

## PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE ANARCHIST PAST

George Cores

BM HURRICANE

K.S.L. LONDON

WC1 3XX ISBN 1 873605 00 6

THE KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY

### INTRODUCTION

George Cores (1869-1949) was an anarchist activist who played leading roles in many of the incidents and activities that shaped class struggle anarchism in England. A Leicester shoemaker, he moved to London where, by 1887, he was secretary of the Hackney branch of the Socialist League – fellow members of the branch included Joe Lane and William Wess. He took part in many formative conferences that began to shape tactics and strategies for the emerging class struggle. One such was the Socialist League Revolutionary Conference at the Autonomie Club in London in August 1890, alongside Charles Mowbray, Frank Kitz, David Nichol, Fred Charles, Louise Michel and Errico Malatesta. He took part in discussions with the early “Freedom” group. He evidently moved back to Leicester for in 1892 he moved from Leicester to Walsall to co-ordinate the local support group for the imprisoned Walsall Anarchists. A naturally unassuming man, it is typical that his memoirs do not say that he took over the editorship of the “Commonweal” (paper of the Socialist League) when David Nichol was arrested for incitement to murder. In 1893 he was again in Leicester active in the unofficial strikes taking place amongst the shoemakers there.

As his memoirs progress so he gradually tell us more about himself but there are still large areas missing from his life and activities. We at the Kate Sharpley Library would welcome any information on Cores that our readers have.

His memoirs describe a life of struggle and a picture comes over of a man of integrity who throughout life held to his belief both in the primacy of class struggle and necessity of activism.

### BRITISH ANARCHISTS AND THEIR MOVEMENT

Some personal recollections 1883-1939

It was, I believe, in the year 1883 that I saw in a small newsagents shop in the Globe Road, Mile End Road, the first number of “Justice”, the organ of the Democratic Federation. The objects and programme of that body interested me greatly, but I did not buy a copy of that issue.

Two weeks after that time, the paper was on sale at a newsagents shop in the Bethnal Green Road, opposite the police station, at the Cambridge Heath end of that thoroughfare. The paper “Justice” was taken round to a number of shops by a man named Joseph Lane, who was a van traveller for R & J Hill, wholesale tobacconists in High Street, Shoreditch. A tremendous amount of voluntary work like that has been done by ordinary working people.

Though Joe Lane did not call himself an Anarchist at any time, so far as I know, his own description of himself will show what section of Socialist thought he belonged to. He called himself an “anti-Statist Communist” and later I shall have occasion to mention him in connection with a “manifesto” which he wrote and published under that title – The Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto (1).

He was a member of the Labour Emancipation League, which was affiliated to the Democratic Federation.

The Labour Emancipation League held both indoor and outdoor meetings, the latter principally on the Mile End Waste, near Charrington’s Assembly in the Mile End Road (where I delivered my first open-air speeches on Socialism).

The other principal open-air meeting spot was outside Hoxton Parish Church in Pitfield Street. It was a great time for open-air meetings. The Temperance Movement and the National Secular Society both used to hold a large number. Joe Lane had a peculiar style of speaking. He used to close his eyes and slightly sway his body while holding forth. It appears that he had come to

London some years previously from Oxfordshire and, being very earnest for political and social reform, had somehow got into contact with a group of Socialist workmen who formed an "International Club" and held small meetings in a room at a public-house in Rose Street, Soho. This was in the 1870s.

There he met Frank Kitz, one of the wittiest public speakers I have ever known. By the way, many small halls and rooms attached to coffee-houses and public houses were used for lectures and debating societies in that period and many young and ambitious orators developed their gift of public speaking in them. It should be added, I think, that it required some moral courage to hold Socialist open air meetings at that time. Socialists were believed to be advocates of bloody revolution and wholesale destruction by the use of dynamite bombs, and the more timid members feared they would be chased by a violent hostile mob if they showed their noses in public.

But the Socialist orators of all schools of thought were most persuasive and effective advocates, and usually won not only respectful attention but even enthusiastic support from their audiences.

Bear in mind that amid the riches and prosperity of this land there were millions of working people in town and country who suffered from dire poverty and destitution. And so the speakers who advocated a new society of justice and freedom touched the hearts of their hearers, just as the Owenite Socialists and the Chartists must have done fifty years previously.

Frank Kitz was a dyer by trade, and a few years afterwards was employed by William Morris at his works at Merton, near Mitcham.

Another man, surely one of the greatest working-class orators who ever spoke in public, was Charles W. Mowbray. He was the first person whom I knew personally who described himself as an Anarchist-Communist and he maintained that view in a discussion with William Morris in the "Commonweal". He was a Durham man, and had served in the Durham Light Infantry. He was a tailor by trade, well-known in the Amalgamated Society of Tailors. He did all in his power on behalf of the sweated foreign immigrant Jews, who flocked into the East End of London in many thousands from the pogroms and persecution in Russia. Mowbray was rather a handsome man, and was always popular with his audiences.

The police did their best in the eighties to harass and, if possible, stop the open-air Socialist propaganda, on the excuse of "obstruction", and Mowbray was more than once arrested on these grounds and fined by a man called a "magistrate".

Mowbray was, a few years afterwards, sentenced to nine months imprisonment at Norwich for leading, and speaking to, a procession of riotous unemployed working-people. He had said that they had "a right" to "take" the necessities of life. He died while addressing a public meeting in Lancashire.

