

With The Poor People Of The Earth
A Biography Of Doctor John Creaghe
of Sheffield & Buenos Aires
by Alan O'Toole

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A BIOGRAPHY OF DOCTOR JOHN CREAGHE OF SHEFFIELD & BUENOS AIRES

I offer advice and medicine to working people for sixpence because my work as an Anarchist is among them, because with all the drawbacks of their poverty I prefer their society to that of the well-to-do.

Doctor John Creaghe [1]

INTRODUCTION

1What follows is an attempt to reconstruct the life and work of a figure who, for all the obscurity which surrounds his name today, was one of the most able propagandists and organisers in the Anarchist movements of three countries. He was also one of the most fascinating and colourful figures ever produced by the movement.

I also intend to outline some arguments which raged (and still rage) on the policy and philosophy of Anarchism and to outline the role played by Anarchism in those countries which were the sphere of activity of this figure, Doctor John Creaghe.

ANARCHISM

It may be useful to say something about the origin and nature of Anarchism. The word itself derives from the Greek 'an anarchos' – 'no rule'. The word 'anarchist' was coined during the French Revolution as a scornful epithet for the libertarian elements who opposed the dictatorial rule of the Directory. Not until 1840 did the word have any meaning other than that of an advocate of chaos.

In that year a French printer named Pierre-Joseph Proudhon published his classic analysis of capitalist private property, *What Is Property?* In it he argues that the capitalist state is merely an instrument of coercion invented by the capitalist class to enforce its property relations on the workers. Abolish property, he argues, and the State will have no function. Social harmony will be insured by identity of interest.

In the following thirty years Anarchism became one of the major forms of progressive thought in Europe, closely rivalling Socialism and Communism in its following. The larger part of its support came from the European peasantry, but it also had a great attraction for the artisan class; nor were industrial workers absent from the ranks. Anarchists were extremely important in the creation of the First International and one of its chief luminaries, the Russian exile Michael Bakunin, wielded as much influence in the International as Karl Marx, if not more.

Anarchist theory developed from the rather crude notions of Proudhon, which were really suited only to artisans and peasants, into a consistent philosophy which could function in an industrial world. Through able thinkers such as Bakunin, his fellow Russian exile Peter Kropotkin, and the Italian Errico Malatesta (and many others) the philosophy developed into Anarchist Communism. Anarchism is most simply defined by another Russian exile, Emma Goldman. She phrases it thus:

“ANARCHISM: The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary” [2].

Anarchist Communism says that private property, since it involves the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few, is also a restriction on liberty and must be abolished along with the State.

This was the philosophy which, more than Communism and almost as much as Socialism, was a “spectre haunting Europe” during the formative years of John Creaghe. This was the philosophy which, born almost simultaneously with Creaghe himself, he was to serve for so many years of his life. [3]

[1] Letter from Creaghe to the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, May 24th, 1891. Quoted in ‘Anarchism in Sheffield in the 1890s’, by Sheila Rowbotham.

[2] *Anarchism And Other Essays* by Emma Goldman.

[3] For a readable and reasonably comprehensive (if sometimes inaccurate) history of the Anarchist movement, its ideas, and its chief theoreticians, see *Anarchism* by George Woodcock.

EARLY LIFE 1841-1874

Creaghe leaves little account of his early life before his conversion to Anarchism. However, it is established that John O’Dwyer Creaghe (to give him his full name) was born in Ireland in 1841 [1]. His exact birthplace has not been established but the Creaghe name is usually only met with in Limerick and Cork, where it is a branch of the Clan McCostello. The family was prominent in both these counties; giving several Lord Mayors to Limerick City and owning Creaghe Castle in Cork (Creagh is the usual spelling of the name, a form Dr Creaghe sometimes used himself). [2]

It is to be presumed that John Creaghe’s family were fairly well-to-do if they survived the terrible years of the Potato Famine of 1846-8 with both their lives and sufficient funds to put John through medical school. The year of ‘Black ’47’ remains as an obscene scar on the Irish folk-memory. Whole villages died of hunger after the blight attacked the potato crop and tales of mothers lying dead at the roadside with infants still at the breast were commonplace. ‘Young Ireland’, the radical movement of the day, pointed bitterly to the fact that vast quantities of grain were being exported from Ireland while over a million people starved, and declared that “God sent the potato blight, but England made the famine”. [3] It is interesting to speculate as to whether the famine turned young Creaghe’s thought in a radical direction, as the abominable conditions of the peasantry were to affect the thought of Robert Tressell a generation later [4].

Perhaps the horrible ravages of typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis which followed on the famine affected John’s choice of profession, for the next we hear of Creaghe is as a medical student at Queens College, Cork [5].

His address is given as Mitchellstown, then a rather scenic market town of 2,500 inhabitants on the Limerick-Cork border. No Creaghes appear in the Postal Directory, but a Captain Creagh is listed, and possibly young John stayed with a relative of that name [6].

On March 30th, 1865, Creaghe submitted his diploma work to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, which is based in Dublin, and was awarded a licence to practice surgery [7]. For a short time Dr John Creaghe L.R.C.S.I. was resident in Mitchellstown and then emigrated.

In the 19th century emigration was Ireland’s great prophylactic against revolution. The cycles of poverty and famine drove the young, the able, and the best to foreign shores in search of the freedom and prosperity

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denied to them at home. Only two choices faced a youth of spirit and intelligence; emigration or enlistment in the gathering forces of revolution. Creaghe chose the former. Later, as we will see, he was to regret that choice. Perhaps he regretted it by 1867 when the simmering discontent of the Irish people boiled over in the abortive Fenian uprising.

He surfaces next in Boston, Massachusetts Medical Society [8], so it is to be presumed that he was intending a distinguished career. He also acquired, in 1869, a general practitioners licence from the King and Queens College of Physicians in Ireland (L.K.Q.C.P.I.). He further added to his qualifications a Licentiate in Midwifery (L.M.) which indicates that he had two years of hospital work [9].

Doctor Creaghe seemed at this point to be headed for a career of respectability. But in 1874 he emigrated to Navarra, a small town in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. [10]

The reasons for Dr Creaghe's move are not clear. Argentina certainly appeared (as we will see) to be a developing nation, with plenty of opportunity. It also had a large Irish community, partly because it was a Catholic country. Indeed, Argentina has acquired a number of Ireland's political refugees ('wild geese', in the Irish phrase) over the years, many of whom passed on the revolutionary tradition to their offspring. It is worth noting that Patrick Lynch, a Galwayman executed for rebelling against the Argentinean dictator, Juan Manuel de Rosas, had as a direct descendant the most famous of Argentinean revolutionaries (and also a medical man), Dr Ernesto 'Che' Guevara [11]. So perhaps Creaghe's move was an early sign of his developing social consciousness.

It should, however, be noted that three Irish doctors and brothers, the Greene brothers, were practising in Buenos Aires at the same time. One: Professor Arthur Paget Greene, was, like Creaghe, an L.R.C.S.I. He would have issued Creaghe with his Membership of the Medical Faculty of Buenos Aires (M.F.M.B.A.) which he received that year. Little can be said for certain, but Ms Juliet Greene, an ancestor of Professor Greene, is of the opinion that the Greene brothers and Creaghe would have known each other and we may suspect that Greene had offered the highly-qualified Creaghe a consultancy at the British Hospital in Buenos Aires city, with which Greene was also connected [12].

Something must now be said of the social and political scene with which the 33-year old Creaghe was faced in Argentina.

[1] Information supplied by Señor Ricardo Falcon, via the Institute of Social History, 15/1/1982.

[2] Information from Cork County Librarian 25/9/81, and *Burke's Landed Irish Gentry*.

[3] *The Great Hunger* by Cecil Woodham-Smith (1962).

[4] *One Of The Damned* by F. C. Ball (1973).

[5] Registrar, Queens College 17/9/[81?]

[6] *Postal Directory of Munster 1865*.

[7] Information from College of Surgeons in Ireland, letter 27/8/81.

[8] Information from Massachusetts Medical Society, letter 11/12/81.

[9] *Medical Directory for 1876*.

[10] Ibid.

[11] *Che Guevara: A Biography* by Daniel James (1970).

[12] Letter to myself from Ms Juliet Greene, 6/10/1981.

ARGENTINA 1874-1890.

Argentina is a vast country, sprawling over 2,700,000 square kilometres. Yet at the time of Creaghe's arrival it had a population of less than four million, of whom only about two-thirds lived in towns of more than two thousand in population. The rural areas had been largely taken over by a small sect of landowners who had driven out the Indians. These landowners had set up a feudal system known as *latifundia* which resulted in their solidifying into an aristocracy and in the peonage of much of the rural poor (though a large independent peasantry still existed). The usual concomitants of a feudal economy, a low grow rate and extreme social stratification, prevailed in the country.

But by the middle of the 19th century there had been a growth in urbanisation and industrialisation (mostly of small businesses and factories). One factor which facilitated this development was large-scale immigration from Europe. Chiefly, (though by no means exclusively) those came from the poor catholic countries of Spain, France, Italy, and Ireland. A very large percentage of the immigrants were of the proletarian and artisan classes, enticed by cheap fares, crippling poverty at home, and the hope of a new frontier – much the same reasons as brought about large-scale immigration to the United States in the same period. [1]

Herded into inadequate accommodation in the rapidly-growing urban areas such as Buenos Aires, fighting one another for too few jobs, these immigrants were to suffer conditions comparable to those described by Engels in his *Conditions Of The English Working Class*. Creaghe [2] tells of how he “heard some dreadful accounts of the misery endured by working people out of employment in Buenos Aires... I did not really know all of it until told by some of these eye-witnesses. I was told of strong young men going around in the morning and collecting scraps of refuse food from the *casura*, or refuse boxes, which are left at the doors to be emptied into carts which call around for the purpose. One man said he saw poor women, brought out as immigrants, going about near the Immigrants Home in the most frightful state of filth and crawling with vermin, offering themselves for sale for any trifle they could get to buy themselves some decent food”.

The conditions which Creaghe would have seen among the rural poor in Navarro, Mercedes, and Lujan (three small towns in Buenos Aires Province where he lived between 1874 and 1890 [3] while possibly not subject to the dismal squalor of the cities, were bad enough. An Anarchist named Sadier leaves us an account of his fellow-Anarchist, Auguste Vaillant, who was enticed, with many others, from France to the Argentine Republic in 1886 by the lies of the Emigration Agents. Sadier warned Vaillant that, “far from all means of communication they would be abandoned to the wealthy *estancieros* and the police. Thousands of unfortunates had paid dearly for believing the lies of the emigration agents and succumbed to fatigue and privations”.

Ignoring Sadier's warnings on this point, Vaillant and his comrades allowed themselves to be transported to an area far from the capital. “There”, says Sadier, “instead of finding the means of colonisation they were left to their own devices. For so long and so well that they were eventually obliged to hire themselves out at starvation wages. The Emigration Agent who had conducted them there had disappeared. A certain Count de Weechey, who had arrived as if by accident... engaged them to cultivate some possessions of his... making them the most attractive promises.

