a programme with sufficient appeal to the electorate to secure the ousting of the Labour Party at the next General Election. As such it can have very little interest to those who seek the abolition of the State and the wages system, and it will therefore not be necessary to go into any details of the business.

What does interest us very much, however, is the evolution of new methods in the technique of mass deception which is the first pre-requisite of any organization which aspires to wield power over the workers. Not that one envisages the Tory leaders as conscious and diabolical deceptionists deliberately thinking out a code for hoodwinkers; they are, doubtless, every bit as sincere as their Labour counterparts. And, like them, the evolution of their Party policy is chiefly a matter of adapting it to practical issues of the day, of making it more in line with the needs of the time.

What, however, does this mysterious phrase "the needs of the time" mean? In a leading article in the last issue of *Freedom* certain aspects of Labour policy, notably, the direction of labour, were shown to be framed less by the principles of Socialism than by the seemingly inevitable development of a State Capitalist mode of economy. The Tory Conference at Brighton showed that the same trend bears on Conservative policy with a similarly resistless power.

#### ECLIPSE OF THE DIEHARDS

All the political commentators have noted the "progressive" character of the conference, meaning by this that the old type of Tory is giving place to men whose espousal of reactionary ideas is less openly wholehearted. Thus the Executive was considerably embarrassed by certain speakers who advocated an almost explicit anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-foreign and anti-Communist opinion, and received not inconsiderable applause from some quarters. But more tactful speakers from the higher reaches of the Party contrived to put matters in a rather less unattractive light.

Again, Sir Waldron Smithers has been made the Aunt Sally for a good many gibes. He merely put forward the traditional ideas of Conservatism untinged by any "progressive" fancy dress—and was overwhelmed by the younger leaders of the type of R. A. Butler. To us there seems no question that the reaction speaks openly through men like Sir Waldron Smithers, while it clothes itself in deceptive phrases in the mouths of the "modern" Tories. Straightforward reaction is far preferable—and far less insidiously dangerous—than the more practical reactionary who knows how to suit his policy to the "needs of the time". These latter know when to sacrifice the indefensible outposts of Con-

Anarchist point of view depends on how one regards the relationship of the individual to society, and how one estimates the potentialities of individuals. But it is a suggestive pointer confirming the anarchist position to find that the policies of "Left" and "Right" also converge so strikingly under the pressure of developing State Capitalism, to the point of virtual identity. Labour "betrays" socialism because of the "needs of the time"; and the Tories "betray" conservatism under the same impetus. It is not surprising that the needs of the time often produce coalition governments of "all the talents" when the dividing line between them is so tenuous. The times are indeed propitious for the setting up of a single party as under the totalitarian regimes. General de Gaulle is openly demanding a single party government to suppress the struggle between parties in France.

British Democracy may as usual prove more subtle and preserve a two party system, both however having the same programme! Such an outfit would provide a traditionally perfidious cover for the advancing totalitarianism of the twentieth century.

#### CONCESSIONS TO SOCIALISM

The clearest manifestation of this process of bringing Conservatism up-to-date was the wholehearted acceptance of the "Industrial Charter". The conference thereby committed the Tory Party to maintain certain measures brought in by Labour, notably the nationalisation of the Bank of England and of the mines, despite the fact that they were bitterly criticized by conservatives when first proposed and carried through.

Practical men among the Tory leaders, like Anthony Eden and R. A. Butler, recognize such measures as inevitable and necessary in the world economy of today. Their acceptance by the Tories shows that they are not a product of socialist theory as the Labour leaders contended when they were first brought in; instead they are simply necessary measures for the smooth introduction of the State Capitalist economy which is the social framework of contemporary history.

#### BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Anarchism teaches that government itself is evil because it deprives the individuals who compose society of all responsibility for the management of their common affairs. If this view is accepted it immediately obliterates the differences between the politicians of the Right and of the Left—for it is not how they rule that matters, but the fact that they rule at all. Of course acceptance of this

#### FRENCH BREAD RATION NEVER SO LOW

The conditions of French workers are deteriorating at an amazing speed and one cannot help being struck by the acute feeling of insecurity looming over the great majority of French people to-day. The fantastic rise in prices has come as a hard blow after government promises, a few months ago, that prices would be frozen and even decreased. The daily bread ration is down to 200 gr. (just over 7 oz.) and French people remark bitterly

## ANOTHER MOSCOW HOAX

IN 1943, the stinking corpse of the Comintern, with its long record of betrayal of the workers and service of Russian foreign policy in all parts of the world, was buried with great ceremony, as a magnanimous gesture on the part of Stalin to his new friends, Churchill and Roosevelt.

Of course, the decision did not mean a great deal. The Comintern policy had served its turn, and now the Russian government, assured of the temporary co-operation of its capitalist allies, could well afford to throw overboard this temporarily useless piece of machinery, particularly as the various national parties were already well disciplined enough to carry out Soviet orders with any international organisation.

The Communist parties thereafter served Soviet interests by supporting the various capitalist interests and entrenching themselves as strongly as possible in resistance movements, trade unions, and all kinds of labour movements, so that when the time of need arose they would hold as many keys as possible.

The situation has since changed. The common interests of Anglo-American capitalism and Soviet authoritarianism have dwindled away, and their imperialist interests clash at a dozen points in the world, from Germany round to Korea. Soviet policy has changed, and the policy of the Communist parties changes

with it. For some time it has been clear that a return to a pseudo-revolutionary policy was imminent, in an attempt to use the workers of Western Europe, Asia and America as cats' paws in the imperialist struggle.

That phase has now been officially declared open, by the formation of a new Communist International, at present only consisting of the parties in countries where Communist influence is strong. Denunciations have been made of the Western democracies and of the right-wing Socialists. The talk of popular fronts is dropped, and we are back where we were in the early 1930's, back to the old phase of "Social Fascism" which preceded the campaigns for "United Fronts" with the Socialists and the later participation in coalition governments.

It is clear, from the present international situation and the past record of the Communists, that this new adventure is nothing more nor less than an attempt to utilise working-class feeling for furthering the ends of Russian imperialism.

Once again, the workers will have to be on their guard not to play into the hands of the Communists not to allow their genuine rebellions against the capitalist governments to be used by the Communists for their own ends. The Communist spokesmen will once again talk revolution while it suits them; they will cynically make use of every working-class movement they can dominate for their own ends, but they will certainly contribute nothing to any genuinely revolutionary cause.

The workers should remember how they were betrayed by the Communists in factories and workshops during the war, how for their own ends the Stalinists were ready to ally themselves first with the Nazis and then with the capitalist democracies. The new Comintern is merely another of these manoeuvres. It will certainly destroy any genuine revolutionary movement that comes under its sway; the workers can protect themselves only by making their own organisations which are free alike from Trade Union bosses and Communist stool pigeons, and by refusing consistently to be used as the tools for Russian or American foreign policy.

## THE CABINET CHANGES

After months of rumour, the Cabinet changes have at last taken place, and while we are under no illusion that any alteration in the composition or political flavour of the Government will lead to advantage for the workers or will halt the speeding progress towards dictatorship and increased want for the masses, there are certain important tendencies revealed in the changes.

The first is the emergence of "strong men" in the key positions, and particularly of Cripps as "Economic Dictator". As is pointed out elsewhere in *Freedom*, Cripps is the man who, more than any other of the Labour leaders, has contended that the workers are incapable of managing industry. His advent to a position of almost absolute power in industrial affairs means a consolidation of managerial power, the advent of technocrats and "experts" to increased authority, and strengthening of the old capitalist industrial ruling class as part of the "Labour" autocracy, as has already happened in the case of the mines.

The second is the increasing upper middle-class composition of the Cabinet. Now, no less than six out of the eighteen members of the Cabinet are old public school boys, which means that they come from the more select stratum of the old capitalist ruling class, trained in institutions which have the avowed object of turning out young men who will be able to wield authority over the "lower orders". This move undoubtedly is an attempt on the part of the Labour Government to try and regain the support of the middle class in the next election, and to counter the clearly increased influence of the Tories in those marginal constituencies where a middle class vote awarded the Labour parliamentary majority.

two tendencies, firstly, the emergence of ruthless authoritarian to key positions, and secondly, a preparation for the next election by trying to placate as many sections of the Party's supporters as possible at the same time. The net result of it all is that the power rests more securely than ever in a small inner group of four or five men, such as Attlee, Cripps, Bevin and Morrison, while the lesser members of the Government become more than ever puppets to be moved about for the entertainment and misleading of the election public. The real decisions are made by the tiny group of key ministers and the civil service and industrial bureaucracy who control the politicians behind the backs of the ministers whose photographs appear in the newspapers, in nicely domestic attitudes calculated to please the readers of the *Daily Herald*.

## NATIVE IMPERIALISM IN INDIA

The character of the new regimes which have arisen in India and Pakistan is shown very clearly in the rush to take over as many of the Native States as possible.

The Indian Native States, it is true, are islands of medieval autocracy, where a small ruling class of the richest men in the world live in luxury at the expense of the poverty-stricken masses of their people. But there is no real evidence that the Nehru government, for instance, wishes to change that. This is no sug-

and would set out a programme of freedom from autocracy. Instead, their objection is not to the autocracy of the ruling prince, but to the fact that he wishes to adhere to the rival state of Pakistan, and they try to solve the matter by a show of military force which reminds one of the British in the partly days of their rule in India, and which is certainly a strange culmination to the passive resistance that was once the cherished programme of Congress.

Furthermore, while the Congress leaders



# NEW ALIGNMENTS

The end of the Spanish War brought certain immediate problems with it; in particular the influx of a large number of Spanish refugees, many of them C.N.T. — F.A.I. members. There had already been established (by the I.L.P. and Emma Goldman) an orphans' home at Street for Basque children. "Spain and the World" had maintained its own orphans' home in Catalonia itself. Most of the contact with the Spaniards arriving in Britain was through Marie Louise Berneri and Vernon Richards; many comrades co-operated wholeheartedly, in particular good old Marie Goldberg, stalwart of the movement in Russia and England, who had used her little dressmaking workshop in Holborn for business meetings in support of the Spanish struggle, and now opened her home to refugees. Innumerable comrades had been interned in cages in France like animals; an appeal was launched to meet their immediate needs. Some were enabled to pass on to a new life in South America. Few of those who remained in England became integrated either with the movement here or with English life in general. They retained their own groups around Swiss Cottage and Notting Hill, constantly hoping for a return to Spain. During the war many of the men served in "alien companies" of the Pioneer Corps, some of them supported the war it is true, but the majority because there was very little alternative at the time and they were fairly stunned at the magnitude of the defeat.

The belief of one group, publishing "Cronica Obrera" — composed of those who had been in the government or served in the police of the Spanish Republic (albeit as "representatives" of the libertarian movement) — inclined to revisionism (which in practice always seemed to be less revolutionary and not more) and discarding such myths as the proletarian struggle, accepted realities such as the one that Churchill would oust Franco and lead them back to Spain. They had nothing but scorn for those Quixotic believers who felt that the Spanish workers had to go on struggling since Mr. Churchill was only concerned with winning the war for the British Capitalist class and would go to the extent of allowing Franco to remain after the war, if he felt it was in his class interests to do so. When, ultimately, he did, they felt it was Churchill who was the traitor, though he, to do him justice, had never claimed to be anything but an Imperialist since he left the Liberal Party many years before.

Some who did not feel inclined to oppose the "official" line of "Cronica Obrera" did so because they feared, justifiably, as it later appeared, police repression in England might cause the deportation of known anti-war, anarchist militants to Spain. After the war, the Spanish movement both in England and elsewhere in exile formed and re-formed many times, Federica Monseny later visiting London but being boycotted by those who opposed her ministerial participation in the Republican Government.

The disappointment with the victory of Franco ended the campaign in England of Emma Goldman, who in Spring 1939 went to Toronto. In Canada she had the success she had only dreamed of in England. The newspapers gave her headline treatment, remembering her from her American days; and she raised large sums for Spanish relief. It may be mentioned that the Canadian newspapers, the Toronto Star in particular, had always been reasonably fair in their Spanish coverage, as distinct from the British Press. In Canada, Emma Goldman died soon after the outbreak of war (at last receiving some press coverage in London). The end of this campaign did not greatly damage the anarchist movement. Already since the Munich crisis of 1938 the split between the "Emma Goldmanites" and "pure anti-fascists" on the one hand, and the anarchists on the other, had become apparent. (Some of Emma's close friends, such as Rebecca West, went so far to the right as to get out of sight; though it is true these had never pretended to be other than "fans"). The dropping off of activity led to the calling of the first Anarchist Federation (since the abortive one in the early thirties). It still admitted the Emma Goldmanites, "anti-fascists" and "trade union" anarchists; and also the A.S.U. (staggering under a load of debt incurred by over-printing of pamphlets) and other groups such as the Committee for Workers' Control (which still carried on its separate activity), the North London group, various Freedom Groups and the anti-parliamentary groups (which had moved towards an Anarchist

Communist Federation, of Glasgow, and were more or less affiliated to the London Anarchist Federation).

The first secretary of the A.F. was R.W. Sturgess — who had come from the Communist Party and became secretary of the A.S.U. after only a few months, in succession to William Farrer, its previous secretary, who had caused some controversy both for his association with the Clapham events (which had angered the "pure" anti-fascists who felt their secretary should not have been concerned) and for his pacifism (at that time most pacifists were presumed to be bourgeois Christian pacifists and the Peace Pledge Union of the thirties; Farrer was one of the first followers of the Bart de Ligt school (he was inconsistent, in that he later joined the Air Force). Sturgess, although an efficient secretary, was still largely under the influence of his C.P. background.

A word on the Committee for Workers' Control, which had its niche in working class history will not come amiss. After the May Days of 1937 in Spain, my group felt it slightly pretentious to continue to use the name "Friends of Durruti" and formed a youth movement (originally the Revolutionary Youth, publishing "The Struggle", later — in a fusion with a S.W. London group — the Libertarian Youth). We decided that the name "youth" was limiting our activities and that we should concentrate — particularly after our experiences at breaking up the Clapham fascists — at a movement aimed at direct workers' control of industry, including anarchists and non-anarchists alike. The anarchist section joined the Anarchist Federation but we kept the Committee going. The intention was to include only those in industry, advocating direct action and direct control. We hoped to galvanise the various groups especially of Scots engineers who had come south, but met with only limited if any success in our chosen field; what we did find were a large number of problems relating to housing coming our way and in particular from Bethnal Green, where a critical housing situation existed in that higher rents were being charged for slum property. The original idea for a rent strike came from our comrade Maguire, and we pushed the idea around, getting support from members of the East London I.L.P. (then quite strong; it was later split up by trotskyst infiltration). A large amount of credit must go to the East London I.L.P. though the C.P. also came in and with their superior numbers and organisation, managed to take it over. The strikes were wholly successful, so far as fighting the rent increases were concerned, and a curious, unforeseen by-product was that it smashed the East London fascist movement.

Mosley had been getting large support in the Bethnal Green area, chiefly on the basis of anti-semitism. When the rent strike began it was enthusiastically supported by housewives; both Jewish and Gentile. The Blackshirts had orders from above not to take part in the strike, even against Jewish landlords, of whom there were a certain proportion; the Jewish workers, on the other hand, were understandably well in favour of striking, irrespective of whether the landlord was Jewish or Gentile. The lesson could hardly be lost; but despite the local gauleiters' pleading for a reversal of policy, Mosley, who had undoubtedly instructions from elsewhere, would not yield on so vital an issue. Although by the time victory over landlords, and a bye-win over the fascists, had been won, the Committee for Workers' Control was elbowed out of the running by better organised bodies, it was going ahead with plans for the production of a journal when the (first) Anarchist Federation was formed.

As "Spain and the World" had ceased publication with the end of the Spanish War, Richards put its circulation and goodwill at the disposal of a new editorial committee, formed by another conference. "Revolt!" was formed. It did not in fact achieve the circulation of "Spain and the World" which had already been moving away from the opinions held by a large part of its (non-anarchist) readership. For some time the paper had condemned the compromises made in Spain and had held resolutely that if the struggle continued, it would be merely a defensive war in which only the capitalist powers could benefit, by using it as a dress rehearsal to major war. "Revolt!";

# WAR COMMENTARY

## For Anarchism

We are opposed to all monopolies of power whereby the division of society into a ruled and ruling class are maintained. Similarly, we oppose all the means of maintaining the class-divided society—parliament, the legal system, the police, the armed forces, the Church, etc. All such means are the expressions of the State, which always exists to protect the interests of a privileged minority, e.g., capitalists, landlords, bureaucrats, etc. We are therefore unalterably opposed to the State.

Vol. 6, No. 2.

11th NOVEMBER, 1944

Fortnightly, 2d.

# WIDE UNREST IN INDUSTRY

**Dockers Strike in Bristol and Newcastle—Gas Workers out in Manchester—Women Spinners out at Paisley—Port Glasgow and Greenock Shipyard Workers demonstrate**

## Bristol Dockers

BEFORE the war there was always surplus labour in the dock areas, and the casual labour conditions created no real problem as far as the number of men who were able to work on any particular gang was concerned. But war conditions necessitated the creation of the Dock Labour Corporation which absorbed all labour resources, and this was hailed by many, especially the Communist Party, as a step in the right direction—the fools imagined, or attempted to lead others to imagine, that the bosses and the Unions were organizing labour for the benefit of the workers. However, in recent weeks the dockers have been confronted with several problems and grievances which indicate that conditions have in no way improved. It is encouraging to note that the dockers are tackling every problem with the only effective weapon, that of direct action, e.g., the recent strike on the Newcastle docks, and other minor disputes.