I myself did a month for obstruction then, because many of us felt that by paying fines and costs we were simply encouraging the police in their campaign of provocation.

During 1883 differences of view, and some personal antipathies, arose inside the Federation – it had become the Social Democratic Federation on the proposition of Labour Emancipation League delegates at its annual conference – and at the end of 1883, William Morris seceded from the SDF with a number of other members and formed the Socialist League, and published "The Commonweal" weekly. William Morris, aided by an Oxford don named Faulkner, and Philip Webb, an architect (who shared Morris's and Ruskin's views on Art) provided the money for the paper and for offices, with a lecture room, at 13 Farringdon Road, near Holborn.

This they did for about five years.

The SDF wanted to capture the State while the Socialist League desired nothing to do with the parliamentary politics of the time, and said that its function was, in Morris's own words, "the making of Socialism". They held the opinion, rightly I contend, that the achievement of Socialism must proceed not only from the interests but from the intelligence of the workers, in all lands.

With these seceders from the SDF went the Anarchistic section. Among them was Sam Mainwaring, an all-round engineer by occupation, who brought Tom Mann into the movement (I heard Mann himself say so). Mainwaring was the foreman of an engineering firm where Tom Mann

worked. Mainwaring, who usually spoke for several hours at a stretch, addressed open-air meetings all the year round. He and Frank Kitz held the first Socialist open-air meetings in South Wales in the modern movement. He was a fluent speaker, both in English and in his native Welsh (about which he was very enthusiastic, declaring it to be the finest language of all). In Wales Kitz spoke in English and Mainwaring in Welsh. Mainwaring gave many years of service, and unhappily fell dead while addressing an open-air meeting at Parliament Hill, Highgate. Mainwaring published, incidentally, a small paper called "The General Strike", which indicated his learning on industrial labour policy.

In the Socialist League were also John Turner, a grocery shop manager (for the Home & Colonial Stores, then a new concern). He came of an Essex farming family. John Turner, with two or three other Anarchistic shop assistants, started the first National Shop Assistants Union which, after some years of existence, was merged into a larger body of which John Turner became a paid organiser and, finally General Secretary.

I remember Turner debating in favour of "Anarchist Socialism" against Herbert Burroughs of the SDF in the Patriotic Club of Clerkenwell Green. How enthusiastic he and a group of us young ones were! Of course, in our view, Turner had the best of the argument.

Our enthusiasm, I hold even now, optimistic though it was, was justifiable. Everywhere, in this country and throughout the world, a great awakening of the peoples on social and economic problems was taking place. Politically, only France and Switzerland, in Europe, were republics. Centuries-old monarchies began to fall, and have been tottering ever since. It is true that shocking State despotisms have, at times, taken their places, but I think that it is a reasonable expectation that all of them will follow the monarchies, because they all contain within them the seeds of their own destruction. Even when they acquire the marvellous success which Hitler's "National Socialism" did, their very success may lead to their downfall.

During the last seventy years chemical, electrical and engineering science has revolutionised conditions, while other branches of science, such as biology, have provided mankind with knowledge which, seemed, a century ago, to be chimerical.

But to return to the movement itself. The great agitation which was carried on (it should always be borne in mind that it was of a voluntary character; no State department anywhere pioneered in such an effort) led to some startling developments, in which the Anarchist Socialists took their full part. There was the "New Unionism" which organised the "unskilled" workers into large bodies, like the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union. Incidentally they were the first to win an eight-hour working day by strike action, instead of waiting for it as part of the SDF programme to be brought about by Act of Parliament

One of our people, a member of the Socialist League, an Anarchist, was Ted Leggatt, a man with a powerful voice, who became an organiser of the Carmen's Union. He was a very effective speaker to the carmen. (2) Another kind of man, and a valuable worker, was William Wess, only recently (1946) passed away, aged 84. (3) He served as secretary etc to a number of workers' unions in the East End of London. He belonged to the Socialist League, and also to the "Freedom Group" when Kropotkin came to this country.

One fact I would like to emphasise, and that is that most of the work which was done was due to the activities of workingmen and women, most of whom did not appear as orators or as writers in printed papers but sold or gave away innumerable journals, pamphlets and books, mainly at their own expense, in order to influence the minds of others. They worked at it day and night, everywhere, pleading for the ideal. William Morris, in his poem "All for the Cause", refers to them in the words, "Named and nameless, all live in us; One and all they lead us yet". A great deal is ascribed to so-called leaders, but most of the real leaders never aspired to, or obtained, that public distinction. The struggle for a free or unstamped press, connected with the names of Richard Carlile and Henry, was maintained by hundreds of such people, many of whom suffered imprisonment for the cause. Of course, I do not ignore the great services rendered to that movement by George J. Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant and G. W. Foote, the great Freethought advocates.

I feel sure that they all would, if they were alive now, endorse what I have said about the undistinguished ones. It is nothing less than a crime, in my opinion, for any “minority” to suppress or cripple this great lever for progress. No guidance by “Authority” can take its place.

The Socialist workers movement opposed “red herrings” such as Emigration and Sugar Bounties. This led to the first great sensation of the movement in modern times. The paid anti-Sugar Bounty agitators at Barking took advantage of the general Socialist activity on the unemployed question by calling a demonstration in Trafalgar Square on Feb 8 1886. The SDF organised active opposition, and when the Anti-Sugar Bounty appeared, an enormous hostile crowd, who had been listening to John Burns and other speakers, violently attacked them, smashed their platform and marched through Pall Mall and Piccadilly to Hyde Park rioting and looting shops and rich people’s carriages on the way.