“But, arrived at the promised land the promises were once again forgotten. The Count sold his estates, and the immigrants into the bargain, to an English company. The company began by selling food to the peons at exorbitant prices. As the latter were far from rich, hardship and privations resulted.

“There was a law... which made the peon the slave of the *estancieros* or to the factory in which he worked... Working conditions were deplorable, and the men suffered terribly. Racked with fever, Vaillant and some of his comrades resolved to escape.

“‘Escape’ was the word, for the employers had rights over them, even though they had broken all the promises made to them. They embarked on rafts they had constructed and were fortunate enough to evade the posses of military strung out along the river for the very purpose of preventing the escape of any peons who preferred flight to death from starvation” [4]

Disheartened, Vaillant returned to France. There, desperate from poverty, this quiet, gentle man threw a bomb into the Chamber of Deputies. Though no one was killed he was sentenced to death and went to the guillotine with moving courage.

Such was the environment in which Creaghe was to spend the next sixteen years of his life. Such was the environment which created an Anarchist. For as Doctor John Creaghe, the University educated doctor with the impressive qualifications and former practice in Boston, began to come face to face with poverty of a kind which he could not have seen since leaving Ireland eight years before, voices were beginning to be heard in Argentina. Voices which attempted to explain the causes of poverty and point to its cure. Voices which eventually led him to reject his middle-class professional upbringing and enlist him in the forces of revolution.

Many of the immigrants had had experience of trade unionism. Many had participated in left wing political activism. Some were actually political refugees. The first socialist group in Argentina was set up among them in 1871, Vaillant's countrymen giving the lead. Similar groups soon sprang up among the Spanish and Italians. In 1872 a branch of the First International was set up in Buenos Aires. By 1876 an avowedly Anarchist group – El Centro de Propaganda Obrera (Centre for Workers Propaganda) – was founded, along with a journal, *El Descamisado* (Literally, 'the shirtless one' but, presumably, meaning 'the poor man') which preached the Anarchist Communism of Michael Bakunin [5]. By 1877 the Argentineans were able to send several delegates to the International Anarchist conference in Europe. [6]

For many years after this time, for all the social democratic propaganda of figures such as Juan Justos, "thanks to propagandists of the calibre of Esteve, Nido, Prat, Antonio Pellicer, Gilimon, Mattei, Creaghe, Malatesta, Gori, and a host of others, anti-authoritarian socialism predominated in the thinking that lay behind actual combat, as well as the combat itself" [7].

It is not known at what point Creaghe became involved in the revolutionary movement. The absence of his name in any of the source materials on the Argentinean movement prior to 1888 (even in the fine collection of the International Institute of Social History) indicates that he was very much a 'late developer' in this line. His earliest known utterances rather give one the impression that he had earlier seen himself as a self-sacrificing, crusading doctor of the poor, of the type so loved in later years by Hollywood, but that exasperation at the futility of such a stance led him to the belief that only the workers themselves, organised into their own fighting bodies, could improve the conditions of the working class. Perhaps, like Doctor Guevara, he saw that poverty was the chief cause of disease and that revolution was the only vaccine which could cure it. Certainly Creaghe was to take this stance in many of his writings.

All that can be said for certain is that Creaghe's name first crops up in Argentinean political history in 1888. In that year he began to publish a journal entitled *La Verdad* (The Truth). In this paper Creaghe advanced few directly political opinions. Rather, he confined himself to truthful reportage of the struggles of workers and peasants and of the bitter conditions which provoked those struggles. Dr Creaghe clearly shows that his political thought had been developing for some time but he shows little interest or confidence in political struggles. Instead, Creaghe (who has sometimes been falsely regarded as an egoist or individualist) sees progress as being achieved by unions of workers – not in the sense of social democratic unionism which requires an employing class from which to make demands (and therefore reinforces the rule of the bourgeoisie) – but in the belief that the only power that working people have is their ability to organise around their own problems at grass-roots level; and that in such organisation lies their only chance if seizing power. In this, Creaghe might be described as a syndicalist.

Syndicalism is a belief first propagated in France, chiefly by Ferdinand Pelloutier (though Georges Sorel is often falsely given the credit). It played an important role in the British Labour movement between 1889 and 1914, where it produced such skilled organisers as Tom Mann [7]. In the United States the syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World, carved out a legend in American history between 1905 and the virtual collapse in the '20s [8]. In the Latin countries it often took the form of anarcho-syndicalism, a form which argued for less bureaucracy, more local autonomy, and for using the syndicalist model to achieve the Anarchist goal of stateless socialism. Such was the form most prevalent in Argentina and such was the form advocated by Doctor John Creaghe.

In this belief, and other aspects of his philosophy which he was to voice in England, Creaghe clearly shows the influence of a remarkable character named Errico Malatesta.

Malatesta was born in Italy in 1853. As a student in Naples in 1871 he met Michael Bakunin and was converted to Anarchism. Soon he was the most important organiser for the Italian section of the First International, suffering police harassment and imprisonment in consequence. In 1874 an economic depression led to widespread looting. Malatesta and his fellow Bakuninists felt that they must support such actions, while attempting to give them a more effective expression. As Malatesta said, "Revolution consists more in facts than in words, and whenever a spontaneous movement of the people occurs, whenever the workers rise in the name of their rights and their dignity, it is the duty of every revolutionary socialist to declare himself in solidarity with the movement in question".

In this belief, which was to become the principle plank in the political platform of John Creaghe, Malatesta and Bakunin organised an uprising. The affair was a wretched failure and Malatesta lay in prison for a year awaiting trial. Due to popular sympathy he was acquitted on all charges. Over the next ten years he established himself as Anarchism's ablest propagandist and organiser; his herculean efforts being interrupted only by frequent spells of imprisonment in gaols across Europe. In 1885 his journal *La Questione* ran foul of the Italian authorities. Expecting, rightly, another prison sentence, he left the country and allowed the courts to sentence him in his absence. Shortly afterwards he surfaced in the Argentinean Republic [10].

Malatesta took work as a baker and, by 1887, had organised the Bakers Union, the first militant workers union in Argentina. Many Anarchists participated in this enterprise, though a number of purists of 'anarcho-communism' held the 'organisers' (as the anarcho-syndicalists were then called, as the latter term was not coined until 1912 in Wales [11]) in scorn, believing that participating in strikes was reformist. Creaghe and Malatesta were among the ablest advocates of the school of 'organisers'.

Malatesta, who seems to have so influenced Creaghe (and who lived a few miles from him in the capital) returned to Europe in 1889. Creaghe carried on for a year, during a period in which the tide of immigration seemed to be reversing itself. As Creaghe noted in November of 1890, "even the poor Italians, who suffer such misery in their own country, are returning in thousands, and this has been going on for the last six or eight months". With his characteristic and disarming optimism Creaghe concluded that, "at last the emigration fad is thoroughly played out. The wanderers are returning, and with a vengeance, for from men of all nations I have heard the opinion invariably expressed that poor men had better remain in future in their own country, and do what they can to change social conditions so as to make it possible to live there".

This belief recommended itself to Doctor Creaghe, possibly encouraged by the growth of revolutionary thought and 'new unionism' in Britain. In any case, on September 19th 1890, he left Argentina and set sail for England.

Creaghe travelled as a steerage passenger on the 'Trent', a Royal Mail steamer. The first port of call was Santos, in Brazil. There, Creaghe saw 800 Italian immigrants bound for San Paulo province. His Argentinean experiences told him that, for all the promises of a new frontier which the Italians would have received, they were really being imported because increased immigration to the area would increase the value of the land. Wryly, he noted that this would serve the bourgeoisie in two ways; firstly, the increased price of land would mean that only the capitalists would be able to afford to buy it up; secondly, intensive immigration would decrease the value of labour, so that the immigrants would be virtual slaves. He sardonically noted that, "Brazil is at present going ahead on the same road of progress which I have seen have such a pleasant turning in the Argentine Republic."

After several more stops Creaghe and his fellow steerage passengers found it almost impossible to sleep below decks, so stifling was the atmosphere as more and more passengers were crammed in. The company forbade the taking of mattresses on deck but "a blanket and pillow on the hard deck were preferable to smothering below."

The food consisted mostly of "black beans and rice. Black water called coffee was served, with a piece of bread badly baked, at 6 a.m. Then at 8 we had beans and rice boiled in a mash, and ladled out to us from a

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bucket, which each one had to receive at the end of his bunk. As there are two rows of bunks, the feet of the man on top either brushed the hair of the man below or hung on either side of his nose!

“Then you received your ladleful of the mash, scalding hot, on a tin platter which the ladle nearly filled, and then you must decide while your fingers burn whether you will be able to endure it on your thighs, or with a wrench round your body place it hastily in the middle of your bed!

“We generally got a nauseous-looking hunk of tough, uneatable meat as second course, on the same platter, and a cup of wine, and the same at dinner at one o’clock. Tea and bread and butter at 5 p.m., and this closed the festivities”.

Creaghe led a protest of the passengers concerning the food but this “had little or no effect, except in bringing the wrath of the chief steward down on my devoted head”.

The voyage was further enlivened by a brief and abortive strike by the ships stokers who had the temerity to demand a cup of coffee before their descent into the stokehold. “If they only chose”, commented Creaghe when the strike collapsed, “they could have their coffee and everything else they asked for, or stop the whole machinery, as I hope to see the coal-miners do some day with the whole machinery of capitalism.”

At Lisbon the conditions of the steerage passengers were still worsened by the taking on of a cargo of barrels which were placed in their already overcrowded quarters. “Cargo of all importance, steerage rubbish none”, commented Doctor Creaghe, and led his fellow passengers to occupy the second-class quarters, “and we remained there in spite of all efforts to dislodge us.” Doctor Creaghe spent the rest of the voyage discussing his by now iron-clad revolutionary Anarchist convictions with his steerage comrades. [12]

In such fashion did John Creaghe travel to England, where he took up residence in Gower Street, a slum district of Sheffield, in South Yorkshire.

[1] See ‘Anarchism in Argentina’, by Eduardo Columbo in *Anarchism Today* ed. Apter and Joll.

[2] ‘Life on an Emigrant Ship’ by Dr John Creaghe. *Commonweal* Nov. 1890

[3] *Medical Directory and Medical Register*.

[4] *Four Patients Of Dr Deibler* by J.C. Longoni.

[5] Columbo. op. cit.

[6] *Anarchism*, by George Woodcock .

[7] ‘The Tragic Week’ by Serafin Fernandez in *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* [4].

[8] See *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* by Bob Holton (1975)

[9] See *Rebel Voices* by Joyce Kornbluh (1964)

[10] See *Malatesta: His Life And Ideas* by Vernon Richards (1965) and *Pioneers Of Anti-parliamentarism* by Guy Aldred.

[11] *The Anarchists In London 1935-1955* by Albert Meltzer (1976).

[12] This account is extracted from *Life On An Emigrant Ship* by John Creaghe serialised in *Commonweal* in November 1890.