On Tuesday, 24th October, 1944, the dockers at Avonmouth stopped work because of a decision by the bosses that certain leading gangs should consist of six men instead of eight, so that we can see that although the men now have guaranteed work and wages under the new scheme the bosses still seek to drive them like slave gangs. In support of the men at Avonmouth all the men of the Bristol City docks and the Fortished docks struck in sympathy on the next day, so that in all 4,000 men were then

who had been waiting to hear the result of the meeting gave a grand display of solidarity by following suit.

After the meeting with the men all that Mr. Donovan had to say seems to be contained in the following statement to the *Evening World* of the 27th October, 1944: "Following the resumption of work at Avonmouth yesterday, the local joint committee considered the matter in dispute and reached a settlement which has been en-

No statement better bears out our view of the Trade Union leaders. They have no excuse. The bosses have no excuse. The plea of shortage of labour is ridiculous when everywhere thousands of workers are being sacked under the new name of "redundancy".

### Dockers win extra pay for one job

As a result of further discussion with the Union officials on Saturday morning, the dockers decided to resume work on October 30th, on the terms of the settlement which was drawn up by the Local Joint Council for Dock Labour. The result of the strike is only a partial victory for the dockers, as the agreement only grants higher rates of pay for men on certain leading jobs and continues to ignore the original plea for eight men in a gang. At the same time the employers and the Union officials have attempted to strengthen their hand by stating that any further adjustment in the manning scale operative will be subject to present agreements, and will come up for examination by the Local Joint Council for Dock Labour, with a provision for a further delaying action that the dispute can be submitted to the National J.C.D.L. if necessary. Well, the dockers know which

## Paisley Women

The industrial disputes and strike actions during the war years have been notable that, with the exception of the ever militant miners and dockers, they have always been carried out and organised most successfully by those elements who are entirely new to the industrial procedure and are therefore neither contaminated nor disillusioned by the trade union leadership.

The more conspicuous of these elements have of course been the "Bevin boys" and the conscript women in the engineering industries. A good example of this was seen last week at the Anchor Thread Works, Paisley. These factories consist of non-union shops and the dispute in progress there at the moment has resulted in the first strike for 35 years.

The strikers say that they are being paid less than £2 per week which includes one night overtime, and that whenever they are transferred to higher paid work they are still paid at the old rates. Complaints were made

Finally the strikers left and a strong cordon of police were stationed round the factory.

Apparently some attempt has been made by a trade union official to organise the strikers. It seems obvious to us that they are already organised, they organised spontaneously and for a specific purpose, and can well do without the disrupting tactics of union bureaucracy.

## Greenock & Port Glasgow

A big demonstration of shipyard workers in Greenock and Port Glasgow was held on the afternoon of the 6th October, in support of a claim for an increase in wages to meet

though bright and lively, came out at a bad time when the general disillusionment with the end of Spain, and the growing war hysteria, was not conducive to the building of readership, though it may be curiously mentioned that this war hysteria ceased when the war actually came. Perhaps those who were being hysterical had a chance to justify their hysteria; which they may or may not have taken. The new paper did not pick up the strings left by "Spain and the World" and ran only a few issues.

The (first) Anarchist Federation was not a success; the secretary leaving it suddenly, having disagreed strongly with his colleagues on the "Revolt!" editorial board, it disintegrated. We were back in our various groupings, and generally isolated not merely from the rest of the working class but from each other, when the war actually broke out. Many of us expected wholesale arrests at the outbreak of the war, and most people expected mass bombings and chaos. The "phoney war" was a breather. We began to pick up the loose strings of our movement. We began to notice that our indoor meetings were becoming packed—especially with young people. Everyone was not "brainwashed". As a result, two important undertakings were begun. One was the establishment of "War Commentary" by a group consisting of Richards, Marie-Louise Berneri, Tom Brown and myself. We had in mind a purely duplicated journal (the first issue, now unobtainable, was produced on a stencil machine) thinking that it would be obliged to undertake a clandestine existence. On the contrary it was so well in demand by various peace groups, coming into contact with anarchist ideas for the first time, as by the almost "unknown quantity" of anarchists around the country by now, that we were encouraged to have the second issue printed. We did not have a purely anarchistic journal in mind at first; thinking of a journal dealing with issues raised by the war whose readers we would introduce to anarchist ideas by other means. In practice, the journal did become an anarchist one and in a mainstream leading to its change of name to the present "Freedom"; but in pursuit of the idea of introducing anarchist ideas, M.L. Berneri and I organised what would now, to use a term not then used, be called a "teach-in" on Spain. She interviewed the Spaniards in England over and over again, going through the events of the War and Revolution, and passing her notes to me. I organised the seminary lectures to various branches of the peace movement.

The first of these was organised by C.J. Wade in Enfield, an area in which we had already been active in the No Conscriptio League and so on. I think to these meetings we owe Alan Albon already co-operating with us who moved from left socialism to anarchism (and became one of our experts on agriculture). The second was in London, organised by the Forward group of the Peace Pledge Union, and this series was extraordinarily prolific, from it coming a whole generation of militants. John Hewetson was one of the first; he had long moved on from bourgeois pacifism and had moved to anarchism of his own accord, as indeed, is so often the case with many who come to the anarchist movement.

It would be invidious to mention names where so many are concerned, but from the Forward Group came Tom and Elizabeth Earley (later one of the first women C.O.'s); the witty writer Tony Gibson; and many others, the beginning of a general exodus—P.P.U. to Anarchism. Also from the Forward movement came the surrealist group, vaguely connected with E.L.T. Mesens and Toni del Renzio, who did not stay around long; but who introduced us to such diverse personalities as Jankel Adler, the painter (who remained a sympathiser until his death) and Ken Hawkes (whose interest in art was very fragile and did not survive, but whose interest in syndicalist activity increased).

Notwithstanding so many people coming to the movement, we moved very cautiously in regard to organisation, still expecting that emergency regulations would put us out of open action. When these were, in fact, brought out, and led as they did to wholesale internment, it was regarded by most of us in the "outside left" as the prelude to the imprisonment of outspoken left wing critics of the government; in the same way that the French Government had arrested, interned (in the case of aliens) and sent to penal battalions (in the case of citizens) revolutionaries and anti-fascists, while old friends of Hitler and declared fascists were left to extend their influence. But British Imperialism was not in such a suicidal mood as French Imperialism (with its unspoken motto "Rather Hitler than our own working class"). In proceeding against the fascists, who folded up without a struggle, the British Government was aided by the very establishment and family connections so assiduously exploited by Sir Oswald Mosley in his courtship of the police against "the mob". Even the stupidest Chief Constable knew of members of "the County" who had so long pressed Hitler's claims at fashionable dinner parties and had come back from Germany with glowing accounts of the Third Reich as opposed to decadent England.



# OPPOSING THE WAR

Notwithstanding some vague threats against the Communists, and in particular their national peace campaign, the "People's Convention", the Home Secretary did not act against them, partly because Communist trade union leaders were already co-operating in the war effort even in the anti-war days; partly for political reasons, because of that section of the Labour movement which, while not supporting the Communist Party, never likes to see them attacked either; and partly, of course, because it was by no means certain which way Russia was going and whether the Hitler-Stalin Pact would endure. The first challenge to libertarians came in Essex, where — acting on the pretence that Southend was a danger area — the entire Anarchist group together with local ILPers and Pacifists were interned. Amongst them was Mat Kavanagh, then in his seventies, who gathered the libertarian lefts around him, and announced to the Commandant that they would in no circumstances mix with the Fascists. If he wanted trouble, he would get it.

"You may be terrorists but you won't terrorise me," said the Commandant. "I see you know our reputation", said Mat. "But all we are asking is that you divide the camp into two wings — fascist and anti-fascist. We don't want to mix with the British fascists; we'd be quite happy with the German Jews and political refugees you've got here, and I'm quite sure they don't want to be mixed with the Nazis."

This was, of course, eminently reasonable. In the same camp was for instance, Mr. Eugen Spier. He has since written of his experiences as a religious Jew, who was also an admirer of Winston Churchill, forced to mix daily with the Nazis.\*

The Commandant complained bitterly that he was not running the camp for the benefit of the prisoners. That weekend J.M. Humphrey visited the camp to see Mat. "They say I'm an enemy of the State," said Mat. "You've been that now for forty years to my knowledge," he retorted, somewhat to the alarm of the duty officer who probably thought that people capable of denying the State were capable of denying God Almighty, as indeed they were. He passed the news on to me, and I endeavoured to contact an influential member of the Jewish community, since elevated to the peerage, whom I reasoned might well press for Mat's "compromise" from the point of the German-Jewish refugees unreasonably classified amongst the Nazis by virtue of a citizenship they had lost, if not from the point of view of the anti-Fascists. My attempts were made known to the Home Office when apparently all hell broke loose. I was visited by a detective, who insisted to me that we had unintentionally stumbled on a hornet's nest; that vital anti-espionage security was involved; and unless I ceased meddling I would find myself inside as well.

It seemed that Sir John Anderson, the Home Secretary, had been "personally humiliated" at a luncheon with the King, when Sir John and the leading Home Office official responsible for the internment of refugees had utterly failed to persuade the King of the necessity and he had even indulged in some mild sarcasm at their expense, asking what they would have done with Einstein if he had remained. If the British Jewish communal leaders once realised that the refugees could be better treated without endangering security, they would never be budged. They were not unaware of the degree of anti-semitism in the Home Office; indeed, many of them were professionally concerned to exaggerate it. The detective promised that if I dropped any communication with the Jewish community he could fairly say that our lads would be out in a week or two. As I was more interested in their getting out than in mitigating the conditions of internment, I naturally agreed, not being able to avoid a sarcastic comment to the effect that I hoped this would not prevent my going to shule (synagogue) if I so wished. The detective, showing an unexpected sense of humour, replied, "Not if you want to say *kaddish* (memorial service) on Emma Goldman".

I now realise, of course, that the espionage story was a complete hoax and that no security arrangements were involved. It purely meant that the arrangements suggested, of fascist and anti-fascist wings of the internment camp, was so reasonable that the Home Office could not have resisted it

once the Jewish leaders had asked for it; but that Sir John would have become the laughing-stock of the country, and furnished a magnificent stick with which he would have been beaten by those politicians already getting ready to push him out of office, had he publicly to announce an *anti-fascist* wing in detention camps in what the Socialists and Liberals, at least, were claiming was an anti-fascist war.

Mat and the others were duly released, their numbers increased by a number of I.R.A. men whom he claimed as members of his group for the purposes of securing their release, not without giving them a few well-chosen words as to the political role of the Roman Church and asking them not to disgrace us by turning up at Mass until they were well clear of the camp. There was no further use of arbitrary internment against us during the whole remainder of the war; not of course that this prevented the authorities acting against us in regard to specific "offences", and a great many of us went to civilian prisons for conscientious objection, breach of industrial by-laws; and other crimes ranging from not firewatching to spreading sedition; or military prisons.

Almost our entire Irish support was lost by emigration to Australia in the years 1938-39. Having spent years in unemployment they were not prepared to face going into the war industries, or continuing out of work. The Australian Anarchist movement had for years consisted of one man, the stalwart W. (Chummy) Fleming, who had for fifty years spoken at the Yarra Bank, Melbourne, turning up with his flag "For Godless Anarchy" on the May Day meeting — despite Catholic and Communist attempts to turn him out (resisted by the crowd who knew a fighter when they saw one).\*

We endeavoured to call our scattered forces together once it was fairly established that we were, if ultimately to be made illegal (as we still believed would be the case and particularly, of course, in the event of invasion and occupation), to be given a run for our money, a conference was called at the Workers' Circle Hall, New Cavendish Street, for April 28th, 1940.

This time we determined to keep out the old "conference anarchists" by the simple expedient of not inviting them and allowing them to die out in isolation; also in an endeavour not to admit people from other movements (who had also come in and swamped previous conferences) admission was made by possession of the agenda only. At this conference this (second) Anarchist Federation was formed, or at least, its clandestine existence was recognised. Particularly good speeches were made by Tom Brown and Ralph Mills (South London NUDAW member).

We cannot take any credit for the fact that around this time occurred the most anarchistic act the people of London had prepared in years: namely, the seizure of the London tube system as deep underground shelters, against the authority of the State. Without the direction, or even the permission of the Government, the Londoners swarmed into the underground when the bombing began; and authority was obliged to recognise what anarchy had already achieved. The blitz brought out so many examples of mutual aid between neighbours and strangers, and so many instances of initiative without direction, that one might be forgiven for a certain degree of optimism for the future. Certainly nobody in those days thought the war would end, as it did, back in established dreary routine; but for the Labour Party, one doubts if it could have. We expected the probability of invasion, creating a revolutionary situation; or a collapse of authority when the war ended. Whether or not our optimism was justified in the circumstances, we felt we could only carry on with the work we had undertaken.

Following the occupation of the Tubes, I, in my small way followed suit by installing myself in the writing room of a leading hotel. Here I began translating articles professionally. I extended the use of my "office" to the

\* The Australian movement was strengthened by the arrival of Italian anarchists during the late thirties and by a strong Spanish contingent in 1939 — later reinforced by a number of Bulgarian anarchists in 1945 after the defeat of their movement in what amounted to a civil war with the new Communist Government after their long and bitter struggle with successive nationalist and fascist governments. The present Australian movement has grown in part spontaneously from the new ideas sweeping the younger generation but also by the work put in by the Irish, Italian, Spanish and Bulgarian "new Australians".

\* "The Protecting Power", Eugen Spier, Skeffington, 1949

Anarchist Federation, the hotel management being blissfully ignorant of my, or its existence, the use of the writing-room having been arranged for me by Jack Mason, who knew of everything of that nature that was "going". Nobody questioned my right to be there, and the assumption that I was some sort of Rotary secretary was enhanced when I began to receive letters addressed there to the "London Freedom Group" — I gathered that it was thought that this consisted of people who had received the Freedom of the City of London. There was an added advantage in that the management also provided free sleeping accommodation when the siren sounded, in the armchairs in the basement lounge. This was of great convenience when transport had ceased during the blitz, and it was of course a courtesy extended not only to guests but to diners, even to those who had come in only for a shilling cup of coffee or (if there were others like me) were merely squatting there. If the all-clear went early in the morning — sometimes, aggravatingly, at two or three a.m. — there was a mournful procession of supernumerary guests to Lyons' all-night Corner House, to sit over a cup of tea until transport began again.

"War Commentary" appeared at first from a purely accommodation address — an unfurnished back room in a block ready for demolition, in Newbury Street. Callers came there in vain, the actual work of the paper being done in the Richards' flat, while the secretarial work of the federation was carried out in the ornate Edwardian surroundings of what has always remained my favourite hotel (I felt somewhat guilty at returning years later and being greeted by the doorman as an old and valued customer).

The accession of John Hewetson to the editorial group, following his abandonment of the "Forward Group" position impelled our publishing activities forward. For several years he gave up medical practice to devote himself full-time to anarchist propaganda; Marie-Louise Berneri also worked full-time, both of them on a purely voluntary basis. We were thus enabled to open Freedom Bookshop in Red Lion passage (the street itself has now vanished); it was rented from Dr. Josiah Oldfield, centenarian health worker who had previously used it as a shop for vegetarian produce and was not too clear as to its new use at first (though he did not quibble afterwards). Large stocks of anarchist literature came from Whiteway, where they had accumulated for many years. This in one way was a pity, since they had been safe, at least, in the country, Gloucestershire; whereas in London, after a few months, the whole lot was consumed by flames in a bombing raid.

The first publication of Freedom Press (as it now became, the "Distributors" being dropped since new publications were intended) was Tom Brown's "Trade Unionism or Syndicalism". Tom was then in close touch with industry, and spoke at all our meetings. The editorial team worked well; and from the large amount of correspondence that came in mostly dealt with by myself in the Strand Palace Hotel (I can conceal its name no longer) I realised we had the beginnings of a virile movement. One of the most immediate demands made upon us, and which caused considerable heart-burning, was precisely what lead we should give to those who came to us for one. For many years, in time of peace, there had been discussion as to whether, in time of war, the anarchist should "stand out" as a conscientious objector (in the tradition of the English socialists of World War 1 who faced considerable ill-treatment) or "went in" among the armed forces (in the tradition of the Russian revolutionaries); if some argued that the first was Quakerism, others argued that the latter was Leninism. Experience obtained in Continental countries, with their tradition of conscription, was scarcely relevant. The British workers had always resisted conscription; how did we face it when it was a fact?

We had on one hand a tradition in common with the "anti-parliamentary communists" who were against entry into almost anything, not merely parliament or parliamentary institutions, but also the trade unions (even at places like Fords of Dagenham, they stood out against joining the union). So far as the Communist Party was concerned, it believed in entry into the armed forces and industry, and was opposed, in Leninist fashion, to conscientious objection (even when it was anti-war), and this line was taken up by the Trots (in practice, many of those stated in public that "conscientious objection" was "petty-bourgeois evasion" but tried to get deferred jobs in industry). The I.L.P. took up a consistently pacifist position but also claimed to be in the tradition of Luxembourg and Liebknecht. None was more hypocritical than the S.P.G.B. which ignored the issue as an irrelevancy; denounced the idea of pacifism and objection and pointed out that its aim was to "take over" the armed forces by legalitarian means; yet privately supplied its members with a pacific case to argue before the C.O. tribunals (the Jehovah's Witnesses were a religious parallel; but they were prepared to resist if necessary which the S.P.G.B. members were not).

It should also be borne in mind that so far as the Second World War was

concerned, few British C.O.'s suffered for anything except lack of literacy. Any person with sufficient education to be able to speak a reasoned case before a school debating society, in possession of a few relevant stock arguments about non-violence and some Christian clichés for good luck, could obtain unconditional exemption without any difficulty whatsoever, and the tribunal merely tried to catch him out on trick questions, such as asking what he would do if a German soldier raped his sister (whether he had one or not), the suggestion being that any decent person would then do murder, for which, in appropriate circumstances, the judge then presiding over the tribunal would unhesitatingly have sentenced him to death.