The only man among the speakers who afterwards professed to be an Anarchist was “Navvy” Andrew Hall. He used to dress in typical navvy costume, and very ceremoniously throw his cap, jacket and “choker” down at the commencement of his speech. Then came, in 1889, the marvellous “Dock Strike” – which was, to a great degree, a general strike. That gave a great fillip to the whole Socialist movement.

But previously, in 1885, Peter Kropotkin came to London, and although he first wrote some articles for Henry Seymour’s “Anarchist”, he started, with other Anarchists, in 1886 the journal “Freedom”. With him were Count Ferdinand Tcherkesoff (a Georgian), Mrs Dryhurst, Mrs Wilson and Sydney Olivier (the last two Fabians). A couple of well-known members of the SDF, Charles Morton and W. Pearson, compositors in the printing trade, joined also, and lectured to SDF branches on Anarchist Communism.

The Socialist League passed through some troubled times at the end of the eighties. Although it was well-known that the League was founded and carried on as a non-parliamentary propagandist society, Dr (of Science) Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx (a daughter of Karl Marx) tried to subvert it into a rival to the SDF, on similar lines, much to William Morris’s indignation.

Joseph Lane organised a communist opposition to them, and publicised his “Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto” as a counterblast. This pamphlet was far from being brilliantly written, and was so very dogmatic in tone that the Aveling section derisively styled him “Pope Joe Lane”.

But before very long, dissension appeared between William Morris and some of the Anarchistic section and then Morris (who used to finance the “Commonweal”) resigned from the League.

David Nicol became the editor of the paper, and Charles Mowbray the publisher. An indication of the growing cleavage in opinion between the non-parliamentarians and the definitely anarchistic members was shown by a lecture given in the Socialist League hall in Farringdon Road. William Blundell, a compositor who became the manager of the printing office when William Morris ceased to provide the money, lectured on the line of “demarcation”. The “line” was illustrated by a bound volume resembling the London Postal Directory, which contained only the titles of the hundreds of laws which still had force in Britain. Blundell contended that to make an abundance of additional statute laws, versus the ideas which would lead in the other direction, was the “dividing line” which marked the two sections. In a way, it was as quite prophetic to the present (1946/7) period.

I am afraid that under Nicol’s editorship, the “Commonweal” did not shine as an advocate of Anarchism. Nicol was of a poetic and dramatic turn of mind, and wrote a number of songs for the movement. He was quite a good public speaker, and a simple, good-natured man. At that time a section of Anarchists in France had been connected with bomb-throwing, and the newspapers generally misled their readers into the belief that violence was the aim and method of the Anarchist movement. But Nicol was defiant on the subject.

Then came what was known as the Walsall Anarchist bomb plot. Fred Charles, a clerk and cashier (from Norwich) visited Walsall and, in conjunction with two French Anarchists (Cailles and Batolla) undertook the making of bomb-cases to be used, it was said, in Russia. This was at the instigation of a police-agent named Auguste Coulon who lived in London. He was connected with Louise Michel’s international school. The upshot was a sentence of ten years penal servitude on Charles at Stafford Assizes, five years on Cailles and Batolla, and eighteen months on Ditchfield.

Wesley was acquitted. (The last two were local men). Nicol denounced the infamous judge, Hawkins, in the "Commonweal" and declared, by implication that he deserved to be assassinated. (4) Nicol and Mowbray (publisher) were both arrested, and Nicol was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, which he served in Chelmsford Jail. Then the "Commonweal" unfortunately fell into the hands of F. B. Samuels, a ladies' tailor, who was simply an advocate of violence – by others. He ruined the paper and his editorship came to an end when his brother-in-law, Bourdin, a young Frenchman, accidentally killed himself through a bomb which he was carrying, exploding in Greenwich Park, in the vicinity of Greenwich Observatory.

Samuels' conduct was deplorable, and laid him open to the gravest suspicion. The police took no action against him. Frank Kitz then took over the paper, which soon ceased publication. A most unpleasant occurrence was the decision, by the "Commonweal" Group not to restore the editorship to Dave Nicol when he was released from Chelmsford Prison. It certainly affected him mentally.

The Socialist League, at that time, faded right out of the picture.

A sidelight, I think, can be thrown on the circumstances of that time by mentioning that a doctor named Faucet MacDonald had a surgery in the Edgware Road, near Marble Arch, and encouraged a number of younger comrades to go there, where he initiated them into the knowledge of picric acid and other explosive agents. Dr MacDonald went to Australia. But Nicol, who by now was issuing a small paper called the "Commonweal" made a direct personal attack on Dr MacDonald, attributing to him very doubtful motives. The "Freedom" Group published a "vindication" of MacDonald, and made a painful reflection on Dave Nicol's state of mind.

I have so far spoken as if the Anarchist movement was confined to London. That is quite contrary to the truth.

I think Manchester deserves priority in reference to this side of the picture. There two lads, Alfred Barton, a clerk, and Herbert Stockton (an odd job man and later an industrial assurance agent) commenced, with a group of other working boys and girls, to hold meetings at Preston Park Gates on Sunday mornings, at Stevenson Square on Sunday afternoons, in St Augustine's Parish on Sunday evenings, and near the market during the week. This was about 1886. Barton and Stockton were very sincere, brave lads, and worked hard in the propaganda for many years. It is nothing against them that they supported the ILP in their older years. Bert Stockton went to prison for a month in the fight for Free Speech. An ironic feature was that his father was a warder in Strangeways Gaol when he was there. It is to the credit of the famous editor of the "Manchester Guardian", C. P. Scott, that he wrote a leading article in sympathy with Stockton. Barton and Stockton were the fearless pioneers in Manchester. The SDF made their initial start in Salford. All the other movements came later - "Clarion", ILP etc.