ENGLAND 1890-1893.

In 1890 England was, in the belief of many, a country on the verge of revolution. They were wildly incorrect, but they might be excused for their mistake. Radical and even revolutionary thought was obtaining a more attentive audience than at any time since the heyday of Chartism fifty years before.

In the early 1880s much agitation centered around the extension of the electoral franchise. The most noted reform pressure group was the Democratic Federation, which was largely dominated by a Tory stockbroker turned radical, named Henry Myers Hyndman.

With the passage of the third Reform Act in 1884, which extended the franchise to all male householders and lodgers, the organisation, now known as the Social Democratic Federation, turned their attention to implementing their recently adopted socialist policies. But the suggestion of Hyndman and his supporters that parliamentary candidates be put up met with fierce opposition within the SDF. Chief of the anti-parliamentarians was William Morris. Morris, a well-known designer and poet, had become a socialist through disgust at the ugliness and brutality of capitalism. His socialism often inclined to the romantic but he was shrewd enough to see that parliamentarism would involve numerous shabby alliances with the rival major parties, would deprive us “of some of our most energetic men by sending them to our sham parliament, there to become nonentities, or perhaps our masters and it may be our betrayers”, and would not increase the power of the workers.

In place of ‘parliamentary cretinism’, as he called it, Morris and his supporters proposed a programme of education and propaganda for socialism amongst the working class, who could develop their own forms of organisation and decide for themselves how they would administrate society when they were sufficiently organised to seize power.

In December 1884 Morris and his supporters decisively outvoted Hyndman and the parliamentarians in the SDF. Having won this moral victory Morris and his followers withdrew from the SDF and formed a new body, the Socialist League, rather than continue with internal squabbling.

The Socialist League drew up a manifesto which demanded that, “all means of production of wealth... must be declared and treated as the common property of all”. The League was unspecific about the means by which the workers would seize power, declaring only that capitalism in crisis would eventually create a confrontation, and that the League’s business was to spread socialist thought among the workers to give them the consciousness to seize that opportunity. The inference is clearly that insurrection would be necessary in one form or another. The League attracted a large following across the country. Not surprisingly many Anarchists were attracted to its ranks. [1]

Though William Godwin has been retrospectively classed as an Anarchist, Anarchism as a political philosophy was late in arriving in Britain. Largely, it was carried across by political refugees from Europe. Some of the Jews who fled from the pogroms and settled in London’s East End had a long tradition of Anarchist thought. The stringent Anti-Socialist laws passed in Germany in 1878 brought many political refugees over from that country, many anarchists among them. One, Johann Most, provided a *cause celebre* in 1881 when the British authorities gaoled him for endorsing the assassination of Tsar Alexander in his paper, *Der Freiheit*. By 1885 there was a reasonably flourishing Anarchist movement in Britain, or at least in London. Many of Morris’ supporters in his fight with Hyndman had been Anarchists, and many of them joined him in the Socialist League.

In 1886 an Anarchist organisation known as the Freedom Group was formed, along with its own journal, *Freedom*. But this group was centred around the charismatic figure of Peter Kropotkin, who arrived in England that year, and was small in number and rather elitist in character, with little knowledge of, or influence upon, the working class. Such contact was left to the Anarchists in the Socialist League. From 1886 onwards certain factors were to increase the numbers and influence of Anarchists in the League.

The first factor was the severe unemployment of 1886. Hardship was great and demonstrations broke out across the country. After a march in London organised by the League and the SDF the unemployed rioted in the West End, doing considerable damage to the ‘Gentlemen’s’ clubs in the area. Similar scenes occurred in other parts of the country as the depression continued into 1887. The tendency of some local authorities to ameliorate the hardships of the unemployed following such actions led many to wonder if a little direct action was not worth a ton of verbal propaganda (as many have recently concluded in Toxteth, Brixton, and St Pauls [riots of 1981]). The Anarchists, many began to think, might have something.

In London a precisely opposite reaction by the authorities produced, oddly enough, a similar response on the Left. There, the authorities responded to the demonstrations by naked force and suppression of free speech. Marches and meetings were ruthlessly and bloodily broken up. Trafalgar Square was banned as a

meeting place. The radicals responded to this by calling a meeting in the Square for Sunday, November 13th, 1887. Thousands turned up at the appointed time, marched into the Square – and into a police trap. Hundreds of mounted and foot police charged at the crowd with batons flying. The meeting was dispersed with incredibly brutality, leaving three fatally injured, hundreds hurt, and putting the day into British history as ‘Bloody Sunday’.

Many began to think that verbal propaganda had only limited use if the state was going to repress free speech in this manner when that propaganda became effective. The execution, two days previously, of four Anarchists in Chicago on patently trumped-up charges (of which more later) added force to these thoughts, and created sympathy for Anarchist ideas of ‘propaganda by the deed’, direct action, street fighting and general strike. Purely propagandist tactics began to seem a very feeble response to many people. Parliamentarianism was being called for by some in the Socialist League. The anti-parliamentarists having no very clear programme, many turned to the Anarchists.

With the end of the depression in 1888 working class militancy took another direction. This was the period of the ‘new unionism’ – the entry by the thousands into trade unions of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers. A great breakthrough was the successful strike by the women workers of Bryant and Mays matchworks. The next year Will Thorne led 20,000 London gasworkers on a successful strike for the 8 hour day. In the summer of 1889 the great London dock strike broke out. [2] Within days the London docks were paralysed. Many sections of labourers came out in sympathy. Rent strikes occurred. The East End was virtually in the hands of the working class. Socialists and Anarchists participated in the movement and the accompanying marches, and meetings were held on street corners daily. David Nicoll, an Anarchist who was shortly to become editor of the Socialist League journal, *Commonweal*, likened the East End to “Paris in the first revolution”.

The strike ended when the employers conceded the demand of a minimum rate of sixpence per hour – the “dockers tanner” – but Anarchists argued that the popular feelings exhibited showed that it was time to go beyond propaganda and begin organising for revolution. They also claimed that the high degree of organisation displayed by the workers proved the feasibility of the Anarchist strategy of general strike and seizure of the means of production, leading to direct control of society by the workers without the intervention of the state or other external authority. Many in the Socialist League (and outside of it) came to agree.

William Morris took a dim view of this development. Despite his opposition to the parliamentarians he was very dubious (quite rightly, as it turned out) of the possibility of imminent revolution. He was also very dubious about Anarchism, declaring on one occasion, “I would as leave join a White Rose Society as an Anarchist society, so great a nonsense do I deem the latter” [3]. This seems rather strange coming from the author of *News From Nowhere*, his novel which describes a definitely Anarchist utopia. Other remarks of Morris seem to indicate that he saw Anarchists as either indulgers in elitist conspiracies, or as extreme egoist individualists, both notions for which few Anarchists would have sympathy. It is hard not to feel that his misunderstanding of Anarchism was wilful, possibly because of prejudice against some individual Anarchists. Whatever the truth, his expectations for the future of the Socialist League had become gloomy by 1890, when John Creaghe arrived on the scene.

With so much happening in London, it might seem strange that Doctor Creaghe should have settled in the provinces but, as we will see, Sheffield had much to offer.

[1] On the SDF, the Socialist League, and the Hyndman-Morris conflict see *William Morris: Romantic To Revolutionary* by E P Thompson and *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History Of The British Anarchists* by John Quail.

[2] For the unemployed agitation, the ‘new unionism’, and the effects on the socialist movement, see *Tom Mann And His Times* by Dona Torr, Quail, op.cit., and Thompson, op.cit.

[3] Quoted in *Political Writings Of William Morris* edited by Al Morton.

SHEFFIELD OCTOBER 1890 – NOVEMBER 1891.

Sheffield is a city built on the steel industry. Over its hills and along the banks of the Sheaf and the Don a multitude of workshops provided employment for the craftsmen of that industry. Like the miners who also proliferated in the area, they were a hard-bitten independent crew, and the area's continuing reputation for militancy and left-wing radicalism was early won. In 1817 a group of Sheffield grinders were arrested for conspiring at an insurrection involving the seizure of the local barracks and of Wentworth House. For long after this event (which involved the notorious agent provocateur, 'Oliver the Spy') an atmosphere of radicalism, unrest, open protest, and clandestine conspiracy continued. In 1820, in the angry days following the Peterloo Massacre and the Cato Street Conspiracy, the Sheffield tailor-revolutionary, 'Jacky Blacker' led a force of 200 men to join a force from all over Yorkshire, but the gathering dispersed after being warned of large-scale troop deployment [1].

In 1838 the publication of the Peoples Charter led to the founding of the Sheffield Working Men's Association, which attracted over 20,000 people to a public meeting that year. Riots and large-scale demonstrations occurred the following year, and in 1840 the chartists attempted a rising in Sheffield, but the affair was a failure due to lack of co-ordination and the activity of informers [2].

Owenite socialism was popular in Sheffield, advocated by figures such as Isaac Ironside [3]. Trade unions were unusually militant in the area, and a government commission was ordered in 1867 into the so-called 'Sheffield Outrages', a series of terrorist attacks on scabs and non-unionists.

In the 1870s and '80s old Owenite and Chartist traditions were still felt in the area. John Ruskin had aided some locals in a failed attempt to start a rural commune outside Sheffield, and radicals still met in the old Owenite Hall of Science. Sheila Rowbotham [4] comments that, "the old Owenite search for a new moral world had not exhausted itself in the 1880s. The longevity of early political traditions in Sheffield can perhaps be explained by the organisation of production in the metal trades, which continued to be in small workshops scattered about the town and countryside and in the farm smallholdings which could be combined with employment as a miner. These were occupations in which stubborn individual resistance, local loyalties, and sporadic violence came easier than solidarity and national organisation".

In the 1870s Edward Carpenter came to Sheffield as a lecturer for the University Extension scheme. Carpenter, remembered today for his sub-Whitman poetry, his homosexuality, and his pioneering advocacy of sexual freedom, was an ethical socialist of the William Morris school, emphasising simplicity of life, love of beauty, and Whitman's "dear love of comrades" above what he saw as the drab, mechanistic vision of the political economists. Carpenter's ability as a propagandist and a visionary contributed much to the growth of revolutionary thought in Sheffield and South Yorkshire generally.

In 1885 Carpenter and others supported the independent radical Mervyn Hawkes as a parliamentary candidate on a platform of radical reform of land, education, and parliament. Hawkes was unsuccessful but the following year Carpenter and 43 of the other campaigners met and drew up the Sheffield Socialist Manifesto. The resulting Sheffield Socialist Club was active in the various agitations of the next few years [5].

The various dissensions which had split the Socialist League were mirrored in Sheffield, particularly after the unemployed troubles and the execution of the Chicago Anarchists. During the industrial unrest of 1889 several of Carpenter's hard-core supporters moved to an Anarchist-Communist position. The most notable of them were two grocers, the brothers Bob and John Bingham. Their married sister, Louisa Usher (who in addition to the usual difficulties of her sex, had an alcoholic and apolitical husband to contend with) moved to the same position. All three were extremely active but Bob appears to have been the 'star', due to his gift for oratory combined with an uncompromising temperament (which led to his standing trial in February 1890 for incitement to murder a scab during the Brown's strike of the previous year).