As a result of the C.O. tribunals, a sort of dialogue was entered into between the State and the pacifist movement, such as has possibly not existed in any other country. Those Labour Ministers in Churchill's Cabinet who had themselves been pacifists and C.O.'s in the first World War, well knew how to clip the paws of the pacifist pussy; but moreover, it seems now pretty clear that the Army itself did not want the job of dealing harshly with influential Quakers or troublesome pacifists merely in order to make the Ministry of Labour's call-up plans "fair". The tribunals were well in the tradition of English bureaucracy, and contained trade union representation; they still resembled nothing so much as the old Poor Law Committees examining the sturdy paupers as to whether they were able to work or not.

By taking the tribunals seriously the Peace Pledge Union formulated those ideas of co-operation with the State which have foxed the peace movement ever since. To this dialogue we can trace the "necessity for logical non-violence", suggesting that if you oppose the atom bomb, you must not knock a policeman's helmet off, an attitude only a much later generation has discarded.

It seems that many people need intellectual or moral justification for acting in their own self-interest, and if some of these temporarily sought ideological backing for their "stand" as C.O.'s I do not think it matters greatly, provided one does not exaggerate how much that stand meant in practice. It is fair to say that many anarchists were conscientious objectors but never regarded the tribunals as anything but a farce; one comrade at least, G.R. Nunn, felt so strongly on the subject that, after getting unconditional exemption from a tribunal, he went into the army. Even those who did not wish to state a case to the tribunal in which they did not believe rarely got more than a year's imprisonment; certainly not in our movement, with its many literate helpers to come to the rescue. The cat-and-mouse treatment resulting in long sentences mostly went to those unfortunate enough to have no friends to advise them and insufficient knowledge of what was required to be said. (I met in prison, and tried to advise, one such man who had spent five years there, coming before many tribunals, but unable to express himself other than that "he did not want to go into the army". There was a central board for conscientious objectors, who helped a great many people, but would not, on Quaker grounds, put words into their mouths which they did not believe, merely to help them. Yet were all the ex-grammar-school boys so sincere? This man sincerely did not want to join up).

What we found in the first year of the war was that conscientious objection was both a farce and yet a method by which a small, privileged (though not class or money privileged in that sense of the word) group could opt out of the army. It was no doubt a good thing for us that this was so; we relied on voluntary labour and could not get our "essential workers" exempted, as could the political parties; had we not had the support of those who had been through the tribunals, or been exempted in some way, we would have gone out of existence. Yet as serious revolutionaries it was totally inadequate: the majority of the correspondence that came to us came from members of the armed forces. There was a bohemian fringe around our movement (I will deal with it in the next chapter), swelled by conscientious objection, in the main it contained those who, having achieved their personal liberation from conventional ties and duties, vanished from our ken and expressed cynicism about revolutionary aims because they had no need for them any longer.

Among us, too, was always the occasional person who felt that because he personally had "got off" in regard to military service, by making a coherent and acceptable case at the tribunal, or even by serving a short term of imprisonment (and including some who were medically unfit or in a reserved occupation) he had in some way made a stand against the war which entitled him to look with scorn on a revolutionary wearing His Majesty's uniform, though the latter might for his activity, in the midst of other military hazards, be facing every penalty from pack drill to the firing squad.

But in the days of 1940 and 1941 our movement grew among the forces. The innocuous sounding name of "War Commentary" (purely a coincidence in that it was originally chosen for an ephemerally-duplicated bulletin and was retained for a monthly — later in a fortnightly — printed paper) enabled





Eddie Shaw in Maxwell Street, Glasgow, 1945

it to be read in soldiers' canteens and reading rooms all over the country. Some zealous librarians stamped "not to be taken away" upon it when they saw it lying around. A privately-circulated bulletin "Workers in Uniform" was begun; I undertook the editing and correspondence in connection with this, and handed over the secretaryship of the Anarchist Federation. This (second) A.F. held regular business meetings thereafter and, while the main pivot was the London group, many provincial groups considered themselves affiliated though independent to all intents and purposes; the Glasgow group was the largest and most active of all the British groups, and made an impact upon the industrial workers that exceeded anything known before, even in the palmiest days of the Anarchist movement before the first World War. They had good speakers — Frank Leech, Eddie Shaw, Jimmie Raeside — and a Bookshop as well as an Anarchist Hall. The London group had for years been deficient in speakers: one of the last, Jenner (who had spoken in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Finsbury Pavement and Hyde Park since the 'twenties) had recently died. But a new generation took over. The most fluent, though far from the best, was Frederick Lohr. He had been secretary of the Forward Movement of the P.P.U., and was basically not in sympathy with anarchism; seeing his members — and all his close friends — moving over to anarchism, he declared himself a "Christian Anarchist", by which he basically implied support for the authoritarian trends within Christianity rather than the libertarian ones, allied with hostility to all political parties and powers. (Later, gathering his own occultist group together under the title of the London Forum, he moved away from Anarchism back to his own philosophy, one hard to define other than as a sort of revolutionary Anglicanism). The presence of so able a speaker, did, however, lead to many others trying their luck upon the platform, with varying results; and a regular Anarchist platform existed in Hyde Park throughout the war and for several years following.

At this period, Freedom Press and the Anarchist Federation moved their offices to Belsize Road, though I never understood how we became so lumbered with such an inconvenient address at a time when so much property was available. It represented merely the top maisonette in a private house and was used as a meeting place as well as offices. In Swiss Cottage it was hardly convenient for anyone to reach (though the tubes always functioned). A happier opportunity was taken by Vernon Richards to acquire the derelict printers in Whitechapel, on lean capital; that is still capable of work after

35 years usage is a minor wonder of the print world. Two happy-chances helped to offset the loss sustained by the demolition of Freedom Bookshop: Penguin Books rationed their sought-after books upon a period in which they had published Kropotkin's "Mutual Aid", which had not unnaturally been well sold among the Anarchist groups. The paper ration was based on a period when "Three Years of Struggle in Spain" had been published, and this again (a statement made by the C.N.T. — F.A.I. on the end of the Spanish War) had a sale out of proportion to our usual pre-war output.

At this period our activity began to boom; apart from indoor Sunday night meetings at Belsize Road, re-started after some years' lapse, and the well-attended Hyde Park Meetings, there were many indoor and outdoor meetings going on throughout London. This, however, only touched the fringe of the activity we were undertaking, since the volume of correspondence — both to "War Commentary" and to "Workers in Uniform" — was colossal. A group of full-time voluntary workers took over in the office — Marie-Louise Berneri, John Hewetson, Lilian Wolfe — then in her seventies, who came up to London specially to help — Peta Edsall. In addition, Tom Brown, Vernon Richards and myself were then on the editorial committee; I was helped on the soldiers' committee by Fay Stewart, and on the International Correspondence committee by M.L. Berneri.

Most of our workers were, of course, part-time voluntary workers. There were no paid officials, a fact on which many took great pride, but as a result of which we did not succeed in building up a lasting organisation. An active, full-time paid secretary at that time would have been a major asset; but the movement was certainly not ready to accept one. Nothing could be relied on to produce more shudders at conferences. As a result, however, considerable influence in the organisation, to say the least, fell into the hands of the full-time voluntary workers. This was only natural and to be expected, but nobody deplored it more than those who objected to a paid secretary as the beginnings of bureaucracy and authoritarian organisation. We were explaining constantly at our meetings that anarchism meant libertarian organisation: not lack of organisation as was popularly supposed. In practice I am afraid we confirmed our critics by never getting down to organisation. I plead guilty to sectarianism in most of my career in the anarchist movement; I do not plead guilty, however, to condoning its lack of organisation, having tried over and over again to start organised bodies. There is something to be said for a sectarian.

# THE INTELLECTUALS

Augustus John, the painter, was perhaps the "doyen" of the artistic fringe of the anarchist movement. Although he himself belonged to an older school of painting that had long since been accepted by the Establishment, he was greatly admired by younger artists. To the lay public he was perhaps better known for his eccentric dress; he once told us a possibly apocryphal story that he had attended a Spanish Anarchist Conference before the civil war (Saragossa?) and to his surprise, he was loudly booed as the audience rose to denounce him. He had been wearing the Carlist colours and a general's hat. Years later, the jazz singer George Melly, when serving in the Navy, was arrested by the Spanish police whilst on leave from Gibraltar. They apologised and let him go, explaining that he had been wearing the Anarchist colours ("the red and black of our enemy"). Melly became an active sympathiser of the Anarchist movement, as did many jazz men. He later did well in music and journalism, becoming a "Hampstead liberal", but in no way forgetting his old sympathy with anarchism, I am assured. I think the first of them must have been Albert McCarthy, who was in correspondence with me when he was living in Southampton just before the war and made contact with the anarchist movement then. By some oversight I have not met him since; I always admired his writing on anarchism, though must admit to a tepid interest in jazz.

Augustus John was not (I think) active on behalf of the Spanish struggle, at least in association with our movement but was certainly so afterwards. Charles Duff – possibly better known for his books on the teaching of language – edited a generally Republican paper, and was always sympathetic to Anarchism. One of his satirical works, "A Handbook of Hanging", was reprinted by Freedom Press. Like many other forgotten treasures, this had first seen the light in Charlie Lahr's old bookshop in Red Lion Street, which flourished during the 'twenties and early 'thirties (when Bloomsbury was not just a geographical expression but a literary one). "Bohemia" spread from Bloomsbury, thanks to the encroachment of the office buildings, to Hampstead and the Soho crowd. The servant shortage and spread outwards of the bourgeoisie in the 'thirties meant that the large houses of Hampstead – formerly occupied by one family apiece – were broken up into flats. It became a haven for Continental refugees, artists, and intellectuals, cloistering around the smarter part of Hampstead with its delectable mansions for bankers, stockbrokers and Labour M.P.s'. The anarchist "fellow-travelling", if I can use this word, intelligentsia focussed around Kitty Lamb's maisonette and Lisa Monks' house; I once heard it said they must have housed and fed more unrecognised and misunderstood talent than anyone but the prison commissioners; that part of it that did finally achieve fulfilment through the film and advertising worlds has yet to render any gratitude to them.

Many of this fringe tended – like Gerry Kingshottt – to a sort of "pacifist-I.L.P.-anarchism" that balanced varying creeds equally, without involving any commitments and indeed, expressly cancelling them out. Their pacifism excused them for working for anarchism and their "anarchism" from political activities for the I.L.P., while their allegiance to the I.L.P. made them look chary on "mainstream" or "traditional" anarchism. However, making the exception in favour of the one person most noted for this trinitarian juggling, Ethel Mannin the novelist in fact did a great deal of work for the anarchist movement, in particular during the Spanish struggle, and continued to give us support during the war.

I would like to recall, in connection with Ethel Mannin, once on a train journey discussing anarchism with a Communist shop steward and his young wife. He knew nothing of it beyond vague party-line defamations (wasn't it Trotskyism?) – she, on the contrary, knew quite something of the subject, and was quite proud to think she, for once, could carry on a political conversation while her husband was at a total loss. (She was not unaware how maddened he was). He asked her, amazed, "What do you know of Alexander Berkman?" when she asked if I had met him – she smiled and explained that she was not as dumb as he evidently thought she was. I realised – as much from the occasional mistakes she made as from the general knowledge of anarchism she showed – that she was a reader of Ethel Mannin, who had come

to her political books via her novels, and indeed, probably learned a lot from some of her better novels too. I naturally did not give this away to the husband, who was probably the better for the chastening experience. Before this I might have criticised Ethel Mannin's emotional approach to anarchism but not since.

Her husband, Reginald Reynolds, who had previously been associated with anti-militarist movements, was more closely identified with the anti-imperialist movement in the years I knew him. There were a number of people around him who came to our platform equally with that of the I.L.P., taking purely an anti-colonialist line. Chris Jones, who spoke on Negro problems, was certainly one of the most effective. Another, whose main interest was the Negro peoples, was George Padmore. He had originally been a Communist (his "Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers" was written in those days). His (Communist) publishers had a book of his in proof form when the party line changed from anti-imperialism to Popular Frontism. It was too late to withdraw the book, so their house-organ and blurbs described and denounced it as reactionary! He went from the C.P., understandably, to the I.L.P. which he aptly described as being at the time, "a party with a programme in advance of its membership" – an advanced socialistic programme had been foisted on what was still basically a reformist labour party\*). Padmore died soon after returning to Ghana when it was granted its independence. It is hard to know whether he would have "kept the faith" or not. Krishna Menon, whom we all knew in the days of the Indian struggle, as a hard-up comrade of the left, who occasionally addressed meetings and always needed slight pecuniary assistance until he found a job with Penguin Books, soared into heights with the granting of Indian independence in which he has never been seen by his former friends and creditors except through trailing clouds of glory. Jomo Kenyatta was at one time prepared to speak at anarchist meetings on the subject of Kenya, though a more intolerant man it would be difficult to meet. There were of course good reasons for his bitterness; I am glad however that when the British Press was exaggerating his role in the Mau Mau, I made my prophesy that he would probably be the first Prime Minister of Kenya; it is nice to be able to point to the occasions when one is right and, like any good tipster, ignore certain other comparatively minor occasions when matters happen unpredictably.

For instance, on one occasion in the post-war years a young man from Nottingham came along to our meetings, talking the utmost drivel about "the outsider" being the hero of our times, and with the old pseudo-revolutionary provocateur nonsense about the criminal being the only real anarchist and so on (Mr. Capone would have put him right on that one; part of the American dream was the opportunity for the businessman like him to arise, he stated). To keep him off the outdoor platform, we invited him to speak at an indoor meeting. It was such rubbish – Jack the Ripper had murdered several prostitutes in different parts of London and he had gone and stood reverently at each spot – Dostoiievsky's rapist was truly a saint – and all that – he was laughed out. Poor Colin Wilson (that was his name, I recall) was utterly crestfallen. I knew he had literary ambitions but in my innocence would not have given much for his chances. He went away; there was some dialogue between him and the well-known but unrelated Angus Wilson; and the next thing we knew was the learned critics of the Observer and Sunday Times had simultaneously hailed "The Outsider" as a masterpiece. This was all that was necessary to launch a career. Not without some obvious cause, Colin Wilson subsequently published some very snide remarks on the London Anarchists in a novel I read when remaindered; a pity that, though Soho types abounded, the originals were certainly not Anarchists, as alleged in the book. I am not at all sure that this is an occasion when I was wrong; I think the critics themselves may by now have come to the realisation that they could

\* On one occasion, Fenner Brockway, reminding the English they did not always give credit to "their own great men" pointed out that we spoke, for instance, of Karl Liebknecht's stand in Germany...did we realise that we had in England a similar figure? – and he introduced John McGovern.



have done with the sense of humour displayed by our group; it is too late now, of course, to damage a literary reputation established by such cement as a joint Times-Observer discovery: librarians will still demand "the latest 'Colin Wilson'".

It is worth mentioning two names which have been closely associated with the anarchist movement to many "outsiders" (in another sense of the word!) though without as good reason as is popularly supposed: Guy Aldred and Herbert Read. It was for years the fate of the anarchist movement in the United States to be associated with Carlo Tresca. He had done good work for the anarcho-syndicalist cause and the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) in his youth. Later on there might be some controversy; indeed the full picture is not to hand even now. Did Tresca, in his later years of denouncing the Communist Party, go a little too far? — to the point of collaborating with the State? He was finally killed — by whom? The New York police were not beyond using and murdering him. Or is this a calumny on Tresca?

Though Aldred was certainly one who never collaborated with the State, there is some parallel in that for years many journalists thought of Aldred as synonymous with the anarchist movement — at the time he might have been in the I.L.P., associated with this or that right or left wing party, actually standing for parliament — who knows? Within his own terms of reference, he remained consistent. He was basically an "uncommitted socialist" though: "I had every reason to detest both Socialists and Anarchists because neither treated me decently," he says revealingly in his autobiography.\* He made most of the mistakes of careerism without taking advantage of its opportunities, and saw a whole generation of young socialists with him go on to parliamentary power. A Londoner, he shifted to Glasgow after World War I feeling that "Red Clydeside" would be a more fruitful field of activity. He remained an outdoor speaker all his life, often coming to Hyde Park. His attacks on opponents were largely of a personal nature (e.g., attacking the C.P. via their M.P. Saklatvala, who was a practising Hindu, with an article on "Saklatvala's Household Gods"). He was as well known to Londoners, in his day, as "the shorthand professor" ("old Charlie", regularly baited by Hyde Park hecklers) or ex-Inspector Syme, who paraded his case daily and weekly alleging wrongful dismissal by Churchill, he became a left wing hero, but outstayed his welcome.