It was the custom to look to London for public speakers, and I went to Manchester and spoke at several of their open-air meetings. I felt very bashful in the presence of so many charming and enthusiastic girls. I was supposed to be very good. I only hope I was. One of Stockton's sisters, Mrs Eleanor Barton (she married Alf Barton) was a very prominent member of the Women's Co-operative Guild. She always spoke of herself as an "Anarchist-Communist".

The next provincial town in order of importance, in my view, was Sheffield. There the Sheffield Socialist Society was formed early in the eighties by Edward Carpenter – the author of "England Arise" – who described himself as a non-governmental socialist. The SSS became an active Anarchist group. I went there through the action of Fred Charles (a couple of years before his imprisonment) and for several months shared in their activities in Sheffield, Rotherham and in the miners' villages.

Charles was clerk and cashier in the brothers Bingham, wholesale and retail grocery business. The brothers Bingham, Robert and John, were outspoken advocates of Anarchist thought. Tom May an engineer's labourer was a most popular speaker. Tom Brown reminds me of him. One of the most remarkable individual characters there was Dr Creaghe. (5) He published the "Sheffield Anarchist" It was probably the most outspoken paper ever published in this country.

He attacked a local lawyer, describing him as a villain etc. For this he was charged with criminal libel. At the trial, at Leeds Assizes, he defied the judge, said that he was biased against him. Strange to say, he was not sent to prison. I fancy that the judge regarded him as a madman.

Other provincial towns had their Anarchists: Matt Kavanagh in Liverpool, Rooke in Birmingham, McAra in Edinburgh. In Leeds were John Sketchley, an aged Chartist, backed by Dave Wormald, an engineer, Jim Sweeney, a boot operative, Bill Allworthy, an engineman in a cotton factory, W. McQueen, grainer and other workers whose names I forget. For some time I worked in Leeds and spoke at many meetings on Wodehouse Moor, the market and other places. Other provincial towns, like Norwich, Leicester, Hull, and similar had similar groups of workers. Most of them were my seniors in age, and I wish it were possible to pay adequate tribute to their memories.

Bristol must not be overlooked. for from there came George "Barrett" (his real name was Ballard) who flashed like a brilliant meteor over our horizon. He came to London and went to Glasgow. He was favoured by a rich man named Davison. A director in the Kodak firm, he provided him with the means to publish the "Anarchist", a weekly paper. I wrote for the first nine issues. George Barrett was an engineer by trade. Recklessly, he made long journeys on his motor-cycle in the worst of weather, which resulted in illness and death. The movement lost an inspiring personality when he died (6)

There were also other individuals such as James Harrigan, a handsewn bootmaker, who travelled from town to town, He held outdoor meetings on his own. We used to laugh at a favourite phrase of his, "this bloody monstrosity-government". But when we think of the colossal and terrible crimes of the State governments of the world, we must admit that the words were not too strong.

In London there was Walter Ponder, a cabinetmaker, who used to speak at meetings in Hackney and Islington. He had the reputation of being a terror to "Marxian Social-Democrats": I do not know about that, but I am sure that he would prove himself a "foeman worthy of their steel" (7)

There were other more or less unattached speakers, like Jack Walsh, who finally linked up with a blind organ-grinder, and had the tunes "The Internationale" and "The Marseillaise" added to its programme. (8) Charles Palmer, at Hackney, J. Walters (a commercial traveller) at Brixton, and Max Greenbaum in Marylebone were others.

In the earlier years of "Freedom" and the "Commonweal", some ardent young spirits around Kings Cross, London, yearned to print a paper which would coincide more with the mentality of poor working people such as themselves. They met in a coffee and dining rooms weekly, and put their shillings into a common fund until they could purchase enough type and other printing accessories. This they did and printed "The Alarm", which lasted for some months. One thing they did which lasted years was to hire premises down a small courtway behind a shop in Ossulston Street, Euston Road, which was taken over by the "Freedom Group". Jack O'Malley, a carpet cleaner, and W.W. Banham, an insurance agent, were two of the most prominent of the "Alarm" group. A daughter of Rossetti, the poet, also published a small paper on the same lines for some time. She called her paper "The Torch".

The Syndicalist movement of 1911 should not be passed unnoticed. There was a great strike of railwaymen, and a general fear that the soldiers would be ordered to shoot the strikers down. An Anarchist wrote a very fine "Don't Shoot" leaflet which was distributed all over the country where soldiers were stationed. A railway worker named Crowsley was arrested at Aldershot and sent to prison for distributing the leaflet.

Guy Bowman, the editor of the "Syndicalist", and its printer, at Walthamstow, were prosecuted and imprisoned. Tom Mann also was imprisoned at Manchester, at Strangeways Gaol, for six weeks. There were protests everywhere against these sentences. When Guy Bowman went to prison some Anarchist workers in London got together and resolved to print and publish "The Syndicalist". Money had to be raised and guaranteed. A printer in the City of London was found who was prepared to print the paper. And then a strange thing happened.

