

**Kate Sharpley Library collective interviewed  
 by the Tyneside Anarchist Archive**

1. – Can we have a brief history of the Kate Sharpley Library?

A: The Kate Sharpley Library was established in 1979 by comrades connected with 121 Bookshop in Brixton. Originally it covered a broad range of subjects of interest to anarchists. After it moved out of London in 1992 the focus changed to be a collection of material by and about the anarchist movement. In 1999 the physical library moved to California, but with the same focus on preserving anarchist history and the stories of the people who made the movement.

2. – As with other archives, we share a passion for collecting and preserving past printed anarchist material. With (predominantly) instant online reading these days... are the days of physical literature numbered?

A: We are constantly getting newspapers/ pamphlets/ leaflets etc. that have been recently produced. These are coming from across the world and seem to me to evidence that anarchists are not moving to a (purely) digital movement but are staying loyal to printed matter and physical objects.

3. – I've seen previous online comments from some who say that now the KSL is mainly based in California, with much of the UK anarchist archive based there too, then why donate material (or even support) when such aforementioned literature 'should be available/ accessible in the UK' What do KSL say?

A: If people don't want to donate that is fine. It is their material and they have every right to decide where it goes. I think/hope that scanning material which is available to all may appease some people's worries. We're very grateful to everyone who does support us, in particular the Friends of the KSL who have set up regular donations.

4. – There was discussion quite some time ago of making the KSL archive available online somehow, or a listing of what it holds, is this still planned?

A: I am not certain that we would need to scan our whole collection. Some of what we have is replicated online by other groups/libraries/archives etc. To scan what is already available wouldn't serve much purpose. What we do scan, more often than not, can't be found anywhere on the web and we see that as

being a service that helps people. We could certainly do much more: papers like *Iconoclast*, *Rational Review*, *The Syndicalist* etc. etc. as well as historic personal correspondence certainly could do with being put on line. We could also, we sense, supplement what is already available. For example, we have a lot of 1940s Anarchist Federation correspondence that could supplement the Syndicalist Workers Federation material up at The Sparrows Nest; or a collection of Freedom Press leaflets from 1912 onwards that might be better placed on the Freedom Press website. That needs talking about with them and others, of course. Sometimes seeing scanned material sitting in isolation from any context doesn't really help! We do have a catalogue and we are a little embarrassed by our earlier entries in it. To be fair to us we were a lot less experienced and far too casual with it in those long ago days. We want the catalogue to be an educational tool with as much detail as we can add for each item. We also want it on line.

5. – You have moved from producing regular pamphlets to (in conjunction with AK Press) releasing some great books. What forthcoming titles are planned? any future pamphlets?

A: Our next publication with AK is *Agitated* by Joni D., a translation of a great work on the Spanish Autonomous groups during the 1970s. Readable and thoughtful it adds to our knowledge as well as expanding our understanding of anarchism. We have a project underway on the writings of Camillo Berneri and one or two other topics and we are always on the lookout for interesting material that can be translated into English. We may also publish more on-line such as our work on the 1945 split in British anarchism, [<http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/139511268/The%201945%20split%20in%20British%20anarchism>] which makes available scans of contemporary documents and newspapers which people may find useful.

6. – We have previously talked about our 'encroaching old age' and lack of 'younger comrades' eager to 'take over the reins of running an archive' what can be done to encourage the next generation to realise the importance of 'dusty old anarchist papers'?

A: There are young people who are interested in the

KSL. They're a bit like ourselves in the beginning: we were excited by the content and not so much by the means of conserving and protecting the material. And that still is very common. In the past students writing on anarchist history have helped us. That said, we are all volunteers and we understand that the problem has been maintaining the ability to regularly work with us, either on site or remotely. As we all know the throughput within anarchism is a distinct phenomenon and we suffer as much as anyone.

7. – With the last question in mind, what projects have the KSL planned, and what is the future for the KSL itself?

A: As outlined above, we do have lots of plans. As an ageing affinity group we are looking to add younger people and with ideas. Covid affected our work quite badly – especially in terms of people being able to work in the archive. Much of what we do isn't necessarily public facing. It's the ordering and cataloging of material together with constant work on the conservation of old newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets etc. We are still working on a sizeable backlog. We have mentioned plans for scanning and working on the catalogue for putting on line above. There is always the Bulletin which takes time to put together as well as individual bits of writing Collective members might want to do. Never mind the regular search for publications and the constant work on those we think are good! Please bear in mind that we are a small affinity group some of whom have full time jobs. Consequently we are wary of promising what, in the end, we can't deliver. The KSL plans to be here for a long, long time and as people can see from our replies there's a lot for us to do. The public facing projects we will be working on will need some prioritizing. Some of these plans may change.

8. – Thank you for answering. Is there anything you would like to add/ say?

A: If people want to know more about the KSL or explore what we have already put online, our website is [www.katesharpleylibrary.net](http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net)

From <https://tynesideanarchistarchive.wordpress.com/2022/11/13/interview-kate-sharpley-library/>

## Slaughter or slander? Notes on the Albert Meltzer-George Woodcock conflict

London anarchist Albert Meltzer was a longstanding critic of non-revolutionary and 'intellectual' trends described as 'new anarchism' or 'militant liberalism' (depending on your point of view). Part of this was

his conflict with the Canadian writer George Woodcock. I want to examine that conflict and when and how it arose in particular.

### Detour 1: When is anarchism 'new'?

The phrase 'New anarchism' crops up once in Woodcock's 1968 essay 'Anarchism Revisited', with much more attention paid to the 'new anarchists': 'They were militant pacifists. They represented a trend which had appeared from outside Old Anarchism.' [1] The rise of the tendency can be traced through Albert's critiques. In 1949 it was only a possibility: 'there is a danger that some anarcho-pacifist-surrealist cult might arise, having about as much connection with anarchism as the Freemasons have with building.' [2] By 1968 Albert was criticising 'the sociological school of advanced liberalism which finds its expression in the magazine "Anarchy"'. [3] Also in 1968 he identified the tendency as 'Liberal Anarchism' 'which seeks to adjust to present day society, without the need for overthrowing the State (regarded as an unlikely contingency)'. [4] By 1970 it was described by Albert and Stuart Christie as 'militant liberalism'. [5]

### Did the conflict begin in the 1940s?

I want to look at and try to improve on accounts of the conflict between Albert and Woodcock that claim it began in the 1940s. Both had been members of the (British) Anarchist Federation and connected with the Freedom Press Group during the Second World War (though in 1942 and 1943 Albert was working outside London). Woodcock was the subject of a special issue of *Anarchist Studies* in 2015 containing 'George Woodcock's Transatlantic Anarchism' by Allan Antliff & Matthew S. Adams. They combined autobiographical writings by both Albert and Woodcock to produce an 'agreed version' of when and why the two fell out:

'Within the [Anarchist] Federation, Woodcock's views soon brought him into protracted conflict with Albert Meltzer, whose conviction that violent working-class revolution was the only path to anarchism grated against Woodcock's pacifist convictions. Pointedly and haughtily describing Meltzer as a "pompous young man of undefined education", Woodcock retrospectively deemed their animus a product of Meltzer's desire to be the unquestioned "authority on anarchist history". For his part, Meltzer characterized Woodcock as a "bourgeois 'intellectual'" who joined the movement to advance his literary career by utilizing its resources (the press) to publish *Now*. Worse still, his pacifist theorizing reduced anarchism to a "marble effigy of utopian ideals, to be defined and even lived up to by some chosen individuals within the framework of a repressive society."' [6]

The same issue contains 'Pacifism, Violence and Aesthetics: George Woodcock's Anarchist Sojourn,

1940-1950' by Mark Antliff which relies on Woodcock's memories from 1974:

'Woodcock later recounted "the anarcho-syndicalists connected with Freedom Press objected that avant-garde poetry and literary criticism had nothing to do with the workers' struggle". These advocates of "revolutionary purism" led by anarchists Albert Meltzer and Tom Brown instituted a compromise that continued until the journal's demise in 1947.' [7]

I have doubts about much of this and suspect that there's a large amount of hindsight in these autobiographical accounts. This is partly based on the Kate Sharpley Library's study and chronology of the events leading up to the 1945 split in British anarchism, based on primary source documents.[8] That research shows how hard it is to write history without letting published versions of the past control the narrative; but also how using primary sources can enlighten us (or simply not answer the questions we want to ask). I have tried to provide a better account of the dispute, but this is provisional, since new primary sources would help to clarify what happened when.

