

**Invisible or just underrated? Thoughts on anarchist solidarity with the Miners' Strike of 1984-85**

2024 is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Miners Strike of 1984-85. 'The vast majority of miners were not fighting to overthrow the government or state or seek to create a revolution, but simply to keep jobs to keep their communities intact. They were not even fighting to take over their industry – theirs by right. True, there were some, both within and outside the mining communities, who were fighting for more. But it was not a political strike of the miners' choosing, but as a direct result of government, that made it clear from the outset that their objectives were to smash the union, to defeat militant unionism and break up the communities.'<sup>[1]</sup>

I have been reading and thinking about the strike and anarchist solidarity actions with the miners. That anarchist solidarity seems less visible now. Diarmaid Kelliher says 'It is necessary to be careful about using the support movement as a way of gleaning positives out of this history.'<sup>[2]</sup> That's a valid warning against cherry picking stories 'as compensation for a miserable present'.<sup>[3]</sup> But do we have to resign ourselves to being written out of history?

In one mention of anarchist involvement Kelliher says 'There is evidence of some limited anarcho-syndicalist influence, for example in contacts developed between Doncaster miners and Barcelona dockers, but more broadly this is probably wishful thinking.'<sup>[4]</sup> I find that 'probably' quite strange. My initial impression is that it's something he doesn't have time to check (in writing history, there are often loose ends). But I can't help also hearing 'if the anarcho-syndicalists were important, there would be a book about them'.

In 2005 Ben Franks wrote an article about 'British Anarchisms and the Miners' Strike' which focussed on the effect of the strike on the anarchist movement (which is not what I'm talking about here). While noting that some groups actively supported the miners he claimed 'Although the miners' strike had a marked influence on libertarian movements, anarchist involvement had little overall impact on the direction of the dispute.'<sup>[5]</sup>

Franks examined the poster for 'The Miners' Strike Twenty Years On: Challenges and Changes' conference at Northumbria University (2004) to suggest 'alongside the miners, their partners and families, the dominant political players were unconnected with anarchism', and looked at the books that Socialist Workers Party

members, academics and the like had written since the strike: they 'make no mention of anything that could be labelled "anarchist involvement".'<sup>[6]</sup> It's obviously possible to write about the miners strike and not mention anarchists. I'm not convinced that means that anarchist solidarity was entirely absent (or unimportant).

In 2009 Franks claimed that 'By the time of the Miners' Strike in 1984, anarchism had minimal influence on – and in – working-class structures of resistance.'<sup>[7]</sup> Yet some anarchists were actively attempting to maintain and build 'working-class structures of resistance', like the Burnley Congress for Industrial Action (January 1985).<sup>[8]</sup>

In the anarchist press the strike caused debate and exposed wildly differing attitudes to what anarchism is or anarchists should do. Again, those debates aren't what I want to talk about. The anarchist press reported some of the anarchist solidarity actions with the miners. Here are just a few examples.

In Glasgow, anarchists occupied the offices of Price Waterhouse.<sup>[9]</sup> In their leaflet for the action the occupiers said 'The unemployed know only too well the hardship the Miners and their families must be facing after six months on strike. We can't give much money from our own pockets. We can't go on strike. BUT WE CAN DEMONSTRATE OUR ACTIVE SOLIDARITY.'<sup>[10]</sup>

In Bedford, a 'Coal not Dole' banner was hoisted as part of an anarchist 'day of action' (where nuclear waste, meat eating and the Conservative Party were the other targets).<sup>[11]</sup>

Freedom Press hosted miners from Blyth's Bates Pit NUM, thinking they had found them by their own initiative. 'Actually, the miners in question [...] were told locally, once they decided to head to London to raise much needed funds and asking where was a good place to begin/ stay, try asking *Freedom*, they should know.'<sup>[12]</sup>

The Direct Action Movement used its international contacts for fundraising and to arrange meetings. Hull DAM reported passing on £10,000 from the Dutch syndicalist union the OVB, and '£400, with more coming in' from the French CNT, plus a speaking tour.<sup>[13]</sup> DAM contacts were also used to get Doncaster strikers to speak in Spain,<sup>[14]</sup> and a Spanish CNT member to speak in South Wales.<sup>[15]</sup> [pto]

**Inside: more on British anarchists and the Miners' Strike**

Some London anarchists attempted to ‘open a second front’. ‘We have argued in the last two issues of Class War that the best support we can give to the miners is to open up a second front by rioting in the inner cities. There is no prospect of any other organised section of the working class taking industrial action in solidarity with the miners – so the sooner we get out on to the streets with our bricks and bottles the sooner they’ll have to withdraw police from the mining areas.’[16] There was a day of action on the 5 November 1984 (Bonfire Night) ‘Possibly not to great effect, but it was an effort.’ [17]

But most frequently, anarchists seem to have acted within the generalised solidarity movement and not limited themselves to explicitly anarchist actions. A mass of fundraising, food collecting and picketing kept the strike going as long as it did. Anarchists were involved in all of these as well as other forms of support like printing, babysitting and cooking breakfasts (a way of supporting both the miners and the women’s action groups from the mining communities).

Dave Douglass said at the time ‘It will come as a surprise to many but the Anarchists have in fact been far more helpful than many of the self-proclaimed saviours of the working class. Since they are against people telling other people what to do, they have in fact spent what time and energy they have actually helping us in the ways we asked to be helped. Printing is often their strong point and they have often done this for free; they have also helped in food collections, etc and when WE have asked they have shown up on picket lines, without the newspapers the others on the left usually carry.’[18]

I think the anarchist disinterest in recruiting and self-promotion (certainly compared to the ‘revolutionary parties’ of the left), coupled with their involvement with the grassroots action partly explains why their actions are now less visible. ‘The strategy, if we could give it so grand a title, that many anarchists adopted was to support the miners. Consequently much of that support work relied on having conversations with miners and their families and working out how we could help them. That help was very rarely trumpeted, just done. Maybe printing leaflets and posters, helping with food provision, sitting on picket lines to give some a break, organising speaking events for miners both here and overseas. Sometimes just listening and occasionally trying to answer questions about what we felt was going on “out there”. Consequently for the historians there is not a lot of hard material they can use.’[19]

After the strike many active anarchists moved on to other campaigns (like the Wapping dispute). Those most heavily involved in strike support must have been most affected by the ‘depression [that] seems to have engulfed our movement’.[20] At least one attempt was made at the time to gather accounts of anarchist solidarity ‘A comrade in the North-East is

hoping to put together a record of the current Miners Strike as witnessed by anarchists who have been involved either directly or by providing physical support.’[21] But that seems to have come to nothing.

So, have you read any good accounts of anarchist solidarity with the miners? Would you like to write your account or notes on what was done in your area? I know someone is doing interviews with people who were involved on anarchist solidarity with miners. Would you like us to put you in touch?

## Notes

- 1, ‘Was the Miners Strike winnable?’ in Black Flag Supplement no.2 Miners Strike in *Black Flag : the anarchist fortnightly* No.139 9/9/1985 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/rr50mw>
- 2, Kelliher, Diarmaid ‘Networks of solidarity: the London left and the 1984-5 miners’ strike’. In: Smith, E. and Worley, M. (eds.) *Waiting for the Revolution: the British Far Left from 1956*. Manchester University Press (2017) pp. 125-143. [on p137] ISBN 9781526113658. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18b5jz6.12> Manuscript free at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/155166/>
- 3, Warren, Richard ‘The misadventures of Ann and Archie [on the uses of history]’ in *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, #5 [1980], p55. <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/jm65bt>
- 4, Kelliher ‘Networks of solidarity’ p133, quoting ‘Barcelona Dockers’, *Rank and File Miner*, June 1985, p. 5.
- 5, Franks, Ben ‘British Anarchisms and the Miners’ Strike’ *Capital & Class* 29, 3 2005 <https://doi.org/10.1177/030981680508700113>
- 6, Franks ‘British Anarchisms’ p.233
- 7, Franks, Ben ‘Anarchism, Britain’ in *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, edited by Immanuel Ness, 108–110. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp0045> and <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/benjamin-franks-anarchism-in-britain>
- 8, See reports from *Direct Action* <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/n5td3n>, *Black Flag* <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/44j2k8> and *Freedom* <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/08kr9w>
- 9, See Brian Biggins ‘The day we took the white tower [Price Waterhouse occupation, Glasgow, 1984]’ <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4xgzxz> which was also published in *Black Flag* 119, 15/10/1984
- 10, the leaflet, from Glasgow’s Spirit of Revolt collection is available at <https://archive.org/details/minersstrike/> and <https://libcom.org/article/day-we-took-white-tower-brian-biggins>
- 11, See ‘Letter [Bedford Anarchist Collective Day of Action, December 1984]’ From *Black Flag : Anarchist Fortnightly* Vol. VII, No.125 28/01/1985 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vt4dh5>

12, Tyneside Anarchist Archive, *Anarchism in North East England 1882-1992* p302

13, 'Dutch, French Unions Support NUM' from *Direct Action* 18, (September 1984)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3bk54x>

14, See 'NUM in Spain' from *Direct Action* 18, (September 1984)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/k98vfg>

15, See 'Miners Update: Ammanford South Wales' From *Black Flag: Anarchist Fortnightly* vol VII, 6E, no.116 6/8/84

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/xksq8r>

16, 'Kinnochio speaks and his nose starts to grow' *Class War* 12 (1984)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/mw6pbh>

17, 'Talking to Dave Morris about the Miners Strike, Wapping and Poland : A transcript of a conversation [April 2024]'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/tdz2g7>. The

leaflet calling for the day of action is at

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vx0nndd> The

'Open up the second front' article appeared in *Class War* 11 <https://libcom.org/article/class-war-11-1984>.