An American "Marxist" Socialist named Gaylord Wilsher, reputed to be a goldmine millionaire - came forward, and undertook to print the paper at his own expense. He engaged a small office in

Fleet Street, but was rather dilatory in getting the paper out. So Fred Large, an old Anarchist comrade, and myself were sent to see Wilsher at his house on Hampstead Heath. He had all the copy, but we asked him to either get the paper out, or hand the copy over to the group. He then published the paper. I regret I forget the names of the workers, British, French and German, who composed the group.

In those days Jack Tanner was an Anarcho-Syndicalist. (9). The paper was sold at demonstrations and meetings by members of the group. The Anti-Shoot leaflets were given away outside police courts. The Syndicalist movement faded out, as it had no organisation.

After some years "Freedom" was compelled temporarily to cease publication. Thomas Cantwell, ex-Socialist League member, did his best as manager and printer to keep it going. But he had, as acting editor, a peculiar habit of censoring all contributions, making everything which appeared conform to the gospel according to Cantwell. This did not suit the comrades, Mrs Wilson and other supporters had discontinued their connection with the paper. But the workers in the group got together and kept the paper going. John Turner became publisher.

Alfred Marsh, the son of a brush manufacturer, had a hundred pounds left him by his father (he himself was a violinist) and he devoted the money to the printing of pamphlets and more important still, to stereotyping them, which enabled fresh editions to be published at little more than the cost of paper and machining. The income from these, aided by Kropotkin's reputation, kept "Freedom" going for years. Pamphlets by Kropotkin, Tcherkesoff, Malatesta and other writers were put into stereotype. Also, the "Speeches of the Chicago Martyrs" ran into a number of editions,

At a restaurant where Marsh used to go for meals, he met Thomas H. Keell, a compositor, who worked in the "Spectator" office. He was a member of the ILP. Finally, Keell became manager of "Freedom" and was content with a very modest income from it. "Freedom" was excellently produced under his control. I met him there about 1911 and he was very kindly towards me. Alf Marsh invited me to contribute the front-page "Notes" which I did. I also contributed a two-column article each month. This went on till near the autumn of 1914 when Marsh's fatal illness came on. Tom Keell afterwards claimed that he was sole editor of the paper at that time, but I can only say that I saw no evidence of it. Through maturer understanding, I should say he was Associate Editor.

Unfortunately, the First World War began July 1914 and this country became involved in it during the first week in August. Kropotkin was ill at Brighton at the time. I want to protest against the utter falsehood that Kropotkin was ever favourable to war, militarism or imperialism. He never was. (10)

He did see in Germany the core of the reactionary centralised State power ideas. And he was right. The German Social-Democrats were even more reactionary than the Kaiser in that respect. It was an article of faith with them that "the State was everything, the individual nothing". The victory of Hitler, too, in the Second World War would, I believe, have been an irretrievable disaster from an Anarchist point of view. My own view then, in 1914, was expressed by Rudolf Rocker in his article "Blood and Iron" in "Freedom". John Turner's opinions were expressed by Errico Malatesta.

However, Keell took full possession of "Freedom" and all the literature. He declared to me that he considered himself to be a trustee for the movement, and that "Freedom" was to be carried on as an anti-war journal. Everybody else in the Freedom Group he regarded as a "War Party" – at least so he professed: I suppose he did. (11) He called to his support the "Voice of Labour" Group – its most prominent members being William Dunn, a postal sort, and Miss Mabel Hope, a telephone operator.

In this way the Freedom Group lost everything. I regret to say that during 1914-18 Keell and Miss Lilian Wolfe, who I believe was also employed by the GPO, were sentenced to six months imprisonment on account of an article which appeared as the "Voice of Labour". During their imprisonment, "Freedom" was carried on by Percy Meachem and several other comrades.

The movement declined after the war and Tom Keell ended the publication of "Freedom" (1927) saying that he "laid down his pen as editor for the last time". But there was an outstanding debt of

£100 and the London Freedom Group was reconstituted, John Turner, William Wess, with one or two other old "Freedom" comrades joining with them, and the £100 was eventually cleared off.

It was proposed to re-publish "Freedom" but Keell's friends insisted that he should be editor. Meanwhile, Keell removed all the "Freedom" literature to Stroud, Gloucestershire. This action infuriated the members of the group and they resolved to re-start the paper, which they did in May 1929. Unhappily, its leading article was a bitter personal attack on Tom Keell, which made the breach complete and permanent and only did harm. Still, Keell had made no attempt at a fair and friendly agreement.

The London Freedom Group held lectures and socials in 1930 at the Food Reform Restaurant in Furnival Street, Holborn, and later monthly dinners (2/-) at the Chinese Restaurant, Denmark Street, W.C.2. (12) The late W.C.Owen, Madame Kropotkin, Mrs Rocker and other comrades were honoured as "guests" on these occasions.

But the depression in 1930 gave "Freedom" a shattering blow, and John Turner, who was honorary treasurer, in 1931 said the paper "must stop". Before I go further, I must add that during the above period Bessie Ward (a freelance journalist) and A.B.Mace (commercial traveller) gave cordial help to the group's activities.

The income had fallen to about £2,5.0 per month. The paper had cost over £6 monthly but I wanted to remedy the situation if possible. I had somehow got into close friendly association with John J. Humphrey, an employee of the underground railways, who had a small printer's outfit, with a platen machine. I told him what was on my mind, and the upshot was that "Freedom" appeared the next month as usual, and was produced by voluntary work. Humphrey also provided premises for it by Malden Crescent, N.W. This first issue consisted of four pages, produced by Comrade Humphrey and a nephew of his named Bob Finch, an all-round printing worker, who was employed by a firm in Lambeth. I recognised that these two comrades could not be expected to perform the drudgery indefinitely, and learned, by Humphrey's kind permission, to assist in typesetting.