Later, left a legacy by Sir Walter Strickland, of Malta, Aldred published "The Word" originally to "oppose war" (when in 1940 he temporarily shifted his position, "to oppose fascism"; later, in alliance with the Duke of Bedford who was nothing if not pro-fascist, only to "speed commonweal" the first part of its sub-title applied). The paper later managed to shift its position to support of East Germany and China. Aldred's position appeared to be that if he were not an anarchist he did not like anyone to say so, because he did not care to yield a position on the "extreme left". Having said so much, one must add that for years, Aldred's uncompromising atheistic propaganda and his general exposition of socialism, with his denunciation of careerism, did nothing but good for a libertarian atmosphere generally. It was a pity that his marital life had not been happy and that he was constrained to spend so much time attacking his in-laws (Rudolf Rocker) to whom, indeed, he once devoted a whole paper.\*\*

Without doubt, the resources of Freedom Press were used by Woodcock to help advance his literary and academic career; in a movement expressly opposed to political careerism this inevitably appeared to many militants as something of a confidence trick and some of the bitterness that arose within the movement at that time must be accounted to this and in particular the publication of "Now". It was ingenuously explained by the voluntary full-time workers on Freedom Press, who were becoming a distinctive group as opposed to the voluntary part time workers, that they had not exceeded their functions, being on the spot; by adding the initials "c/o". The journal was not a Freedom Press publication and had nothing whatever to do with it apart from having its mail sent "c/o" Freedom Press and being printed at its press. Had a commercial catalogue been brought out under the same arrangement they would certainly have seen the falsity of this argument; they were, unfortunately, unable even to appreciate that there existed an argument that advancement in the academic world is even to be compared with advancement in the world of politics or commerce. One of the minor amusing effects of this is how the "New Statesman" praised the "usual brilliancy" of a very humdrum essay by the other George Woodcock — the TU bureaucrat — in an anthology, obviously confusing him with the author George Woodcock who belonged to the fraternity of reviewers and was hence

entitled to his little laurel.

The use of the term "intellectual" is debatable. When used in her books by Ethel Mannin, it is clearly used in a "trade union" sense to meet all painters, writers, musicians and so on by occupation. Yet even here there is a contradiction because even so she clearly implies "left wing" — Daphne du Maurier might be as capable a writer as Ethel Mannin, but the latter thinks of herself as an "intellectual". On the other hand, used by Herbert Read, it clearly meant people of the calibre of the philosophers Albert Einstein or Albert Schweitzer — Camus, Sartre, and various "names" — and including himself — but certainly (except out of courtesy) not, say, Ethel Mannin. Or more specifically, not J.B. Priestley who was once quite hurt that Read excluded him from a libertarian canon of intellectuals. There are various other ways of using the word by specifically stretching it to include oneself; the idea that it could be used rather as the fascists used the idea of "race" — the supermen of society — is an offshoot of the Popular Front period (an idea rejected by them but lying around to be picked up) — not unknown in early socialist thinking (especially French — "in the society of the future people will throw roses under the feet of poets"), certainly captivating to latter-day Stalinism and the Western Meritocracy. Woodcock's introduction of the word into anarchist circles (Hewetson was also hooked on the word, though his anarchism was far deeper and he rejected the conclusions of accepting the idea) was a gift to the wobbling "trinitarians" (I.L.P. — pacifist-anarchists) who from now on had a ready identification and a ready excuse for retreating to Cornwall to grow roses: they were Intellectuals. The somewhat sordid preoccupations of the "mainstream" anarchists, fighting the everyday battle for individual rights in the factory, were beneath their breadth of humanity. As for war and the State, it was only necessary to ignore it. A one-way ticket from Paddington to the English Riviera, for those fortunate enough to be able to purchase it, was the only passport to utopia. This philosophy preceded the "drop-out" one by a generation and had the advantage that prices being so much cheaper then, it was that much easier to get to the chosen haven where one could drop out and turn one's nose up at sordid material considerations.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast than passing from Guy Aldred, the street corner propagandist whom the popular press occasionally wrote up, to Herbert Read, scholarly academic and dispenser of judgement well within the literary Establishment. As Read was the most distinguished man of letters to come to the anarchist movement in this country (since Edward Carpenter) some observers have written of him as if he were the most distinguished anarchist, which is not indeed quite the same thing. His pre-eminence in other, and totally different fields of literature and art causes bourgeois historians of the labour movement to fall into misconceptions as to the role he played. To them, social theories must be traced to this or that academic theoretician, and the fact that the anarchist movement in this country, over years of discussion, hammered out a viable revolutionary theory — which might be presented in a polished form by a theoretician (and in fact has not been, except in ephemeral articles) — is quite unthinkable.

Read no doubt knew about Kropotkin and anarchist writers in his youth but the suggestion (made in Rocker's "London Years") that he had anything whatever to do with the anarchist movement then (or during the first World War, in which he served as an officer) or had any but a cursory knowledge of its principles at the time, is quite absurd. He states himself that he was a "guild socialist" in his youth and that his later acceptance of anarchism was a return to that guild socialism. In the years between the wars he moved around politically from communism to social credit, and first became aware of anarchism in 1937, when he wrote "Poetry and Anarchism". That he had no great knowledge of it before can be seen from his contribution to the revealing "Authors take sides", (1936) a booklet on the Spanish Civil War, with statements from the vast range of British writers, known and unknown, the majority of whom were "for the Republic". Ethel Mannin is the only one to state her firm belief at the time that she was not merely "for the Republic, inasmuch as I am against Franco, and that passionately" but for the social revolution and "not Marxist but Anarcho-Syndicalist (C.N.T. — F.A.I.)". No other writer goes so far (Aldous Huxley says he has a preference for the Anarchists, though he ran off like a startled fawn when Emma Goldman tried to rope him into activity for the Spanish Anarchists); certainly not Read, who merely states a general intellectual anti-fascist case.

His book was enthusiastically received by the Bohemian fringe of anarchism, and it indeed became the bible for that not inconsiderable body, toed to convention, in provincial towns, that became liberated by acquaintance with the anarchist ethic, even came into activity, moved to London; and having achieved personal liberation, disappeared into the delectable duchy of Cornwall where the beat generation before two is still painting itself out.

\* "Dogmas Discarded", 2 vols. (Strickland Press, Glasgow).

\*\* Now a piece of curiosity: "Hyde Park" Vol.1. (1938 — no further issues) was almost exclusively devoted to an attack on Rudolf Rocker, who had once been excluded from the U.S.A. for not being legally married, and "posed as a freethought martyr" when the "dreadful" truth was that he was already legally married to somebody else.





It was a pity that some of Read's other followers tended to form a coterie which, calling itself anarchist, was certainly not; and the Woodcock clique (nothing to do with the General Secretary of the TUC), to which I shall refer, was undoubtedly a reactionary force. One could not, however, blame Read for his followers; one could find fault with him for sometimes, in his writings, imagining that he had invented anarchism himself (some lines in "The politics of the Unpolitical" suggest that he is the *only* anarchist extant when he refers to that "particular form of guild socialism of which I seem to be the only present exponent"). Emma Goldman, however, made full use of his name in her Spanish meetings; and later Freedom Press published "The Philosophy of Anarchism", "The Education of Free Men" and other small books by him which have been admired by many as able expositions of anarchism in relation to educational, artistic and philosophical ideas.

In my view, for what it is worth, he is to be congratulated for enriching certain fields of anarchism, art and philosophy with anarchist ideas. The Anarchists may well be proud that theories, worked out over generations by experience and discussion among unknown people, could prove of such great value in their application to those fields. Read did not in return contribute anything new to anarchist theory. Perhaps one could compare him to the Englishman who returns from Japan with traditional ideas such as flower arranging, tree growing, and the collection of netsuke. The Japanese may be flattered, but the gain is England's. Nor need the Japanese be surprised if in time of war the Englishman proves to be a patriotic Englishman rather than a Nippophile.

Read gave a certain implicit support to the second World War — explicit so far as his statements to the "outside world" were concerned — lukewarm so far as his writings go. His poem "To a Conscript" still appears to be anti-war. I understand he raised a fund to keep Dylan Thomas out of the army; though when he rallied to the defence of the editors of "War Commentary" in 1944, he said he had been "naive enough" to believe that the war was anti-fascist. It is quite clear that he was anything but a "leader" and in fairness to him, he would hardly have made the claim himself. Nor in fact was his later (post-war) acceptance of a knighthood any surprise, or embarrassment, except in the way in which it was dealt with by the group editing "Freedom" at that time. It would appear that Read had originally explained to them that he regarded his knighthood as conferred not on him personally so much as being a recognition of the work he had done for the unorthodox, "persecuted surrealist minority" and he could hardly refuse it in the circumstances; however, it turned out — before they had a chance to publish his "explanation" — that the award was not for his services to art, but to literature, in which he was nothing if not highly orthodox. The editorial published therefore merely tried to justify Read's acceptance of a knighthood partly, one suspects out of a desire to go on publishing him should he choose. It was not altogether surprising that a number of people, receiving their regular issue of "Freedom", wrote off some highly indignant letters. No concerted plan need be supposed;

the editor of a Temperance journal may well expect a degree of reader-reaction if he suggests that the best way to mix a Martini is to add a dash of rum. The receipt of these letters provided the then members of the Freedom Press Group with a ready answer; they had themselves had reservations about Read's acceptance of a title, true, but they could not stand for people "ganging up" and if "everyone" was out to hound the poor man they would certainly refrain from criticism while he was "down". After all, one of them explained to me privately, "If Russell or Neill were to call themselves anarchists, we should be delighted; yet they would be immediately criticised for this or that deviation from their anarchism by sectarians". In fairness to Neill, this was precisely why he did not call himself an anarchist though nobody made a greater contribution to anarchistic educational theory; in fairness to the editor in question Russell had not made quite such a fool of himself then as he has since. The frequent references by George Woodcock in his writings on Read to the fact that he disagreed with the Anarchists because of his "pacifism" can be seen to be totally incorrect and based on Woodcock's striving to identify himself with the more important Read.

To the best of my knowledge, A.S. Neill was never personally involved with the anarchist movement; though many anarchists supported the free school movement — as teachers or parents. In contrast, Alex Comfort a man of many parts as scientist, poet, doctor and novelist — gave practical help and encouragement to the movement on many occasions, including one of the post-war Summer Schools. His main interest may be said, however, to have been the peace movement.

Last to be mentioned of the "intellectuals", and certainly least so far as intellectual ability or importance to the libertarian movement was concerned, was George Woodcock, who introduced the term to us so far as its specific use as a divisive slogan was concerned. Woodcock came (like a great many others in the early days of the war) from the pacifist movement; he may have been one of those brought in by the Forward Movement. He had already a minor literary reputation as a critic among a specific clique which may be said to be a hangover from the thirties — those out of the Popular Front clique which dominated the literary thirties. As he has threatened to write his memoirs in which one may be sure his critics, like Johnson's "Whig dogs" will not get the best of it, a corrective in these pages may be deemed necessary. Under the tutelage of Berneri (possibly Hewetson also) he wrote several pedestrian pamphlets on anarchism in the mainline of the general discussion at the time, and went on to write a number of books on related subjects: Kropotkin, Winstanley, Proudhon (whom he patronised), Aphra Behn, and inevitably Oscar Wilde. His book, ultimately appeared in 1963 as a Penguin, "Anarchism", passes off as being an unbiased study; but its inaccuracies are hard to bear. Some of his later writings are downright lies, and include war atrocity stories against the Spanish and Russian Anarchists to demonstrate the breadth of his charitable Tolstoyanism.

# 'SEDUCING' H.M. FORCES

The entry of Russia into the war in 1941 while it had hardly changed the nature of the war so far as we were concerned, made a considerable difference to the extent of influence exercised by the Anarchists (and by the Trotskyists also). It may be said at once that this was one of the main reasons for the immunity from prosecution, whilst purely engaged in propaganda, enjoyed by both these movements during the middle part of the war. The Government had failed to make use of 18b so far as we were concerned — the stand made by the South-end Group at the right psychological time had made that impossible. Undoubtedly the reason why we now enjoyed comparative freedom from molestation was the full realisation of the Home Secretary, Mr. Herbert Morrison, that we were a major thorn in the flesh to the Communist Party. Himself a typically British version of the diehard Russian bureaucrat, I once heard that years ago, in the early days of the socialist movement, someone asked the hoary question (originally asked of socialists but latterly of anarchists — today plaintively asked of society as a whole) "who will do the dirty work?" The meeting roared with one voice, "Our Herbert!"

An expert at "Tammany" electioneering, Morrison hated the guts of the C.P. and faced a strong Communist opposition in his own constituency of South Hackney, carefully nourished on personal grounds against him throughout the war (and because of which he changed his constituency afterwards). He also saw very clearly that the build-up of Soviet Russia during the war, after Hitler had turned against Stalin, would lead to a considerable accession of influence to the Communist Party. Yet there were strong criticisms of the Communist Party from a working-class point of view which the socialists had to let go by default, since they were part of the Government; while even those who considered themselves left of the government were only the more pro-Soviet while the myth lasted. The I.L.P. was too committed to a pacifist policy to help much; if the Anarchists and the Trots were going to "dish the Reds", Morrison was quite prepared to let them do so (and equally prepared to clamp down on them the moment this objective was achieved). Hence the otherwise inexplicable anomaly that both movements were allowed to go unmolested while the war was on, yet pounced upon almost simultaneously within months of its finish.

Morrison would have loved to have attacked the Communists himself, but he could not do so. He had to lift the ban on the "Daily Worker" once the Communists became the greatest patriots of all (to the extent that by 1945, Lord Beaverbrook could quieten a Communist crowd by telling them to vote for "Churchill, Stalin's pal"; and the party put forward the line of "a Labour Government under Churchill's leadership"). The attacks made upon the Communists by those more principled than Morrison did, however, limit the Moscow-line influence on the British working-class considerably. When one compares the C.P. in 1945 — with its two members of Parliament, one elected by a mere electoral fluke (both gone today) — the French or Italian C.P., one can see what an effect we had. The British C.P. had received more Russo-ophile publicity than anyone; it had not had the opportunity to commit any excesses; and its propaganda had never been interrupted. But it had been subjected to severe public criticism of a nature it had not received anywhere else, either.

The Trotskyists benefited directly from their criticisms of the C.P. in the fact that many militants went direct from one to the other. We preferred that dyed-in-the-wool Stalinists, with their minor differences in policy only, should go to the Trots rather than to us. The Trots at this time abandoned their normal policy of "entryism" (into other parties) and formed their own party, the Revolutionary Communist Party. They had spectacular successes in industry, partly as the result of the accession of C.P. militants; we on the other hand found our support steadily amongst soldiers. This became clearer than ever by 1944: the remarkable degree of support found for our May Day meetings, and the clear fact of the Anarchist influence in the armed forces and the influence of the more militant Trotskyist in industry, must have made some supporters of the established order shudder, though there was no remote possibility of unity between the two movements.

Whether Morrison decided that the time had come after studying reports of the May Day meetings of 1944, or whether his hand was forced by his superiors in the Cabinet, who may have felt that this was becoming too much of a good thing, we may in time find out. Certainly at that period began constant police harassment by the Special Branch, which at times "made one wonder not merely that they thought they were running the Gestapo, but the Gestapo in an occupied country, at that", to quote one of our speakers. Exaggerated? Certainly. But while the breaking up of meetings by asking persons attending for their identity cards may sound comparatively mild to those who experienced the Gestapo, it is — as H.G. Wells pointed out, only a matter of degree. "Then long live the degree," replied Madariaga. But how is the degree to be preserved if one does not protest the moment it is lowered? If our movement did nothing else in English history, it helped to preserve that degree by standing out against these police infringements of liberty after 1944.

One of the first to be "done" was T.W. Brown, a young comrade from Kingston, who had published on his own initiative a leaflet denouncing the war which was interpreted as an incitement to sabotage for which he served eighteen months imprisonment. Following this case, the authorities began taking a very close look at our activities amongst soldiers. This may also be connected with the fact of Common Wealth having achieved a remarkable propaganda success among soldiers (though its line was pro-war) especially in the Middle East. The "Cairo Parliament", began as an Army Education debating centre, was hastily disbanded lest it prove a centre for soldier's councils. Being basically middle-class and parliamentary (fighting by-elections, and winning them during the electoral truce) it was not orientated to industry, but there was a working-class element in it (at Napier's, for instance), especially in the London region which was less interested in the party's primary aim (to break the party truce and gain M.P.s) and more interested in its professed aim of workers' ownership and control.

Our attitude to the Army — as exemplified in the first "Workers in Uniform" group — had been to agree that the way of the "skyver" rather than the striker was to be recommended. Our ideal was the Good Soldier Schweik; he had reappeared in France (1940) as the "debrouillard"; and the "skyver" too, led the bureaucracy a dance. We even evolved a scheme whereby, by mere dumb helplessness on the part of the victim, it took the bureaucracy three years instead of three weeks to call a man up. Oddly, this appealed to far more people than did conscientious objection.

Within the factories, the C.P. carried out a campaign for greater production, and denounced those who did not follow suit to the authorities, getting them sacked, even getting them called up. Within the Army, however, we were able to rout the C.P. They could not get people thrown out of the army. Communist influence — except among a certain section of the officer class — was reduced to zero.

We did not overlook that a serious revolutionary movement might need one day to have guns in its hands and that a certain knowledge of military techniques were necessary. Until 1942 there was always the slight chance that the people might one day be able to intervene on their own behalf. After that period, the consolidation of the war meant that it was firmly in the hands of governments, except for some of the anti-Nazi Resistance movements in Europe which chose to act on their own behalf and not on instructions from London or Moscow. When the period of heavy bombing of German cities began, a new dimension entered into the thinking of soldiers with anarchist sympathies. "From now on," said Alex Comfort, "the deserter is every man's friend".

The common notion of deserter is one hiding in the shadows of a large city, with a weeks growth of beard, looking fearfully around. It was not like that at all. Considerable mutual aid was found that enabled large numbers of deserters to lead reasonably normal lives. Even identity cards were found. Some co-operatives were established. There was even a tacit understanding on the part of the police, for obvious reasons of their own, that at least one



"Alsatia" was preserved. The "Coffee An" in Soho was a meeting place for all who came to London to find work. One of the favourite jobs was film extra. The wartime epics needed large numbers of unskilled labour, so I am told, and most of the British film extras — ageing over years of keeping out newcomers — had just about given up after weeks of being immersed in the floods of "The Mill on the Floss". The battle of Agincourt, fought in "Henry V", contained a record number of ex-Army skyvers and deserters, suitably disguised as Harry's archers. They fought later when the "Coffee An" was closed down following complaints by the American authorities, who did not share the view of many British officers that they were well-rid of some people and did not at all appreciate the efforts of the civilian police to bring them back.