18, Douglass, David 'Bores under the floor [a view of Anarchists in the Miners' Strike]' From: *Black Flag* no 117 (v.7, n.6F) 20/8/1984.

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/w0vvn6>

19, Barry Pateman, email of 14/7/2024

20, Ridley, Pete 'London, England' [Letter about anarchist actions in support of the miners strike] *SRAF Bulletin* 91 (Nov.-Dec 1985)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/sn050s>

21, 'Strike History [1984 call for information on anarchist solidarity with the miners strike]' From *Black Flag* vol 07 7d #122 (27/11/1984)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/6hdsx9>

[See elsewhere in this issue for more articles on the strike; other pieces were reprinted in *KSL Bulletin* 91-92 (October 2017). Those and more are at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/93207x> ] ■

## Kate Sharpley: what do we know?

What (and how) do we know about Kate Sharpley? Albert Meltzer tells her story in *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels* [chapter 20] and in 'Kate Sharpley's story' from 1978, published after his death in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* number 6 (September 1996). We have no documentary evidence that she threw her family's medals in the Queen's face during the First World War. That no echoes have appeared in the welter of digital historical sources now available is curious.

We have spent a long time digging around in anarchist history in an attempt to recover the names, lives and perspectives of the grassroots militants who

made up the anarchist movement. Albert was key figure in arguing for that perspective (see 'Albert Meltzer and the fight for working class history' In *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 76, October 2013). We know that Albert had an anecdotal approach to history. Digging into the history of the 1945 split in British anarchism has made us appreciate how his view of past events was coloured by later internal conflicts in the movement. However, looking at that history shows us that every account needs to be read critically.

Is 'Kate Sharpley's story' just that, a story? It's possible, but what would it change? If she only *wished* that she'd thrown them, perhaps it should be a warning about the power of anecdote, and the problems of anarchist history? ■

## Louise Bolotin 1961-2022

News has reached us of the death of Louise Bolotin, in October 2022 from bowel cancer. Louise will be remembered by people in many different places for her rebellious spirit, her Jewish atheism and her commitment to fighting sexism. The strength of her character meant that she sometimes clashed with people in the anarchist movement, but that can also be seen as a strength.

Louise was born in 1961 and was one of the generation politicised in the punk years of the 1970s. She started out writing fanzines and for a music listings paper in Edinburgh, rejecting the dominant politics of the time, particularly the sexism. She moved to Leeds in the early 80s and became an activist in anarchist and direct action groups there. She was involved in anti-racism, women's groups and spent time at Greenham Common, while studying to follow her ambition to be a journalist.

She moved to London later in the 80s and was active in the Anarchist Black Cross and the Direct Action Movement. She was also in a relationship with Leo Rosser, a young militant who took his own life in 1990, which was devastating for her. She became active in the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign supporting defendants after the anti Poll tax riot. Louise made a fresh start afterwards in Paris, working for Reflexes, an anti fascist network, touring Europe and co-ordinating groups.

In 2009 she moved to Manchester and met her last husband, Adrian. She lived life to the full – enjoying music, travel and food as well as keeping up activism in the National Union of Journalists. After her diagnosis of stage 4 bowel cancer, she refused to give in to self pity and rejected the narrative of cancer being a battle or a journey. At her funeral, it was said "she never put up with anything just because convention dictated that she should".

Louise Bolotin 23-10-1961 – 30-10-2022 ■

# Giuseppe Pinelli, Anarchist

## His Life

Giuseppe Pinelli was born in Milan's working-class Porta Ticinese district in 1928. After completing elementary school, he was "forced" to go looking for work, first as a messenger boy and then as a warehouseman. His innate thirst for learning prompted him to fill in the gaps in his self-education by reading hundreds upon hundreds of books.

In 1944-45 he took part in the antifascist resistance as a runner for the Bruzzi-Malatesta Brigades. Once the war ended, 'Pino' remained committed and active and played an enthusiastic part in helping to boost the anarchist movement in Milan.

In 1954 he successfully passed a competition for a job with the railways as a labourer. The following year he married Licia Rognini whom he had met while on an Esperanto course.

In 1963 he joined the young anarchists from the Gioventù Libertaria (Libertarian Youth) and two years later was among the founders of the 'Sacco and Vanzetti' Circle. In 1968, the members were forced by an eviction notice to shut down that circle, but on 1 May Pinelli was among the founders of a brand-new circle at 31 Piazzale Lugano, within metres of the Ponte della Ghisolfi.

The new circle hosted a series of lectures and meetings of the earliest united grassroots committees, the legendary CUB, which reflected the first wave of direct action trade unionism outside of the official trade union organizations. 'Pino' was among the promoters of the (re)construction of the local chapter of the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI), the revolutionary syndicalist and libertarian-inspired organization. Following the nonsensical arrests of anarchists in the wake of bombs going off in Milan on 25 April 1969 at the central railway station and trade fair (those arrested were to be acquitted in June 1971), Pinelli threw himself into collecting food parcels, clothing and books for forwarding to the arrested comrades. Under the auspices of the newly launched Anarchist Black Cross, he busied himself setting up a solidarity and counter-information network that might be of assistance in other similar situations.

On 12 December 1969, in the wake of the Piazza Fontana massacre, Pinelli was invited to accompany the police to headquarters and indeed rode there ahead of them on his motorbike. Three days later, his body was thrown from the window of a fourth floor room used by the political branch. It marked the end of his life and the opening of a tragic farce that is still being played out today.

## State Murder

Pinelli had been arrested within hours of the 12 December 1969 massacre in the Piazza Fontana. He was interrogated for three days and on the evening of the third day was found dead in the courtyard at police

headquarters, after falling from the window of the interrogation room on the fourth floor. The official version speaks of suicide; investigators tried to peddle the story that Pinelli took his own life because of his part in the outrage. Not true. Any more than the story of the last few hours of his interrogation.

1968 and 1969 were years marked by worker and student rebellions that seemed to augur great changes. Between January and December 1969, there were 145 attacks mounted, almost all of them fascist in provenance.

On 25 April 1969 at 4.37 p.m., a bomb went off at the National Agricultural Bank in the Piazza Fontana in Milan, it claimed 16 lives and injured a further 88 people. At the same time, other bombs exploded in Rome. Finally, in Milan's Commercial Bank a briefcase containing a bomb was discovered; it was hurriedly detonated, destroying evidence that might have been priceless to investigators. Immediately, indicative of a pre-ordained plan, the inquiries which had no clues to go on, set off in pursuit of anarchist culprits. By 7.30 p.m. (3 hours after the Piazza Fontana outrage) Inspector Luigi Calabresi was arresting anarchists outside the club on the Via Scaldasole.

On the night of 12 December 1969 around 84 people (nearly all of them anarchists, Giuseppe Pinelli being one of them) had been illegally arrested. On Monday 15 December the anarchist Pietro Valpreda was arrested and charged with the massacre. After serving more than three years in prison, he was to be found innocent and completely acquitted. The press embarked upon a campaign of libel and denigration, swallowing the theories coming from police headquarters.

Giuseppe Pinelli perished after three days of unrelenting questioning when he fell from the fourth floor of police headquarters on 15 December 1969. While strolling around the yard at police headquarters, Aldo Palumbo, the correspondent from *L'Unità*, heard a thud followed by two more thuds as a body fell from above, striking the first cornice on the wall, bouncing on to the one below and finally crashing to the ground, half on the paving stones of the courtyard and half on the soft earth of a flower-bed.