Then I had the good fortune to meet Fred Stroud, who lived at Holloway, a french polisher by trade. I introduced him to Humphrey and he became quite an expert voluntary compositor and machine operator. We published an eight-page paper until August 1936.

I would like to mention that the machine would only print one page at a time, So that an issue of 1000 copies entailed eight thousand impressions.

Ambrose G. Barker, a schoolmaster, who came into the Socialist movement from Northamptonshire, in 1876 or 1879, was still the nominal editor. He retired from that position and asked me to take his place. I endeavoured to do the work without the title. There was an interval in the publication of "Freedom" at Humphrey's premises in Malden Crescent. By vote of the Anarchist Federation (13), Dr Swede, Henry J. Jones and Victor Neuburg, a journalist, were given the job of running the paper for about five months. It was then printed at Stepney. But they were gaily running up a debt with the printer, and so the printing and publishing returned to Malden Crescent. The Stepney printer threatened to "county court" the hon. treasurer, Bloom. for the money owing, but the Workers Friend Club (then at Jubilee Street, Mile End, E. London) gave their remaining funds to the settlement of the debt.

The London Freedom Group hired a room at 144 High Holborn, from the Emily Davison Dining Club, and carried on meetings there for several years. They also held open-air meetings in Hyde Park, at which William Farrer and William Gape were the chief speakers. We were few in numbers, with very few orators. Our members included W. Brewster, a taxidriver, Henry J. Jones, a clerk, Max White, William Wess, Alf Rosenbaum, a ladies tailor, George Stenzleit, a cabinetmaker, Albert Meltzer (14) and ex-captain Jack White (son of General White of Ladysmith). We also held meetings at the National Trade Union Club (then in New Oxford Street) against Italian fascism, and also in support of our Spanish comrades. We held weekly meetings there, in a small room, for several years. I was honorary secretary.

From Malden Crescent we aided our Italian comrade Anzani in printing and circulating distributing leaflets exposing Fascism in Italy, which were circulated all over the British Isles. Copies went out with "Freedom" to other parts of the world – Australia, Canada, France, India, the

USA etc. Anzani was rushed by the police, under the Home Secretary Sir John Anderson, on to the "Arandora Star", which was sunk by a German U-boat in the Atlantic Ocean. Other Italian comrades died with him.

The London Freedom Group really came to an end in the winter of 1939. We received extremely little outside support, probably owing to the fact that we were only poor working people, with no "distinguished" or well-to-do persons amongst us. The best friend to our indoor meetings was F.A.Ridley of the ILP, who I am pleased to say, lectured to our most successful meeting. He was always willing to help us. I felt so grateful to him that I could not speak in opposition to him, though I was much opposed to many of his opinions. Professor Herbert Read did come once, and lectured to our final meeting in High Holborn, which was very successful too.

When Emma Goldman came to London we joined in the welcome to her at a dinner at a restaurant at 11 High Holborn, a building since destroyed by a German bomb. She ignored the London Freedom Group during the whole time she was here, although we boosted her in "Freedom". We had no money. I do not need to refer to the time when the premises at Frith Street were engaged. We had nothing to do with that (15)

There are two more places, however, to be added. First, the Hammersmith Group, which really needs a written history all to itself. That commenced with James Tochatti, a tailor (ex-Socialist League member) who worked for the movement from the 1880s, a very able man. He made his clothing shop near the Broadway a centre for local propaganda. He exercised a great influence with young men, gathering round him men like Percy and John Tanner (now the President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union – we never dreamed of that happening in those days). Tochatti circulated many thousands of pamphlets.

Mrs Barker, Percy Meacham (who went to prison for a month in upholding the right to hold open-air meetings in the Grove, Hammersmith), Ralph Barr, Beer and others carried on meetings in the Grove for many years. Tochatti had a printing outfit and published a journal called "Liberty", advocating Anarchist Communism. Mrs Tochatti used to sing revolutionary songs at open-air meetings. I cannot pretend to do justice to their efforts. James Tochatti was always at hand to keep the local meetings going.

In the history of the movement the Workers' Friend Group must not be forgotten. In fact, somebody ought to write its history separately. It started with the international club in Berners Street, Commercial Road, Whitechapel, London E about 1881. The personnel of the Club were Jewish but British, German, and French comrades were all welcomed at all times. Amongst their numerous deeds was the defending of the Bryant & May matchbox makers, when they were on strike.

They published the "Workers Friend" published in the Yiddish language, for many years. One of the early editors was Yanovsky, who migrated to New York. But a really great editor arose in Rudolf Rocker (a gentile German) who made the paper a powerful tribute among Jewish workers. The Jewish comrades have always assisted the British movement while supporting their own.

I do not recollect their names – many I did not know – but E. Michaels is well known and to me, at least, represents a host of splendid workers. (16)

I have done my best to bring to mind many of the workers in the Anarchist movement whom I knew since 1883. I do not pretend that I have been able to include everyone. Many names I have forgotten.