### Questioning the 'agreed version'

1. Did Woodcock's pacifism lead to friction? Woodcock at the time clearly identified as an anarcho-syndicalist: see 'What is Anarcho-syndicalism?'[9] and *Anarchy or Chaos* (1944). His *What is Anarchism?* is a straightforward recommendation of 'working-class revolution': 'It is clear, then, that if men are to become free and are to enjoy anything approaching a complete development of their faculties, the state must be abolished, together with the system of property, and other means of exploitation, such as the wages system, which are contingent to it.' [10]

If Woodcock embraced revolution, was it an explicitly pacifist one? In *Anarchy or Chaos* his brief discussion of nineteenth century anarchist political violence treated it as a past stage, but did not condemn it on pacifist grounds: 'the bombs thrown by anarchists have been very few and have always been directed against those who were guilty of the oppression and murder of their subjects [...] the practice of individual terrorism was virtually abandoned by the anarchists some forty years ago, when the advent of anarchist syndicalism opened up the possibility of the more satisfactory tactic of revolutionary mass economic action.' [11]

There is no evidence of Woodcock renouncing his pacifism (he wrote about it outside of *War Commentary*) but he seems to have 'fitted in' by ignoring or downplaying whatever differences there were between his idea of revolution and those held by other members of the Anarchist Federation. His 'Editorial minority view' on the subject did not appear until 1947 as part of the discussion stirred up

by Herbert Read's call for an 'educational' and 'non-violent' anarchism. Even then, Woodcock did not sound strictly pacifist: 'I think that violence is such a danger to the revolutionary cause that we should discard it as far as possible, and in no circumstances should indulge in the kind of romantic glorification of it which seems to tempt many revolutionaries.' [12]

2. Was *Now* a source of friction? The research on the 1945 split has thrown doubt on the idea that Woodcock's editorship of *Now* was a major source of friction at the time: 'There appears to be little contemporary discussions about the financial relationship between the FPG [Freedom Press Group] and *Now* in the various collection of papers we have seen.' [13]

Home Office files contain a letter written by Albert to the exiled Spanish Anarchist paper, *Tierra y Libertad* on 6 December 1944. Distributing *Now* is mentioned as one of the achievement of Freedom Press: 'Our books and pamphlets are sold out in a very short time after appearing, and Freedom Press has probably published a wider range of classical and new literature on Anarchism than any other Anarchist pre[ss], during the war. Freedom Press also distributed the literary review "Now".' [14]

3. Did Brown and Albert unite to oppose Woodcock? It is hard to imagine Tom Brown seeing *Now* as an asset to the anarchist movement. But it is unlikely, given their conflicts at the time (recorded in the chronology), that Albert would have supported him.

4. Was Albert jealous of Woodcock writing anarchist history? Between 1939 and 1945 only a handful of Albert's articles in *War Commentary* dealt with history ('Sacco and Vanzetti (Pages of revolutionary history)', December 1943; 'Anarchism in Cuba', August 1944; 'Anarchism in France', October 1944). In 1952 Albert discussed 'The lessons of history' without mentioning or criticising 'professors' for distorting or profiting from anarchist history as he would later do. [15] The writing of history became a bone of contention later, as we shall see.

### When did the dispute between Albert and Woodcock arise?

*Freedom* in 1947 contained articles where Albert and Woodcock disagreed (on the commune, on public opinion) but nothing foreshadowing what came later. [16] In 1949 Woodcock moved from London to Canada and established a successful literary career. In 1965 Albert made a passing dig at Woodcock's careerism: 'I recall that when George Woodcock was making the grade as a litterateur – he worked hard enough at it, poor lamb – and had built his coterie of writers, using us poor anarchists as a stepping stone (thanks to "Freedom", "Cuddon's" was temporarily out of publication at the time) it became the fashion

to call him brilliant.’[17]

In 1962 Woodcock published *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (the British edition came out in 1963). It is mentioned in Albert’s first memoir, *The Anarchists in London 1935-1955*. Albert damned much of Woodcock’s writing with faint praise but also criticised him for slandering anarchists:

‘Under the tutelage of [Marie Louise] Berneri (possibly [John] 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.’[18]

*The Anarchists in London* was published in 1976 but a manuscript of it was in circulation by 1967. It is mentioned as forthcoming in *Wooden Shoe* (1967) and described as ‘sure to cause a controversy’ in *Freedom* in 1968.[19] While both Albert and Woodcock were willing to ‘back-date’ their feud to the mid-1940s, Woodcock’s publication of *Anarchism* in 1962 possibly marks the beginning of the breach. ‘Some of his later writings’ suggests that what Woodcock wrote in the 1970s was more important. Before we get to that, I want to examine what Woodcock said in 1962.

### **Makhno**

Woodcock’s *Anarchy or Chaos* (1944) devoted a chapter to ‘The Russian Revolution and the Makhnovist Movement’ which said of Makhno ‘Today, in Russia, his name is name is obscured and sullied by scandal, and the Anarchism he represented is driven into the recesses of men’s hearts by one of the cruellest oppressions in history.’[20] There’s nothing in the chapter to suggest it was written by a pacifist.

In *Anarchism* (1962) Woodcock’s account of Makhno had changed greatly and he quoted Volin: ‘Under the influence of alcohol, Makhno became irresponsible in his actions; he lost control of himself. Then it was personal caprice, often supported by violence, that suddenly replaced his sense of revolutionary duty; it was the despotism, the absurd pranks, the dictatorial antics, of a warrior chief that were strangely substituted for the calm reflection, perspicacity, personal dignity, and self-control in his attitude to others and to the cause which a man like Makhno should never have abandoned.’[21] Woodcock went on to state that ‘the Makhnovists and the anarchists in the Spanish Civil

War [...] Both lost the purity of their ideals when they became involved in military activities.’[22]

Woodcock was mistaken to describe Volin as an ‘admirer’ of Makhno, given their ‘war of words’ in exile. Historian Malcolm Archibald has written about this conflict (and its consequences): ‘Makhno was able to mount an able defense to Volin’s attacks during his lifetime, but after his death Volin had the field to himself and did much damage to Makhno’s reputation with accusation of drunkenness and debauchery.’ [23]

### **Barcelona**

Here is Woodcock’s 1962 story about the Spanish anarchists:

‘It was such groups [ie ‘small groups acting on their own anarchic responsibility’] too who carried out many of the summary executions of suspected Fascists which took place during the same initial period; these acts were usually committed, not by the ordinary working men of the C.N.T., or even by the more responsible F.A.I. militants, but by relatively small groups, sometimes of professional pistoleros, but more often of hot-headed young fanatics belonging to the Libertarian Youth organization. Their favorite victims included priests and monks on the one hand, and pimps and male prostitutes on the other; both classes they shot from a moral bigotry that was characteristically Spanish – the priests having, in their eyes, mocked the ideal of human brotherhood and the pimps and male prostitutes having offended against the Law of Nature. [...] On this level there is not really a great deal to choose between the anarchist minority who killed priests and pimps in Catalonia and the Falangist minority who killed trade unionists in Granada; both were the products of Spanish history rather than of the political philosophies they claimed to represent.’[24]

### **Detour 2: 1968, nothing happened**

In 1968 Woodcock published his polemic ‘Anarchism revisited’ in *Commentary* (of New York). I have not found any responses (either from Albert or other British anarchists) at the time. I cannot imagine Albert not responding if he had read it.