Up in the interrogation room were Inspector Luigi Calabresi, sergeants Panessa, Mucili, Mainardi, Caracutta and *carabiniere* Lieutenant Lograno: all of them were promoted on the grounds of "merit". Within 20 minutes, the police chief Marcello Guida, who back in 1942 had been a henchman of Benito Mussolini and governor of the political internment camp on Ventotene, had declared that Pinelli had taken his own life and that the suicide was tantamount to an admission of guilt because "his alibi had fallen through".

Over the first few months, three competing versions of how that suicide had come about were on offer. The anarchists immediately accused the police

of being murderers and fascists and the state of having been behind the bomb outrages. A campaign of counter-information got under way, with meetings, parades and books, tantamount to putting the State on trial.

It was discovered that at two seconds to midnight (that is, 2 minutes 2 seconds prior to Pinelli's fall), an ambulance had been called. The interrogation room measured 3.56 by 4.40 metres and held a number of wardrobes and desks and that, plus the presence of six bodies, made Pinelli's having darted for the window an impossibility. The odd thing is that the window was open (this was *in December* and *at night*). Pinelli struck the cornices on the way down. Meaning that there was no 'leap' involved. He fell without making a sound and without raising his hands to shield his head, as if he was already lifeless.

We charge the police with responsibility for the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, who had been arrested twice in breach of the fascist code's own regulations. We accuse the chief of police and the police commanders in Milan of having announced to the press that Pinelli's suicide was tantamount to proof of his guilt, and of deliberately concealing his alibi whilst declaring that it "had fallen through." The investigators themselves have admitted that they kept no written minutes of Pinelli's interrogation, so any potential record emerging later can be regarded as false. We accuse the Italian police of having deliberately prevented the investigation from proceeding under the supervision of a magistrate and with the participation of defence lawyers. We accuse the magistrates and police of having repeatedly breached the secrecy of the inquiry by peddling rumours and making accusations tending to defame an entirely innocent man in the eyes of public opinion; a man who was innocent but, in their eyes, guilty of being an anarchist.

We accuse the Italian State of criminal conspiracy targeting the anarchist Pietro Valpreda who for months was subjected to a ferocious moral and physical lynching, whilst what evidence investigators thought they had against him fell apart, item by item.

Such, in sum, is the anarchist accusation against the State and its machinery, whose intrinsically criminal and violent nature stands exposed.

### **Memories of Pinelli**

The figure of Pinelli has come to symbolize opposition to the established order in general and police powers in particular.

Down through the years various songs have been written about Pinelli – songs such as *The Ballad of Pinelli*, written by (young Mantua anarchists) G. Barozzi, E. Lazzarini and U. Zavanella) on the evening of his funeral and subsequently reworked, amplified and set to music by Joe Fallisi in 1969. Every year, various demonstrations are held in Milan to ensure that Pinelli and the Piazza Fontana outrage

are not forgotten: a plaque has been erected in the Piazza reading "To Giuseppe Pinelli, anarchist railwayman killed though innocent on the premises of Milan police headquarters: 16/12/1969"

The Pinelli incident also inspired a play by Dario Fo, *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (in actual fact the reference is almost explicitly to Andrea Salsedo). Enrico Baj's painting, entitled *The Pinelli Funeral* which was due to go on display in Milan on the very day that Calabresi was murdered, was also inspired by these events.

The Pinelli case has been dealt with at length by Camillo Cederna, a renowned journalist, who published his evidence in a book entitled *Pinelli. A Window on the Outrage*, published in 1971 and republished in 2004. Here is an extract from it (from a letter from Giuseppe Gozzini, the first Catholic conscientious objector and friend of Pinelli's): "He had followed the developments in my case in Catholic (and mainly Florentine) circles and was almost enthralled by the type of testimony. He was familiar (and not from hearsay) with movements and groups which, prompted by their non-violence, were keen to discuss with me the chances of non-violence's becoming an instrument for political action and conscientious objection a lifestyle, an ongoing social commitment. I used to speak to him about a society based on institutionalized selfishness, established disorder, class struggle and he would steer me back beyond the formulas to the root of the problem, being unwavering in his belief in man and the need to construct a new man, working from the bottom up. Later we met up on lots of occasions and the mainstays of our friendship were Fr Primo Mazzolari and Fr Lorenzo Milani, two misfit priests who have made their mark and not just on the church." "He lived off his labours, as poor as the birds of the air, staunch in his affections, hungry for friendship and he used to stun his friends with his inexhaustible humanity. I have never been one for labels. The one hung on Pinelli – individualist anarchist – is bland, not to say indecent. Actually he fought at all times against the individualism of tame consciences; he, the atheist, used to help Christians to believe (and so many of my Catholic friends can bear witness to this); he, the working man, taught intellectuals how to think, free at last of stifling schemas. He appreciated the social roots of injustice, but had no faith in radical changes and the sort of 'revolutions' that leave men they way they were before. Patient, candid, above board in his everyday commitment, he was a far cry from the fashionable extremisms and ideologies that fill the head but leave the heart empty. For that reason too, I got on well with him." by Sergio Falcone

*Sicilia Libertaria* (Ragusa) December 2008  
<https://www.sicilialibertaria.it/wp-content/uploads/sicilialibertaria279.pdf> ■

# Political Violence and Liberty : Stuart Christie on The German Guerilla

[The state of the world more than the history of the movement means anarchists frequently discuss political violence. These texts were printed anonymously in *The German guerrilla; terror, reaction, and resistance* by Cienfuegos Press and Soil of Liberty in 1981. We assume that, had they been written by anyone other than Stuart, a pseudonym (at least) would have been used. They also match his comment that 'any justification terrorism – as practised today – had as a tool for social change has long been debased.' [‘A time for anarchy’ *City Limits* 22-28 April 1983, reprinted in *A life for Anarchy*.]

## Preface

There are many important reasons for publishing this interview with Joachim Klein, the German guerrilla who was wounded during the kidnapping of the OPEC ministers in Vienna. Klein is trying to ‘come in from the cold’ and obviously this influences some of what he says, but it does not invalidate the basic points.

Such rare accounts are vital if we are to make up our minds on both the moral and strategic aspects of armed resistance. Any form of ‘party line’ on this question is abhorrent because an individual must take up a position according to her own beliefs. But that doesn’t mean that we cannot clarify the issues in libertarian terms, and for this purpose we have included a short postscript examining political violence.

Klein’s account of life underground is fascinating for, without dramatising it, he conveys the atmosphere through his concise answers. One of the most important aspects which emerges is the loss of personal identity through living a false life with false names and documents. Another is the desperately restricted circle of people with whom the guerrilla can discuss his feelings. Both of these products of secrecy cut him off from reality and thus make him lose touch with the very people he is trying to help. This armed elite cannot avoid having an incestuous circuit of ideas which must be influenced by the need to bolster their own morale, and that will automatically warp anyone’s view of events.

The very nature of clandestine existence and warfare has an appalling effect on the minds of those who carry it out. To trust nobody and to rely on the gun at every moment to bolster one’s confidence gives the individual concerned a totally different perspective. Secrecy, short-term ‘military necessity’ and opportunist alliances change values and moral judgements. How else does one find anti-fascist

guerrillas at Entebbe separating Jew from gentile by allowing themselves to say that anyone with a Jewish name must be a Zionist?

Klein accuses his former comrades of being mercenaries but offers no details to support this apart from references to the luxurious life style to which some apparently became accustomed. It would be fairer to say that their sense of values was altered by the life which they had to lead, but this is a criticism of the inevitable effects of such a life. It would be completely wrong to impugn their original motives on these grounds. Once again we see the (inevitable?) distortion – the false identity and false environment which create a fake outlook, and which in turn distances and alienates them from their comrades and from their former idealistic selves. We already know that, however lofty the motive, *power corrupts*. Secrecy and violence are its two most important ingredients.

## Postscript: political violence and liberty

If the first casualty of war and conflict is truth, then so is the meaning of many words in the political vocabulary, and in the present orchestration of opinion the term ‘terrorism’ is being deliberately warped. Even that authoritarian apologist Lord Chalfont said recently that ‘one of the interesting aspects of the phenomenon of political violence is the remarkable difference between the image and the reality’. Anyone who now dares to lift a finger against the State is indiscriminately labelled a terrorist with every horrific nuance that the word has been enrobed with by the media.

Political violence takes many forms but it comes from three main areas of motive or source, and these are probably more important when attempting to define it than the resulting actions. These areas could be described as state terrorism; revolutionary terrorism, and violent political reaction. Terrorism in its strict sense is a policy of using terror to achieve particular ends. (An act of indiscriminate violence for its own satisfaction or to cause panic for its own sake cannot be regarded as political whatever the motives claimed retrospectively). Terrorism is a weapon of compulsion and is therefore a means adopted by a State to preserve and increase power, or by an authoritarian revolutionary group to obtain power. A violent political reaction is an act of armed resistance against specific repression without any programme of achieving ends through force.