As for recent years, reference must be made to the pages of "War Commentary", now under the title "Freedom", and "Direct Action", the organ of the Anarchist Federation of Britain. (17)

I have not tried to say anything about Guy Aldred, and his Shepherds Bush and Glasgow friends; or his papers "the Herald of Revolt" the "Spur" and the "Word". I believe that he has written and published his life story himself.

New people have now undertaken the work of propaganda and have a big task before them, and I wish them all the best of good luck. I have not tried to write an account of the persons in the movement with any attempt at literary excellence, or to interest outsiders. As I am, at the time of writing, nearing eighty years of age, I was asked to record as many as possible who have

contributed their part to the Anarchist movement in England, and to connect their names to some of the events of my time.

GEORGE CORES

#### Notes

(1) Reprinted by Cienfuegos Press.

(2) The anarchist draymen of Stratford and Woolwich broke away from the official union after Ted Leggatt's death and formed an independent Horse Transport Union, the first specifically anarcho-syndicalist working union in Britain.

(3) We omit Cores's use of the words "the late" in this and subsequent names, of people who died recently to 1946 when Cores wrote this memoir. Nobody he mentions is now (1992) living, except F.A.Ridley, 95, and Albert Meltzer (who appends these notes).

(4) David Nicol in fact responded to the words of a socialist who said that someone who passed such a sentence "was not fit to be a judge" by saying he "was not fit to live". Hardly an incitement to assassination, as alleged. A lot worse was said by Muslims, and considered legally acceptable, in the Rushdie case!

(5) Dr Creaghe emigrated to South America, and was a founder of the anarchist daily "La Protesta". In his later years he was involved in the Mexican revolution.

(6) The essays of George Barrett are still available.

(7) Walter Ponder seems to have founded the Deptford and Woolwich groups, according to Kate Sharpley, who referred to "Wal Pounder" whom I presume to be the same.

(8) In those days outdoor speakers were found at every street corner and park pitch. Some Anarchists who were blacklisted, unemployed or who regarded professional propagandism as a formal if impoverished occupation (e.g. Guy Aldred) lived on collections at meetings; many others voluntarily gave their spare time evening after evening at this thankless, and at one time perilous, task. Cores makes no distinctions between them. The most well known 'professional' was Bonar Thompson (who continued as a caricature of himself after becoming disillusioned). Presumably Jack Walsh was a "stump speaker" as they called them, like Tom Brown, the tramp Anarchist speaker (who died in 1938 after 50 years of "stump speaking").

(9) Jack Tanner moved to the CP and then to the Labour Party; he had risen high in the TU hierarchy by the time Cores wrote these notes.

(10) Many well-known Anarchists who had become the objects of a personality cult, not only among Anarchists, found it hard to resist public opinion, which seems to explain Kropotkin's stand. Nettlau, using the same sort of arguments, denounced Tsarism and justified the Central Powers. Rocker opposed the war by denouncing his native Germany but from Britain. According to Nettlau's later excuse, they had never considered what should be actually be done if war broke out, and Kropotkin's first advice was to ignore it and concentrate on positive matters of international cooperation (as the American IWW officially did). None of them belonged to or spoke for any anarchist organisation which could dissociate from them, and the personality cult around them enabled Marxists and others to denounce "anarchist leaders".

(11) Keell promised in 1927 to return Freedom Press as such to the movement when it was (in his view) capable of handling its own affairs, and regarded himself as a trustee. It is ironic that when he finally did so, another individual repeated his high-handed action within less than ten years, making the same promise.

(12) The first meeting at the Chinese Restaurant was to honour a young Chinese student visiting London, enquiring about new Anarchist literature he could translate. He is now the greatest living Chinese novelist, who has suffered greatly for his Anarchism, Pa Chin (Li Fei-kan).

(13) Several groups had affiliated to the first (short-lived) Anarchist Federation in GB in 1934, including the London Freedom Group. In 1936 it was decided to fold the paper and transfer it to Glasgow, where it would merge with "Fighting Call". "Spain and the World" had just commenced. Cores, Harvey, Humphrey and a few others dissented. Ralph Barr became the secretary of the Freedom Group in 1935, and was impatient with the "old guard".

(14) Still at school but Cores did not know this.

(15) Cores' chronology is inaccurate on events nearer to when he wrote, and from this point he begins to omit matters in which he was not concerned or felt bitter. Ralph Barr (an unemployed workers organiser) dissolved the Freedom Group to form the Anarcho-Syndicalist Union, in reality propaganda body. He was also Emma Goldman's secretary in the CNT-FAI Bureau (a kind of "embassy" of the Spanish movement). Cores re-formed the London Freedom Group, though unable to publish "Freedom", solely to hold weekly lectures, with which younger people became impatient. Under "Frith Street" he lumps "Spain and the World", the CNT-FAI Bureau, the ASU and the later AF. Dissatisfaction with the ASU's lack of activity other than a "Salvation Army attitude to Spain" led to younger activists breaking away from that too. Its break-up in 1939 led to the formation of a third AF. The present proprietors of "Freedom" issued a so-called "Centennial Number" carefully missing out all the details Cores gives and more besides.

(16) The references to the "Jewish movement" are misleading. Pre-WWI immigrant Yiddish-speaking workers organised themselves into separate sections based on language (not race nor religion) hence (say) Emma Goldman was not thought of as part of the "Jewish movement" but Rudolf Rocker was. Owing to activists returning to Russia in 1917 to take part in the Revolution, the females were the bulk of the movement after 1920, but the decline of the language (outside America and Eastern Europe) meant the decline of the group as such. Michaels perpetuated the Jubilee Street Club, though without premises, and held annual "reunions" of older people who had mostly long since reneged, which some outside observers, like George Woodcock, thought represented an actual movement. It would seem Cores did too. Emma Goldman, addressing one annual reunion, thought she was addressing the "English comrades" and could not understand their lack of enthusiasm. This relict of a movement ended decisively when Michaels died. Its history to 1920 was written in "The London Years" by Rocker (a year or so after Cores wrote this) saying "not a ripple remained".