Jim Shortland, an engine fitter at Vickers and Maxims, also drifted toward Anarchism. Andrew Hall, a navy from Chesterfield and a popular speaker on Anarchism (describes by Carpenter as "a regular rough-looking chap") was frequently in Sheffield at this time, as were two Anarchist clothing workers, H. B. Samuels of Leeds and Charles Mowbray of London, both of whom were involved in producing *Commonweal*.

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In 1890 two valuable additions were made to the Anarchist movement in Sheffield. The first was James Brown, a Glasgow tailor who had moved to Sheffield for his health and because of his interest in Edward Carpenter. He had something of a falling-out with Carpenter when the latter rather alienated the affections of Brown's lover, Bob Muirhead, and subsequently drew close to the Anarchists.

In mid-1890 Fred Charles arrived from London. Charles (whose real name was Fred Charles Slaughter. Possibly he dropped his surname because of the nefarious use to which Anarchist-baiting journalists might put it) was originally from Norwich, where he had been active in the Socialist League, but had been in London on a vain search for work. After some activity in the Anarchist movement there he came to Sheffield in the hope that employment prospects might be better in the industrial North. [6]

It can be seen that the revolutionary tradition was firmly established in Sheffield and that Anarchism, if not flourishing, was at least fairly well planted. The attraction of such an area and situation to a man of the background, talents, and personality of Doctor Creaghe are obvious. Upon his arrival in late October 1890 he wasted no time in becoming acquainted with the members of the local movement and becoming involved in their activities.

[1] 'Sheffield and the English Revolutionary tradition 1791-1821' by F K Donnelly and J L Baxter, in *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* ed. by Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (1976).

[2] 'Early Chartism and Labour Class Struggle' by J L Baxter, in Pollard and Holmes op.cit.

[3] 'Isaac Ironside' in *Co-operative Review*, Vol. 34.

[4] 'Anarchism in Sheffield in the 1890s', by Sheila Rowbotham, in Pollard and Holmes op.cit.

[5] *Socialism and the New Life: the Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks.

[6] Account of Sheffield Anarchism based on Quail, op.cit; Rowbotham, op.cit; and Rowbotham and Weeks, op.cit.

THE CREAGHE-MORRIS POLEMIC

Creaghe's first public appearance in Sheffield appears to have been at a public meeting held to commemorate the deaths of the Chicago Martyrs. Such commemorations were held wherever Anarchists were to be found, from the day of November 11th 1887, when the Martyrs died, up until 1918 when that date was co-opted by the bourgeoisie as a hypocritical day of homage to those they had sent to their deaths in Flanders.

It is worth saying a little about the Chicago Martyrs. The road to martyrdom for these men began in 1885 when the Knights of Labor, a US trade union fraternal organisation, drew up plans for a general strike aimed at securing a statutory eight-hour working day. The date set for the strike was May the first, 1886 – the first May Day.

As time wore on the more conservative Knights got cold feet and withdrew, leaving organisation of the strike to the revolutionaries, notably the Anarchists. The strike drew a patchy response in most areas, but was widely supported in Chicago – Upton Sinclair's 'Jungle', the most brutal and brutalising centre of American capitalism.

On May 3rd, 1886, a meeting was held outside the McCormick Harvester plant in Chicago. Police and Pinkerton men dispersed the meeting with guns and clubs, killing seven strikers. Two days later a protest meeting was held in Haymarket Square in the city centre. A large force of policemen attempted to disperse this meeting also. Suddenly, a bomb was thrown in the police ranks, killing one officer outright and mortally wounding some others. The bomber's identity was never discovered. Perhaps it was an outraged Anarchist, perhaps (as some claim) an agent provocateur who did his work too well.

In either event, the bombing led to a reign of terror by the police against the Anarchist movement which ended in the trial of eight men for conspiracy to murder. No claim was advocated that any of them had thrown

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the bomb, so they were in the remarkable position of being tried as accessories to a crime in which there was no principal! Conducted in an atmosphere of artificially induced hysteria, and accompanied by every unprincipled trick which the prosecution (with the collusion of the judge) could devise, the trial ended inevitably in the conviction of all defendants, seven of whom received the death sentence and one a long prison term. Two men had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment and one (apparently) forestalled the hangman by suicide.

The case became a *cause celebre* similar to that of Sacco and Vanzetti a generation later. The blatancy of the frame-up and the courage of the men, Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel, (Parsons had given himself up voluntarily for trial and later refused a commutation of sentence, saying that he wished to share the fate of his comrades) launched a wave of protest throughout the world, including Britain, where the protests were co-ordinated by William Morris and Eleanor Marx.

The hanging of the four men on November 11th 1887 led to many people joining the Anarchist movement, including Emma Goldman (and perhaps John Creaghe. Who can say?), giving point to Spies' defiant claim on the gallows that, "the silence of our graves will echo louder than the voices you stifle today". [1]

By 1890, two years before the Martyrs received posthumous pardons, the commemorations were, as has been said, an Anarchist tradition. One commemoration was held on November 10th that year at Oriol Hall in Leeds, at which speakers included H. B. Samuels, a *Commonweal* contributor from Leeds, Tom Maguire (later of the ILP), together with Bingham, Hall, and Charles from Sheffield [2].

The following day another meeting was held in Sheffield with much the same personnel on the Anarchist side, but with the addition of Dr John O'Dwyer Creaghe as a speaker. *Commonweal* recorded that their stirring revolutionary speeches were received "with the utmost enthusiasm by the large audience". An associate of Carpenter's wrote of the meeting in a letter to him, "I suppose you'll have heard how Andrew Hall during his speech suddenly dropped down to his knees and, well, I'll give you his own words... 'With the shadow of the rope hanging over me I call upon each of you to vow with me that we will never rest until the murder of our comrades has been avenged, blood for blood and life for life and etc'. There was a good big meeting and nearly everyone held up their hands for the vow. I must say I didn't like the proceedings much – too much blood and vengeance about it". [3]

The position of George Hukin (quoted above) was shared by Carpenter and by William Morris, both of whom were becoming increasingly worried by the advocacy of violence among the Anarchists. They seemed unable to appreciate the viewpoint of Creaghe, Hall and company, who saw the victims of Chicago as murdered comrades requiring retribution. Equally, Dr Creaghe and the advocates of violence were mystified by the Carpenter-Morris position which seemed to them to be that of not replying to the violent assaults of the State, but using that violence as grist for the propaganda mill. It is easy to sympathise with the Doctor. If martyrs could, by their shining example, win revolutions, we would presumably be in the promised land by now.

Of course, in some Anarchist, as well as utopian socialist, mythology one can find the self-sacrificing martyr, both as flesh and blood being and, more often as iconised, depersonalised object of veneration. The idealised figures which Carpenter and Morris and a good many Anarchists made of the Chicago Martyrs (and, later, Sacco and Vanzetti) are examples of this. Indeed, such figures often assisted at their own apotheosis. Fischer cried out on the gallows, "This is the happiest moment of my life" [4]; Vanzetti said of his impending execution, "this agony is our triumph" [5].

This rather sickly romanticism seems rather aberrant in a philosophy such as Anarchism, which holds the individual life as being of more value than ideology, and to belong more to Christian ethics. Even more aberrant is the conversion of human beings into symbols – that is, into *things*. It is significant that such martyrs are always claimed (often dubiously) to be innocent of the acts for which they are condemned. They therefore die for their 'faith' rather than for their actions.

Dr Creaghe and his followers had little sympathy with such a stance. They saw themselves as soldiers in a war, not as secular martyrs to an abstract idea. Nor were they much concerned with bourgeois notions of 'guilt' and 'innocence'. As Creaghe said of one person on the question of the Chicago commemorations. "He

forgot that he was there to commemorate the killing of comrades who had done more for Anarchy than any others – not by their preaching but by their acting. And yet he says the lesson that they left us now was to preach. ‘They did not throw the bomb’, it may be said, but it was the throwing of it which gave force to all that followed, and they got credit for it, so the case is just the same for us as if they had thrown it, or one of their comrades with their consent” [6].

The 1890 Commemorations and the extreme direct action position stated by many Anarchists during them led to Morris resigning from the League. He contributed a farewell article for *Commonweal* entitled ‘Where Are We Now?’, reviewing the struggle of the previous seven years. In it he dismissed the unions as reformist and complained that he had hoped that the workers might have been able to do without middle class support and stand on their own feet, but that it did not seem likely. Similarly, the Fabians were dismissed for their reformism. He then denounced those who advocated direct action for proposing, “necessarily futile, inconsequent revolt” (futile, presumably, because the ignorant workers would make a hash of it); Revolutionaries should devote their time to educating the workers by enticing them to meetings (addressed, one suspects, by William Morris or various clones thereof). [7]

Morris was a grand, good man and we may now forgive such claptrap because of his importance. Craghe could not be so forbearing.

His reply began by stating that Morris’ piece had been read in Sheffield with, “a shiver”. He went on to say that Morris seemed to think that Anarchists advocated conspiratorial insurrection when they really advocated support for the riots and uprisings autonomously begun by the working class.

Though Craghe can well see that such insurrections might lead to revolution, his chief concern is their immediate value in raising consciousness. “Let those, then, who can speak and write do so by all means, but let us clearly understand that this is not the only way to make socialists, nor by any means the best”. Again, “the slave who prefers death to a continuance of his slavery cannot be called a slave any longer, and if his example be followed by his fellows there is an end of servitude.” [8]

In Anarchist theory this position is known as ‘propaganda by the deed’. The phrase was coined at the International Anarchist conference of 1881, which debated, among other things, the propriety of the assassination of the Russian Tsar, which had just occurred. Thinking of the blackness of the Russian oppression, the Kaiser’s tyranny, and the awful memory of the 20,000 survivors of the Paris Commune butchered ten years before, the Anarchists gave their consent to, “the addition of propaganda by deed to written and spoken propaganda”, and said that, “the abandonment of the path of legality for that of illegality, is the only path to the social revolution.” In the next 20 years Queens, Kings, Presidents, and millionaires fell victim to the awful anger of the Anarchists. [9]

Craghe suggests that if violence changes nothing else, it changes its perpetrator; the slave who kills his/her master kills two men, as Fanon puts it; the master and the slave in his his/her own soul.

The validity of such an existentialist position cannot, of course, be established, but the idea of resistance, however intrinsically futile, breeding further resistance is often recorded in history. We might note John Brown’s Slave Revolt of 1859, which polarised American opinion on slavery, or the Dublin Rising of Easter 1916, which led to a general rising against British rule within three years. Essentially, Morris advocated the sterile policy of theory without practice. If Craghe advocated practice without theory (which is not the case) at least such a course had possibilities of development, which Morris’ did not. It could only lead to socialists cutting themselves off from the workers by refusing to participate in their day-to-day struggles.