There is no need to cite a host of examples when referring to state terrorism. It is used by authoritarian governments to enforce unpopular policies, suppress dissent and establish the power of their ruling elite. And because the State is automatically a reactionary organisation being committed to the maintenance of power, the description a ‘revolutionary State’ is a grotesque contradiction in terms.

The State claims the monopoly on violence by

saying that it is inherent in man and therefore must be controlled and used only by an organisation which is 'above man'. It is not necessary to list the scientific evidence which refutes this theory of innate violence, but it is worth remembering Proudhon's statement that order is the daughter of liberty, not the mother, for there will always be violence and disorder while man is oppressed. Of course the State cannot recognise this or else its whole justification for existing is destroyed. So instead of removing the causes for violence in present society it is perfecting methods for 'removing violence' from man. These include Operant Conditioning, Delgado's electrodes for implanting in brains, drugs and narco-hypnosis, lobotomy and electro-convulsive therapy. This is their new arsenal which goes far beyond the mass apathy inculcated through the media's diet of trivia that clips the wings of the people's imagination.

It was the Vietnam War which showed the most flagrant example of the State's hypocrisy of violence. Another country had 'to be destroyed in order to be saved', as one American general explained. And on their own side recruits were subjected to 'Life-Value' treatment to reduce their reluctance to kill (surely the greatest example of contemporary double-speak). And then when these soldiers returned from Vietnam many had to have the instilled violence cut or electrocuted out of their brains.

We are also beginning to see the appearance of a new means of increasing governmental power and that is State-manipulated 'revolutionary' violence. It is a strategy which has developed out of black propaganda, or psych-ops. In this country General Kitson has advocated the assassination of 'moderate' trades union leaders so as to blame their deaths on the extreme left. It is a tactic used by the Selous Scouts in Rhodesia where they commit atrocities dressed as black nationalist guerrillas, and it was used by Green Beret trained Vietnamese. But the strategy of manipulated or faked terrorism was demonstrated most spectacularly in Italy when the Italian Secret Service set off bombs killing innocent people, and then tried to blame it on Anarchists.

Revolutionary terrorism can basically be defined as the use of fear as a means to obtain political power. It is the policy which is used by a group believing that virtually any methods are justified by the end. History has shown us that such ruthlessness can only finish in a dictatorship as bad or worse than the regime it replaces. It is the inevitable extension of a belief in doctrinal infallibility.

A violent political reaction is not authoritarian when it is resistance against violent repression. If it goes beyond that and begins to develop into a policy of achieving objectives through force alone, then it has started to move towards revolutionary terrorism. It is into this grey area that several revolutionary groups have moved developing a retrospective justification for their actions. For example in

Germany we have seen two contradictory rationales, one saying that if the State is provoked into showing its true repressive nature a spontaneous revolutionary movement will spring up, and the other saying that although the time is not yet ripe it will be too late if the correct moment is waited for. Both of these ideas are short sighted to say the least.

Firstly, the idea of provoking the parliamentary state is a rehash of the 'detonator-explosive charge' theory and makes the dangerous assumption that the State's reaction will automatically manufacture the 'explosive charge' while the reservoir of potential support is not alienated by the revolutionary action. Events have shown that this not only fails in practice, but even strengthens the State's hand in obtaining a widespread acceptance of further repressive measures. Any such policy cannot succeed while the working class has not yet been convinced of a viable alternative society for they will not understand or sympathise with the intentions of the revolutionaries. Kropotkin's insistence that no violent act should be committed unless its purpose was clearly understood by the average worker cannot be ignored.

Secondly, the idea of not delaying the armed struggle for fear of leaving it too late justifies falling into the beguiling trap of resistance for resistance sake. The purpose of a revolutionary is to build a new society, so the armed struggle must only be undertaken within that context and not for its own temptation. Without preparing the ground properly in a Parliamentary State by showing how a libertarian society can succeed, the armed struggle will not be understood or supported by the workers. They will reject it and be pushed into the arms of the very State which is oppressing them. The other fundamental mistake which revolutionaries tend to make is only to view the struggle from their own side. The most effective strategy is always to weaken the governing class's ability to resist by discrediting it and wearing it down. While the impatient and furious attack, which so easily results from bitter desperation, usually plays straight into their hands, the only way of destroying the morale of security forces is through boredom and making them look ridiculous. Dramatic action makes them feel important and needed. It provides the very excitement which attracted them to the job in the first place.

The situation in a dictatorship is obviously very different for the spirit of resistance will already exist and the working class will understand the reasons for armed action even if they have not yet been convinced that a libertarian society is possible. There they see that when power comes from the barrel of a gun it can only be fought with a gun. But in a parliamentary state when power comes from deception it can only be fought effectively by truth and propaganda of the deed relevant to the situation, i.e. demonstrating that a better society is possible despite the misrepresentation by authoritarians.

This brings us to the central problem facing libertarian revolutionaries in a ‘liberal-democratic’ State. Herzen said that ‘the truly free man creates his own morality’, and this is totally accurate when we realise that the methods and objectives of an Anarchist have to be unfailingly consistent. A libertarian society can never be imposed by force and destroying the State is insufficient, (or again in Herzen’s words: ‘To dismantle the Bastille stone by stone will not of itself make free men out of the prisoners’). We cannot follow the American general’s sick paradox of destroying to save. We must recognise that the new society must start to grow before the old dies, and that we cannot ‘transfer moral responsibility from our shoulders to an unpredictable future order’. Only a soldier of the State claims to be released from personal morality on taking his oath of allegiance. However, we all know that a ruling elite will not give up its power voluntarily so it would appear that we are faced with an impossible contradiction. And yet facing that very contradiction will not just show us that our actions and morality are indivisible, but it will point to the only way a truly free society can be created. Anarchists have shied away from blueprints of a libertarian society rejecting the idea as authoritarian. But it is only authoritarian if the structure proposed is liable to give power to individuals or groups within it, and obviously it is a horrific travesty if anyone attempts to impose it by force. Discussing theoretical schemes is essential in that people can decide more clearly on what they want to work towards. And yet the only way to prepare a libertarian society is by starting to develop one within the old environment so that it is shown to work as a viable and better alternative. We have no right to expect support until we do this for revolutionaries have misled the people too often in the past. It is the only way of proving that a social revolution does not mean exchanging one set of masters for another. When we have this to point to, then and only then can the workers in a Parliamentary state sympathise with an armed struggle. Without this demonstration they will be completely alienated, preferring the devil they know. And yet we will certainly have to fight at some stage, of that there is little doubt, and we must be prepared for it. But to fight before we have built something to show what we are fighting for is to resign the moral and propaganda struggle before we start. And without that, the technocratic state will wash us effortlessly down the drain of history.

[*The German guerrilla; terror, reaction, and resistance* is available at <https://archive.org/details/TheGermanGuerrilla> ] ■

## 1926: The Watershed of Class History

Celebrate 1926? It was a defeat arising from a betrayal. Celebrate what? Only the parting of the ways for the labour movement. Here it was above all the General Strike that was a decisive test for the workers’ movement. Before then, with all its faults, there was a working class movement. Afterwards it disintegrated, and the name was taken over by class enemies... It was not the General Strike which caused this to happen, but it marked the process by which it happened here. It was a watershed of our class history. There were many currents within the working class movement. Not all went into the major sea of parliamentary reformism. But those that did were channelled off into minor streams.

We neglect at our peril the old syndicalist traditions which existed within the British working class movement before 1926. This is why, in ‘Black Flag’ we have always accentuated the need to discover our old traditions and history. To the extent socialism was a working-class movement, it was libertarian – just as in other countries. It was the canalisation of socialism by the middle-classes into planned [caus?]es that caused libertarian socialism to become a backwater explored only by sectarians.

During the First World War the working-class had rejected the bureaucratic top-heavy and reformist trade union leadership which had compromised itself with the State. The shop stewards’ movement had developed as a decentralising shop-floor corrective. In effect, there was one vertical movement (controlled from above downwards) and one horizontal movement cutting across it (controlled from the shop floor). This existed formally in many other countries: to ensure the ‘vertical’ movement was triumphant the full force of the State was used against the workers to whatever extent was necessary. Ever since the one gauge of democracy has been – not the extent to which society is managed by those who make it up – but the extent to which repression had to be used against the people to make them accept the fact of rule from above.