(17) In 1939 Cores found himself isolated. None of the younger comrades wanted to perpetuate the lack of activity other than weekly lectures. Ridley speaking on "Marxism and Anarchism" and Read's lecture attracted large crowds which paid its debts. Also, Cores' attitude to the war was considered dubious. Nobody then wanted to continue the Freedom Group. In 1944 the (third) AFB split. A section calling itself the Freedom Press Group took hold of "War Commentary", re-naming it "Freedom" (it was then stated it would be a new paper not a revival of the old). The other section, which published "Direct Action" later dissolved. Some of its members formed the Syndicalist Workers Federation.

#### Postscript

Cores (who resided from 1934 to his death at Strode Road, Willesden) wrote as a postscript to this essay: "I felt very unwell while writing the foregoing, and the weather was extremely cold and bad." He died soon after writing it. He had been asked to do so during a chance encounter at an anarchist open air meeting after the Second World War. He had met in Hyde Park one of the "DA" pioneers who did not know of the history of "Freedom", then being represented as if it had existed continuously since 1886 and belonged of right to the Freedom Press Group (later calling itself Freedom Press) who had taken over "War Commentary". Partly because his views on the war, as contrasted with his strict non-violent stand on any other matters, were unpopular with Anarchists, he had become isolated. It is sad that as a result he was neglected and forgotten in the last six years of his life.

#### TOM BROWN

It would be well worth printing the memoirs of Matt Kavanagh, which cover the same ground as George Cores, but these were lost by "War Commentary", which did however print some extracts ("Lesser-Known British Anarchists").

Another later figure was Tom Brown (not to be confused with several others in the movement of the same name). Tom Brown was an engineering shop steward who was the finest writer and

speaker on anarcho-syndicalism the movement has produced. His thoughts were expressed clearly and concisely, One could always put a pamphlet Tom Brown in the hands of someone totally ignorant of anarcho-syndicalism. His speeches were clear of jargon and at any meeting he sounded ‘the voice from the workshop’. Their collection in one book (Tom Brown’s Syndicalism, Phoenix Press) is a superb introduction to British anarcho-syndicalism.

The book is only marred by an inadequate title and a superficial biography, albeit not malicious (like the ones Rocker has suffered). He is described as a ‘latter day Tom Mann’ (Tom Brown’s contemporary Tom Mann was a Syndicalist organiser in the trade unions in his early days and a CP hack orator in his “latter days”). Tom’s clear style of addressing audiences, his long industrial struggles, his patience in addressing the problems of anarcho-syndicalism, and the existence of a movement that owes much to him, are not given coverage.

As a member of the editorial board of War Commentary, when Freedom Press was revived from the dead as a publishing wing of the then Anarchist Federation, many were incensed at the way pseudo-intellectuals like Woodcock & Co emerged from the woodwork to take it over and advance their careers; in what is described here as ‘unhappy circumstances, but on a point of principle’ Brown was pushed out quite shamelessly by those who abandoned their ‘anarchism’ when they had made their name as writers and by those who later lived on the cult of Freedom Press.

Brown formed the Syndicalist Workers Federation (which later merged with others into the DAM); he was concerned in two important dockworkers strikes where, had we a press and a HQ building, we could have achieved a positive movement second to none in the world. But it was gone.

He was also active in community struggles. When in the part of London where he lived (owned by the Church Commissioners) the Mob moved in to run nightclubs and turn it into a brothel area, his neighbours selected him spokesperson for a protest group. As a result, he was beaten up with iron clubs going home from the nightshift, so badly he was unable to work any more.

Retired, almost disabled and weak in Newcastle, he wrote his memoirs by hand. A University student offered to type them if she could use parts for her thesis, but he died before she finished and his widow wasn’t interested in their return. If they could be found, they would be worth a ton of that passed off by the political research industry.

These memoirs were first published in five consecutive editions of “Direct Action” (then the paper of the Syndicalist Workers Federation) during 1952 and 1953. They were drastically altered for publication and sections of another article by Cores was also added. As far as we know this is the first time that his memoirs have been published in their original form. This pamphlet has been copied direct from Cores’s original typescript.

#### KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY AND ANARCHIST ARCHIVE

This pamphlet is the first in a proposed series on Pages from Anarchist History, The Kate Sharpley Library exists to preserve and illuminate aspects of anarchist history and thought, and by doing so challenge the “official” history of anarchism put forward by people both allegedly within and outside our movement. We will be available for consultation in late 1992 and we host a massive collection of anarchist pamphlets, books, newspapers, magazines and documentation from all over the world. We are named after an anarchist militant who was active in the anti-war struggle of 1914-18. She doesn’t appear in any of the “official” histories yet as George Cores writes, “most of the work which was done was due to the activities of working men and women, most of whom did not appear as orators or as writers in printed papers”.

A copy of our news letter is available by sending a s.a.e. to our address, We welcome any interested correspondence.

KSL, BM Hurricane, London WC1 N 3XX, GB

K.S.L.

THE KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY