

# **Black Flag**

## **Anarchist Review**



**Ethel  
MacDonald  
(1909-1960)**

**Sylvia  
Pankhurst  
(1882-1960)**



**Ethel  
Mannin  
(1900-1984)**

**And much more...**

**Autumn 2025**

**Volume 5**

**Number 3**

## Contents

|                                                                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Death of L. S. Bevington .....</b>                                                 | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>Ethel MacDonald: An Anarchist Engima? .....</b>                                    | <b>43</b>  |
| <b>Ethel Mannin.....</b>                                                              | <b>70</b>  |
| <b>Sylvia Pankhurst: Anti-Parliamentarian Communist.....</b>                          | <b>96</b>  |
| <b>Anti-Parliamentarism and Communism in Britain, 1917-1921 .....</b>                 | <b>138</b> |
| <b>Why socialists need a better strategy than electoralism .....</b>                  | <b>147</b> |
| <b>Reviews.....</b>                                                                   | <b>152</b> |
| <b>The British Communist Left, 1914-1945 .....</b>                                    | <b>152</b> |
| <b>Kropotkin's "The Conquest of Bread" for Today; Anarchist Political Economics..</b> | <b>158</b> |
| <b>Parish Notices .....</b>                                                           | <b>163</b> |
| <b>Future Society .....</b>                                                           | <b>164</b> |

## Editorial

Welcome to the third issue of *Black Flag* in 2025!

We start with Lousia Sarah Bevington (1845-1895). A well-known poet and anarchist, if she is remembered today it is usually for the former. However, she was an active anarchist and a regular contributor to our press, with her writings often reprinted as pamphlets. Hopefully our selection shows why she should be better remembered in the movement.

We have not reproduced three pamphlets – *Common-Sense Country* (London: "Liberty" Press, 1895), *Chiefly a Dialogue: Concerning Some Difficulties of a Dunce* (London: Freedom Press, 1895) – itself an expansion of "A Dialogue" (*Freedom: A journal of anarchist communism*, June 1895) and *Liberty Lyrics* (London: "Liberty" Press, 1895), although we do include one poem from it.

Next is Scottish Anarchist Ethel MacDonald (1909-1960). We include a selection of her radio speeches for the CNT-FAI during the Spanish Revolution (seven of which were published in her local paper, *Bellshill Speaker* in 1937) plus other reports from Barcelona as well as two articles.

It is unfortunate that even the author of a sympathetic account of MacDonald's life seems to be so unclear about her politics to proclaim them as being "somewhere between anarchism and Trotskyism". (Chris Dolan, *An Anarchist's Story: The Life of Ethel MacDonald* [Birlinn 2009], 89). A case could be made, perhaps, that they were somewhere between anarchism and the (Marxist) council communist tradition but it would be accurate to say that she was a revolutionary class struggle anarchist, an anarchist-communist.

We move onto Ethel Mannin (1900-1984), a noted author who moved from Leninism to anarchism and pacificism. We start with her *Women and Revolution*, which while dedicated to Emma Goldman expressed Trotskyist politics. She was active in campaigning for the Spanish Revolution and drew closer to anarchism and we include articles written for the anarchist press. Then extracts from her book *Bread and Roses*, a summation of utopian visions, are given.

Then comes Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960), the British suffragette and socialist, one of the earliest supporters of the Bolsheviks in Russia, involved in the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain before being expelled and moving to council communism. While often claimed for Marxism – but also dismissed by certain Marxists for not being one! – her politics always had a libertarian aspect and, indeed, her newspaper *The Workers' Dreadnought* increasingly included anarchist articles. Given her progression from suffragette to libertarian communist as a result of her involvement in the class struggle, anarchists should be better acquainted with her ideas and their evolution.

This is followed by Bob Jones account of the anti-parliamentarian communist movement after the First World War and a contemporary article by an Australian anarchist arguing for a consistent anti-Parliamentarian strategy by socialists, repeating arguments long proven by history. It is clear from recent events, not least in America, that a strategy of just voting for the "lesser evil" leaves us weak when the "greater evil" gains office (or when the "lesser evil" inevitably pursues terrible policies). We simply cannot rely on whoever wins elections not abusing their power, rather we need to build a social movement which can effectively resist power by means of solidarity and direct action.

We end with reviews and our usual news of the movement, *Parish Notes*.

If you want to contribute rather than moan at those who do, whether its writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us: [blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk)



# Death of L. S. Bevington

*Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, December 1895

It is with deep sorrow we record the death of our dear comrade, Louisa Sarah Bevington, which took place on Thursday, the 28th ult., at her residence at Willesden, in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of her age.

L. S. Bevington was one of the most remarkable women of her time. Born and reared in the lap of luxury, but of better stuff than most of those thus delicately nurtured, she gave early indication of that great ability as a thinker and writer which she afterwards displayed, and which led to an introduction to the leading writers on science and philosophy, and secured for her the life-long friendship of Herbert Spencer.

Her early writings, which were chiefly of a poetical nature, gained recognition at once, and stamped her as a poet of uncommon power. Her later writings marked her out as one of the keenest and brightest thinkers of the day on social topics.

As an advocate of free thought she won renown in her brilliant reply to Mallock's article on "Modern Atheism," in the *Nineteenth Century*. This reply necessitated a second edition of the magazine. It was in this reply-article our friend enunciated her firm conviction – arrived at after years of thought and investigation – that "Conscience has taken milleniums to develop, and it has developed in obedience to a need, not to a *creed* – springing out of the fundamental demands of progressive existence rather than from the comparatively recent demands of theological aspiration."

Of late it has been one of L.S.B.'s greatest regrets that she was prevented by ill health from earning money by her pen which would have enabled her to support and advance the cause with which her feelings were in most active accord. Only those who were fortunate in having her friendship could adequately appreciate her natural purity of character, and the great bravery which characterised her whole life.

It might truly be said that she rose superior to circumstances. Her private trials were of that description which would have utterly broken down

a less resolute nature, but so keenly alive was she to social injustice, that – ignoring her own sufferings – she strove with all her might to make the world better ; and the advanced thought of today is enriched by her efforts, and her name will be revered, and handed down with those of Francis Galton, Herbert Spencer, Peter Kropotkin, and Louise Michel. Her friends were to be found in all ranks of life, and her readiness to aid all with the hand of a friend was not limited to her own circle, but everything she did in this direction was characterized by the grace and unobtrusive charm which so highly distinguished her.

As our readers are aware, it was during the latter part of the summer that our comrade's illness assumed a serious aspect, and necessitated all the care and attention her family could give her. Nothing however could save her life. Only a few hours before her death she was in excellent spirits – had been in fact dictating a contribution for the columns of *LIBERTY*, in answer to the letter of D.B. in our last number, which she was of opinion was both "quaint and foolish", her contention being that any person recognising authority of a spiritual nature could not possibly be a true Anarchist. With this conviction she passed peacefully away early on the morning of the date above mentioned.

"Key-Notes," a small volume of poems – the title of which was probably suggested by Emerson's reference to the "Key-Note of Nature and Spirit" – was the first of Miss Bevington's works. It was published in 1879. Four of the songs, entitled respectively "Morning," "Afternoon," "Twilight," and "Midnight," were reproduced in a well-known American periodical, the *Popular Science Monthly*, at the special request of Herbert Spencer, under the title of "Teachings of a Day." One of the teachings was that

"In the drift of things and forces  
Comes the better from the worse."

The mind of Miss Bevington had not as yet acquired its full vigour, for we find her asking

“When breath has ceased for ever, are men all the same?” Indeed the whole work is not inaptly described in a few lines which we quote from the dedication:

. . . “The sum of them together cast  
Makes just one questioning dissonance,  
such chord  
As symbolises best unfinished life.”

At this time Miss Bevington had scarcely begun the good work she was eventually to carry on.

Between 1879 and 1882 (the latter being the date of issue of her second book) L. S. B. had been very busy contributing articles to various magazines and newspapers – *Modern Thought*, *Mind*, *The Anglo-Continental Review*, etc.

“Poems. Lyrics, and Sonnets” displayed most unmistakably an advance on all previous efforts. There was a breadth, a fire, a power to

. . . “Hold aloft a meaning steadfastly  
Amid the ruin-crash of falling creeds“

which occasioned *The Cambridge Review* to say

“This little book shows beyond doubt that a poetess has risen among us stronger in her particular style than any of her predecessors.”

The *Athenæum* wrote

“That Miss Bevington is a poet there can be no doubt: her poetic gift is that of an uncommon order to be met with in Blake’s drawings and in the best of Dr. Garth Wilkinson’s poems. There is in all three that sure power of inner vision which can clothe spiritual state with visible form.”

In well-nigh every page of these “Poems, Lyrics, and Sonnets“ there is an ever growing desire for freedom – the purest, the strongest, the best that men or women may win. It is in connection with this incessant longing and craving for liberty that one of the most important events in the life of L.S.B. occurred. She was married to an artist, a German. After a few years of wedded life they found themselves not altogether at variance, but out of tune with each other. In the light of this fact the last verse of the last sonnet (“For Freedom’s Sake”) in the volume has now a touching interest:

“But we have chosen Freedom: so I make  
Here – as we part for weeks, for years, for life –  
My promise: I will whet my will’s keen

knife

And one by one all memory’s fetters break.

Ah! go Forget, forgive love’s lingering strife!

One Kiss? – Our last. Goodbye – “for Freedom’s sake”.

Her “will’s keen knife” was used – how deep, how hard to bear, the wounds inflicted only she who felt them could tell. But her path thenceforward was clear and straight, and her work thorough. She took her stand with

. . . “Anarchy’s few;  
Fighting the False and the Bad  
In all that they do;  
Forcing a way for the Glad,  
The Pure and the True.”

Her articles in the *Commonweal*, *Freedom*, and *Echo*, and more recently in *Liberty* and *Torch* are ample evidence of our assertion. Our readers will remember “Liberty Lyrics”, containing the latest of L.S.B.’s poetical works. We must not omit mention of the fact that the translation of Louise Michel’s “Commune of Paris” (which has been running through the last 12 numbers of *LIBERTY*) was done by Miss Bevington, between whom and the author there has long existed a sincere and sympathetic friendship.

The last work published by L.S.B. was “Common-Sense Country”. Our Comrade has left some finished and some unfinished MS. The publication of all or any of these will be eagerly anticipated by those who have already become acquainted with her writings.

The interment took place on Tuesday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> inst., at Finchley Cemetery. Amongst those attending were the brother, a sister, and several cousins of the deceased, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Kropotkin, Dr. and Mrs. Donkin, Mr. and Mrs. James Tochatti, the Misses Rossetti, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, and others.

The coffin was taken from the hearse to the grave, and at once lowered to its resting place amidst the utmost silence and without any formal ceremony whatever. A gentleman, a stranger, stepped forward and placed a very handsome wreath upon the coffin, and then quietly withdrew. To the wreaths contributed by the relatives of our comrade was added a large one “From the London Anarchists,” the ground work of which was red flowers, the letters being formed in white flowers.

# “Leaden Instincts v. Golden Conduct”

L. S. B.

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, September 1892

It is not desirable that Anarchists should expend much time in controversy. John Stuart. Mill was not far wrong when he coupled “loud discussion” with “weak conviction.” Also not far wrong when he considered both of these to be characteristic of the age in which we live. Genuine Anarchism, however, represents very strong and profound conviction indeed; – conviction, too, on a very serious, not to say tremendous, subject. It is, accordingly, a creed which tends to issue directly in action consistent with its principles, rather than in the prolonging of noisy and fruitless disputation.

Anarchism is no “fad.” The men and women who profess it have not come by it carelessly or hastily. The posture of mind and condition of the sympathies found in the more earnest Anarchists is that of people who have undergone the indispensable “forty days” of education in the wilderness. It is reached, not before, but after having learned that in very deed we do not live – LIVE – by bread alone. It is reached, not before, but after having had the advantage of a remarkably instructive bird’s-eye view of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; with a broad hint as to how and at what price these kingdoms are to be possessed. It is reached, not before, but after having conquered the inclination to fling Self and its skull-ful of consciousness DOWN, no matter whither, so only it be away from the pinnacle of a desecrated temple, a temple wrested to the pitiful uses of the buyers and sellers and merest money changers; or of scribblers, pharisees, and hypocrites, who don’t yet know themselves for what they are.

But though the inky small fry of a venal press are not worth powder and shot to do battle with, it is quite another matter with regard to the criticisms of the great and good few who are as intent as we are ourselves in the desire to aid poor, bothered humanity to find its way out of the mess into which a primitive laissez faire caused it to stumble, and to reach a goal at which it may

find the splendid happiness of a noble and healthy self-fulfilment. These loyal few, who care for truth, and who recognise the necessity for progress, differ from us not at all as to the kind of goal to aim at; they differ merely as to what are the surest means and what the fittest method by which that goal may be really reached.

Foremost among the worthy opponents of our doctrines are the orthodox evolutionists. (For ALREADY the evolution theory has not only its orthodox but also its heretical adherents!) Recognising the fundamental principle of evolutionist philosophy, we Anarchists

differ from the Spencerians as to the social and ethical application of those principles. We take the same scientific truths for texts, but we preach quite other sermons from them.

For instance, what can be truer or what truth more significant than that witnessed to by Mr. Herbert Spencer?<sup>1</sup> “The belief,” he says, “of the Socialists... is that by due skill an ill-working humanity may be framed into well-working institutions. It is a delusion. The defective natures of citizens will show themselves in the bad acting of whatever social structure they are arranged into. THERE IS NO POLITICAL ALCHEMY BY WHICH YOU

CAN GET GOLDEN CONDUCT OUT OF LEADEN INSTINCTS.” No; and there is no political horticulture by which you can get grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. But how can any one miss the fact that this is a two-edged truth, and cuts both ways! It is fatal for State Socialism; it gives one of the strongest of thrusts IN FAVOUR of Anarchism.

Remembering that we live in a world, NOT of fixed conditions, but of flux and of growth, the very predominance of leaden instinct should make us anxious to note accurately what special conditions they are which encourage the instincts to remain leaden. Haply we may alter such conditions, – sending the lead to the bottom, and letting it atop there, as WORTH NO ONE’S WHILE to fish up again. Things as they are, are

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was an English philosopher, psychologist, biologist, sociologist, and anthropologist. Spencer advocated classical liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism, opposing all forms of state intervention beyond

protecting property and enforcing contracts. During his lifetime he was well-known and respected in academia, although his influence declined sharply his death. Kropotkin critiqued his ideas numerous times. (*Black Flag*)

GOOD for lead; – BAD for gold; and this fact alone seems warrant enough for the Communistic experiment.

In closely watching life – the real thing, as it exists off paper – and in noting the intricate play of cause and effect within the all-important domain of CHARACTER, one is struck at every turn by the fact that “golden” impulses are opposed in a very deadly way by the existing terms on which alone human beings allow one another to live. The vicious relation works harmfully IN EVERY LIFE and ALL THE TIME. And worse is true. Inferior conduct is constantly FORCED by the struggle for existence out of the possessors of superior inclinations. Character, on which all depends, is KEPT DOWN; and so we are all more miserable than we need be, and make one another more miserable than we really mean to. It is not merely that existing conditions, political and commercial, are responsible for the transformation of citizens, originally well-disposed and public-spirited, into desperately unhappy blunderers like Ravachol. A still more serious, because more insidiously evil result is seen in the universal and ceaseless temptation offered to mere venal cuteness at the expense of all regard for consequences to the community. Those who are complacently content with things as they are, pretend that it is VIRTUE, in the forms of industry, energy, and prudence that is rewarded; and that those who are luckless fail merely because they are deficient in these excellences, and therefore deserve their fate. Whereas there is in fact no CONSTANT connection at all between even industry and energy, on the one hand, and material success, on the other. And as to that self-regarding QUASI virtue called “prudence,” it is of little use unless with the prudent conduct there goes the trick of cuteness. Shrewdness in the limited cause of Self has only to be sufficient in degree and in unscrupulousness, and, as things are, it is safe to succeed, and to be in external ways even respected. In a soil and climate propitious to thistles how can we expect to gather figs and grapes?

Nor does the condition seem to be a normal or vital thing at all, but merely a morbid result of a general false start, HAPPENED UPON long ago. Those who were the best brutes seized most; those who were the greediest stored most; and the rest of the community let it go on, at first through innocent indifference, and later, when it began to hurt them, it was too late to protest. The least scrupulous bad got it all their own way. Not only the resources of the community were in their custody, but also the power of protecting their “rights” (save the mark!), by means of “law and order”; – the “law” of privilege; the “order” that is maintained by force.

With regard to the sheer difficulty of being at the same time successful and honest, Mr. Spencer has himself contributed excellent scientific testimony in his well-known essay on the MORALS OF TRADE, written more than thirty years ago. And he points out that there

verily is, in the nature of things, only one possible remedy for the evil came to wit, a “purified public opinion.” So much of purified public opinion as our generation has arrived at, is now striving to make itself heard in the Anarchist cry for a radical change. Material progress, – the conquest of physical Nature for human purposes, – in the view of the orthodox evolutionists necessitates the disregard FOR THE TIME BEING (so many generations or perhaps centuries!) of the needs of the moral and social life. Men’s conscience and sympathies must content themselves with starvation, or with humble pie at the best, until men’s cupidity and cruelty shall have had their full fling and eaten their own head off! Oh, surely not! Let us, at any risk, at almost any cost, wrest a broad field on which that which is healthiest, individually and socially, may at least compete on fair terms for survival, against the ugly monsters’ tyranny and avarice. Within a single bosom, as in the open world, are these antagonists constantly brought face to face; and so far the lower can bully the higher, and then point to facts of bread and cheese for self-justification.

How long are the sentiments, the taste, the reasoned convictions of a socially-disposed minority to count for nothing? – a minority who, if unhindered by coercive artificial conditions would be happy centres of usefulness, each man and woman, willing to work for and to trust a community that fed and trusted them. A minority to whom the squalid talk is as meaningless as it is revolting about the “enjoyments of private property,” and the “rewards of ability” in shape of “rights” to sate and surfeit Self, and at will, under one smug pretence or another, to keep food out of starving stomachs, work out of willing hands, clothes off shivering backs, and hopes out of wistful hearts. Oh, it is all so grimly absurd and wrong headed!

“Merit,” says evolutionist philosophy, must be reckoned by “power of self-sustentation.” As things are, who is to say where this power exists, and where not? In one direction there is no test provided. The human creature is placed on the top of the hill of opportunity at birth, and be he ever so much of a social “good-for-nothing,” “law and order” will take care he shall come to no serious grief. In an opposite case, splendid faculty and noble character is born, and the hill of opportunity is placed on the top of IT; and all the faculty and all the energy and all the character is needed for the life-long task of crawling out from beneath it; much to the loss of everybody all round.

What confusion it all is! We, who are not parliamentarians, nor seekers of even individualist “rewards,” are FORCED to live as if we were, at least, individualists; on penalty of death, disaster, or moral checkmate. And oh, how afraid people are that force will be met with force; and THEY, likewise, constrained to be communists against their will. THEY

may protest against coercion; WE are deprecated if we ever appeal against it.

“Improvement of character,” says Mr. Spencer, “results from carrying on peaceful industry under the restraints imposed by orderly social life.” That is what we Anarchists think too; but as yet there has been but little “orderly social life”; nor has there been any “peaceful industry.” The hideous scramble of mutually-envious starvelings, seeking work and finding none, on one hand; the sickening, dog-in-the manger scramble for more than enough of everything, on the other THIS is not “peace”! Force alone secures the thin semblance of peace; all but the minority whom existing methods favour, know, or might know, that it is WAR, to the knife, – aye! war to the dynamite bomb. There is NO peace below the surface; but instead of it, the desolation and woe caused by wasted powers, stunted character, pent sympathies, the whole being surmounted by certain neat and tidy “institutions,” providing for the protection and perpetuation of crude and barbarous instincts, aims, methods, and principles, far beyond their normal term existence; far beyond their due time for SUPERSESSION.

Then comes the question, How best discourage the meaner tendencies of humanity? What does Nature say when we ask her? What paralyses a function, or kills an instinct? Surely atrophy of the structure – the organ – of that function. What causes atrophy? WANT OF OPPORTUNITY OR OF TEMPTATION FOR ITS EXERCISE. We must see to it that the new chances be such that the woe-working instincts shall be starved out, dimmed, not missed, and finally forgotten.

Then comes the question of revolution. “Let human nature slowly grow into better things,” say the orthodox evolutionists. “Little by little amity will prevail.” “Inch by inch human creatures will concede one another the right to be, and to breathe.” “Someday, somewhere, possibly conscience, sympathy, sincerity may get a high old time of it, without fearing the wolf at the door.” AND MEANTIME? Oh! meanwhile, millions must

suffer and rot unavenged; PREACHING may be permitted from pulpits today and tomorrow if you like; PRACTICE must WAIT. Human nature is not good enough yet; it were madness to trust it to act as it preaches.’

O ye of little faith! For the sake of each and all shake off this timidity. Give us no more of these “ifs” and “buts” and “probablys” and “ultimatels.” Set free, – DARE to set free – at least so much of human nature as has, despite all your discouragements, achieved “golden instincts.” Free these for the sake of the rest; for all suffer, when the best are bound. Let the little leaven at least get its full chance of leavening the whole lump.

Anarchism represents the present protest raised by checked sympathies against that which thwarts them. It will continue its protest. It cannot be punished. Crucifixism, ostracism, or even polite snubbing will NOT stamp it out. The flag will nevermore be lowered. Purified opinion will go on and on, setting spiritual fire to old QUASI-moral rubbish, until it shall become no longer “respectable,” no longer counted for “honest” to accept personal inheritance of parental hoards, or to accumulate means of existence and means of POWER in “own” hands, in excess of all possible need or

use of them.

Communism is as yet theory – an ideal. But it is s reading. It appeals not to the basest but the noblest side of human character. It has a claim to be allowed fairly to compete with, and if it can to supplant the more barbarous system now wasting. But it must first wrest the field is which to set up its tents. Amity and kind concession is better than revolution; but such concession is denied. Nature, therefore, will continue, whether we like it or not, to work by her own rough old method. She will thoroughly purge her floor. We know what will become of the chaff. She will require us to brace our energies for revolution, and that soon. Let us be on our guard against all those evil passions which alone could impair the moral force of strong action, and make it of none effect.

**The hideous scramble of mutually-envious starvelings, seeking work and finding none, on one hand; the sickening, dog-in-the manger scramble for more than enough of everything, on the other THIS is not “peace”! Force alone secures the thin semblance of peace; all but the minority whom existing methods favour, know, or might know, that it is WAR**

**“The modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable – so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of ‘No force’ be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination.”**

– Peter Kropotkin, “Communist-Anarchism,” *Act for Yourself* (London: Freedom Press, 1988)

# ***Wanted: Order***

**LSB**

*Commonweal*, May 1893

Yes! order. That is what we Anarchists are struggling to get in the place of the shameful “chaos and disorder” that we see around us.

The disorder in the World and the Misery of the Workers is caused by the system of Monopoly and Capitalism, and by the brutal working of the laws, made by Monopolists and Profitmongers to protect themselves and their dishonest gains.

It is to the interest of Monopolists and Capitalists to make you believe that Anarchists are “enemies of society”. They tell you that Anarchists want to turn the world “upside down.”

Workers! “The world is upside down already” and the Anarchists are people who are giving their whole lives and powers in trying to set it on its feet.

Anarchists are not enemies of society, but they are enemies of the Capitalist system of Competition and the Government by Mammon, which keeps society in wretched confusion, filling it with Crime, Fraud, and Cruelty, and making men the enemies of one another, instead of friends.

Under the present Mammon-based system of society, everything is in the wrong place, and goes by contraries. Everything is out of proportion. Everything is put to false and fatal uses. There is waste everywhere; there is want everywhere.

All the natural resources of our rich and beautiful world are at the disposal of a few idle men. Workers are set to make shoddy clothes, to jerry-build houses and to manufacture and mix rubbish and poison in foods and drinks.

The starving and shivering poor must pay back their hard won earnings for these wretched mockeries, which their own hands have been forced to make only for the exploiters’ profit.

Is this “order”?

Language is used to defraud and deceive. The commercial advertiser, the politician, the priest, and even the labour-leaders use fair words for their own ends, either to make you buy some profit-making sham, or believe some profit-protecting lie.

If a man is rich, no matter by what means he has become so, he is flattered, allowed to live in idleness, and to dominate the lives of the workers. He is so far

free; and law (which, mark you, knows nothing of justice) protects him in his idleness.

If a man is poor, there is one rigid condition on which alone society allows him the necessities of life, he must become the wage-slave of some exploiter. He must give his time and powers of body and mind to producing something to present to a profitmonger. Then a pittance will be returned to him, and he must live on it how he can. The exploiter pockets his present; the slave pockets his hopelessness.

Not merit, not need, decided who shall be supplied with the world’s resources. Money, or credit the phantom of money, decided that. And law protects and upholds this arrangement, and perpetuates the human hell that it results in. . Is this order?

It is said that soldiers and police, armies and arsenals, torpedoes, dynamite, and the taxes that go to pay for all this brute force, are “necessary”. Necessary for what? “Why, to keep disorder in the world!”

Workers! citizens! the “order” which is kept by these brutal means is the order of a smart tomb, with a putrefying corpse inside it. Corruption is the order of the present day. Monopoly and Exploitation are two great, cruel Crimes. Society is heaped up, in its present hideous disorder, on these Crimes as its foundation.

All the anxious sorrows of the workers, all the depravity and degradation of those whose lot is yet lower in the social Chaos, are due to these two great cruel Crimes. All Governments came into existence, and remain in existence, to protect these two great Crimes to protect the Monopolist and to protect the Exploiter. (Aye, and to protect the priests and other menial hangers-on to the skirts of mammon!)

All wars are fought to defend Monopoly to open markets for the profitmongers, to secure wage-slaves for the exploiter, to force the will of the strong upon the weak and of the rich upon the poor. How long?

Mammon governs Man; and until Mammon be destroyed, and the fiction of “Property” be abolished, none of us can help ourselves. Till then all must stifle the voice of honesty within the hearts, and compete for money in order to live. And all must compete for profit (that is, defraud and over reach other competitors) if life is to be free from anxiety, if leisure is to be enjoyed or the faculties allowed full development and exercise.

Mammon makes law; and law holds your necks under the yoke of this anomalous, homicidal system, where there is Private Property there must be Government. And where there is Government there cannot be Freedom or Justice.

“Law and Order” are jingled together in a phrase, by those whose turn it serves to pretend that they mean the same thing. We Anarchists declare to you – and it is a matter of social life and death that you heed us, – that where there is man made law there can be no order. It is to get Order that we are determined to abolish Law.

Law hinders Order. Law keeps food out of hungry stomachs; for it protects the stores of the exploiter, and punishes with penal servitude the starveling who would seize a loaf. Law keeps the rich, rich: and the poor, poor. Law keeps safe the gains of the sweater and the swindler. Law forbids Industry to till uncultivated lands,

unless at the exploiter’s bidding; and takes from the worker the fruit of his tillage, should he be employed.

Workers, insist that all this shall be changed. Refuse to be governed. Resist the exploiter. We must get possession of the means of life. When everyone is fitly occupied and everyone’s needs fitly supplied, when men co-operate as friends having common ends in view, and when each is allowed the scope proper to his own individuality, then and not sooner will Order take the place of Chaos, and Society be worth the name.

We Anarchists do not desire to enrich ourselves. We do not want your money. We do not want to rule over you. We do not want praise, or pay, or privilege, or power. We want for you, for ourselves, for all, free access to the Means of life. We want Justice. We want Honesty. We want Human Brotherhood. We want ORDER.

# Mr. Auberon Herbert’s “Voluntary State”

L. S. Bevington

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, July to December 1893

## Part I

Conservatism seems to me to be giving another dying gasp as I read two leaflets lately issued by Mr. Auberon Herbert.<sup>1</sup> The habit of domination dies hard, and dies hardest, of course, at its tap-root, Mammon. Mr. Herbert, as we know, still retains an unshaken belief in the rightfulness of property-owning, and in the healthfulness of commercial competition; consequently, he acquiesces without a sigh in the tortuous wriggles human nature is compelled into executing in the name of the wage-system, and acquiesces, also, in just as much hired brute force as may be required to keep property where it is, commercial competition what it is, and the wage-earner in his “proper place,” *i.e.*, at the beck and call of the wage-dispenser. This is conservatism pure and simple, candid and honest; but Mr. Herbert, besides believing in property and its train of . . . consequences, also believes in the development of individuality up to the limits necessarily imposed by property restrictions, and is possessed by the idea that property-owning on part of some, and property-seeking on part of all, is a means by which that blessed thing, Liberty, may be obtained. The thing he chiefly objects to is that particular function of Government which *limits the absolute sway of the individual property-owner*, compulsory taxation; -- the taking of money out of private pockets for so-called public purposes.

One of the new leaflets gives a sketch of the “*Voluntary State*” which (as soon as, and no sooner, than mankind at large shall have peaceably evolved towards a recognition of the evils of compulsory taxation) is to somehow bless us all by ensuring the repose of money in the private pocket, until, and unless, voluntarily drawn forth by owner of the pocket for purposes which, whatever their public significance, shall be yet frankly and primarily that owner’s individual purposes.

What place in this Voluntary State for us Anarchists, who regard property as a word-based illusion, and ownership a myth?

The other leaflet gives twenty-three “*Reasons why we object to Compulsory Taxation in all its forms.*”

The spirit which animates the “Liberty [of] Property Defence League” breathes throughout both these manifestoes; and, if space be allowed me, I will take their clauses, one by one, and do my best to give an Anarchist’s reasons for repudiating them.

The Voluntary State “limns the features” of what, without disrespect, I may call a Pocket Utopia. It is to be a State in which the pocket is to be in a heaven of its own. And each man is to carry his own share of heaven in his pocket, or nowhere. The pocket is to be regarded as part of the person of the individual. In Mr. Herbert’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Auberon Edward William Molyneux Herbert (1838-1906) was an English writer and 19th century individualist. He was a son of the 3rd Earl of Carnarvon and a Liberal Member of Parliament for the two-member constituency of Nottingham from 1870 to 1874. He advocated a classical liberal (*laissez*

*faire* capitalist) ideology, taking it a stage further than most of its adherents by advocating a voluntary-funded government that uses force only in defence of private property. He is known as the originator of voluntaryism and a precursor of right-wing “libertarianism”. (*Black Flag*)

words, “It is impossible to separate *freedom of action from freedom possession*. A man acts through and by means of the various substances of the world, and if he is not free to *acquire* and *own* these substances as an individual, neither is he free to act as an individual” – (I fancy I hear some comrade ejaculate, “What hopeless rot!”) The Voluntary State is to be a state in which the volition of the property-owner shall virtually be the sole moving power: in which, too, the protection of *all* as *persons*, is to be practically of secondary importance to protection of *some*, as *owners*, since under its provisions it is the persons of property-owners, and of those whom it may suit property-owners *voluntary to pay to have protected*, who alone are to have the services of the hired brute force which this Voluntary State will support. I will quote. “The Voluntary State” would be founded on the following principles:

(1) “It (the State) would acknowledge as its highest law, supreme above itself, the sovereignty of the individual. In J. S. Mill’s words, ‘Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual would be sovereign’; in Mr. Herbert Spencer’s words, The widest possible liberty of each would be only limited by the like liberty of all.”

How heartily will every Anarchist echo these sayings, adding only that the like liberty of all cannot exist so long as liberty remains an article of commerce, depending on “property” – that skeleton-key, forged by force and fitted by fraud, and kept in the hands of the “owner,” to open the gate to freedom: the gate over which the custodians had written in the blood of the down-trodden of the crowd outside – “*No Thoroughfare*.” The *like* liberty of every baby born! Where, so long as property thus bars the way, shall parents find this preliminary boon for their little ones?

(2) “So far as it employed force, the State would simply do so to protect person and property from injuries inflicted against the will or consent of the injured person. It would use force to guarantee every living person against the murderer, the thief, and the swindler, and his property against injurious acts; but for no other purpose.”

Again this clause we Anarchists urge two considerations: (a) The thief and the swindler are two culprits incidental to the mammon-based system under which we live; they are bred of that institution “property” itself, which, if you anywhere scratch its surface, stands revealed as a consolidated theft and

swindle, and, like a ripe cheese, is ready to produce its own maggots to prey upon it. So long as poor humanity is forced to tolerate this gigantic and pestilent evil, let it – thief and swindle – be robbed and swindled; force will be of no avail against the production of the natural maggot; fraud will, as heretofore, always “go one better” than force; and the “voluntary” law (how funny that sounds!) be as frequently evaded by the cunning of the hungry, and the cunning of the would-be rich and richer, as in these days of compulsory taxation. (b) The “murderer”? Deduct all the murders committed for property’s sake, or because of grievances having their root-cause in property (the institution rather than the thing), and how many remain?

Would the number of men and women ready to destroy one another, *for any case at all*, under a system of society where all should have more than the scope, the ease, the resources, and enjoyments now monopolised by a few – would the number of murderers under a Free State be worth the ugly risk to social peace implied in a standing apparatus of force to guarantee citizens against their attacks? Surely the question answers itself.

(3) “It (the Voluntary State) would establish Free Trade in everything. It would have no Tariffs, or Custom Duties. It would not interfere with or regulate any part of production or distribution. So

far as force was concerned, would not inspect anything or anybody; would not guarantee the safety of any article used by the public, or the fitness of any person employed.” . . . And so on.

Good. And yet we maintain that neither Free Trade, nor free anything else, can be possible under Capitalism. The profit-monger, the man with capital, must always push markets about, and coerce the action of the man who is destitute of capital or who repudiates profits. The man who will not starve while he waits will always force his own terms, under one form or another, on the man who cannot wait and *live*. And then, what mockery it is to talk of not interfering with or regulating any part of production or distribution, so long as the force-protected private property-owner remains, and that system of competing in mere pursuit of “property,” which, once owned by the most ruthless or the most cunning, means so much opportunity snatched clean away from neighbours right and left.

(4) “No compulsory taxes or rates. [Only] voluntary contributions.”

Good again. But how about rents? (!)

## **what mockery it is to talk of not interfering with or regulating any part of production or distribution, so long as the force- protected private property-owner remains**

## [Part II]

Next comes: *The Working of the Voluntary State*

(1) “*Taxation*. Public days would be fixed for the collection of Voluntary Contributions. These days would probably become national holidays, meetings being held and performances of many different kinds being organised by those citizens who would undertake to act in this matter to assist the raising of contributions. It would be attempted to enlist everywhere the energy and goodwill of all leading citizens. Hospital Saturday and Sunday offer on a minute scale an example of what would be done.”

You see! No real voluntaryism after all. Public days are to be fixed (we presume by the State,) on which days the wills of the not interested are to be inveigled by means devised by the wills of the keenly interested; the wills of “leading citizens” to be quite specially angled for, of course. No honest nailing up in public of a permanent ‘propertyist’s alms-box’ with the inscription – “Whosoever of his own accord really desires to pay money for some one else to carry a bludgeon or employ dynamite or build ironclads in defence of his own or any one else’s purse or person, please pay here. Amount. voluntary.” That would be voluntary taxation; and of course it would be a sheer human impossibility to buy bludgeoners or dynamiters enough – or even the ten million pounds’ worth of them that Mr. Herbert presently hints at – to protect all the propertyists, national and private, out of such sums as people at large would be willing to pay for that definite purpose. No one *likes* to buy anything at his own felt expense (even for his master!) dearer than he need. Our unjustly mistrusted mother, Nature, has ordered it so, and has actually made the dislike nowhere more intense than in the bosoms of the well-fed of the children of Albion. And at the present social and ethical time of day, when to a large and daily increasing intelligent minority the buying and hiring of people to do what *we* want and *they* don’t care about is beginning to appear a somewhat questionable and foolish process, it seems a little farcical to propose measures for rendering the protection of the property-owner by the propertyless a voluntary business at all. Possibly our Anarchist time-pieces are a little prone to gaining where practical ethics are concerned; but I think there can be no doubt that that of Mr. Herbert is, in this particular case, behind time. Or may we read between the lines or among the corollaries of his proposal any willingness that property *shall* dissolve through the natural liberated action of volitional cause and effect, and the people become truly free, although by a more unconscious, random, and circuitous route than that of direct intelligent revolt? I trow not. For *Free Life* “resolutely defends private property.” It must be that the absolute and helpless dependence of this institution on coercive Government is not yet apparent to Mr. Herbert.

And then, I for one have an objection to the *method* of this madness. Lo! legal and official coercion of the tax-paying will being once abolished, that more shifty and demoralising form of will-coercion is contemplated which already brings silver threepenny bits in such myriads to the coffers of Hospitals, etc. The threepenny bit represents mammonised Respectability’s compromise between the “I don’t want to pay,” on one hand, and the “I don’t want Mrs. Grundy to *know* I don’t want to pay,” on the other. The threepenny bit is the only voluntary coin to be expected from the well-clad portion of the public; if larger sums are needed they will have to be bought or bribed for, by means of “performances of many kinds” – concerts, theatricals, bazaars, what not? And then, think of the “cadging” that will go on on part of “leading citizens” among the (always more generously disposed) poor. Think of how the “black police” and their petticoated subalterns will “work” the villages, the schools, the slums; every nook and corner where ignorance and innocence renders minds and wills defenceless against policy and influence. I do not think the picture of Mr. Herbert’s national tax-collecting holidays a pretty picture at all. Of the two methods I had rather that the State wrenched open my fingers and seized the tax in spite of me, than have it wheedled out of me while the “Voluntary” is being played on the church organ.

(2) “A State Contribution paper would be circulated stating the various needs of the Government, and the amount required under the various heads. Each contributor would fill in his contributions under such heads as he chose. Whenever the amount fell short for an important purpose, the Government would issue a supplementary notice pointing out the amount which was deficient. It would then rest with the country to supply or not to supply the deficiency. Those who gave contributions for any special purpose would mark their paper if they chose to indicate that when a certain sum had been obtained, say £10,000,000, for national defence, their contributions should be transferred to other purposes.”

Think of the army of salaried officials even this distantly future Government would still be obliged to employ! Inducement to corruption must remain so long as salaried officialism remains; no incorruptible officials can be hoped for so long as the officiating is done mainly for a living, or for promotion, and only secondarily or not at all for sake of anything else. And imagine if you can the posture of mind which contentedly looks along an evolutionary vista, and sees at the end of it nothing better than Government agents busily carrying round the hat in the name of that anachronism “the Country.” National defence! – when Internationalism is already the ingrain sentiment of

millions – when the proletariat of the whole planet, exactly in proportion to its rapidly advancing enlightenment, is sick of the farce of nationality, the cant of patriotism, the barbaric pretence of empire; false ideals which have brought to the peoples nothing but servitude and woe. 'Why, it seems to me, that long before any propertyist gets even the smallest current of popular feeling to set in anywhere towards his goal, events will have tided us all on to a social *terra firma* where there will be no more nations to hate, and compete against, and attack; -- no more nations to bluster about, and murderously defend.

(3) "*Debt*. In order to get rid of all existing debt, central and local, the greatest efforts would be made; funds opened, gifts and legacies invited, some public property sold . . . A crusade would be preached in every part of the country to get rid of our existing evil and humiliating burdens."

It is of course only financial debt that is here meant. The deeper debt that has accumulated for centuries the debt which the Appropriator, national or private, everywhere owes to the Producer of property – this remains out of count. The "humiliating burden" spoken of is not the burden of living and enjoying at the sole cost (in life and enjoyment) of the overworked man who fills your purse, or that other man whose sad life you penalise, and whose enjoyment you utterly forbid, only because you cannot employ him to enrich you further. And what a waste of crusading energy would be that proposed preachment against national financial debt, while the causes, one and all, that drive nations into debt remain untouched.

(4) *The Vote*. "A payment of 5s. per annum would give the vote; but it might be found

(5) "*National Defence*. The Voluntary System would be much developed. A large body of men drilled in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons, and receiving perhaps £5 a head per annum, would form an intermediate class between the regular forces and the volunteers. The regular army would be smaller in number; the men would be highly trained."

Comrades! all these hirelings, to defend other people's "property" and privileges! and to keep our race divided

convenient to put matters dealt with by the State on the voluntary principle under separate Boards which would be elected only by those contributing to each matter so dealt with. These Boards would be independent of the Government though they might, if convenient, report their proceedings to the Government."

Every man (and we presume every woman), then, who in the days of Voluntary Statism shall feel in need of governing or who wants to get other people governed, will merely have to inherit, work for, beg, borrow, or steal five shillings, as a year's qualification for the privilege of saying what representative stranger shall perform the operation for them. The majority, then, of those folk who care to buy this five shillings worth of

indirect and risky dominating power will decide for the rest – *as at present*. There will be legal penalty in some shape for evasion or defiance (however conscientious) of the vote-buyers'-representatives' regulations. No provision whatever is made for the people who don't want to be represented at all, or governed at all. Anarchists and "Abstentionists" will have to remain either the *subjects* of the more numerous of the competing parties of 5-shillingers, or else the discredited *rebels* that they are today. As to the separate little elected boards for this and that, with their reports to Government and their Government-audited accounts, their two salient features loom so large in my anarchic vision that I cannot care about any of their

minor and comparative advantages and disadvantages. Being worked by money and for money, money will, as now, come first, and man second, in their every provision; and the officialism necessitated, with that inevitable concomitant of officialism – corruption, will continue to ensure waste of power and abuse of trust all round.

### [Part III]

into two camps – those whose adventitious clutch on the general resources enables them to utilise the vital needs of their fellows in the cause of their own supremacy, and those who must sell themselves in order to be clothed and fed. Why does Mr. Herbert so often use the word "Liberty" as if it were something that we all had a right to? Echo answers, Why?

(6) "*Foreign Policy*. There need be no break in the general Foreign Policy of the country. Its natural pacific tendency would be confirmed. . .

. At present the chances of war are much increased because those who desire it are able to make others who are opposed to it support part of the burden.”

Compulsory taxation makes war equipment easier; yes. But removal of compulsory taxation does not touch the causes of war. Foreign Policy! The new Economy and the new Ethic recognise no “foreigner” as such, and require no foreign policy as such. One blow dealt at the spirit of nationalism does more towards abolishing the waste and the burden of war than a thousand and one blows dealt merely at the mode of collecting money for it. The British Empire is already too confined an ideal for the fast-developing instinct of human fellowship. Mr. Herbert would diminish the mechanical facilities of nations for flying at each other's throats. We would spend our crusading energy on no lesser aim than that of destroying their immoral pretexts for doing so. The property craze and its incidental vices lurk in all Foreign Policy. And then, as to the chances of war being “at present much increased” because those who desire it can force the money burden of it on the rest: surely not *much* increased? The chances of war can at no time be greater than is the confidence which the minority who are interested in wars can place in their hired soldiers. This confidence is again measured by the ability of officers and priests to keep soldiers blind and

ignorant as to all deeper and higher issues, to inflate them with hollow vanity, and pervert any power of manly devotion that is in them to the service of false and ignoble ends. (Sir Garnet Wolesley's Handbook containing *Advice to Officers* will show “how it's done.”) None, however, at this hour know better than the powers that be how the sword they grasp already threatens to pierce their own hand; how increasingly indifferent soldiers everywhere are to “patriotic” considerations; and how increasingly aware of and disgusted at their own degraded position and inhuman vocation. Thus the confidence which is necessary to war-making wanes from week to week, and with it the chances of expensive conflict with the mere “foreigner.” Fighting no less than tax-paying must in future be done voluntarily, and because the actual combatant has his natural heart in it. And so it will presently be seen that the *propertyist must be his own defender*. It will be seen first by property's hirelings – seen, despite the frantic and increasingly convulsive efforts now going on to lash into activity the perishing remnants of barbaric sentiment, or to smuggle the seeds of that noxious weed “patriotism” into the fresh soil of little school-children's defenceless consciences. Only a little later, and it will be brought home to the propertyist himself. The international proletariat will find means of bringing it home to him.

#### [Part IV]

(7) “*Local Government*. . . . The important point is that no local authority appointed to manage common property should have any right over private property. If any owner of private property injures . . . . the property of another person, as for example by allowing his sewage to affect the soil of such person, he must be restrained by the action of the ordinary courts. Such acts . . . . must not be made an excuse for confounding the rights of private owners in managing their own property and the rights of public authorities in managing common property. . . . Over public property – which must only be *acquired in the same equitable manner as private property, by gift or by sale* – the managers appointed by the public must have full authority; over private property they must have no authority.”

Here we seem to have one rule proposed for No. 1 – that is, for His Almighty Majesty, the private owner – and a precisely opposite rule for Nos. 12, 100 or 1000, who own property in common. *Government by their own servants*, for people who jointly “own” property. Their property is to be under the authority of the “managers appointed by the public.” For the private proprietor, on the other hand, *no government at all*, least of all the authority of *his* servants – the bailiffs, agents, what not – appointed by him to manage his property. Of course I shall be told that it is necessary to be practical,

and not quibble at apparent discrepancies: for how *could* private property be properly managed except by the individual, part of whose working individuality his goods are supposed to be? although when the property part of a man's working individuality is very big it becomes somehow needful to have other individuals, disconnected with the goods, to do the managing as *their* wills do *not* direct. Yet, contrariwise, how could public property be managed by the actual individuals owning it jointly? They are too many, and these is a will and a right of ownership to every man-jack of them; they must have proxies, fewer in number, to represent them; that is, to act independently of any *one* of them or of any *minority* of them. So we see that private owning means despotism unalloyed, while common owning means mob-rule so far as it is not officialism, and officialism so far as it is not mob rule.

But, to me, the significant point in the paragraph about Local Government is that parenthesis which I have above italicised. Quite by the way, Mr. Herbert divulges his idea of what constitutes an equitable title to property and its privileges; and the ethical dusk in which the property-ridden mind habitually moves becomes once more evident. The root question which underlies the whole position is begged – nay, stolen off-hand in that parenthesis; and on we go as if nothing had happened. “Private property *is*” then, in existing society, acquired “in an equitable manner”? Ye crowns and periwigs! And this equitable manner is “by gift and sale.” (Note

that in these last words it is once more the will of His Almighty Majesty the “owner” which is alone considered. It is not my own act of purchase or acceptance which gives me a right to my pound of tea, or my pig in a poke. It is His Almighty Majesty’s “gift” or “sale” by which *I* do the acquiring. This is a trifle, but it is a tell-tale straw on the propertyist current of thought all the same.)

As to sale, I bethink me instantly of the little boy who, on hearing that property in the soil is acquired by purchase, asked his father whether the first owner bought it from God? We know

that those who undertake the tricky task of defending the existing “rights of property” cannot afford to think of first owners, or to ask or answer questions about any previous owners at all; they have to fall back upon the term “gift,” so construed as to include *bequest*, and somehow even *inheritance*.

At no step of the factitious reasoning is there moral space for standing upright in. Mr. Herbert gives no sign that he considers productive or constructive industry any title to ownership. Still less is urgent need a title.

The property owner’s *will* is the single road along which starving humanity (though it be the humanity of a genius or a saint) may travel towards the necessary loaf. Mr. Herbert, in sketching his State, ignores the sole agency to which the institution “property” owes its existence—individual grab *plus* public concession. This was, is and will be property’s only demonstrable title, whatever number of theoretical justifications special pleaders may invent. *Individual grab* and the concession of those who, either through indifference or fear, found it their policy then and there to “let be.” With the withdrawal of this concession the *quasi* title of present owners to custody of property falls to pieces. No “right” to it has ever been acquired, nor in the nature of things could be. It is from hour to hour a purely provisional and conventional concession, which changing human conditions are rendering obviously preposterous, and already it is being more and more widely and distinctly disallowed. A like public concession, however, regarding a new set of owners would have no more ethical significance than the ancient one. As Anarchists let us bear in mind that *private property as an institution* should be swept out of existence, and that *common property* is, in the last resort, a contradiction in terms.

*Re sale.* Sale cannot mean any acquisition of property at all. It is only a change in the form of property already held. What is acquired by purchase is something to

balance the yielding up of some other thing of the same nominal value. If you have made the equitable exchange you are supposed to make, you have acquired no increased custody of the community’s ways and means, no access of “property” (which always implies such custody) by the transaction. The only man who acquires property by purchase is the profit-monger, the mercenary, the man who extorts *more* than he yields. Will Mr. Herbert call him equitable too? Of course this is what the property owner habitually and despotically does, as regards the property-less; the result being the steady increase in the number of distressed citizens, side

by side with the increase in the total wealth of the community. Strange that equity should yield such queer statistics.

As regards gift, the distribution of goods or of opportunities effected by gift may in single instances be either apparently equitable or obviously the reverse; the chances being each time hundreds to one against equity. For all depends on the degree of disinterested impartiality, as well as on the degree of human insight into actual needs possessed by the giver. But to call gift *as* gift “equitable,” with no regard to the giver’s title to what he gives

or the recipient’s need of what he receives is to dogmatically impose the whole principle of ownership; and is from a social and moral point of view once more preposterous, I even venture to repudiate any compromises under the name of “relative justice.” For you cannot have a relatively just application of a radically unjust principle.

Lastly: *Administration of Justice.* In this paragraph Mr. Herbert foretells

“an immense simplification of the civil and criminal code . . . in criminal cases by the sweeping away of the many offences with which it has been the modern fashion to fill the statute book. The State would recognise its moral incompetence to deal with vice or folly, or to protect human beings against themselves; and all the odious punishments connected with Education Acts, or Factory Acts, with Acts intended to repress betting, gambling, drinking, and other unlovely habits would disappear . . . Some much less brutal and less stupid form of punishment for slight offences than imprisonment would be employed.”

With this Anarchists have no fault to find, as far as it goes. Only of course we would go very much further, and, disbelieving wholly in the statute book as serving

any good purpose at all, or in the utility of “punishment” as such, we would try the effect of complete freedom from public regulation for everybody, leaving individuals to settle their own disputes privately; and forbidding no individuals or

groups of friends to protect themselves or one another, in cases of aggression, as each should think best. For no two persons and no two cases of offence are ever sufficiently alike for a like mode of action to be fair in each instance.

### [Part V]

Finally Mr. Herbert gives us a description of the Results which he expects from the working of his “Voluntary State.” He claims that these would show themselves in (1) “a great addition to material prosperity”; (2) “a great development of intelligence”; and (3) “a great advance in general happiness and friendliness.”

As to the increased material prosperity, Mr. Herbert shows up the actual play of financial cause and effect within the confines of the existing unhealthy economic system clearly enough to make one wish that he would convey his reasoning faculty to a truer point of view, whence that system as a whole should appear to him as a single sorry phenomenon already doomed to inevitable dissipation. Imagine a hollow sphere containing a number of peas, and rolling with its contents down a steep incline with a precipice at the bottom. Mr. Herbert is busy with the hopeless task of securing to a selected number of the fated peas a better time of it inside their sphere, ignoring the accelerating downward run of the whole thing. We Anarchists stand outside the enclosing sphere, which we regard, not as the home, but the prison of the peas. Our idea of saving the peas is to break the sphere and get them out in time. As for the accursed prison, let its wreck roll into the abyss of Nevermore, and let the rescued peas take root on *terra firma*, and shoot and flower and bring forth the natural fruit of fitly-conditioned living things. – Meanwhile, as to the way in which voluntarism is to increase material prosperity – at least for the already prosperous – within the existing property-bound system:

“Doing away with all custom duties would . . . . cheapen taxed articles, would release commerce from delay and vexatious examinations; would lessen adulteration; . . . . would save much official labour; . . . would call small ports into importance; would open the import trade,

making ports free for import to small men as well as to large houses; would thus lessen the chance of corners and monopolies, and *lessen the chance of the dockers dictating their own terms to the rest of the nation*; (dreadful dockers, so to usurp the privilege of property owners!) . . . would increase the shipping trade, and make this country the commercial depot of the whole world.”

This last clause, appealing to mere John Bullism, reads quaintly enough in the midst of an exposition of a scheme for relieving pain-racked humanity as whole. As to the above list of probable effects to follow the removal of custom duties, we may say: “That’s so.” But what of it? Cheapening taxed articles would make wages go a bit further, with the “iron” consequence that wages would be adjusted down to the lowered subsistence mark. Commerce would be released from delay and examinations? much the better for the merry profit-monger! For the mere *lessening* of adulteration our thanks are not hearty; we see a way of *abolishing* that most unnatural of all property-seeking devices, whereby men do themselves out of the means of life for the mere sake of tyrant Mammon. To open the import trade to small merchants is to make it easier to such men to supply their shops with wares, but goes small way towards enabling the needy producers or the starving unemployed to purchase them. While, as to lessening the chance of corners and monopolies, I still fail to see how within the limits of even the most lightly taxed wage-system that supreme monopolist the landlord is to be induced to give up the old game that he is so anxious the hungry useful docker should not play namely, dictation of his own terms to the rest of the world.

### [Part VI]

“Still greater would be the effect of destroying the compulsory character of the rate. The rate perhaps does more than to discourage material prosperity than any other governing device. . . . Land and houses offer the readiest and most natural investment for the savings of the small man, but . . . the growing rate depreciates these forms of property and discourages ownership.”

Does it? If so, good old rate! For in discouraging the *ownership* as distinguished from the fit occupation of property, it discourages the most deplorable and crippling of all human blunders, the noxious source of almost every form of evil doing, the most woe-working

and homicidal of all modes of arbitrary domination. But, after all, the rate only discourages ownership of land and houses, and consequent domination by the individual, in order to encourage like domination on part of a governing collection of individuals. I, for one, care little whether the game be in the hands of one man or of many men, when that game consists in robbing me of my harmless liberties. In hard fact, my material prosperity is more seriously interfered with by the landlord whose extra house I occupy than by any one else at all. Compulsory rate-paying for jobs in which I am not consulted is bad. Compulsory rent-paying for occupying an otherwise empty house just that a man

housed somewhere else should get at my pocket and (land-) lord it over me – this is worse.

As to ownership *per se*, nothing can really discourage it so long as the means of existence and every kind of liberty are, in the last resort, made to depend upon owning, instead of upon conducting yourself as a useful and pleasant citizen. The man in whose hands lodges the money price of the mutton chop can buy the chop, and passes for “honest” though he be the bornest of born idlers, and sit down to eat it with two locked-out and starving industrials looking on right and left of him. No question is asked as to how the fellow came to be able to buy. What does commerce care about that? If any cannot *pay* neither shall he eat. And if any does not *own* neither can he pay. Work nowhere comes in in this arrangement unless incidentally, and as a means of putting further ownership into the hands which already have some. There’s your property system! On its face smirks the image of the smug profit-monger, canting about “honesty.” On its obverse are three; the worn face of the weary wage-slave; the haggard face of the starving unemployed; the brutalised face of the dare-devil outcast. Meanwhile, so long as a man must own something or other before his fellows will recognise his claim to one man’s share of our superabundant supplies, so long will owning be “gone in for,” by hook or by crook, by everyone, from Rothschild or Vanderbilt to the pitiful pickpocket in a City ‘bus. For, owning, big or little, legal or illegal, means one thing only; it means the intrusion of arbitrary terms between something and someone’s use or enjoyment of that thing; and this proceeding is most evil when the man who imposes the terms is himself already well supplied. Commercial society says to the citizen: “You *must* own (and do business with me for my profit) or you shall not live; and for all I care you *may* own in such wise that others have to die.” Nature says to the citizen: “You shall LIVE, whether you own or not.” And the conflict between these opposing behests issues in the phenomenon we call Crime, much of which is nothing more than disregard or defiance of property’s infamous regulations. To think that men are yet found to stand up in the midst of the weltering muddle and wretchedness of our economic Topsy-turvydom, and link the plea of “material prosperity” with schemes for the further encouragement on its fell course of a system which makes desperate rebels and

mortal enemies of such men as a Ravachol or a Pallas! Well, let them try; they can but precipitate the Great Event – they can but hasten (even though they make more grim and more costly) that approaching outbreak of Nature and Common Sense, which shall herald the Social Revolution.

Then about the savings of the small man, for which Mr. Herbert shows concern. Alas, for what money-saving has done for the world! Had we all and always free access to means of life, in return for good citizenship, where were the need of “putting by”? Saving, as known today, is the first little step in that downward course which results in the congestion of supplies and

dislocation of human affairs which at this very hour is making our civilised world such a hell for a large and increasing majority of men and women. “Material prosperity”! How, except in bitterest irony, can the term be used to indicate the existing outcome of the immoral scramble for the rights of property?

And now, how about the second of the expected good results of Voluntary Statism – Increase of Intelligence?

“The intelligence of a people depends upon the efforts they make to overcome difficulties and wants. All evils and all hardships are nature’s educating forces; they *constrain us to find the necessary remedies*, and in finding these remedies we acquire those mental and moral qualities which really constitute progress – progress being the

acquisition of new qualities developed under the friction of difficulties . . . The politician is the born marplot, who always interferes with the natural process . . . he takes the growing movement out of the hands of the people and turns a voluntary agency, with all its teaching and training influence, into a new bit of departmental work that asks no more of the people than to hold out their hand and take what is put into it. Thus in every direction the growth of intelligence is arrested, and every modern State-created improvement costing us thought or labour beyond giving a vote leaves the people, as regards character, pretty much where it found them.”

How often is this kind of thing about the educational advantages of adversity preached to the poor from the pulpits and platforms of prosperous propertyism! It

**If any cannot *pay*  
neither shall he eat.  
And if any does not  
*own* neither can he  
pay. Work nowhere  
comes in in this  
arrangement unless  
incidentally, and as a  
means of putting  
further ownership  
into the hands which  
already have some.  
There’s your property  
system!**

always seems to me like adding insult to injury; and the hard word “cant” *will* rise to mind. Be it here said flatly, *All* evils and *all* hardships are *not* “nature’s educating forces.” Some evils are thrust, by man’s callous cruelty, and greed for domination, on other men, and in direct trespass against nature’s educational processes. Some evils and some hardships are due to man’s arbitrary interference with the true laws of life and of ethics. True, nature works indirectly and painfully by these also; but in far other ways than any which Mr. Herbert would deem salutary. The property-owner is himself the wage-slave’s greatest obstacle; and verily the slave is today feeling himself “constrained to find necessary remedies.” Whether or no he thereby “acquire the mental and moral qualities which constitute progress” is a matter of opinion. He certainly has to sharpen his wits. The capitalist has the wage-slave in thrall. He owns the latter’s means of life and personal faculties. Among the wares composing the merchandise of the great world’s mart are verily (in the words of old time) “gold, silver, wheat, beasts, sheep, horses, *slaves*, and the *souls of men*.” (*Revelations* XVIII.) The cat plays with her doomed mouse; yet feline malice out-does itself in purring meanwhile about the advantage wrought to the mouse’s intelligence by the worrying process, which has no visible end or object than the cat’s own ultimate profit. Possibly, if it could survive the process, the intelligence of a cock-chafer might be sharpened by its whirling efforts round a school-boy’s impaling pin. There must, I think, be a hopeless twist in the minds of those who see so clearly the evils of State domination while overlooking the uglier and crueller domination of the man who by help of bludgeon and bayonet is ready to maintain his right of prohibitive custody of greater or less portions of the general resources, and who thus practically denies to the worker the ownership of himself and his faculties.

And, lastly, Mr. Herbert persuades himself that property-owning and unchecked property-seeking is the true way, leading to –

“Increase of peace and friendliness.” (!) If we relieve people from State interference, “they will gradually see that the only possible solution in the interests of peace is the recognition of the differences that are inherent in human minds, and the abandonment of the unhappy attempt to *force one half of the nation under the yoke of the other half*.”

Yes, there are differences. Some – very many – of us don’t want to be forced to be owners of property, under

penalty of death or destitution if we don’t own property. Some of us would – oh, how gladly! – just work our best and be our best without money and without price if only we might quietly receive in return the necessities and comforts of life, and elbow-room to employ our faculties in our own way. But the capitalist has made the world narrow for us, and we are handicapped even where not hand-cuffed. Mr. Herbert thinks it horrible to use the law to “force one half of the nation under the

yoke of the other half,” yet has no word of protest against the actual forcing of the two-thirds or four-fifths already under the yoke of the remaining few to remain there till in the remote future it be the good pleasure of the few to release them.

He objects to the use of “material force” on part of an oppressed “faction.” Should victory be won by use of such force,

“the true road of progress is lost, and passions (say rather sufferings) become so intense that, as is now happening in some foreign countries, revolution or dynamite becomes the last court of appeal.”

Well, ask those factions who are resorting to revolution or dynamite whether it is the State *per se*, or rather the State as supporting the pretexts and enforcing the decrees of property that is hourly felt to be the tyrannous obstacle to peace and progress. I am one of those who in my heart of hearts believe that the State, in absence of the private propertyist, could not live a year. Property *is* government; – is that substance of which government is at bottom merely the magnified shadow.

Comrades, we are surely aware that the horrible man-imposed struggle for mastery by means of Mammon has lasted its full time, with the result that fewer and fewer, whatever their faculties, are *free* as the years go by, and that the minority who are so are more and more able to suppress the rest.

Mr. Herbert professes to love Liberty, and is yet a special pleader for Property – Liberty’s natural and irreconcilable foe. Property enjoys immunity and impunity today, only because it owns brute force to protect it, and because it subsidises the powerless to preach Pinkertonianism one hour and to cant about the Rights of Self-Ownership the next. Well, it cannot, we think, do so much longer. In a sense the trump has already sounded; the dead are awakening on every hand, and presently there will be separation of the just from the unjust on a scale and with a definiteness without precedent in human history. And then. . . .

# Why I Am an Expropriationist

L.S. Bevington

*Liberty: A journal of anarchist communism*, May 1894<sup>1</sup>

I advocate and I look forward to wholesale expropriation because I do not believe there is any such thing as a right to property, and because I hold that it is disastrous, nay, fatal, to the welfare of all individuals composing the community, to have to regulate their lives and affairs in accordance with a fictitious abstraction which has no warrant and no basis in the natural laws of life. I desire universal expropriation, not merely because the power that property-holding gives to man over man is in wrong hands, and consequently abused, but because it seems clear to me that property-holding is all abuse in itself, and that to hold property is to make wrong use of anyone's hands at all. I desire to see the bottom knocked out of the noxious property idea itself, for good and all.

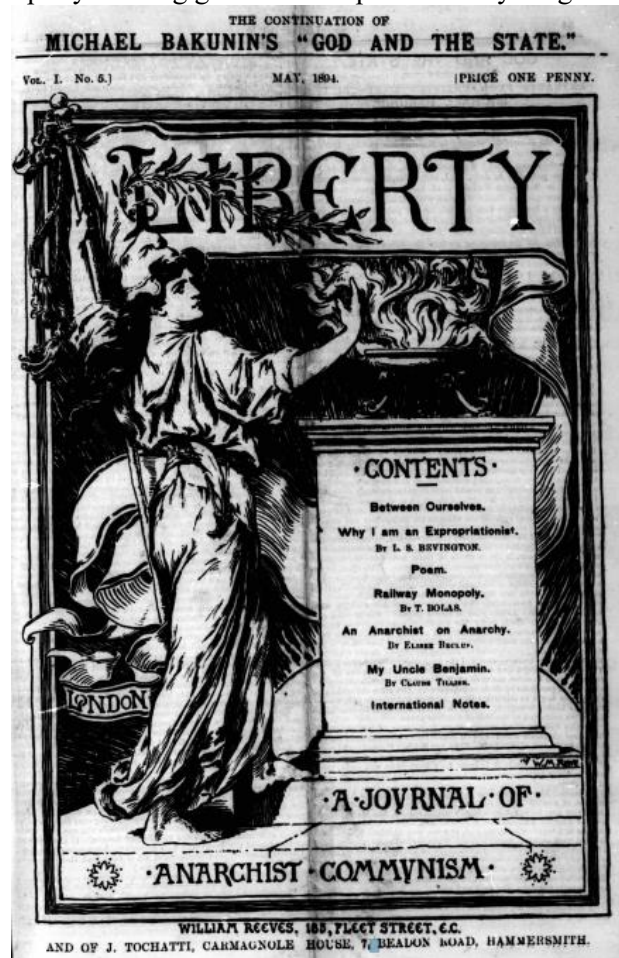
"The love of money is the root of all evil." Why? Because the love of money is the love of domination. Property is government. Property – that is, the prohibitive custody by particular persons of any part of the general resources – cannot be shown to have any value at all for any one, merely as "owner," *except the power it gives him over the faculties and liberties of his fellow-creatures*. And this is a false value, an illusion. It is a craze to believe that you are necessarily better off – the richer or the freer – through dominating your fellows by dint of keeping prohibitive custody of what may be of greater service (intrinsic value) to them than to yourself.

No true, nature-based title to property as merely such can be shown to exist. Perhaps even some Anarchists will demur to this. The belief still lingers that there is such a thing as a man's natural right to "own," to have the prohibitive custody and disposal of whatever his industry or skill may have produced or constructed out of the raw material provided by Nature. "There is one

true title to property – to custody of superfluity – and that is the Labor title;" so say many. It is a delusion. There can be no such thing as a natural title to what is after all an artificial and merely nominal relation between a man and his product; a relation having no basis in reality. That which at the outset is not anybody's cannot be made anybody's by manipulation. This is not a mere metaphysical quibble. He who produces anything useful has, other things equal, a *first*

*comer's economic right* to use, consume, or enjoy it, up to the limit of his own ability to do so. Yet this use of his product is not what the world specially means by ownership. This is not the cursed thing that keeps the world poor and squalid and sordid. Ownership begins to be talked of (here disputed, there enforced) just where the natural relation of a man to men's wealth leaves off – just where the limit of ability to use or enjoy has been fully reached. This natural limit once overstepped there is no other natural limit to be found ever again, till revolution sets one. The moment that ownership, merely as ownership, begins to be stickled for, then, no matter what its "title" may be, property will be able and eager to defend itself by means of law; it will "govern," and ensure to the owner the opportunities of becoming

indefinitely richer and richer, with the necessary result that the non-owner must become ever poorer and poorer. Nothing more stable than conventional concession originally placed or left in the hands of individuals, whether producers or not, any power over that part of wealth which remains after satisfaction of requirement – which the individual cannot use, and his fellows are in want of. Conventions remain unquestioned until some lurking hurtfulness in them comes out as a glaring social evil, and then, whether



<sup>1</sup> This article was reprinted as part of the series of *The Why I Am*s pamphlets published by *Liberty's* editor, James Tochatti, in the same year. It was paired with *Why I am a Communist* by William Morris (which appeared in the February 1894 issue). (*Black Flag*)

backed by government or not, the struggle or their displacement begins, and their doom is fixed.

As to the modern cry, “the product to the producer,” it is surely all right economically and ethically, so far as it goes. But directly it is insisted on that “the whole of the product belongs to the producer as his property” (to use, waste, sell, or hoard at his pleasure) and directly it is insinuated that human faculties and the wealth the faculties (help to) win are of equal inviolability, then we are face to face with the worst of social superstitions once more. The property holder will remain dominator, the property-holding class will remain the dominating class and its weapon, the Government, will remain in existence until the idea that things or privileges can “belong” to persons or groups of persons, is seen for the figment it actually is. Government is only another name for property. You can make Government hop from one leg to another, and on the standing leg hop from one point to another. But it will wink at you and evade you, so long as Property exists. You can alter Property’s title; what was Strength of Arms one day became Inheritance next; then Purchase. To-morrow perhaps it will be Labor. The poison is in it still. It casts a shadow still, on one or another side of itself, – the dark shadow of Mammon’s “laws.” It *absolutely needs* Government, to be alternately its protector and its tool, so long as under any form it remains a recognized institution.

At the present hour the notion that it is only the existing title to possession and not the institution of property itself which cries for abolition is fraught with social danger. I am very sure indeed that in a community regulated in recognition of individual ownership, or even *state* ownership (virtual ownership by a central company of officials), every citizen will be less free, less happy, less a man, than might be as a member of a community where free access to products of industry should have become the universal rule. Reciprocally free access of individuals to personally superfluous products of individual industry, reciprocally free access of districts to the locally superfluous products of local industry – this is what we want for the weal and solidarity peace of our lives as a world full of friends.

I see as much danger in taking property from one class only to give it another, as in taking Government out of the hands of one class only to give it to another. Nay, it

is the identical danger under another name. The prohibitive custody of superfluous wealth, as now maintained in the case of landlords and capitalists, all Socialists see to be evil. To land this prohibitive custody in the hands of an official class, as would be *virtually* done under “Social Democracy,” all Anarchists see to be evil. But to say to the producer: Whatever personal superfluity you by the use of your personal faculties unearth or construct is therefore “yours,” to withhold at pleasure from the immediate use of those to whom it would be immediately serviceable – this is not generally seen to be an evil. Yet it is only to conventionally make the producer a dictator of terms to his fellow men, and to leave the broad gate that leads to destruction wider open than ever. Let us cease to trade, and learn to trust. Let me have free access to opportunity and material for the constructive or productive, exercise of any faculties I may possess, and then J. K. and L. only do me a service in coming and making free use of so much of my product as remains useless to myself. Of course this is an extreme position, but it is one on which Nature smiles in the case of communities of intelligent dumb creatures, and I am utopian enough to believe that we word-befogged humans have not yet so far spoilt our own impulses and ruined our own chances as to make it impossible or even very difficult to organise freely on these lines. That is, after once the

existing cruel system shall have been paralyzed or broken up. It needs that we make up our minds to inquire less anxiously what is “wise and prudent,” and be quicker in response to the simple dictates of common-sense and good-will as they present themselves from day to day and from hour to hour.

A man who has made such use of material that a hat is the result, has made a hat. That is all he has made. He has not made a “right to property” in the hat, either for himself or anybody else. Before this exercise of his faculty there existed the materials, tools, and himself. There exist now, the tools, and himself, and the hat. He is related to the hat as its *producer*, not as its owner. If he has no hat and wants one, the obviously fit place for the hat is on his head. He then becomes further related to the hat as its *wearer*; and still the word “owner” remains a term without special meaning. But say that he already has a hat and the first passer-by has none, and wants one, then the fit place for one of the hats is on the passer-by’s head. It sounds childish, but it’s true. The

**I am very sure indeed  
that in a community  
regulated in recognition  
of individual ownership,  
or even *state* ownership  
(virtual ownership by a  
central company of  
officials), every citizen  
will be less free, less  
happy, less a man, than  
might be as a member of  
a community where free  
access to products of  
industry should have  
become the universal  
rule.**

hatter has not produced, over and above a hat, any such identical thing as a “right” to forbid the hatless man to wear the hat, apart from some arbitrary terms of his (the hatter’s) making, and which the hatless man, as likely as not, is unable to comply with except to his own damage. (Ah, “damage,” – he must pay damage, must he? See how instinct lurks in language! Realize the unhealth of a community run on lines, in which damage results to some one at every turn of its minutest wheels).

The hatter’s product is his product, not his *property*. His hands belong to him, but not his tools. His tools are, whoever made them, fitly and justly in his hands, his product is the product of his hands plus the tools which other hands have made; and the same justice and common-sense which is satisfied by the placing in his hands as needing them the tools which he did not make, but which he needs and were not in request elsewhere, demands the placing of the needed hat on the head of the hatless stranger. None of us would object to this sort of method of distribution if we were sure that our pleasure in life did not consist in the abundance of things which we possess, but in the fitness of such things as we had to our real needs and enjoyments, and in the degree of freedom and enjoyment of our powers accorded its by our fellows. But we are not sure that our fellows *would* leave us free, would not take advantage of us, if we did not force them a little by means of withholding something that they require or desire until they have first paid for it in service to ourselves. And so we stickle for “ownership” (under one title or another) so that at a push we may have the wherewithal to

compel or to bribe someone or other to do our bidding. It is a lot of trouble wasted. It is very poor economy. None of this is surely new, but it needs constant re-statement, even among Anarchists, by those of us who see the most vital of all social questions to be involved in it.

“Property is Robbery,” said Proudhon. That is not the bottom truth about property. François Guy in his work on *Prejudices* justly points out that the word “robbery” subtly connotes recognition of property. Expropriation should, for the true and radical Anarchist, mean something quite different from, something much more than, any mere retributive robbery, any seizure of possessions as such, any usurpation of title to possession as such. It should mean the total subversion of every vestige of this most solid and yet most insidious form of government, and the final explosion of the idea that there is or can be anything real or useful in property holding. Every pretext by which such an idea is still bolstered can be, and should be, by ruthless logic torn to pieces. Every action, political or social, purposing to reinstate cruel old pretensions under new sanctions should be unflinchingly opposed to the death.

I have in this article done no more than just step on the threshold of the subject. Space does not now allow me to justify the position. But I am an Expropriationist in the fullest sense that can be given to this clumsy word, because I regard the property idea as a craze – the very most pestilent delusion that the human mind, tricked by language has ever had the misfortune to entertain.

# The Last Gasp of Propertyism

L. S. Bevington

*Liberty*, September 1894

What do the Individualists mean when they talk of the *right* of personal *appropriation* of their *own* labour-product? What is an “own” labour-product? What is “appropriation”? What is a “right”?

In his letter to *Liberty* [published in the September 1894 issue], on “Proudhon and Communism,” Mr. Seymour<sup>1</sup> takes for granted that these three words stand for universally discernible things, and stand in an indisputable relation to one another; and from a little three-legged platform so based, he puts a pose: “If the man who conceives and carries out the production of a commodity has no right to consume (sic) or appropriate what he has produced, how can some other men (the community so-called) have a right to consume or appropriate it who have *not* produced it?” In this conundrum several open questions are begged outright.

My answer to it would be as follows: Supposing you could find a man who had all by himself, “conceived or carried out the production of a commodity”, and suppose you could find something other and more than his need or fitness to be the consumer or user of that commodity binding him to it when it is produced; and suppose you could further find this extra bond to be something other or more than a legal, conventional, and removable concession on the part of other people, *then* I will accept the term “right” as designating this bond. But the first step towards bringing my mind up to a level from which I might see and so have a chance of disposing of the aforesaid poser as it stands, is to find your individual conceiver or carrier-out of the production. (And by the way, which of these two

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Albert Seymour (1860-1938) was an English secularist and individualist anarchist. In 1885, he published the first English-language anarchist periodical in Britain, *The Anarchist*. The paper was produced from 1885 to 1888 and

was briefly co-edited by Peter Kropotkin and Charlotte Wilson, both of whom went on to form *Freedom* in 1886 following disagreements between the three. (*Black Flag*)

wonderful persons, when found, is to have precedence as a *more-than-consumer* of the finished product?)

I am not quibbling. It is at this very point – the supposed “right” to the supposed “owning” of supposed “individually produced” wealth, that the not-so-very-ancient property superstition is to draw its last gasp. The air is noisy and heavy with the gasping already. I wish for all our sakes it were over, so that economic sanity might bless us all at last, and make our planet our home instead of our purgatory.

That conventional “article” of a transient economic creed which binds surplus goods (consequently opportunities) to the will or whim of individual “owners” is after all as irrelevant as it is dogmatic. It has, like most man-imposed dogmas a sorry and shady history; and it has no logical basis in actual relations between men and thing.

To me it seems that there exists, to begin with, no individual producer. No one does, or can do more than put a finishing touch to something which the labours of countless others had brought into position for his hand, having provided him also with tools to work with, to say nothing of having fed, educated, and protected him up to the stage of ability required for his job. The job when finished, is a many men’s job every time. Say it is a specially original and prophetic book; it is then a many men’s job than if it is a wild fruit gathered in a jungle. The wild fruit, too, which one hand gathers, can be consumed by the owner of the hand. But the book that has taken the mental work of generations and the manual work of a great crowd to bring it into existence, will serve a great crowd and many generations, and will the more widely and easily fulfil its end and function of instruction the less its production and distribution get hitched on the thorn of the property hedge.

Thinker, inventor, able mechanic or husbandman, it is not for you to say who has not had part in the making of your finished product. “How can some other men (the community so-called,) haven right to consume or appropriate it who have *not* produced it”? “Right to *consume*” means actual need and natural ability to consume, or it means nothing. “Right to *appropriate*” means law-protected ability to withhold at will; or it means nothing. The first – the title to consumption, may exist on the part of the finisher of the product, when it is good economy all round for him to put it to use as first

comer; or, it may not exist, when it is poor economy not to let anyone have it who does need it for immediate consumption. In the case of appropriation the right is spurious, and exists nowhere. There are only three real terms – Men; goods; use. Men make goods. Goods belong where they are useful *as* goods: not as wares; not as merchandise; not as speculations; not as instruments, for profit making or for bribing. These uses are all wasteful of wealth and of time.

Proudhonians, says Mr. Seymour, “preach Communism in relation to land and natural products, *for the reason* that such are in no wise due to the efforts of individuals; and emphasise the right of personal appropriation of labour-products *for the reason* that they are due to personal effort.” “*Reason*”? “Why, reason? It seems to

me that it is dogma rather than reason which speaks here. Surely the true reason for general and free seems to natural products is general need. There is a *positive* reason for my drinking at yonder spring. I drink because I am thirsty, *not because I did not create the water*. I do not think a new principle comes in with regard to human products. I have made a walking stick. I keep it instead of giving it to my brother, because he has one already, and I have none; *not* because I cut the stick, and he did not. If I have another stick, and he has none, and wants one, my work is better rewarded in his fit use of it than in my unfit custody of it. Nor need he pay me “damage” for it.

No. Let us all say what we mean. There is no fitness in the property-idea; it is not good

**Let us all say what we mean. There is no fitness in the property-idea; it is not good logic; it is not good economy; it is, in our day, awfully difficult, and disturbing, and dangerous, and morally disastrous to keep it enforced, and in working-order.**

logic; it is not good economy; it is, in our day, awfully difficult, and disturbing, and dangerous, and morally disastrous to keep it enforced, and in working-order. To take away its grab-title, and its pedigree-title, and its business-title, and to give it a brand new labour-title won’t alter the nature of its tenure, *as an instrument of rulership and power over the opportunities of others*; but, say some, keep it intact as an idea, we *must*; or else the drone and the dunce, our moral and intellectual weakling and inferiors, well live upon us, and eat us clever and industrious ones out of house and home! How on earth am I to punish my inert or imbecile fellow creature, if I let them have what I don’t want for my own use, *without fining them*? Well, to begin with, I think ninety-nine per cent of the drones are only drones because we have poisoned the honey to such an extent that it has, for a large number, become not worth the trouble of gathering. I do not despair of the average

drone, even when sure that he *is* a drone, by preference, and not merely a badly-circumstanced, ill-placed bee. And the dunce? Poor, stupid or semi-stupid blunderer and cumberer! Nature has fined the dunce already. Human law has often cancelled the fine. Look at Royal Families. But shall we withhold from the powerless dunce of the future his mere bread and cheese only because, for lack of wits or briskness, he cannot help us to produce them. I fear nothing from the inferior. When access is free, and powers all freely engaged in co-operative production or in healthy emulation, neither the dunce nor the drone will rule over us, as at present, take

tribute of us as at present, or deprive our children of like opportunities with their own, as at present; and surely that is all that matters.

I hate almost murderously the parasitic drone and the dunce in office; but I declare that I could make them both most kindly and pitifully welcome to my superfluous food and clothing, (even though I personally had been the busy and clever part-producer of either form of wealth), so soon as it should become a clear fact to me that both drone and dunce were my powerless pensioners, and not my masters.

# “The Prejudice Against Property”

(Mr. Seymour's Ground Re-surveyed)

L. S. Bevington

*Liberty*, February 1895

In your October number Mr. Seymour criticised some of my objections to the property idea – an idea which Anarchists regard as inherently incompatible with individual freedom, and consequently with social prosperity, but which Individualists regard as modifiable in such ways as to make it reverse the part it has hitherto invariably played in human affairs, and disclose itself as a means of emancipation and of true progress.

We Anarchists have controversial reason to grumble at our Individualist antagonists. We cannot get our questions answered. I asked Mr. Seymour what he meant by “owning”; what he meant by “appropriation”; whist he meant by a “right.” He did not reply. They never do. I have tried for years to discuss the basis of the property idea with different Individualists but they always stop short of essentials, and slide off on side issues. Let me put the preliminary questions once more: (1) What essentially is it that is stickled for as property, it *not* the prohibitive custody of something not wanted by the individual for his own use or enjoyment, but which other people are needing for their use or enjoyment? (2) Why does anyone care about retaining this prohibitive custody if *not* as a means of bending and shaping to his own ends the activities and opportunities of those with whom he deals, from that point at which their need and his ownership of the propertised utility meet, and compel them to deal with him?

Pending proof to the contrary, I continue to see in this relation of man to man an economic absurdity, and a moral atrocity – the root-cause, in short, of all human fault, and feud, and failure. I am aware of limiting the equal liberty of my fellows wherever I limit their free access to anything whatever which awaits human use, and of which their need is greater or occurs sooner than my own. In a society freed of devices for penalising propertylessness (or the non-possession of superfluity) I

would not burden myself with the precautionary custody of a superfluous pin.

**Why does anyone  
care about retaining  
this prohibitive  
custody if *not* as a  
means of bending and  
shaping to his own  
ends the activities  
and opportunities of  
those with whom he  
deals...?**

It is fair to ask Individualists how, in the absence of any Government to enforce property owning, and submission of all citizens to the property idea, they propose to deal with their Anarchists – those irreconcilables who are determined to repudiate respect for any property as “theirs,” and are equally aware of the fitness of making use of whatever is necessary for life, locomotion, and exercise of faculty? What is to be done with the men (and there more of them from day to

day and from hour to hour) who don't want to own property, or to control others, but who do want freedom to live, to work, and to hand on, as they choose? Are these serviceable and inexpensive persons to suffocate to the end of the chapter, in their surely false position as mendicants at the gates of the over-supplied bargain-monger? Yet why discuss improbable contingencies? The deeper currents of human character and human tendency are today setting full towards unalloyed freedom; the economies of tomorrow will know no rules

but the unwritten ones of compunction, courtesy, and common-sense.

But now for Mr Seymour. Waiving inquiries as to first principles, he (1) explains what he means by the individual producer. (2) Supposes me to pretend that opportunities of production are limited apart from the incidental consequences of a vicious monetary system, and of “re-stating the monstrous proposition of Malthus”; and (3) declares that Communism is now impossible; primitive man “only tolerated it” because he had to; the communistic instinct of being “outgrown,” and liberty approached in proportion to the outgrowing. “Civilised man could not go back if he would.”

(1) Mr. Seymour’s “individual producer” is, then, not necessarily the commodity-finisher after all. He is only “each contributor to a product from beginning to end”; plainly, then, only an infinitesimal unit in a crowd of collaborators. It is pleasing thus to see the Individual Producer, that new pretender to future world management, throw up his hand directly he is challenged to show his title. The efforts of his forefathers, and his fellows, have helped him into the position of being able to *buy* what he needs in order to a producer. He has bought some material, fetched by others, bought some tools, made be others, and then, with the co-operation, either direct or indirect, of others, has turned out a product which he may or may not want, when produced, for own individual use or enjoyment. If he wants it, Mr Seymour would agree with us that he has the first comer’s economic right to its use. If he does not want precisely it, something else, we should say that, other things equal, his freedom is best secured by letting the product go, unmeasured and unweighed, wherever it is needed; so as to be rid, head and hands, of what he does not want, while receiving freely from some other quarter that which others likewise have to spare, and which he does want. Mr. Seymour on the contrary thinks that the individual’s *freedom* (for he declares it is not mastership he desires) would be better secured by constituting himself the arbiter of that product’s further utilisation, and by being at the trouble of safe-guarding it in his own custody for purposes of merchandise. Each individual is to be denied access to unemployed tools; he is not to be a free worker in a in a freely fluid, self-adjusting society; his fellows are to charge him for leave and means to support and occupy himself; and he likewise is to charge his own price on society, before he will let the product of his industry flow freely where it is natural service. But mark, “come weal, come woe, Nature will have her way” athwart all our didacticisms and perversities; and the commercial

producer’s own price for the product will always be, virtually, the whole amount of everything he is in need of, *minus* only what he cannot induce society to give him. I mean he wilt always aim at getting as much as possible of things or liberties valuable to himself, in exchange for that which is immediately valueless to himself; in a word, everything for nothing. That is what putting one’s own price on anything always, at bottom, means. It is only a perverted action the natural law of self-preservation. It would be all right to claim all one wants every time, were it not for the artificial limitation of supplies by supposed possessions, which causes the natural tendency to work inharmoniously and disastrously. Well, is the sordid bargain driving, the squalid, self-centred caution, the sour old property-tussle to have no end? To Anarchists it is pain and grief – it is *bondage* – to be compelled to charge anyone anything. To Anarchists, individual buying and selling, weighing and counting, accumulating and safe-guarding, appear methods as barbarous anal absurd as they are grievous and wasteful, in a world where there is enough, and might easily be abundance, of everything for all.

Meanwhile, now that the question as to how buying the material or tool, or working on the product, make them “mine” to withhold, remains unanswered. “Purchase makes it *his*” – his to waste (if his innate sociality dot s not check him) while another perishes for need of it. “His?” How? Why? The dogma that a right of prohibitive custody, whether of objects or privileges, is acquired by something or sacrificed by the individual, is re-stated. That is all.

(2) Then, what is that about Malthus? Where and how is it pretended that opportunities of production are limited in respect of all men’s needs? The very opposite is what we, Anarchists are always pointing out. Remove the artificial and legal disabilities which are inseparable from any property system whatever, and natural opportunity abounds. And the monstrous proposition of Malthus remains monstrous to all time.

(3) Lastly, Communism is impossible. “Primitive man only tolerated [this impossibility] through sheer necessity.” It was due to a communistic “instinct,” and man was driven by necessity to tolerate the gratification of his instinct(!).<sup>1</sup> “Civilized man,” having partly “outgrown” the instinct, has acquired some liberty instead. “He could not go back if he would. He must advance. If individual liberty has been found wanting by the worker it is because it has been denied to him.”

---

<sup>1</sup> That communism was, is, and ever shall be a deep-seated human instinct I heartily allow; but I had always imagined that sheer necessity pressing from without was in no wise needed to induce an instinct to seek its appropriate satisfaction; it being sufficient to remove extraneous impediments to ensure its certain activity. It is of the nature of

an instinct to be its own propeller and its own rewarder; and to grow every stronger with exercise. In absence of forcible deposition, its mandates, ever life-regarding, are spontaneously obeyed; and in the case of the communistic instinct, nothing but force has compelled it into prolonged but temporary abeyance.

Read “property,” for “liberty,” in the last few sentences, and I agree. I perceive, however, that just in proportion as property has been the award of the minority who have and ignored the communistic instinct, liberty has gone on diminishing for the rest of mankind. Under even primitive communism – no starvation! and where food is, life is, and with it all the progressive possibilities inherent in that which lives. It seems to use that Mr. Seymour reads human history and human nature very superficially. For my part I am struck at every turn with the indomitable vitality of the blessed communistic instinct. It is born again with every little child, and it is the last thing to go when Shylock, in the eager process of gaining the world, says goodbye to his own soul. Civilisation (curse it!) never has and never will become hereditary or instinctive. It has consisted mainly in an attempt to run life for all in grooves marked out by the will of the least scrupulous. We look forward to a society in which the individual of finest social sentience, and of quickest compunction, shall have the best and not the worst chances of success *along the lines his own individuality*. Under any property-regarding system whatever, social scruple must go, cap-in-hand, begging for tolerance and a crust. We have for long centuries wheeled away from communism and freedom, and yet we have, howbeit lamely, progressed. Oh yes, I admit it. We have had other absorbing jobs on hand; we have made great way, despite property checks, in geology, astronomy, electrics, neurology, and on. We shall want it all yet. It is no ill store. Man does not go back on the whole, though he proceeds rather by indirection than straight-forwardly. In the spiral ascent of his nature, he is, at his best, already *coming round again* to a point where the painfully checked instinct of solidarity is once more claiming recognition and liberation, *but on a higher plane*. To ascend spirally is not to go back. Civilisation or proprietism is not a final development. Already it is cracking and crumbling at all points, and the world-wide sociality that has been ripening within its confining institutions is fast preparing to force an outlet and try its wings.

Instinct does not speak in terms either of business, or of policy. All that appertains to these unhappy devices has to be sadly and slowly learnt afresh from the beginning by each growing youth and maiden, and in most cases a deal of teaching and terrorism is required to drive the lesson home. If, meanwhile, one wants to know where instinct lurks, and what it is that individuals, in intervals of non-coercion, tend to be, watch the every-day mode of action and speech when your ordinary (the man or woman of moral and intellectual mediocrity) is off

**I perceive, however, that just in proportion as property has been the award of the minority who have and ignored the communistic instinct, liberty has gone on diminishing for the rest of mankind.**

guard – when legalities and conventions leave him at liberty to be natural, and when he is in no civilised anxiety as to the safety of his privileges or his property, for to-day or tomorrow. See him then very gladly “unbend;” – yes, that is it. Instinct lurks in that word. It lurks in the simple modes of. Speech – “Yes, and welcome;” or “Pray don’t mention it;” in all the little gratuitous graces and courtesies and neighbourlinesses which prevent absolute social suffocation even under that sordid burden of “legal tender” with which our poor groaning and travailing lines have invested themselves. Social free access, as tacitly claimed and as granted before asking, by full-blown individuality, will truly, when established, differ widely from the primitive in which conscious individuality played no part. What was blind and haphazard will be conscious anti discriminate.

What was merely tribal and communal will be human and social; and whereas Nature was formerly a mere propeller, she will be at once the accepted instructress and the most effectual co-operator.

I am fully aware that all this that I have written contains nothing of “practical politics,” or of business-like opportunism. Both of those branches of mental industry are likely to be sufficiently subserved by the “social” Democrat on one bawl, and by the commercial

Individualist on the other. I do not think we shall have freedom sullenly, or soon; but the goal has to be kept in sight, and the dust wiped out of our civilised eyes as we jog along. I think the individual producer, keeping his necessary force of hired “Pinkertons” to prevent non-commercial access to his superfluous product, could not but rapidly develop into one of the most coarsely selfish and graceless tyrants before whom the stifling socian has ever had to bow the knee. And I don’t think his nostrums will ever admit of the wiping of tears from all honest faces, as some pretend. “In a society such as we are striving after, there will be direct exchange of product for product – because the real worth of products cannot by any measure be determined, – but the different producers and groups of producers will bestow their finished articles in magazines, and every individual or group will take what he needs.” But in order to call this new society into life the gangrened old one must be done away. That is our first job. Health does not grow out of disease. Freedom cannot be developed out of the apparatus of bondage. Evolution requires the forcible breakage and abandonment of the effete bean-pod – eggshell – chrysalis. This is revolution every time.

Down with Property.

# An Anarchist Manifesto

## Anarchist Communist Alliance

(written by Louisa Sarah Bevington)

1 May 1895

Fellow Workers,

We come before you as Anarchist Communists to explain our principles. We are aware that the minds of many of you have been poisoned by the lies which all parties have diligently spread about us. But surely the persecutions to which we have been and are subjected by the governing classes of all countries should open the eyes of those who love fair play. Thousands of our comrades are suffering in prison or are driven homeless from one country to the other.

Free speech – almost the only part of British liberty that can be of any use to the people – is denied to us in many instances, as the events of the last few years have shown.

The misery around us is increasing year by year. And yet there was never so much talk about labour as there is now, labour, for the welfare of which all professional politicians profess to work day and night. A very few sincere and honest but impracticable reformers, in company with a multitude of mere quacks, ambitious place-hunters, etc., say they are able to benefit labour, if labour will only follow their useless advice. All this does not lessen the misery in the least: look at the unemployed, the victims of hunger and cold, who die every year in the streets of our rich cities, where wealth of every description is stored up.

Not only do they suffer who are actually out of work and starving, but every working man who is forced to go through the same dreary routine day by day – the slavery and toil in the factory or workshop – the cheerless home, if the places where they are forced to herd together can be called homes. Is this life worth living? What becomes of the intellectual faculties, the artistic inclinations, nay, the ordinary human feeling and dignity of the greater part of the workers? All these are warped and wasted, without any chance of development, making the wretched worker nothing but a human tool to be exploited until more profitably replaced by some new invention or machine.

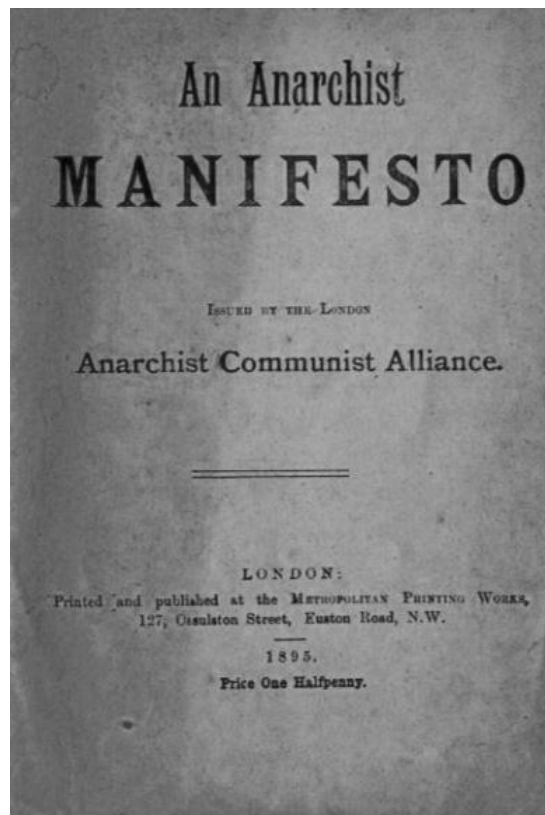
Is all this misery necessary? It is not if you, the wealth producers, knew that there is enough and to spare of food and of the necessities of life for all, if all would work. But now, in order to keep the rich in idleness and luxury, all the workers must lead a life of perpetual misery and exploitation. As to these facts we are all agreed; but as to the remedy most of you, unfortunately, have not given up trust in Parliament and the State. We shall explain how the very nature of the State prevents anything good coming from it. What does the State do?

It protects the rich and their ill-gotten wealth; it suppresses the attempts of the workers to recover their rights, if these attempts are thought dangerous to the rich. Thus idle electioneering, labour politics etc. are not suppressed, but any effective popular demonstration, vigorous strikes as at Featherstone and Hull, Anarchist propaganda, etc., are suppressed or fought against by the vilest means. Moreover, the State, pretending thereby to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, grants Royal Commissions on the Sweating System, the Aged Poor, on Labour in general, or Select Committees on the Unemployed – which produce heaps of Blue Books, and give an opportunity to the politicians and labour leaders, “to show themselves off.” And that is about all. If the workers demand

more – there is the workhouse; and if not satisfied with that, the truncheons of the police and the bullets and bayonets of the soldiers face them: – not bread, but lead!

All political promises are of the same value: either they are not kept, even if it could be, or they involve social changes which can only be effected by a revolution, and not by mere votes cast in Parliament. This applies to the promises of Socialist candidates, even if it could be admitted that these candidates could remain uncorrupted by the demoralising influence of Parliament.

There can be no true humanity, no true self-respect, without self-reliance. No one can help you if you do not help yourselves. We do not promise to do anything for



you, we do not want anything from you, we only appeal to you to co-operate with us to bring about a state of society which will make freedom, well-being possible for all.

To do this efficiently, we must all be imbued with the spirit of freedom, and this – freedom, and freedom alone – is the fundamental principle of Anarchy.

Freedom is a necessary condition to, and the only guarantee of, the proper development of mankind. Nature is most beautiful when unfettered by the artificial interference of man. Wild animals are stronger and more harmoniously developed than their domesticated kind, which the exploiting mind of man makes mere instruments of profit by developing chiefly those parts of them which are of use to him. The same threatens to be the case with the human victims of exploitation, if an end is not put to the system which allows the rich and crafty exploiters to reduce the greater part of mankind to a position resembling that of domestic animals – working machines, only fit to do mechanically a certain kind of work, but becoming intellectually wrecked and ruined.

All who acknowledge this to be the great danger to human progress should carefully ponder over it, and if they believe that it is necessary to ensure by every means the free development of humanity, and to remove by all means every obstacle placed in its path, they should join us and adopt the principles of Anarchism.

Belief in and submission to authority is the root cause of all our misery. The remedy we recommend: – struggle unto death against all authority, whether it be that of physical force identical with the State or that of doctrine and theories, the product of ages of ignorance and superstition inculcated into the workers' workers minds from their childhood – such as religion, patriotism, obedience to the law, belief in the State, submission to the rich and titled, etc., generally speaking, the absence of any critical spirit in face of all the humbugs who victimise the workers again and again. We can only deal here briefly with all these subjects, and must limit ourselves to touch only on the chief points.

Economic exploitation – the result of the monopolisation of the land, raw materials and means of production by the capitalists and landlords – is at the bottom of the present misery. But the system which produces it would have long ago broken down if it were not upheld on one hand by the State, with its armies of officials, soldiers and police – the whole machinery of government, in one word; and on the other hand by the workers themselves, who tamely submit to their own spoliation and degradation, because they think it right, owing to a superstitious belief in a divine providence inculcated by their masters, or because they desire, by sneaking means, to be exploiters themselves – an object which only one in a thousand can succeed in – or because they have not lost faith in political action or the

capacity of the State to do for them that which they are too ignorant to do for themselves. Under these protections the rich classes are enjoying their spoil in safety and comfort.

It is evident that this system, if to be destroyed at all, must be attacked by the workers themselves, as we cannot expect those who profit by it to cut their own throats, so to say.

Many still consider the State a necessity. Is this so in reality? The State, being only a machine for the protection and preservation of property, can only obstruct freedom and free development, being bound to keep up the law and every statute law is an obstacle to progress and freedom.

Laws are of two kinds. They are either simple formulae, derived from the observation of phenomena as the so-called laws of nature, the phrasing of which is open to revision with the progress of human knowledge and the accumulation of fresh material to draw deductions from. No authority is required to enforce them, they exist; and every being arranges his conduct in conformity with his knowledge of their action. The phenomenon of fire burning is the result of such a natural law, and all pay attention to it though there is no policeman posted behind every match and fireplace. Here again Nature gives us an example of free development and Anarchy, and in a free society all social facts and necessities would be equally well recognised and acted upon.

But there is the other kind of law. That which is the expression of the will of an unscrupulous minority, who, owing to the apathy and ignorance of the majority, have been able to usurp the means of power and purport to represent the whole people at the time of the enactment of the laws.

The fact that a great number of persons is in favour of something is evidently no guarantee that it is right. Experience, on the contrary, shows that progress is usually brought about by individuals. New discoveries, new lines of human activity are first found and practised by a few, and only gradually adopted by the many. The majority that makes the laws or abides to them will almost always lag behind progress, and the laws made by it will be reactionary from the very beginning. How much more so as time proceeds and new progress is made!

Of course, progress itself laughs at the puny efforts of the usurpers of power to stop its triumphant march. But its apostles and advocates have to suffer much and severely for the enthusiasm and the hope that is within them. Prison and often death itself is their doom, the penalty for having raised the standard of revolt against authority and law, the embodiment of the spirit of oppression.

And the very makers of these laws are forced to admit that their work is useless. Is not the continuous

manufacture of new laws going on in the Parliaments of all countries throughout the greater part of this century, and in England for many centuries, a proof of the fact that the laws never satisfy anybody, not even those who make them. They know, however, that their legislating is mere mockery and hypocrisy, having no other object but to make the people believe that something is being done for them, and that the public interest is well looked after. The people obey all these laws, whilst the State, in the alleged interest of all, in reality in the interest of the property owners and of its own power, violates them all and commits numberless crimes – which are glorified as deeds of valour committed in the interest of civilisation.

This principle, kept in the background in time of peace, is paraded before the eyes of so-called “rights” in some savage territory, plunders and provokes the natives until they return force by force. Then the State steps in, in the pretended interest of religion and civilisation, slaughters them and annexes their land. The greater the slaughter, the greater the glory for these “heroic” pioneers. Or it may be in a war on a greater scale with a European State, when the workers of one country are let loose against those of another, to murder, plunder and burn homes and villages, and perform such like patriotic deeds of valour and chivalry.

We Anarchists are internationalists, we acknowledge no distinction of nationality or colour. The workers of all countries suffer as we do here, and our comrades have everywhere to fight the same battle for freedom and justice. The capitalists are internationally unanimous in persecuting the defenders of freedom and in fleecing the workers. Even England is brought more and more under the sway of a continental police system, the dangers of which the British masses do not see at present, as it is used chiefly against friendless foreign refugees. They are regardless of the fact that it is but the forerunner of an attack on their own liberties.

The workers as a rule are filled with an unreasoning dislike to the workers of other countries, whom their masters have succeeded in representing to them as their natural enemies, and herein lies one of the main sources of the strength of the capitalist system; a strength which has no other foundation than the weakness and the

helplessness of the people. It is in the interests of all governments to uphold patriotism, to have their own people ready to fly at the throats of their fellow workers of other nationalities whenever it suits the interests of the employers to open up new markets, or draw the attention of the people away from the contemplation of their own misery, which might drive them to revolt.

Patriotism and religion have always been the first and last refuges and strongholds of scoundrels. The meek and lowly servants of the one blessing – in the name of their God – the infamies committed for the sake of the

other, and cursing in the same name the deeds they just now blessed if committed by the enemy.

Religion is mankind’s greatest curse! It is absurd to expect that science, in the few years that the State and the priests have left it to a certain extent alone – the stake or the prison has been too often the reward of its pioneers – should have discovered everything. It would not be worth living in a world where everything had been discovered, analysed and registered. One fact is certain: all so-called religions are the products of human ignorance, mere phantastical efforts of barbarous people to reason out matters which they could not possibly understand without some knowledge of science and scientific methods. The opinion of the savage on the power that works a steam engine, or produces the electric light, is evidently worthless and could be refuted by anyone possessing elementary knowledge. In the

same worthless way our forefathers, savages also, reasoned about the phenomena of nature, and came to the naive conclusion that somebody behind the curtains of the sky pulled the strings. This supposed individual they called God and the organic force of man the soul, and endowed it with a separate entity, although that organic force does not possess any more separate entity than that working a clock or a steam hammer. A dim consciousness of this has permeated the mind of most in spite of the fact that religion has been bolstered up by all the forces of authority, because it teaches submission to the law, and as a reward gives cheques drawn on the bank of heaven, which are not more likely to be met than the politician’s promises of what he will do when he is returned for Parliament. Religion is the most deadly enemy to human progress. It has always been used to poison the mind and deaden the judgment of the

**We Anarchists are  
internationalists, we  
acknowledge no  
distinction of nationality  
or colour. The workers of  
all countries suffer as  
we do here, and our  
comrades have  
everywhere to fight the  
same battle for freedom  
and justice. The  
capitalists are  
internationally  
unanimous in  
persecuting the  
defenders of freedom  
and in fleecing the  
workers.**

young, thus making grown up people accept all its absurdities because they are familiarised with them in their youth.

Unfortunately, religion is not kept out of the labour movement. Priests and parsons, who should be a horror to mankind, as their presence adds an additional element of corruption, sneak into it, and labour politicians use their services as the Liberals and Tories do. There is actually in existence a body of persons who prostitute the noble word "Labour" by coupling it with the disgusting word "Church," forming the "Labour Church," which is looked upon favourably by most of the prominent labour leaders. Why not start a "Labour Police"?

We are Atheists<sup>1</sup> and believe that man cannot be free if he does not shake off the fetters of the authority of the absurd as well as those of every other authority. Authority assumes numerous shapes and disguises, and it will take a long period of development under freedom to get rid of all. To do this two things are wanted, to rid ourselves of all superstition and to root out the stronghold of all authority, the State.

We shall be asked what we intend to put in place of the State. We reply, "Nothing whatever!" The State is simply an obstacle to progress; this obstacle once removed we do not want to erect a fresh obstruction.

In this we differ essentially from the various schools of State Socialists, who either want to transform the present State into a benevolent public-spirited institution (just as easy to transform a wolf into a lamb), or to create a new centralised organisation for the regulation of all production and consumption, the so-called Socialist society. In reality this is only the old State in disguise, with enormously strengthened powers. It would interfere with everything and would be the essence of tyranny and slavery, if it could be brought about. But, thanks to the tendency of the ways and means of production – which will lead to Anarchy – it cannot.

But whilst State Socialism is impracticable as a system of real Socialism, it is indeed possible if its advocates had their way, that all matters of general interest and more and more of private interest too would pass under the control of the State; whether it be a little more

democratised or not, it does not matter, for we reject Democracy as well as Absolutism. Authority is equally hateful to us whether exercised by many, or by few, or by one. The last remnant of free initiative and self-reliance would be crushed under the heels of the State, and the emancipation of the workers would be as far off as ever. State Socialism has indeed strengthened the decaying faith in, and renewed the prestige of, the State.

All we Anarchists want is equal freedom for all. The workers to provide for their own affairs by voluntary arrangements amongst themselves. This leads us to a consideration of the economic basis of the state of things we desire to bring about, and here we avow ourselves Communists.

Everybody has different faculties and abilities for work, and different wants and desires for the various necessities of life and leisure. These inclinations and wants require full satisfaction, but can only receive it in a state of freedom. Everybody supposing his faculties to be properly developed can best judge what is best for himself. Rules and regulations would hinder and make him a fettered, incomplete being who necessarily finds no pleasure in work forced upon him. But under

Anarchy he would associate voluntarily with others to do the work he is best fitted to do, and would satisfy his wants in proportion to his needs from the common stock, the result of their common labour.

Cut-throat competition for the bare necessities of life would be done away with, leaving many matters of a more individual, private and intimate character, in which the free man would find opportunity for peaceful and harmonious emulation, and thereby develop his faculties in the highest possible degree.

One of the stock objections against Anarchist Communism is that no one would work. We reply that to-day work is viewed with disfavour and neglected by all who can possibly exist without it because it has to be carried on under the most disadvantageous conditions and is, moreover, looked upon as degrading. The worker earning his food by hard labour and ceaseless toil is a pariah, the outcast of society, while the idler who never does an hour's work in his life is admired and glorified, and spends his days in luxurious ease amongst pleasant surroundings. We believe that

should destroy the basis of our own hopes and ideals, if we were ever carried away by the spirit of persecution, bigotry and intolerance, which is so commonly raised against us.

---

<sup>1</sup> This open statement of our convictions does not imply any spirit of persecution on our part against those who believe in the absurdities of the different religions. Persecution is essential to authority and religion, and fatal to freedom; we

under Anarchism everybody would be willing to work; work being freed from the badge of dishonour now associated with it will have become a labour of love, and the free man will feel ashamed to eat food he has not earned. But as to some atavistic remnants of modern capitalist society that would only work if forced? Well, nobody would want us to retard the emancipation of the immense mass of mankind on account of these few unsocial beings who may or may not exist then. Left to themselves and scorned by everyone they would soon come to their senses and work.

We cannot further enter here into the arguments which show the tendency of a development into Free Communism, and we refer to our literature on the subject. (See Kropotkin's "Anarchism: its Basis and Principles." Freedom Pamphlets, No. 4, etc.)

Anarchist society will consist of a great number of groups devoted each to the production of certain commodities free of access to all, and in local and interlocal contact with other groups to agree and make arrangements for purposes of exchange. With regard to the first necessities of life, food, clothes, shelter, education, Free Communism would be carried out thoroughly. All secondary matters would be left to a mutual agreement in the most varied ways. There would remain in such a society full freedom for the Individualist as long as he did not develop any monopolistic tendencies.

These are our principles; let us consider the means to realise them.

Here we are met by the cry "Dynamiters," "Assassins," "Fiends," etc. Let us see who chiefly utter these cries.

The same people who, by colliery disasters, the ensuring of rotten ships, fires in death-trap-houses, railway accidents caused by overwork, etc., daily massacre more people than the Anarchists of all countries ever killed. The same people who are ready at any moment to have the natives of any country slaughtered, simply to rob them, who are overjoyed at the butchery of the Chinese war, which will enable them to make fresh profit, who are slowly starving and killing the millions of workers, whose lives are shortened by overwork, adulterated food, and overcrowding slums. These people have, in our eyes, no voice when the question of Humanity is considered. They may abuse and insult us just as they like. The worst thing that could happen to us, indeed, would be to win their approbation, to be petted by them as the respectable labour politicians are.

Some well-meaning, but rather weak-minded people too, are misled by these cries. To these we say come and study our movement and gain a knowledge of its history and personalities, and you will find that every act of revolt is but a reply to a hundred, nay, a thousand villainous crimes committed by the governing classes against us and against the workers in general. You will

find that those who did these acts were the very best, the most human, unselfish, self-sacrificing of our comrades, who threw their lives away, meeting death or imprisonment in the hope that their acts would sow the seed of revolt, that they might show the way and wake an echo, by their deeds of rebellion, in the victims of the present system.

With the specific mode of action of anyone we have nothing to do. Anarchists advocate the propagation of their ideas by all means that lead to that end, and everyone is the best judge of his own actions. No one is required to do anything that is against his own inclination. Experience is in this as in other matters the best teacher, and the necessary experience can only be gained through entire freedom of action.

Thus the means which we would adopt embrace all that furthers our cause, and exclude all that will damage it. The decision of what is good or harmful must be left to persons or groups who choose to work together.

Nothing is more contrary to the real spirit of Anarchy than uniformity and intolerance. Freedom of development implies difference of development, hence difference of ideas and actions. Every person is likely to be open to a different kind of argument, so propaganda cannot be diversified enough if we want to touch all. We want it to pervade and penetrate all the utterances of life, social and political, domestic and artistic, educational and recreational. There should be propaganda by word and action, the platform and the press, the street corner, the workshop, and the domestic circle, acts of revolt, and the example of our own lives as free men. Those who agree with each other may co-operate; otherwise they should prefer to work each on his own lines to trying to persuade one the other of the superiority of his own method.

Organisation arises from the consciousness that, for a certain purpose, the co-operation of several forces is necessary. When this purpose is achieved the necessity for co-operation has ceased, and each force reassumes its previous independence ready for other co-operation and combination if necessary. This is organisation in the Anarchist sense – ever varying, or, if necessary, continuous combinations of the elements that are considered to be the most suitable for the particular purpose on hand, and refers not only to the economical and industrial relations between man and man, but also to the sexual relations between man and woman, without which a harmonious social life is impossible.

These views differ immensely from those held by the believers in authority, who advocate permanent organisations with chiefs or councils elected by the majority, and who put all their trust in these institutions. The more they centralise these organisations and introduce stringent rules and regulations to preserve order and discipline, the more they will fail to achieve their object. In such organisations we see only obstacles

to the free initiative and action of individuals, hot-beds of ambition, self-seeking and rotten beliefs in authority etc. That means, we see in them agents of reaction to keep the people in continued ignorance of their own interests.

We do not therefore discourage workingmen from organisation, but such organisations could only be free groups of men and women with the same aims for identical purposes, disbanding when the object in view is achieved.

This brings us to the question of the advisability of Anarchists to join Trade Unions, not the question of the membership of Unions which may be a necessity for them as the case stands, but the question of propaganda in them. Anarchists do not wish to isolate themselves and Unions may be useful as a place to meet their fellow workers. But whether Unions should be formed by Anarchists is entirely dependent on the particular case. For we do not consider Trades Unionism as at present constituted as a serious force to overthrow the system, but only as a means to get a little better provision for the workers under the present conditions. Therefore they cannot be carried on without dealing with immediate so-called practical questions, which are never settled without compromises, as all members are not Anarchists.

In Unions the General Strike might form a proper subject to start the propaganda, and such a strike, though in itself not effective as a remedy, would probably bring about revolutionary situations which would advance the march of events in an unprecedented way. To speak plainly, we advocate the General Strike as a means to set the ball rolling: who knows whether it may not lead to the Social Revolution, which we all desire as the only thing that can help us.

The Social Revolution, as we conceive it, would consist in the paralysation of all existing authoritarian institutions and organisations, the prevention of new organisations of this character, the expropriation of the present exploiters of labour, and in the rearrangement of relations between men on the basis of voluntary agreements. This will appear to some to be rather a large program, but logical thinking will convince them of the fact that every one of these points is the necessary consequence of the others, and that they can only be carried out altogether, or not at all. For what is really

impracticable are not full measures, but those half-hearted measures – so-called reforms – which pretend to do away with a part of the existing misery, whilst the root remains intact and makes the whole reform futile and useless.

These then are our means of propaganda, and we trust they are manifold enough to allow everybody full scope for his energies who chooses his place amongst us. The leading idea of our propaganda must always be defiance and destruction of the principle of authority in all its forms and disguises – full scope for freedom, the basis and condition of all human development and progress.

In conclusion, let us consider briefly the remedies proposed by the other parties – useless as they are, as the ever-increasing misery around us abundantly shows.

**In Unions the General Strike might form a proper subject to start the propaganda, and such a strike, though in itself not effective as a remedy, would probably bring about revolutionary situations which would advance the march of events in an unprecedented way**

The State Socialist parties, apart from a few Socialists pure and simple who, if they were true to the foundations of their opinions, would come over to us, have of late become entirely parties for advocating political action. They believe in sending the right man to Parliament, and we have the choice between the chosen of the I.L.P., of the Fabians, and of the S.D.F. We do not consider their minor differences: what is the principle of political action worth? – is the question we ask. It is intended to bring pressure on the governing classes to effect social changes. We maintain that no amount of pressure exercised through political action can bring about these social changes. Some palliatives may be adopted, but the system will continue to exist; for these labour parties make the workers believe in constitutional means, in the leadership and

worship of men; in short, they will destroy their self-reliance and self-respect, and do for them that which religion does – make them expect everything from others, nothing from themselves. The history of the labour movement in Europe and America shows the greater these parties become the less advanced their leaders grow and the less is achieved by these bulky, cast-iron organisations with no room for freedom left in them.

We have no more belief in Trades Unions as such than in political action, yet we prefer those Unionists, who rely upon their own action to those who cry for State help. Our propaganda might sometimes use this question as a starting point.

The Co-operative movement can only benefit a few who remain unnoticed among the general misery. Productive Co-operation on a large scale would have to compete with capitalism, which ruthlessly cuts down wages and gets a supply of cheap labour from the unemployed. Co-operators would have to work on similar lines, those of the greatest possible exploitation of labour and that will be no remedy for the needs of labour, or they would be crushed by the capitalist competition, being in fact the first victims of a commercial crisis. Thus on a large scale Co-operation is impracticable, and those who take part in it in its present form are only too often estranged from the general labour movement. So we consider Co-operators as workers who are no essential factor in the coming struggle.

The meanest and most repulsive “friends” of the workers are the Teetotalers, Malthusianists, and advocates of thrift and saving, who propound each his particular croquet as an infallible remedy for poverty. They want the workers to give up the small mites of, however adulterated and paltry, pleasure and enjoyment that are left to them. “Hypocrisy is the compliment vice pays to virtue,” the proverb says, and the other parties make at any rate promises of better things, but these want to make life still more dreary and cheerless. Economically they are utterly wrong. If all were content to live as Coolies do, on a handful of rice per day, wages would be lowered by competition down to the level of Coolie wages – a few pence per day. We want the standard of the workers’ living raised, not lowered, and all the things to which these “friends” object belong to a real, full, human life.

We need not dwell on all the cranks who have cut and dried remedies like the Free Currency advocates, who ignore the principle of every society with private property: “No property, no credit.” To be benefited by money cheques, it would be necessary to possess some kind of portable or realisable property to be given in exchange for the cheques or to have them secured on. Nothing would be altered by them, they could simply perpetuate the worst evils of the present system in a more aggravated form. To the worker who has no property but his labour to dispose of, in times when work is slack and labour therefore not in demand, they would offer no resource whatever, and he would still be

obliged to suffer and to starve. To make the remedy proportionate to the evil proposed to be cured, it would be requisite to abolish all private property and make the land and all it contains, together with all the implements of production, common property – that is, to introduce Communism, where money and money cheques will become equally useless.

As you will have seen, Anarchism does not preach anything contrary to the principles which have always inspired men to strive for freedom and right. It would indeed be absurd to try and impose something new upon mankind. No! Anarchism is nothing but the full acknowledgment of the realisation of the principle that freedom is at the root of sound natural development. Nature knows no outside laws, no external powers, and only follows her own inward forces of attraction or repulsion. Everything is the result of the existing forces and tendencies, and this result becomes again in turn the cause of the next thing following. In its childhood, humanity suffered from ignorance of this cause, and suffers still by being trodden under the heel of imaginary celestial and human authority (both arising from the same sources – ignorance and the fear of the unknown). All progress has been made by fighting and defying authority.

Great men in history – men who have done real work, that is, work useful for the progress of the human race by breaking and defying laws and regulations apparently made for everlasting time – showed mankind new roads, opened new ground. These were rebels, and the last in this series – those who wish not only to be free themselves but who saw that which before them men did not see so clearly, that to be free ourselves we must be surrounded by free men; that the slavery of the meanest human being is our own slavery. Those last rebels for freedom and progress are the Anarchists of all countries, and in solidarity with them we appeal to you.

Study our principles, our movement, and if they convince you join us in our struggle against authority and exploitation, for freedom and happiness for all.

London, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895.

**To make the remedy proportionate to the evil proposed to be cured, it would be requisite to abolish all private property and make the land and all it contains, together with all the implements of production, common property – that is, to introduce Communism**

# Property is Government

L. S. Bevington

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, May 1895

Can it be said too often: "Property is Government"? It is the modern measure and means of domination, and it is nothing else at all. It ceases to exist directly the human will decrees its annihilation; the moment a private individual is sick of it in his own case, he is rid of it.

The moment collective opinion shall be averse to it, it will vanish from the planet. The word "property" slips glibly enough from many a pen; yet I declare that it fits nothing real within the range of my intelligence, and nothing desirable in the range of my emotions. Objects may be partly made by me, or handed to me; they may, next, be welcome (because useful to me); or they may be in my way, because useless to me. In the latter case, the wisest thing to do is to send them or carry them across the street to the neighbour whose requirement they exactly fit. The objects may, by the custom or the law prevailing around me, be called my "property", in which case the neighbour, unless he be a "thief", will take no direct steps towards removing them from my custody, but will, if I choose, meekly permit me to fine him of time, trouble, or goods (as represented by money), before considering himself their fit custodian. Yet the things are still only the things; and have no natural point of attachment with either my neighbour or me, until one of us puts them to their appropriate use.

Popular concession, fixed with force-law, may never have been questioned by citizens born under the law; but no amount of human concession, or human force, can make *real* a relation which is naturally non-existent; or will avail to keep up the solemn pretence of it when the general discomfort and distress arising from such pretence, causes the force-law to be chafed against, and thus annuls the ancient concession on which law originally took its stand.

At the present hour, the bulk of humanity has not begun to recognise the property idea as *in itself* debateable. All the talk is of a change of title in property-owning; and this even among many who dream of abolishing Government. And all the while Property and

Government are as inseparable as Substance and Shadow; and as long as you keep either one of them, you will have to put up with the vagaries of the other.

Meanwhile of those whose minds are active concerning the Property "question", one set regards it as a necessary element of orderly progress that may safely be left to evolve through future phases as a dominant institution; while another set regards it as the chief, and constant, and necessary foe of order and progress; the bulwark and the *raison-d'être* of force-law; the promoter of militarism; the cause of human antagonisms, great and small; the root of all evil, and of all the frightful waste involved in the arming and defending of man against man.

The question then arises: Which of these two sets of thinkers is in advance of the

other? Which see the deepest into the springs of human action? Which displays most intellectual perspicacity and moral (that is, healthily social) momentum? Which most accurately interprets Nature and History? And which, if at once able (by help of revolution) to put theory into practice throughout a whole community, would do most to dissipate existing evil tendencies in surrounding citizens, and to invigorate and foster in them useful and beneficent tendencies?

The thing to bear firmly in mind is that property, however acquired, must maintain itself by governmental force. And this is in itself a tell-tale fact. We do not need to *force* upon one another that which Nature has instituted as useful to all.



Liberty Lyrics.

BY

L. S. BEVINGTON.



LONDON:  
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY JAMES TOCHATTI,  
"LIBERTY" PRESS.  
1895.  
—  
PRICE ONE PENNY.

# The Whereabouts of Property Ethics

L. S. Bevington

*Liberty; A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, June 1895

In Mr. Seymour's useful rejoinder (see April No.) to my recent survey of his position, he charges me with "sophistry." Which way pass: readers will judge.

The present article concludes my share in this particular controversy, and before saying farewell to my courteous opponent, it may be well to draw our mutual readers' attention to the valuable verbal concessions we free communists have obtained from him. The preliminary questions have been answered precisely in the fashion which was to be foreseen. They were awkward questions. To ask Property what its identical use is, if not to force your own way with, is much like asking Government how it would get on if Property didn't hire its services. No answer is possible, in either case, which when honestly analysed does not "give away" the property position, as inimical to the progress of men, and of Man.

The original questions put to Mr. Seymour as an Individualist were these: "What is an 'own' labour-product? What is 'appropriation'? What is a 'right'?" I prefaced the controversy by challenging Mr. Seymour to trot out a man who should have "conceived or carried out all by himself the production of a commodity"; and who, further, should be bound to that commodity, when produced, otherwise than by his "need or fitness to be its consumer or user."

And I challenged him to show that any extra bond (beyond this of need and fitness) between a man and a product, should be "other or more than a legal, conventional, and removable concession on part of other people."

In LIBERTY of Oct. '94, Mr. Seymour gives the desired reply as to the "individual producer." He admits that the term cannot be taken literally, since he means by it "each contributor" to the joint product of indefinitely many individuals, each of whom shall have paid his way as a worker; *buying* his tools, and, by expenditure of personal energy, acquiring – what? The natural fruits of such conduct? – increased aptness as worker and purchaser? – increased usefulness as producer and cooperator? – increased personal facility

as economist of personal powers and resources? No ; it is something perfectly *irrelevant to his activity* which Mr. Seymour conceives him to have acquired; namely, a "right of appropriation" – of withholding, for individual purposes (which may or may not be anti-social purposes), that which society has enabled him to produce. In my view a man appears simply as an active and efficient citizen whom it is to everyone's advantage to leave well-supplied and free. But he is *not* thus shown to be an independent producer, and there can be no object in insisting on calling him an *individual* producer, apart from the difficulty of finding a theoretical pretext for perpetuating the property craze.

His activity suggests to the open mind no natural reason for regarding him as exclusive custodian of *surplus opportunity* (or means of domination) as lodged in the excess of his product over his individual power of consumption, and as based on a purely conventional system of trade-privilege.

Having thus helped to confirm our disbelief in the "individual producer," Mr. Seymour, at last (in April's LIBERTY) gives his answer as to the meaning of the other two terms, "ownership" and "right." My words in September were these: "Right to appropriate means law-protected ability to withhold at will, or it means nothing." I also said that the supposed right to exclusive

custody (even of a labour product on which a has worked) depends on a "legal, conventional, and removable concession on part of other people." Compare now Mr. Seymour's definition (in April). "What I mean by to 'own,' is to 'appropriate,' to one's exclusive custody." You see what immeasurable leagues this carries us forward in our comprehension of these two mystic terms! We now know that to "own" is to "appropriate," and to "appropriate" is to "own". Abracadabra, in short, is – Abracadabra! But since we were in quest, not of a synonym, but of a meaning for either term, and a meaning moreover that should ethically light up exclusive custody, this reply might make us cry if it didn't make us laugh. And then, as to his elucidation of a "right", Mr. Seymour's brilliant and conclusive rejoinder is as follows: "A right in this economic connection is the individual limitation (in the

**His activity suggests to the open mind no natural reason for regarding him as exclusive custodian of surplus opportunity (or means of domination) as lodged in the excess of his product over his individual power of consumption, and as based on a purely conventional system of trade-privilege.**

reciprocal relation between all men) to such appropriation; such limitation being set by an *equality of opportunity* between all men.” A *right* to appropriation then is a *limitation* to appropriation. Hm! We had hitherto imagined that, ethically speaking, limitation came in where “right” left off; and *vice versa*.

Passing this by, however, as perhaps a mere piece of careless diction, we may be glad at Mr. S’s honest admission as to the purely conventional basis of property “rights.” He thus throws up the sponge, admitting that “it is conventional;” adding “but so is [Individualist] Anarchism;” (in so far as the latter, to avoid egoism, must include contract).

Truly, to portion out *admittedly conventional rights* by a pre-established dogma as to *equal opportunity* is a task which may well be expected to tax the ingenuity of that “free Government” to which Mr. Seymour elsewhere pins his prospective faith and allegiance;<sup>1</sup> a government to be somehow “supported entirely by “criminals,” and to favour the reign of the individual property producer. But we don’t see where the Anarchism comes in in so fanciful a scheme. We Communists may emphatically deny that Anarchism is conventional. Real Anarchism – that is, Natural Order freely establishing itself, and from moment to moment *freely re-adjusting itself* in social life – must, in our view, be as unconventional as the play of the vital forces in nature at large. And after all, Mr. Seymour’s definitions bring us no whit nearer to the individual’s right to limit (or be limited – which is it?) with regard to access to redundant human products. The limitation-right is to be “set” by an equality of opportunity between all men. Another myth. Opportunity has its subjective as well as its external conditions; and in the particular case of property-getting, it is ever the less social citizen, the man or woman most backward in the development of anti-barbaric compunctions, whose subjective checks are small, and whose opportunity is thus greater. No man can pre-judge another’s opportunity as a competitive scrambler. Nature knows nothing of equality. She works out all her problems and reaches all her best effects by rule of thumb. Every organism that prospers does so by means of the constant and free equilibration of such initial disparities as disturb its vital powers of resistance. Human society is, in a sense, subject to like conditions with organised life. Herbert Spencer calls life “a moving equilibrium.” Sound economy and sound ethic consist, I think, at our present pass, in the *making good* of unequal social opportunities on the part of social units, all alike interested in the healthy coherence of the community on which they depend. In basing our social methods on the arbitrary and false assumptions (1) that equal opportunities can spontaneously exist in a ready-made social medium to which the degree of individual adaptation is never twice alike, (2) that all honest men have equal opportunity of keeping or

utilising for self even such chances as they are born with (and this in a society in which a “conventional” property system biases initiative all along the line) we confuse the issue both economically and ethically; insanely piling up opportunities in one direction while thinning them out in all other directions. Mr. S. waxes irritable over my “deplorable ignorance” of the [purely commercial] law of value, and my supposed “justification of a general scramble.” (!) As to the general scramble, it is on hideously enough at present, and there is not a civilised adult alive who is not in some way maimed or marred by the exigencies of the scuffle. It will continue so, with ever less and less room for scruple, so long as competition for property remains the keynote of industry. and until free communism, by doing away with all pretext for scrambling, shall give men time to draw a full breath, come to their senses, and catch sight of one another’s human faces. And as to that “deplorable ignorance” concerning market-values. What if it be as deliberate as it is deplorable? implying a matured contempt for respectable current pretences by which the business theorist tries to sever the artificial exchange-value from real use-value, by imposing the dogma that value is somehow honestly separable from needs, which are as Mr. Seymour admits “as variable as they are indefinite.”

There is no other real measure of value than need. Think right home to the core of the matter and you will have to discover that *cost* is only *need* differently written. Only that really *costs* me anything which I cannot produce, or part with, without deduction from my own personal resources or liberties, and which I therefore *need* either to keep intact or to replace as fast as I lose it, under pain of being to that extent disabled. I make myself needy, else why “pay” me for the benefit my work affords you? Why have the theory lurking in your mind that it is *fair* to pay me? And how should my work be of any value or benefit to you if you do not need it? Let us never forget that the property ideal distinctly discourages hearty cooperation on part of all who value freedom more than power, and renders unnaturally rare the direct voluntary application of aptitudes to their social ends. Note also that at our existing stage of material advance, individual innocuousness is a far safer test of the “right” to live, than is individual productivity. The avaricious producer is a more noxious creature than the non-aggressive loafer, cripple, simpleton, or other social *infant*.

Meanwhile, needs are, to use Mr. Seymour’s own words, “as variable as they are indefinite”. (LIBERTY, April.) And this statement brings us to the real crux of the question. What is the soundest scientific basis for the ethico-economic system of the future? “No ethico-economic system,” says Mr. Seymour, “could be founded on human needs,” because the needs are variable. Will some Individualist tell us in what ethic or

---

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Seymour’s leaflet “The Two Anarchisms.”

economics consist? and why they exist in the absence of human needs? What is economy *per se*, if not a method of fulfilling needs unwastefully? Apart from needs, why bother about supplies or distribution? What is ethic *per se*, if not a theory as to the due conduct-relations between the individual and his fellows as concerning the needs of each? Apart from their needs, why bother about men's relations as citizens? What are needs but incomplete life-and-liberty supplies? What is economy if not the best means of completing the supplies by of human action? What is ethic if not the principle by which motive and character may most easily yield such action as shall keep unsupplied need of every kind at a minimum, with least violence done to the life chances of any?

Divorce ethics and economics from human needs as capable of fulfilment by human action, and what basis, in the name of common-sense, will Mr. Seymour pretend to unearth for either?" O absurdity! is there any length," etc., etc? (LIBERTY, April)

I have headed this article as above, because the discussion seems to have changed its axis since it began, and to have become a question as to the relative fitness and survivability of two opposed human propensities or tendencies, one or the other of which has to be taken as the present touchstone of economic and ethical progress. Mr. Seymour, in common with Individualists at large (whether they style themselves Anarchists or not) believes that the ethic of the future, continuing to recognise the legitimacy of private property (of course with a labour title) will increasingly discountenance whatever impulse to communism now exists; and that general and particular welfare will increasingly subserved by leaving men's chances of access to food and all else, more and more at the mercy of free competition among those able to compete, i.e., more and more at the disposal of those individuals whose aptitudes and tastes are of the commercial kind.

My belief is that the withholding of finished products for purposes of individual trading, means roundabout and incomplete economy, as well as miserable morality. It cannot but tend to hitch and retard distribution, to aggravate the initial disadvantage of citizens whose small powers need special facilities to bring them up to efficiency, to starve out incipient new aptitudes of any kind that has not yet reached market value, and, by the perpetuation of the militancy involved in any system based on property, to perpetuate human suffering. And whatever perpetuates human suffering has the disastrous effect of making life painful for the sympathetic, of making the comfort, of which all are in quest, depend in the foremost individuals on the searing of the social sensibilities; and so, (as Herbert Spencer has repeatedly pointed out) is checked the free development of that altru-egoism in individuals, on whose maturity and free exercise the ultimate triumph of man over misery, and the ushering in of a thoroughly harmonious social state, will depend.

Property or exclusive custody of personal superfluity is monopoly so far as it goes, though in an incipient form. As an institution it must follow the general law of its own evolution, and there will emerge from it monopoly in the glaringly anti-social form which even Individualists deplore, as surely as a chick will result from a well incubated egg. Leave

property, and it *must* maintain its conventional existence and claims by force, masked as law. Leave law, and in the interests of the law machine, property *must* be privileged. Leave privilege, and the path to monopoly of markets *must* in the natural course of competition be traversed. Altering the title to property will never – can never – alter the laws of its evolution. This is truth. Is it also poetry? If so, let us willingly accept Mr. Seymour's impatient suggestion, and "stick to poetry;" finding courage to leave market-values (as also the economics and ethics which shall have no foundation in human needs) "severely alone." Amen.

## Revolution

*Liberty Lyrics* (London: Liberty Press, 1895)

Ah, yes! You must meet it, and brave it;  
Too laggard—too purblind to save it;  
Who reck of your doubting and fearing  
Phrase-bound "Evolution?"  
Do you not hear the sea sounding it?  
Do you not feel the fates founding it?  
Do you not know it for nearing?  
Its name—Revolution.  
What! stem it, and stay it, and spare it?  
Or will you defy it, and dare it?  
Then this way or that you must change you

## For swift restitution

Do you not see men deserving it?  
Do you not hear women nerving it?  
Down with old Mammon! and range you  
To aid Revolution!  
The last hour has struck of our waiting,  
The last of your bloodless debating,  
The wild-fire of spirit is speeding  
Us on to solution.  
Do you not thrill at the uttering?  
Do you not breathe the breeze fluttering  
Round the brave flag of our pleading?  
The world's Revolution!

# Anarchism & Potatoes

L. S. Bevington

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, July 1895

While writing his article for June *Freedom*, comrade Bell did not “care a copper” whether the commonly assumed relation between men and property is real and natural or not. Well, that sort of indifference is likely to remain quite in order till the next social corner has to be turned by the mass of civilised mankind. Then all that which is sham in our institutions will pass into limbo. Yet in evading the question as to whether the notion of property is or is not based on real and natural (and hence irreversible) grounds, it seems to me that it is comrade Bell and not L.S.B. who “gives away our Anarchist position.” Anarchism will bear investigation right down to the bed-rock of natural verity, out of which language originally took its rise. To de-sophisticate our talk is not to indulge in “metaphysics.”

Meanwhile comrade Bell sees in his mind’s eye two equal gardens belonging to two equal (or, at any rate, similarly circumstanced) garden-owners. He next sees garden-owner A growing lots of potatoes while garden-owner B, despite equal opportunities (in the matter of means, tools, muscle and leisure), grows flowers, or leaves Nature to grow only weeds, thus evidently showing himself unequal to A so far as constitutional taste, aptitude, and propensity are concerned. Poor A soon finds this out: for B makes no offer of his flowers, not of his unused tools, nor even the garden-space for A’s children to play in. And yet he is caught bagging some of the potatoes A had cultivated, on the pretext that A only wants them to sell, while he, B, wants them to eat. And so, naturally, a hot dispute arises between them. Comrade Bell then turns his mind’s eye on L.S.B., and asks what that passer-by would say.

Probably nothing; only “think the more.” The likely reflection would be – “Those two claimants of as much as they can get along the respective lines of least resistance for their unlike temperaments must be left to fight it out. I am neither policeman, judge, nor jury: and even honest amateur meddlers are liable to mistake.” The reflection would wind up with an impatient sigh,

meaning: “Oh, for Anarchy! and that common-sense condition of society which would make both A and B look silly fools – A, for toiling and moiling at producing private potatoes only to buy other things with which he could have and welcome by more direct means: B for exposing himself to the bruises or bad names which are the natural mead of the aggressive up-setter of other people’s hobbies, instead of getting his potatoes peaceably elsewhere as his socially conceded right.”

Truth to tell, the sordid little scene conjured up by comrade Bell as a conundrum for ultra-Communists to guess their way out of, is an apt case in point, showing what a nuisance property-owning may make of one’s

neighbour. Both A and B are likely types enough under our existing uneasy conditions; but both would show as “cranks,” and by no means common “examples,” in a healthy social environment. I conceive the Anarchist task at present to consist in eye-opening (in the case of self and others) as to what it is that human nature really wants to be at. Beneath all narrowly selfish workings, loafing, grudgings and grabbings each man, I take it, is only taking his own shortest cut to freedom; and not once in a million would at all object to being fair to Dick, Tom, and Harry, if he could only first make sure he wasn’t risking his own personal liberties. I don’t see much use in asking how we would run equal garden-owning

or potato-selling in the absence of policemen; but it does seem to me desirable that should have a clear idea as to what “owning” involves in the way of inconvenience, and how it is that, behind the back of the property assumption and its indispensable though unreliable and expensive “Robert,” human nature persistently tends to work out its own salvation. Most neighbours happen to do one another little unweighed, unmeasured, roughly equivalent good turns over the garden wall: and potato-sneaking isn’t half so usual as under present miserable conditions it ought to be, if human nature were as individualistic as property-croakers gratuitously assume.

**Comrade Bell fails to see that property holding, so far as it empowers at all, is with monopoly, since arbitrarily to associate with your own will and caprice the use by others of anything whatever which you are unable to put to direct use yourself is to make your will an obstructive factor in other people’s opportunities.**

Comrade Bell fails to see that property holding, so far as it empowers at all, is with monopoly, since arbitrarily to associate with your own will and caprice the use by others of anything whatever which you are unable to put to direct use yourself is to make your will an obstructive factor in other people's opportunities. Everything you trade with, you govern by. Property in anything, merely for trading with it, monopolises that thing as yours; and even though you are not the least in the world a would-be governor (and may under the commercial system be obliged to trade with your superfluity as the only alternative to being governed yourself), yet you are a *must-be* governor, all the same, of those who have us no superfluity at all. Such is the ugly fact.

Comrade Bell is doubtless right in saying that "the essential thing is liberty to MAKE, not to TAKE," (he means take *away*, of course). That is exactly the point. With liberty to make afforded to all who already take pleasure in productive activity, to say nothing of the many more who would find delight in working usefully and steadily if the present physical and mural slavery attached to labour were removed – with all this natural impulse to cheerful productivity liberated, society could not but find itself so wealthy that none need take away from others in order to supply himself. As to "unbalanced" Communism, I don't understand the term. Does comrade Bell mean that free society would still contain the unconvinced private trader trying (even without statutory protection) to accumulate superfluity for the purpose of bargain-driving? Why not? – to begin with, at any rate. To be free, society must include different methods, resulting from the different predilections of differing men. Only FREE Communism once merrily afoot (which under a law-protected property system can never be the case), it is hard to see of what advantage the private bargain-driving could be to either party engaged in it. To me it seems certain that the game would quickly be seen to be not worth the candle. A stile set in a hedge or fence may offer itself as the easiest point to go one's own way over; and quite a crowd of delayed pedestrian's way collect round it awaiting their turn; but imagine the hedge removed and the ditch levelled, while the stile is yet left standing as someone's private property! who would *then* want to climb over it as the easiest way of getting across country?

**Property in anything,  
merely for trading with  
it, monopolises that  
thing as yours; and  
even though you are  
not the least in the  
world a would-be  
governor ... yet you are  
a *must-be* governor, all  
the same, of those  
who have us no  
superfluity at all**

On this point I may, perhaps, be forgiven for quoting from a letter on Free Access which I wrote more than a year ago to the "Weekly Times & Echo":

"If, having produced that which he cannot consume or enjoy, the producer stickles for a right to prohibit the use of the remainder by others, save on terms imposed by himself, there can be but one motive for his doing so. He must be believing that the retention of his product (always at more or less inconvenience to himself) is necessary, in order to prevent his going short of something which someone else has produced. He wants it, in short, to bribe someone else to hand him something which the other only withholds for like reasons. All this is comprehensible under the existing competitive systemic (which is but a confused plexus of artificial hindrances), but it would show like a craze in a free and healthy society. Even now the assumption is false that, beside wanting to have his own needs satisfied, his own opportunities open, his own activities free, and his own enjoyments secured, your fellow-man cares at all to hinder your reception of like benefits. He only gets in your way because he thinks you will get in his if he

does not. The queer acquisitive grudge which makes men keep what they *don't* want in order to buy what they *do* want may also be partly due to the delusion that enough could not be immediately forthcoming of everything for everybody. And so, to make sure for themselves, the privileged market-managing minority have bungled affairs so far that the divorce between natural demand and natural supply is now-a-days well-nigh complete."

Comrade Bell's bracketing of a question regarding a market-gardener's potatoes with a question as to a woman's person is altogether surprising, since insistence on personal freedom is no less surely the starting point of Anarchism than denial of the arbitrary connection between person and things is the outcome of that insistence. The very words "a woman's person" are tautological. A woman is a person and it is as herself, not as her property, that she claims not to be aggressively treated. In the letter from which I quoted I made my opinion clear on this point – "[People] commit absurdity in claiming to own themselves: . . . it is a mere playing with words. I do not 'own' myself. I *am* myself. A, B, or C or is not I. Therefore 'hands off!' And that is all about it."

# The True Direction of Moral Progress

L. S. Bevington

*Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, April 1896

Broadly stated, the functional basis of morals appears to be the perpetuation of human development. This development presents itself under two aspects: (1) The evolution of society as a whole; (2) The evolution of the social or super-personal impulses, emotions, and tendencies in individuals. "Virtue", functionally considered, amounts to the maintenance of humanity's fitness for survival, so far as this maintenance may be secured by the socialisation of individuals through the medium of their own conduct. That character is "moral" which (whatever the formulated principle recognised by its owner) issues in conduct conducive to the well-being, not necessarily of the personal agent, but of his kind: which keeps man at the head of things, and elevates his headship. That motive is "moral" which implies a desire to exhibit such conduct, so far as the owner knows how. Just in proportion as the desires and purposes of the individual lead him to conform to social requirements and to merge self, the person, in self the social unit, can he obtain a virtual mastery over his conditions. Happiness consists in such mastery; rectitude in the conformity which leads to it.

If the function of morals be thus to subserve the interests of the community, those motives and principles must be most moral which concern themselves most closely with the welfare of the community, and which have least regard to considerations indifferent to that welfare. The most moral belief, again, must be that which tends to the institution of such social motives and principles; and which, in its indirect effect on the emotions of its followers, brings his will increasingly under their power.

A high degree of enlightenment and prosperity, or swift progress towards it, commonly accompanies the high estimation of such principles as self-government, sympathy, and equity. The latter especially is the crowning virtue of civilisation. From first to last moral advance appears to have consisted under varying guises in the slow surmounting, not of individual distinctions, but of personal considerations; in the gradual lessening

of the weight of special interests, whether egoistic or altruistic, in the balance of morally accredited motives, and in increasing the preponderance of what are virtually race-instincts as a compelling agency in the conscious lives of individuals. In states pre-eminently civilised we find teachers, governments, and even public opinion busy, more or less consciously and more or less successfully, with the inculcation of ends and the institution of restrictions bearing directly on the products of individual character and conduct, as affecting the vital resources, not of the agent *per se*, but of the community; the interests of the agent being included only in proportion to his capability of development in social conditions.

Society is no impersonal structure; neither as regards the requirements of its development is it a merely magnified person; but it is a great superpersonal organism, into which the self-hood of every one of its units enters, not merely as a modifying influence or a supplementary end, but as an essential ingredient. The requirements of society include, while transcending, the requirements of the individual, and, when supplied, yield what is felt as an improved quality of happiness to each individual who lives in practical recognition of his share in a larger life than his own.

Men are slow to learn that even their own glory must play second fiddle to the wants of a solidifying community, although it is a happy thing for themselves and for the community when at last they do learn it. Life is at last simplified and beautified, and many faults of character with their attendant miseries vanish spontaneously when the individual learns to (find himself, and) content himself in what Emerson calls "his social and delegated quality" – when he sees that whatever "respects the individual is temporary and prospective, like the individual, who is ascending out of his limits into a catholic existence."

(The above article was the last received from our Comrade, and was sent shortly before her death.)

***Other Fellow.—They are called "poor" people. They spend their time, strength and ability in making necessities, comforts and luxuries to give the rich people. They generally die early, and often miserably. They are not at all respected or envied.***

– "A Dialogue", *Freedom: A journal of anarchist communism*, June 1895

# Anarchism and Violence

**Louisa Sarah Bevington**

*Liberty: A journal of anarchist communism*, November 1896<sup>1</sup>

What? bomb-throwing – killing – violence, useful? What sort of Anarchists are those who say that? Where is their Anarchism, their belief in freedom, and the right of every living man to his own life and liberty? Anarchism is not bomb throwing, violence, incendiarism, destruction. Odd that anything so self-evident should need saying. Odder still that one set of Anarchists should be obliged to turn round in the thick of battle against the common foe to say it to another set. Real Anarchists too, not hybrids, with one eye on freedom and the other on property. Of course the capitalist press has naturally found it convenient to identify Anarchists with bombs, and equally of course, some of our “social” democratic friends have said within themselves, “There, there! so would we have it.” All the same, Anarchism not only is not, but in the nature of the case cannot be, bomb throwing. An “ism” is an abiding body of principles and opinions – a belief with a theory behind it. The throwing of bombs is a mechanical act of warfare, – of rebellion, if you like; – an act likely to be resorted to by any and every sort of “believer” when the whole of his environment stands forearmed against the practical application of his creed. The two cannot anyhow be identical; the question of the hour is – Is one of them ever a rational outcome of the other? Can anyone professing this particular “ism” resort to this kind of act, without forfeiting his consistency? Can a real Anarchist – a man whose creed is Anarchism – be at the same time a person who deliberately injures, or tries to injure, persons or property. I, for one, have no hesitation in saying that, if destitute because of monopoly, he can.

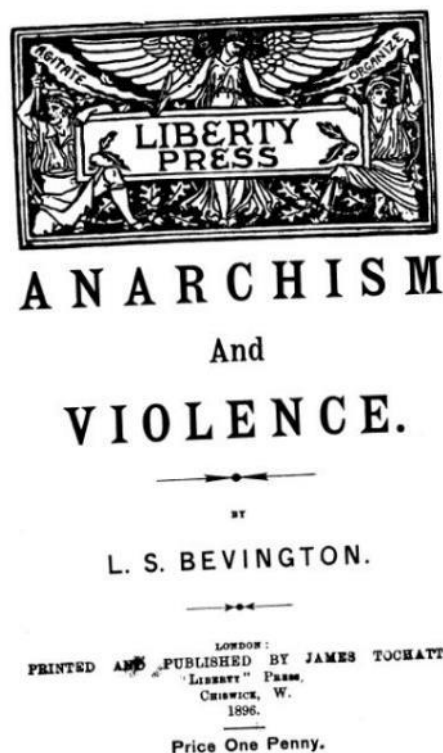
I go even further. It seems to me that under certain conditions, (within and without the individual) it is part and parcel, not of his Anarchism but of his personal whole heartedness as an Anarchist, that he feels it impossible in his own case not to abandon the patiently educational for the actively militant attitude, and to hit out, as intelligently and intelligibly as he can, at that which powerfully

flouts his creed and humanity’s hope, making it (for all its truth, and for all his integrity) a dead letter within his own living, suffering, pitying, aspiring soul. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that there are now and again conditions under which inaction on the part of the Anarchists amounts to virtual partisanship with the “reaction”, and this, even though the only kind of effectual activity left open to them be of the directly militant kind.

The extraordinarily rapid spread of our Ideal during the past few years seems to me to have been indirectly but clearly traceable to the quickening effect of the

militant but generally intelligible acts of a few maddened individuals upon the thousands of minds in all countries which were already unconsciously hungry for the Idea, and which found themselves thus compelled to closer reflection and aroused to definite self-recognition as Anarchists.

For what is Anarchism? Belief in Anarchy as the ultimate solution of all social and economic difficulties. A belief, that is, that Anarchy (or freedom from laws made and fixed by man for man,) is the ideal state in which alone complete harmony and a self-adjusting equilibrium between our individual interests and our social instincts can



<sup>1</sup> Issued as a pamphlet and reprinted “Anarchism and Violence”, *The Firebrand* (Portland) 14 March 1897. (*Black Flag*)

be secured and maintained. A belief that nearly all human depravity on one hand, and nearly all human wretchedness on the other, have been brought about through men's bondage to the coercive regulations imposed by fallible, purblind humans on one another, in the interests, not of general progress and universal friendship, but of this or that imposing class. Anarchy, which claims the full release of the majority from the dictation of the minority, and likewise the full release of the minority from the dictation of the majority, means, further, the removal of all the enervating restrictions and excuses which have hitherto hindered the individual from developing his self-controlling tendencies in spontaneous obedience to the inevitably social and peaceful instincts of his own humanity, as a creature who from time immemorial has been incessantly dependent on his fellows for all the necessities and amenities of life. Anarchy means a life for man analogous, on a higher plane, to the life of bees, beavers, ants, and other gregarious creatures, who have not only all natural resources, but also one another's products freely and peacefully open to them, and who do but co-operate the more perfectly and happily in securing the common interests of all for the fact that they are free, as individuals to follow their inherent instincts and inclinations untrammelled by considerations so foreign to their well-being as property laws within their own communities.

Despite its supreme advantages, our faculty of language has immensely complicated and confused our development as social beings, since it has decoyed us by means of dangerous and misleading abstractions from the surely and safely educational paths of actual experience, causing a long and painful digression from the natural high road of our progress as a species.

Language! – hence, on one hand, the abstractions, “property”, money, credit, law, subjection, crime; and on the other, those sad resulting concretes, – poverty, parasitism, degeneration, despair, and the wholesale tormenting of man by man. Nature shows us that among wild creatures, destitute of true language, and so safe against abstractions and prejudices, it is precisely the most social which have become the most intelligent. We human beings cannot develop wholesome customs, at once tough and flexible, – self modifying and fitted to our individual comfort and our reciprocal protection by one another, so long as we are harassed by the crude provisions of artificially

coercive law. And we are, one and all, the poorer for this.

For, surely, the world's wealth should be at least as freely accessible to every human creature as it is to every other creature. Surely the natural human being should be as free to use his whole set of faculties from the first, and so to be a joy to himself and a welcome “fellow” to his fellows, as is the mere bee or beaver. It would be possible enough if once we could explode that property superstition which involves, and ever must involve government – or the coercive regulation of everybody's life and chances so as to suit those who can obtain prohibitive custody of the natural and produced capital of the race.

But now – what is there about Anarchism which should suggest, justify, or render intelligible the use of violence in any of those who profess it? Anarchy in itself bodes peace; with happy, amicable co-operation. Where Anarchy is already the rule with an intelligent species, deliberate violence, whether organised or not, can never be needed between the members of that species, but only in casual self-defence, or in the repelling of aggression from without. (Even under Anarchy, I fear we shall sometimes have to kill rattlesnakes, tigers and noxious vermin!) Anarchy, however, means – No more dividing of a race against itself, through the contentious and antagonisms of nations and classes; no more dividing of the individual against himself, as a luckless creature who can only be his best, socially at his own risk and cost; or, egotistically, at social risk and cost.

Were the conditions in which we live our present lives a condition of freedom from all laws that fall short of, or are in conflict with the natural and salutary laws of life – then indeed would violence find no place in our conduct towards our fellow mortals.

But we live in a world where property-getting is made virtually compulsory, under penalty of one kind or another; and to us also who abominate property-seeking and property-wielding as the poisonous root of every misery and turpitude. We who are full of the spirit of what shall be, and who ceaselessly and hungrily press towards its realisation, cannot – dare not – be frankly and fully ourselves in our dealings with our fellows, because some of these fellows have decreed that neither industry nor good citizenship shall be the passport to food and freedom, but solely and simply – money, or its phantom “credit”. But, so long as

Government exists, we cannot, even as an experiment, establish Anarchy, we cannot live our individual lives as Anarchists, – freely, uprightly, simply, generously, bravely – in the midst of a political society where it is virtually punishable with death or misery to turn one’s back on legal considerations for the sake of moral considerations. We cannot live as we wish in an artificial society presided over by an unpunishable set of punishers – any Government. Government, whatever its form, is Property’s body guard and hireling, and in the nature of the case cannot admit the independent freedom of any citizen whatever without self-frustration. So long as artificial Law exists, every citizen falls perforce into one of two categories, he belongs virtually either to the property seeking, law abiding class, or to the law breaking, law ignoring, “criminal” class. The law may not legally be experimented upon or even improved upon by extra-legal methods; it will punish you if you ignore its provisions in any of your dealings on the plea of having discovered a shorter or better way to well-being. And another desperate feature of the Anarchist case lies in the fact that Government is a permanent necessity so long as property remains a recognised and tolerated institution. So long as this purely conventional bond between any man or men, and any thing or things, has to be recognised as a preliminary to every kind of action, and is made to usurp the place of, and to crowd out natural and simple purpose on every occasion, such recognition must be maintained under penalty – by force – against those who would go their way, however harmlessly regardless of its bars and boundaries.

Meanwhile, the Anarchist is not a mere claimant for intellectual liberty of thought and speech respecting these things. Even these lesser boons are not fully granted by those in power, for the idea of freedom is as attractive as it is sound; nature takes care to award a specially intense kind of happiness to the consciously attained correspondence of logical Idea with vital and ineradicable instinct; and Anarchism strikes home, and takes deep root in precisely most discriminating minds where-ever it

**We cannot live as we wish in an artificial society presided over by an unpunishable set of punishers – any Government. Government, whatever its form, is Property’s body guard and hireling**

gets a chance of propagation. The State, like its sinister coadjutor, the Church, fears full daylight, and is perfectly consistent in discouraging plain-speaking – diplomatically.

But the Anarchist, as I said, claims more than the right to hold and expound his creed; he feels no rest, and he will give us no rest, until way be made for its natural expansion, and its practical realisation, as a principle of life. For he feels, sees, knows, and at no moment forgets all the evils caused by the laws of property, and by the

Governments which in cold blood concoct, and cruelly enforce them. He is heartily tired of being made an unwilling party to that which he repudiates as monstrous.

So we see that the Anarchist is in a unique position. Of all would-be experimenters, benefactors, or deliverers, he alone is a person who by virtue of the principles he holds must be a revolutionist, and so must have, not one party, but all parties, not one sect, but all sects, not one nation, but all nations, as such, dead against him. For he

would overthrow or break down every frontier, as well as every form of law-making and of prosecuting domination. The law, if you tease it enough, will help you slowly to minimise every minor evil contained within its own provisions, but will never aid you one step towards its own eradication as the chief evil of all. It is useless now as it was in the days of the revolutionary Galilean to look to Satan for the casting out of Satan. Nature is against that plan. No evolving thing stops in mid-career of development along its own lines, and puts an end to its own existence just because you tell it to. A cancer that has got a good hold of the living tissues which its foul life is torturing and disabling, will not dissipate itself merely because the physician and the patient join their hands in prayer to it to do so. The cancer is, so to speak, quite within its rights if it replies – “Why, I am quite as much part of the general order of things as you are. The law of evolution regulates my development just as truly as it does yours. I have got a hold on you because you are just what I require to feed on; and I shall not die of my own accord until I have eaten you up first.” So then the surgeon is sent for,

and the enemy is audaciously and summarily dealt with.

Similarly, you cannot blame Capitalism for developing after its kind. The Property-Tyrant may cease to call himself a ruler and law-maker. A sect of Mammonites, which would be a pestiferous sect if it could, is now in the world, declaiming against the government, not of man by man, but of the propertyist by the politician, and sometimes assuming the name of Anarchist – but demanding, under all disguises, Absolute rule by the Property-holder.

Another sect declaims futilely against private property while proposing the official direction of all property holding in the common interest. These two things, Individualism here, Democratic Communism there, seem at first glance opposed in principle. They are not. The evolution of the idea of domination has developed two branches from a parent stem; there are ideas nowadays of how the governing is to be done. One is plutocratic, and says – “Leave me my purse, and leave me free to do my will with you by its means.” The other is democratic, and says – “Give me your purse, and leave me free to do my will with you by its means.” But we will listen to no ‘crat at all; the wage system is developing after its kind, so is the Government superstition. In their nature intimately dependent on one another, in destroying the root of one, we destroy both. Capitalism must evolve – but if we love its victims, and either through experience or sympathies participate in their sufferings, we shall see to it that the cursed thing be laid low in mid-career.

The enemies of our cause are exceedingly anxious that no moral distinctions be drawn on this burning question of Anarchist violence. The big, indiscriminating, morally inert public are encouraged in their prejudices by the capitalist press, which is at once their sycophant and their deceiver. For the blind and their leaders all violence is held to be vile, except legalised and

privileged violence on an enormous scale. Cordite, manufactured wholesale by poor hired hands for the express purpose of “indiscriminate massacre of the innocent” in the noble cause of markets and of territory, is regarded with stupid equanimity by the very same public who are taught by their pastors

and masters to cry “Dastard!” when a private individual, at his own risk, fights a cordite-manufacturing clique of privileged rogues with their own weapons.

Of course we know that among those who call themselves Anarchists there are a minority of unbalanced enthusiasts who look upon every illegal and sensational act of violence as a matter for hysterical jubilation. Very useful to the police and the press, unsteady in intellect and of weak moral principle, they have repeatedly show themselves accessible to venal considerations. They,

and their violence, and their professed Anarchism are purchasable, and in the last resort they are welcome and efficient partisans of the bourgeoisie in its remorseless war against the deliverers of the people.

But let us stick to our text – “Bomb-throwing is not Anarchism”; and whenever violent action is unintelligent and merely rancorous, it is as foolish and inexpedient as it is base.

Killing and injuring are intrinsically hideous between man and man. No sophistry can make “poison” a synonym of “food”, nor make “war” spell “peace”. But there are cases where poison becomes medicinal, and there is such a thing as warring against the causes of war. No Anarchist incites another to violence, but many an Anarchist repudiates, as I do, the hypocritical outcry against Anarchist militancy raised by those who pass their lives in active or passive support of the infamous institutions which perpetuate human antagonisms and effectually hinder the arrival of that peace and prosperity for which the world is waiting.

Meanwhile let us leave indiscriminating killing and injuring to the Government – to its Statesmen, its Stockbrokers, its Officers, and its Law.

**These two things,  
Individualism here,  
Democratic Communism  
there, seem at first  
glance opposed in  
principle. They are not.  
The evolution of the idea  
of domination has  
developed two branches  
from a parent stem; there  
are ideas nowadays of  
how the governing is to  
be done.**

# Ethel MacDonald: An Anarchist Engima?

Keith Millar

In the past 15 years or so the legacy of Ethel MacDonald has become more widely appreciated.

She was born and raised in Bellshill, Lanarkshire from 24-2-1909, & lived only to 51 years, dying after battling Multiple Sclerosis on 1-12-1960. It is an intriguing thought that had she not been stricken with MS, and had lived to the age of say 70 to 75, that she would almost certainly have come across this writer and the likes of Stuart Christie and Ronnie Alexander.

Awareness of her contribution, especially in the years of the Spanish Civil War, was heightened by the Mark Littlewood film<sup>1</sup>, the Chris Dolan book<sup>2</sup>, the books covering Aldred and anti-parliamentarianism by JT Caldwell<sup>3</sup> and songs<sup>4</sup>.

Her period of anarchist involvement began in 1925 when she was just 16, active in the APCF<sup>5</sup> and unlike Alfred's partner Jennie Patrick transferred to his new project the USM<sup>6</sup> in 1934. After WW2 she became central to the day-to-day running of the Strickland Press until it was forced to close in 1968 with Caldwell keeping it going till 1968, 5 years after Aldred's death.



**Ethel MacDonald  
(1909-1960)**

It is easy to read up or indeed watch her dramatic involvement in Barcelona from 1937-38. Not long after arriving in Barcelona she began an English language broadcast on the anarcho-syndicalist radio station run by the CNT.

Less than 6 months after her arrival she played an important role in helping Anarchists being hunted down by the Secret Police of the Republican Government and the Communist Party. She became known as the "Scots Scarlet Pimpernel", evading arrest between July and November 1937 when along with Patrick she had to flee to Paris then Amsterdam on her way back to Glasgow.

The death of Independent Labour Party activist, Bob Smillie who had enrolled with a POUM battalion on 12-6-37 in Valencia became highlighted by the CNT and MacDonald internationally to reveal the crackdown on the revolutionaries which contributed to the defeat by Franco's forces in 1937<sup>7</sup>. Although widely disbelieved due to CP influence especially in the UK, testimonies by George Orwell and other ILP returning volunteers backed up Ethel's account.

After various speaking engagements on route home and in the UK she returned to loyally assisting Aldred's projects, which during WW2 were less

<sup>1</sup> Which appeared on the BBC etc. see <http://www.spanishcivilwarfilm.com>

<sup>2</sup> *An Anarchist's Story: The Life of Ethel MacDonald* published 2009 by Birlinn of Edinburgh.

<sup>3</sup> Including *Come Dungeons Dark* (1988) and *With Fate Conspire* (1999). I interviewed and met 'Caldie' on several occasions including his meeting with the Bairds and Raesides in 1987 when the first Free University forum was on that 1930s/40s period. He was a demure man unless stirred by injustice and perceived historical inaccuracies. He shared a flat at 16 Gibson St with Ethel prior and after her return. There was never any suggestion that they were a couple – more like Aldred's adopted protégé's!

<sup>4</sup> *From Bellshill to Barcelona* on the Lanarkshire Songwriters album on the International Brigades and in an unfinished song by the late socialist. Alister Hulett.

<sup>5</sup> The *Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation* which existed in the West of Scotland 1921-41 when the remnants led by Willie McDougall changed the name to the Workers Revolutionary League. Initially created by Guy Aldred and others, by 1934 a split led to a new Aldred venture, the USM.

<sup>6</sup> The *United Socialist Movement* based in Townhead sought to connect with ILP and non-Stalinist radicals and fizzled out by the onset of WW2 when the group became devoted to the Strickland Press.

<sup>7</sup> See books by Burnett Bolleten and other commentators on what really happened. The POUM were the Workers Party of Marxist Unification which attracted volunteers such as Eric Blair (Orwell) and ILP members and were persecuted and vilified by the CP as 'Trotskyite'

significant locally than the Glasgow Anarchist Group with Leech, Raiside, Shaw, Dick and Baird to the fore.

While central to Aldred, who regarded her as a surrogate daughter, one can speculate that had she not resumed that mission, she might have blossomed more as she undoubtedly did in 1936-8. She had acquired a confidence and developed abilities that might have been better expressed elsewhere .

On the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her premature death in 1960 she deserves to be commemorated as do her contemporaries in that difficult period of history.

#### Further Reading

Apart from *Wikipedia* check out *Strugglepedia* at [http://strugglepedia.co.uk/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://strugglepedia.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page)

Plus the *Spirit of Revolt Archive* <https://spiritofrevolt.info>

The Mitchell Library Archives in Glasgow hold all the items from Aldred and MacDonald. They can only be viewed in person.

## Ethel MacDonald (1909-1960)

***Workers City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1988)**

**Ethel, one of a family of nine, was born in Bellshill and came to live in Glasgow as a young teenager in the mid twenties. Soon after, she became a socialist and mixed for a time with the ILP. By about 1932 she made contact with Bakunin House and the anti-parliamentarians, including Guy Aldred, and from this time on she became more and more identified with Anarchist ideas in the revolutionary struggle. A gifted linguist, she went to Spain in 1936 accompanied by her friend and colleague Jenny Patrick. Whilst Jenny travelled on to help in Madrid, Ethel stayed to work with the Anarchists in Barcelona. She was there during the famous 'May Events' when the Republicans had their own civil war behind the lines - with the Communists determined to break the power of the CNT even if it meant losing the war against Franco. For several days Ethel took part in the street battles on the CNT/FAI barricades. Of her many broadcast speeches on Radio Barcelona, seven were published in the *Bellshill Speaker* in 1937. 'The Volunteer Ban', the speech chosen here, was published in *Regeneracion* the same year. Ethel's whereabouts were unknown for several months after her imprisonment by the Communists. On her release towards the end of 1937, six hundred well-wishers crowded into Queen Street station to cheer her return. The remainder of her life was likewise devoted to the libertarian struggle. She, along with Guy Aldred, Jenny Patrick and John Taylor Caldwell, founded the United Socialist Movement and worked from the Strickland Press in George Street, Glasgow, producing in all 25 volumes of their monthly paper *The Word*. On 1 December, 1960, Ethel died in Knightswood Hospital. She was only 51 years old. In view of the nature of the illness from which she suffered - multiple sclerosis - it was her wish that her body be donated to the University of Glasgow for medical research in the hope that other sufferers might benefit. It was typical of the quality of mind displayed by this woman throughout her life. An invaluable collection of papers, posters, leaflets, letters and other historical memorabilia was brought from Spain in 1937 and, through the Mitchell Library, bequeathed by Ethel to the people of Glasgow.**

# Barcelona Bombed!

## An Appeal to the Workers of Britain

**Ethel MacDonald**

*Regeneracion! 28 February 1937 (The Word, August 1961)*

Today has been an eventful period in the life of the people of Barcelona. Today saw the interment of the victim of the brutal bombardment by the cannon of the Fascist ship, which took place on Saturday evening at 10 o'clock.

Barcelona has given many lives in the cause of Freedom and Justice. These persons were not the first victims of the cruelty of Fascism. Barcelona too, has its "Wall of Death", but unlike the death wall of Badajoz, it is a death wall of inspiration to the workers, a death wall that stands as a symbol of the people of Barcelona. For it was here, at the commencement of the Fascist uprising, when the forces of oppression and tyranny massed to impose the will of Franco on them, that the people of Barcelona stood firm, and willingly gave their lives that their comrades, following behind them, might face the fascists and battle with them hand to hand. As they advanced for this purpose, the shots fell among them, and many brave comrades dropped to the ground, victims of the Fascist guns. But the others came forward and forward, until at last they conquered their opponents and took from them their weapons, until the soldiers, realising the determination of the common people of Barcelona, of the Anarchists of Barcelona, surrendered and submitted their arms to the people. This was an honourable end, an end that might be envied by every class conscious worker – to die for freedom, to die struggling against capitalism, to die for the rights of his class. Those who fell were victims, but they were heroes. Heroes of the working class.

The murder wall of Badajoz was not less honourable, but death came after defeat, and not before victory. The murder wall in Barcelona, from one point of view was necessary, for someone had to advance, someone had to die before the workers could conquer. In Badajoz, the murder wall was the venting of the incomparable and wanton cruelty of fascism on the workers after they had been conquered. To make an example, Franco had

20/000 workers shot. The same is taking place in Malaga, today. Another victory for Fascism which has to shoot thousands of workers in cold blood in order to make its victory complete. The so-called Patriots are so confident that they will bring a new era to Spain with their triumph, that they find it necessary to murder practically all the population in order to assure that not

one voice will be raised against them. That Fascism might stabilise itself, it is necessary that every one become a slave, without a will and thought of his own, without the desire to protest, with the sole desire of living merely as a vegetable, taking what is given him without complaint. That is the new era of Fascism.

Throughout the seven months of civil war, Barcelona has given its men and women who have fallen at the battle-fronts. For although at present Barcelona is not the battlefield, the workers of Barcelona struggle on all fronts, recognising that wherever there is struggle there is their place.

But the victims of Saturday last come under a different category. We are at war with an enemy that gives no quarter! We do not expect any modification, for we fight

without giving quarter ourselves. We fight bitterly and with determination to crush the enemy. We know that either one or the other must fall, and we are resolved that it shall not be our people. We are resolved that the one that falls will be Fascism. Fascism must die in order that we might live.

But we do not attack the populations of cities and towns. We do not bring disaster to women and children and innocent old people. We fight the foe at the battle fronts, for there they are definitely our combatants. But in the villages and in the towns are our own people, those of our class who, for various reasons, have come under the domination of Fascism. To attack them would be to attack ourselves. To kill them would be to murder our brothers and our sisters. True, some of our brothers are at the fronts fighting against us, but they have taken



Ethel MacDonald, photographed with a Dutch comrade, outside the CNT Headquarters in Barcelona

their stand on the wrong side, and so it is either them or us.

But Fascism, which is but another name for Capitalism, is the definite foe of the working class, and Fascist fury is brought to bear upon the workers. To the Fascists, the working class is a sign of their quick decease, and despite their constant reiterations of belief in law and order, despite what they have said to the working class for centuries that the legal government and the constitution of the country must be obeyed and respected, when, in Spain, that government and that constitution was changed: by the legal means at the disposal of the workers, they threw everything to the winds, they disclaimed the legally constituted government and they set themselves to overthrow it by force of arms. They believed in what they preached just so long as it suited their purpose, just so long as it gave them power and dominion over the workers, just so long as they were able to enjoy all the fruits of the land while the workers starved and groaned in misery. Then law and order and government were good. They coincided with what they wanted. They gave them that which they desired. There was no reason to disbelieve in it. Why should they quarrel with their best friend? But the time came when misery could no longer be silent, when the workers demanded a change. Not a very great change, a little more opportunity of living slightly above the level of slaves, a little more opportunity of educating their children above the level of illiterates. But even that little Capitalism was not prepared to give, for Fascists definitely believe that to those that have must be given, and from those that have not must be taken away, even that which they have.

And so, when the possibility for change came, the Fascists planned the military rebellion. Although they had on their side might and power, arms and ammunition, the people stood firm. Their patience had been tried too much. The struggle had to come. It came, and in parts of Spain, particularly in Catalonia, through the courage of the workers, the foe was vanquished, and having risen, the workers went on. They took possession of industry; they commenced to inaugurate the principles of libertarian communism.

Capitalism was amazed. The propertied interests rallied and struck again, this time with more strength. This time with the might of international power. Germany and Italy openly entered the fray. They poured into the rebel bases of Spain war material, guns, ammunition, aeroplanes and trained soldiers. They gave everything that was necessary, and the legal forces of Spain were denied everything. By means of the Non-Intervention Committee, the people of Spain have been continuously sabotaged. By means of this huge farce the people of Spain have been murdered in their thousands.

But Spain still struggled. Catalonia still proceeded with its work of reconstruction. Barcelona became the centre of world hope. Barcelona was to the workers of the

world, the inspiration and the symbol of the triumph of the will of the proletariat. From Barcelona emerged the thought that will yet emancipate the world.

And so they brought their attention to Barcelona. On Saturday night fell the first victims here to the might of international capitalism. The first victims of bombardment. Seventeen of the civil population were killed, others were injured. This is war in its most brutal and degenerate form. The inventive genius of man used to murder innocent women and children.

What is the reaction of the people of Barcelona to this act of aggression. Today, they came in their thousands to show their horror at this crime. They came to show their determination that they will struggle more and more; that they will not cease until every sign of fascism is cleared out of Spain completely. The events of Saturday might have had the effect of making the workers here more grim, more fixed in the determination to overcome this age-old enemy of the working-class – capitalism-fascism.

This is the spirit of Barcelona, the spirit of liberty and freedom. To endure without cessation, to battle on until victory comes.

Thus the workers of not only Barcelona and Catalonia, but of all Spain, will continue to fight. Should they be deprived of all means of warfare, still they will struggle. The libertarian impulse of the people once it has burst, cannot be quenched. The only solution is its triumph.

But what have the workers of other lands to say to this? Are they content to allow this crime to continue? They may say it is war, and that Spain must settle the question for herself. Spain is prepared to do that, but can she fight if she is deprived of every means of fighting? Can she fight against a well-equipped foe that has everything at its disposal, without arms, without the necessary means of defence?

We- want the workers of the world to take their stand by Spain. We want the social revolution in every country throughout the world: Spain would gladly and willingly give more lives than it has, if the sacrifice of those lives would result in the world revolution.

We want the world proletariat to take action to see that Spain is provided with all those things she requires for the struggle against Fascism. We want arms and ammunition sent direct by the workers throughout the world. We know too well that Capitalism 'will never assist us. We know they will use all means at their disposal to crush us. By means of their Non-Intervention Committee; by permitting Germany and Italy to assume control of parts of Spanish territory, by any means they have. This we know. This we expect, but from the workers, members of our own class, we expect solidarity and assistance. We expect the proletariat to rally to us. We expect them to take direct action to see that we have these things. We expect them,

to make war on fascism at home to crush it, and to make the social revolution.

World Socialism, world Liberty, must be the outcome of the Spanish revolution. This will be the triumph of

the Spanish revolution. The uprising of the workers throughout the world, for socialism, for communism, for Anarchism, for a new society. Workers of the world, let your reply to the attack on Barcelona be a counter-attack on world capitalism.

# The Volunteer Ban

**Ethel MacDonald**

*Regeneracion! Organ of the United Socialist Movement, 7 March 1937<sup>1</sup>*

[Many comrades complain that they find it difficult to contact Barcelona, in their interest, we reproduce the text of the speech made by Ethel MacDonald before the microphone at Barcelona on 19<sup>th</sup> February last.]

To-morrow, Saturday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1937, is the date fixed by the Sub-Committee of Non-Intervention, sitting in London, for the commencement of the ban on volunteers for Spain. Volunteers to Spain! From where have these volunteers come? Italy has sent, not volunteers, but conscripts. Germany has landed in Spanish territory, not volunteers, but conscripts. The army of the rebel Franco consists, not of volunteers, but of conscript Moors, conscript Germans, conscript Italians, all bent on making Spain a Fascist colony and Africa a Fascist hell, with the defeat and the retreat of democracy everywhere.

The situation to-day proves the truth of the words of St. Simon and of Proudhon that parliamentarism is the road to militarism, that parliamentary democracy is impossible, and that mankind must accept industrial democracy, revolutionary syndicalism. But syndicalism and industrial democracy do not imply trades unionism which is the British idea of organisation and action. If mankind is not prepared to accept this, then the only other ultimatum is a retreat to barbarism and militarism. An insistence on parliamentary so-called democracy is merely playing with freedom and in effect, retreating to militarism. The progressive conquest of political power

under capitalism is a snare and a delusion. The present situation in Germany illustrates this truth very clearly.

[The speaker discussed the suppression of anti-Fascist demonstrations by the Social Democrats, the huge

Parliamentary Socialist vote, and limited support commanded by German Fascism, and the triumph of Hitler, notwithstanding. She continued]

If parliamentary socialism had any worth whatever, this could never have taken place. Germany could have given the world the example that would have set alight the fires of world revolution. But Germany failed because of this paralysing belief in parliamentarism and this disbelief in the power and initiative of the working-class. It has been left to Spain, with its Anarcho-syndicalism, to do what Germany should have done. And this paralysis extends to other countries that still believe in the power of parliament as an

emancipating weapon of the proletariat. It should act as such but that is beyond its power. Belief in parliament does not lead to freedom, but leads to the emancipation of a few selected persons at the expense of the whole of the working-class.

What are the actions of the parliamentary parties with regard to support of the Spanish struggle? They talk, they discuss, they speak with bated breath of the horrors that are taking place in Spain. They gesticulate, they proclaim to the world their determination to assist Spain and to see that Fascism is halted; and that is all they do. Talk of what they will do. This would not matter if it were not for the fact that the workers, through a



<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *The Word* (December 1961) and *Workers' City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1988). (*Black Flag*)

disbelief in their own power to do something definite, collaborate with them in this playing with words.

Comrades, fellow-workers, of what use are your meetings that pass pious resolutions, that exhibit Soldiers of the International Column, provide entertainment, make collections and achieve nothing. This is not the time for sympathy and charity. This is the time for action. Do you not understand that every week, every day and every hour counts. Each hour that passes means the death of more Spanish men and women, and yet you advertise meetings, talk, arrange to talk and fail to take any action. Your leaders ask questions in parliament, in the senate, collect in small committees and make arrangements to send clothes and food to the poor people of Spain who are menaced by this horrible monster of Fascism, and in the end, do nothing.

We welcome every man that comes to Spain to offer his life in the cause of freedom. But of what use are these volunteers if we have no arms to give them? We want arms, ammunition, aeroplanes, all kinds of war material. Your brothers who come to us to fight and have no arms to fight with are also being made a jest of by your inaction.

We want the freedom of the Mediterranean. We want our rights, the rights that are being taken from us by the combined efforts of international capitalism. You have permitted Franco to have soldiers and arms and aeroplanes and ammunition. Your government, in the name of democracy, have starved the government and workers of Spain, and now they have decided to ban arms, ban volunteers, to the government of the Spanish workers. Your government, workers of the world, are assisting in the development of Fascism. They are conniving for the defeat of the workers' cause, and you tamely accept this or merely idly protest against it. Workers, your socialism and your communism are worthless. Your democracy is a sham, and this sham is fertilising the fields of Spain with the blood of the Spanish people. Your sham democracy is making the men, women and children of Spain the sod of Fascism. The workers of Spain bid you cry, "Halt!" The workers of Spain bid you act!

I, myself, was in Scotland when Sanctions were proposed on behalf of Ethiopia. The Labour Party there threatened war. The Trades Unions threatened war. The Communist Party threatened war. The threats wore off, and Italy seized the land of Ethiopia, and despite the

continued protests from various persons, Italy has commenced the exploitation of Abyssinia. Ethiopia is now the colony of Italy.

But Abyssinia is not Spain. Despite its history, Abyssinia is a wild and undeveloped country and may, indeed, in some parts, be semi-savage, But Spain is a land of culture and more important, a land of proletarian development, and it is menaced by the hireling Franco because it possesses proletarian culture. And Franco is assisted by Hitler and Mussolini and all the hordes of international capitalism because of the wealth contained within its territory, and to gain possession of that wealth for purposes of further exploiting the working class and for their own personal aggrandisement, they are prepared to massacre the whole of the Spanish working-class. For what are the lives of the workers to them? Labour is cheap, and is easily replaceable.

And you, parliamentarians, you so-called socialists, talk and talk, and know not how to act. Nor when to act. For Spain, you are not even prepared to threaten war. Non-intervention, as a slogan, is an improvement on sanctions. It is even more radically hypocritical. It is more thorough and deliberate lying,

for Non-intervention means the connived advance of Fascism. This cannot be disputed. Under the cloak of Non-intervention, Hitler and Mussolini are being assisted in their wanton destruction of Spain. Non-intervention gives them the excuse to do nothing, and behind the scenes to supply these European maniacs with all that they require. Your governments are not for non-intervention. They stand quite definitely for intervention, intervention on behalf of their friends and allies, Hitler and Mussolini. Your governments and your leaders have many points in common with these two arch scoundrels. All of them lack decency, human understanding, and intelligence. They are virtually the scum of the earth, the dregs that must be destroyed.

Comrades, Workers, Malaga has fallen. Malaga was betrayed and you too were betrayed, for you have witnessed not merely the fall of Malaga but the fall of a key defence of world democracy, of workers' struggle, of world liberty, of world emancipation. Malaga fell; you, the world proletariat, were invaded: and you talk. Talk and lament and sigh and fear to act! To-morrow, Madrid may be bombed once more. Barcelona may be attacked. Valencia may be attacked, and still you talk! When will this talking cease? Will you never act?

**You know the conditions  
in that famous land of  
social democracy to-day.  
Yes, parliamentarism  
saved Germany. Saved it  
from Socialism. Saved it  
for Fascism.  
Parliamentary social  
democracy and  
parliamentary  
communism has  
destroyed the socialist  
hope of Europe, has  
made a carnage of  
human liberty.**

To go back to Germany. At the Second Congress of the Third International, Moscow, a comrade who is with us now in Spain, answering Zinoviev, urged faith in the syndicalist movement in Germany and the end of parliamentary communism. He was ridiculed. Parliamentarism, communist parliamentarism, but still parliamentarism would save Germany. And it did. You know this. You know the conditions in that famous land of social democracy to-day. Yes, parliamentarism saved Germany. Saved it from Socialism. Saved it for Fascism. Parliamentary social democracy and parliamentary communism has destroyed the socialist hope of Europe, has made a carnage of human liberty. In Britain, Parliamentarism saved the workers from Socialism, gave them a Socialist leader of a National Government, and has prepared the workers for the holocaust of a new war. All this has parliamentarism done. Have you not had enough of this huge deception? Are you still prepared to continue in the same old way, along the same old lines, talking and talking and doing nothing?

Spain, syndicalist Spain, the Spanish workers' republic would save you. Yes, save you with the hunger and blood and struggle of its magnificent people. And you pause and hesitate to give your solidarity, you pause in

your manhood and democracy of action until it is too late.

The crisis is here. The hour of struggle is here. Now is the decisive moment. By all your traditions of liberty and struggle, by all the brave martyrs of old, in the name of the heroic Spanish men and women, I bid you act. Act on behalf of Spain through living, immediate Committees of Action in Britain, in America, throughout the whole world. Let your cry be not non-intervention, but "Hands off Spain," and from that slogan let your action come. In your trade union branches, in your political party hall, make that your cry: "All Hands off Spain." What will your action be? The General Strike. Your message? "Starve Fascism, end the war on Spanish Labour, or — the Strike, the strike and on to Revolution."

The British Government says: "You shall not serve in Spain." Good! Then to the British Workers we say make this your reply. "We will serve Spain and the workers in Spain and ourselves in Britain. We strike." Down tools! There is one flag of labour to-day. Spain's Red and Black Flag of Freedom, of Syndicalism and Courage!

"Workers of the world! Rally! Think — and act now!"

# The Situation in Spain

**Ethel MacDonald**

*News From Spain, May Day, 1937 (The Word, August 1962)*

## Ethel's Letter

Barcelona, March 7, 1937

I shall do my best to answer the points you raise in your last letter.

(1) Here, in Catalonia, the C.N.T. is on perfectly amiable terms with the P.O.U.M. These two organisations are definitely opposed to the C.P. As the C.P. is not very strong in Catalonia, the matter is not stressed against the C.P., since that would weaken the Anti-Fascist front. In Madrid, the situation is different. The Republicans and Socialists and Communists are stronger there, and the C.P. possesses no sense of expansive unity. It is not the P.O.U.M. that makes the attacks, but the C.P. In fact, the C.P. in Spain is like the C.P. everywhere else. The party stands for all power to the Government, and for Parliamentary and Capitalist Republicanism. This attitude is dictated, no doubt, by Moscow. The C.P., in my opinion, is more dangerous than the Fascists.

(2) As regards the workers Patrols, they perform very useful work; and they have been responsible for routing out a great many secret food reserves concealed by the bourgeoisie. The Generalidad wanted these Patrols to be

dispersed because they wished all forces to be under the control of the central government. But the C.N.T.-F.A.I. refused to consider this — although this is not yet official — and the workers' patrols will continue to function under the control of the C.N.T.-F.A.I.

(3) The U.G.T. It is the desire of the C.N.T. to have a Pact with the U.G.T. for workers' unity. In Some parts of Spain this has been effected. This has not been realised yet in Catalonia. Why, you will understand. The U.G.T. 'is socialistic and believes in Central government, BUT THE AIM OF THE C.N.T. IS THE COMPLETE UNITY OF THE WORKING-CLASS. Strong propaganda is. made by the C.N.T.-F.A.I. for this purpose. You will read in the new bulletin about the pact formed between the two syndicates in the Asturias.

(4) Workers' Army and People's Army. This is difficult, You know our views on the matter. But one has to remember that, fighting at the barricades, is a very different matter from fighting on planned battle-fields. Although the C.N.T.-F.A.I. have agreed to general mobilisation and a sole command, this does not mean the supreme command of one individual, but a committee composed of all the Anti-Fascist sections.

I am sure the Anarchists here feel the contradictions as much as do Comrades in other countries. But circumstances alter cases, and the Anarchists in Spain always had their minds fixed that they would not permit the Spanish Revolution to degenerate like the Russian Revolution, and that, at all costs, the fate of the Anarchists in Russia must be avoided in Spain. The point is that the war must end. Not by armistice or by any agreement between governments and interested parties, but by the victory of the Anti-Fascist forces over the Fascists. That is the real solution. Continued war drains the blood of revolutionary people. Spain wants to get busy reconstructing, but it is compelled to concentrate most of its forces on the war. The situation is quite different from any that existed in any other revolutionary period. I was reading old Mike Bakunin in the Council yesterday, and it just struck me that everything that he says we should not do we have done. But what would he have done if he were alive today?



I object to seeing men marching in files, even though they do carry the red banner. Living revolution is so unlike speculating about revolution. People do not change much in a short time; we all have our weaknesses: and inequalities are so difficult to root out. Tremendous patience is required, Personally, I am convinced that the Spanish struggle must end, victoriously for the workers. To secure that, there is only one way: workers' unity here which has been always a part of our program, and to forward which the U.S.M, was founded in Scotland; and direct action in solidarity with the Spanish struggle by workers in other lands, How? By sending arms, yes; but by social revolution, primarily. Will this come? I don't know. It is in the lap of the gods.

There is no doubt that there is a move on foot to reintroduce the old constitutional governmentalism here, and there are elements, like the C.P., who favour this reaction. To this, the Anarchists will never consent. It would be treachery to the revolution, treachery to the fallen, treachery to the world proletariat. I am in thorough agreement with all that, Jenny (Patrick) has written from Madrid on this point: there can be no unity with the C.P., not even here. At the beginning of the struggle they did not amount to anything, neither in numbers nor character, and there should have been no

unity with them. They are habitual betrayers and traitors, and all because they start from Moscow and not from where they are. They have no true foundation of principle and understanding. How true it is that each country must develop according to its own inclinations! For instance, I do not see Britain developing along the lines of the C.N.T. The trade union movement is too

strong for that. Our propaganda must be as it always was: Councils of Action. But we must give credit to Spain for developing along her line. Propagate our ideas, yes: but let them yield their own harvest, and do not let us try to force it.

What you say about the U.G.T. and C.P. is right enough, but in the U.G.T. there are thousands of workers who are struggling for freedom, and who really desire the complete victory of the revolution as much as any worker in the C.N.T. Leaders, and the interests of leaders, are dangerous; and often the ideas of the workers are moulded to suit the ambitions of their spokesmen, Many workers follow a false lead without realising

whether they are drifting.

There is an article on Spain in the *Daily Herald* of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, which must be replied to. It places all the responsibility for the defeats that have taken place on the anarchists and states that if Madrid falls, Barcelona and Catalonia will be responsible. At present there are 50,000 men from Barcelona who have been sent to Madrid. Today here it is Madrid day. Everything for Madrid. The point is that if Madrid had permitted more Anarchist thought things might have gone differently. Look at the censorship of the C.N.T. paper. Disgraceful. There is nothing like that here in Barcelona. But that is the latest move. To make the Anarchists responsible for every defeat in' order that the others might take all the credit for the victories. This propaganda must be combatted. The Anarchist press is very limited in countries abroad as you know. Here we can deal with it, but it must depend on other comrades to do it abroad. This is your stuff: to show the worth of the Anarchists in Spain.

I note about the I.L.P. and the C.P. That is typical of the I.L.P. Never to declare themselves against the C.P. They should not be let off with it. Here it is different. At any rate, the C.N.T.-F.A.I. does not cease its criticism of all parties who go off the straight line.

**"Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name. . . Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed."**

**- Ethel MacDonald, *Workers' Free Press*, October 1937**

# Save Spain. Act!

## Radio Speeches by Ethel MacDonald

Glasgow, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1937<sup>1</sup>

(The BELLSHILL SPEAKER, from March 12 to April 16 inclusive, published Ethel MacDonald's speeches over the radio from Barcelona. In all, our excellent Lanarkshire contemporary, whilst not endorsing Comrade E. MacDonald's remarks, published seven of her radio speeches. These we reprint, since they cover a wide field. The diary from her pen which also appeared in the SPEAKER, is one of adventure and personality, and is not reprinted meantime.

Constant nightly speaking over the radio compels the speaker to borrow thought from here and there, and especially illustrations and fact records. It is necessary to add, therefore, that the "Example of the Asturias" and "Socialist Thought" speeches are adapted. The other speeches are original. This remark applies also to Comrade MacDonald's speech on the Volunteer Ban, published in REGENERATION for February 19th last. – Ed.)

### THE VOICE OF FREEDOM.

The English language is held by those who speak it to be the great language of freedom. Democrats forget that Charles I and other upholders of tyranny and the divine right of kings and centralised State oppression, George III, and such like, used the English tongue. They think only of John Hampden, of Milton, of Richard Carlisle, of George Washington, not as a slave-dealer but as a challenger of British Monarchy, of Thomas Paine, the venturesome needleman, of Abraham Lincoln, at Gettysburg, Emerson, Lloyd Garrison, James Russell Lowell, etc. Yes, martyrs for freedom and pioneers of liberty, equality and democracy, have spoken and written in English. To all who believe, therefore, the best of the English tongue; who hear in it the ringing accents of the martyrs and not the callous cynical tones of the persecutor and the judge, I address myself. I ask you again to make it the language of freedom. Let it vie with the Spanish tongue and the tongue of one-time revolutionary France. Let it speak to Fascism, to Hitler, to Mussolini, and to Franco. Let the voice of the people of England, the voice of strangled freedom, be heard.

### FASCISM CHECKED.

Comrades, Workers, I ask you to consider the great battle of the Spanish people. Parliamentarism placed the military fascists in military power, hesitated to give effect to constitutional reformist demands. The common people of Spain armed, sometimes battled with only their bare fists, and walked heroically to their deaths, to vanquish fascism. The ill-equipped and betrayed people were winning. So Fascist Portugal, Fascist Italy, Fascist Germany, stepped in. At first they warred secretly, against the Spanish Government, against the duly elected government of Spain, against Syndicalism expressing the will of the people, as the democracy of Spain fell back on Syndicalism. They warred secretly whilst France and Britain, especially Britain, played at democracy. Played at democracy, spoke non-

intervention, and behind non-intervention, assisted Fascism and Franco. Non-intervention blockaded loyal Spain and assisted Franco in the Mediterranean, assisted him at Gibraltar, at Ceuta, at Tangier. Non-intervention gave Franco a base at Lisbon. And still the workers of Spain won. Despite the governments of the world, despite the apathy of British labour, the workers of Spain won. They checked Fascism. They rolled back the tide of Fascism. Franco marched his Moors on Madrid, his Christian Mahommaden Moors, with their Sacred Hearts, and still the workers won!

Remember that, fellow-workers of Britain and of the English-speaking races. The Germans camped outside Madrid. The Italians camped outside Madrid. German planes, Italian planes bombed the city. And still Madrid held out. Durruti died. And still Madrid remained firm and Catalonia built and rebuilt the world, developed industrial administration, developed workers' control.

### REVOLUTION AND INSOLENT FASCISM.

This was not the French Revolution, ending in Bourbonism or capitalist republicanism. This was not the Russian Revolution, isolated and demoralised by a Europe turned to Fascism. This was the Spanish Revolution, challenged into existence by the menace and mendacity of insolent fascism; the struggle of the workers of heroic Spain, of Catalonia, rising to suppress fascism, to bring hope to the workers of the world, to destroy Hitler, Mussolini and Franco.

Comrades, you recall the Versailles Treaty. You recall the occupation of Germany. You recall the Black troops imposed on Germany. You recall the protests, the protests of Germany, and of all that was best in Britain, in France, in America. If it was wrong to impose Black troops on Germany, is it not wrong to use Black troops in Spain? Yet Germany and Italy rejoice in these troops. Franco uses them: and Britain makes no protest. You, English workers, protested against using these troops in

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *The Word*, January 1962 to July 1962. (*Black Flag*)

Germany. Why not protest against using them in Spain? Why not organise, demonstrate, strike against your government standing by and passively, if not actively, aiding Franco and his Black troops. WITHOUT YOUR BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S CONSENT THESE TROOPS COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN. Without your apathy the Moorish troops would never have entered Spain. English-speaking workers, why are you sleeping whilst your Spanish brothers and sisters and comrades are being murdered? Where are your traditions? Speak! Act! Answer with word and answer with deed. Your brothers call. Your class comrades call. Workers of Britain, answer now! Act — and overthrow fascism. Emancipate Europe, the world. End class society now.

#### THE VOLUNTEER FARCE

What farce is this? English volunteers turned back from France. Germany will stop volunteers. Italy will stop volunteers. Did Germany ever send volunteers to France? Did Italy? Not volunteers, but conscripts. And Germany and Italy are to send no more volunteers! No more volunteers, provided England recalls the volunteers who have joined the workers of Spain. Provided France recalls the volunteer. The volunteers must come back, and the conscripts — they will remain!

Are you, English-speaking workers, prepared to let this tragic farce which means the rape of Spain, go on? Are you prepared to lend yourselves to this mockery? Are you willing to be fooled longer in this fashion?

If you are men and women, if you sense the class struggle, you will permit no ban on volunteers. Spain does not want British volunteers. Spain wants action — action by the great democracy — in every democratic country — action at home — to defeat Fascism, to aid the struggle of anti-fascist Spain. Spain demands the historic loyalty to their own class-interests of the British proletariat. Workers, act!

The Spanish workers are holding the pass. They cannot hold it for ever. Will you not rally to their assistance? Will you not defeat fascism? If the workers of Britain act, and act now. Franco is beaten, Franco will be swept into oblivion. The victory of the Spanish democracy means the end of fascism in Italy and Germany. Madrid calls. Barcelona calls. Your past calls. Workers of Britain, act!

## FROM CIVIL WAR TO WORLD CONFLAGRATION

It cannot be disputed that the struggle taking place in Spain has created dissension in the most unexpected circles. It is not merely the fact that a civil war is being conducted that causes this disagreement, but it is due, in no small measure, to the brutality and ferocity with which this war is operated on the part of the fascists. And there is also no doubt that most persons who move in diplomatic circles are quite aware of the implications contained in the struggle. In the capitalist press, Spain is still a front page sensation. Not merely because of the heroism that the proletariat of Spain is showing in face of the onslaught by Germany and Italy, but because they know that from this civil war there is the possibility of a world conflagration ensuing that will have no equal in history.

A Glasgow newspaper says in a special article devoted to Spain that "Even yet, Anglo-French pressure has resulted only in provisional acceptance by Portugal of the Non-Intervention Agreement which bids fair to be an official success now that Germany and Italy have succeeded in arming Franco to the teeth and landing thousands of trained 'volunteers' and the rebels seem to be gaining ground."

#### NON-INTERVENTION A CLASS WAR.

It is obvious that the British capitalist press has no illusions about the matter. Non-intervention is merely a tactic of the European class war against the workers. The workers' organisations in Spain have proclaimed this from the very beginning. The Spanish press has stated this daily. Non-intervention is but the cloak that conceals the most decided intervention in the affairs of Spain by the forces of capitalism throughout the world. The capitalist press is aware of this. The workers of the world must be aware of it also. Why then this inaction on the part of the international proletariat? So sure are the capitalists of breaking down the workers' resistance in Spain that no effort is made now to hide their designs.

#### SIR PETER MITCHELL

Another interesting example is given by the statement of Sir Peter Mitchell, who has lately returned to England after having been in residence near Malaga, and who was detained by the forces of Franco when they took Malaga. He was only released on the intervention of the British Government.

**There is no doubt that  
the magnificent struggle  
of the Spanish workers  
challenges the entire  
theory and historical  
interpretation of  
parliamentary socialism.  
The civil war is a living  
proof of the futility and  
worthlessness of  
parliamentary  
democracy as a medium  
of social change**

Sir Peter states: "I am on forced parole. I am released on the understanding that I would say nothing of what has been happening in Spain."

And why the secrecy? If Franco had been received as stated by other sections of the capitalist press with tears of joy on the part of the population, why should this man who must have witnessed what took place be pledged to secrecy? If Fascism brought a new state of affairs to Malaga, why should not every person be free to give honour to Fascism? But the world knows that secrecy is demanded because if one should tell what they witnessed it would bring about the indignation of the whole world. One is asked not the terror that is taking place in the territories controlled by the fascists is so horrible that even the capitalist press would squirm. Malaga is a place of suffering and torment. And Fascism does not wish that the truth be told. On the other hand there have been hundreds and thousands of representatives who have come to Spain to see what was actually taking place. In no instance has the Spanish Government demanded secrecy as the payment of their departure. For the legitimate forces in Spain have nothing to hide. All that is done is for the world to see. And for the world to follow.

The Dean of Rochester and Chichester, the Reverend Henry Carter of the Methodist Church, and Mr P. Bartlett of the Society of Friends visited Spain from January 29th to February 9th. They visited Barcelona, Valencia, and Madrid. What did they say? Their report was issued on February 16th. They say:—

(Miss MacDonald here read the report of various members of the delegation.)

These representatives were not asked to come. But they visited freely and their report speaks for itself. What have the supporters of Franco to say to this? These gentlemen may be opposed to us on many points. We are opposed to them on a great deal. They represent that for which we have nothing in common. But that is their report.

### **FRANCO OPPOSED TO DEMOCRACY.**

That Franco is opposed to the interests of democracy should be apparent to every worker from the articles broadcasted in the capitalist press with splash headings. In huge print, they state, "Alfonso Praises Franco. Congratulations on Malaga's Capture."

And beneath these headings can be read, "General Franco, the Spanish rebel leader, at Salamanca received a telegram from Rome conveying to him the enthusiastic congratulations of ex-King Alfonso of Spain on the capture of Malaga."

General Franco has replied with thanks.

Enthusiastic congratulation for the massacre of thousands of workers, men, women, and children. What callousness. But how typical of the ruling class. How

typical of those who consider the workers merely as machines, as cannon fodder and not as human beings with the rights to lives and to enjoy all that life can offer. But Alfonso is putting his eggs in the wrong basket. Not only Spain has no use for Alfonso, but Franco has no use for Alfonso. The ex-King will never return. His day has passed. He should reconcile himself to this and attempt to instil a little decency, a little human understanding into his heart. But that would be asking too much.

Spain has made the issue clear. And it has brought a sword to many Christian hearts.

### **SPAIN AND TRADE UNIONISM**

There is no doubt that the magnificent struggle of the Spanish workers challenges the entire theory and historical interpretation of parliamentary socialism. The civil war is a living proof of the futility and worthlessness of parliamentary democracy as a medium of social change. For many years now the workers have been fed on the idea that with the right persons in control with alleged working-class leaders arranging the affairs of the nations, social change, a betterment of conditions leading finally to complete emancipation would come about. That this conception has been accepted by the proletariat is witnessed by the growth of parliamentary Socialism since and even before the last world war. The influence and power of the organised workers' movements in Britain and America, with the reformism and supposed gradualism, are merely further demonstrations of the impossibility of this way to a change of society. The more mighty the strength of these social-democratic organisations became, the further has been the distance placed to the betterment of the conditions of the workers. Despite its pretensions, parliamentary Socialism has proved one of the greatest impositions and betrayals in the history of working-class struggle. With each advance made in organisational development, the more removed became the workers from participation in the affairs of that organisation. The Trades Union movement in Britain is a perfect example of this. So thorough is the organisation that there is no possibility of the workers in any way changing it. But this is inevitable when the aim is organisation of the workers instead of organisation by the workers. True organisation is the workers, each in his industry taking a living part in the management and affairs of that industry.

### **THE OUTCOME OF THE VERSAILLES TREATY.**

These so-called leaders of the workers' movement have no shame. They faced the war struggle with their stupid little adventurism and discussed learnedly the Kautsky theory, that Germany alone was responsible for the war, and as learnedly decided that that was not true. The period that should have been used to rouse the workers in their respective countries to active anti-militarist

organisation was wasted in talking, talking that served no other purpose than to deceive the proletariat and set them on a false trail. Although we may deride these worthless discussions to-day, at that time it was considered to be a most important question and the politicians thought it had to be embodied in the Versailles Treaty. The Versailles Treaty which created the military psychology in German.

After the Russian Revolution, the question lost its importance because there appeared across Europe the spectre of class uprising. With the Russian Revolution the world began to visualise world revolution. And such could have taken place. But Germany, the land of social democracy, the country that dominated socialist thought right up to the outbreak of the war, and having a tremendous influence on world socialism even after the Russian Revolution turned to fascism. Had Germany become revolutionary in 1918, had the struggle of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg triumphed, it would have been the beginning of world revolution. The time was then. But Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered by the representatives of the social democracy they had pioneered. Capitalism in Germany won the first hand in the game and very quickly after came Nazism. German fascism triumphed and now that fascism seeks to conquer the whole world.

And the politicians who had discussed so learnedly the Versailles Treaty suddenly discovered that the Versailles Treaty, and perhaps even the war itself, belonged to the accidents of history and were but phases of cataclysmic social changes, the seeds of which were laid long before. The seeds which were laid when the exploitation of man by man commenced and which have their first flowering in Spain to-day.

#### **THE DEATH OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.**

All that has followed the parliamentary social democratic betrayal in Germany were expressions of the eternal class struggle. The civil war in Spain, the greatest event in history and intervention in that struggle is the class struggle at bursting point. And the struggle in Spain, whilst following upon the betrayals of the social democratic movement throughout the world, gives the lie to the defenders of social democracy to-day. Spain proves that parliamentarism was and is a failure. Spain proves that Anti-Parliamentarism is right. Spain proves that revolution can only triumph through

organisation by the workers. The struggle of the Spanish workers, when history is written correctly at a later date, will show how stupid were the attacks on the barricade, on direct action by the representatives of social democracy. Spain will prove the parliamentary presumption of the careerists who betrayed the struggle in Germany, and of those who seek to betray the struggle to-day by mouthing reformist platitudes against the reality of the struggle. Spain is the reality, the living demonstration of the power of the proletariat, the living truth of the force of direct action. Had the workers of Spain left their affairs in the hands of their government

when the uprising took place on July 19th, had they been silenced by the voices of those who ask them to wait, had they not grasped the opportunity for the application of the theories they had worked out in common collaboration inside their workers' syndicates. Spain would now be another Fascist State. If the Spanish workers had failed at the critical moment, fascism would now have another victim.

But the workers of Spain rose to the occasion. Their experience of the worthlessness of intermediaries, their understanding of the cause of the German betrayal, through the constant propaganda of the Anarchist comrades all went towards the triumph of the workers' cause. When fascism showed its hand the proletariat

had the answer ready. It answered by direct action, the method that can never fail.

The Spanish struggle re-interprets history. It is the applied theory of reality, a practical demonstration of the soundness of anti-parliamentarism. It clearly demonstrates that there is but one way truly - the way of direct action. And that but one class can make the change — the working-class. Social democracy has lived too long. It is said Spain has killed it. And now it is merely necessary that the corrupted body be buried.

#### **THE UNITED FRONT**

I want to address myself to all those who in Britain and America — I put Britain first because I come from Britain and because one must mention some place first — are supporting the United Front campaign that is now being developed. That campaign, destined to cover up the real treachery of parliamentarism, is a campaign of petty political reform, which leaves their fundamental wage-slavery unrelieved, leaves their ready open victimisation and preparedness for war unaltered, but does promise soothing syrup for an hour, and it does

divert attention from the Spanish struggle. Of course Spain is mentioned with a flourish in the speeches. At the mere mention of Spain is applauded. But as the applause dies down, the effort for Spain is evaporated. But here in Spain the carnage of Labour continues. I want you to consider what parliamentarism and opportunism mean.

In 1914 there was the great war. I refer to the events from knowledge of the contemporary Socialist and Labour literature I have read. The war discovered a few thousand men in Britain who refused to serve, who refused to believe that it was a war for democracy and who believed that they had nothing in common with war between nations. There were resisters in other countries, and when the United States of America entered the conflict there was a non-conscription movement there just as there was in Britain. Partly supporting these war resisters, arose a parliamentary movement urging an early peace by treaty, urging the end of secret diplomacy, urging the parliamentary or popular control of all democracy. Only a very few said peace did not matter, unless it was the peace of revolution.

The war ended in 1918. The parliamentary democrats, the enemies of secret treaties, progressed to public importance and then to office. You all know what happened. The Labour movement in Britain was wasted. Its enthusiasm passed. In office it continued the Conservative foreign policy of one hundred years, it built in second diplomacy, it revelled in intrigue; and finally, the great leader of open diplomacy became Heaven's gift to the Tory National Government. Parliamentarism destroyed Socialism.

In Russia, before the Armistice, Czarism passed. Kerensky passed. Bolshevism triumphed. But have you ever considered the period during which Anarchy prevailed in Soviet Russia, during which Syndicalism existed, during which Makhno was defending the revolution as well as Trotsky? The period when comrades spoke of the Soviet power and not the Soviet Government. The period during which Lenin repudiated the age-long slanders of the anarchists, adapted himself to the language of direct action, and cried "All power to the Soviets." Then came diplomacy. The treaty of Best-Litovsk, the diplomatic status of the Soviet Government, the invasion of the workshops, the new economic policy, trade delegation, ambassadors, communications with royalties, inspection of foreign armies, the jailing of anarchists and Bolsheviks, more new economic policy, recognition of foreign debts,

Socialism in one country, meaning entrenched neo-bureaucratic capitalism in one country, recognition of and extensive trading with the fascist nations, and now the desire to sabotage the Spanish Revolution. In Britain and America, the parliamentary United Front are urging a parliamentary democracy in Spain as opposed to the Workers' industrial Republic. Parliamentarism, Statism, destroyed the workers struggle in Britain, betrayed the General Strike, and would betray now the workers' struggle in Spain, pioneered and saved by direct action, by syndicalism, by anarchism.

Comrades, reflect, before it is too late. I ask you to

**we want your solidarity,  
we want your  
emancipation and our  
emancipation. The Red  
and Black Flag calls —  
calls to the renunciation  
of the desolating  
pestilence of authority,  
calls to action and to  
freedom.**

consider how Communist diplomacy in Russia recognised Chiang-Kai-Check just before he drowned the Communist movement in China in a bath of blood. I ask you to recall what happened in Italy. In 1920, Malatesta was publishing his great daily paper, syndicalism and anarchism were active, great strikes were occurring, but the parliamentary communists, inspired by Zinoviev, withheld support. The solidarity and power of the workers were sabotaged. Two years later. Fascism moved into power.

The anarchists and syndicalists do not strive for power. Lenin and Zinoviev wished to destroy Sovietism for Communist Party dominion. Zinoviev realised his dream. Its fulfilment was perfect. For the dream of Zinoviev realised was Zinoviev's own execution.

The Spanish workers' struggle would rouse you from your sleep, rouse you to the horror of reality, rouse you to a realisation of the blood and crime and hopeless miser of capitalism. With closed fists only the anarchists and syndicalists of Spain first walked down the enemy, Fascism Comrades, we want your solidarity, we want your emancipation and our emancipation. The Red and Black Flag calls — calls to the renunciation of the desolating pestilence of authority, calls to action and to freedom. Comrades, brothers, fellow-workers, we, your comrades and brothers and sisters in Spain call. We are struggling, but we are beleaguered. We will conquer, even though it be death. With your marching to our aid, we can conquer and live. Our soil is fertilised with the blood of our heroic proletarian dead. How many more must fall before you rally? Comrades — Think. Act. Rally.

We end with the Spanish Salud, which means "Greetings." We want that word to pass into all languages, a word full of blood and struggle. The greeting of comrades, comrades in struggle. The word of the Spanish Revolution. Comrades, Salud.

## THE EXAMPLE OF THE ASTURIAS

The slogan, U.H.P. (Unite Sons of the Proletariat), has definitely become historical. In that Red October of 1934 the union of the proletariat in the Asturias demonstrated to the whole world the force contained in these obscure masses in the mines and factories who desire their emancipation. When the repressed fury of the reactionary class was vented upon the flesh of the workers, their call still rung out, across land and sea, "The Revolution has not been lost; it has only been postponed!" Such was the strength and power of the workers' alliance in that epoch written with their own blood.

In this mining province of Northern Spain, the workers' organisations had been united by Workers' Alliances for over a year, with socialists, anarchists and later, communists participating. Strengthened by this Workers' Alliance, and resolutely determined to end the system of exploitation, the workers of Asturias armed themselves. A general strike was called on October 5th. The next morning the workers of the Asturias were ready and prepared for action. Fighting commenced in the streets of Oviedo between the civil guards and the shock troops, and the city was placed in the hands of the militarists. The workers in Oviedo knew that they could not master the city unless they obtained the assistance of the miners. The miners came in their thousands at the call of the workers of Oviedo, and, attacking the strategic centres of the Government forces, they overwhelmed them. The troops of the government tried to attack but it was hopeless, and they were driven back by the Asturian miners, and many were taken prisoner. The workers' flag flew over nearly all of the province and Oviedo, the chief town, became a workers' commune.

It was at this moment that the workers realised that they were isolated. Insurrection in the rest of Spain had either not taken place or had been suppressed. As the government rallied its forces in the other parts of Spain, it turned its attention to the Asturias, sending warships which bombed the coastal towns, aeroplanes which rained down bombs, and troops, including the Moorish and Foreign Legions, which commenced to slaughter the workers.

The leaders of the workers thought that it was folly to waste time on a cause that was already lost. We recall the words of one of these who addressed the men with these words: "We must separate, but not before having signed the pact of unity which has carried us through these days crowned with glory. May the working-class of Spain and the world see in us what is the strength of a united working class."

General Lopez Ochoa, who until then had kept the 3rd Battalion of the Foreign Legion and Moorish troops in reserve, let them loose, and the massacre of the population began in earnest. This was intended to give

an example to the rest of Spain as to what would take place if any further risings occurred.

The resistance of the workers was completely broken, but it was impossible to conceal the extent of the butchery that had taken place amongst the proletariat. The massacre of the workers of the Asturias became known in all the world. General Lopez Ochoa was arrested and legal procedure was taken against others when the injured workers had recovered sufficiently to make their protests at the treatment they had received from the hands of the militarists. We can be sure that the reaction to their treatment, in no small measure, assisted in the bringing about of the present revolution.

The miners of Asturias are uncontrollable. Nothing can daunt their revolutionary ardour and their magnificent courage in the face of tyranny and oppression. They feel the workers' cause and are prepared to fight until the last.

## HOW THEY TOOK GIJON

Their courage is demonstrated by the manner in which they took Gijon from the rebels during the present civil war. We quote from a person who saw what took place. He says: "A detachment of Asturian miners, specially trained in throwing dynamite bombs from a short distance, were sent from the Oviedo front. A last chance was given to the rebels, but the ultimatum remained unanswered. Then on Friday morning the final attack was launched. At noon the Asturian miners entered into action. They approached to the outer walls of the barracks and threw their dynamite bombs through the holes which the shells had pierced. Five of them were killed, partly by the explosion of their own bombs. But the effect was terrific . . . Within a few minutes the whole main building was ablaze. Other Asturian miners and militiamen followed and threw petrol bottles into the place."

A few weeks ago the workers of Asturias realised the reactment of their gesture of October, 1934. One alliance, the reaffirmation of the glorious alliance, was expressed through a solemn pact between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. And it is these united workers who are placing their own fighters, as wedges, in the struggle that is taking place to-day in the very heart of the Asturias, in Oviedo.

When there are some who resist the authentic voice of the workers, when there are some who do not respond to the invitations extended by the Federation and when there are some who emerge with slogans of struggle that come from the museum of parliamentary democracy, then it is that the voice of the Asturian proletariat issues its call and administers the necessary rap to bring about the unity of all the workers in the Iberian Peninsula.

Why do we want workers' alliance? Why do we desire a pact between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T.? We want these in order to win the war and secure the conquests of the

revolution! There is no other way. There can be no vacillations and no arresting transitional period.

There is only one truth which rings out as clearly as the call of the Austrian proletariat: The Revolutionary Workers' Alliance!

The workers who gave their best men in October, 1934, those who have been responsible for making the slogan, "United Sons of the Proletariat," international, those who stood up and fought the friends and inquisitors in that memorable October and who are, in the whole of Asturias and in other parts of Spain, struggling on the battlefields with their marvellous weapon, dynamite, these are the ones who have understood the solution. These are the ones who understood what is necessary for the proletarian cause. And with the same decision and earnestness which they put into all their actions, they immediately made operative that which they considered was their duty: the alliance between proletarian brothers.

And when the pact was reaffirmed in the document at Gijon, the happy news passed through all the battlefields, it ran from town to town, from heart to heart, whilst at the same time their arms were in action. And what happened after that? After that came the attack, the brilliant attack of our miners and the world hung, once more, on each step and each gesture of the men of Asturias.

And so it will be in all Spain. The salvation of the proletariat is in the workers' alliance, in revolutionary union, in a pact between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. This is not the kind of unity that is proclaimed at meetings and in newspapers, and then forgotten about. To-day it must become fact. Unity between the two syndicates must be born. There must be unity for a common object, for a common activity, for the co-ordination in all the aspects of the struggle and for the reconstruction of society.

### THE EXAMPLE OF THE ASTURIAS.

That is what the Asturias has done. And this has just been realised in Aragon. This is what all Catalonia and indeed all Spain wants. Understanding the proposals as made by the C.N.T. for unity, this unity is desired by all the workers. The proletariat wishes to follow in the footsteps of the workers of Asturias. And so they must understand that it is necessary that they rise above the feeble barriers of lack of understanding or the manoeuvres of the leaders. Nothing must be permitted to come between the unity of the proletariat. On the proletariat depends the victory against Fascism. Unity

shall come in our assemblies, then in the two syndicates, through the various committees and from there to the various regions and the whole of anti-fascist Spain. The workers of the Asturias have given the lead. The rest of Spain will follow their example.

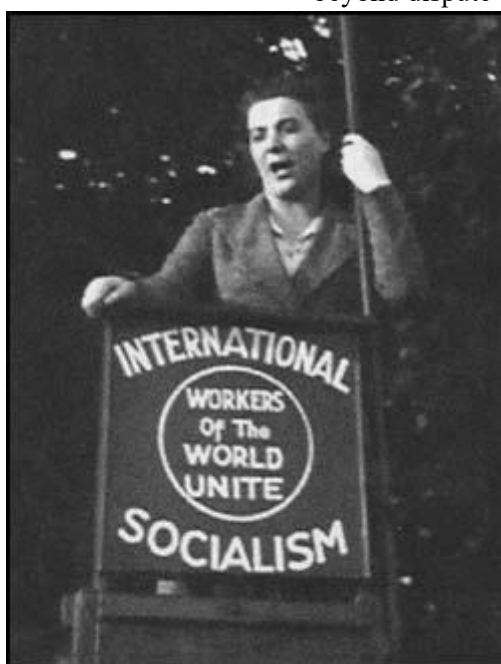
### SOCIALIST THOUGHT

Within the Socialist movement there are many schools of thought. Indeed they are so numerous that it would require a great deal of time and study to have a complete understanding of all the differences of approach and method that are responsible for the existence of various parties and groups within the movement. But this separation of the movement is not a cause for despair. The average person very often expresses the opinion that this continuous disagreement is a bad thing and that all socialists should be united in one party. There is a fair amount of truth in this, but it is beyond dispute that agreement between all socialists

would be fatal to the movement. Due to varying circumstances and experiences, each person has his own particular understanding of the struggle. Disagreement is inevitable and desirable. Disagreement leads to discussion and discussion leads to agreement on most unsuspected points. Discussion often leads to unity. And certainly discussion gives understanding and increases our knowledge. Without differences of opinion, progress would not be possible. Total agreement would be equivalent to stagnation. And although it may appear on the surface that socialists of all shades and colours are continually arguing among themselves and can reach no common agreement, it cannot be

disputed that they are all united in their common objective: the desire for social change.

And it is only when this point is reached that real disagreement exists. For in the working-class movement there are two fundamental varying approaches, two fundamental sections. These are the reformist and revolutionary sections. The tactics of these two are so widely separated that no unity is possible. Unity is necessary at critical periods and critical periods are revolutionary periods. At a critical time in the history of working-class struggle, those of the proletariat who formerly were reformist become revolutionary and they wipe aside the reformist elements that would hold them back. This is inevitable. Until the last moment the majority of the workers place their hopes in parliament and leaders and when that moment comes and they find that these are unable to solve the existing economic problems, they turn to direct action. No matter what are the traditions and despite the process of restraint to



which they have been subjected, at the hour of crisis, the worker uses his last and only useful weapon - direct action.

Within the last year Spain has had two definitely critical periods, definitely revolutionary periods. But in one time, the revolutionary situation was faced with reformist weapons and so failed. And at the other, the situation was confronted with revolutionary weapons: and the revolutionary methods brought victory.

### **THE HISTORY OF THE SPANISH STRUGGLE.**

Let us try and see what actually took place. The Spanish conflicts led in 1931, to the fall of the monarchy and to the establishment of a bourgeois democratic regime. The agrarian reform bound up with this political change was inadequate, and incapable of meeting the needs of the country population. The indemnities to be paid to the landowners for relinquished domains were set so high that the burden upon the peasants was not mitigated at all. In many localities the peasants took possession of the large estates; but even though these expropriations were in part later legalised by the government, still at the same time the peasants were subjected to new burdens which were no more bearable than the old lease obligations. The Zamora republic was not inclined to proceed against the interests of the land owners, as also in the political field it did not dare to suppress the reaction. The reactionary forces assembled again and organised further advances. The Fascist "Accion Popular" of Gil Robles unfolded a wide propaganda which was able to win influence even among the impoverished and deluded peasants. In view of the continuing social unrest, brought about through the isolated but ever occurring manifestations of the workers and of a part of the farm population, the bourgeoisie once more formed a closer union with the reactionary forces. The elections of 1933 had again put the reactionaries in charge of the government, which now proceeded more harshly against the workers and the rebellious peasants. The restless humour of the country was reflected in the rapid alteration of the governments: from Azana to Lerroux and Martinez Barrio, and then to Lerroux and Gil Robles. The uprisings in Asturias in October 1934 formed the climax of the proletarian endeavours to make use of the revolutionary currents for proletarian ends to strike the decisive blow at the reaction. The uprising remained isolated and was suppressed, though the attempt to establish social peace was still by no means successful. The acutely revolutionary situation led to a number of government crises in conformity with the reorientations of the different classes and groups, and which pointed to new and greater conflicts to come.

Here was the necessary revolutionary situation. But the elections at the beginning of 1936 witnessed a new coalition of the liberal bourgeoisie with the parliamentary labour parties and led to the forming of the popular front government. This new government

promised to put through a series of reforms such as are advocated by liberalism in general, and a better agrarian reform with partial land distribution. But as to be expected, the new government failed to put into operation its promises and the expropriation of the land by the peasants continued as did the workers' strikes in the towns. But the failure to make this strike action united defeated the period of revolution that existed in February.

Despite the results of the elections and considering the operations of the government the reaction did not consider itself beaten. The popular front government, which, of course, was made up only of bourgeois-liberalistic elements was unable to govern, as would have been necessary, either against the workers or against the reaction for the machinery of State remained in the hands of the right. The workers attempted to broaden the movement against the reaction into one against exploitation in general; a situation which left the government no choice but to look for new compromise solutions, which were, however, neither able to restrain the workers nor to prevent the fascist movement from assembling its forces for new thrust Workers' strikes continued. The government, although assisted by the labour parties, was not able to put an end to this movement. And it did not have the courage to purge the administrative system and the military apparatus of the reactionary elements, for, firstly, it might have had to bring this apparatus into action against the workers and, secondly, it did not wish in any way to offer any provocation to the reaction. And this procrastination of the government strengthened the fascist forces. A revolutionary situation was fast approaching and the government were incapable of doing anything. Reaction was quickly revealing its hand. The government remained paralysed.

Shortly after this occurred, in alliance with the Fascist formations and the Church, the uprising of the army against the government. The Liberal government was given no opportunity to capitulate. The fascist attack, by reason of its extent and fierceness, precluded any seeking after compromise solutions. It was only directed against a government which, by its previous policy, seemed liable to become the prisoner of the labour movement, and which was left with no choice but to defend itself against the fascist opposition. Had it been sure that the uprising would not affect them in any way, there is no doubt that the government would have refused to give even the assistance which it did to the workers. And the fascists, knowing the weakness of the government, thought the victory would be quick.

### **THE RESISTANCE OF THE WORKERS.**

But they underestimated the power of resistance of the workers who united together for a decisive counter-attack. The army to which the Fascist organisations were closely linked, rebelled in all parts of Spain, but with few exceptions was quickly suppressed in those

areas where a strong workers' movement existed. As moderate as was the popular front government prior to the uprising, with equal moderation it wanted the uprising suppressed.

And the labour parties belonging to the popular front were in sympathy with this moderation. But the workers, who felt all too keenly on their own bodies the lack of moderation by the fascists would not submit to this. The moment had arrived. Because they knew what faced them, they themselves were compelled to become immoderate. The counter-revolt of the workers had behind it all the strength of the propaganda conducted so untiringly for many years by the Spanish Anarchists. Spanish anarchism has a long history. The labour organisations which were formed in 1869, and influenced by Bakunin soon won great influence both in the industrially more developed parts

of the peninsula, and mainly in Catalonia, as well as in the most backward parts among the farm workers of Andalusia. The organisations that rose at a later period were never able to combat in any effective manner the influence of the early anarchist movement. And it was under the influence of these teachers that the workers took their stand against fascism. Gone completely was any belief in the genuineness of the government. The workers and peasants realised that it was they who had to make the defence, they realised that if they did not struggle against the reaction themselves, they would be betrayed and the reaction would triumph. The National Confederation of Labour had always been in opposition to the Popular Front Government although they had participated in the elections for the sake of freeing the 30,000 political prisoners, but was quite prepared to accept unity with the other workers' organisations. But it always refused to have any unity with political parties. For the C.N.T. had always maintained that the revolution must come from below, from the workers themselves by their spontaneous action. This was proved to be true on July 19th. It was due to the direct action of the workers themselves that fascism is having such difficulty. All the experience of the past, of the strikes, all the reformist governments have had their culmination in the action of the Spanish proletariat on July 19th, when taking arms in hand, they flung themselves into the conflict. No more reformism, no



more parliamentary debacles. Their day had passed. The time had arrived for action. And this time the workers of Spain took advantage of the situation. And now all eyes are turned to Spain. Spain has become an international question.

## THE ISSUES IN SPAIN

From the commencement of the propagation of the ideas of Socialism, the struggle between the proletariat and capitalism has become more vehement each day.

Strikes, lock-outs and revolutions have increased. This age-long battle between the poor and rich has its point of culmination in the social revolution that has been unchained by the Spanish workers as an answer to the treacherous and murderous intentions of international fascism. A great deal has been said and written regarding this revolution and also, much slander has been made against the working-class forces in Spain. This slander does not come only from the bourgeois and

capitalist elements, nor is it issued only in the capitalist elements, nor is it issued only in the capitalist press. Slander is to be expected from this class of society. Whenever a struggle assumes a proletarian character, it is the signal for a huge campaign of calumny by the enemies of the working class. And so we are not surprised. They are merely fulfilling their duty to their own interests. But the slander against the workers of Spain has also come from the so-called Socialist and Communist elements, from their press. But if we examine the matter we will find that this does not cause us much surprise either. Experience has taught us that this is their correct role: to slander and misrepresent the workers' cause. Why?

Throughout the whole history of the workers' movement, we have abundant proof of the continuous treachery and betrayal that has been perpetuated on the proletarian cause by the Socialist and Communist parliamentarians. And Spain is no exception. Here, too, facts prove that they have fulfilled their life-long role. What have we in Spain? In Spain we have the common people struggling for their liberty. A struggle is taking place in Spain that should have the assistance of all decent minded men and women in every part of the world. And at least, this struggle should have the assistance of all those who call themselves Socialists. That much is to be expected. But what do we find?

There is no united action to assist the proletariat of Spain in their struggle. There is no general solidarity of the workers' movement throughout the world. Instead we have a united front of the Socialist and Communist parties with democracy, that is with capitalism.

The struggle in Spain is maintained by the Anarchists and without the Anarchists the war would have been lost for the workers before this. And it is because of this fact, that the Socialists, or those who call themselves Socialists, refuse to have anything to do with the Spanish Revolution. It is true that these persons organise collections for the poor children of Madrid who have lost their parents as a result of barbarous bombardments, and it is true that these persons are collecting clothes and food and dispatching the same to Madrid. But that is all. The Spanish conflict is regarded as a case for charity, something on the same footing as the poor of the Salvation Army. This is typical of the social-democrats. It exposes them clearly as pretty bourgeoisie with hearts that beat warmly for the poor starving children of Madrid. But speak about the revolution and they gooseflesh all over. To them revolution is illegal and unlawful and as good law abiding citizens and subjects, they refuse to have any association with it. This is the treachery that is perpetuated on the working-class by these individuals and parties. They claim to be socialists and with that label attached to them, they seduce the working-class. In reality, they are but poor miserable little capitalists who consider that their interests are much safer in the hands of a Hitler or of a Mussolini than in the hands of the proletariat. They feel that they have something to lose with the coming of Socialism and so they resist it with all their might whilst superficially they make a pretence to being for the workers. And so they are willing to give their petty assistance to the victims of the Spanish war because they feel that by doing so they will not lose anything, they will not suffer any inconvenience or hardship. But at the first breath of suspicion that the help were for the Anarchists, immediately their assistance would be brought to an end. If they thought that by their deeds of charity they were helping the cause of Anarchism, very soon we would find that their love for humanity was only on the surface. They are capitalists in excelsis. And they would have no hesitation in seeing the whole Spanish population, men, women and children murdered, if they felt that as a result, anarchism would be destroyed. And that is the extent of their socialism.

But the Spanish workers are not alone. The Spanish people know that there are thousands and millions of comrades who feel their cause as their own, and who want to do all that they can to assist in the triumph of the workers of Spain, who wish to give their assistance to the struggle that the Spanish workers are conducting against international Fascism and capitalist democracy. The Spanish workers know that the Anarchists of the whole world are with them. Though these might be few

in number, there is no doubt that it is their work that will convince finally the millions of the world proletariat of the right and justice of the Spanish workers to defend their liberty against all persons who attempt to endanger it. And even to defend their liberty against those politicians of the Left who, like the brave heroes they were, stayed at home on the 19th of July and left the resistance to the military attack of the rebel army to the Anarchists of the F.A.I.

### **THE EXAMPLE OF MEXICO.**

But there are others, millions of others, who from the commencement of Spanish struggle have definitely chosen to be on the side of the Spanish revolutionists. We refer to the people of Mexico, our brothers by blood, birth and language. Mexico, the land which is geographically so far from us but which is so near to us in Spain from sentiment and understanding. Mexico, the country which, with no political axe to grind, without making any conditions, has offered and given to Spain all that which it had to offer and to give. Mexico asks only one thing from the Spanish people. And what is that Mexico asks? She asks that we will prove ourselves worthy of being helped.

The people of Mexico themselves have been hardened in the struggle against oppression and exploitation by the international capitalists and landowners who with the assistance of the Church exploited the proletariat. The Mexican people, by extending the hand of friendship to the Spanish people, prove that they have not forgotten their own slavery. And they have shown their understanding in a manner which puts to shame all other people. For Mexico is revolutionary. The voice of the Mexican people is the voice of Spain in America. The revolutionary history of Mexico is the revolutionary history of all peoples. It is the history of the struggle between exploited and exploiters; between masters and slaves, between the persecutors and the men and women who hunger after justice. And so the Mexican proletariat, the Mexican nation, mighty in its young revolutionary society, takes its stand by the side of the Spanish people without first asking if the Spanish people have ideals and aspirations other than the people of Mexico. We in Spain look upon the Mexican people as our brothers and sisters because they did not desert us in our hour of need.

The example set by Mexico must be followed. You can count upon the assistance of the workers in Mexico and also you can depend upon the solidarity of the Spanish comrades in your struggle against Fascism and capitalism. For there is no doubt as to our ultimate victory. Our victory is sure because the Spanish proletariat has the will to conquer. The almost superhuman determination of the workers on July 19<sup>th</sup> when with their comrades of the F.A.I. they destroyed, without any preparation, the whole fascist army in Catalonia will be repeated on the fronts of Aragon and Andalusia. For five months, Madrid, the brave capital of

the revolution, has demonstrated that it is invincible. Madrid, the destroyed capital of Spain, the heart of the proletarian world is still beating. And it will continue to beat even should the last house be destroyed by the criminal hordes of invaders. It may be that thousands of more workers will fall in the process of this bloody struggle against international Fascism: it may be that more women and children will be torn to pieces by bombs, but from these dead and from the ruins of Madrid, from out of the fields of Andalusia and the Asturias, fertilised by the blood of the heroic proletariat, will arise a new Spain of the proletariat, the Spain of free Socialism. And this new Spain will stretch out its

hand to the far away Mexican people and will form with Mexico the vanguard of the proletarian army that will destroy capitalism throughout the world.

Surely your leaders have proven to you sufficiently that they are unwilling to fight against Fascism. The leaders of the proletariat handed over Italy and Germany to fascism. They betrayed the proletariat of these countries because they detest the thought of revolution, they detest the revolution itself as they would detest a pestilence. And they will hand the proletariat of the other countries over to fascism, too, when the time comes.

# From **ETHEL MACDONALD**

**Ethel Macdonald**

*Barcelona Bulletin*, 15 May 1937 (*The Word*, September 1962)

BARCELONA, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1937.

I have just received four letters, some of which contained cuttings from the Glasgow papers on the Barcelona trouble. For the moment we must deal with this and leave all personal matters for a later date.

Jenny has already written to you giving you some information but I shall tell you about it as I see it. Also you must understand that we were right here in the C.N.T.-F.A.I. headquarters during: ail the trouble, although during the lulls in the early morning we went out to see what was taking place in other parts.

To begin. The first information we received was that during a quiet time for business in the afternoon (about 4 p.m.) the Guardo Alsalto entered the Telephone Exchange and attempted to take possession. Of course, previous to this there had been a certain amount of tension underneath regarding the censorship of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. papers that had been taking place in other parts of Spain (Madrid, Valencia, etc.). Then Roldan Cortada, member of the U.G.T., was assassinated. It is beyond any question that this act was that of an agent provocateur with the scheme in mind of destroying any possibilities of unity between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. As the C.N.T. has been and still is, advocating unity between the two workers' syndicates, obviously this deed was perpetrated by some person or persons opposed to unity.

Following upon that, Martin, an Anarchist in Puicerda, who had been working steadily to install Libertarian Communism and refusing to work in any other direction, was assassinated also. Can it be doubted that this further act was another chain in a well-planned plot to bring about disruption between the workers. We know the desire to bring the revolution to an end and to impose the democratic republic. We also knew the tactics of those countries and those persons who favour this. But despite this deliberate provocation the C.N.T.-

F.A.I. still urged: unity between the workers, still insisted that victory over Fascism, and a successful revolution, could only be brought about by the unity of the two workers' syndicates. The provocation was ignored.

But the telephone seizure was too great to be ignored. Here was the deliberate attempt to take away the telephone exchange from the control of the C.N.T.-U.G.T. Which means away from the C.N.T. because there can be no doubt that the U.G.T. became involved in this also. In fact, personally I say the leadership of the U.G.T. share the responsibility for the beginning of this terrible bloodshed that has taken place. Twelve of the comrades of the C.N.T. in the telephone exchange refused to allow this seizure to take place and resisted. They were in the top part of the building, which faces directly on to the Plaza Cataluna and the Guardia Alsalto took up their position in the bottom stories. When our comrades informed us of the happenings, we saw in it an attempt to take away the control from the hands of the C.N.T. Spontaneously the comrades erected barricades in the streets. The others had obviously done likewise previously, if one can judge from the appearance of the respective barricades. Shooting took place in the Plaza Cataluna on Monday afternoon.

The indignation of the comrades was great, but we were all warned to keep our heads. Jenny and I, with Charlie Doran, who had come to see us in the Casa, left the Casa for the hotel that night. We had to pass through the Plaza de la Replublica, where the Generalidad has its central building, and at the entrance we were challenged by the Guardia Asalto, Charle was searched. We, being merely women, were not searched. We reached home safely although held up several times by our own comrades. During that night shooting took place.

In the morning about 7.30, after realising that trouble was taking place, we made for the Casa C.N.T.-F.A.I.

From our window in the hotel Oriente, which faces directly the street leading to the Plaza de la Republica, we could see that shots were pouring down the-street from the Guardia Alsalto and the Civil Guards, and were being replied to by our comrades who were stationed behind trees and lampposts. Again we were warned not to go into the streets, but needless to say we ignored the warning and left. We told our comrades that we wanted to get to the Via Durruti. To get there meant that no matter how we went we must pass through the scenes of the shooting. How we went I don't know, because most of the time we were lost and taking cover. But we reached the Casa after a few adventures, being stopped, having to "reach for the sky," etc.

Inside the Casa, naturally there was an atmosphere of tension, but the shooting coming from here was very slight. But the shooting from the barricades at the Generalidad was constant. This changed and we started. But *never once did we begin firing*. We merely answered. If I give you a few instances you will obtain a better impression.

1. Three comrades (from which organisation it was not known) were driving down the street in a car when the Guardia fired upon them. The car was stopped and they managed to run and take shelter in a doorway. But there was a constant fire directed upon them. When we saw this from the Casa we started shooting in order to protect them. It was an impossible situation. Eventually one of the tanks were sent out to rescue them, and in doing so, one of the comrades inside the tank was injured by a bomb that was thrown at the tank.

2. Twelve comrades were dragged from their cars and shot to pieces. When the Red Cross attempted to help them, they were warned that if they aid so they would be fired upon too.

Of course others on the other side were shot. You have heard that SESE was shot. But I am told that he walked across the Plaza Cataluna with a Guardia Alsalto on each side of him. That was courting danger, if true.

Now the trouble is that events inside the Generalidad took place so rapidly that even now all is not clear. The changes that took place the Governments that were formed, etc, But all the time, the attitude of the C.N.T. was to bring this struggle to an end. Whether they were right or wrong from our point of view is another question. *But never were they desirous of continuing the bloodshed.*

Being, afterwards, more or less confined here most of the: time, our viewpoint is limited.

*Throughout all these days the comrades of the P.O.U.M. fought side by side with the Anarchists, The P.C. fought with the GdA and the Guardia Civil, Does its prove the role of the C.P. at long last?*

But of the Anarchists what is to be said? There are two points of view.

One is that this provocation was deliberate with the intention of splitting the anti-fascist front and separating the Anarchists from all other sections. And that our enemies wanted the struggle to go on so that the Central Government could step in and crush the Anarchists completely. One side say that this being so, we are wise to capitulate that we have lost men, we have lost the telephone exchange, *but our position is stronger normally*. No doubt there has been manoeuvres from outside Spain in this matter. Has this been the manoeuvres of England and France?

The other point of view is that the leadership of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. has betrayed the struggle. It is held that we should have taken up the challenge, wiped out these counter-revolutionary elements and taken over complete control.

I think it was desired that the struggle should continue; that this was a definite manoeuvre to bring the workers back from the fronts and finish the war and restore the Democratic Republic. It-is beyond dispute because when we stop firing – for quite a time – our enemies started again and continued firing. *On Thursday afternoon and all Friday morning not a fire came from us, but they fired all the time*. The point is: Were we wise in refusing to accept their challenge! Was not this the time to take over complete control? Would we necessarily have lost? We control the ammunition factories, the transport, practically all the means of sustenance. Would we have lost?

The discussion goes on. There is dissatisfaction. And now we have the Assault Guards from Madrid controlling public order. I am told that here in Barcelona none of-our Anarchist comrades entered this police force after July 19<sup>th</sup>. In Madrid they did. Can we enter such forces and remain unchanged? Will there be another move to take over something else? Is the revolution finished? Certainly the counter-revolution is in march and has been so for some time. We have lost the telephone. Can we regain what we have lost? If we had continued and the Central Government had come against us, what would have been the outcome? A bourgeois republic? A Communist Dictatorship?

The picture is slightly too near to see it clearly. The P.O.U.M. attitude is definite. That the leadership of the C.N.T.-F.A.I sold out. Can we take the P.O.U.M. seriously. What are their connections in other countries – the I.L.P., etc.

In the port in the last days were three Government battleships and one French and British one. This is significant. All of us wanted naturally to fight back. That is natural, very natural. But have we been wise. And what comes next?

# The Anti-Worker Repression in Republican Spain

Ethel MacDonald

*L'Espagne Nouvelle*, New Series, No 18-19, 17 September 1937<sup>1</sup>

Comrade Ethel MacDonald, for whose release *L'Espagne Nouvelle* made repeated appeals, is now back among us. She has asked us to thank our readers for the gestures of solidarity afforded her and requested that the same effort and the same assistance now be afforded, with 100% greater intensity, in supporting and defending the revolutionaries held in the Modelo Prison, Montjuich and Valencia (among them lots of German and Italian comrades utterly bereft of legal guarantees and outside support).

Below, comrades will find an account of the situation inside Catalonia, based on the personal experiences of our valiant contributor.

To work, everyone. Help *L'Espagne Nouvelle* to mount the campaign required to rescue our brothers.

## IN THE WAKE OF THE RETREAT

The May Days debacle in Barcelona led to a formidable wave of repression by the Communist Party targeting the revolutionary personnel who had fought on the streets and barricades to bar the way to the counter-revolution. Since then, the schemes of Moscow's men have been deployed in the light of day. Between 3 and 8 [May 1937], they showed their true faces to the entire world looking on. Along with the Assault Guards and the Civil Guard, they made their stand against the Barcelona workers in a coup de force designed to wrest control of firms and social life from the labouring masses organized within the CNT and partly also within the UGT. Their efforts proved less successful than might have been hoped because within hours the proletariat rose up as one to defend its rights. Workers from the CNT and members of the FAI and POUM stood side by side to bar their way.

But the workers' backlash was aborted by the potential ministers from the trade union organizations, after which the Communist Party's fury was unleashed on the members of revolutionary organizations. In the aim of disguising the part that it had played during the May events, the Communist Party, aided and abetted by the Valencia-controlled Public Order Delegation, strove to shift the blame for the uprising on to the anarchists and the members of the POUM. In authentically Moscow-style fashion, any who had resisted reactionary moves were denounced as "Trotskyists, provocateurs, fascist agents, etc." Unable

to get the better of the CNT-FAI in the short term, the Bolsheviks started with the POUM.

## THE 'ANTI-TROTSKYITE' OFFENSIVE

The POUM is made up of Marxists from a range of persuasions, in contact with lots of Marxist groups in a range of countries. Hanging the tag "Trotskyist" on these groups is as handy as it is wrong. Only a tiny faction within the POUM has a definite connection with Trotsky and a lot of its members are utterly opposed to him. But all of these strands share with the anarchists a patent lack of sympathy with the bourgeois-stalinist CP and this is why, in the hope of covering up its own treachery, the Comintern has lumped all its opponents together, labelling them "Trotskyists" in defiance of the actual facts.

And the Stalinists added the most cynical brutality to their usual slanders.

Over the space of two days, POUM locals were shut down, their presses seized and Spanish and foreign comrades were sent to prison. Comrades living in houses commandeered by the

POUM since the July revolution had their effects searched and their papers and documents impounded.

## MASS ARRESTS

At that time I had occasion to call daily on a Dutch anarchist comrade who had been jailed without charge. The day after the arrests of the POUM leaders, I called to see him as usual, with another female anarchist in tow. At 'Police Headquarters' where visiting permits

**In authentically  
Moscow-style  
fashion, any who had  
resisted reactionary  
moves were  
denounced as  
"Trotskyists,  
provocateurs, fascist  
agents, etc." Unable  
to get the better of  
the CNT-FAI in the  
short term, the  
Bolsheviks started  
with the POUM.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wdbtt6>

were issued, I came upon five comrades of my acquaintance, three of them from the POUM and two from the CNT-FAI. They informed me that the Assault Guards had searched their quarters that very morning, arresting them and seizing their personal effects without a word of explanation. Because my female friend and I had spoken to them, we were also locked up. When we took exception to this, we were told that we were not “detainees”, but merely “remanded”. The fact that we were acquainted with the arrested comrades was grounds enough for us to be taken captive.

All that day there was a constant procession of comrades, foreigners most of them, who had been arrested like the ones first mentioned. In fact, so comprehensive was the round-up that a cigarette-seller operating in the doorway of the POUM headquarters was rounded up with the rest and was only freed when he claimed membership of the UGT and produced a membership card from that organization. Some female comrades bringing food to their husbands or partners were arrested and, as a rule, it as dangerous to be anywhere near ‘Police Headquarters’.

### **THE PRISON REGIMEN**

In police stations around Barcelona, it was virtually impossible to get news of those arrested. Bereft of any protection whatever, they were entirely at the mercy of the authorities.

Under Spanish law, no one may be held in secret for any more than five days and no longer than thirty days on remand, without being tried or released. In practice, the situation is quite different. Our comrades were placed in cells and denied visitors for however long the authorities chose to deny them. The same goes for the length of their detention without trial. Instances of comrades jailed for months without trial and denied contact with the outside world are too numerous to list. And the conditions in which they live in prison are very dire.

The overall health situation in Barcelona leaves a lot to be desired and the position of the prisoners, especially during the early weeks following the mass arrests was genuinely unimaginable. The prisons and police stations being filled to overflowing, garages and warehouses were used as holding centres. In one such garage, directly facing the ‘Police Headquarters’ on the Via Durruti, 140 comrades were packed together. The luckier among them had a blanket to sleep on, but most had to lie down on the concrete floor. And not for one night but for weeks on end and, in certain cases, months on end. At the same time there was only one wash basin-cum-toilet. Their only food, served twice a day, was a plateful of rice soup and potatoes. At the Hotel Falcon, I saw a lot of men from the International Brigade totally enfeebled from lack of food. Being foreigners and without friends in Barcelona, nothing could be done to alleviate their enforced diet.

### **SCREAMING FROM UNDERNEATH THE GRINDSTONE**

One way or another, protests were mounted and appeals got out, the upshot being that the POUM’s militants, initially held at their former headquarters in the Hotel Falcon, were removed to proper prisons.

Not that that brought an end to the arrests. In the hotel in question, a lot of CNT-FAI comrades and International Brigade volunteers were jailed. These men had enlisted under the aegis of the Communist Party in their respective countries, in the honest belief that they were to help the Spanish people in its battle against fascism. But the behaviour of their officers and political commissars on the front was so dictatorial and anti-communist as to compel them to voice protests. Now, protesting was rewarded with imprisonment.

Gradually, it became obvious that the Communist Party was not content with exterminating the POUM. Having swept them aside, they now turned their sights on their real foes: the comrades from the CNT-FAI. Foreign comrades in particular, they regarded as a threat. Those comrades knew the truth about the May events: each and every one of them was keen to make it known abroad. Unfortunately, there was complete censorship of the newspapers and the mail. As for the workers’ control over the border, that had been done away with and handed over to the carabineers and Civil Guard, and the latter would only allow Communist Party sympathizers to leave the country. Day in and day out, the Dutch comrade I was visiting in prison regaled me with the names and tribulations of the many comrades who had been arrested in Port-Bou whilst attempting to leave the country and been fetched back to Barcelona and imprisoned.

I spoke with lots of comrades during my time in prison and the only upside to my captivity was this: that it gave me the opportunity to hear expressions of utter disgust with the enormous man-trap known as the Communist Party from the lips of recently expelled ex-communists.

### **THE GPU AT WORK**

My own arrest was a typical example of the way in which the Communist Party operates. In Scotland, the group of which I am a member has always been utterly opposed to the CP. In countering its propaganda with our own, we have always had to reckon with their deep-seated ignorance and brutality; in Spain, despite the fact that the party recruits its supporters from among a rather different class than in Great Britain, its stance is exactly the same. The moment it gets hold of the tiniest morsel of power, it exploits it in order to break its opponents by force.

Late in the night, the Assault Guards and Security (Public Order) police raided the house in which I was living. Without a word of explanation, they set about ransacking all the rooms and every cupboard in the

house. My room was ransacked and my personal effects, scattered all over the place, were strewn on the floor. After stumbling upon what they reckoned was proof enough to get me hanged (revolutionary literature, etc.) they asked to see my passport. Having scrutinized it, they announced that I was in Spain illegally, even though I had entered strictly according to regulations, before crossing of the border was ruled out for foreigners. They tried to get to me concede that I was not British, but French and that my plan was to leave the country along with a sum of money. All evidence to the contrary meant nothing. They believed what they wanted to believe. In the end, I was lumped with another five comrades and taken to the station. All of the papers and documents in my possession were unlawfully taken away and every objection was met with the same response: genuine antifascists, they argued, would raise no objection to being searched and questioned and to their homes being searched – having, by definition, nothing with which to reproach themselves or conceal from the police! After an interrogation that was equally nonsensical and tendentious and which got them nowhere we were subjected to comprehensive fingerprinting. Two of the prisoners were released at that point, but as for the rest of us, we were moved overnight to a different police station. My three male comrades were locked in an underground cell, but, I being a woman, was authorized to stay upstairs and to spend the remainder of the night in a chair.

#### MY DETENTION IN THE HOTEL FALCON

The following evening, our ‘pals’ from ‘Public Order’ showed up again and asked us to sign a statement about our having been arrested on account of our papers not being in order. Let me add that two of our three male comrades had returned from the front just five days before and their papers were wholly in order, except that being expelled Germans, they had no passports of course.

After that we were taken to ‘Police Headquarters’ on the Via Durruti and handed over to other police personnel who brought us to the notorious Hotel Falcon, formerly the headquarters of the POUM, which the Stalinists had turned into a sort of a private political prison. There I bumped into loads of familiar faces. Despite the nonsensicality of our predicament, we could still joke about it. We were taken to our rooms by means of a lift and even had running water there. But right now the Hotel Falcon is no longer in use as a prison. Its inhabitants have been relocated – some to the Modelo Prison, others to Montjuich and, worse still, some to Valencia.

## **The Revolution should spell the end of prisons, rather than just a change of the prison guards.**

Morale is high among the imprisoned comrades. The persecution and jailing of revolutionaries are nothing new in Spain and a lot of foreign comrades had endured the same treatment in their respective homelands. Even persecution at the hands of self-styled communists is not without precedent. The treatment meted out to revolutionaries in Russia is there as testimony to what is to be expected of the current regime over there in the socialist homeland. But for revolutionaries to be arrested in such large numbers in Spain even as their comrades and brethren are falling on every front facing the fascist foe represents a scandal that brings everyone who tolerates it without speaking out in protest into disrepute.

The Revolution should spell the end of prisons, rather than just a change of the prison guards.

#### GORY RUINS

The lot of the German and Italian comrades in Spain is heartbreakingly pathetic. Driven from their homelands, they sought refuge in France and elsewhere. But, when the call of the Spanish Revolution sounded, they cast aside what little they had and rushed to play their part in the great fight. Many have been wounded, crippled and undermined by serious illnesses. Thanks to the party of the bolshevist counter-revolution, they have been reduced to gory ruins. Some are languishing in prison, unable to find a refuge in any other country. And in Spain itself, the threat of arrest is constantly hovering over them. As the reaction makes progress, there will be growing numbers of arrests and expulsions.

What befalls those jailed, we cannot say. Where are all our foreign comrades? No news filters through to the public, thanks to the censor’s close surveillance on the press. Actually, anything might become of them. Queries about the detainees go unsatisfied. Maybe they are captives, or perhaps dead. We have no way of knowing. They might, like Nin, have been done to death. Despite all theories to the contrary and statements issuing from the supposedly responsible authorities, there is no doubt in Barcelona that Nin is dead, a victim, like our comrade Berneri, of stalinism’s executioners. At a monster rally held in Barcelona, a public announcement was made by Federica Montseny that the corpses of Nin and two other individuals have been discovered under the highway in Valencia. The full text of Federica Montseny’s statement appears in the (Spanish edition of the) **Information Bulletin** published by the CNT-FAI dated 24 and 25 July. A recent edition of the POUM newspaper **La Batalla**, currently being published in defiance of the law, has the most explicit details regarding the way in which the murder was carried out. (Unfortunately, I cannot quote

the text, as there was no way that I could smuggle papers of any sort out of Spain).

### **LEAVING NO TRACE**

Allow me to add one or two more examples of the dangers hovering over our foreign revolutionary comrades. When I was freed thanks to the intervention of Fenner Brockway, secretary of the ILP of Great Britain and on account of the publicity afforded my case by the British and French comrades, an assurance was also secured from the Valencia government that William Krehm, a Canadian comrade, would be released. Krehm was not released: I was informed by the British consul that he had been deported a fortnight earlier, since when none of Krehm's friends in Barcelona has had any further news of him. Krehm had been expelled, but his friends have not heard a word from him and must conclude that he is still in prison. No prisoner is allowed to take his personal effects with him when leaving the country: I myself realized that all of my personal effects had vanished. Plainly, once someone is arrested, the conclusion is that she will have no further need of civilian clothing. After I was released, I made ongoing efforts to recover my papers and articles. This was denied me, on the grounds that they contained propaganda against the Spanish government.

The following is but one instance among thousands. The wife of one German comrade used to visit him in prison twice a week. That comrade had been arrested on returning from the front lines in a special mission. Later, he was relocated to the holding centre on the Calle Angel where the Cheka operates. His wife was told that she would be allowed to bring him a blanket and provisions, but once she had stepped outside to fetch him these things, nothing more was heard of her. In all likelihood, it had been a ploy to get rid of the wife as well.

### **GAGGED**

The persecution is growing by the day. It is affecting even correspondents from foreign newspapers. The special correspondent from one great liberal newspaper in Great Britain has been missing for five weeks now. No information regarding him has been forthcoming, in spite of the intervention by two consuls. The journalist in question was not English, but Italian and, according to what I have discovered, operated exclusively as a correspondent for his newspaper, steering clear of active involvement in Spanish politics.

I have instanced just three cases, but there are thousands of similar ones. Those of us who are free, because their friends still have the capacity to protest, are jammy so-and-so's. But what about those of our comrades who have no friends and no homeland? Are we going to let them rot in prison just because we are not ready to help them? Sound comrades who had already endured too much persecution and imprisonment, are languishing in

the dungeons of Spain merely for having fought in revolutionary Spain on behalf of the Spanish people's cause. Is it not a scandal that a party made up of bourgeois and small businessmen, for these make up the Communist Party in Spain, have the authority to annihilate the accomplishments and all of the efforts of the Spanish people? The POUM has been held answerable for the uprising in May. Now, the Spanish people and we foreigners who were in Spain at that time know that the blame for the days of bloodshed in May belongs, not with the POUM, but with the Communist Party and the fascist personnel within its ranks. If the POUM is answerable, so too are the anarchists. But if the anarchists are to blame, then that blame will have to be shared with the masses of the populace, as the Barcelona anarchists are the very people. And, after all, who is the Communist Party to oppose the will of the people?

### **STALIN AND THE WORLD COUNTER-REVOLUTION**

Today, thanks to the Stalinists, there is a ready-made list of revolutionaries, a blacklist accessible to any government that may seek access to it. What other purpose could there be to the systematic arrests of the foreign comrades fighting in Spain? How come Russia police personnel are photographing them one by one and making multiple copies of their fingerprints? The files on them will no doubt make it possible to monitor the movements of revolutionaries and, with the connivance of the political police forces across the world, to seize them at any point.

Stalinism, which has betrayed the hopes of workers in so many countries, should see its careering provocation and felony ended in Spain. If the action does not come from that country itself, it has to come from outside. There we have a short-term goal around which all revolutionaries around the globe must be united: action on behalf of the release of the revolutionaries jailed in Spain. Russia's masters, frightened that the possibility of there being a free country of workers might pose a threat to their own future are using every means at their disposal to crush the Spanish workers. And unless we intervene, they will pull this off. Are we going to be faced with another shambles like the Russian revolution? If we are to avert this, we have to act. The stalinists' deeds and actions have to be dragged into the light. We must incessantly protest at every Spanish embassy to secure the release of all the revolutionaries. We must urgently set up Committees to come to the aid of released comrades and secure them livelihoods. Respect for the right of asylum must be imposed on a number of countries. Our German and Italian comrades have neither rights nor protections nor homeland. It falls to us to see to it that they need not suffer for their loyalty to the cause of the proletariat.

Nîmes, 10.09.1937

# Revolutionary Syndicalism in Britain

**Ethel McDonald**

*One Big Union Monthly* (IWW), March 1938

Actually the organised labour movement in Britain is dead. This is due to the fact that parliamentary socialism is no longer trusted by the worker owing to the record of the two Labor governments. The workers have come to realise that parliamentary socialism supports Imperialism and Empire and is not the road to their emancipation, and [anti-]parliamentarians feel that this has justified their criticisms and prophecies of the past thirty years.

This result however is barren or purely negative, because the workers do not appreciate the relation between parliament and trades unionism. It stands to reason that the workers could not be betrayed on the political field unless they were also betrayed on the industrial field. Reformism is the essence of trades unionism and it is reformism that reconciles the worker to the Capitalist system. The joint nature of the betrayal of the working-class was demonstrated in the mis-called General Strike of 1926 when the very persons who had previously betrayed the workers through parliamentary action also betrayed them at the time of industrial action through the medium of the General Council of the Trades Unions.

The classic example of the parliamentary and capitalist nature of trades unionism was found in the case of the late John Turner who was an anarchist and also General Secretary of the Shop Assistants Union. First as organiser, and later as secretary, John Turner's duties compelled him to support parliamentarism, whilst his approach towards Revolutionary Syndicalism was purely academic.

The history of trades unionism in Britain proves beyond doubt that the Labor Party is the child of the craft union. Kier Hardie, for example, only obtained standing as a labour leader when he identified the Independent Labor Party with the trade union. During the war the bloc vote of the trades unions robbed Ramsay MacDonald of his leadership of the Labor Party. Under James Maxton the influence of the ILP has dwindled to nothing because the trades unions are behind the Labor Party. Every vote in parliament of the Labour Party, and of its different elements, can be traced to this or that unions

represented by the particular member speaking or voting. Today therefore, the task of anti-parliamentarism as such is to pass from its excellent criticism of parliamentarism as such to make war on trades unionism on the industrial field. The time has come to unfold the banner of revolutionary syndicalism and so give practical expression to the ideas of libertarianism or true revolutionary socialism.

It is only necessary to relate the details of trades union history in relation to the more important workers struggles to understand the reactionary role played by the British trades union leader.

## Trades Union Activity

Let us begin with the demarcation disputes. These prove that the purpose of trade or craft unionism in Britain has been not to pursue the class struggle or to inaugurate socialism but to better the lot of one section of the workers at the expense of another section in a perfect cycle of futility. here is the record of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers from 1865 to 1904 inclusive.

1865 - Dispute with boilermakers over A.S.E. men working as angle

iron-smiths.

1881 - Fight with shipwrights

1889 - Blacklegged fellow Trade Unionists during the strike at Silver's Works, Silvertown.

1890-2 - Persistent demarcation disputes with Tyne plumbers and boilermakers.

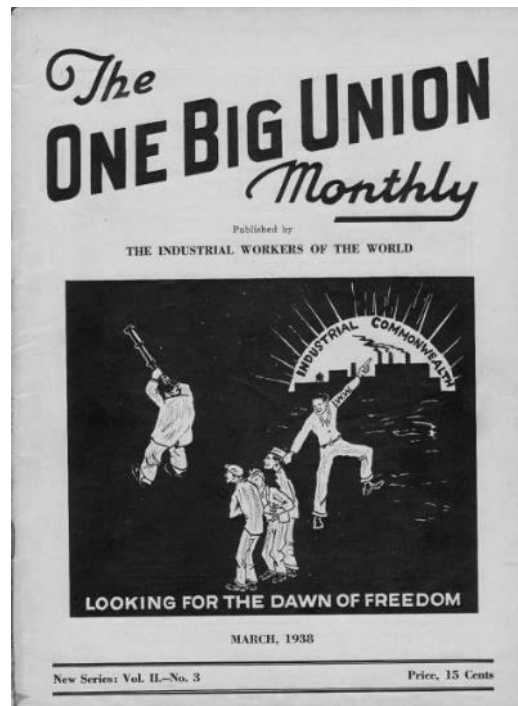
1894 - Demarcation disputes with scientific makers at Weymouth

1895 - Similar quarrel with steam-engine makers at Burton-on-Tyne.

1896 - With milling machine hands and brass finishers at Earl's of Hull, and Thornycroft's of Chiswick.

1897 - Historic struggle with master-class; supported by machine workers and steam-engine makers. Blacklegged by moulders, smiths and boilermakers. Last mentioned blacklegged because their funds were invested in Armstrong, Whitworth and Co.

1899 - Demarcation fight with smiths on the Tyne.



1904 - Same with Electrical Trades Union in Harland and Wolff's Yard at Belfast.

Time remedied none of these grievances. These demarcation disputes continued down to the very outbreak of the war. There are records of disputes over the studding of armour plates between boilermakers and engineers in which the employers were called upon to settle the dispute. Similar disputes arose over the making of bulwark stanchions and rudder quadrants.

Then there were disputes between the engineers and the plumbers over pipe fitting. In every case the employer settled the differences between the unions. In some cases strike preceded the settlement; not strikes by the workers against the employers but strikes by the workers against each other. There is the classic statement of the secretary of the Portsmouth Branch of the Coppersmiths and Metalworkers who complained "of the activity of the boilermakers, plumbers, etc., in claiming work that had been done hitherto by coppersmiths." This report declared that the purpose of the organisation was **"to prevent coppersmiths walking the streets whilst men of other trades are employed on work previously done by us."**

No comment is necessary to show how thoroughly reactionary has been the role of trades unionism in Great Britain. From 1912-1914 the **Herald of Revolt**, the anti-parliamentary **"Organ of the Coming Social Revolution,"** described in detail this phase of Trades Unionism.

### Organised for Defeat

That trades unionism is unable to organise the workers' struggle has been demonstrated by the history of the great dock strike. Ben Tillet whose political and parliamentary record is that of a war jingo has retained his hold on the Labor movement purely and simply through ignorance and illiteracy of ordinary British Trades Unionists. In July, 1912, he published a manifesto on behalf of the dock workers giving the history of Trades Unionism since 1893. In that manifesto he showed that in 1911, the dock workers struck without holding a trade union card, paralyzed shipping and won their strike. The following year they were organised into a trade union, struck again and were completely defeated. Further, in the second strike the trade union dockers of one port handled the goods sent by blacklegs from another port with the result that the workers were thoroughly demoralised.

The thing that brought about the defeat on that occasion has operated several times since, particularly among the railway workers; the accumulation of funds and the investment in the very industry in which the strikers were employed. As Dominion Secretary, Mr. J. H. Thomas persuaded the National Union of Railwaymen to invest its funds in a vast network of British Imperial finance that identified trades unionism with the ruling-class interests of the British Empire. In 1923, the

peculiar organisation for work and wages outlook of British trades unionism was demonstrated when the Clyde workers rejoiced at the promises made by Stanley Baldwin that the Government was placing more ship orders on the Clyde. At Tyneside the trades unionists protested that the warship orders should go to the Tyne. This is an index to the mentality and outlook of trades unionism.

We can pass over the General Strike. Supported by the Communist Party, the General Council of the Trades Union [movement] finally betrayed the workers' struggle and turned what was actually a revolutionary situation into a triumph for reaction.

The 1926 strike was the last word in the betrayal of the British miner that began with the Datum line struggle in 1921. From that date to 1926, the Miners' Federation steadily retreated. The miners threw up one leader after another and each leader betrayed them in turn.

In 1925, the mine bosses were in despair and the Government granted a nine months subsidy. Instead of rejecting this concession the parliamentarians and the trade union leaders rejoiced at a bogus victory, at a peace that was a capitalist preparation for war.

In 1926 came the strike and the debacle. This should have ended the history of trades unionism in Britain. It has not done so because the mind of the British worker is still reformist. He is afraid. Fear is the explanation of parliamentarism and trades unionism. It is our business to awaken courage and develop syndicalist activity.

### Syndicalist Revival

There is some promise of such awakening in the Omnibus Workers' Strike in the spring of this year. The Transport industry, so far as the road traffic is concerned, was completely paralyzed and it was admitted that the strike was directed not only against the company but also against the Transport [and] General Workers Union. The trade union officials repudiated the Strike Committee and made agreements behind the backs of the workers with the 'bus chiefs and government traffic commissioners. The unofficial action was 100 per cent and the trade union leaders had a rough passage. Although the strike was finally broken there is not the least doubt the transport workers will rally again. The United Socialist Movement intends to develop powerful syndicalist activity among these workers. It should be pointed out that there are four opposing unions canvassing for the Transport Workers. Just consider what a chaos of organisation, or rather disorganisation this implies.

The condition of the Transport Workers in Scotland brings us to a complete indictment of current Labor Parliamentarism. In Glasgow there is a Labor majority in the Town Council, a Labor Lord Provost and a Labor City Treasurer. This Labor majority has decided to have an Empire Trading Exhibition in Glasgow during the

coming year. The parasites of the world are being invited to visit Glasgow. This creates a tremendous transport problem. It was necessary to keep the workers quiet. Accordingly, with their Marxist understanding of economics the Labor majority met the Transport Workers Trade Union leaders and came to an agreement. The question of hours, which owing to its tax on the nervous energy of the worker, is a scandal never dealt with. The agreement conceded to the Transport Workers from the age of 14 to 19 and increase of one shilling per week; and to those over 19 and increase of two shillings. This agreement is binding for two years. It covers the period of the Empire Exhibition and the union pledges the workers not to strike. this is trades union treachery up to date.

The United Socialist Movement, which is an anti-parliamentary body and continues the tradition of the old anti-parliamentary movement founded in 1906, is entering the field of industrial action with a view to forming an Industrial Union of Direct Action (I.U.D.A.). The purpose of this activity and method of organisation is not industrial unionism in the sense of a vast centralised body outside the workshop, although it is opposed to the craft form of trade unionism. Its theory and method is syndicalist and it intends to organise along the lines of solidarity, spontaneous action and no agreements with employers. In other words its activity is preliminary to revolution and its conception to what has become to be known historically as Bakuninist and not Marxist.

The Industrial Union of Direct Action was first mooted in 1906 but was discarded for intensified anti-

parliamentary agitation on the political field. The workers did not seem to be ripe for syndicalism. this organisation, the I.U.D.A., is being revived to meet the situation. Glasgow which is a highly industrialised centre and a port and is a centre of the highly important Lanarkshire coal-fields is the very place in which to

build syndicalism. The coming Empire Exhibition, and its support by the labour parliamentarians and trade union leaders is our opportunity.

It may be that in the development of our activities here, the workers on the Continent may be able to give us great support. We should endeavour by economic action to throw up forces that will challenge and paralyze the Empire Exhibition. If we are successful in organising the strike at which we aim we shall need the support of the Continental workers in proclaiming a boycott. Declarations to this effect by the French workers would assist our organisation here. Not only is there an opportunity of evincing the power of syndicalism in Britain but the intention to re-open the Paris Exhibition would also afford a splendid opportunity to the French Workers to strike. In this way a united syndicalist movement of action pioneering an

entirely new era of struggle could be built in France and Britain. By this action, French and British workers are brought into line.

The author is a member of the United Socialists, a British Anarcho-Syndicalist movement. She was in Barcelona for some time after the commencement of the civil war and edited the English radio broadcasts. After the events of last May she was deported, it is presumed on the initiative of the Communist party.

**The purpose of this activity and method of organisation is not industrial unionism in the sense of a vast centralised body outside the workshop... Its theory and method is syndicalist and it intends to organise along the lines of solidarity, spontaneous action... its conception to what has become to be known historically as Bakuninist and not Marxist.**

**My arrest was typical of the attitude of the Communist Party. In Scotland the group to which I am attached has always been in complete opposition to the Communist Party. In opposing their propaganda we have always had to face and deal with their fundamental ignorance and brutality. In Spain, their approach is the same. Assault Guards and officials of the Public Order entered the house in which I lived late one night. Without any explanation they commenced to go through thoroughly every room and every cupboard in the house. After having discovered that which to them was sufficient to hang me - revolutionary literature etc. - they demanded to see my passport. On this being shown they informed me that I was in Spain illegally, although I entered Spain quite legally.**

— Ethel MacDonald, interview in the *Glasgow Evening Times* (1937)

# Ethel Mannin

**Nick Heath**

'There was an English poet called William Morris who said that the less people were governed the better. He called himself a socialist and he said anarchism was impossible but in his ideas about government he was an Anarchist, all the same....No one seems to think much about him nowadays - hardly anyone reads him and his socialism is considered old-fashioned. He hadn't much use for politics. He wrote a book called *News from Nowhere*, about an imaginary community who lived according to the laws of common consent, and had all things in common. They turned the Houses of Parliament into a dung-market, and their children didn't go to school, being too busy learning to waste their time there!'

– Ethel Mannin, *Comrade, O Comrade* (1945)

The comment that “No one seems to think much about him nowadays - hardly anyone reads him” could be equally applied to Ethel Mannin. As Peter Faulkner writes in his *Ethel Mannin and William Morris*: “in view of the vitality and political idealism that seems to pervade much of her writing, it is a pity that most of her books are now buried in the stacks of our public libraries. I hope that they will come back into the limelight of fashion.”<sup>1</sup> Ethel wrote a hundred books and none of them are currently in print. The publishing house Virago, who have published works by women authors since 1973, have never deigned to publish any of her books, and yet she is a better writer than some on the Virago list. Second wave feminism seems to have ignored her, despite her books like *Women and Revolution* and her own emancipated life. Neither have academics given her much credit, most studies of British women writers totally ignoring her, with the rare exception of Andy Croft’s “Ethel Mannin: The Red Rose of Love and the Red Flower of Liberty”<sup>2</sup>.



Ethel Edith Mannin was born in London on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1900, in Lavender Hill, London. She was of Irish descent. Her father Bob, a postal worker, had been a member of the Socialist League. Her mother, Edith Gray, was a daughter of a Devon farmer. Ethel described her father’s politics as ‘the true communism of ‘all things in common’ utterly-and tragically-remote from Stalinism...’

Before becoming a postal sorter at the Mount Pleasant office, Bob had worked as a Covent Garden porter, and as a teenager had joined the Socialist League. He attended

meetings at William Morris’s house at Hammersmith and was present on the plinth at Trafalgar Square when the police baton charged a demonstration in 1887, an event which became known as Bloody Sunday.

Ethel showed an aptitude for writing at an early age, and a story of hers was published in a magazine when she was only ten. Whilst at school, she wrote an essay attacking patriotism and the monarchy, which got her into trouble.

<sup>1</sup> Faulkner, P. *William Morris and Ethel Mannin* (1999): <https://morrissociety.org/wp-content/uploads/SP99.13.2.Faulkner.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939*, edited by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai, (1993).

At the age of fifteen, she won a scholarship to attend a commercial school. There, she developed a crush on a woman teacher who was a member of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society.

She got a job with an advertising agency and then was promoted to copywriter. She developed a relationship with a New Zealand artist that she identified only as J.S. in her 1930 memoirs *Confessions and Impressions*, a convinced antimilitarist who eventually returned to his homeland in 1917 to avoid being conscripted. Her introduced her to a whole range of radical books, including works by William Morris and Kropotkin's Mutual Aid, to the Industrial Workers of the World and to vegetarianism and atheism. Up to then Ethel had been deeply religious and she now became an atheist, as well as becoming a vegetarian.

Ethel Mannin's writing abilities allowed her to start publishing novels from the age of 23. She did this to pay the rent. As Albert Meltzer was to remark, "She was in her way a skilled craftsman, her trade was with words...her works, of consummate craftsmanship if not great art, are there to be admired"<sup>1</sup>. Her early works were popular novels, and it was not until the Thirties that her books became openly political. Nevertheless, there was always sympathy in her early works for her own class and the situation of women.

In 1931 she published *Common Sense and the Child*, a book on progressive education and on A.S. Neill's educational theories and she sent her only child, Jean, to Neill's Summerhill school. She followed this up the following year with a novel, *Linda Shawn*, which had progressive education as a subject. The same year she brought out her first openly political novelette, *Love's Winnowing*. It delineates the life of a working class woman, striving to fight against both class oppression and the subjection of women.

Mannin started frequenting meetings of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and finally joined it in 1933. She visited the Soviet Union in 1936, and quickly realised that this was not the ideal vision of communism that was being portrayed by the Communist Party. She rendered an account of

her visit there in the book *South to Samarkand*. This made her highly unpopular in much of the left.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, she became very active with the ILP in organising meetings for solidarity and fund raising for the POUM, (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), working closely with anarchists. She came in contact with the American anarchist Emma Goldman, in Britain to fundraise for the CNT-FAI and she chaired a meeting setting up the CNT-FAI London Bureau, speaking alongside Goldman and the Irish anarchist Jack White. She continued to chair solidarity meetings alongside Goldman. She started to contribute articles to the anarchist paper *Spain and the World*, edited by Vernon Richards.

Mannin began to move towards an anarchist position. Her 1937 book *Women and Revolution* investigates figures such as the Communard and anarchist revolutionary Louise Michel. Whilst praising the Spanish anarchist women's organisation Mujeres Libres (Free Women). In this book she stated that "The women of today must either ally themselves with freedom and life, or with oppression and death; either work for a brave new world, or surrender themselves, and their children, to the doomed old world." Women must awaken "to the meaning of social revolution, and how it can serve her and her children..." and to "the realisation that revolution is not exclusively man's business, no mere affair of politics, but her business...an affair of life itself – a choice between life and death."

Around this time Ethel began a relationship with the Quaker pacifist Reginald Reynolds, who took an active part in anti-imperialist work around India and Palestine. Reynolds also became involved in anarchist activity. He resigned from the ILP in 1938, because it failed to take a critical attitude towards Zionism. Ethel Mannin resigned from the ILP the following year because of the ILP's failure to thoroughly condemn Stalinism.

She took an intransigent antimilitarist line during the Second World War. In 1941 she produced a novel, *Red Rose*, which fictionalised the life of Emma Goldman, in which was not averse to criticising Goldman's cantankerousness and sometimes obnoxious behaviour. In 1944 she

---

<sup>1</sup> Meltzer, Albert. "Mannin, Ethel." *The Anarchist Library*, (2020): <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/albert-meltzer-mannin-ethel>

published a fine account of utopian visions of the future, *Bread and Roses: A Utopian Survey and Blue-Print*. I remember being lent this inspiring and thought-provoking book by another worker at the industrial laundry in Hove I was working at in the early 1970s. That year also she brought out *No More Mimosa*, a collection of 31 short stories which addressed itself to the Spanish Revolution, and dealt with anarchist figures like Goldman and Ralph Barr. It was dedicated to the Spanish anarchist Delso de Miguel.

In 1945, Mannin produced *Comrade O Comrade, or, Low-Down on the Left*, a fictionalised, witty, and satirical commentary on the British left, a book portraying high principles and multiple clay feet. Mannin does not spare the withering sarcasm in her accounts of the Communist Party, ILP meetings, her Irish hero Larry Harrigan attends. In that year she was one of the few writers to support the War Commentary editors, arrested for anti-war activity on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, and she served as Secretary of the Freedom Press Defence Committee.

In the years after the war Mannin and her husband Reg Reynolds were heavily involved in focussing on Palestine. They both insisted that opposition to the State of Israel and Zionism was not antisemitic, long before the controversies of today. Ethel wrote in her work *A Lance for the Arabs* (1963) that “It cannot be too strongly insisted that being anti-Zionist and anti-Israel is not being anti-Jewish” and that “by no means are all Jews pro-Zionist”.

In later life Ethel Mannin described herself as a Tolstoyan anarchist. In 1973 she wrote that “I have been a socialist all my adult life, from the age of 15, and now, at close of play, in the seventies, am more than ever convinced of the necessity for social revolution.”

**Ask who is the writer who has contributed most in the English language to the spread of libertarian ideas and you will get some peculiar answers, probably one of them some obscure Canadian professor whom nobody reads except as prescribed in the university curriculum. You might well get the same answer from Ethel Mannin, but for my money it is she who deserves the maximum credit, and seems to have received none that I know of. She was writing on sex and women’s liberation fifty years ago and has introduced anarchist ideas in numerous works of fact and fiction.**

**Alas, she has committed the major literary sin: her novels have been successful, and the higher critics cannot possibly evaluate her.**

**Dig into the novels of Ethel Mannin and you will find anarchism, the Spanish Revolution, Emma Goldman, women’s lib., the colonial struggle, the Arab guerrillas, all dealt with: her factual works include *Women and the Revolution* and many others.**

**At 75 she has announced she will write no more. The great quality in her novels was a zest for life. She owed a lot to her father, an old-time socialist who kept the faith. The drive for freedom, the resentment of injustice, and also the occasional ideological muddle (one of her best books was *Christianity or Chaos?*, an oddly titled book for an agnostic talking about purely secular matters) were all very typical of her British working class background. She was in her way a skilled craftsman, her trade was with words. Now she has retired, her works, of consummate craftsmanship if not great art, are there to be admired. Thank you, Ethel Mannin.**

**Albert Melzter,  
Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review No. 2 (1977)**

She died on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1984.

Stuart Christie, often a harsh critic of other personalities on the anarchist scene, lumps her in with Reg Reynolds, Herbert Read, George Woodcock and Vernon Richards, as having a deleterious effect on the movement, collectively describing them as a “coterie of Tolstoyan and Gandhi-influenced middle-class pacifists and academics” who rejected class struggle<sup>1</sup>. His *Black Flag* associate Albert Melzter would have agreed with this to an extent, but was generous enough to write: “Ask who is the writer who has contributed most in the English language to the spread of libertarian ideas and you will get some peculiar answers, probably one of them some obscure Canadian professor whom nobody reads except as prescribed in the university curriculum (a snide reference to Woodcock). You might well get the same answer from Ethel Mannin, but for my money it is she who deserves the maximum credit, and seems to have received none that I know of. She was writing on sex and

women’s liberation fifty years ago and has introduced anarchist ideas in numerous works of fact and fiction...”, writing elsewhere “Ethel Mannin the novelist in fact did a great deal of work for the anarchist movement, in particular during the Spanish struggle, and continued to give us support during the war...”

<sup>1</sup> Christie, Stuart. *Granny Made Me an Anarchist: General Franco, the Angry Brigade and Me* (2007).

# Women and the Revolution

Ethel Mannin

1938

## Chapter I – Women and the French Revolution

[...]

Had the Commune survived it must almost certainly have included women in that “universal suffrage” which was to serve the people in place of a government made up of members of the ruling classes for whom the “lower orders” had the “privilege” of voting every three or six years; almost certainly, because of the progressive communist spirit of the Commune, and because of the part women played as Communards, defending the Commune at the barricades side by side with men. It is unlikely that had the Commune survived the women who had helped to make it would have been content to have had the laws of the Commune made for them by men, or that the men themselves would deny the women in peace the equality they had gladly conceded them in the struggle. And had the Commune lived to fulfil its rich promise there would have been the gallant

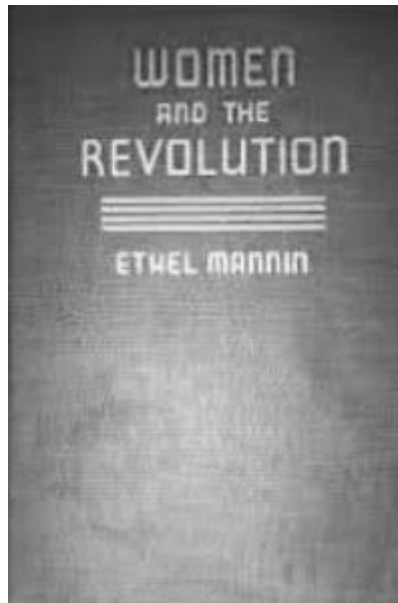
*Louise Michel*

to give courage and inspiration to the women.<sup>1</sup>

Emma Goldman has described Louise Michel<sup>2</sup> as “the greatest revolutionist France has ever known... the most inspired in the Paris Commune. The bravest and most gentle of them all.”

This remarkable woman was the illegitimate daughter of a peasant servant-woman and a son of the Dehamis family who employed her on their estate. She was brought up by the grandparents and given a good education and trained as a teacher. As a young girl she appears to have been a mixture of tomboyishness and wild spirits, and of studiousness and scholarliness. She wrote poetry from an early age, and had a feeling for music, both of which her grandfather encouraged. She was interested in revolutionary politics early, from her grandfather’s stories of the Revolution, and when she came to Paris at the age of thirty-six, to teach in a Montmartre school, inevitably she was drawn into revolutionary political circles, and became known as *La Vierge Rouge de Montmartre*. It is a comment on her character that she was known also as *La Bonne Louise*,

from the innate compassion which caused her to associate herself with charitable works, and in later years as *Mère Louise bien aimée*. Like that other passionate revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, she had intense feeling for animals, an intense hatred of cruelty, and a deep feeling for poetry and the tender and lovely things of life. Yet with all this, on revolutionary issues, she had a masculine hardness.



In appearance, too, she was what is generally called “masculine”. She had no softness of face or form, and no interest in dress. She was thin, angular, ugly.

Margaret Goldsmith describes<sup>3</sup> a portrait of her, drawn when she was over seventy, and comments that in it she “does indeed look like... a man who has been a fighter throughout his life... She wore her hair a bit longer than was usual among the emancipated women of her generation, but the rest of her head is extremely masculine. The lower part of her face reminds one of portraits of Frederick the Great.” She refers to her “high, not beautifully shaped forehead” resembling “pictures of old generals”,

and to her “very long and ugly nose”. She was straight and thin, she says, and refers to a German journalist, Teophil Zolling, who interviewed her in 1880, and who declared that she did not strike him as ugly if he tried to forget that she was a woman.

In her *Memoirs*, Louise herself tells a story relating to her “mannishness”; she was being followed one night by a man, in the streets of Paris, and when she turned to protest, and spoke to him, he was so startled by her deep masculine voice, she says, that he fled, believing she was a man disguised as a woman.

Margaret Goldsmith says that “when she began to talk, when one studied that fine ugly face more closely, something of what she had been through in her long and eventful life was communicated to the listener”.

She has been described, also, as “a strange figure, who did not seem to belong to our own prosaic age, but to the past or to the future. She went through life – that life full of conflicts, deportations, imprisonment,

<sup>1</sup> “Louise Michel”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 5 Number 2 (Summer 2025). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to the author, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> In *Seven Women against the World*, Methuen 1935.

persecution and continuous apostleship – always enveloped in a black dress, which was like a flag of despair and of revolt.”

Emma Goldman, who met her in London when she (Louise) was sixty-two, describes her in her autobiography, thus: “She was angular, gaunt, aged before her years ... but there was spirit and youth in her eyes, and a smile so tender that it immediately won my beam ... As I sat near her at our first meeting I wondered how anyone could fail to find charm in her. It was true that she cared little for her appearance. Indeed, I had never seen a woman so utterly oblivious of anything that concerned herself. Her dress was shabby, her bonnet ancient. Everything she wore was ill-fitting. But her whole being was illumined by an inner light. One quickly succumbed to the spell of her radiant personality, so compelling in its strength, so moving in its childlike simplicity. The afternoon with Louise was an experience unlike anything that had happened till then in my life. Her hand in mine, its tender pressure on my head, her words of endearment and close comradeship, made my soul expand, reach out towards the spheres of beauty where she dwelt.”

She joined the National Guard during the Commune, and fought on the barricades; she was with the Communards in their last desperate stand against the wall of the Père Lachaise cemetery, Montmartre, when the frightful massacre of 25,000 men, women and children began. She could have escaped, but gave herself up in order to release her mother who was being held as a hostage by the Government. Like her great friend Theodore Ferré, who was also arrested with the fall of the Commune, she refused to defend herself at her trial, though she fully expected that like him she would be shot, and demanded the death penalty meted out to her comrades. She was sent instead to the penal settlement of New Caledonia – a sentence which caused her to admit that she would have preferred death. She served eight years in New Caledonia, where she studied botany, taught the children of the prisoners, and, Emma Goldman writes, “became the hope and inspiration of the exiles. In sickness she nursed their bodies; in depression she cheered their spirits.”

The amnesty of 1880 brought her back to the living world with her revolutionary ardour unchanged, and she returned to France to find herself “the acclaimed idol of

the French masses”. She continued to preach revolution, her political philosophy, previously unformed, shaping now to the libertarian doctrines of Kropotkin and Bakunin. It is as an Anarchist that she goes down to posterity in revolutionary history.



Two years after her release from New Caledonia she was sent to prison for two weeks for her part in a demonstration commemorating the eighty-second anniversary of the birth of the revolutionary, Blanqui. The following year she was in trouble with the police again for her part in a hunger-march of unemployed.<sup>1</sup> She was charged with leading the marchers in raids on bakery shops. The court decided to “make an example” of her, and she was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Emma Goldman declares that she did lead the raids, and in court defended the rights of the hungry man to bread, even if he has to “steal” it. Margaret Goldsmith says that she declared that not she but *agents provocateurs* of the police were responsible for the raids.

Whichever is correct it is certain that in the court she defended the rights of the hungry to eat, and showed a contempt for the “justice” of the court which further prejudiced authority against her and resulted in the savage sentence.

The death of her beloved mother from a cholera epidemic affected her profoundly, and in her great grief she declared that now she had nothing left to live for but the Revolution.

Life had piled cruel blows upon her; she had known the bitter disappointment of the fall of the Commune, that great dream of liberty for which she had been ready to die; Theodore Ferré, whom she deeply loved, and from whom she had drawn great inspiration, had been shot; she herself had known eight years of living death in New Caledonia; Marie Ferré, her great friend, had died shortly after her release from there; and now came this other great personal tragedy. Now there was nothing left but to work to numb her grief – “Having nothing to hope and nothing to fear.” she wrote in the dedication of her *Memoirs*, “I hurry toward the goal, like those who fling away their drinking cups with the dregs in them.”

The prison governor was so filled with pity for her in her broken state that he recommended the curtailment of her sentence, but like Ernst Toller years later, and for the same reason, she refused to accept this concession; Toller refused to leave prison whilst his comrade were

<sup>1</sup> Constance Bantman, “The unemployed demonstration of 9 March 1883, a snapshot of anarchism in the early 1880s”,

still imprisoned, and Louise Michel declared that she had no more right to this pardon than the others, adding that she wished no favours at the hands of the men at present governing the country, nor did she wish to pay with a pardon for her mother's dead body.

Emma Goldman declares that she "had to be taken forcibly from prison in order to be set at liberty".

Shortly after her release she was addressing a large public meeting at Havre when she was shot at from the audience. Emma Goldman says that "the man who nearly killed her had been influenced by a priest to commit the act, but Louise tried her utmost to have him released. She induced a famous lawyer to defend her assailant and she herself appeared in covert to plead with the judge in his behalf". She asked the surgeon who attended to her at the hospital – she had been wounded behind the ear – to assure the judges that the wound was a mere scratch.

The following year she was arrested in connection with a big strike in which she was interesting herself. She was made drunk before being brought into court, the warder having offered her some strong alcohol which he assured her was weak wine mixed with water. She was incoherent in court, and was dismissed as "irresponsible". It was part of a plot on the part of

authority to have her certified as insane and sent to an asylum – a living death that would have been far worse than prison, for from its horror there would have been no ultimate release save death. The discovery of what Emma Goldman truly describes as "this fiendish plan" finally persuaded her to heed the advice of her friends and come to England.

"The vulgar French papers," says Emma Goldman, "continued to paint her as a wild beast, as *La Vierge Rouge*, without any feminine qualities or charm. The more decent wrote of her with bated breath. They feared her, but they also looked up to her as something far above their empty souls and hearts."

In England she continued her revolutionary propaganda work. In 1896 she returned to France on a lecture tour on revolutionary developments in Russia. She worked unceasingly till the end, which came in France in the year 1905, the year of the first Russian Revolution. She foresaw the Revolution to come, which would remove the Tsar and in which the soldiers would side with the people. Her last lecture was on "Anti-militarism and the Russian Revolution". She died as she had lived believing that freedom must be taken by force, and not begged for, a fighter to the end.

[...]

## Chapter XII – Women and the Spanish Revolution

Let us now consider the part of the women in the Spanish anti-Fascist struggle and the Revolution. As already indicated women fought with the men in the revolutionary struggles before July 1936, and became "miliciens" in the early days of the Civil War. From the beginning they did war-work, organized in Labour Sections by the *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), a group formed by the Anarchist trade unions. These women's Labour Sections operated Transport and Public Services in the absence of the men at the different fronts, worked in clothing and health departments, and did nursing work. Brigades of women were organized to take the place of men in all depart-menu of public life; these brigades were assisted by the workers' syndicates, who trained the women in mechanics, driving, and so forth. A leaflet distributed in the streets of Barcelona called upon women to be fighters in the rear, and pointing out that "the war we are waging is not a capitalist war; we are not out to gain land or to win laurels. Two classes and two ideologies are fighting each other; labour versus privileges."

The aims of the *Mujeres Libres* are as follows: "To emancipate women from the triple slavery of ignorance, traditional passivity and exploitation. To fight ignorance and educate our comrades individually and socially through simple lessons, conferences, talks, lectures, cinema-projections, etc. To arrive at real understanding between men and women; living together, working together and not excluding each other. We will perform

a powerful part in the revolutionary task of reconstruction, supplying nurses, teachers, doctors, artists, chemists, intelligent labourers. Something more effective than just good will and ignorance. We will liberate women from the stagnation of mediocrity."

It has to be realized that despite the fact that Spanish women may vote, until 1936 they lacked the social freedom of other European women. They were tremendously under the power of the priests who, as we have seen, through the confessional, influenced them as to how to vote; they were not expected to take part in public life; it was "not done" for them to share the cafe-life of the men, and they were kept rigidly within doors after sunset. The feminist movement for their emancipation from this social backwardness was largely initiated and organized by the *Mujeres Libres* group. What the movement had to fight was the Spanish woman's traditional "passivity"; for generations she had been brought up to hold herself aloof from the life of men in the world outside of the home; her education was even less theirs, and the Church held a powerful hold on her. Low recalls a Spanish seminary for young ladies the Revolution, "dark apartment, full of pot-plants and massive furniture with gilt texts on the brackets, the oppression of tight corsets and three petticoats and of grilled windows. The education to resignation, the Spanish woman's load of Moorish heritage." The middle classes were educated in convents for the most part, educated to look beautiful, to please

the opposite sex, and ultimately make a successful – from the material point of view – marriage. The Revolution finished all that; like the French Revolution it undermined the power of the Church, sent the bourgeoisie scurrying, brought a new and real education to women. Once again it was a story of women's emancipation marching side by side with the revolutionary movement. In the words of Lucia Sanchez Saornil, of the *Mujeres Libres*: "Groups of women have emerged everywhere and have actively organized their activity in accord with the revolutionary aims of the proletariat. . . . We have convinced them that isolated and purely feminine activity is now impossible, that they must see everything from the angle of comprehensive human aspirations for emancipation. which can be realized only in a social revolution. All of which makes it necessary for us to add our efforts to those of the workers defending our common cause. Already we can begin gathering the fruit of our labour. In Catalonia, Valencia, Alicante, Madrid, Guadalajara, in the towns and villages of the South – throughout the whole of Spain that is free from Fascist yoke, we can count on active groups of women."