The difference between ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ unionism was informal in this country; but it existed nevertheless. The TUC managed, after 1926, to break with the last vestiges of syndicalism and of independent action. More than ever they leaned to parliamentary participation in seeking to gain the struggles they could not gain by industrial action. The establishment had a bad fright in 1926 – it took them a long time to get over it – but the TUC General Council was even more frightened than they of the possibilities which the conflict had evoked. This is what made them lean more heavily on the Labour Party, which had been infiltrated and conquered by the middle class intellectual authoritarianism of the



Fabians.

The influence of the Communist Party was from the first a treason to the whole conception of the working class movement. It made 'revolution' synonymous with State dictatorship. It tried to impose its own authority – not succeeding in Britain, it subordinated the struggle in 1926 to the leadership of the TUC General Council and thereafter to parliamentary socialism. It diverted all struggle into what were presumed to be 'Left' causes but were all concerned with the defence of the Russian dictatorship.

When the working class movement became Statist it ceased to be working class. It was pushed into defensive positions in the thirties – the fear of fascism, the struggle against sub-standard housing, the battle against unemployment. These were the battles of the 'Old Left' – succeeded by the 'New Left', still with Statist ideas, always with the fallback of supporting the Labour Party, still supporting dictatorial movement abroad, still wanting to subordinate the working class to an intellectual middle-class leadership – now a student one.

It plays on the fear of fascism when only its ghost appears; it struggles to get into sub-standard housing, by squatting rather than get out of it; and on the subject of unemployment it is divided between those who want the 'right to work' and those who want the right 'never to work again'!

One looks with amazement at all that is left of the conception of the movement fifty years after 1926. What has it to do with us?, we ask. The workers ask it too. What has it to do with the class struggle or with social liberation? It deals in State reforms, in liberal measures, in State participation, in national liberation, in support for tyranny everywhere provided its labelled 'Left' by Moscow. But of the elements of democracy and socialism, not even to speak of syndicalism or anarchism, not a trace – but one.

It still pays lip service to workers control from time to time, and next year it is proposed that this will become 'law'... the Old and the New Left will be at one in the Labour Party scheme for 'management participation'. You want workers' control? You shall have it... we shall simply give the name to something utterly different. Just as in Russia where the name 'soviets' implying something democratic and socialist – has been taken by the State and given to something utterly and completely in contrast! Just as in Germany where the name of socialism and of 'folk' – the people – was given to something utterly different to socialism and opposed to the people!

So it will be here. The name of the cause that cannot be eradicated will be taken as a label for its opposite. That is the very stuff of State oppression.

In fifty years not only have we gained nothing, we have lost everything, so far as aspirations to freedom

are concerned The material benefits consequent upon the efforts of civilisation as a whole – lauded as being due to the State in totalitarian countries or to the Chancellor in power for the time being in parliamentary ones – mean that, inevitably, our living conditions have improved. But as for getting the whole benefits for ourselves we have taken many paces back.

We have not lost our traditions though the Statists would rewrite history. But we need beginnings too.

[Albert Meltzer]

*Black Flag* Vol.IV, No.8 (May 1976)

<https://libcom.org/article/black-flag-vol-04-08-may-1976> ■

## Elena Melli Tribute [1946]

Not unexpectedly – in that we had guessed from her recent letters at the awful, relentless ailment that was eating away at her – news has reached us of the death of Elena Melli, the loving companion and, over his last twelve years the devoted nurse of Errico Malatesta who owed it to her that he did not end his life as a battler in the direst loneliness.

In the hospital in Carrara where she was being treated, she did not have access – due to the lack of medicines and a diet appropriate to her illness – to all the treatments and remedies she needed to ease her suffering. She was not yet 56 years old. Young, sturdy and daring, she could be seen in the years after the first war in the front ranks in street demonstrations, imbued with an ardent belief that made her heedless of danger. When fascism came to power, she found herself, so to speak, sequestered in Rome with Errico. Two policemen kept watch on their apartment day and night and followed them through the streets when they ventured outside. Not that that stopped Mussolini from announcing that the dangerous anarchist Malatesta, feared by all the world's police forces, was living as a completely free man in Italy!

After Errico died in 1932, poor Elena suffered the grief of seeing her daughter marry a fascist. He must have been the one to forward to the Duce Malatesta's letters and books; in spite of an offer made through the Dutch Legation to purchase them at a good price, he destroyed them. After that Elena did not rest until she had Errico's body lifted from his grave and placed in a columbarium. After which she had her own ferocious persecution to contend with. Since there were no grounds on which to clap her in prison or banish her, they had her declared mad and locked up in an asylum in Rome. The doctors treating her declined to diagnose her as mentally ill and had time and again signed her discharge papers, but on reaching the gate lodge she was turned around. How long this disgusting game was played out we do not know and whenever she was finally released, along came the war and all correspondence was

interrupted. Once it resumed, she wrote to us from Apuania, to where she had been reassigned pending leave to go back to La Spezia. She still displayed the same belief, the same love and enthusiasm, but then illness overcame her, an extremely painful disease that destroyed her sturdy physique.

Trans. PS.

‘Our bereavements: Elena Melli’ from *Il Risveglio Anarchico* (Geneva) 03/01/1946 ■

## Anarchist History roundup July 2024

The Summer 2024 *Black Flag Anarchist Review* is out <https://www.blackflag.org.uk/>

Includes gems ‘John Turner, anarchist union leader’ by Barry Pateman and ‘The “Trial of the Thirty”, the failed trial of anarchy’ by Constance Bantman.

*For Stuart* This August will be the fourth anniversary of the death of our friend and comrade Stuart Christie. We have just posted the Introduction to *A Life For Anarchy: A Stuart Christie Reader* <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5tb4dg>

*The Transmetropolitan Review* is always worth a look. ‘Reading a century-old anarchist newspaper, the last thing I expected to do was laugh, but as I read *Why?*, I laughed my ass off more than once.’ <https://thetransmetropolitanreview.wordpress.com/2024/05/27/why-a-tacoma-anarchist-newspaper/>

Anarchist Red Cross: ‘An Ephemeral Look at Russian Anarchist Life in the United States’ <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/427/article/930372> tells a story from one anarchist postcard (paywalled). *Behind the Bars*, Published by the Anarchist Red Cross Society, New York, January 1924 is now online <https://archive.org/details/behindbarsissue>

AK Press have just published *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in America : A Historical Review and Personal Reminiscences* by Joseph Cohen. Originally published in Yiddish in 1945, it was translated by Esther Dolgoff in the late seventies. Editor Kenyon Zimmer explains how it was finally published and, pointing out ‘Today even most experts in anarchist history would be at a loss to identify most of the people Cohen references’, gives a heroic number of footnotes as ‘starting points for future researchers’. <https://www.akpress.org/the-jewish-anarchist-movement-in-america.html>

We keep scanning ephemeral treasures. You might like to check out ‘An Englishman’s Home’ and leaflets by Ted Leggatt and John Lowden Macartney <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/9320sp> ■

## Calverton Colliery [Picketing report, 1984]

Much has been written about womens’ actions during the present miners dispute, but it has concentrated on ‘traditional roles’, such as in the kitchen and demonstrating passively. Whilst these functions remain vital, women on picket lines have been virtually ignored, although many have been on the ‘Front Line’ since day one of the strike. This action is now spreading, and police handling of the situation is interesting.

On June 27th a hundred women from various parts of the Nottingham and Yorkshire coalfields converged on Calverton Colliery near Mansfield. At that particular pit only 60 out of 1,300 miners are on strike, and attitudes towards strikers and their families are both vicious and vindictive.

When the first contingent of about fifty of us arrived, there were twenty to thirty police waiting, including a senior officer (amazing how they seem to know where people are going to be!). We sang and chanted for fifteen minutes and cheered as other women arrived. This proved too much for the protectors of law and order who asked us to move. We refused and they tried to push us. Our ‘line’ held and they had to think of a new tactic. Response? Reinforcements. Now we were outnumbered and were pushed, not without a struggle, to the opposite side of the road. More police reinforcements and we were surrounded.

Scabs were arriving to go on the night shift, and we were not happy about being hemmed in, unable to get near the scabs let alone put forward a point of view. So a push took place to try and break police lines. Arrests began to take place as women were dragged out – still struggling. Unfortunately, not being used to this sort of activity we weren’t really sure how to break through the lines. The police are used to containing or at least, facing this kind of action, and whilst their task wasn’t made easy for them by the women, their line held.

A senior officer was heard to tell his ‘men’ to treat us like men, and later, not to make too many arrests because he’d be the laughing stock of the force.

Another push took place, and the police knocked out an elderly woman, and although allowed to carry her across the road, they didn’t call an ambulance. Luckily a nurse was on the picket line, and was able to carry out limited treatment. More arrests, but we were unable to break through, and the circle tightened. We tried to push back against this, giving rise to the loud comment on a certain uniformed persons erection (not so politely put) much to his consternation and embarrassment and amusement of his colleagues.