[1] For the Chicago Martyrs see *History of the Haymarket Affair* by Henry David, *Living my Life* by Emma Goldman, and *Pioneers of Anti-parliamentarism* by Guy Aldred. [And our *Mayday and Anarchism*]

[2] Advertised in *Commonweal* November 8th 1890.

[3] Both accounts quoted in ‘Anarchism in Sheffield in the 1890s’ by Sheila Rowbotham in *Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* ed. by S. Pollard and C. Holmes.

[4] Henry David op.cit.

[5] *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* by Nick Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1928)

[6] Letter from John Craghe in *Commonweal* 28/12/1891.

[7] ‘Where Are We Now?’ by William Morris, *Commonweal* 15/11/1890.

[8] Letter to *Commonweal* from Craghe 29/11/1891.

[9] See *Four Patients of Doctor Deibler* by J.C. Longoni.

THE SHEFFIELD ANARCHIST GROUP

In the months following the polemic Creaghe and the others formed an Anarchist tendency within the Socialist Club at Blonk Street, which rather alienated the Carpenterites such as George Hukin. The Anarchists then established separate premises at West Bar Green (known as the 'Den' or the 'Lair'.)

The also began to hold regular Sunday meetings at the Jubilee Monolith at Fargate (since removed in favour of a fountain). Simultaneous meetings were held at Attercliffe and West Bar. Thursday night meetings were held in the 'Den'. Their vigorous efforts aroused both admiration and resentment among what are contradictorily termed 'moderate' revolutionaries.

In this period Creaghe earned his living as a 'sixpenny doctor'; sixpence being his fee, though he often gave the sixpence back to the poor, telling them to buy food with it, as food was better than medicine [1]. Consequently, he found it hard to manage and took a second dispensary at Hill Top in Attercliffe. This also served as an Anarchist bookshop, which was run by another Anarchist named Charles Brackenbury. He made some essential repairs to the premises, which the landlady refused to pay for. In consequence, he went on rent strike.

[1] See Rowbotham, & reports in the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* for March 24th & 26th 1891.

THE POKER INCIDENT.

On March 17th Creaghe's refusal to pay rent for the Attercliffe Dispensary cum bookshop led to an amusing fracas. The exact facts are in dispute since all parties damned each other as liars in court, but the event probably occurred as follows: – a person correctly designated as a Sheriff's Officer but termed by Creaghe, "A big fat Bum", went into Hill Top and demanded the outstanding sum, or Creaghe's furniture in lieu. Creaghe seized a poker and, with the help of Charles Brackenbury, forcibly evicted him. Clarke, the 'bum-bailiff', was ill-advised enough to raise his walking stick and Creaghe "applied a few whacks to him with the poker... We closed the door and laughed at him through the window" [1]. Clarke reappeared with a constable, whereupon Creaghe claimed that the 'bum' had been trespassing. Clarke broke down the door and rushed in. He claimed that Creaghe then hit him again with the poker and that when Constable Wortley seized the poker Creaghe attacked him with a chair and his fists before they overpowered him and dragged him off to the police station.

Creaghe denied the second assault and the Police Inspectors refusal to charge Creaghe, saying that Clarke should take out a summons, gives credence to this.

Dr Creaghe returned to Hill Top, where Clarke was loading his goods on a cart, and allegedly threatened Clarke with "serving him as they did in Ireland", and there would be no more bailiffs or police (presumably a reference to the Land Leagues resistance to evictions) and gave a speech on Ireland to the gathering crowd (It was, after all, St Patrick's Day). On Bob Bingham's advice, he then paid the outstanding sum and recovered his goods.

He was summonsed for assault and appeared in court a few days later. The Stipendiary [Magistrate] criticised the 'bum-bailiff' for "a great want of tact" since Creaghe obviously had a good claim against the landlady. Nonetheless, he found for Clarke and fined Creaghe £2:18p.

Creaghe was a little put out by the Press account of his trial, which quoted Clarke's description of him as a 'sixpenny doctor', and a 'quack', and put inverted commas on his claim to be "Doctor" Creaghe, and he wrote in pointing to his qualifications and giving the reason for practising among the poor quoted at the beginning of this biography. He went on to say that his only regret was that he did not "really punish the wretched instruments of Landlord robbery as they deserved". He pointed out that in his harangue to the crowd he had gone further than referring to Ireland and had urged them, "in every way to resist the robbery of Private Property", ending by stating that in Sheffield such men as Broadhead (a chief figure in the 'Sheffield Outrages'), "have given an example far more valuable than any in Ireland of continual resistance to oppression".

He continued to practise from Gower Street but, "though the Lord sent me an epidemic of influenza I still found that my earnings did not justify rent", and so he went on rent strike in Gower Street.

CREAGHE AND ILLEGALISM

In April Doctor Creaghe and his supporters formally declared themselves as “The Sheffield Group of Anarchist Communists”, and addressed a manifesto to the local criminal fraternity. In it Creaghe asks those who live by theft to understand that the real robbers are the capitalists class and, “that the frightful robbery which Society allows the rich to perpetrate inevitably leaves a large number of the workers without the means of existence, and compels them... to retake from the rich a part of what they have stolen” [2]. Creaghe urged the criminals to, “continue... your resistance to this vile thing called property”. He also urged them to attend the Anarchist meetings.

Now, while one might readily agree with Creaghe’s analysis of the causes of crime, and with his contempt for the hypocrisy of the capitalist class in judging others as thieves, most of us would find his assumption that burglars and the like prey only on the rich dubious in the extreme and would balk at his description of such persons as, “brave soldiers fighting in the very vanguard of freedom”.

Creaghe often advocated theft in the paper he was shortly to found, *The Sheffield Anarchist*. Typical was a mock advertisement for the “Wealth Restitution and Bank Exploration Trust Co. This company has been formed with the object of restoring to the poor by civilised methods the wealth they are daily robbed of by the rich plunderers and pirates. All good cracksmen should join. N.B. Civilised methods include force in every shape, and all kinds of weapons and explosives” [3].

This, and similar references, would suggest that Creaghe was not entirely serious in his advocacy of robbery, but he was actually firm in the belief that, “the only logical way for a Revolutionist to make his livelihood is by pillage of some sort – by living on the enemy.” [4]

In his polemic with Morris he declared that, “every man should take what he required of the wealth around him, using violence whenever necessary, and when dragged before his enemies he should tell them plainly that he has done what he knows to be right” [5].

Now, while many might feel that collective expropriation during times of hardship, bread riots and the like, are legitimate revolutionary tactic, living on individual expropriation cuts one off from the mass movement because of its necessarily clandestine nature. This has been the experience of groups such as the Red Army Fraction.

The notion of the criminal, and particularly the burglar and bandit, as undeveloped revolutionary has a long tradition in Anarchist thought. Bakunin called bandits “heroes without phrases”, though he was thinking primarily of peasant cultures where banditry was often the only recourse of the dispossessed peasants (perhaps Creaghe formed his ideas in Argentina). Even in such cultures the bandit-hero was often a romanticisation of a brutal reality, as Hobsbawm has pointed out [6].

Equally certainly, the ‘Robin Hood’ figure is not entirely mythical. Italy, Sardinia, and Sicily have a tradition of such figures, the most recent being the charismatic Salvatore Guiliano (before he was co-opted by the Mafia). South America has such a tradition, represented most notably by Pancho Villa. Spanish Anarchism produced a host of men who ‘robbed from the rich and gave to the poor’; Durruti, Facerias, Caraquemada, and Sabate, to name but a few. France had the celebrated burglar Marius Jacob, who gave the bulk of his sensational hauls to the Anarchist movement.

In the main, though, it cannot be denied that the majority of thieves act simply to enrich themselves; will prey on their own class, or only refrain from doing so because of the poor pickings involved. Still, if the dispossessed English tenantry of the 1700s, the poor whites of Southern America in the 1870s, or the ‘Okies’ of the 1930s made unlikely folk-heroes of Dick Turpin, Jesse James, and John Dillinger, it takes little imagination to see why, and we can see Creaghe’s point that political people willing to live by expropriation might give a living critique of capitalist property ethics. John Dillinger, the bank robber and ‘Public Enemy Number One’ of the American Depression, declared that, “we only robbed from the banks what the banks robbed from the people”. He was echoed in this sentiment by the impoverished Midwestern farmers – quite an achievement, given their usual conservatism.

At the time Creaghe published the *Appeal To Criminals* France was beginning to ring the deeds of Francois-Claudius Ravachol. Ravachol travelled through the country carrying out bombings against those he saw as enemies of the people in general and the Anarchist movement in particular, living all the while by counterfeiting and forcible expropriation. He became something of a folk-hero to many who were willing to admit the logic of his challenge in the dock: “Where do you get the right to kill or imprison a man who... saw

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himself in the position of having to take what he lacked to nourish himself?... Judge me... but judge all the unfortunates whom poverty allied to natural pride has made criminals. Of whom... adequate means would have made honest men. Of whom an intelligent society would have made people like everyone else" [7].

For Creaghe and Ravachol (and Bonnot, Ravachol's chief successor in French Anarchist banditry), crime was 'propaganda by the deed', clearly showing the absurdity of the ethic of property. All criminals, if they could be imbued with sufficient social consciousness, might put forward a similar analysis. But crime was also personally liberating. Ravachol and Bonnot saw themselves as engaged in a war to the death with society and the State; living on expropriations so as to be, "neither masters nor slaves", as Bonnot put it. Their deaths they saw, not as symbolic martyrdoms, but as the price which would almost inevitably have to be paid for living as free men. Like Lenin they saw revolutionaries as "dead men on holiday". Their violence they saw partly as "slamming the door behind us" (in Trotsky's phrase) and partly as a final rejection of the bourgeois world. To them, violence and terror were *in themselves* liberating. Violence involved a burning of bridges. Crime is not co-optable.

Whatever one thinks of such a theory, it seems rather naive of Creaghe to have expected the local criminals to troop into the 'Den' and enlist for the revolution. They did not. It was probably just as well. Relations between apolitical criminals and revolutionaries have usually been disastrous to the revolutionaries; the average criminal being more inclined towards plea-bargaining than to defiant gestures in the dock.

To even issue such a call seems patronising, as does Creaghe's statement that, "our sisters driven to live by means for which they are condemned by society, though the fault is not theirs but that of society itself, are particularly invited". Still, as a doctor in Attercliffe, Creaghe must have had some knowledge of the local prostitutes if not the local versions of Bill Sykes. It is interesting to note that in his set-to with the Press he indignantly listed his medical qualifications but forgot to mention his licentiate in midwifery. One wonders if he was an early and practical advocate of 'a woman's right to choose'. If so, so highly qualified a surgeon would have been a welcome alternative to the usual back street abortionist.

[1] This account is based on a letter from Creaghe in *Commonweal* and accounts in the local press.

[2] *Communists' Appeal To Criminals*, reprinted in *Commonweal* April 1891.

[3] *Sheffield Anarchist* September 1891.

[4] *Commonweal* 28/11/1891.

[5] *Commonweal* 29/11/1890.

[6] *Bandits* by E.J. Hobsbawm.

[7] *Four Patients Of Doctor Deibler* by J.C. Longoni.

THE PARIS COMMUNE – STANLEY'S VISIT

In the same month the Sheffield Group of Anarchists took part in a commemoration of the Paris Commune, which was held on Attercliffe Common. The socialists significantly appeared with a banner bearing the question, "What shall ye lack when ye lack masters?", a quotation from Morris' *Dream Of John Ball*. Creaghe's group bore a flag with the word 'Anarchy' in yellow bordered with black, and a banner bearing Blanqui's slogan "Neither God nor Master". They declared, "Wretches that we are, we demand bread for all, science for all, and for all Freedom and Justice". The Blanqui slogan aroused much indignation in the Press [1].

At about this period Fred Charles returned to London, still in search of work. This was to have tragic results, as will be seen.

While he was away Creaghe's Gower Street landlady sent the 'bum-bailiffs' around. Creaghe was a wiser man for his previous experience [2]. He signed a paper authority for the 'bum' to take his furniture within five days, if necessary. Shortly afterwards, Creaghe removed the furniture to prevent seizure. They issued a summons on Creaghe which he chose to ignore, apart from writing a letter to the *Sheffield Telegraph*.

In about May Fred Charles returned to Sheffield, accompanied by a French Anarchist named Auguste Coulon, who had arrived in England in 1890. He represented himself as an extreme advocate of violent revolution. As a half-Irishman he was able to be a French-English language tutor and offered his services to the celebrated French Comunalist exile, Louise Michel, who ran a language school in London. His association

with Michel gave him impeccable credentials and soon he edited the 'International Notes' for *Commonweal*. He much impressed the impressionable Charles.

After meeting Creaghe's group the idea of setting up a local Anarchist journal was mooted. But the claim that E.P. Thompson [3] advances that Coulon was involved in its production seems to have no basis in hard evidence, like Thompson's claim that, "In Sheffield... the Anarchist Communists aroused disgust among the workers by advocating immediate forcible actions", a spiteful innuendo which Thompson probably regrets. Coulon hung around Sheffield for a time but does not seem to have aroused the same confidence in Doctor Creaghe as he did in the woolly Fred Charles, and he left for Walsall and thence for London in July of 1891.

At the beginning of June Creaghe and John Bingham were provided with a little diversion by the arrival in Sheffield of Henry Moreton Stanley, the workhouse boy made bad, whom had achieved fame for uttering a banal pleasantry to Dr Livingstone, and for various sanguinary expeditions in Africa, which fellow explorer Richard Burton had likened to, "a red-hot poker drawn across a blanket". Stanley had lately returned from an expedition to free the Emin Pasha from captivity. The expedition had collapsed after the bloody repression of the mutiny caused by the inhumanity of Stanley and his fellow-representatives of what is termed 'Western civilisation'. Worse still for Stanley's reputation, it was shown that Emin Pasha had no wish to be rescued and the pious Mr Stanley was only acting in hopes of gaining the Pashas fabled store of ivory. In an attempt to revive his flagging reputation (and fortune) Stanley launched a lecture tour.

One venue was the Albert Hall in Sheffield. Creaghe and company were there an hour early, selling copies of Nicoll's pamphlet, *Stanley's Exploits*. Being given some difficulty by the gentleman of the constabulary outside, Creaghe and Bingham bought some gallery tickets and began selling their wares there. Practically everyone in the gallery bought a copy of the deceptively titled pamphlet and Creaghe went down to the body of the hall – leaving Bingham to face the wrath of the jingo's when they realised what they had purchased! As Creaghe filled his collection bag he heard cries from above of, "it's a fraud. Turn him out etc". An official attempted to evict the delighted doctor, "but with all the indignation of a Briton who has paid his money, I shook him off, telling him he should not prevent my turning an honest penny as I had the ambition some day to be a capitalist" [4]. The intervention of a constable caused Creaghe to interrupt his sales, but when the guardian of all that is decent withdrew he recommenced.

Meanwhile, the other members of the group hooted Stanley as he arrived. Many members of the waiting crowd joined in (though afterwards some members of the great British electorate were heard to inquire, "Why did we hoot him?").

Creaghe, after hooting Stanley from the body of the Hall, joined his comrades outside to hoot him as he left. Creaghe grabbed the window of Stanley's cab and, "told him what I thought of him". Parfremont, a French member of the group, chased the cab for some distance, waving his stick and treating Stanley to some Gallic invective.

Creaghe rang down the curtain on the hilarious scene with the hope that, "in some other town the pious buccaneer may meet his deserts". Alas, a vain hope!

[1] *Commonweal* April 1891.

[2] *Commonweal* Letter from John Creaghe 11/7/1891.

[3] *William Morris: Romantic Revolutionary* by E.P. Thompson.

[4] *Commonweal* 10/6/91.

THE SHEFFIELD ANARCHIST

The two weeks following the Stanley picket seem to have been spent in producing the first issue of the *Sheffield Anarchist*. Creaghe and Fred Charles laboured away in the 'Den' at West Bar Green. "How we laughed", recalled Creaghe, "as we scribbled and enjoyed in anticipation the horror and rage of the enemy" [1]. The *Sheffield Anarchist* was one of the most delightfully scurrilous journals to ever appear in Britain.

The general contents were translations from foreign journals, news of the nefarious doings of the local bourgeoisie, 'movement' news, theoretical pieces, and witty and outspoken calls to arms. There was also a nice line in tongue-in-cheek advertisements. Typical was an advertisement supposedly placed by a local employment agent which read, "Mr John Delaney, in view of the approaching depression of trade, calls the attention of Sweaters once more to his Auction and Slave Market. When the pinch of hunger comes, strong

young blacklegs can be had for about 2s per day, old men, women, lads, and girls, at Starvation prices. Delaney and Freedom forever!”

Delaney apparently spoke with a magistrate friend who advised him to inflict, “dire personal chastisement” on Creaghe, with a promise that the magistrate would dismiss any resultant prosecution. But the good Mr Delaney apparently did not care to fight the irascible doctor, and confined himself to threats.

A large part of the first issue was given over to a piece by Creaghe on the continuing affair of his rent strike. Muir Wilson, his landlady’s solicitor, had issued a summons calling on Creaghe to appear in the Town Hall. The charge was that of removing his furniture before the ‘bums’ could seize it! Creaghe commented, “I shall consider it an honour whenever I am brought up for some big stealing or plundering of the rich but – Holy Moses! – stealing my own furniture!” [2].

Creaghe found this twist of the law too ridiculous to be worthy of attention and ignored the summons of the “practised and practising thief of an attorney, A. Muir Wilson”. Wilson said that, “these men are all cowards”. Creaghe replied by loudly denouncing, “this pettifogging thief – this vendor of chicane, fraud and lies... the brave Muir Wilson, pettifogger-at-law. Enough of the little licenced thief”.

Great interest had been aroused in the poor districts of Sheffield by the activities of Creaghe, and he was finding imitators. A gang of bum-bailiffs had been chased out of one street with a kitchen poker. A bailiff’s crew led by one William Smith was more successful in seizing the goods of a Mr Padley but Padley opposed the seizure and, “William Smith was severely punished in the assault on Padleys house” [3]. A little rhyme circulated which celebrated Creaghe’s brand of direct action:

“Hurrah!; for the kettle, the club, and the poker
Good medicine always for landlord and broker
Surely ’tis better to find yourself clobber
Before paying rent to a rascally robber” [4]

Further proof of local interest in Creaghe’s doings was that the first issue of the *Sheffield Anarchist*, containing the story of the rent strike, sold no less than 600 copies in one day at the Sunday meeting at the Monolith. Admittedly, the Sheffield Group were holding a special conference that day and many out-of-town Anarchists were present, but it seems that locals accounted for most of the sales. A further indication of the agitation which Creaghe was causing was the presence of hecklers, apparently hired by the local Property Owners Association. The Association also called a special meeting for July 2nd to discuss the matter. The Anarchist Group responded with plans for an ‘Anti-Property Association’.

Meanwhile, Creaghe had a charge of Criminal Libel laid against him by Muir Wilson, the “little licenced thief”. Life was certainly not dull!

About this time the Group suffered the loss of Fred Charles. Charles had been working as a clerk at the Bingham’s shop. The local Left were shocked when Bob Bingham sacked Charles, forcing him to move to Walsall to find work. Carpenter’s comrade, Hukin, said that Bingham had behaved like a scoundrel [5]. Perhaps Bingham’s action is understandable, if not justifiable. Charles, for all his virtues, was a rather feckless character and even Creaghe, who greatly admired him (and who offered to keep him in Sheffield), admitted that, “If his chance of getting £1,000 depended on his keeping an appointment, I am certain he would not be there” [6].

Such a cavalier attitude to the work ethic may be fine when one is employed by a capitalist, but when one is involved in a collective it can, to be inelegant, be a pain in the arse. The Bingham may have had no choice but to expel the warm-hearted but massively undisciplined Charles. But the consequences for Charles – and for British Anarchism – were to be serious.

In Charles’ absence the rest of the group pressed on with the Anti-Property Association. This was aimed at encouraging and assisting resistance to bailiffs, to encouraging poaching (a hobby-horse of Creaghe’s) and aiding the families of those jailed for such activities. [7] It seems to have been a damp squib, though rent resistance continued.

On July 28th Creaghe stood trial at Leeds Assizes on the Criminal Libel charge. He made it a rather lively affair with his witty interruptions from the dock. His own speech was a vitriolic attack on the legal profession and even lawyers joined in the general laughter. He ended by telling the jury that, were they to convict, they would be handing him over to a Judge infamous for his treatment of radicals. Unmoved, they convicted.

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Justice Grantham, to everyone's amazement (not least Dr Creaghe) gave a complete discharge to the prisoner, depriving him of the dubious distinction of martyrdom. [8]

The *Sheffield Anarchist* continued its scurrilous career. One curious feature of its contents are the pieces on women. We have referred to Creaghe's patronisation of prostitutes. Worse still is an article entitled, 'A Parable of Misfits', in which a barbarian comes to a city and attempts to buy a pair of shoes, but is not allowed to try them on until he marries them. Finding them uncomfortable, he is vilified as a cuckold for giving them away. He goes to a 'House of Easy Shoes' where shoes can be hired but finds them unclean etc. The whole silly-clever piece is not only vastly offensive to women, but assumes that they have no sexuality, merely a function to please men [9].

Rather better is 'Women and the Family' [10]. This piece argues that, "All being... interest calculation in society, how... could the family be an exception to the rule? Woman... loses in marriage... her individuality; she exists only for her husband, and he, having bought in the market his merchandise... believes he has a right to expect from the woman passive and blind obedience. Law aids him, even authorising crime under certain circumstances".

The tone of the piece is patronising, but one might agree with the conclusion that women, "in revolting against marriage, against property, against the State, against all the iniquities of this vile society, you will do more for the emancipation of your sex than all the women doctors, the women lawyers etc".