One deserter, John Olday, was a brilliant cartoonist, who contributed biting cartoons to "War Commentary"; born in Germany (of Scottish-Canadian parentage), he had been an enemy alien (British) in the First World War whilst at school, and experienced the revolution in Germany in 1918. His book, "The Kingdom of Rags" is now a very rare item. He first put forward the idea to which several (though far from all) of our comrades subscribed: that it was the task of the anarchist to go into the army, learn a little of military techniques for revolutionary purposes, and to come out, taking others with him so that the army might "vote with its feet". Olday was a competent organiser, and when I gave up the editorship of the bulletin (during the 1941 to 1944 period my work took me mostly outside London; for the first time in several years I was free from any voluntary secretarial or organisational work and concentrated on speaking) and he took over. If, while I was editor, the bulletin's ideal was Schweik, it now became Spartacus. Olday insisted on the lessons of the German Revolution, and the discussion on tactics overflowed into "War Commentary", with articles on the setting up of soldiers' councils. He also persuaded Ernst Schneider, a veteran seaman and former Spartacist (who had participated in the Hamburg soldiers', seamen's and workers' councils of 1918) to write his reminiscences of "The Wilhelmshaven Revolt".\* Olday made a great impression as a writer and cartoonist. With the end of the war Olday reverted to the German movement beginning an intensive propaganda campaign among the prisoners-of-war which was the origin of the German Anarchist movement of today.

We unfortunately lacked anyone similarly competent to undertake industrial organisation, although Tom Brown, himself a shop steward, put forward a clear line of anarcho-syndicalist theory and technique, lucidly expressed both in pamphlets, articles and on the platform. We had no organisers to carry this decentralist policy into practice; though talent was not wanting (especially in some mining areas). The shipbuilding Clyde remained the most receptive area for our meetings and literature; while in the London area, the Kingston Group (founded at this time by Jim Barker, veteran Secularist and

former Labour councillor and candidate) made striking propaganda successes amongst the West London bus garages. The most forceful speaker and organiser amongst the busmen was Frank Soden. It should also be added that the (second) Anarchist Federation held regular meetings at this period and its outdoor meetings in Hyde Park — notwithstanding the war — were highly successful. Philip Sansom, who had recently joined our ranks, very speedily became our most fluent outdoor speaker in London, mastering the technique of Hyde Park in a regular series of lectures uninterrupted during the remainder of the 'forties (except for the period of his imprisonment) until the 'sixties. I spoke in many draughty halls to audiences ranging from two upwards in many towns. One well-attended meeting was by invitation at a Merchant Seamen's club in Wapping. The "Brains Trust" was all the rage at the time; some Toc H characters had the idea of getting along a couple of Anarchists and "taking the mickey" out of them. He was under the impression they would send some raving lunatics whom it would be easy to debunk. Marie Louise Berneri and myself went. One need hardly say that this extremely attractive, exotic Latin-type girl went down extremely well before an all-male audience of 200 Merchant Seamen. The chorus of wolf-whistles that went up considerably upset the chairman (who, having been given only the name "M.L. Berneri" in correspondence, had announced "Mr. Meltzer and Mr. Berneri"). We gave a good account of ourselves in the debate — the parson who opposed me suddenly jumped up and down while I was speaking, making animal noises (this was by way of an illustration of anarchism in practice); I politely said I would wait until he had finished his prayers, which sent the audience into a howl of laughter. What really rallied support to us was, of course, the discussion veering to sex (Marie Louise was accused by the other parson of "advocating rape" — it was hardly the time or place for her to do so, one would have thought). She answered with a straightforward talk on freedom and sex, even tackling the subject of homosexuality which (while it could scarcely be new to the audience) few had ever heard expressed in terms of scientific psychology before, least of all by a charming girl. (Much has changed in twenty years; then the British could still be embarrassed — now only their judges can).

The two young parsons were even more disgusted with the Freudianism than with the anarchism, and tended to confuse the two (how the Church has changed!). In the "Tribute to M.L. Berneri" published after her death, one of the writers says that when she spoke to the Progressive League on sexuality, no doubt around this time, "many of her hearers spoke of the remarkable impression this this young and beautiful woman made by her calm discussion of matters which the majority even of intellectuals fear to think about". To talk in those terms to the Progressive League was no great shakes in my opinion; our friend should have heard the same speech before the lusty Merchant Seamen.

WS CHRONICLE, Tuesday, April 26, 1945

## 'FIGHT, FOR WHAT?' POEM READ AT

### OLD BAILEY Four on charge of disaffection



Dr. J. C. HEWETSON



MARIE LOUISE RICHARDS



EXTRACTS from a paper which was said to have advocated anarchy, and verses of a poem which asked that landlords should do the fighting, were read at the Old Bailey yesterday.

Three men and a woman pleaded not guilty to having conspired to seduce from duty persons in the Forces and to cause disaffection.

They are:

Vernon Richards (29), civil engineer, and Marie Louise Richards (26), secretary, both of

VERNON RICHARDS (right) and (below) PHILIP R. SANSOM

News Chronicle report on the trial of Vernon Richards, Marie-Louise Berneri, John Hewetson and Philip Sansom (not shown) for conspiracy to seduce H.M. Forces and cause disaffection.

\*"The Wilhelmshaven Revolt", by Icarus (Ernst Schneider), Simian Publications.



# DARK YEARS OF VICTORY

As already mentioned, on May Day 1944 we had held an exceptionally good rally, first of all in Hyde Park, later in the evening at the (now demolished) Holborn Hall. The film "*Kameradschaft*" was shown (after many years, and with added point) and a packed audience of some six hundred responded with electrifying enthusiasm. It included industrial workers, deserters, soldiers, and as a demonstration of our then potential strength impressed a good many (the Special Branch it would seem not least). This was at a time when Labour enthusiasm was down to zero, the Government was losing elections to Common Wealth, and the C.P. "Second Front" campaign had aroused positive hostility towards them (notwithstanding Kremlinophilia, which ever since 1941, following the fatuous line first laid down by Bernard Shaw — "all we have to do now is to sit back and watch the Red Army roll over Hitler" — had obsessed a great many minds).

It is curious that both the Trotskyists and also the Anarchists were at the peak of their war-time propaganda successes, and had effectively stripped the Communist Party of any of its working-class pretensions; they both in their own ways had shown they were capable of unified action within their own ranks; and almost simultaneously but separately they caved in on themselves and, whilst in a state of schism, were subjected to prosecutions. As one would be suspect of conspiracy mania: were one to urge more than coincidence in the matter, it need only be said that while the trots were always known to "infiltrate" the Labour Party (as well as the C.P. and each others' groups), any suggestion that the Labour executive under Morrison undertook the job of "infiltration" of the Left normally given to police departments and agents-provocateurs, is generally regarded as fantasy.

In the course of numerous police raids and visits on private houses around this period, largely undertaken to frighten people off rather than for anything it was hoped to find, I must record two amusing incidents: one, the discovery by Inspector Whitehead, then head of the Special Branch (political), of a Nazi soldier's uniform complete with pistol while searching the house of one young couple. They, not knowing it was there, were so outraged by what appeared to be a flagrant frame-up, that no action was taken apart from seizing the gear which they hotly claimed the police had planted. Later a comrade who had been staying with them (but whose name had not been mentioned, as he was an Army deserter) came in and anxiously asked for the missing outfit, which belonged to Denham Studios and which he had borrowed for laughs; he happened to be a film extra.

The other incident was when the police broke into the home of Fay Stewart: her dog, Mickey, either not understanding the legal niceties of a magistrate's warrant as regards unwelcome intruders, or determined to live up to Michael Bakunin for whom he was named, bit a police sergeant in the ankle. Many bones came his way from grateful but more inhibited humans.

Fay Stewart, an attractive warm-hearted blonde, was active in our movement throughout the war; she was tragically killed in a lorry accident at the early age of thirty while cycling to her work as an industrial nurse, in the last days of the black-out. Thanks to her vigilance, the addresses of our soldier contacts were saved from the police when John Olday was arrested. She resorted to the trusted English expedient of making them a cup of tea, taking care to light the fire with her files. Olday was arrested on a charge of having a false identity card; refusing to give evidence on his own behalf, or to speak at all, he went up to the Old Bailey for conviction, receiving a sentence out of all proportion to the offence as a result. On his being returned to the Army, however, the military authorities, not having his political dossier to hand, could not understand how the civilian authorities had given him so heavy a sentence, and it weighed in his favour in getting a speedy "dishonourable discharge".

It is quite incredible to reflect now to what lengths the police went in prosecutions. Tom Earley and Cecil Stone, for instance, were arrested whilst selling "Freedom" at Hyde Park (in September 1945) and charged with obstruction. During the hearing of the case a Special Branch representative was present. Our two comrades, charged with this minor offence, had previously

been searched. What was the point? Only an attempt to humiliate and terrorise opponents of the government. When Freedom Press was raided "files, card indexes, typewriters, letters, etc. were all bundled into sacks, taken away and kept for months...resulting in a complete disruption of the business of the office...the whole affair was reminiscent of the attacks by fascist bands on the offices of revolutionary newspapers during Mussolini's rise to power in Italy" (Freedom 6.10.45).

Amidst the general squalid series of police persecutions, Freedom Press was not of course overlooked; and following investigation, pressure was put under threat of invocation of the Registration of Business Names Act, 1916, to "register" Freedom Press under a business name. It had carried on and off cheerfully since 1886 without doing so. Express Printers had to follow suit; it was indeed still registered under its previous owners' name. These minor pressures were of course the preliminary to prosecution: on the principle laid down by Mrs. Beeton — "first catch your hare" — having netted some responsible people by threatening one action, they could then consider under which recipe to cook them.

Alongside this, however, was a split in our ranks which only became apparent (so far as I could tell, having been away from London while it was developing) after May 1944, when many "came back" to the anarchist movement who had not been seen since 1938 for the specific reason that they were pro-war (and only belonging to my category of "conference anarchists" beforehand). One such was Sonia Clements, whose father (Edelman) had been a trade union organiser in the States, whose son became a key figure in the social-democratic movement here and who herself became chairman of a local Labour Party a year afterwards, but who for the time being constituted herself the centre of a "split" in the anarchist movement. The (second) Anarchist Federation had been organised on a basis that specifically excluded both bourgeois pacifists and supporters of the war. It had a "two part" programme; the first a general case; the second a revolutionary programme which did mean that many people felt themselves excluded by a clique.

The degree of acrimonious criticism against that group within the Federation which included the full-time voluntary workers, by virtue chiefly of the growing influence of Woodcock, caused it to constitute an organised group for the first time, and stating they were now independent (with Vernon Richards as the secretary). Tom Brown, who had concentrated on industrial propaganda, led the opposition group which resented this. It is doubtful if the argument would have become so bitter had there not been introduced into it the "outsiders" who now appeared for the first time, or the first time for many years, and who — having caused a split — withdrew. The Spanish group in London which now, for the first (and last) time interested itself in local affairs also intervened; Ken Hawkes, who identified himself closely with the C.N.T. — F.A.I. although he actually had not been in association with the movement until after the Spanish struggle — became their English spokesman.

This latter group gained a majority at one of the now regular verbal battles at the Sunday morning business meetings, and claimed it constituted the A.F.B. proper. Unfortunately, the majority of those active in the movement at the time had very little to do with the resultant schism, which became largely a question of personalities centring around a dozen or so people. Any excuse at a later date that the split was in any way ideological is, I fear, merely an excuse. There were some bitter disputes, following which there emerged the Freedom Press Group, as a separate and independent group from then on; the (third) Anarchist Federation (for apart from two or three people, it from then on consisted of entirely different people, by taking into membership many who had been excluded by "Part II", as members of the P.P.U. or supporters of the war); and finally as a third undefined group, everybody else in the anarchist movement. On the whole this third group was inclined to give more favourable support to the Freedom Press Group — although it entirely disagreed with their attitude which it felt had brought on the split — partly because they were the victims both of the police and of some petty violence from those from

whom they dissented; mainly because they carried on. It is remarkable that "War Commentary" carried on through this period without missing an issue, largely due to three women – M.L. Berneri, Peta Edsall and Lilian Wolfe.

The police not only raided 27 Belsize Road, but helped to terminate the lease there by the "scandal" thus caused. They seized the files, looking for soldiers' addresses. In the soldiers' group we took the decision to notify everybody of the changed situation, point out a general suggestion for the future, and explain that we would no longer publish. We then burned all copies of our files, which in any case would soon have been obsolete with demobilisation. The police searched Freedom Press high and low without success. All they obtained were the addresses of those soldiers who had subscribed to "War Commentary" and were in the general "War Commentary" files, but not to our bulletin (we enclosed the paper with the bulletin in a sealed envelope). The addresses thus seized were passed on to the military, who had searched soldiers' kitbags all over the country and abroad to see if they had been receiving the paper.

Those who were found to have done so were then subpoenaed as witnesses, necessarily hostile, for the Crown in a charge of conspiracy to seduce his Majesty's Forces laid against Vernon Richards, John Hewetson, M.L. Berneri and Philip Sansom. The former had been netted under the Business Names Act; the latter, who was an active speaker at the time, had nevertheless only recently come to the movement and was no more guilty than at least two hundred others, but he happened to be working at the office when the police arrived. Had more been there, they would also have been arrested.

The charge was manifestly absurd: not one word had appeared in "War Commentary" in recent months more nor less seditious than had appeared at any time since the war. Justice, one might presume, should not depend on Mr. Morrison's political manoeuvres. The paper was not secret. Its paper supply could have been stopped at any time. Any offence was clearly condoned. But there was a revolution in Greece; it was not desired that soldiers should refuse to shoot down revolutionaries, as they might well have done (and some did, both in Greece and Yugoslavia) nor were the dreaded soldiers' councils which might appear with the end of the war going to be tolerated for one second. That was why the "Cairo Parliament" was closed; that was why they decided to put an end to the Anarchists once and for all. The judge stated that it was desirable and important that justice should be seen to be done in this case, and that free speech was not in jeopardy. This was rubbish. It was clearly shown in evidence that the people concerned had been seditious; it was equally clear that they had been so since the war began, and were not alone in the sedition; and that the sedition had been overlooked for political purposes.

Unfortunately the defence was in the hands of lawyers with their own reputations to consider and the case was not put forward on these lines. The defendants were all highly individualistic; they also resented ill-founded criticism made by some out to cause a schism among the anarchists that people with their views should not rely on defence lawyers. This suggestion that the revolutionary should always be acting a part, striving for undiminished personal glory and defying his executioners so that he may ultimately run to a three volume biography as Patriot - Liberator - Martyr, is one of the misconceptions of revolution that haunts the lecture room. There is no reason why one should not defend oneself in the courtroom except where it is so blatantly rigged that by refusal to participate one may appeal to public opinion. However, if one cannot find lawyers capable of doing the job – and most English barristers are utterly useless at anything but fixing their wigs and collecting their guineas – one has perforce to undertake it oneself, and any one of the defendants in this case could have put up an argument that would have knocked the prosecution for six. But having accepted the legal representation, they could not speak up. The legal defence was quite proud that they had secured the acquittal of one of the defendants, M.L. Berneri, since the police in their enthusiasm had overlooked the fact that she had taken the precaution of securing British nationality by legal marriage and could scarcely be charged with conspiracy with her own husband.

It should be mentioned in passing that the magistrate at first had refused bail to the defendants, since the bailiffs, Frank Leech and Simon Watson Taylor, had declined to give the oath, which under the Bradlaugh Act they were perfectly permitted to do; while his decision was set aside by a judge in chambers, the fact of his prejudice against atheists could not be set aside by process of law. The Old Bailey judge's prejudice against anarchists could not be questioned. His sentencing of the three men to prison was regarded as a scandal by many with a concern for civil liberties. A defence committee was set up: it included many Labour M.P.s who had, however, the embarrassment of being returned to a Labour Government before the campaign was over. They were now in a position to help. They had basked before the electorate as men concerned with civil liberties: now they were the Govern-

ment. Needless to say, they did not protest any longer. Many distinguished writers and others joined in the protest at the treatment of Freedom Press. Amongst them was George Woodcock, who had previously been a member of the editorial group and subsequently became one again, to the extent of excluding articles with which he disagreed, but who did not hesitate to state boldly in a letter to the press that however much he disagreed with "War Commentary", as a pacifist, he would fight to the death to defend their right, etc.

It was important, however, that the Anarchist movement, notwithstanding its dissensions, and however one might feel it could have behaved more coherently at this juncture, in fact carried on. There were no recantations or general alarm at police action. People who were raided in the morning were still prepared to go out and have a social gathering in the pub in the evening, and reckon that "on the whole" it was a fairly good day. Repressive action always begins against the "extreme" or the most unpopular; if it gets away with curtailing their freedom, the limits are drawn a little more. I do not think that minor criticisms made here should deflect from the positive statement that a major stand for civil liberty was made at this juncture. It was another rude jolt to those in the Establishment whose minds are never far away from a dictatorship. It would have been a disaster had the Anarchists behaved like the Russian Trotskyists (the English Trotskyists, charged by Ernest Bevin as a Coalition Minister under the very Trades Disputes Act brought in by the Tories against the Labour opposition, and amended it at one fell swoop by the Labour Government, did not recant; but they were facing a clear "class enemy", not "their own"), or the German Communists – admittedly these faced greater odds, but not more so than the Russian or German Anarchists who did not recant.