A lorry (mobile prison) arrived and the scabs were arriving by the bus. A further push and this time a woman not actually in that particular push was picked

out and dragged out. She fought against this, and other women helped her. We managed to get her free – but the police ran in, kicked her in the back and pulled her – again having to fight off the women. This time they had no choice but to call an ambulance because she was in such a bad way, and the older woman was taken to hospital. Eventually we were allowed to go. More than twelve had been arrested. Two were in hospital.

The arrested women were allowed to see a solicitor at 4.45pm June 28th, and appeared in court at 5pm. Although they didn't have their photographs taken, fingerprints were, and they were released on conditional bail.

Many of us at Calverton on Wednesday night were not used to such action, and some decided that they wouldn't do it again. This of course is good, because if you make that decision, those who want to picket will know that those present are of similar mind and will not be troubled by people standing by whilst others are knocked about by police. There will not be the 'spectator' problem that the men have had, whereby you think everyone's with you when in actual fact many are just there to make the numbers up. This will lead to a more militant women's force, independent of the Union, prepared to take autonomous action.

Three of the women were charged with assault on a police constable, and four with obstructing the police, the rest with threatening behaviour. All were released on conditional bail that states they are not allowed into Nottingham.

*Black Flag : Anarchist Fortnightly* vol VII, 6c  
No.114 [July 1984] ■

## Miners - the latest [Report on on visit to Nottinghamshire, 1984]

A couple of weeks ago I went up to Nottinghamshire with some other women to lend some support to the miners. These are some observations and thoughts about what I saw.

The strikers and their families seemed very determined to stick it out despite the hardships they are having to endure: most of them receive little or no State benefit, and are having to sell T.V.'s, videos, cars etc. to get by. (It's easy to say 'I can't afford a fucking video recorder' but it's hard to experience such a drop in your standard of living). Even so, from what I saw, they can't afford to eat enough, and some of the single men (who get no State money at all) have not been able to manage and have gone back to work with the other 2/3 of Notts miners.

A lot has been written about the role of women in the strike; people have begun to realise that everyone's help and co-operation is needed to win the strike. Women can picket etc. as well as cook and wash-up.

On the other hand, the striking men could help with things like cooking, but on the whole they didn't seem to. I was told by one woman that 'the men are useless at cooking'. There seemed to be a passive acceptance on the part of the women that this was *their* role and not the men's. Also, on the one picket I went on the women were shouting things like 'Maggie Thatcher's got one, Ian Macgregor is one', which I found a bit objectionable.

A pleasant exception was the couple I stayed with who seemed far more aware of things like sexism. The bloke was a bit of an anarchist. He didn't have a blind faith in Scargill, as he thought many did, and he was slagging off groups like the S.W.P. who turn up on picket lines with the sole aim of recruiting and selling 'the paper', and generally trying to take over. They've been told to fuck off by pickets in Derbyshire and elsewhere who got fed up with this authoritarianism.

We have just been shown a document produced by Doncaster N.U.M. Strike Committee titled 'Bores Under the Floors' (as opposed to 'reds under the beds'), which is a criticism of the various lefty groups 'currently invading the pit villages'. It says that

*'almost without exception they see themselves as "Marxist" prophets, dispensing their tablets of gold, to the untutored masses, who, to their minds anyway will flounder without their "expert" advice and guidance.*

*'They see the masses in general (and the miners as no exception) as a gullible, inexperienced morass, organised in trade unions destined to sap their energies, led by fat self-interested bureaucrats and totally unable to see the road ahead without their clear-sighted vision and light. They are political self-appointed messiahs.'*

It goes on to personally deal with the various groups in the same unflattering way. The S.W.P. have been trying to take over the strike, whereas the Workers Revolutionary Party wants to 'urge us into a defeat, get us smashed, and then pick up the pieces to build their own outfit by blaming it all on the leaders of ours. Nice'. Of the Left groups only the New Communist Party (Stalinists), Militant and Socialist Action have been helping the miners in the way the miners want. With the aim of gaining credibility and building 'the Party' of course.

But the activities of these lefty groups is the least of the miners' worries. Police harassment is an everyday occurrence. Striking Notts miners have to carry around with them a brass disc with their clock number on it, which they have to show everytime they're stopped by the filth, perhaps to prove that they're genuine miners and not 'outside agitators', or maybe the police just want to humiliate and inconvenience them. After the dawn picket, I was in a car with three strikers on their way to get a free breakfast at another village. We were stopped at a road-block: the police took the drivers licence, asked where they were going and why, and wouldn't believe

the real reason ('I-am-here-to-keep-the-Queen's-Peace-I-believe-you-intend-to-picket-which-is-likely-to-cause-a-breach-of-the-peace-blah-blah-blah...'). So we had to turn back without the miners getting any breakfast. Before returning the licence having examined it thoroughly this copper wanted to know the names and dates of birth of everyone else in the car. The reason he gave was that if any of us were going to complain about him later he would need those details at that moment!! We had other theories as to his reasons and we all refused.

Also, on the picket line we were not allowed to shout 'scab' or swear, unless we wanted to get arrested. The scabs were instead called 'little monkeys' and 'bounders' (!).

We should not be surprised at this policy of harassment since the police are just doing the job they were created for: to control the working class and protect their rulers. The army has already been used in a subtle way (squaddies on picket lines dressed as policemen) but if it comes to it the ruling class will send in the army on a greater scale, putting into practice on the British working class what they've been perfecting on the Catholic working class in N. Ireland for the last 15 years. The legal system has its role to play as well, of course. For, as General Frank Kitson, the former chief of the British Army in Northern Ireland, wrote in his book 'Low-Intensity Operations', *'the law should be used as just another weapon in the government's arsenal. The law should be used for the disposal of unwanted members of the public'*.

Because of this inevitable repression the miners need all the support they can get. This means being active, by picketing (with no strings attached), trashing cop-shops (as has happened in Yorkshire), going on strike in sympathy, and generally extending the struggle, as well as the more mundane, but very important, shaking buckets, leafleting, organising meetings/ benefits and good old-fashioned talking to people.

The miners are very grateful for *true* solidarity. Back to that N.U.M. report:

*'It will come as a surprise to many but the Anarchists have in fact been far more helpful than many of the self-proclaimed saviours of the working class... they have spent what time and energy they have to actually helping us, in the ways we asked to be helped... when WE have asked they have showed up on picket lines, without the newspapers the others on the left usually carry ... In addition you will find that when push comes to shove in dangerous situations on the picket lines, the 'Left' are way back with an armful of papers, whilst the Anarchist is stood to the end with you'*.

'O.A.' From *Alive & Kicking* : Cambridge anarchist news no. 1 (1984 [Before September]). ■

## Whose Strike?

### SO IT'S NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU, EH?

There's been a lot of nonsense talked by people who have refused to aid the Miners' Strike this summer because it's 'political'. They won't extend solidarity because they say they don't want to be a pawn in Arthur Scargill's war.

The strike is 'political', we make no bones about that. But then workers have had to struggle for everything we have gained as a class over the years. In this sense every strike is political. Otherwise why are strikes necessary at all? Why doesn't the system give the workers their rights without the need to struggle? The politics behind the strike certainly don't embarrass Thatcher's mob, that's why they're prepared to sink billions of pounds and thousands of boys in blue into defeating the strike.

The myth that the Miners' Strike is just wrecker Scargill's personal war with the system has its source in the Establishment and their friends or Fleet Street. Unfortunately, many working people have swallowed hook line and sinker the lie that Scargill has pressured the Miners out on strike, and is keeping them out by denying them a National Ballot so beloved of those great democrats Thatcher and McGregor (or for that matter Kinnock). But the facts of the strike tell a different story. The strike was not the work of NUM Generals but was built by rank and file miners and families up and down the country ever since. The vast majority of miners are behind the strike. Ordinary working people don't suffer real hardship for over seven months unless they feel an issue is worth the sacrifice.

This isn't Arthur Scargill's war. This is a fight by the miners and their families to protect their livelihoods and communities. And it's also a fight for all the working class. A victory for the miners against the Government will be a victory also for over four million unemployed, dockers, steelworkers, engineers, healthworkers, housewives – all of us. A defeat will make things for us all harder in 1985. A victory against the miners will give the Govt. the confidence to launch an offensive on jobs, workers and union rights that will make the last five years seem tame by comparison. That is why the Miners' Strike is political. That's why we are all political.

*Direct Action* No.19 October 1984.