Creaghe's basic attitude is that the nuclear family is, among the wealthy, a device for continuing property rights, and among the poor, a device to keep the male 'bread winner' working for his wife and children. He makes no real attack on the sexual division of labour. Nor does he say much about contraception. Of course, as a doctor he may have had to be careful, especially if (as I suspect) he was an abortionist.

To be fair, it is said that Rose Witcop's pioneering contraception clinic in Hammersmith was based on technical information supplied by Creaghe (presumably transmitted through Margaret Sanger, as Creaghe was in America at the time). [11]

Creaghe's own sexuality is unknown. There is no record of any female companion in his life. Interestingly, two members of his group, James Brown and Jim Shortland, were gay (and possibly also Charles, who only married in later years). Of course, this proves nothing about Creaghe since, as Sheila Rowbotham notes, "he could have gone with prostitutes" [12] but it is tempting to speculate.

Another theme of the *Sheffield Anarchist* was its attacks on religion ("where a priest treads no grass grows"). The summer and autumn of 1891 must have heightened Creaghe's dislike of religion, as the Monolith Sunday meetings were frequently disturbed by what Creaghe termed "Christian Association brats", led by two worthies named Osbourne and Liddell. One of Creaghe's group, Fishbourne, was fined for resisting them. Creaghe himself had an altercation with Osbourne during a particularly bad display of "Christian Rowdyism", when Edward Carpenter was sharing the platform. Many non-Anarchists helped to hustle off, "Poor fool Osbourne and his gang". Creaghe put an advertisement in the *Sheffield Anarchist* for "Anarchists to face Christians on the war-path... Clubs supplied" [13].

But Anarchism was now declining in Sheffield and after October the paper collapsed. After the Chicago meeting in November Creaghe, harassed on all sides, left for Liverpool from where he wrote, "our paper dragged on badly, we could never pay more than half the cost... But Anarchy is safe in Sheffield". He was wrong. It went into slow decline [14].

[1] *Commonweal* 21/5/1892.

[2] *Commonweal* 11/7/1891.

[3] *Sheffield Anarchist* 19/7/1891.

[4] Quail op.cit.

[5] Letter from George Hukin to Edward Carpenter in the Carpenter Collection.

[6] *Commonweal* 21/5/1892.

[7] *Sheffield Anarchist* 19/7/1891.

[8] *Commonweal* 15/8/1891.

[9] *Sheffield Anarchist* 20/9/1891.

[10] *Sheffield Anarchist* 19/7/1891.

[11] Information supplied by Albert Meltzer, who knew the Witcops. Letter 15/6/1981.

[12] Letter to myself n.d.

[13] For disputes with Christians, see *Sheffield Anarchist*, July 19, Sep. 20, and Oct. 4, 1891.

[14] Letter from Creaghe to *Commonweal* 28/12/1891.

LIVERPOOL-BURNLEY-SHEFFIELD. NOVEMBER 1891-JANUARY 1893.

Creaghe fared little better in Liverpool, where he found only one Anarchist [1] named W.H. Chapman, whom he described as an academic (actually, he ran a vegetarian restaurant) and after a few weeks he moved to Burnley.

Remarkably, he joined the Burnley branch of the S.D.F., though he remained an Anarchist. He was, naturally, at constant loggerheads with the other members, and enlivened many a dreary debate with his invective [2].

In January 1892 tragedy struck British Anarchism. Fred Charles, who was still in Walsall, had been inveigled by Auguste Coulon into a conspiracy (with other Anarchists in London and Walsall) to manufacture bombs, supposedly for export to Russia. Coulon turned out to be a latter-day version of 'Oliver the Spy'. In January the carefully-laid trap was sprung by Chief Inspector Melville of Scotland Yard, Coulon's puppet-master. Charles and five others were arrested. The 'Walsall Bomb Conspiracy' was headline news for months. Though Coulon's part in the affair was well-known, he was not charged, though he was living quite openly in London. Despite a fierce propaganda campaign and the complete exposure of the police provocation, Charles and three other men were convicted. Charles and two others were sentenced to ten years imprisonment. [3]

Creaghe wrote movingly of Charles', "gentleness, his kind-heartedness, his complete and entire forgetfulness of self, not only to comrades but towards any man who said 'Charles, I want... He and his comrades must soon come out of that dungeon, or...' "[4]

A campaign for the release of the men, courageously led by *Commonweal* editor David Nicoll led to Nicoll being given 18 months hard labour after an article by him condemning Melville and the other police conspirators was interpreted nonsensically as incitement to murder. Nonetheless the campaign, in which Creaghe took part, carried on. But Creaghe had now given up hope of any immediate prospect of revolution in Britain and he decided to return to Argentina. On New Years Day, 1893, he made a brief return to Sheffield on business of the Walsall Defence Committee [5]. The comrades held a farewell party for him and he left for London where, after a brief stay, he set sail for Spain. After a short stay there he returned to Lujan, in Buenos Aires Province [6].

In his absence the Anarchist movement went into even further decline. The Walsall case and another incident in which an Anarchist named Bourdin was killed during a supposed attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory (again, almost certainly a police provocation), led to much popular antipathy to Anarchists, especially since the great wave of bombings in France, perpetrated by men like Ravachol, Vaillant and Emile Henry was at its height. In France, some would be willing to see such actions as revenge for the many incidents in which strikers were fired on by troops, or as Communard hawks coming home to roost. The English, lacking the bitterness born in 1871, began to see Anarchists as caricature wild-eyed, black-cloaked figures with smoking bombs, with no philosophy but crime and destruction. The Anarchist movement also split internally, with accusations of this or that person being a police spy (sometimes quite credibly) flying back and forth. With the collapse of *Commonweal* the movement went into decline [7].

[1] Letter from Creaghe in *Commonweal* November 1891.

[2] Reports from Creaghe in *Commonweal*, May and June 1892.

[3] Quail op.cit.

[4] *Commonweal* 21/5/1892

[5] Rowbotham 'Anarchism in Sheffield', op.cit.

[6] 'Some Lesser Known British Anarchists' by Mat Kavanagh, in *Freedom*, June 1934

[7] Quail op.cit.

ARGENTINA 1894-1911.

When Creaghe arrived back in Argentina from Spain in early 1894 he found the Anarchist movement of pivotal importance in working class politics. Its only real opposition came from the Socialist Party, headed by Juan B. Justos. Soon, Creaghe was editing another journal, *El Oprimido* (The Oppression). Creaghe's monthly

paper, published in Lujan and Buenos Aires City, took an anarcho-syndicalist stance and engaged in frequent polemics with those Anarchists who felt that participation in unions was reformist. In 1896 Creaghe and his staff attempted to find common ground with the left-wing dissenters within the Socialist Party who were sympathetic to syndicalism, such as Jose Ingenieros and Lugones. Ingenieros and Lugones edited *La Montana*, a paper which opposed Justos' paper *La Vanguardia*, but nothing came of it.

From 1896 onwards Creaghe attempted to unify the warring elements in the Anarchist ranks. He had but little success.

El Oprimido failed in 1897 and Creaghe and his supporters joined with Inglan Lafarga and others in a new paper, based in Buenos Aires, entitled *La Protesta Humana*, which began to appear in June of that year. Dr Creaghe wrote many articles for the new paper, particularly on Public Health and hygiene. He was also a major figure in producing *Ciencia Social*, the major Anarcho-Syndicalist review.

In 1891 six Communist-controlled anti-Anarchist Unions created the Federation Obrera (Workers Federation). In rivalry, the Anarchists, who enjoyed the support of most of the Argentinean proletariat, formed the FAO (Argentine Workers Federation) in 1901. In 1902 the FAO led a series of strikes which brought repression down on the staff of *La Protesta Humana*, causing the paper to discontinue for a time [1]. In 1903 the journal was recommenced. Lafarga was in hiding and Creaghe became editor. He also helped financially to re-open it, to the tune of 5,000 pesos (so he must have been back at hospital work). The title of the paper was foreshortened to simply *La Protesta*.

During 1903 Creaghe fought a polemic in *La Protesta* with Altair and other left-wing intellectuals on the right of white-collar and intellectual workers to participate in the FAO. Creaghe (himself, of course, an intellectual worker) agreed with such persons being excluded because of the attempt of rather right-wing intellectuals to obtain some power in the movement. In 1904 the FAO conference (at which the organisation changed its name to FORA, or Argentina Regional Workers Federation) a definitely Anarchist Communist line was put in the constitution, and the unions were declared only means to an end, rather than the model of a new society, as the syndicalists (anarcho- and otherwise) saw them. Creaghe supported this line, despite the disagreement of his old mentor, Errico Malatesta.

A military coup was attempted in February 1905 and, though the Left was not involved, the chance to close down *La Protesta* and jail various militants was taken. Whether or not Creaghe was one I cannot say.

After one Colonel Falcon was appointed Buenos Aires Police Chief, repression of Anarchists intensified. On May Day 1909 a FORA demonstration in the city was fired on, with loss of life among the workers. This led to a general strike among the workers and to widespread arrests and repression on the Left. In November of that year a young Anarchist named Simon Radowsky killed Falcon with a bomb in reprisal. Within the next two days a state of martial law was declared and thousands of militants were arrested, many of the foreigners among them being deported after torture. Others were sent to Ushuaia prison or Tierra del Fuego. *La Protesta*, which had become not only the most important Anarchist paper in Argentina, but the most important labour journal generally since Dr Creaghe had made it into a daily in 1904, was particularly singled out. Creaghe and all his staff were arrested and placed aboard the warship 'Guardia Nacional', where, it is said, they were ill-treated, if not tortured.

In January of 1910 the staff of *La Protesta* were released. Doctor Creaghe, whose rhetoric of resistance may have seemed somewhat motivated by empty bravado in Britain, showed that his courage was real and not feigned, by immediately re-opening *La Protesta*.

Within four months martial law was again imposed. The reason was the agitation surrounding the 'Centenario', the hundredth anniversary of Argentina's independence from Spain. Violent conflicts marked the 'celebration'. The protests included a general strike, led by FORA, with the support of *La Protesta*. Repression ran riot.

La Protesta continued clandestinely to exist. It was the major paper of revolution in Argentina until quite recent years. Its establishment and continuation was probably Creaghe's greatest single contribution to the politics of revolution.

But from 1911 onwards Creaghe's attention turned to the events in a country higher in the Latin American continent – Mexico.

[1] This section is based on information supplied by Sr Ricardo Falcon and on Iacov Oved's *El Anarchismo y El Movimiento Obrero En Argentina*.

MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES 1911-1920.

In 1910 Mexico celebrated the anniversary of its independence from Spain. Beneath the carefully orchestrated atmosphere of festivity discontent began to boil over. While industrial workers laboured for an average wage of 12½ cents a day peasants groaned under even worse conditions as virtual slaves of the wealthy landowners, or 'hacendados'. The dictator, Don Porfirio Diaz, had once been a brave soldier in the revolution of Juarez but for 34 years he had sold Mexico to the hated 'gringo' businessmen. His iron rule was enforced by the brutal Federales and Rurales. He held power by sham elections, suppression of opponents by prison and bullet, and by wholesale intimidation of the Press.