We were confident during the war that a revolutionary situation would come about and we were ready for it with our Army contacts. But the heat was taken out of the situation with demobilisation; the Cairo mutiny was the last fling. The prospect of invasion in 1940 would have meant a totally new situation; particularly if there had been a "legal" surrender and therefore the conservative forces would have accepted Nazi rule. We had guns stored away for that eventuality; and acquired more during the war for the "day". I suppose most of these arms have long since been traded in under arms amnesty arrangements but there are some forgotten caches around to be dug up by future generations of archaeologists. Jack Mason buried some at Hampstead Heath, but I have long since forgotten where.

One old Irishwoman, a comrade of many years standing, very alone in her old age, had charge of a dozen machine-guns. She insisted that her grand mother's chest was the perfect hiding place which indeed it was; and that she had experience oiling guns. Her grand-daughter had ascended the social scale and knew nothing about her grandmothers' anarchism, and one may picture the scene when she ultimately died, and the family opened the chest wondering what treasures grandma stored there...

At no time were we ever a very unpopular minority. People might have wild ideas as to what anarchism meant, but rarely did they violently disagree when we told them what it did mean, unless they were hooked on a totalitarian philosophy. With the repression of 1944/45, there was some turning against us – it was curious how some employers and landladies used the excuse of the "War Commentary" trial. On the whole, however, it was felt we were shabbily treated. It is true the Buchenwald Camp revelations made many people think that we had been in the wrong to oppose the war. There were even some so horrified at these revelations – which were scarcely surprising to those who had been in the anti-fascist movement – that they declared their hatred of all things German, and sacked Jewish refugees from their jobs. "Pacifism" became suspect, even ours!

It escaped notice in some quarters that our revolutionary policy had been to overthrow governments that were causing these atrocities. The pro-war policy had done nothing to prevent them. It had added mass-bombings, and finally Hiroshima, to the atrocities.

We had nothing to apologise for in our stand beyond our lack of success; we had reason to be proud that we had resisted encroaching police state; and I also think in retrospect we had one more achievement of which to be proud. For years we had fought the cause of colonial independence, with a very clear knowledge that the "allies" of today would be the bureaucrats of tomorrow, and we had helped to create an atmosphere where a prolonged colonial war was against the grain. Would the Labour Government so readily have consented to the independence of India had it not been for the years of thankless endeavour undertaken by the "far left"? I wonder if it might not have become another Algeria, draining off another generation into battle, had a conscience not been created on the subject?

The new sahibs of India have forgotten the penniless militants who helped them out with one campaign after another to save political prisoners. The



reports of the "War Commentary" trial, incidentally, which went out all over India, introduced anarchism to the Indian scene; but for years there was in the whole continent only one active militant. Like "Chummy" Fleming in Australia, my old friend M.P.T. Acharya plugged away on his own;\* he had been one of the early members of the Indian Communist Party, as an exile in Moscow, and the first to leave it. Married to a talented artist, Magda Nachman, he lived with her in Germany until the Nazis came, when fortunately he was able to return to India under a political amnesty. With a growing interest in anarchism among Indian students, a Bombay publishing house reprinted many classical Anarchist works, but Acharya did not succeed in building a movement before his death, nor do I think one exists yet.



M.P.T. Acharya (1935)

I may mention here in passing that a friend of mine of many years standing a Methodist minister, wrote to many people when I was in prison; among them was Mr. Nehru, to whom he addressed the perhaps specious plea that as he knew me to have taken part in many campaigns for Pandit Nehru's release when he was in prison, perhaps it would not be amiss for the latter now to intercede on my behalf. The worthy Pandit replied in a letter which will ultimately reach Sotheby's, to the effect that he was grateful to all those Englishmen who had taken part in the fight for India's freedom and the liberation of political prisoners, and he was, his sincerely. Of such a letter one could only say it was worthy of the leader of British Socialism, Mr. Attlee himself.

The latter's regret expressed in Spanish War days, that "the British workers" knew little of the aims of the C.N.T. assumed tragic proportions when he became Prime Minister. The C.N.T. refugees in France had resisted any blandishments to support the war which after all is only a euphemism for supporting the national government, and the French Government never — even in the phoney war — pretended to be "anti-fascist". Members of the C.N.T. fought in resistance movements against fascism, while disclaiming any direction from London; by virtue of their stand they had been arrested by the French police, shot or sent to concentration camps by the Gestapo, deported to Spain or Germany, or taken forcibly into work camps as slave labour, where their experience of years of sabotage did much to undermine the German war effort. Some eighty C.N.T. members, and others, had been liberated whilst "serving" in the latter capacity. They were interned in England as prisoners-of-war, and sentenced to deportation to Spain, "the British workers" (or whoever it was that was consulted in this matter — one suspects it was not them) still knowing little their aims. Or perhaps the Special Branch, that had hindered opposition to Franco, knew too much of their aims too well.

\* I need hardly say that "Anarchist Thought in India", (Asia Publishing House) written by the type of ignorant pundit of which no country has the monopoly, is totally ignorant of M.P.T. Acharya. It traces "anarchist thought" in such figures as Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, confusing the totalitarian strands of Tolstoyanism with "anarchist thought." Acharya, as a Bombay worker, was too insignificant to note for the purpose of such a thesis. It is true Gandhi did once say, in answer to the question as to what would happen to India if the British abdicated their responsibility: "Leave India to God. If that is too much to believe, then leave her to anarchy." Mr. Attlee was quite shocked at the suggestion that so great a continent should be left "to anarchy", in keeping with his persistent use of the term in the other sense (notwithstanding his remarks about the British workers "not understanding" the aims of the C.N.T.).

When the struggle in Spain ended in February 1939, the then secretary of the Labour Party, Mr. Morgan Phillips, had welcomed the refugees who had received so little aid in their long struggle. As a representative of the Welsh miners, he perhaps felt that bitterness might be caused if anyone was betrayed without a suitable quotation from the Bible — his own people would never have stood for it — and announced in the grand manner of the Welsh preacher, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." The faithful servant having done his work in fighting fascism in 1945 — so far as the Labour Party was concerned — received a faithful servant's wages, and the humbug who had basked in reflected glory as namesake of the Major Attlee Battalion (somebody in the C.P. must have had an unusual sense of humour) sent the veterans of anti-fascism back to death or twenty years imprisonment, according to the degree of mercy shown by the Christian civilisation of Spain.

It did not appear that Mr. Churchill's electoral claim that the Labour Party in power would need some sort of Gestapo was far wrong, notwithstanding the manner in which it was derided by his erstwhile Coalition colleagues. They knew, of course, as well as he did that "some sort of Gestapo" was already operating, and had indeed done so, though not normally introduced into political controversy, during the long period of Tory rule. With the aftermath of war it showed itself more obviously, and then, too, some of the new rulers (Sir Hartley Shawcross) had to show "we are the masters now".

During this period, when the "Left in power" naturally lost its natural aptitude for protesting against governmental abuses, and the Tories had yet to find that it was now their turn to play at libertarianism, it is pleasing to note that one man did his best for civil liberty, and he, too, a lawyer — though it must be speedily added, not a reputable one as the world went. Ernest Silverman from Liverpool, was a member of what the world chooses to call a distinguished legal family; the others were distinguished at making a successful career he, though possessed of a brilliant mind, was the "black sheep" of the family. Dealing mainly with the criminal and sporting fraternity he had no compunctions at plundering them; they in turn had no hesitation in parading in the witness box as outraged citizens. When outside prison, Ernie Silverman had a passionate interest in various causes of prison reform; he also time and time again helped fight cases of civil liberty without charge. It was his brain that helped win many cases (though being disbarred, he could not appear in court). When dockers on strike were charged at the Old Bailey — to such a pass Labour Government came speedily — his grasp of the law led to their acquittal. He prepared the brief of the editors of "War Commentary" and of the Trotskyites. Sometimes he helped in cases where he had not even been invited to give his services. No student preparing his doctorate thesis on Civil Liberty and how it was preserved after the second World War will be able to refer to Ernest Silverman, but there is ample documentation available on those who wrote letters to "The Times" when it was judicious to do so. Ernest Silverman — who curiously enough, still disagreeing with the Anarchists who wanted to abolish prisons, remained a democratic Socialist — ultimately fell foul of the law once again himself, embezzling some brothel-keeper's money, and finally died in prison (his great dread). His mourners were "outcast men", and (but for this) he is now forgotten.



Mat Kavanagh (1946)





The author (1948)



Colin Ward, Albert Grace and Tom Earley with two French comrades



Ethel Mannin and Reginald Reynolds (1935)



John Olday performing his Cabaret act at Black Cross benefit in London (1974)

# SURVIVING PROSECUTIONS

With the end of the war, the editorial group shed the name "War Commentary" that had long been inappropriate to the contents, and resumed the name "Freedom" from the older journal which had first appeared in 1886 and continued to the retirement of Tom Keell. Its name had been revived in the (Camden Town) "Freedom" but the "canon" was usually held to be invested in Freedom Press Distributors and Keell's own wish, of the older "Freedom" — thus establishing some line of continuity, which — like all genealogical tables — is capable of being overstated.

"War Commentary" had begun as a monthly and became a fortnightly; "Freedom" soon became a weekly. Its regular publication for the next twenty years made it a feature of the libertarian movement. Criticisms might be made of its new methods of organisation, since the Freedom Press Group had now established itself as a self-perpetuating group which by the nature of things (in times of apathy a paper is bound to become the centre of a movement rather than an organisation) might be understandably mistaken for a non-elected bureaucracy or (at best) clique, but which insisted it was solely an independent publishing venture.

It had nevertheless to be conceded that the paper reached a high standard of presentation and readability; those who disagreed with its composition granted its value; even those who disagreed with its contents admitted the high standard of typography and lay-out. The latter was then a great leap forward over many minority journals; it suffered in later years from some lack of imagination in make-up, but could always compare favourably even with some national journals, particularly when one took into account the number of highly paid staff involved in the latter. The Freedom Press Group clung resolutely to its amateur status; its contributors, editors and administration were all unpaid even though they had to abandon the "full time voluntary worker" concept which could scarcely continue for ever. It rejected paid advertising (largely influenced by the left-wing legend that advertisers can control policy — which is really a journalist's excuse) — relying upon a voluntary press fund. For many years it ran the Freedom Bookshop in Red Lion Street, Holborn, a "fortress" held by Lilian Wolfe and later, Jack Robinson (who came from Birmingham).

Over the twenty years since the name was resumed "Freedom" continued to appear regularly, with a circulation usually around the 2,000 mark that has sometimes increased with fluctuations of interest. It acquired for some ten years a stable-mate, the monthly "Anarchy" — edited by Colin Ward — originally intended as a theoretical journal of anarchism but which has become much more the mouthpiece of "sociological anarchism" — those who would apply anarchist theories to other fields of action such as education, and who tended to despair of "revolutionary" methods to such an extent as to advocate a type of Revisionist Anarchism little different from Liberalism or qualified with the ambiguous term "permanent protest". The material success of "Anarchy" in reaching a wide audience in the universities could not be denied, though its value may be questioned.

But we are here running a little ahead of our period. In the immediate post-war years the Anarchist movement was facing a combination of difficult circumstances — police repression, the sudden enthusiasm for a Labour Government once it was seen that at long last the Tories could be ousted, a general disinclination to be committed and a tendency to put the war years aside as demobilisation proceeded. We had in London been able to give some aid to the French and Italian movements in the early post-war years; it gave us great satisfaction to be able to help the German comrades materially with food parcels. The effect of food parcels from abroad gave a great impression in a whole locality. We in England had been somewhat embarrassed at receiving food parcels from America during the war. Many comrades had been extremely poor before the war and would have gladly welcomed such aid; during the war, the working-classes began to receive their full rations for the first time. (I recall one parcel arriving from Chicago, and Jack Mason saying what a boon it would have been to his family in 1935; as it was we passed it on to a hospital. I also seem longingly to recall the admittedly unusual offering of a delicious salmon dinner regularly provided during the war by a Certain Scot-

tish group as a reluctant courtesy to their visiting speakers from his grace the local Duke, whose army of gamekeepers was no longer sufficient to protect his preserves now that many of them were protecting his interests elsewhere.) Our despatch to Germany of food parcels from this country, and from abroad meant we could keep many of our comrades, who had survived the Nazis, alive; amongst those sent were some coming not only from the U.S.A., Canada and Australia, but from Palestine.

Though the circumstances of the split in the London movement bedevilled our communications for a time, the joy of other political factions was short lived, for it did not hold up our activities. The London Anarchist Group was reconstituted, in the intention of uniting the factions or remaining independent of both.

The organisers were Mat Kavanagh, Ronald Avery (a tractor worker who incidentally, had a brilliant flair for chair design which the economic circumstances of the time prevented him from perfecting) and myself; we also succeeded in forming the Union of Anarchist Groups which contained most of the groups carrying on, with the exception of the Freedom Press Group and the (third) Anarchist Federation. There was some degree of co-operation with the former; the latter tended to co-operate with the C.N.T. group in London, and later with the Socialist Workers League, a small Marxist body (which eschewed the name "Trotskyist" for "Oehlerite").

The (third) Anarchist Federation participated in many industrial issues as a group, alongside the S.W.L. It for a short time issued a paper for nursing workers, edited by a mental nurse; it took part in dockers' and railwaymen's strikes, and, recruiting from the Peace Pledge Union, formed an activist group of some importance. Its new paper was "Direct Action", its most successful contribution to the London scene the successful running of a Sunday cinema group which re-introduced, after many years absence, the Continental film to London as a regular feature. The commercial world was not slow to follow up on the idea.

The tendency of the post-war days was to integrate much more with the industrial movement; indeed, many militants of many years' standing in the movement became completely absorbed in the activities of their factories or trade unions, and were ultimately lost — in a particular sense — to the anarchist movement proper. Continually in the post-war years, when some particular issue arose in different industries, we found many older comrades who had not been "around" for years but who were none the less militant; though in some cases, of course, the mere absorption into trade union activity meant acquiescence that in effect, though not intent, was wholly reformist.

I was not myself "around" in the immediate post-war periods. I was arrested at my place of work and charged with a breach of industrial relations. I was sent to prison on that charge, and whilst there, informed that I was "deemed" to be enlisted and therefore a deserter — which would have made nonsense of the first charge. It is of some curiosity to note that I was grilled for hours on my relationship with the I.R.A. — of which I knew absolutely nothing — which appeared on my political dossier. Such dossiers, though full of mis-statements and lies, are fortunately not made public (though occasionally lent out for purposes of blackmail). Mine had been prepared by someone who might well have rivalled Dennis Wheatley (he did serve in the Secret Service so perhaps it was Dennis Wheatley!) — it mostly related to a year when I was a Sixth-Former, our preparation of invoices in Alf Rosenbaum's workshop having been greatly exaggerated, possibly by someone who had the story at second-hand. Jack White had died during the war — how he would have enjoyed the story! Brendan Behan certainly did.

"Kidnapped" at the prison gate and taken to an Army detention camp, I met once more John Olday. He had been harshly treated by the provost-sergeant, a London-Italian ex-Fascist, who detested "politicals". I was warned by Olday in a smuggled note to be ready for a beating-up as I was in a confined cell. I was, however, extremely well treated by the sentries, with food, cigarettes and even beer being brought in. I thought this was an attempt to "soften me up" but found that the absurd "I.R.A." allegation had preceded me into camp, where most of the sold

iers were Liverpool-Irish. In addition, the cook-sergeant proved to be our friend Maguire, of the Bethnal Green rent strike days, and there were in the camp some of the very tenants whose battle we had fought and won. Later M.L. Berneri succeeded (quite incredibly) in getting in to see Olday and myself, and could not understand how we both told contrary stories of the treatment at Prestatyn — and assumed I was merely putting a bold face on matters.



John Olday (1947)

My own story — for what interest it may be — diverges here from the main narrative of the London Anarchists. Arising from my experiences I shall be telling the story of the Cairo Mutiny in a separate volume.

Now that it was generally clear that nothing spectacular was going to happen, the militants in our movement tended to integrate into industrial backgrounds and a whole generation or two of Anarchist militants became militants in industry. This was particularly noticeable in Glasgow, where there had been widespread Anarchist support amongst shipbuilding and other workers; it was to be seen to some extent everywhere.

The Anarchist movement moved into militant labour politics, its natural home, but lacking a party organisation, disintegrated as a specific movement. A closer form of organisation, even for social or cultural purposes, would have kept it together more firmly. Those who now came into the movement did so in the main from the peace movement. Both the (third) Anarchist Federation and the Union of Anarchist Groups now made no bones about accepting pacifists, members of the P.P.U.; indeed, for the first time, pacifists began justifying their position on a revolutionary basis and claiming it was possible to be both a pacifist and an anarchist, or that the alternative position was no longer valid since the atom bomb; but tending to leave alone the question of what they would have done in Spain.

The North East London Anarchist Group was actually the first — so far as I know — to organise, spontaneously, as a militant group both pacifist and anarchist. Some of its members were not wholly pacifist but they were all tied up in some way with peace movement activities; they were all of a new generation, mostly students, and all activists. Their movement in Walthamstow and neighbouring districts was the forerunner of an entirely new generation arising out of the peace movement which gradually assumed quite a different character from the P.P.U.

One of the ventures begun in the post war period by the Union of Anarchist Groups was the idea of a summer school. It combined the features of a summer school crash programme on matters of libertarian interest with the better features of a national conference. Indeed, the summer school ultimately, with its regular appearance year after year, became itself the "union" of the anarchist groups. The many able speakers on which the London group could call was, indeed, a surprise to many of our comrades, who in provincial towns, were battling away at ingrained bastions of prejudice and often felt isolated, away from the main stream.