## Kinnochio speaks and his nose starts to grow

Every time Neil Kinnock's name was mentioned at the miners rally at Aberaven it was greeted with a chorus of boos and hisses. 'Ramsey McKinnock'[1] posters were prominent as were cries of 'scab' and 'Judas' whenever the Labour leader was referred to. When

Norman Willis chimed in with his pathetic TUC compromises, he was greeted with shouts of ‘off, off, off’ and the famous noose<sup>[2]</sup> was dangled in front of him (though not close enough in our opinion). At long last there are signs that a large number of miners are thoroughly sickened with the behaviour of the TUC and Labour Party scabs – and may be able to make the first real break of a significant section of the British working class from its ‘own’ supposed party.

It has been sickening in the past to watch striking miners at rallies applaud Labour Party speakers who only the day before have appeared on T.V. condemning the same men for ‘violence’. Now that they are beginning to get their come-uppance, it is of vital importance to keep this process going. Judas Kinnock and the rest of his scumbag Labour cronies (Kauffman-uugh: – don’t he make you want to throw-up) must be hounded and shouted down wherever they try to speak. Kinnock says that violence is alien to the British working class movement – the fucking ignorant tosser, what about the Luddites, the Chartists the Captain swing riots, Tonypandy, etc. It’s alien to him because it might fuck up his chances of becoming the next Prime Minister, who would act like all the other Labour P.M.’s and attack the working class in the interests of the bosses.

The only difference with Kinnock is that he’s moved so far to the right before even getting into power! The rest, Wilson, Foot, etc., usually have the decency to wait till the doors of No. 10 close behind them. At Stoke-on-Trent Kinnock tried to prove what a fearless, gusty, valleys boy fighter he was – by addressing an audience of hand-picked middle-class Labour Party members who were guaranteed to cheer his defence of middle class horror against working class nastiness and violence. Of 1700 tickets distributed at the rally 1500 went to L.P. members and only 200 to NUM members – yet this was passed off as though Kinnock was bravely addressing an audience of hostile miners. Many miners walked out in disgust rather than listen to more of his scab apologetics, others loudly snored through it, and others screamed scab and Judas at him backed up by a hard core of 30 anarchists from Stoke, Sheffield, Bradford, and London who managed to ‘obtain’ some tickets outside (i.e. grabbed them out of some L.P. jerk’s hand) Biggest applause of the night came when the chairman asked if people wanted to leave owing to a bomb scare – ‘Not if it’s under Kinnocks seat’ shouted someone!

So, now is our chance to keep sticking the boot in the Labour Party. But what alternative do we offer people like us? Unlike the leftie groups with their party programmes and ‘correct’ analysis we don’t see ourselves as separate from the rest of the working class, as its leadership as the leftie groups see themselves. The working class is quite capable of getting rid of the bosses, and the miners of running their strike without the benefit of advice from the

would be little-Lenin’s. The mass picketing, the communal kitchens, the women’s support groups, the Hit-Squads is our alternative to the Labour Party and the lefties – a working class struggle in the hands of the working class.

We have argued in the last two issues of *Class War* that the best support we can give to the miners is to open up a second front by rioting in the inner cities. This is still the case. There is no prospect of any other organised section of the working class taking industrial action in solidarity with the miners – so the sooner we get out on to the streets with our bricks and bottles the sooner they’ll have to withdraw police from the mining areas.

In the pit villages in Yorkshire it’s not just miners who are attacking scabs, erecting barricades, attacking police stations. Large numbers of unemployed youths and kids as young as 10 are joining in. This is the unity that’s needed to win. On many nights the rioting spreads to the right around South Yorkshire with people rampaging from one spot to the next. It is getting nearer to the outskirts of large towns like Sheffield and Pontefract – once it reaches to centres the police will be fucked. The sooner we can help this to happen and then to spread riot style to the other major cities the sooner both us, and the miners, will win. In his report as commissioner of the Met. Police, Kenneth Newman stated that keeping public order was the No. 1 priority of the Met. Police. He listed 52 potential riot situations which have been nipped in in the bud *in London alone this year*. Every area of London had its own I.R.U. permanently patrolling in vans to deal quickly with such situations. The authorities know that they’d be well fucked if inner-city rioting breaks out at the same time as the miners strike. We know that too – so let’s see the old year go out with a bang.

### Notes

1, A reference to former Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald, who refused to support the 1926 General Strike.

2, On 13 November 1984, a hangman’s noose was slowly lowered from the rafters of a meeting hall until it rested close to the head of TUC general secretary Norman Willis. Willis was in the process of denouncing miners for picket line violence.

From *Class War* 12 (late 1984)

<https://libcom.org/article/kinnockio-speaks-and-his-nose-starts-grow> ■

## More Hell Raisers Needed

Police sealed off Hatfield Main Colliery entrance and fought off attempts to stop scabs by a mass picket organised locally. Local NUM organiser, Dave Douglass was snatched by the police, but the pickets retaliated. Media coverage was nil.

Several members of the BLACK FLAG collective

were eyewitnesses to the incident, had been invited to the picket and a social (the night before). At the social, a contingent of Nottingham miners were welcomed, as were ourselves (our group included several members of the Direct Action Movement and comrades from South London). A good time was had by all. A BBC crew filmed the evening's entertainment for a slot on their 'Real Lives' series.[1] Behind a backdrop of a banner proclaiming '1926: TUC General Council Traitors. 1984: TUC General Council Traitors', a motley of performers sang songs, told jokes, etc. Dave Douglass did a turn, Sandra Kerr from London sang the 'Unwaged Maintenance Engineer', 'Which Side Are You On' and others, a Labour man sang an anti-Labour Party song called 'Just One More Chance', the only low moments being when a couple of blokes did some anti-women and racist jokes but some good ones against the National Coal Board and scabs. It all ended with the usual 'Here We go'.

The next morning we gathered early at the local Welfare Hall for a pre-march rally. A Channel 4 crew filmed the packed hall and several speeches were made., An ASLEF[2] delegate told those gathered that railway workers had blacked oil (although most of it is carried by truck and by direct pipeline). After a bit of a whine by a local Labour MP, Dave Douglass gave a rousing speech urging miners and support groups to organise to visit workplaces to widen industrial action. His final words were, 'We don't just want fundraisers any long[er] – much needed as they are – we want HELLRAISERS, and more guerrilla resistance'.

The 600 of so of us at the rally then marched out of the hall, past the gauntlet of trotskyist paper-sellers, and walked the mile or so to the pit entrance. We were followed by a convoy of police vans and riot vehicles. As those of us near the front of the march got to where the entrance was a wall of about 40 cops stood in our way. Immediately they grabbed Dave Douglass and three others and dragged them off behind police lines. We then went straight for the police lines. Cops were kicked, punched and stones were thrown. But within seconds the police convoy had sped up and pushed through the marchers, forcing a gap towards the cops on foot. We managed to drag a woman back who the cops had tried to nick, but then we realised that we would all get trapped between the foot cops on one side, the police convoy on another, and a house on a third side, so we regrouped and went for the tail end of the police convoy, which by then was being attacked from all sides. As the last van (a jeep) sped through a couple of miners managed to grab a petrol can and some police baggage and throw them at the windscreen.

For the next 45 minutes we stood our ground while waiting for the scab bus to come by. But some outsiders had already begun to drift away and a contingent of Workers Revolutionary Party members made a dash for their coach before the trouble began. This left about 300-400 of us to face what was by now

a similar number of cops who had their back-up of riot equipment in their vans as well as dogs. There were few missiles around to grab and the roads were all sealed off except for one which the cop vans could easily charge down.

Suddenly the scab coach appeared, there was a big surge forward and stones went flying for the cops. A few hit their target and some vans got hit too. The police retreated to their vans for protection and we lobbed more stones. We then realised that this was only the lull before the storm: we were now few and a large reserve of cops were still waiting in their vans. All of us then began to drift back without getting set upon. For Hatfield the day's events were just one of many such intrusions by the police on their liberty.

*Black Flag : Anarchist Fortnightly* Vol.VII, No.125  
28/01/1985

#### Notes

1, presumably

[https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/service\\_bbc\\_one\\_london/1985-02-06#at-21.25](https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/service_bbc_one_london/1985-02-06#at-21.25)

2, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen ■

## London, England [Letter about anarchist actions in support of the miners' strike; bulletin contents]

Dear Comrades/Sisters and Brothers,

First of all England is subject to creeping Tory fascism. Not only have we seen the once mighty Mineworkers Union fall victim to Thatcher's policies but now we have more stringent laws against trade unionism, picketing, etc. There is a new Public Order Bill coming up which provides for up to 10 years in prison for riotous behaviour. Since the defeat of the miners, a depression seems to have engulfed our movement. In Britain, though there is more class consciousness than in North America, it's at a pretty low ebb, which is why the organized working class watched the miners stoned into submission without lifting a finger or striking a blow.

We in the Direct Action Movement were pretty active with the miners' strike, collecting funds, helping on picket lines, etc. Consequently anarcho-syndicalism (anarchism) got a good name with the miners who were sick of the so-called 'Left' who only pushed their particular brand of 'bossism.' The international anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, Germany, Sweden, Holland and Italy were all acting in solidarity, sending money, providing holidays for miners' kids, organizing tours for miners delegations etc., all without the support of the Mineworkers/NUM bureaucracy.

Finally can I add a plea to the members of SRAF to please write letters describing political events, opinions, etc. and not person trivia? Everyone has personal problems and gripes but the pages of our anarchist federation bulletin is not the place for them.

I suggest the SRAF editorial people exercise a discreet censorship (dare I say it?) and refuse to print personal trivia which has no bearing on the political arena. Either SRAF continues to act as a talking shop for uncommitted loonies (not all) or else it becomes a viable anarchist federation with all that entails. So to make censorship unnecessary I beg the comrades to act responsibly (as Durruti would say) and submit only genuine political letters.

I'll send a donation to the long-suffering SRAF editors as soon as finances allow. In the meantime, yours in love and struggle,

Pete Ridley

Salud y Anarquía

*SRAF* [Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation]  
*Bulletin* 91 (Nov.-Dec 1985) [Thanks to the comrades at CIRA] ■

## Was the Miners' Strike winnable?

At the beginning of the strike many (miners and non-miners alike) thought it would all be over within a matter of weeks. If it was not for the massive scabbing it would have been so. But, with a government bent on confrontation and no compromise, and with no clear overall industrial support from the key trade unions, it was obvious that defensive tactics needed to give way to offensive ones. To a limited extent this was done. Sabotage attacks – some blown out of all proportion by the media, others were merely a continuation of traditional picketing – had little effect overall as they were not adopted on a large scale and taken to the heartlands of the class enemy where direct pressure can be put. Instead, those groups and individuals who undertook offensive actions were few and alas disorganised.

The vast majority of miners were not fighting to overthrow the government or state or seek to create a revolution, but simply to keep jobs to keep their communities intact. They were not even fighting to take over their industry — theirs by right. True, there were some, both within and outside the mining communities, who were fighting for more. But it was not a political strike of the miners' choosing, but as a direct result of government, that made it clear from the outset that their objectives were to smash the union, to defeat militant unionism and break up the communities.

The State sought industrial and community confrontation never before witnessed for decades. As for the strike's progress, class warfare gave way to civil warfare. Community was set against community, village against village, union against union with the media pulling the strings. By the time the odds were realised — the legal processes, the new policing arrangements, the contingency plans, the role of the far-right extremists in helping to exacerbate the

conflict between scab and striker with 'return to work' movements funding etc.; the importance of anti-union legislation, Courts fining and sequestering, the end of civil liberties and the introduction of harsh picketing penalties against those involved in civil infringements (but charged under the criminal law), the use of the bribes and lies to win over more scabs by the NCB (Xmas bonus etc); the total inadequacy of the official trade union movement in lending effective industrial support also ground down the fight left in the resisting miners.

By the time it was realised that new tactics were needed – although many long forgotten ones were remembered and some new ones adopted – and to be practiced too, it was too late.

At the NUM Annual Conference earlier this year Arthur Scargill was forced to defend mass picketing. He did so by stating that it failed, not of itself but because there was not enough support for mass picketing, or enough mass pickets.

He implied that Orgreave did not succeed because the pickets were in the end out-numbered, and that even so there should have been more attempts similar to Orgreave.

Unlike at Saltley Gate, in 1972, the support was not as great, while the police presence and tactics was far bigger and far more aggressive. That should have been taken into account in the wake of the rout and put as an argument for more mass pickets, organised on a far greater scale, employing a variety of tactics in addition to the set-piece battles that were so essential in terms of international (and national) coverage and their effect on the stability of the currency.

Near the end of the 12 month strike, mass picketing was outlawed by the Court leaving only a few, mainly in South Yorkshire, to challenge that ruling. The ruling came at a point in time when the mood within the South Wales Area leadership switched to supporting tactical withdrawal and mass picketing all but ceased in that Area due to the demands of the leadership.

The Euro-Communists are trying for a softly, softly approach with everything they are doing, competing with the Trotskyists – and near well beating them – at their entryist games a la Militant Tendency. It began to become all too commonplace to see CP members policing rallies and demos looking for anyone who might try to resist police provocation and so upset the 'glorious martyrdom' label they attempted to fix. This was done in the hope that pity would win greater support from the moderates and liberal middle class etc.

They became a reactionary and restraining influence, together with their ilk in the TUC and the Labour Party, on the strike as the full weight of the State came down to bear.

'Noble' defeat was preferred to further 'adventure'. Behind the scenes McGahey and other Area leaders decided to pull in the reins, seeing Scargill as a

liability to their own ambitions and their own Party loyalties. Scargill the orator had by then in their view, served his purpose.

In the last weeks of the strike it was clear that failure was a strong possibility. The leadership of the NUM were demoralised and there were tactics not pursued which should have been tried and tested long before the strike had begun to deteriorate. One antidote for example, was that in the absence of massive rank and file industrial support, a mobilisation of all striking miners, support groups, rank & file workers groups and unemployed groups, could have led to a massive blockade of the East Midland power stations and scab coal fields, supported by diversionary and rearguard actions elsewhere.

Even in their hour of defeat the miners showed more courage and solidarity than the whole trade union and organised labour movement in Britain has been able to muster since its inception. The General Strike in 1926 began with the miners and they were the last to go back; the great miners strike of 1984/5 was a great feat of resistance by the miners and their few friends. The claimants mobilising and the international solidarity were inspiring to the miners and their support groups.

But despite all the remained winnable right up to its demise, victory *was* always a possibility. At least through mass rank and file unofficial action, or through an escalation of widescale community resistance and revolutionary violence, leading to localised and open insurrections.

What was clear in retrospect, was that there was neither the will for mass solidarity action, in industry or generalised resistance against the forces of the State.

The miners were defeated in the end by their own class and by the trade union movement especially submissive to the governments' attack.

Black Flag Supplement no.2 Miners Strike in *Black Flag : the anarchist fortnightly* No.139 9/9/85 ■

## Out of the shadows: two comrades of Ponzán Vidal [Book Review]

Spanish anarchists played a key role in the WW2 escape lines, getting escaped servicemen (and others) out of Nazi-occupied Europe. Two new biographies shed extra light on this.

Bruce Dowding was a Francophile Australian and escaped POW who became a key figure in the 'Pat O'Leary' (or Pat-Ponzan) Line. His nephew Peter Dowding and historian Ken Spillman faced a challenging task in reconstructing his clandestine work but do give a sense of his experiences and motivations. They don't just look at this young man

who 'once sat two tables from Picasso', either: telling his story does justice to all the workers on the line. They don't share British Intelligence's view that the anarchists were just 'expensive subcontractors'. In fact, Ponzan Vidal comes across as reliable and the opposite of Harold 'Paul' Cole, a chancer who found 'escape and evasion' a nice little earner but sold his comrades to the Gestapo 'with a smile' (and not to save his own life, but out of spite).

This is not an easy read. Dowding was executed and his name supposed to be erased by the 'Nacht und Nebel' (night and fog) decree. The Australian military weren't very interested in his fate since he wasn't under their orders. *Secret Agent, Unsung Hero* has its roots in family tragedy but makes a fine tribute to a life cut short.

*Blind Spot : Manuel Huet and the libertarian underground in France* by Imanol records the life of another of Ponzan's comrades. Huet's clandestine activities stretched from Barcelona before the civil war, through the French resistance, to the anarchist resistance to Francoism after the second world war into the 1970s. Until now, Huet largely kept himself out of the historical record. Imanol uncovers his life and does justice to all of Huet's comrades without sugar-coating anything. See Huet's comment on the failed attack on Franco from the air in 1948: 'I would have put the barrel of my gun to the pilot's head and, had another pass been impossible, we could have crashed the plane into the yacht. Because when it comes to organizing an attentat, one has to see it through to the finish, no matter the cost.'

*Secret Agent, Unsung Hero The Valour of Bruce Dowding* by Peter Dowding, Ken Spillman. Pen & Sword Military, 2023 ISBN 9781399055437

*Blind Spot : Manuel Huet and the libertarian underground in France* by Imanol, translated by Paul Sharkey, Kate Sharpley Library, 2024 (online)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/q575q3> ■

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