### **1972 onwards**

The dispute reached its peak in the early 1970s. In 1972 George Woodcock reviewed Victor Peters’ *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* for *Anarchy* (second series). Woodcock claimed ‘The kind of coldly conceived “executions” which the Makhnovists and later many of the Spanish anarchists perpetrated, the slaughter of defenceless men who happened to be in their power just because of their social backgrounds, their beliefs or even their sexual predilections (for it is established that Barcelona anarchists at one time rounded up male prostitutes and liquidated them), are in effect

demonstrations of the illusory nature of anarchist beliefs.’[25]

Albert responded in the next issue of *Anarchy* with ‘The Nature of Non-Violent Fascism and the George Woodcock Myth’. It attacked Woodcock’s ‘idealisation of the cult of non-violence’, careerism and willingness to use slander: ‘He himself, for reasons of radical chic, is prepared to let his name go on the snob-appeal lists of “distinguished sponsors” put out by Spanish refugee organisations. Yet these are the very people one would not touch with a bargepole if the accusations he now makes against them are true.’ ‘How, in Spain, could a witch hunt for homosexuals have taken place unnoticed? How could the anarchists, above all, have conducted one?’[26]

To Albert, for Woodcock to claim without proof that Barcelona’s anarchists killed male sex workers or gay men was slander; and the killing of pimps ‘had nothing to do with the anarchists.’ [27] Regarding Makhno, Albert asserted ‘Makhno could not help fighting, but he directed his fighting to the anarchist cause and the peasant revolution. [...] Or he could have laid down and died [...] He chose to arm the peasants, to fight for freedom, and to battle against impossible odds, in the course of which some mistakes may have happened but in which he managed to keep the banners of freedom flying before two great totalitarian armies pressed in on him.’[28]

Strangely, Woodcock’s ‘Reply to Albert Meltzer’ referred back, not to the review which was criticised (where ‘many of the Spanish anarchists’ were accused of ‘slaughter of defenceless men who happened to be in their power just because of their social backgrounds, their beliefs or even their sexual predilections’) but to the similar accusations from *Anarchism* (1962) that ‘pimps and male prostitutes’ were killed for ‘having offended against the Law of Nature’: ‘What intrigues him, and leads him into the fascinated speculations which innate puritans devote to such matters, is my statement in ANARCHISM regarding certain “executions” of [imprisoned] prostitutes by self-styled anarchists in Barcelona early in the Civil War. I made it clear [...] that the acts were not committed by “the ordinary working class men of the C.N.T. or even by the more responsible F.A.I. militants”, but by “professional pistoleros” working with the anarchists and by a few “fanatics”. [...] I based my statement that they did take place on the evidence of a reputable anarchist who was in Barcelona as representative of the French movement and who was troubled by what happened and by the way the propagandists of the movement covered it up. He was André Prudhommeaux, who wrote as André Prunier.’[29]

‘The Nature of Non-Violent Fascism and the George Woodcock Myth’ also led to a letter from Nicolas Walter. Normally keen to correct any writing on anarchist history, Walter ignored Albert’s

accusation of slander in order to defend Woodcock’s pacifism. ‘The term “non-violent fascism” gives rise not to great offence, as you claim, but to great amusement, and not because “fascism” is a bogey word, as you claim, but because “non-violent fascism” is a self-contradiction.’

The response, presumably by Albert, states ‘it is such clichés as [...] “by using violence you become the same as those you are using violence against” – that illuminate the phrase “non-violent fascist” since the issue of “violence” is the one thing the person concerned is objecting to in fascism.’[30]

### **Were male sex workers or gay men killed?**

Woodcock did not produce any further ‘proof’ nor retract his accusations. Despite his claim about Prudhommeaux, the accusation that Barcelona anarchists killed male sex workers or gay men appears nowhere else. I ran the accusation past Paul Sharkey who had never seen anything to suggest a particular targeting of homosexuals but provided two references to gay men in 1930s Spain. The *Giménologues* (quoting José Mariño) mention ‘La Joconde’, a CNT jeweller, friend and possible lover of Justo Bueno who, ‘back in 1934 had been a member of the same affinity group, made up of about fifteen metalworkers close to or members of the FAI, that his homosexuality was common knowledge and that no one made any slighting remarks to him because of it.’[31]

The second was from Augustin Souchy, the exiled German anarcho-syndicalist and ‘kind of “Foreign Minister” of the CNT-FAI’,[32] concerning his time in Barcelona: ‘One day, a commission of journalists from abroad came to me to ask for my intervention in favor of the German-Italian journalist Ludovico Strauss who was under arrest because of a homosexual affair. I picked up the telephone and said to the corresponding officer: “Bed affairs are no counter-revolutionary conspiracy; Tell Strauss that I expect him tomorrow in my office. Okay?” “Entendido (agreed),” it came back. The next morning Strauss thanked me personally for his release.’[33]

I asked Richard Cleminson (who has written extensively on attitudes to same-sex desire in the Spanish anarchist movement) if he had come across any mention of anarchists killing gays or male sex workers. He replied ‘I haven’t found any evidence to suggest that anarchists shot either male sex workers or gay men. That said, as you know, there was still a lot of prejudice against same-sex behaviour and this was voiced, for example, in many libertarian publications. But homosexuality was generally viewed as a misfortune, not something to be punished. For this view, we can turn to Félix Martí Ibáñez, among others, to see how he believed that homosexuality was a deviation that would be “cured” in time. Despite this, he steadfastly disapproved of

repression. There is also the case of Lucía Sánchez Saornil, one of the founders of Mujeres Libres, who was openly lesbian and her fellow ML militants knew this and apparently accepted it.'

To Albert, Woodcock's disregard for historical accuracy established him permanently as an enemy; not simply a political opponent, or someone who had changed his mind, but a liar:

'In Anarchy No. 10 George Woodcock made a positive allegation which, he stated illustrates the "illusory nature of anarchist beliefs". This was that "many of the Spanish anarchists perpetrated the slaughter of defenceless men who happened to be in their power just because of their social backgrounds, their beliefs or even their sexual predilections (for it is established that Barcelona anarchists at one time rounded up male prostitutes and liquidated them)."

'These allegations of vicious murder by professed libertarians, many dead, many living, are either true or false. If true, they do not necessarily establish the "illusory nature" of anarchism but they condemn those whose sympathies are with the Spanish Anarchists. If false, Woodcock is a vile libeller and the acceptance of him as an impartial historian is an illusory belief.

'In his attempt at self-justification, he no longer says that people were murdered merely for their sexual predilections – which presumes moral vigilantes, thought police and so on – he brings in "pimps". The late Prudhommeaux (who edited a paper on Spain during the civil war and was silent on the subject of the killing of "homosexuals") is supposed to have told Woodcock this in 1950, and "these statements were published", "most anarchists in England" knew about them and "Red Lion Street" (which was dear old Lilian Wolfe and arch-pacifist Jack Robinson, unless he includes Vernon Richards) found them unwelcome. It is a long way from the positive "it is established" to "someone told me!" [...]