They were a minority, but as they now saw, a minority within a main stream of contemporary thought. Eddie Shaw, the popular and quick-witted (if not always very profound) speaker from Glasgow, summed up the Conferences on one occasion: "When I'm up in Glasgow we're always *teaching*," he said. "That's the job of the propagandist. But I find that when I come down to London I'm *learning*". This indeed, was a very searching analysis of the

L.A.G. lectures. I later found when I was in contact with Americans of a high rating educational standard, that despite their staying on in college until four or five years past the English average, and going on to university, that I knew far more about events than they could ever aspire to; indeed, they regard me as more erudite than their own tutors; a tribute, not to an English grammar school education, but solely to the high standard to which anarchist meetings bring one (and the occasional crank should not deter one to this fact). The reference made by Eddie Shaw was to a lecture by Alex Comfort, who as a poet, sex educationalist and doctor, was profoundly interested in anarchism. I should here mention too that famous sex educationalist, Norman Haire, who until his death addressed anarchist lectures and as he put it, "was able to state my revolutionary theories more radically than I can elsewhere; the fees may be nil but the standard of response is higher".

One of the most successful summer schools was held in Liverpool, where the nucleus of an anarchist movement benefitted from the influx of open-air speakers. At this conference a local worthy with a mania about methods of food cultivation, all very well in their place, pontificated heavily on the subject of dung. A broad Yorkshire voice interrupted and badly shook him by saying "Baloney"! I think this was the first time Donald Room was at one of our major meetings. He later came to London, earning his living as a cartoonist (also contributing to anarchist publications), and the echoes of that "Baloney" resounded some years later when a gallant police sergeant, with an impeccable war record, happened to arrest him during a demonstration. A half brick was mysteriously found in Donald's possessions, which it was alleged he was about to throw either at the Queen of England or the Queen of Greece. Unfortunately, it was the police sergeant who dropped the brick and the wheel of events now known as the Challenor Case arose out of Donald's refusal to play the classic but passive role of the heroic martyr, and gallons of official whitewash have not quite managed to obliterate the nasty blot on the police escutcheon.

Both the (third) Anarchist Federation and the Union of Anarchist Groups sent delegates to the first post war international anarchist conference in Paris. It endeavoured to set up a bureau of international correspondence, which for a time was successful, under Prudhommeaux, but when the French movement withdrew him from the secretaryship, it collapsed. The 1948 conference gave a remarkable instance of one family working together in the anarchist movement in various countries. Camillo Berneri had died in Spain after years of activity for the Italian movement in Italy and in France; now as one of the delegates from Great Britain was Marie-Louise Berneri; her sister Giliane was one of the French delegates; her mother Giovanna (co-editor of "Volonta") one of the Italians. It was pleasing to those who recalled how seldom the children of libertarians remained libertarians themselves (the Princess Kropotkin resumed her title in the U.S.A. and referred to her father as a "famous geographer"; Makhno's daughter married and returned to Russia). Very soon afterwards our Marie Louise died at an early age as the result of pneumonia following childbirth; a great loss to our movement here and abroad.

The scene no sooner down on the tragedy than the knock-about clowns come across the stage for comic relief — a middle class youngster of about twenty came to us, knowing all about the anarchists — weren't they the bloodthirsty revolutionaries? — didn't they want to exterminate the capitalists? — well, here was their opportunity. He was emotionally and financially dependent on his mother; she was a well-to-do capitalist; why didn't they get rid of her for him? Alas, it was all talk; when it came to the point the anarchists were just as weak-kneed as the social-democrats; nobody would murder his mum and finally he tried it himself — bungled it, of course, and was tried and put on probation, one more of those who would say how "disillusioned" they were with the self-styled revolutionaries.

I must add that a recent convert to our ranks from the Young Communist League produced a brilliant "bleeding heart" appeal for the unfortunate victim (not, I need hardly say, the poor old mater) asking us to contribute to the cost of his defence.

From time to time one feared that our movement attracted every kind of lunatic. When one got to know other movements, one began to find that we merely tended to accentuate them when they came. Absorb someone of that kind into a political movement and sublimate his urges and you have a great politician. Better leave them alone to come and bay at meetings that they are "disillusioned".

For back to more serious matters: the League for Workers' Control was formed at a conference in Islington. It was a short-lived attempt at uniting various factions of the Left — including Common Wealth (now reduced to very small rump) and the I.L.P. whose secretary, Wilfred Wigham, put a great deal of hard work into organising the new movement whose aim was to provide a policy for militants in industry. The anarchists and syndicalists on the one hand, together with the Socialist Workers' League, succeeded for once in out-manoeuvring the Trotskyists



who unusually united with each other and endeavoured at the conference to impose their brand of "workers' control" (nationalisation under workers' control, not control by the workers themselves). The aims of the League remain one of the most coherent statements of workers' control and with direct relevance to British working class practice arising out of the shop stewards' movement — that have yet been made. It is on record as the only common denominator for joint action between diverse factions of the libertarian left.

If we had kept alive a "conscience" over India before the war that ultimately influenced national policy, so I think it is true that we helped to keep alive a "conscience" over Spain, to the despair of "sensible" and "practical" politicians. What was the difference, they demanded, between dictatorial Spain and dictatorial Portugal? — Were not some of the worst features of Franco's Spain indistinguishable from Communist-controlled Eastern Europe? Then why could not the Falangist victory be recognised and Spain be treated like "any other Western country" and Franco parade abroad with other rulers? "Only" solidarity with his victims prevented this. What less "sensible" or "practical" a policy?

Equally, our "utopian" policies may have ultimately influenced many protest movements against involvement in colonial wars and the cult of the atom bomb; imperceptibly but surely, this attitude began to influence a new generation. Though in the post-war era we lost many of our old militants by death (Frank Leech, Matt Kavanagh and most of our best-known speakers) or retirement from militant activity, and our organisational status was down to almost zero (except for the continuous publication of "Freedom"), we still maintained some integration with militant elements in industry as well as having a growing influence on student politics; but those who came into our movement came now very largely through finding the peace movement inadequate.

Another syndicalist propaganda group was begun in 1953, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Committee. It included Albert Grace, one of the few who had maintained both active industrial activity and anarchist propagandism throughout his career in the anarchist movement, somewhat longer than mine and who was then active in the docks; and Philip Sansom, then taking the open-air platform regularly with Rita Milton (an attractive red-headed girl who achieved the distinction of being the first anarchist to be interviewed as such upon television). We founded the monthly paper "The Syndicalist", with myself as editor, with contributors from outside London including Donald Room, and in particular Tom Carlile, our mining correspondent.

"The Syndicalist" was my model of what I thought of as an anarcho-syndicalist paper despite its short life of one year.

In facing at this period some recession in activity we faced what was indeed an old "professional revolutionary" dilemma. People cannot be expected to go on year after year doing the same activity in their spare time, and after they "drop out" even though remaining sympathetic. Without some guiding link, even social or cultural, they "disappear". Those who are the vanguard of the movement, active both as propagandists and as militants in their industry, fall into two groups: those who give up their specific anarchist activity; and those who do not. The former tend to become inactive in their place of work — it is an anomaly that the most active propagandists for the specific idea tend to become unknown as such where they are working. The latter are thought to have "dropped out". Unfortunately without creating a party bureaucracy this dilemma is mostly unsolvable and one of the hazards of anarchist activity. When I found myself out of my industry and having lost my ticket, I tried to solve it in an almost traditional way of the propagandist, but not always effectively, by going to work for myself. This does have some advantage in that it makes possible access to such elementary prerequisites for activity as typewriters, a duplicator (which even a local church has, and militant bodies often lack), somewhere to meet. The quaintly derelict building I took as a book warehouse (374 Grays Inn Road) had old associations with the labour movement. Ghosts of the trade union activity of the 'twenties and 'thirties flitted through its shabby rooms. Both the "Daily Worker" and the Unity Theatre and all sorts of fellow-travelling outfits had been born there; the Movement for Colonial Freedom grew up there, and after "The Syndicalist" ceased publication the Anarcho-Syndicalist Committee carried on there, until Albert Grace went to work in Bristol; it issued duplicated circulars, and attempted to provide a link between anarchists in industry, rather than a specific industrial organisation.

In 1954 various London Anarchists — in particular, I think, Donald Room, Max Patrick, Philip Sansom, Rita Milton and Frank Hirschfield (who became a regular on the Hyde Park platform, as well as being a keen amateur wrestler) formed the Malatesta Club, a social club which ran for several years, originally in High Holborn, later in Percy Street (Tottenham Court Road). A lot of hard work was put into the club by its members, too numerous to mention, and it was there, in 1958, that the second post-war (but somewhat abortive) international conference took place.

Spanish workers celebrating the social revolution (1936)



A similar venture to the Malatesta Club, but organised along somewhat more commercial lines, and catering for the "New Left" that was beginning to emerge at this time from the wreckage of the Communist Party, was the Partisan Club. It is sometimes argued that the Anarchists missed their opportunity of influencing many of the "New Left" or alternatively, it is sometimes imagined they arose out of the "New Left". It was impossible for any one of my generation and political background to find any real sympathy with people who needed the example of Russian tanks mowing down the Hungarian revolutionaries before they realised that the Communist Party was now a counter-revolutionary organisation and merely a part of Russian Imperialism; least of all could we understand how people who had swallowed the line on Spain could now leave the party but retain their implicit belief in everything the party had done up to the time of their leaving (so that it was right to turn against the Barcelona workers but wrong to turn against the Budapest workers). The "New Left" filtered out through communism into Trotskyism; the best of those who went into Trotskyism came out again. The Healey movement acted as a sieve. It was Stalinist without Stalin: it took the crude unrefined Stalinists and kept them, sans Stalin; the others went into the other Trotskyist movements which if they agreed on one thing at all, was the common dislike of the Healeyite Trotskyists. Some of these (notable the "Solidarity" group) went past Trotskyism to a position much further to the left and became intrinsically a part of a new "libertarian left", the unifying feature of which was a belief in workers' control similar to that advocated by the now defunct League for Workers' Control.

There was in the fifties a growing involvement of clerical groups in political intrigue. The Hungarian Revolution exposing the Communist Party, gave them an opening. Moral Re-Armament began recruiting former members of the I.L.P. (even McGovern himself); it spread its tentacles into industry, trying to isolate the "intelligent" natural leader from "the rest", hoping to make a positive lead in conciliatory industrial relations. The Catholic Activists too — who had made great inroads into English trade unionism — turned their attention to the far left. Catholic Activism normally represents fascism in Latin countries and corruption in Anglo-Saxon ones. There was a more sophisticated type of Catholic Activism which posed around the extreme left parties, and even tried to penetrate the Anarchist movement in the hope of using the English-speaking movement as the "soft underbelly" of anarchism in an endeavour to reach the anti-clerical movements in Spain and Italy and also help deal a blow to the Communist Party.

My old friend from schooldays, George Plume, a member of the I.L.P. for many years, gathered a good deal of information on Catholic Action in the labour movement.

At the time of his sudden and accidental death he was working on a major exposure of papal aggression in the working-class movement. Later the secularist J.M. Alexander with Joe Thomas and myself fought this issue in the "Rational Review". It is one we neglect at our peril.



Jimmy Raeside speaking at factory gate meeting outside the Royal Ordnance Factory, Dalmeir, Glasgow.



# THE EARLY FIFTIES

Some time in the middle fifties, the movement in Britain entered the doldrums as it had occasionally done before. Our older generation had now almost all gone, with notable exceptions. The heritage of the "barren twenties" meant that people in their thirties and forties were now beginning to be thought of as "the older generation". Of the militants outside the active movement many "became disillusioned" in the period of Labour power and Tory revival. Of the industrial militants with whom we were in touch, many had gone into the Labour Party; others had retired from political interest; mass unemployment, war and poverty were no longer a spur to action. Then, too, Freedom Bookshop had closed down in central London and gone to Fulham; "The Syndicalist" was no more; the Malatesta Club closed; many local groups were out of action.

But at the same time, a new movement was growing up. While in the United States, protest alignments against atomic involvement, tied up with a revolt against the all-conforming Affluent State, had moved along lines pioneered by the civil rights movement and thus to a new liberalism. This new liberalism had its influence on British protest; but a different form of non-aligned politics grew up here. This — having no such civil rights background and already acquainted with the results of parliamentary emancipation — was by nature anti-statist. (It too influenced American protest). There were various streams, stemming from Hungary, Suez, the Cold War and the nuclear programme; they came together in a casual protest march to the nuclear base at Aldermaston. These marches grew into the first protest march movement since the thirties, and on a higher level when one considers the subjectivity of the latter; though inevitably a bureaucracy, with Labour sympathies, grew up within the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the protests against that bureaucracy signified the increasingly libertarian nature of the Committee of One Hundred, many of the latter had moved to anarchism from the ideas of international non-alignment; distaste for the Labour Party; and a moving forward from pacifism by virtue of their own experience confronting the police.

The anarchist movement already existing did not exactly encourage the new trend. With memories of many abortive peace and reform movements, the "older generation" either grandly ignored this one (I did so myself) or pointed out logically but derisively that merely to call for the banning of the bomb was hardly enough. How could they expect that governments would "ban" the bomb? — or respond to appeals to do so? — or be expected to keep such a "ban"? And what hypocrisy to associate with the Labour Party and Liberal M.P.s! All this was very true, but it was an echo of the conclusions arrived at independently by a large number of the C.N.D. rank-and-file. Indeed, so impatient with the leadership were many of the latter that they lined up behind the Anarchist banner so that they would *not* co-operate with what was — so far as the nuclear dividing line was concerned — the loyal opposition.

More than one development took place at the same time; suddenly there was an entirely new generation, that grew up in its own struggles and through its own experiences and came over to a position we had clearly defined but which they had not accepted on a platter. It did happen occasionally that some found it hard to give up some shibboleths of the peace or labour movements — hence some inconsistencies, such as the occasional group thinking it could be anarchist and still support the Vietcong Government for instance; but by and large the British Anarchist movement leaped forward with this generation to become, somewhat to its own surprise, something to be taken seriously in an assessment of the political scene; notwithstanding the fact that journalists might scoff, politicians, mindful of our programme of electoral abstentionism could not.

With the "New Left" and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament of the fifties, many in the peace movement looked to anarchism rather than to established parties, though it is not clear what some of them thought as "anarchist" and they may have confused it with a more militant liberalism. The belief that this "New Left" movement created an upsurge in anarchism led to the formation of a theoretical journal "Anarchy" by Colin Ward, with the initial assistance of "Freedom". It sought to examine the idea of anarchism from a new standpoint and enlisted the aid of students in anthropology, economics, social sciences, cybernetics and even criminology towards a new libertarian theory. Its technical

production and its covers by Rufus Segar were of a high quality. It was described as "revisionist" though it frequently published historical articles to put itself in the perspective of the international anarchist movement. Many of its contributors were not revolutionary but regarded themselves as "non-violent anarchists" or believers in "permanent protest" and it was somewhat intolerant of traditional working class anarchism. The main viewpoints of "Anarchy" were summed up by Colin Ward in "Anarchy in Action" (Routledge 1973).

The second series of Anarchy had little connection with the first. It broke from the "revisionist" theories and more closely reflected the thinking of anarchist groups, though not so regular in appearance nor so well produced as the first series.

At the same time "Freedom" declined as the main journal central to the British Anarchist movement and has inclined towards pacifism. The ghost of the old schism with "Direct Action" seems finally to have been laid — the Syndicalist Workers Federation having been revived by a group in Manchester.

The looseness of structure of the Anarchist Federation in the late sixties — having been revived in the early sixties — led to its disintegration into unrepresentative conferences, at which anyone could attend. A Harlow group, originally extremely pacifist, opposed a militant tendency but then swung to another direction and criticised the formlessness which was the result of trying to include activists and pacifists in the same federation. In doing so it formed the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, borrowing the title from France though in an early pamphlet it dissociated itself from the French working class resistance. Some of its pioneers went over to Trotskyism. Another grouping described itself as the Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance (publishing for a time "Red & Black Outlook"), placing stress in the local grassroots groups of the anarchist movement and its members moved into many campaigns such as squatting, claimants' unions and so on.

This activity proved all absorbing and it could not possibly be ascertained how many anarchists there were in such activities, together with a new libertarian left which was neither anarchist nor marxist but contained elements of both.

The anarchist movement in London worked together in the production of "Ludd" at the seamen's strike of 1967; it was possibly its high spot, being prepared one day and sold on the dockside the next morning. The Anarcho-Syndicalist Committee (Albert Grace and Albert Meltzer) which had published "The Syndicalist" in 1953, now merged with the group publishing "Cuddon's Cosmopolitan Review," after some years as a purely industrial group. This became the Black Flag group, publishing "Black Flag".

On the return of Stuart Christie from a Spanish prison where he served three and a half years of a 20 year sentence for "Banditry and Terrorism" (a planned attempt on General Franco) he began an aid organisation for Spanish and other prisoners, the Anarchist Black Cross, which merged with the Black Flag Group. It now exists in many countries its aim being to help libertarian prisoners — and others if possible — not as a charity but as a means of affording solidarity and using the struggle to build an anarchist international.

It at first published the "Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross"; later switching over to offset and becoming the "Black Flag". Working closely with activist international anarchism, the Black Flag group combines the traditional working class anarchism with a belief in individual action. It has co-operated with some non-anarchist bodies in industrial and other matters and helped form the International Libertarian Centre, a meeting place for anarchists visiting London, whose most active component is the Centro Iberico where Spanish immigrant workers and visiting students meet exiles.

The Black Flag group has received considerable press, radio and TV publicity because of its activities. Supporters of the Black Cross have been in conflict with the authorities in several countries, in particular Giuseppe Pinelli (Milan Secretary of the Anarchist Black Cross, a railwayman) who "fell" to his death from a police station window — and Georg von Rauch, a Berlin student, shot by the German police.