One man he could never intimidate was an Anarchist lawyer and journalist named Ricardo Flores Magon. Magon, born in 1874, spent much time in prison for his fearless attacks on the regime. It has been said that, "his was the loudest, clearest, most unequivocal voice urging the Mexican people to revolution" [1]. In 1903 he and his brother fled to the USA where he continued to edit his journal, *Regeneracion*. He also founded the Partido Liberal Mexicano (literally, Mexican Liberal Party, but perhaps better translated as 'Mexican Libertarian Group') which soon had cells all over Mexico. After the usual sham election in 1910 Magonista guerrillas fought running battles with the government. In November Madero, the defeated bourgeois liberal candidate in the election, launched a rebellion in uneasy alliance with the Magonistas, declaring himself provisional president. He was backed by the ex-bandit Pancho Villa and a young Aztec peon named Emiliano Zapata who cried out Magon's slogan 'Land and Liberty' (Tierra y Libertad). Additional support came from the more moderate Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregon. The most radical was Zapata, who began to collectivise land in his native province of Morelos. Soon Diaz fled and Madero was elected President, but then showed his true colours by harassing the revolutionaries. Zapata rebelled against him, allied with Magon and the PLM.

In September of 1911 the struggle in Mexico led Doctor Creaghe to give up his practise in Lujan and to resign as editor of *La Protesta*. He went to live in Los Angeles, California, where he joined the editorial board of *Regeneracion*. Shortly afterwards he made several trips to Mexico. He spent some time in Mexico City but he also travelled to Morelos (presumably with letters of introduction from Magon) and studied Zapata and his movement at first hand. It has been alleged that Creaghe combined his fact-finding mission with gun-running to the rebels but this story is unsubstantiated and probably apocryphal [2].

One result of his trip was his *Manifesto to the Comrades Of Argentina, Uruguay, and the Whole World*, which appeared in *Regeneracion*. It begins, "Comrades, I think it is my duty to give you my opinion of the actual movement in Mexico. As one who has had the privilege of seeing it at its foundation. So I speak with knowledge of the cause." He goes on to stress the achievement of Emiliano Zapata and the central importance of land communalisation to the revolution. As he says, "I wish to give my sincere testimony, of which I have no doubt, that the movement in Mexico needs all our efforts and sacrifices, and I want to tell you that everything that you can see in our times is going through a regenerative process. What you hear is only a dim reflection of the reality which I have seen. Mexico is proudly leading the beautiful economic and agrarian revolution. Even those bourgeois intellectuals commenting on such affairs admit in their newspapers and magazines that there will be no peace in Mexico until the people themselves have control of the land, which they consider belongs to them". Creaghe's piece ends with a call for support for *Regeneracion* financially, as the chief organ of revolution in Mexico. His manifesto was extremely important in calling the attention of Latin American and US libertarians to Zapatismo. When the article was reprinted in a special Mexican Revolution edition of the important Argentinean journal *Ideas Y Figuras* Creaghe's fellow-contributors included Jean Grave and Peter Kropotkin.

In 1913 the muddle-headed policies of Madero lead to his assassination and a military coup by General Huerta. An uneasy alliance of Villa, Carranza and Zapata rose against Huerta. Zapata's Division of the South and Villa's legendary Division of the North moved pincer-fashion to Mexico City.

Throughout this period Dr Creaghe laboured assiduously for *Regeneracion* and the Magonista cause, making several trips to Argentina to 'spread the word'. He was also personal physician to the ailing Magon [3]. Throughout the regimes of Madero, Huerta, and (after 1915) Carranza, the revolutionary movements of

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Zapata and Magon were harassed by the US government. Carranza was accepted by US business interests (and therefore by the US government) as the best alternative to such men as Villa, Zapata, and Magon. *Regeneracion* offices were regularly raided by the police.

Carranza (doubtless to Creaghe's horror) managed to buy off Mexico's Anarcho-Syndicalist unions and sent their 'Red Brigades' against Magon and Zapata. The defection of Villa after 1917 left the Zapatistas and Magonistas as the only, and much harassed, advocates of agrarian communism in Mexico.

Repression of *Regeneracion* increased after US entry into World War One and the Russian Revolution. Ricardo Flores Magon and Librado Rivera were arrested under the new Sedition Laws and, after a secret trial, were sentenced to, respectively, 20 and 15 years in federal prison.

Creaghe was involved with Emma Goldman, the great figure of American Anarchism, in a campaign to free Magon [4] until Goldman was deported in the 'Palmer Raids', the notorious anti-radical purges of 1919. In the same year the hopes for agrarian communism in Mexico were crushed by the assassination of Emiliano Zapata by the puppets of the Haciendado's and Standard Oil.

Creaghe made a brief return to Argentina that year. He had to sell his furniture and even his medical instruments for the fare back to the USA, where he settled in the state of Washington. His campaign for Magon was unsuccessful. Magon died in prison, under mysterious circumstances, in 1922. But Creaghe was never to know this.

On February 19th, 1920, Doctor John Creaghe died in poverty in Washington. The claim of Sheffield's 'John Creaghe Memorial Society' that he died "freezing to death, under a lamp-post with a bundle of newspapers in one hand and a gun in the other" [5] seems to be a romantic fabrication. He was 78 years old and had given over 30 years service to the movement.

[1] From *Heroic Mexico* by William Weber Johnson from which most of the information on the Mexican Revolution is extracted. But see *Land And Liberty* ed. Dave Poole (1977) for Magon's role.

[2] A story recorded by Mat Kavanagh and reported to me by John Quail. The only reliable account of Creaghe in Mexico is contained in *Historia Del Movimiento Obrero y Social Latinoamericano Contemporaneo* by Carlos Rama.

[3] Mentioned in a letter to myself from Albert Meltzer 15/6/1981.

[4] Meltzer op.cit.

[5] Leaflet issued May 1978. The account of Creaghe's death is based on Meltzer op.cit., Rama op.cit. and information supplied by Sr Ricardo Falcon.

CONCLUSION

So what are we to make of Creaghe in the end? There is a poetic line beloved of Bartolomeo Vanzetti: "Give flowers to the rebels failed". One instinctively reaches for it. But was Creaghe a failure? In terms the world measures by, certainly. Had he chosen, a man of his qualifications could have had a Harley Street practise, lived well, and probably ended as Sir John Creaghe. Instead, he opted for a life of struggle, harassed by the police for much of the time and by creditors for the rest.

But Creaghe made an invaluable contribution to the Argentine labour movement by his fearless writings. *La Protesta* remained for many years as his memorial, the most important daily newspaper in the history of the Argentine Labour movement.

In the Mexican struggle too, his efforts for *Regeneracion* were considerable. Though the great hopes of that period did not reach fruition, *Regeneracion* was for years the most important voice of that brave struggle.

In England, perhaps, his brand of politics was not appreciated, a fact he seems to have soon realised. But his was the most uncompromising voice during a brief period when so much seemed possible if compromise were resisted.

His life was one in which compromise was always rejected. That people like Creaghe could, in the face of shattering set-backs, betrayals, imprisonment, and unending harassment from the capitalist forces, as well as those revolutionary elements who thought that their ideologies were the irrefutable Tablets of Law and regarded those who disagreed with them as traitors, still believe in the ability of human beings to order their own lives and desires without authoritarian guidance and without the prodding of the whip (however well-intended the lashes) is a remarkable feat. And we may yet have good reason to be thankful that men like Creaghe held to their Anarchist convictions, however fruitless their efforts may seem.

In our times it is more important than ever that people reclaim their own consciences, instead of leaving them in pawn to any party or ideology. The history of the years since Creaghe's death is an extended object lesson in what can happen if they do not.

Mat Kavanagh, speaking of Creaghe, in *Freedom* in 1934, said, "He was one of those remarkable personalities that Anarchism alone seems able to produce, who, seeking not place or power, live to serve the cause of Human Emancipation... August Spies, one of the Chicago Martyrs... described Anarchists as 'stormy petrels, harbingers of the coming storm'. This description very aptly fitted Dr Creaghe".

In concluding this sketch for a biography of one 'stormy petrel', I am mindful of the army of others who remain, in Vanzetti's phrase, "nameless in the vast crowd of nameless ones". To them this piece is dedicated.

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What is the Kate Sharpley Library?

The Kate Sharpley Library is a library, archive, publishing outfit and affinity group. We preserve and promote anarchist history.

What we've got

Our collection includes anarchist books, pamphlets, newspapers and leaflets from the nineteenth century to the present in over twenty languages. The collection includes manuscripts, badges, audio and video recordings, and photographs, as well as the work of historians and other writers who have documented the anarchist movement.

What we do

We promote the history of anarchism by reprinting original documents from our collection, and translating or publishing new works on anarchism and its history. These appear in our quarterly bulletin or regularly published pamphlets. We have also provided manuscripts to other anarchist publishers. People come and research in the library, or we can send out a limited amount of photocopies.

Why we do it

We don't say one strand of class-struggle anarchism has all the answers. We don't think anarchism can be understood by looking at 'thinkers' in isolation. We do think that what previous generations thought and did, what they wanted and how they tried to get it, is relevant today. We encourage the anarchist movement to think about its own history – not to live on past glories but to get an extra perspective on current and future dangers and opportunities.

How we do it

Everything at the Kate Sharpley Library – acquisitions, cataloguing, preservation work, publishing, answering inquiries is done by volunteers. All our running costs are met by donations (from members of the collective or our subscribers and supporters) or by the small income we make through publishing.

How you can help

Please subscribe to our bulletin to keep up with what we're doing. There are four issues of the Bulletin a year. Or become a Friend, a KSL Friend subscription gets you the Bulletin and all our publications as they come out.

You can send us anarchist material that you don't need any more (from books to badges) – we can pay postage for large loads, but it doesn't have to be large. A couple of pamphlets will be as gratefully received as anything. Even if you send us duplicates we can trade with other archives for material we do not have. If you publish anarchist material, please add us to your mailing list!

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With The Poor People Of The Earth

A Biography Of Doctor John Creaghe of Sheffield & Buenos Aires

by Alan O'Toole

Con los pobres de la Tierra

quiero yo mi suerte echar.

El arroyo de la sierra

me complace mas que el mar

With the poor people of the Earth

I wish to share my destiny.

The stream of the mountain

means more to me than the sea

‘Guantanamera’ José Martí

John (Juan) Creaghe (1841-1920) turned his back on the chance of a prosperous medical career to live among the workers. He spent an extraordinary lifetime struggling for anarchism: fighting bailiffs and establishing the scurrilous *Sheffield Anarchist*, working in Argentina on *La Protesta*, (for years the main voice of the labour movement), and supporting the Mexican anarchist Magon brothers at the time of the Mexican revolution.

Alan O'Toole's biography rescues the story of this inspiring figure, assessing his worldwide agitation, showing his interactions with figures like William Morris and Edward Carpenter, and illuminating a large slice of Anarchism's "heroic years".

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