'Everyone knows that "pimps" may well be the subject for killing in a busy seaport, in Barcelona as in London. Nobody would in 1936 find it necessary to "cover up" the shooting of Mafia types. On the contrary they would make great play of it. But Woodcock is deliberately deceiving for he has brought the "pimps" in together with the homosexuals, pretending that he does not know really what the latter are and confusing the two – (pointing this out is just "puritan" prurience).'[34]

### **'Opposite conclusions from twentieth century history'**

After 1949 Woodcock grew increasingly strident in his attacks on historical anarchists. In 1944 Woodcock wrote of Makhno as an anarchist. By 1972 'I do not think that his pretensions to being an anarchist can be accepted. He was a peasant insurrectionary'.[35]

For Woodcock, writing about the past was an opportunity to distance himself from the revolutionary ideas he was ashamed that he once embraced: 'the collectivist viewpoint still exists in the form of a mythology that looks towards "the masses" and "the working class" as the saviours of society. I have subscribed to absurdities of this kind in the past.'[36]

'Anarchism revisited' (1968) was partly Woodcock's settling of scores with 'those who fawned most upon me when I was a young and promising writer who also appeared to be a true believer.' It was also an attack on 'old' anarchism: It contrasted the boring and inoffensive working class adherents of 'the syndicalist cult of romantic death' with the 'conscience-stricken middle class' who knew better than to try and make revolutionary changes to society. It seems to me that Woodcock in 1968 and again in 1972 resented that the 'old anarchism' had not laid down and died. Perhaps his slander arose from a feeling that for the 'new anarchism' to live, the 'old anarchism' had to be killed off.

Albert never shied away from defending his comrades. His frequent references back to this dispute show his anger, but also suggest how that anger could provide motivation in 'the fight for history'. Being published by Penguin gave Woodcock huge status as *the* historian of anarchism, but a status he did not deserve: 'Woodcock's *Anarchism* is issued all over the world by Penguins, perpetuating lies and myths'.[37]

Woodcock was one of the main targets of the 1987 *Black Flag* supplement 'Liars and Liberals'. [38] Accused by Malcolm Bradford of 'venting certain people's personal vendettas', Albert responded: 'We dislike him for his atrocity stories about our Spanish friends not for the colour of his eyes. You may call it "vendetta"; we call it "solidarity"; Woodcock calls them murderers, we call him a liar and a swindler, and put that in the historical record as fact.'[39]

Albert's warm words for Ethel Mannin showed he could respect individual pacifists who had contributed to the cause.[40] But he had no time for attempts to create a 'non-violent anarchism'. 'The subject [of 'violence' v 'non-violence'] is irrelevant to anarchism but the imposition of the pacifist ethic upon it always implies an abandonment of class struggle and the acceptance of middle-class values. Not because middle class values are "non-violent" – they are not – but because by qualifying, hyphenating and diluting anarchism, a non-demanding excuse of a philosophy can be manufactured for the disenchanting liberal.'[41]

In the 1990s, Albert looked back to the 1940s and saw the beginning of the division between competing ideas of anarchism – either it was 'a marble effigy of utopian ideals, to be admired and defined and even lived up to by some chosen individuals within the

framework of a repressive society, or it was a fighting creed with a programme for breaking down repression.’[42] Tobias Kelly’s 2022 study of British pacifists contains an echo of this. Kelly quotes Martin Ceadel’s discussion of a ‘rift between those who saw socialism as a struggle for economic and political power and were therefore only opposed to capitalist and imperialist wars, and those who saw socialism as a more personal moral transformation.’[43] If you substitute ‘anarchism’ for ‘socialism’ and ‘social change’ for ‘economic and political power’ you have a suggestion of why the conflicts around the rise of ‘new anarchism’ or ‘militant liberalism’ were insoluble.

Albert and Woodcock drew opposite conclusions from twentieth century history. To Albert it was necessary to resist (even in the face of certain defeat): ‘let us at least go down fighting in our own plumage, the Last of the Mohicans’.[44] To Woodcock, only pacifists could claim to be anarchists and they could do nothing but hang on until ‘the moral forces that depend on individual choice and judgement can reassert themselves’.[45]

Phil Ruff suggested how successful Albert was in defending the idea of a revolutionary anarchism that remained a ‘fighting creed’: ‘Albert’s refusal to kowtow to the pacifist-liberal Mafia who sought to re-invent anarchism in their own image after the war, and his scepticism of the New Left in the 1960s, have earned him a reputation for “sectarianism”. Paradoxically, it was the discovery of class struggle anarchism through the “sectarianism” of *Black Flag* under Albert’s editorship that convinced so many anarchists of my generation to become active in the movement.’[46]

Albert saw Woodcock’s rewriting of anarchism and its history as an example of the working class being pushed out of its own movement. Anti-elitism was always a key part of his politics and drove his disputes with other ideologies (from populism to Trotskyism): ‘We do not “idealise” the workers. But the most reactionary class existing are the intellectual pretenders who take hold of their ideas and try to write them out of it.’[47]

The dispute with Woodcock was not the initial trigger for Albert’s interest in anarchist history but certainly was a major factor in it. This dispute cannot be disentangled from the broader political conflict about ‘new anarchism’/‘militant liberalism’. To Albert, Woodcock’s slander vindicated not only his own opposition to ‘militant liberalism’ but also his approach to history: ‘Our historical judgement was criticised as based only on anecdotal history from veterans but knowing how conventional history is concocted I doubt if it suffered from that.’[48]

## Notes

[Special thanks to Paul S., Richard C and everyone who expressed an interest. A partial archive of

*Freedom* can be found at

<https://freedomnews.org.uk/archive/>. *Black Flag* and *Anarchy* (both series) can be found on Libcom.org and <https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/> ]

1, ‘Anarchism Revisited’ *Commentary*, August 1968 <https://www.commentary.org/articles/george-woodcock/anarchism-revisited/> It’s reprinted in Woodcock’s collection of essays *Anarchism and Anarchists* (1992). Some academics apply the term ‘new anarchism’ retrospectively to ideas in the 1940s; others use it for twenty-first century developments.

2 ‘Dilettantes’ (letter) *Freedom* 19 February 1949 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4f4s7t>

3 p.8, *Aims and principles of anarchism : an essay at defining what the Anarchist Movement is and how wide a field it covers*. London: Coptic Press, 1968.

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## Anarchy in Action by Colin Ward [Book review]

'How would you feel,' asks Colin Ward opening his important new book *Anarchy in Action*, 'If you discovered that the society in which you would really like to live was already here, apart from a few little local difficulties like exploitation, war, dictatorship and starvation?'

Surprised.

The argument is saved from being palpable nonsense by Colin Ward's belief that anarchism is always there, something rooted in everyday life, notwithstanding capitalism and war (which he seems to treat as unrelated phenomena). What he is really saying is that anarchism is not something that comes out of the skies like a divine revelation given on high at Sinai; it is the application of certain principles such as solidarity, freedom, mutual aid and so on. But it can hardly be supposed that the belief in, or application of, such principles are exclusive to those

who call themselves anarchists, or that people have only to call themselves such to appropriate such beliefs. Indeed, the purpose of the sectarian labelling of oneself an anarchist is surely to lift such principles from idealism and transform them into a positive achievable programme. If one does not do that, the label is meaningless.

Just as St. Teresa of Avila said she walked into the kitchen 'and there among the plates, is God' so one could walk into the concentration camps and there, among the gas chambers is anarchism – or rather, attempts at solidarity and resistance before the last flicker of life was beaten out. But having said this, one has merely uttered some words of consolation – which is all ideals ever amount to in the finish – for one could hardly tolerate concentration camps on the grounds that they could not entirely extinguish the basic forces of humankind.

Colin Ward would certainly not do this – he takes the 'moslems' [1] – or 'zombies' – of the concentration camp as an instance of how this last flicker of life can be beaten out – but he undoubtedly feels that it is not necessary to go to the extreme of destroying capitalism and the State in order to realise an anarchist programme. For him, reform and revolution are 'false antitheses': He says, not altogether incorrectly, that one must distinguish between the kind of revolution which installs a different gang of rulers, and the kind of reform that makes oppression more palatable or more efficient, on the one hand, with the kind of social changes – whether revolutionary or reformist, through which people enlarge their autonomy and reduce their subjection to external authority.

But this is to suggest that there can be 'social changes' which 'enlarge autonomy and reduce authority' within the State, a belief which is pure liberalism – for liberalism is the conception of freedom within the State just as anarchism is its conception beyond it (to put it in class terms is completely beyond Colin Ward's term of reference). It is here the flaw in his reasoning comes, for viewing liberalism as a sort of complementary philosophy to anarchism (you get as much as you can your way, and we'll get as much as we can our way) – he comes at times close to losing his way altogether since the deceptive corollary is to get it the easier way – without struggle or resistance.

As editor of the old *Anarchy* [2] Colin Ward called to his aid, to justify the anarchist philosophy – not to make it more clearly defined for at times its writers were totally incomprehensible in order the better to display their intellectuality – but to make it more respectable – the militant liberals of the nuclear disarmament movement who dashed off their learned articles in the common-rooms of universities. What has happened to them all now? It was a movement that has gone with the wind – what remained of it went, with the sniff of anarchism in the air, with the

wind up. Like Kropotkin in *An Appeal to the Young* (and his outlook is very Kropotkinian) Ward asked them to explain anarchist ideas in terms of cybernetics and sociology and all the trendy subjects – even criminology – and the liberal pundits went to it with a will ... to halt with blank amazement when an anarchist inadvertently found his way into the columns and said pointblank – for instance – that prisons should be abolished. Forthwith. But how? 'He gives no indication of how this should be done' they cried.

One feels (even if it could have got past the spike!) a formula for the destruction of prison buildings would have upset their non-violent souls even more. But basically their concern was how could one abolish an institution with no concern for the – well, the State, but they wouldn't put it that way.

An extreme of this liberal 'anarchism' is given in Giovanni Baldelli's unintentionally hilarious *Social Anarchism* (published by Penguin) when he suggested maybe we ('we'? The State? The capitalists?) could try dropping a law at a time and seeing if 'we' could do without it... if 'we' could, and 'we' managed OK, maybe 'we' could try dropping another ... Thus – wait for it, folks, you've heard this before – revolution would be 'outmoded'.

Colin Ward himself would never drop to this level of social liberalism; and in *Anarchy in Action* he is very careful to prune away the excesses of nonsense of the militant liberals and non-volunteers who filled the pages of the old *Anarchy* before they disappeared into Academe.

Though the cover gives a picture of anarchists in action, the book has nothing to do with that at all – the blurb offers it as the 'social theory of the alternative society' but it is not of that either (the social theory of the alternative society is liberal fascism). What the book is is an honest, though circumscribed, attempt to show how a limited application of anarchist principles may be made within in State preserving some civil rights. It therefore has relevance to many issues of the day, and, while it ignores social change, and therefore, avoids all discussion of a future society – and one suspects (but without proof) the author may have some reservations as to whether that is immediately achievable or not – within those limitations it is a major achievement in the discussion of Anarchism.

*Black Flag* v3, n8 (January? 1974). Anonymous but we believe written by Albert Meltzer

#### Note

1, ['Muselmann' was camp slang for someone visibly on the verge of death (there are differing explanations of how the term arose). KSL]

2, The new series of *Anarchy* adopts a very different attitude

# The Idea by Nick Heath [Book review]

*The Idea* is a history of anarchist communism. Communism as in ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’ which appeared in various forms in the working class movement as socialism and then anarchism evolved after the French Revolution (and long before the word was used for the ‘jam tomorrow’ of the post-1917 Russian ruling elite). So, anarchists who see no role for wages after the revolution are communists (‘to each according to their productivity’ is for collectivists). But it’s a bit more complex than that, as anarchist communism (more tightly defined) represents a strand distinct from syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism (though as you’ll see the FORA union of Argentina was – most of the while – anarchist communist; and anarchist communism and anarcho-syndicalism in 1930s Spain were interpenetrated [313]). There’s also the question of how to organise and what tactics to follow.

Heath is a partisan of organised anarchist communism – and has no problem with ‘struggle, contradiction and acute dissensions’ [13]. For example, he warns against the ‘yellow fever of individualism’ [165] and ‘virus of spontaneism’ [364]. His verdicts are clear and, thankfully, he doesn’t twist the facts to bolster them (he doesn’t share Luigi Galleani’s anti-organisational approach, but doesn’t try to deny his anarchist communism [387]). It’s sad to read of so many who saw the value of organisation, yet ended up leaving the anarchist movement ‘behind’ for groups that were definitely very organised but not much use at liberating anyone (Maoism, Trotskyism).

Heath has written a huge number of biographies of anarchist militants, (see <https://libcom.org/tags/nick-heath>) a huge effort of ‘history from below’ that you might think would be enough work for one lifetime. *The Idea* does not compile them, it’s a separate project; but it does have some of that wonderful sense of letting past comrades speak, and showing their anarchist communism in context. Here’s Erich Muhsam in Germany: ‘We claim: no one can be free as long as everyone is not free.’ [199] Or Li Shizeng in Paris, rejecting Daoist ideas ‘Anarchism advocates radical activism. It is the diametrical opposition of quietist nonaction. Anarchism does not only advocate that imperial power does not reach the self; it also seeks to make sure that it does not reach anyone else.’ [447]

It’s a shame there’s no index, though I can see why the publisher thought the extra pages might be too much. I would have liked fuller references (some chapters have them, some not) but I doubt that will stop anyone hunting things down.

I think the parts of *The Idea* based on personal experience will be a useful source for other histories of anarchism. But mainly *The Idea* is a full (and honest) history of anarchist communism: ‘The history of anarchist communism has been full of many defeats, of scissions and failures. Yet it has perennially renewed itself, attempting to learn from the mistakes of the past.’ [472] It’s an epic achievement.

*The Idea* by Nick Heath. Published by Just Books Publishing, 2022. ISBN 9781739723712  
<https://organiseanarchistsireland.com/product/nick-heath-the-idea-anarchist-communism-past-present-and-future-copy/>

## Spanish Participation in the Haute Savoie Resistance

Greetings, readers, here we go again. After a pretty busy month I have found the time to sit down in front of the computer and write. And since I have been working on a fetching granite wall at the foot of Mont Blanc, let me turn to the Spanish resisters in Haute Savoie.

Because, yes, Spanish republican exiles were not found solely in the Pyrenees and Massif Central. We can trace our male and female compatriots throughout the length and breadth of France, in larger or smaller numbers, but the Haute Savoie region in the Alps was one of the places where they were concentrated.

With the wall in Le Bossom near Chamonix complete, off I went with another fan of stones, my pal Samuel, to Annecy for a bite to eat and a bit of down-time. On the way there we passed close to Glières and my ears pricked up because now we were in guerrilla territory. I also remembered that there was a monument to the Spanish dead there and I could swear it was in Annecy. Which in actual fact it was, albeit that in the end we were not able to pay it a visit. But since that niggled with me, I said to myself that on my return I would write something about the Spanish participation in the area in question. The Spanish contribution to the resistance in the Alps was not only sizeable but the libertarian presence there was significant. In fact, the most prominent member of it, Miguel Vera Navas aka *el Padre*, was an anarchist born in Puertollano in 1904.

Among the many libertarians active in the area, I have managed to track down the names of some, which I shall now list. For a start, let me say that with the passage of time the Spaniards from a range of maquis groups banded together to form the “Ebro Section”. That significant group, under the leadership of Miguel Vera, included Jaime Barba, José Clausell aka *Caterre*, Joaquín Dieste Ramos, Miquel Esteve aka *Miquelet*, Manuel Joya Martínez, Francisco Ortiz

Pérez aka *Lieutenant Michel*, Braulio Ramos Lozano from the 'La Combe d'Ire' maquis, or Galo Utrilla Fernández.

There were also Pantaleón Arteaga Cerón, José Barriera Tierz, Saturnino Bretos, Eusebio Pinós Regalado and his brother Gabriel – all from the 'La Vapeur' group in Savoy – who went on to join the Ebro Section and fought in Glières. We also know of a libertarian who fought in the same department, albeit not as part of the Ebro Section. This was José Escribano Saura aka *Pepito*, formerly of the Durruti Column, who served in an FTP maquis group from May 1944 onwards and had a hand in the liberation of Annecy. Plus Ricard Peña Vallespin, Alejandro Sancho Riera or Salvador Solé Clemente. I shall deal separately with Avelino Escudero Peinado as I have him down as an Ebro Section libertarian, but cannot find the document authenticating this, so more of that anon.

Unfortunately, as ever, we lack the names of lots and lots of anarchists of both sexes, who chose to pass through the world without drawing attention, or, because of their affiliation, since, especially if they were in the ranks of the PCE, there was no record of their militant persuasion as they were not members of any political party, or because their details were hijacked for the purpose of inflating the numbers.

Now that we have tied the names to the places, let us say something about the Spanish participation in the resistance in Haute Savoie. On 1 June 1942, Miguel Vera, a member of the GTE (Foreign Labour Group) No 517 started his underground efforts towards establishing resistance groups and he made contact with the Spanish-born Frenchman Ricardo Andrés aka *Richard* and with the Secret Army (AS) resistance organization.

But by that time the Spanish refugees already had a good record as rebels: inciting people to desert rather than perform obligatory labour service for the Germans, advising the deserters, supplying them with foodstuffs, phoney papers and huts in which to hide in the mountains, mounting sabotage attacks on transformers and power lines in the fields and hills, attacking those factories working with the Axis forces, or raiding "Youth Camps" in order to make off with blankets, food, boots or clothing for the fugitives in the mountains.

December 1942 saw the creation of the very first maquis group in the Les-Villard-sur-Thônes area; it was made up of 15 people, including Spaniards.

On 15 March 1943, a group of republicans joined and participated in the "Dents de Lanfon" maquis.

On 1 April 1943, the "Mont Veyrier" maquis was formed; it was made up entirely of Spanish refugees, totalling about fifteen men under the guidance of Jorge Navarro. It operated south-east of Annecy.

On 3 May 1943, several Spanish republicans took part in the "Col de la Colombière" maquis.

On 7 June 1943, the "La Combe d'Ire" maquis

was launched; made up entirely of Spanish refugees and 45-strong, it was led by Gabriel Vilches.

By late June 1943, the "Semnoz" maquis had been set up: it too was wholly made up of Spanish refugees.

In September 1943, after a meeting between Ricardo Andrés and Miguel Vera, an escape line to Switzerland was arranged under the supervision of José Mari. The various Spanish groups amalgamated and reorganized in order to improve their coordination.

On 20 December 1943, the "Bouchet de Serraval" maquis was launched: it was made up entirely of Spanish refugees.

On 18 January 1944, Ricardo Andrés and his driver perished in an ambush after an act of betrayal.

On 30 January 1944, the resistance staff held a meeting: it was attended by Tom Morel and Miguel Vera. The Allies were repeatedly lobbied with requests for arms. Tom Morel was elected leader of the resistance in Haute Savoie and entrusted with overseeing preparations to use the Glières plateau for weapons drops and group gatherings.

On 31 January 1944, the French resistance groups climbed up to the Glières plateau.

On 1 February 1944, the Spanish groups, reshuffled by Miguel Vera into the Ebro Section and the Ebro Reinforcements climbed up on to the plateau. They were placed under the orders of Tom Morel and the latter, cognizant of their experience, deployed them in defence of the more exposed locations.

5 February 1944 saw the start of a drive by the French Milice; two days after that, the Spanish guerrillas came under the first attacks in the Essert area, the violence escalating on 12 February. By the following day, the plateau had been encircled.

On 14 February, the first Allied parachute drop was received. The fighting continued for the rest of the month.

On 5 March 1944, a second drop of equipment was carried out by Allied aircraft.

On the night of 9-10 March 1944, in the course of a guerrilla attack on a Vichy GMR (Reserve Mobile Groups) unit, the guerrilla leader Tom Morel was killed. The very next day there was an abortive attack on the GMR and a further parachute drop.

12 March 1944 witnessed the Luftwaffe's first air raid on the plateau.

From 17 to 23 March, the air raids continued, interspersed with several offensives mounted by the Milice.

On 24 March 1944, it being plain that the French fascists were unable to pull off their mission, lots of German troops from the 157<sup>th</sup> Alpine Division deployed around the plateau.

On 25 March there were uninterrupted bombardments from daybreak until nightfall by German artillery, with all of the buildings and winter

huts sheltering the guerrillas destroyed.

On 26 March, a sweeping attack by the Milice was beaten off. The artillery and German air force then came into play, with the 157<sup>th</sup> Division following up. At 10 o'clock that night, all guerrillas were ordered to quit the plateau.

The better to understand the facts set out thus far, it ought to be said that the guerrillas numbered as many as 465 men, 56 of whom were Spaniards. The men fighting as part of the Ebro Section included four International brigadiers, two Italians and two Germans. In addition to the Milice and the 157<sup>th</sup> Division, the attackers included the German 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain Chasseurs Regiment, the 19<sup>th</sup> SS Police Regiment and the Reserve Mobile Groups (GMR). In all, they numbered as many as 6,000 men, half of them encircling the plateau while the other half tried to capture it. To which must be added the German artillery and Luftwaffe resources.

The upshot was that once the withdrawal order had been issued, 112 French lives were lost, plus 9 Spanish lives. Added to which 75 French people and 5 Spaniards were captured, most of them after being wounded. The Axis losses were much smaller: 4 Germans dead, 17 French dead and I have no figures for the wounded and would query the official French history that hugely overstated the enemy losses. Most of the guerrillas managed to flee across the snow and cliffs of Glières, the last Spanish group to do so being the one to which "*el Cordobeses*" belonged. It took it nearly 10 days to reach the comparative safety of the forests of Chapelle-Rambaud. It was the only group that was not broken up during the withdrawal.

On 13 June 1944 Miguel Vera was arrested in Annecy town before being rescued shortly thereafter in a daring raid by a group of Spanish guerrillas.

By late June, a group of 60 Spanish were back operating in the Annemasse-Annecy area under Miguel Vera's leadership.

In the end, on 9 August 1944, Miguel Vera and a comrade were recaptured whilst transporting weapons and documents. They were interrogated and tortured by the Gestapo in Bonneville, before being moved to Annecy where they were sentenced to death.

Annecy was liberated on 19 August 1944, which thwarted the Germans' efforts and Miguel Vera and Martínez aka *el Chacho* were freed by a resistance team.

And there we have it, the adventures and misadventures of our elders in the Haute Savoie region. Quite a record.

Imanol.

*El Salto*, 31 October 2022

<https://www.elsaltodiario.com/ni-cautivos-ni-desarmados/la-participacion-espanola-en-la-resistencia-en-la-alta-saboya> Translated by Paul Sharkey

## War And Peace by Proudhon [Book Review]

We are deep in the bowels of militarism. Aged 95, General Frank Kitson is drawing his pension for bloody services rendered to Empire – the terror inflicted in Kenya, Malaysia and Ireland. The SAS, we learned recently, ran death squads in Afghanistan, as part of the USA's 'security mission'. Meanwhile, so-called progressives fawn over the Duke of Sussex in uniform (Jack Monroe), or gloat over the numbers of Russian soldiers killed in NATO's proxy war in Ukraine (Nicola Sturgeon). Nuclear weapons strong enough to kill millions are driven in black truck convoys on our motorways and fed into the submarines in Faslane, always ready to fire. Britain's global military export licences since 2008 have reached the value of £54bn – the profits are uncounted. Compare that with the £5.8bn in the global peace building budget of the United Nations. Militarism, that word which names it all, so absent from the centenary commemorations of WWI, was coined by P-J Proudhon in his book *War and Peace* of 1861.

Many a stimulating yet unhappy hour can be spent with this book, pondering the wars in Yemen, Syria or Ukraine and the prospects for world peace. Proudhon's insights are still relevant, even after the 20th Century sprouted tyrannical state powers and weapons which he could only have dreamt of. He tries to understand why war persists, and how it is so important to our societies and institutions. He is unafraid to draw unpleasant conclusions. He wants to pose the problems in a free way, free even from his biases, therefore without a '*socialist flavour*' (p48).

Proudhon believes that war is foundational to human societies: '*[it] is plain that war has deep roots, scarcely discernible, in the religious, juridical, aesthetic and moral sentiments of peoples.*' (p107) We cannot reduce war and society's institutions that spring from it to barbarism, also we cannot easily limit war by relying on external and so-called superior powers such as law and reason. Living in society is already conflict and that is why war cannot be reformed or abolished at the stroke of a pen: '*the social state is always a state of war*' (p75). The tension between capital and labour, lender and borrower, the clash of opinions, it is all antagonism and conflict. Peace at all cost, bad peace, unjust peace is for Proudhon despicable – war can be one way to improve society:

*'But for my heartfelt belief in the Revolution, I would refrain, as I would from blasphemy, from uttering a word against war: I would regard the devotees of perpetual peace as the most despicable of hypocrites, the scourge of civilization and a blight upon societies.'* (p85)

Running against ideas which were prevalent at the

time, for Proudhon there are no providential powers ('reason', 'good' or 'progress') which shape the arc of human history. Instead, societies and their institutions and the future are shaped by a materialist 'immanence' and one of those immanent forces is war. War has its own laws, dating back thousands of years, which are linked to our human instinct to see force as something which both enshrines a right and has the ability to make right (p130):

*'[War is not] the insult from one triggering the self-defence of the other; it is a principle, an institution, a belief, and we are one step away from saying a doctrine [...] Speaking through the mouths of nations, war affirms its reason, its righteousness, its jurisdiction and its function; it is this that we have to penetrate.'* (p118)

Against most philosophical and enlightened opinions and legal norms of his time, Proudhon asserts the primacy of the right of force which finds its shape and habits in war. The right of war is that which founds states, upholds the rights of peoples, underpins all laws and international treaties and '...if there is no right of war in the strict sense of the term, then the whole of history becomes inexplicable and nonsensical.' (p132) War, as a judgement delivered by force, is not simply 'might makes right', because justice is a force immanent to our nature (p156). Running through religion, philosophy and science, justice is this 'potentiality in our soul' which '*has us craving public order above all else*' (p157) and which Proudhon sees as a stronger bond than familial ones or selfish interests.

The term Proudhon uses to describe the central cause of war is pauperism, and he uses it in a complex, provocative way, like his use of the word militarism. His understanding of pauperism is sophisticated and illustrated with examples from many centuries and countries. Attacking the 19th Century vision of unstoppable progress (which persists nowadays as 'full luxury communism'), Proudhon rails against the nexus of: inequality, consumerism and the proliferation of ever-new needs, immiseration, proletarianisation, bloated government institutions and expenditures, parasitism etc. Pauperism leads to 'the rupture of the economic equilibrium', a domestic state of affairs which then leads to wars between states. These wars perpetuate the social domination of the rich. We can beat pauperism with a new set of values, a new temperance, an embrace of modesty and asceticism. While offering practical methods to eradicate inequality and class disparities, it is notable that Proudhon speaks of the necessity of spiritual change, alongside a transformation of mindsets and habits. This has obvious parallels with contemporary responses to the challenge of ecological collapse.

In one of the book's most hopeful passages, Proudhon imagines England defeating and occupying France (p431). The occupying force then takes

measures to destroy France's arsenal and their weapons' capabilities, forgives all debts, handing the land over to the peasants in freehold parcels. The occupiers pass the main industries into workers' ownership and reinstate the 12 nations which were absorbed into the French Empire (Normandy, Flanders etc.). All centralised power is dissolved and federated to the 12 nations who now control their own education, judiciary and finances. Lastly, all centralised metropolitan power in Paris is destroyed and dissolved, all its institutions and monuments, above all 'Paris as an idea'. Nationalism would wither and a great state would disappear, but the benefits would be many: the causes of war would be removed, it would be a more just society with different ideas of its purpose ready to flourish. Thus the recipe against militarism is sketched out as a reduction in the extremes of inequality and a sharing of the collective product by the producers. In addition, crucially, the oppressive force of the monolithic state and its organs of bureaucracy and subjection would be replaced by consensual federalism.

Many of Proudhon's insights have stood the test of time. Anyone meditating on the reasons for the unravelling of various institutional and legalistic efforts towards world peace would find this book helpful. When Russia invades Ukraine, or the USA invades Iraq, or India and China do military exercises on Russian territory, they are all asserting the right of war and the right of force. Prophetic and precise questions he poses (p191) about the 'rights of peoples' (self-determination, state claims, supranational bodies etc.) really came into their own in the middle of the 20th Century. In saying that the force of states comes before any international laws or bodies, Proudhon lays the groundwork for the idea of 'anarchy' in International Relations theory. This is the idea that the world lacks any supreme authority or power that can resolve conflict or impose order or law. States face each other, often on the battlefield.

When it comes to considering future, as yet uninvented, 'infernal machines', Proudhon – again, prophetically – describes the implications of technological supremacy:

*'Once weapons have reached the point where numbers and discipline, as well as courage, no longer mean anything in warfare, it is farewell to majority rule, farewell to universal suffrage, farewell to the empire, farewell to the republic, farewell to government of any form. It will be power to the most villainous.'* (p282)

Because he uses principles from the ancient world (mainly Rome) updated to the 19th Century, giving the devil his full due, this book can help towards a free-thinking analysis of our present moment. The many historical examples he provides are often provocative, irreverent and detailed. Sadly, Proudhon's sexism and racism are in the

commonplace mould of his time. Nevertheless, in this book he laid the groundwork for the extensive anti-militarist thought of socialists and anarchists like Karl Liebknecht and Bart de Ligt who take force and war very seriously in thinking about how to achieve peace. This book, and Proudhon himself, left such a mark on Leo Tolstoy that he decided to change the name of his serialised novel *The Year 1805 to War and Peace*. What a fan-boy.

This new translation is meticulously presented, with detailed commentary contextualising many of the historical figures and events. Prichard's introduction is helpful in presenting this serious set of provocations and meditations on war and peace.

Coco Shrapnel

War And Peace – On the Principle and Constitution of the Rights of Peoples by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon  
AK Press ISBN-13: 9781849354684  
528pp <https://www.akpress.org/war-and-peace.html>

## Chris Jones

### [Chris Braithwaite]

All revolutionary workers will share in our sorrow at the death of our militant fellow worker Chris Jones. He was well known in the North and especially in South Wales, and during the last few years, in London. The best coloured open-air speaker, he drew large crowds at the Docks among his mates. Being one of them, he spoke to them in their own tongue, and knowing their strength and their weaknesses, he knew just what points to make. The docker of to-day is very largely a disillusioned man; tricked and cheated so often by politicians and labour skates, he mistrusts the glib promisers who seek to get on his back. He is loyal to his own mates, and is capable of any sacrifice for solidarity. Chris Jones worked with them, took the same risks and paid the same dues. Always ready to fight their battles, his colour made no difference. His long and varied experience as a seaman enabled him to speak with authority of the conditions of the workers in all parts of the world. Those of us who can remember him speaking at the Freedom Press meeting on India in the autumn of 1942 will never forget his description of the women of India who worked in the mines and on the docks. In terse, biting phrases he told of how the mothers soaked rags in opium for the babies to suck to still their hunger.

Chris Jones left his home in the West Indies quite young and followed the sea. He saw capitalism at work under all conditions, and it aroused all his native antagonism to injustice and poverty. His was not an attitude of mere negative antagonism to injustice and poverty. His was not an attitude of mere negative rebelliousness; he knew and always made it clear that there was no hope under capitalism; only

by the overthrow of the present system could the emancipation of the workers be achieved, and that could only be done by the workers themselves.

His work amongst his coloured comrades made him loved and respected by them all, for these the true spirit of Internationalism shone out. His death is a great loss for the militant labour movement. His life is an inspiration and a spur to more energetic action, for he was a fore-runner of the coloured workers who are finding their places in the International working class. The crisis is approaching; we must be ready for it, must take up the cudgels dropped by our comrades in the struggle. They have not fought in vain, there are willing hands to fight and keep alive the memory of the heroes fallen in the fight.

Mat Kavanagh

Chris Braithwaite (aka 'Chris Jones') 'was a black Barbadian seaman who became a leading organiser of colonial seamen in inter-war Britain. He played a critical role in the Pan-Africanist and wider anti-colonial movement alongside figures such as C.L.R. James and George Padmore.' See the website of Christian Høgsbjerg, author of a biography of Braithwaite *Chris Braithwaite: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway* <https://christianhogsbjerg.com/chris-braithwaite/>

## Library Update [Nov. 2022]

### Elsewhere

The Sparrows' Nest's Oct.-Nov. scans include *Two Lies that Shook the World – The Protocols of the Elders of Zion – The Nationalisation of Women* (KSL) and George Woodcock *Anarchy or Chaos* (1944) <https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/>

Judy Greenway has put up some fascinating Kitty Lamb interview notes <https://www.judygreenway.org.uk/wp/interviews-with-kitty-lamb/>

### Ephemera and other treats

Two pieces relating to the case of the Walsall Anarchists, two pieces by Boris Yelensky relating to *In the struggle for equality*; an Anarchist Black Cross Gala Concert Programme [1975] and a Kate Sharpley Library information leaflet [1980s]  
All via <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/9320sp>

We have put up a lot of other stuff: issues of *Iconoclast* and *Ludd*, pamphlets: *Anarchist Communism in plain English* (Leonard Augustine Motler) and *The Meaning of Anarchism* (Jack White) *The issues in the present war* (Marcus Graham), *Marcus Graham's tissues in the present war: A protest by the 'Workers Friend' Group*, plus *Why does Anarchism progress so slowly?* (Pierre Ramus). Any ideas how best to flag up stuff we've scanned?

# Leeds Anarchist Group (1935)

*To the editors of Terre Libre*  
COMRADES

In setting out this report on our group's activities, I have discovered that it would be impossible to set it out logically and in an interesting way without offering a brief glance at the circumstances that have shaped the mentality of Leeds workers in their attitude to our propaganda. I think we will all admit that, depending on how a man lives, works and sleeps, his mind reacts – broadly speaking – along certain lines to the problems with which the existing social order confronts him.

That said, allow me briefly to put myself in the shoes of any random stranger fetching up in our city and coming into first contact with the vision of devastation that meets his eyes. He arrives around midday. His gaze is carried to the dense curtain of smoke darkening the slum areas of West Street, Kirkstall Road, York Street, York Road, Hunslet, etc... And inevitably his first thought at this spectacle will be that as a matter of urgency our City Council should erect in a prominent place in the landscape a huge hoarding bearing Dante's dictum: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!" In the industrial hell of Leeds there is nothing so striking as the stark contrasts between extreme wealth on the one hand and the extreme poverty on the other. Such is the essence of Civilization.

Such conditions, destructive of human integrity, have, naturally, an impact upon the day to day lives of the workers and indeed upon their leisure. In order to soothe the exhausted nerves of those who were happy enough to have found work, we have here the consolations of drink, cinema and then again the football match. That list would fall short were it not to mention those two, twin, indissoluble and complementary scourges: the Prostitute with her hand-bag and the Minister of God with his little prayer book. The cynicism of the one works hand in glove with the hypocrisy of the other. The entire social life of the Leeds worker is trapped between the two. Such are the hurdles we have undertaken to overcome, whatever the cost.

Our city has a population of 400,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom rely upon their brawn as their only support. Some are steelworkers, others textile workers, garment-workers and others still working in transport and the various building trades. Add to these also the brush factories, the shoe factories, the printshops, the woodworkers, the cement workers, the paviours, etc ... But the main industries are the ones named above. Like other centres of industry, Leeds suffers from the effects of capital rationalization and accumulation, which insists upon ever greater revenue extracted from ever

fewer employees. This can be seen in the figures published by the Labour Office. Some twenty-six per cent of workers tramp the streets. In addition to which another eight thousand are reduced to reliance on Public Assistance, being in no position to feed themselves and their families.

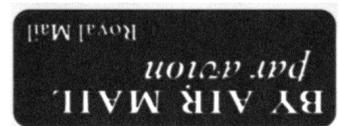
In the past the organizing of these mass ranks of unemployed was undertaken from several quarters, for the purpose of exploiting the worker's misfortunes and cares for political purposes. Once upon a time there was the NUWM (National Unemployed Workers' Movement). Today the local trades council has taken its place, unsuccessfully. Over its existence, which currently stands in excess of two years, it has occurred to me to ask why the solidarity fund has only 700 regular dues-payers when its affiliated organizations have 32,000 unionized members. Also, how the entitlements they have built up are automatically stripped from the malcontents who have left or been thrown out. Likewise, I reckon I am within my rights to argue that, despite the presence in its ranks of such respectable folk as City Councillors, Aldermen and Members of Parliament and other bigwigs, that organization does not deserve the trust of the unemployed workers. In my opinion, it comes as small surprise if these bigwigs are in fact as brutal and cynical a line-up as any gang that ever oversaw slave-driving or galley-slaves. That might appear a bit harsh. But I have, let it be said, had it up to here with their hypocrisy. I see men sent to rot on street corners; nothing to do, forgotten yesterday and today hideous: and tomorrow, a nightmare. They are alive, their hearts beat, their lungs work and yet they are sent away to rot as if they were already in their coffins. Such is the price of capitalist civilization.

That being the situation, our activity has been hampered by several things: mainly by the joblessness that affects 75 per cent of our members, and the resultant dearth of cash. All things considered, I reckon we have not done too badly. We have held an average of two meetings a week and whilst the results have not been as brilliant as expected, we have at the least hopes of doing better in the near future.

We had our friend Guy Aldred here on a ten-day propaganda tour. Three new members and lots of sympathizers were won on that occasion. Pamphlet sales were good and we hope that they will bear fruit. We all believe that once we have set up in our new premises, we will make progress towards the social revolution at a pace that will astonish all the comrades.

Yours in the fight for freedom  
Herbert FOSTER

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Translated by Paul Sharkey.



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