A series of "direct actionist" attacks upon Government buildings, factory premises, police, embassy and military establishments was generally known as that of the "Angry Brigade". The police appeared to believe it was part of





George Barrett (c.1917)

a general conspiracy lasting over several years, and involved the Spanish Resistance movement. Attacks had been made by the First of May Group on Spanish banks and institutions (as well as on institutions of other oppressive regimes) in concerted attacks in this and other European countries. It was endeavoured to show that these were linked with protests against the Industrial Relations Act and other actions of the "Angry Brigade".

Jack Prescott and Ian Purdie were arrested and charged with complicity in these attacks; Purdie was acquitted, and Prescott, despite the most superficial evidence, convicted. He was sentenced to 15 years (later reduced to 10). Then eight persons were arrested in Stoke Newington. They included Jim Greenfield, John Barker, Anna Mendelson, Hilary Creek (all of whom were alleged to have explosives in their flat and who defended themselves; and were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment after a recommendation to mercy by a split jury 10-2). Four were acquitted unanimously by the jury: Stuart Christie; Angela Weir; Chris Bott, and Kate McLean (who helped to print "Anarchy", second series). Christie's acquittal carried the clear implication that the police had planted explosives in his car.

The case generated much indignation on the libertarian left; especially Christie, completely exonerated, had nevertheless spent 16 months in jail, persistently refused bail because of his political convictions, without any redress. Some of others had also been accused of cheque offences and the time spent in prison was in their case put against this.

The constituents of the British anarchist panorama have proved difficult for outsiders to distinguish. There are, of course, ephemeral anarchist groups which have little or nothing to do with the mainstream of anarchist thought but appear from time to time, perhaps lauding Tolstoy or Stirner or others not calling themselves anarchist as their mentors; there may also be groups within these youth cultures and "underground" regarding themselves as anarchistic or pacifist anarchist. The anarchist movement properly speaking has no connection with such groups, and less to do with what the press sometimes labels as "anarchistic" (Marxist or nationalist bodies). There is a constant search for an organisation that will give the movement a working-class basis, and an academic "wing" inclining to militant liberalism or permanent protest which is rejected by the revolutionary "wing".

The international implications of the Black Flag movement and the Anarchist Black Cross seem to have been taken most seriously by the authorities; "Freedom" represents a continuous tradition though it has latterly run into difficulties; others are symptomatic of the many new emerging tendencies from the grassroots of the libertarian movement.

The future history of the Anarchist movement and the period prior to the first world war, or after the C.N.D. and "New Left", will be better documented than the past; it is hoped that the present work, regarded either as autobiographical notes or as a fragmentary history will help to that end.

# APPENDIX 1 WALES

When I was a lad, I would creep surreptitiously past the careless stewards into the miners' conferences which were traditionally held in Cardiff's seedy temperance hall. There I would listen to the bright little alert men as they elevated some local issue on the coalfield to the status of a glorious philosophical dialogue — and all of them were anarchists. The young anarchists of today seem curiously oblivious of the anarcho-syndicalist traditions which exist within their own land and they resort to foreign ancestor figures to fill the gap created by the symbolic destruction of their fathers. But the essential sense of locality, the comparatively small pit where all worked (when work was available), the isolation of the valley village or township — all these were similar to the environment conditions which created the anarcho-syndicalist movement of Spain.

In the history of the South Wales miners' movement, some leaders were overtly anarcho-syndicalist and had international links with syndicalists in other lands, and their attitude was implicit in the movement as a whole. (Leo Abse M.P. in his book "Private Member": Macdonald £3.50).

Mr. Abse goes on to describe some of the other influences anarchism had on Welsh miners. Lewis Jones he says, was the only one of the world-wide delegates to the Comintern conferences in Moscow who would ostentatiously not stand up when Stalin arrived. But more "the miners Lodge was the centre not only of industrial life but of all political and social life as well". It was from its local health schemes that Nye Bevan derived the idea of a National Health Service. The miners' institutions, clubs and libraries, the cinemas and the billiard halls, were owned by the Union. The miners governed themselves — "the State had already withered away. There was an extraordinary contempt for external authoritarian disciplines. When South Wales miners hear music they sing: they do not march."

Mr. Abse's recollection of anarcho-syndicalism in South Wales (he calls "our South Wales Labour movement . . . the most respectable and unselfconscious anarcho-syndicalist movement ever") are interesting especially as the academic historians deliberately blot it out from public record. He does not in any way give the full picture. But his hints of it are fascinating. He himself was a social-democrat with a middle-class background, who was early "led up the garden path" by John Strachey — presumably by way of 'popfront' fellow travelling — but also he says, without following it up, Herbert Read. He makes one or two references to anarchism to make it suggest that he at least had some contact with the movement in the forties apart from his boyhood remembrance of the old anarchist miners' movement. (He actually quotes Berneri totally out of context to justify his entry into Parliament).

There is some justification for his sneer at "young anarchists" though his foreign "ancestor figures" as well as the native ones were always part of the working class tradition. A couple of years ago, one Peter Michael Jones — a Welsh worker whose parents had come to London during the slump, mentioned to me casually that he "got his names from his grad-da who was a great communist and called after someone like Lenin". That the anarcho-syndicalist tradition in Wales and Scotland have been forgotten is true. It is due not to the "curious oblivion" of the young anarchists but to a deliberate policy by Communist Party propagandists and by the historians. History for them is "great names" not people. There are no "great names" for them to collect here. It is true that Emma Goldman married Jim Colton to obtain British nationality, and she is an extremely writeable-about figure, and that is the extent, therefore, that any of the historians and academics and anarchists will give you about Welsh anarchism. But Colton is a more remarkable figure than Emma Goldman for he, with a few others, survived the tremendous blows against Welsh anarchism which would have happened around the time of Abse's boyhood, and may have been the theme of one or two of the conferences he attended.

Sectional socialist divisions were less marked in the period before the First World War; and many working-class anarchists saw nothing incompatible in joining the socialist club or even party; with the rise of the Syndicalist movement, this lack of distinction became even more so. Tom Mann, for instance, was the leading syndicalist whilst in the I.L.P. Jim Connolly, in some ways a syndicalist, was in the Presbyterian background. Kropotkin's attitude to local social-

ist parties, the co-operative movement and the trade unions, was clearly sympathetic. There were a few anarchist groups scattered here and there which maintained aloofness from other socialist movements. But that was the periphery of the movement — now assumed to be all there was at the time, because it preserved its identity. It is probably not true that at the conferences Abse attended "all of them were anarchists". But usually all the activists were.

The dangers of anarchism were seen very clearly by the Fabians, who abandoned their ideas of building a State Socialist movement via the Liberal Party to create the Labour Party — a movement based upon the established trade union bureaucracy in alliance with middle class professionals. This domination of State Socialist ideas is seen in the evolution of the older Independent Labour Party. It became first part of the new Labour Party: then its right wing, then when its leading members were able to enter the Labour Party, secure as its leaders, it became a left-wing and then a really "independent" party. (The Fabian struggle against anarchism incidentally is clearly traceable throughout the works of Bernard Shaw).

As the Labour Party was built by the Fabians throughout South Wales, it came into contact with the anti-parliamentarian traditions of the Welsh miners. Abse indeed makes it clear to the point of embarrassing frankness how, even as late as 1958, "to our syndicalist miners, Westminster had always been unimportant" and they used the House of Commons, through the miners' lodges, "as a dumping ground for those in the union who were supernumerary, awkward, or even slightly senile". He realised that with this indifferent attitude to parliament persisting to the present, any smart, slick careerist could fight on equal terms at the selection conference and once in, with the safety of a majority such as could be commanded in the Eastern Valley of Monmouthshire, he could act exactly as he pleased.

The generation of activist Anarchist miners took heavy blows. During the Depression many of them were the first to be laid off. But more particularly, the insidious growth of the Labour Party's power was strengthened by the rise of Bolshevism. I have heard about some of the South Wales delegates to the Comintern refusing to stand for Stalin in the twenties — as a gesture to feeling back home. But gradually the CP was built up especially among the younger miners (who are now old-timers). They had behind them the glamour value of the Russian Revolution, seemingly appropriated by Lenin, and the apparently irresistible rise of Communist power as well as the myth that only Russia stood between us and world fascism.

The attacks by Churchill strengthened the hold of the CP, for everyone knew Churchill was the Welsh miners' worst enemy. This is why, to this day, you hear Churchill's action against the Tonypandy miners confused with his action at Sidney Street in London's East End.

As the CP grew — and it grew in the heart of the Labour Party bureaucracy — the Welsh Anarchists were squeezed out. Men like Colton, once popular Welsh and English speakers, were ostracised, thrown out of their jobs and had to fight grimly to keep their place in the union — because they opposed the dictatorship in Russia.

In 1937 Sam Mainwaring Junior tried to put forward the case of the Spanish Anarchist miners to the N.U.M. conference and was shouted down . . . that was the bitter nadir marking the end of the movement. Reading from a C.N.T. bulletin received that morning from Catalonia he shouted that Catalonia had never received a penny from British sources yet Catalonia carried the backbone of the struggle. "They are Trotskyists...Fascists..." shouted the Stalinist stooges!

When I knew the Welsh Anarchist miners they were the rump of the grand movement, mostly old men who were regarded as "cynical" by their fellow workers. But the women were usually much more actively "cynical" in opposing the ideas of State Socialism. In 1938, for instance, I was invited to speak at a local I.L.P. meeting on Spain, in a Welsh valley.

"Take care of those at the back," whispered the chairman. "Those are the Wrecking Brigade." They were a group of Welsh speaking women who took great pleasure in "giving hell" to the Labour and CP speakers — especially with "toffee nosed" English accents.

But to their, and my, delight, we proved to be fellow-Anarchists. The "Last movement ever", though not quite all as Mr. Abse discovered. For their influ- of the Mohicans" in the valley were four women, and two elderly miners, all ence was not entirely eroded when he came on the political scene. that remained of "the most respectable and unselfconscious anarcho-syndicalist

# BLACK FLAG

organ of the

# ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS



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# APPENDIX 2 SCOTLAND

Many older anarchists used to speak affectionately of Fred and Amy Macdonald who were active in anarchist propaganda in the West of Scotland as far back as a hundred years ago. Fred was a German baker who had been intimately connected with the International and with the Anarchist workers' faction in Germany that sided with Bakunin. (Fred, who died about 1912, always used Amy's name; his own is not known to me). They formed a circle which met in their tiny flat somewhere in Bridgeton. Whether it was the first Anarchist group in the West of Scotland I have no idea; but its existence shows that anarchist propaganda there well exceeds a century.

As it was a working-class movement we have no historical record of it, since records as a rule exist of successful working-class organisations or of bourgeois intellectuals who make sure they leave records behind (it is true that today this "rule" is being altered). For many years Amy (who lived until 1935) used to tell of the old days when the solitary bands of Anarchists used to speak on Glasgow Green and elsewhere and sometimes be pulled off their platforms or chased by angry crowds of exited Christians disturbed at hearing their superstitions mocked. Their attacks on the Liberal M.P.s (then dominant in the West of Scotland) were the first to crack the gigantic edifice parliamentary radicalism had built up among the workers. Among well-known propagandists of the libertarian idea was James Dick, who was in the old Socialist League.

There were other socialist groups apart from the Anarchists of course; and Glasgow led the way in socialist education and understanding. The Independent Labour Party was strong there from its foundation — with its dour emphasis on socialism — in contrast to the Social Democratic Federation which tried at least to introduce a bit of gaiety (with the Clarion Club movement and so on). It is said that once Keir Hardie turned up at an S.D.F. meeting where he was invited to give a fraternal address from the I.L.P. — he was perturbed to find it upstairs in a pub but horrified when he got up there to find the debauched scene — not merely socialists drinking but ladies smoking! He turned and fled, thinking he was in a brothel. Asked on one occasion what he thought of Anarchism, he said he was only once at an Anarchist meeting "and the language was terrible. I didnae stop tae listen". Yet he was several times on the platform with Peter Kropotkin, whose language may be assumed to have been proper.

Between the pioneer days of Fred and Amy and the exciting period before the First World War, when revolutionary syndicalism made so great an impact on the West of Scotland, (with the syndicalist movement proper, the I.W.S., the dissident Wobs who formed a second organisation here, and the anarcho-syndicalist grouping) there must have been an upsurge of the anarchist idea in the West of Scotland. Perhaps somebody will research it one day: a huge number of working-class militants must have been anarchists, as one can judge by those activists who later switched into other parties and thus by their defection provide a yardstick as to how wide the movement must have been. (e.g. John Maclean always denounced William Gallagher — later Communist M.P. — for having been a recruit to Marxism from anarcho-syndicalism and having only gone over when there was a Bolshevik bandwagon to jump on, always implying he had clung to the movement he left merely for popularity).

The anarchist movement which had been noticeably strong in the pre-world war period did not fold up, though most of its members in Glasgow did accept the Bolshevik myth for a time. This was probably due to the expressive propaganda of John Maclean — one of the few honest socialist leaders — who combined standard-bearing of the Russian Revolution (which he thought had triumphed) with criticisms of Lenin and his authoritarian centralism. It was thought by many that it was possible to defend the gains of the Russian Revolution while not accepting Lenin's triumph — something which with only small hindsight seems a tall proposition — but Glasgow was of course during the whole of the war and its aftermath in a bubbling state of revolution of its own — tanks being brought onto the streets to curb the workers even after the war — and its factory form of organisation was at times almost able to surpass the achievements of the Russian workers in bringing down Tsarism — and it would have been difficult to have imposed a party dictatorship on the Lenin model there, in the circumstances prevailing.

Several Englishmen went north, attracted by the numbers of Anarchists with their roots in working-class organisation — one being George Ballard, of Bristol — who (as "George Barrett") became a fluent speaker for the Anarchist cause in Glasgow, and also edited "The Voice of Labour", a syndicalist weekly. Among the Scots who came to London were James Dick, James Murray, Florence Stephen and several others who helped to build up the anarchist influence in the syndicalist movement of pre-World War I. Florence Stephen (author of "Suffrage or Syndicalism") later moved into trade union activity among women shop assistants helping John Turner (secretary and pioneer of the Shop Assistants Union and one time editor of "Freedom").

As in South Wales, the miners were particularly receptive to Anarchist ideas. It is interesting to note on one occasion Peter Kropotkin went to Blantyre and Burnbank to speak to the miners there. The memory of Kropotkin's visit stayed with the miners of Lanarkshire. Anarchism did not die there until two or three whole generations had passed away. Even during the Second World War it was possible for anarchists to go and speak to the Burnbank miners — I did myself — and received a warm welcome. They were old veterans. Like the South Wales libertarian miners, they warmly supported the anarchist movement even though in practice they had to accept the existence of socialist and communist leaderships. They belonged to the miners' lodge and allowed the Labour and Communist nominees to struggle for the jobs of parliamentary representation. They did not have a distinctive culture from the working-class culture of the time and merged into their background; they would have been the irreducible backbone of the movement had it obtained strength in the rest of the country. As it was they had little contact except by "literature" — and that contact was broken when (as in the case of the South Wales miners) bourgeois pacifist and liberal ideas began to infiltrate in the more formally constituted anarchist movement in complete alienation to anything in which they were interested.

However it was not the same situation as in South Wales where the anarchist movement became so informally constituted and so identified with its background that it lost its identity among the advancing state socialist movements. On the contrary, it was sharply sectarian. The "Solidarity" group (no connection between any of the Glasgow "Solidarity" groups — there were three succeeding each other — or the present group using the name) went to the extreme of rejecting not only parliamentary but trade union activity: they refused to join unions, and this in highly organised industries like ship-building and car making. Some of them maintained this attitude as late as the thirties — I remember some of the Scots comrades even at Ford's of Dagenham maintaining their "conscientious objection" to trade unionism like any Jehovah's Witness. It is interesting to note (for those who think that trade unionists are necessarily bigotted in these matters) that their fellow workers always perfectly understood their position, not only accepting them as militants but even in some cases (quite against the rule book) as shop stewards.

The association of anarchists and council communists, in the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, in particular (founded by Guy Aldred, but he later left it to form his own organisation the United Socialist Movement) went on until the late thirties (publishing "Solidarity" and "Fighting Call"). Then it became specifically anarchist again, chiefly influenced by Frank Leech, one of the most tireless propagandists the British anarchist movement has known. He was a burly ex-Navy boxer, whose work couldn't be measured. He spoke week after week to audiences of never less than a thousand — for a long time he spoke in the open-air every Sunday afternoon and again in a hall — with several hundreds attending — in the evening. He organised a press, he helped in factory gate meetings and factory organisation, started an anarchist bookshop and a meeting-hall, and gave untold help to the German anarchist movement in the late thirties as well as to the Spanish movement.

During the war the movement seemed to grow rapidly, but it was disorganised despite its growth. There were two very brilliant speakers, Jimmy Raeside and Eddie Shaw. Their views on anarchism were original: they described themselves as Conscious Egoists and Stirnerites but rejected the bourgeois individualism often associated with those ideas (e.g. shop factory committees were "unions of



egoists"; anarcho-syndicalism was "applied egoism" and so on), which at any rate made old ideas sound new and which influenced many people at the time. The generation of Glasgow activists which followed on called themselves (some till do) Stimerites, and it was this generation which gave the drive and contin-

uity of revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist ideas to the influx of younger militants following the Scottish apprentices strike; the disillusionment with the Labour Party (Y.S.), and the political short-sightedness of the Committee of 100 in the early sixties.

Jimmy Dick in Brunswick Street, Glasgow, 1945







Front cover illustration: *The Siege of Sidney Street*  
Back cover illustration: *Errico Malatesta and Michele Angiolillo meet in London at the congress of the Second International*  
(From *The Art of Anarchy* by Flavio Costantini)  
Clarendon Press Ltd., Over The Water, Sanday, Orkney