This was published in August 1937; since then the *Mujeres Libres* organization has been suppressed – part of the work of the counter-revolution which suppressed the P.O.U.M. after the May Rising. But nothing short of a Fascist regime can now suppress the feminist movement itself; the women have tasted freedom and will no more tamely retire behind their grills, to be dominated by husbands, fathers, priests, than the women of England retreated from their new-found place in commerce, industry, the professions, when the War was finished. The Spanish women may retain their passion for high heels and elaborate hair-dressing and big combs, but the mantilla, with its religious symbolism, has gone for good, like the veils of the emancipated women of the East, and the foot-bandages of the Chinese women.

The Revolution gave women new marriage and divorce laws similar to those in the U.S.S.R. Marriages could be made in five minutes, without preliminary notice, and the marriage certificate reminded the husband that the woman went into marriage as his companion, with the same rights and privileges as himself, that women were the equals of men, restored by the Revolution to their

natural place in society, and that there could therefore be no sex domination.

Divorce also only took five minutes; women could divorce their husbands on the same terms as husbands their wives, and if two people wanted a divorce, mutually, it was granted without question. The only stipulation with regard to re-marriage after divorce was an interim of thirty days, in case the woman should be pregnant, in order not to confuse the paternity of the child. Mary Low observes, "The Spanish women were anxious to grab their liberty, but they had been closed up so long that they didn't know how much of it there was to be had. Often they were content with the little scraps which answered their first call. It seemed so

much to them." A girl on the staff of the *Mujeres Libres* paper told Mary Low speaking of the women, "They're so eager, and so determined to be free. But most of them don't even know what freedom means. They're not stupid, only untrained to think, uneducated except in the art of pleasing. But



they are awfully courageous, and full of determination. It's wonderful raw material." But this very girl, Mary Low records, could not bring herself to sleep with her lover when it came to the point, her defence being "after all, one can't really be expected to change overnight, can one?" Religion and the family restraint is not easily thrown over after generations.

Louise Gomez, the wife of the P.O.U.M. leader, Gorkin (who was stopped at Croydon airport when he came over to speak at an Independent Labour Party meeting for the assistance of the Spanish workers, in 1936) organized a Women's Secretariat, a Women's Regiment, classes, lectures, and centres of education and child-welfare. She attracted more than 500 women in the first week, but wives and young girls confided to Mara Low, "Of course I wasn't able to tell my husband (or father) that I was coming here; he would have had a fit. I just had to say I was coming to a sewing-circle."

It was a long time, she says, before they could make the women of the Women's Regiment understand that they must come to drill in flat heels and leave their earrings at home – and whilst waiting for members of the Directive Committee to come and lead them to the barracks they would play ring-games on the pavement,

singing and holding hands. Yet these women who had been indolent, in the Spanish feminine tradition, all their lives, in whose blood was the passivity and indolence of generations, learned to drill and shoot and take a machine-gun to pieces and reassemble it. Nobody ever fell out of the ranks. or complained of tiredness, or failed to come again, Mary Low reports. At the front the militia-women were the equal of the men both in their efficiency and in their courage.

Women came in their hundreds to the Women's Secretariat for classes ranging from socialism and their place in society to child-welfare.

Mary Low describes Louise Gomez as charming, energetic, gentle, gay. "She was big and full, and I remember her always going to and coming from something, with a warm contented face and grey fur on her arms. She was French, and not the only one." The other one she recalls was a girl called Simone who, bringing arms to Spain and unable to get past the frontier, took an aeroplane, and when the pilot refused to land in Spain, dropped from the plane with a parachute on her shoulders and machine-gun rifles strapped to her body. Afterwards I talked to a young Catalan kid, with a cropped head, who had been in the same trench with her. "She was game," he said, "but an awful wild cat, though."

Juan Brea tells the story of a militia-woman called Mica Etchebere, the wife of a captain, whom he met on the Sigüenza front, near Guadalajara. Her husband had been in command of troops there, and she had been tending the wounded; they all passed through her hands except one – and that one was her husband. After his death she passed her first-aid work over to someone else and filled his place. Sigüenza fell to the Fascists. Mica Etchebere told Juan Brea, "I was there till the last. We barricaded ourselves in the cathedral—those of us who had been trapped in the town—and determined to put up a good show for the money. We were there four days, without food or anything, firing out into the town, and dying like flies. They kept on shooting cannon balls into the cathedral. It stood up to it pretty well, but in the end the walls began to fall down on us, and we had no ammunition left at all, so those of us who were still left decided to make a run for it after dark, as we couldn't

fight any more." She and her comrades made their getaway through a thick fog; some of them ran straight into the enemy and were shot; the others scattered and reached the woods through a rain of machine-gun bullets. She was hunted for twenty-four hours before reaching the anti-Fascist lines. Only a third of those who set out from the cathedral reached home. After that she went to the Madrid front, leading a brigade of

special shock troops to look after the most dangerous sectors. They distinguished themselves by their valour in action and took several tanks from the enemy. It was Mica Etchebere's last front; she was killed a few weeks later.

A number of women to whom it had never before occurred that they might be anything but prostitutes went to the front; they weren't very good there, but it says a lot for the change of mentality which could take them out of the brothels and send them there. Some of those who remained at home took over the brothels in the same way that the factory-workers took over the factories; they turned out the proprietors, reorganized on a profit-sharing basis, formed a trade union, and applied for

affiliation to the C.N.T. And they hung up a notice requesting the patrons of the houses to treat the women as comrades....

If the Revolution triumphs the next step will be the "liquidation" of prostitution, which was effected in Russia in the early days of the Revolution. Within the first six months of the Revolution in Spain, there appeared in the Ramblas – the main boulevard – of Barcelona posters attacking prostitution, urging that it could not be tolerated in a free society, and must be finished with.

As in Russia, Revolution in Spain has given woman a new social status, and, also as in Russia, whatever happens now – short of a Fascist regime – nothing can destroy this; whatever the counter-revolution takes away from the material advantages which have been achieved for women, it cannot rob them of this new-found dignity as human beings. To borrow from Ramon Sender, the Spanish revolutionary novelist<sup>1</sup>, the women of Spain have made the revolution in their souls; they have learned to become independent and free, and always will be so.

---

<sup>1</sup> His novel of the Spanish Revolution, *Seven Red Sundays*, is published by Faber & Faber (1936) and gives should vivid

impressions of the conflicts in the revolutionary struggle, and some memorable vignettes of revolutionary women.

# The Next War and The Workers

Ethel Mannin

*Spain and the World, May 1938*

The ruling-classes have their processions galore, their Coronations, Jubilees, royal weddings and funerals, their Lord Mayor's shows, their military tournaments and tattoos, all carried out with lavish show. as befits the circumstances of pomp and power. But once a year, "in the sweet month of May, when the May hawthorns are coming into flower," the workers have their own show, all very simply carried out, as befits men and women not concerned with pomp and power. Very brave are their banners and slogans, and the speeches they make under the budding trees. "Workers of the world unite," they cry... but not until now has it occurred to them to ask with whom they should unite, and for what. This year the slogan is more elaborate, more involved. The workers of the world are being urged to unite, and, stranger still, are urging each other to unite, with Tories and Liberals and Bishops. anyone who is anti-Fascist; Unity now is all the cry; it is easy to foresee that Unity and Popular Front will outshine if not altogether replace the old Marxist slogan on this year's May Day banners, and colour this year's May Day speeches.

But the Liberals and Tories and Bishops will not march, I think, with their new-found comrades in the May Day processions, rubbing shoulders with Communists and Socialists. Will they march together in the war they are pledging themselves to unite together to fight against Fascism? And when the workers have united with the employing classes and rulers – of Parliament and Church – and are engaged in yet one more just war, the war to make the world safe against Fascism this time, a war to save the, doubtful virtue of that bedraggled hag which is the contemporary conception of democracy, when the workers are thus engaged, what precisely are they going to get out of it? Once more they will be fighting to preserve the status quo – with its dole and means-test, its exploitation of the many by the few, its criminal wastefulness and stupidity. When the Fascist enemy is defeated – what then? Will it have been worth the flow of workers' blood, that fight for the protection of interests not their own, for the land of which most of

them own not even the backyard of tenement block or jerry-built council house? Those that have survived will be thrown back into the lap of that bedraggled hag that has nothing to give them but unemployment or exploitation... flung back by the very people who urged them to unite with them, for the protection of capitalist-imperialist interests masquerading as democracy.

**And why not workers' action, direct action from the workers themselves. In field, factory and workshop, without. dependence on trade union executives and parliamentary machinery – workers' action at once to save Spain, save civilisation from capitalist-imperialist war?**

'Tis a mad world, my masters! Another strange spectacle of the May Day processions this year will be the anti-war people clinging to the Popular Front idea as a "peace alliance." Hating war and Fascism, they cry, "We must have a Popular Front of all anti-fascists, irrespective of class or political creed, so that we may make a stand against it!" Brave will be the speeches, and brave the slogans under the budding trees. Do they never pause to ask themselves how they propose to support this united front of anti-Fascists in the face of Fascist aggression? If they achieve their heart's desire with a popular front government, how do they propose to back it up against the Fascist enemy they are jointly pledged to oppose? They can only find themselves involved in one more war between capitalist-

imperialist governments, with poor little Czecho-Slovakia, perhaps, replacing poor little Belgium of 1914, and instead of the war to end war it will be the war to end Fascism, and hundreds of thousands of workers will die as they died in the first world-war for something they never possessed, and in defence of the interests which exploited them in life.

O Lord, what fools those mortals be! When will the workers of the world learn that there is no war worth the spilling of a single drop of workers' blood but the war against the capitalist system? That no war between capitalist-imperialist governments is any concern of theirs except as an opportunity to seize workers' power? When will they realise that they and they alone have the power to make wars impossible? When the lilacs were coming into flower did we not see how sweetly Inskip wooed the engineers? As an eminent K.C. recently

remarked, the government so urgently needs the workers behind it in its armaments program that it is even prepared to pay them a living wage in order to get them!

Strange how no one learns from any experience but their own – and as often as not, not even then. We have seen the Popular Front in Spain throwing into gaol those workers who wanted more out of the anti-Fascist struggle than the preservation of the status quo; we have seen it strike-breaking in France; what have the workers of any country to expect from it except reaction and the negation of their own interests? Yet Unity will be all the cry under this year's May-day banners, and those who venture to ask Unity with whom and for what will be lost voices crying in a wilderness.

"Save Spain" will figure on the banners, but how much of it will be "save Spain as part of the international

workers' struggle," and how much "save Spain as part of an international popular front against Fascism" – to save British and French imperialism?

Such questions as these the Workers assembling on May Day will do well to ask themselves under the budding trees.

And why not workers' action, direct action from the workers themselves. In field, factory and workshop, without dependence on trade union executives and parliamentary machinery – workers' action at once to save Spain, save civilisation from capitalist-imperialist war?

That is the thought to take to the parks and open spaces on May Day – Workers of world, you alone can save the world!

You – alone.

# War and Democracy

**Ethel Mannin**

*Spain and the World, 30 September 1938*

During the past few weeks there has been a nauseating flood of sentimentality, and a horrifying amount of humbug let loose. With a bland disregard for a minority's right to its nationalist self-assertion has been combined a sheep-like bleating about democratic freedom and justice. Anyone who ventures to suggest that the Sudeten Germans have a reasonable case against the Czechs, and that Hitler had just cause when in his Nuremberg speech he referred so scathingly to the humbug of the so-called democratic countries, is labelled "pro-Hitler" by the man-in-the-street, and Trotskyist or Trotsky-Fascist by the politically "informed." Backed by the Labour Party, the Communists, the Left Book Club, a new set of initials, the "I.P.C." – International Peace Campaign – has been feverishly organising mass meetings and distributing millions of leaflets demanding peace in terms of war, insisting that "the Hitler menace" be smashed now and forever. In 1914 it was Kaiserism that had to be smashed, and it was not poor little Czechoslovakia but poor little Belgium. Then it was the war to end war we were being urged to support; now it is the war to save democracy, with Hitlerism in the place of Kaiserism, the Fascists in place of the Huns. Hundreds of thousands were misled then, and the same frightful tragedy is slowly being worked out all over again, with the masses following a wolf in sheep's clothing, a wolf that calls itself peace but which is in fact leading Europe straight to the next large-scale, all-in European war.

Has the world so soon forgotten that the greatest war in human history was fought by democratic countries? What is this democracy the peoples of the world are

once more being asked to defend with their lives if necessary? If peace and democracy go hand in hand how comes it that Britain, the supreme champion of peace, has to bomb its North West Frontier so often, and send battleships to quell unrest in Jamaica? And what of Palestine? Is it any wonder that Hitler is cynical? What is this "Hitler menace" to the millions in the British Empire outside of Great Britain – a menace to their civil liberties? They have none. Democracy or Fascism it is all one to them; one master is very like another, and they who already know Democracy's concentration camps, beatings, forced labour, and imprisonments without trial, are not to be awed or moved by stories of Nazi atrocities.

But the man-in-the-street is not very well informed; he knows little or nothing of the Fascism rampant within British and French "democracy," the Fascism of Imperialism; his imagination is easily inflamed by stories of Nazi atrocities, and by the press propaganda which envisages Fascism as the greatest evil in civilisation, with Hitler as the embodiment of that evil. His sense of justice is outraged by stories of Jew-baiting and he does not stop to ask himself whether it is any worse than nigger-beating and race-baiting. And the press, the mouthpiece of our democracy, hammers away night and day, unceasingly, insisting on the menace of Hitlerism and that it must be smashed, representing Czechoslovakia as a united nation about to be dismembered by the rapacious hands of the most evil thing in the world.

Fascism is an evil thing, but it is not more evil than the system that spawned it; it is begotten by Imperialism

out of Capitalism. Nazism is not a greater evil than British Imperialism, and if we are to talk in a high-falutin' strain about "betrayal" and the violation of peace and democracy it were as well to recall the Versailles Treaty and its betrayal of the world's future peace, and its shameless violation of democratic justice. Our so-called democracy is only reaping now, in this European impasse, what our statesmen sowed then for the protection of capitalist-imperialist interests. Those who live by the sword – of parliamentary and military power – sooner or later perish by that sword; it is inevitable.

If there is a war "to save democracy" it will be *la grande illusion* all over again. To attempt to prevent war by calling Hitler's bluff as the I.P.C. would have us is to hurl Europe into the abyss; *Hitler* is not bluffing. Our statesmen are astute enough to know this. What then is the solution, the choice between the two evils, on the one hand the increased power of Fascism in Europe, on the other the horror of a world-war to crush Hitlerism? There is no solution within the existing system. Fascism, war, capitalist and imperialist oppression and exploitation masquerading as democracy, they are all evils. If war comes it will be a war between capitalist-imperialist nations fighting for the preservation of their power and their vested interests, an affair of Governments and their political and economic aspirations; it will be no affair of the

humble masses, not worth the loss of a single worker's life, British, French, German or Czech. It will not be a war of liberation; make no mistake about that; the most we can hope for from it is that it may create a revolutionary system in every country in Europe – including Soviet Russia; if the world must be plunged into a chaos and bloodshed greater even than it knew in 1914-18 – and it will be greater, for the machinery of war has diabolically "improved" since then – good can only come out of it if the workers of the world awake to the fact that here is THEIR opportunity, not merely the opportunity for statesmen and dictators, capitalists and imperialists, to fight for domination, a survival of the fittest in terms of the most powerful bully, or combination of bullies, coming out on top.

We have seen how British and French "democracy" have betrayed the Spanish people in their struggle for Freedom against Fascism. We have been warned. There is no spoon long enough to make it possible to eat with the devil with impunity. When thieves and cut-throats fall out honest folk have nothing to gain by participating in the scrap in any capacity whatsoever; on the contrary they have all they hold dear, materially and in their dreams, to lose; but whilst the brigands exhaust and destroy each other, united the masses may find and follow a path to freedom beyond the reach of governments and their hypocrisy and corruption.

# Capitalist Peace

Ethel Mannin

*Spain and the World*, 28 October 1938

The world is at peace. That is to say there is no actual world war such as we knew in 1914-18 on. There is a war of Fascist aggression in China. and in Spain, and a War against British Imperialism in Palestine. As I write there are reports of mass air-raids in China, 500 Japanese machines in one attack: Arabs have recently been killed in Palestine at the rate of thirty and forty a day, their villages bombed, their property confiscated; British troops have been "cleaning-up" Jerusalem: there have been a fresh bout of air-raids on Barcelona, and savage attacks made by the Fascists near Madrid. But the world is at peace. Peace, we know, was made instead of war at Munich when four capitalist-imperialist powers came to an agreement: if they hadn't come to this agreement there really WOULD have been war, all over the place.

Imagine the reaction of an observer from another planet coming to take a look at Earth and being assured that peace has been made, that the world was not at present engaged in war. He would only be able to conclude either that peace and war did not mean to the inhabitants

of Earth what he understood these things to mean, or that the human beings of this planet were all stark raving mad. He could only cry, "Tis a mad world, my masters!"

But why should anyone expect world-wide peace in a capitalist-imperialist world? So long as States exist they will need protection from the lust for power of other States. Power and the State are inseparable. So long as there are States, there must be war, for a State is a jealous body, possessive, grasping, ambitious. It has been suggested in various quarters that a United States of Europe would solve the question of war by the abolition of nationalist jealousies and strivings for power. But what happens to the Imperialist question under such arrangement? The coloured peoples then have not merely one Imperialist Government to fight against, German or French or Dutch or Belgian, or whatever it is, but a whole Federation of Imperialist Governments a United States of Europe would mean a united front of capitalists and imperialists, so far as the world's subject peoples are concerned – and they too are

human beings, though it is common when speaking of the rights and wrongs of suffering humanity to think only in terms of white people. The tendency is to think altogether too much in terms of races: there is only one race, the human race, some of whom are black, some white, and some yellow.

So long as there is private ownership of the world's natural riches, coal, oil, iron ore, timber, gold, and of the means of production, so long is war inevitable, because there will be the Haves and the Have-Nots among nations and individuals. In short so long as the capitalist system survives. Capitalism cannot guarantee permanent peace. It is not in its interests to do so; sooner or later, however much its statesmen may talk of peace, it is going to be in its interests to wage a war, a War of aggression – expansion is the word used nowadays – or a war for the protection of its interests.

Thus whereas it was not in British interests to go to war over Czechoslovakia, it was very much to British interests to “restore order” in Palestine, and whereas giving away slices of another state's country is one thing, giving away slices of one's own imperialist possessions is quite another. When statesmen, averting war for the time being, assert that they are peace-loving men, they mean that they are in favour of avoiding the expense of a war unless it is profitable to wage it: when it is a matter of protecting vested interests, or of colonial expansion, or of asserting the authority of a mandate, it is a case of “expense be blowed”, and human lives with it. That is why the purely pacifist case of non-violence is not enough: it is not enough to realise that war is anti-social, barbaric, and refuse to co-operate in it; non-co-operation by all means, but the need is to co-operate in the struggle against the root-causes of war. Useless to refuse to have anything to do with an evil, to abominate that evil, yet do nothing to help root it out of society. Anti-fascist fronts will never abolish war, even if they succeed in crushing fascism. Supposing that fascism is crushed in the world today, finally and forever – do we enter the millennium? Was the world so fine a place before Hitler and Mussolini came to power? Is Franco the only enemy of Spain, the Japanese the only menace in China? Supposing the Republican Government wins in Spain, and Italy and Germany become democracies once more? One set of evils will be crushed, but what of the evils that remain There will be no Fascist bosses, but the capitalist and imperialist bosses remain; there will still be unemployment, inequalities, foodstuffs destroyed in order to keep up prices whilst thousands go hungry: the workers will still be bottom dogs, earning

by their blood and sweat what others spend in their pride; there will still be the everlasting threat of war, in which the workers are called upon to pay with their lives for possessions not theirs.

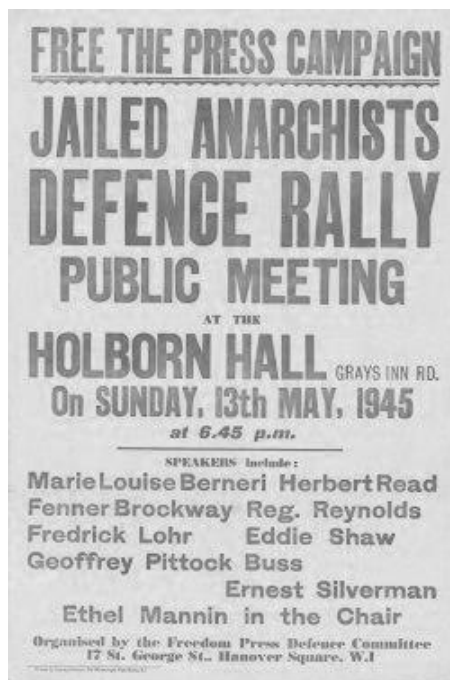
There is a great danger in regarding Fascism as the supreme evil of the world today.

Fascism is an evil, but it is, like war, merely a by-product of the fundamental evil which is the capitalist system. Supposing the crisis had not been aborted at Munich. and there had been a large-scale European war for the protection of Czechoslovakia's interests and the crushing of Fascism; millions of lives would have been lost, hundreds of thousands of them would have been non-combatants; the horrors of Guernica and Bilbao and Madrid would have been enacted in England, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia. Nazism might have been crushed, and Czechoslovakia left intact as arranged by the Versailles Treaty – when it was the conquering powers who wore the jackboots and made frontier markings on maps, and were as little

concerned with minority rights as Hitler is with the Sudetan Germans. The “just” war for “democracy” might have achieved what it set out to achieve, at the cost of millions of lives and wreckage unspeakable; what then? The status quo is preserved in the so-called democratic countries, and democracy restored to the erstwhile fascist states. How much does this benefit the workers? What does it contribute to future peace, the solution of the unemployment problem, the abolition of social inequalities, and the guarantee of security for the mass of people? Precisely nothing. The workers have nothing to gain by capitalist war or peace. At best capitalist peace merely preserves the status quo – and we know what that means; the preservation of imperialism and a system corrupt from top to top.

The workers must always serve the State; the State will never serve the workers. Make no mistake about that. The state is not concerned with the laws of mutual aid, but with the preservation of the interests of those at the top.

No Capitalist statesman can be trusted; no capitalist peace can last. There can be no security for humanity until there has been brought to pass “the withering away of the State”, and only one thing can effect that, the upheaval of social revolution. IN SHORT IF THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD REALLY WANT PEACE THEY WILL NOT HAVE TO LEAVE IT TO STATESMEN AND LEAGUES OF CAPITALIST-IMPERIALIST NATIONS, BUT MAKE IT THEMSELVES.



# War and Woolly Women

Ethel Mannin

*War Commentary: For Anarchism, January 1940*

The women's silent peace march having been forbidden by the police under the new Emergency Powers Act, it was decided to hold a mass meeting under the same auspices – that is, the Women's Peace Campaign. One of the objects of this meeting was to gain support for an appeal to the Queen to use her 'gracious power' to stop the war and call a world peace conference. The Chairman of the Women's Peace Campaign wrote and asked me if I would be one of the 'notable women'

supporting the platform. I refused – for the good socialist reason that I do not support any appeal to royalty, and because I am very tired of woolly women pacifists who go about bleating about the wickedness of bombing babies, and making such 'profound' utterances as to how much better the money spent on munitions would be spent on schools and clinics and so forth. It is time women pacifists got over the pacifist 'facts of life.' There is a terrible ennui in that repetition about bombed babies and wasted money. It is all rather like adult people getting excited about the discovery that kittens come from the mother-cat. When are war-hating women going to wake up to the political significance of war – the socialist realisation that war is an integral part of the capitalist-imperialist system, and that no bigger- and-better League of Nations, no world peace conference, is going to give lasting peace – because it cannot, so long as imperialist interests remain?

Take, for example, the reaffirmation of faith of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom as given in *Peace News* for the week ending December 15<sup>th</sup>: 'We recognise that the Governments of the world have persistently refused to use peaceful means for the adjustment of international disputes and for the remedying of injustices ... In this moment of chaos we believe the essential dignity and sanity of mankind, and we believe that out of the present disorder a new and better world can and will arise ..... We urge that the Governments of the neutral countries should at this time with patience and with persistence seek avenues for mediation, taking opportunities to open the way to negotiation. And more especially we appeal to the

President of the United States of America to call a conference of all neutral countries, having as its aim the putting forward of recommendations to the belligerent countries for the ending of conflict on such terms as will secure a just and durable peace.'

Can woolliness go much further? So long as there are rival imperialisms there can be no peaceful adjustments; there must and will always be wars. How can a new and

better order arise out of the present conflict – short of world revolution? But world revolution is a phrase which strikes terror to the heart of fully ninety per cent. of pacifists. Certainly the Women's Peace and Freedom league does not stand for world revolution, any more than the Peace Pledge Union, or the Women's Peace Campaign. And do they really believe that the governments of neutral countries can find a means of ending the present conflict 'on such' terms as will secure a just and durable peace?' Do they really still pin their faith to another League of Nations, another Kellogg Pact? I am afraid they do – despite the farce of the League of Nations

throughout its history, despite the fact that, as John Scanlon points out in his sardonic little new book, *But Who has Won?* 'armament firms will agree that in the last twenty years only one thing has stimulated recovery in their business more than a disarmament conference, and that was the signing of the Kellogg Peace Pact.'

Three weeks after she had signed that pact, renouncing all wars, America ordered fifteen new cruisers – just as Mr. Chamberlain, as soon as he got back from Munich, where it was agreed that England and Germany would 'never again' take up arms against each other, plunged us into an armaments' race unequalled in history. Yet they still go on, these well-meaning, oh-so-earnest, ladies, babbling of peace pacts and world conferences and a 'lasting peace' between governments with rival interests. "Women Must Awaken to Save Humanity!" cries Vera Brittain,<sup>?</sup> and 'The Freedom for which we are striving today is of far wider significance, (than the feminist struggle of the past) namely, the freedom of all peoples to live in peace and security,' declares the Woman Chairman of the Women's Peace Campaign. All peoples, lady? Are the Indian masses to live free of

**It is not women who must  
awaken to save  
humanity, ladies, but *the*  
*international working*  
*class movement*. Women  
have their part to play in  
this, but it cannot be  
isolated from the  
revolutionary working-  
class struggle generally.  
It is not a feminist issue,  
but a socialist one.**

the British Raj, and the African peoples free of British and French and Dutch and Belgian and German imperialisms? Are the Arabs to have freedom from the British? Is Eire to have her six counties in a united Ireland finally free of British domination? In whose peace are the oppressed races to live, Lady? An imperialist peace, or the peace of their own independence? What security are they to be offered the imperialist humbug of the mandate system? Women must work 'for the new social order which alone will make peace a reality,' you say. That's true enough, but do you mean it? Are you really, preaching revolutionary socialism? Or merely, as I suspect a new social order based on the same old capitalist system, an order which the more it changes the more it is the same? It is not women who must awaken to save humanity, ladies, but *the international working class movement*. Women have their part to play in this, but it cannot be isolated from the revolutionary working-class struggle generally. It is not a feminist issue, but a socialist one.

And it is in this perpetual stopping short this idea of the socialist position that the mass of women pacifists wander off into wooliness. Sending messages to the Queen isn't going to help the anti-war struggle one iota; royalty are the apex of that system which breeds wars. When the Queen of Holland and the King of Belgium rushed round to each other trying to find a solution to the present conflict, do you really imagine for one moment that it is because they are pacifists? Any more than Mr. Chamberlain spoke as a pacifist at Munich. They are all prepared to make wars when it suits their imperialist purpose. No king or queen, no government, no president, wants war if it can be avoided, because war is bad economics; but every member of the ruling classes is prepared to wage war when capitalist-imperialist purpose cannot be served without it. Let's have no illusions about that. They all say they don't want war, didn't want this war; Chamberlain said it, Daladier said it, Hitler said it; and they didn't want it,

but they have got it because under the existing regime there is no other way of consolidating imperialist positions and achieving imperialist ends. The British and French Empires have to be protected, along with British and French economic interests, and German imperialism has to expand, and her economic position made secure. This like all capitalist-imperialist wars, is a trade war, ladies; the issues are markets, and pounds, shillings and pence, and if you really think that these competing nations can sit round a table and come to a lasting agreement not to fly at each other's throats when the economic situation demands it every generation or so, it is time somebody took you all aside and explained to you the basic nature of something called the capitalist system.

Women have a part to play in the anti-war struggle all right, but it must be alongside the men. Even the *Daily Telegraph* admitted the other day that the success or otherwise of this war rested upon the shoulders of industry – that is to say of the workers, who produce the world's goods, and the munitions of war. *Power is in their hands, and it is they who need to awake*, not these muddle-headed, well meaning female pacifists. *Workers' action can stop this war*; without the consent of the workers it cannot possibly go on, since it is they who turn out the food, the munitions – and the manpower that feeds the guns. It is the world's workers who sanction wars and make them possible. It used to be said that war is a thing that were the people wise kings would not play at; today war is a thing that were *the workers* wise governments could not play at....

They would do better, these woolly women, to stop the sob-stuff about bombed babies, and instead of sending messages to the Queen, cultivate a knowledge of economics, and direct their propaganda to the workers to use their power and bring about the new social order in the only way it can be brought about – through direct action on the part of the international working-class movement.

**Ethel Mannin the novelist in fact did a great deal of work for the anarchist movement, in particular during the Spanish struggle, and continued to give us support during the war.**

**I would like to recall in connection with Ethel Mannin, once on a train journey discussing anarchism with a Communist shop steward and his young wife. He knew nothing of it beyond party line defamations (wasn't it Trotskyism?) – she, on the contrary, knew quite something of the subject, and was quite proud to think that she, for once, could carry on a political conversation while her husband was at a total loss. (She was not unaware how maddened he was). He asked her, amazed, What do you know of Alexander Berkman? When she asked if I had met him she smiled and explained that she was not as dumb as he evidently thought she was. I realised – as much from the occasional mistakes she made as the from the general knowledge of anarchism she showed – that she was a reader of Ethel Mannin, who had come to her political books via her novels, and indeed, probably learned a lot from some of her better novels too. I naturally did not give this away to the husband, who was probably the better for the chastening experience. Before this I might have criticised Ethel Mannin's emotional approach to anarchism, but not since.**

**– Albert Meltzer, *The Anarchists in London 1935-1955* (1976)**

# This Reconstruction Business

Ethel Mannin

*War Commentary: For Anarchism, mid-July 1942*<sup>1</sup>

The British are a very curious people. Once, you may remember, they were going to hang out their washing on the Siegfried Line; nothing much may be said to have come of that except a short-lived popular song success. Now the popular theme-song would appear to be,

The more we are defeated

The more sanguine we will be!!

Every fresh defeat is followed by a fresh wave of optimism, and renewed reconstruction and retribution talk. Once it was the U.S.S.R. that was going to save us; not it is the U.S.A. Once it was air supremacy, now, it seems, it is the long-talked of and long-agitated-for Second Front. The ejection of the British from Norway and France is now old history; since then there has been Greece, Crete, Malaya, Singapore, Burma, Libya. Said the *News Chronicle* after the fall of Tobruk, "Whenever we have come up against Hitler's forces, or against the Japanese, there has been the same monotonous record of defeat." Back in February last a writer in *The Observer*, (London), was pointing out that there was 'no Divinely appointed ruling to the effect that the British shall never lose a war.' That was after the fall of Singapore. The 'dismal record', as the *News Chronicle* called it goes on, and still the British babble o' green fields – the green fields of post war reconstruction, that land fit for heroes of which we heard so much in the last world-war (the one that was to end war, if you remember). With Rommel gathering his forces for what must almost certainly be the decisive battle of Egypt, with Alexandria and Suez threatened (no sooner had Rommel swept on into Egypt after the fall of Tobruk than the *Daily Telegraph* hastened to assure its readers that if Alexandria fell it would not close the Mediterranean to the Allies—there were other ports available) we find the *Daily Telegraph* for July 11<sup>th</sup> detailing plans of 'six-track highways linking London with every other great city, running through a series of green belts' as 'the foundation of post-war replanning.' Ministers and M.P.'s are always

telling us, at austerity banquets, how, after the war, public schools are going to be made really public, so that every errand-boy may have an old school tie and, to be hoped, a varsity accent; how many country houses, the stately homes of England are to be handed over to the nation, and a good time, generally, to be had by all. Suggestions on the design, planning and equipment of houses and flats, after the war, were invited by a special subcommittee set-up by the Ministry of Health's

Central Housing Advisory Committee quite early this year.

During the last war there was the same confident talk, the same fine promises; and when it was all over, we had what was called a 'Reconstruction Government.' We had two million unemployed, a trade slump, and a nightmare of ribbon development along the new by-passes, desecrating the English countryside. Men wearing Mons ribbons hawked matches in the gutter, ex-officers turned the handles of barrel-organs and tried to sell vacuum cleaners from door to door. . . . But the masses have no memory. Or have they? Not even politicians can fool all the people all the time, and pie in the sky is all very well, but when the bread

gets worse, and the eggs disappear finally in the Great Egg-Muddling Scheme (eggs, we are told, are going to be scarce 'during the next two years of war.' Surely this is a misprint for wars will be scarce during the next two years of eggs—in that visionary era of prosperity ahead of us?) the pie in the sky may become less palatable. It is not, after all very nourishing fare.

Reconstruction promises, and retribution threats – conferences of the United Nations to be called to settle war-guilt, and punish with utmost rigidity of the law,' to use Mr. Brendon Bracken's words, those responsible for atrocities, such conferences and tribunals will be presided over, no doubt, by Dr. Temple and Cardinal Hinsley – all made in the assumption that in the face of evidence to the contrary the United Nations will win this war between rival Fascisms. . . . When the last outpost of Empire totters there will still be British ministers to babble o' green belts, and how many hens per head

**We need  
reconstruction, all  
right, but a  
reconstruction not  
dreamed of in the  
politicians'  
philosophy. We need  
reconstruction from  
the bottom, from the  
common people, not  
from the top**

<sup>1</sup> Republished in *Why?*, August-September 1942. (*Black Flag*)

the backyard poultry-keeper (having been previously advised to keep hens and help the nation's egg supply) is to be allowed to keep. . .

But by then, perhaps, the masses will come out of their press and radio hypnotized coma and realize that it is not the hens' necks that are in need of wringing, but the politicians'; that, to parody John Ball, things will never go well in England (or anywhere else) so long as there be politicians and governments. So long as there exists the monstrous machine called the State to grind the masses into submission by which it is kept alive – like some hideous monster that thrives on human beings.

We need reconstruction, all right, but a reconstruction not dreamed of in the politicians' philosophy. We need reconstruction from the bottom, from the common people, not from the top. It is not what sort of government we are to have after the war, but how to get rid of all centralized government. The need is for a people's reconstruction program – which can only be effected through workers' control of industry through their own syndicates, and to hell with trade-union bosses, along with the politicians. In short, the reconstruction represented by complete social revolution. All else is mere reformism. 'A socialist Britain now!', cries the I.L.P., and, as Damon Runyon would say, it means nothing, it does not mean anything. The Labour Party has been talking loosely of 'socialism' for years, and increasingly since the war. The I.L.P. wants 'a workers' government' . . . as though Russia was not enough. It clamours in Marxist language

for 'a dictatorship of the proletariat', and dictatorship is an ugly word, and one which can never have anything to do with freedom. No need to go to Stalinist Russia for example; the T.U.C. is a pretty good example of the dictatorship of the proletariat – a dictatorship that refuses to support strikes in war-time so as not to hinder the capitalist-imperialist war-effort.

Whether or not this country after the war is in the position to carry out its reconstruction program for which so many blueprints are now being made, is of no importance whatsoever; if it is in a position – which would seem highly doubtful – the whole thing can amount to no more than so much reformism, whatever government may sponsor it. The basic evils will remain untouched, the many still exploited by the few. The only reconstruction of any real lasting value to the masses is *reconstruction of the whole social system into a stateless society* – that is to say an anarchist society in which men are not governed but govern themselves in the natural discipline of a true communism, whose creed is not competition but co-operation, not Marxism but mutual aid. Such a reconstruction flourished in Catalonia for a short time during the Civil War, until its superb, exciting promise was smashed by the Republican Government and the Stalinists In unholy alliance. Such a reconstruction could flourish in this country if the people had the will to emancipate themselves from the T.U. bosses on the one hand and politicians on the other....

## ***Bread and Roses: An Utopian Survey and Blue-print***

**Ethel Mannin**

1944

### **I: Utopia – The Everlasting Dream**

Throughout the ages, from the earliest times, men of all nations have dreamed of that 'ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants exist under perfect conditions'. What constitutes 'perfect conditions' is obviously a matter of personal preferences and prejudices, but there is a common basis to the visionary dream in all its forms — the increase of human happiness, or, perhaps, more accurately, well-being — the greatest good for the greatest number, whether it is the Golden Age of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, or the confused contemporary dreams of a 'brave new world'.

Plato's influence upon the Utopian dream has, of course, been enormous. Re-reading his *Republic* today it is very strongly brought home to one that not without good reason has he been called 'the father of Fascism'; his insistence on the State, his disregard for personal freedom, and much in his attitude to women is what we today call 'Fascist'. Plutarch's conception of the ideal commonwealth as visualised in his *Life of Lycurgus* is even more so, Lycurgus being the complete dictator.

Thomas Campanella, in the seventeenth century, is, in *The City of the Sun*, in the same Platonic Fascist tradition. Bacon, contemporary with Campanella, in his *New Atlantis* was less concerned with government, and saw the progress of science as the basic source of human happiness: whilst Sir Thomas More, over a century earlier than Bacon, owes something to Plato in his conception of government, but had a more human and a broader vision, and it was he who gave to this dream of the Ideal Commonwealth the name of Utopia, from two Greek words meaning Nowhere. In the seventeenth century we get Winstanley's socialist dream of a commonwealth in which money is abolished along with private ownership, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, with the State supreme authority and money its life-blood, Harrington's *Oceana*, with its redistribution of landed property, which was a part, though only a part, of Lycurgus's programme. At the end of the nineteenth century there was Edward Bellamy's picture of a socialist America in his *Looking Backward*, and William Morris's picture of a socialist England in his

*News from Nowhere*, both of them a break with the State conception of government. The twentieth century has given us H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, but this again is in the Platonic tradition; and from the late J. D. Unwin comes, posthumously, and incomplete, a conception of a monarchist new society called *Hopousia*, a name derived from a Greek word meaning Where. Then we have a kind of blue-print for an English Utopia in Sir Richard Acland's book, *How It Can be Done* — which should have been sub-titled, 'Socialism Without Tears' — and a tremendous spate of White Papers on post-war reconstruction, and booklets and pamphlets issued in series under such titles as *Target for Tomorrow*, *Oxford Pamphlets on Home Affairs*, *Re-Building Britain Series*, *Fabian Research Series*, *Reconstruction Digests*, *Changing Britain*, *Common Wealth Bulletins*, *Tomorrow Booklets* — to mention only a few.... It is enough to drive one back to the social satires of Swift and Butler — if not right back to Aristophanes!

But satire is unconstructive, and however tedious and limited the White Papers and blue-prints they are an expression of the old, deep, ineradicable dream. Unfortunately, where those two great Englishmen, Sir Thomas More and William Morris, saw the dream whole, our present-day Planners — to use the current word — concentrate on details, each on his favourite reform — better housing, equal education, pensions for all — a brave new world constructed on the crumbling foundations of the bad old world. And with all this orgy of 'planning' and 'reconstruction' where, outside, perhaps, of Priestley's play, *They Came to a City*, is the authentic vision? Priestley may be basing his vision upon an illusion of the U.S.S.R., but it still remains a vision. Lenin had a vision; the Spanish anarchists during the 1936–8 Civil War had a vision; but in this country, it would seem, Utopia is to be translated into terms of the Beveridge Report and Mr. Churchill's uninspired programme of 'houses, jobs, security' — as though all that human beings needed for happiness was the roof overhead, employment, freedom from want. As though men had abandoned the dream that they came to a city — a free city of the sun.... Well might they cry, 'We asked for a dream, and ye give us a White Paper!'

For some time past, now, there has been a murmuring amongst the people, and that 'things have got to be different' is the general expression of that murmur. 'We can't go back to 1939,' is how Richard Acland defines the attitude of the common people; Priestley protests

against the defeatist 'We-must-have-changes-but-there-won't-be-any' attitude; he himself sees the 'signposts' to the needed changes in Acland's programme. Whether or not the mass of people believe in their hearts that there won't be any changes — any real changes — I, personally, would not be prepared to say; nor do I believe that Acland's proposals would give us the real changes. But that a very strong feeling persists, throughout the working-classes and the lower middle-classes, that 'things have got to be different —

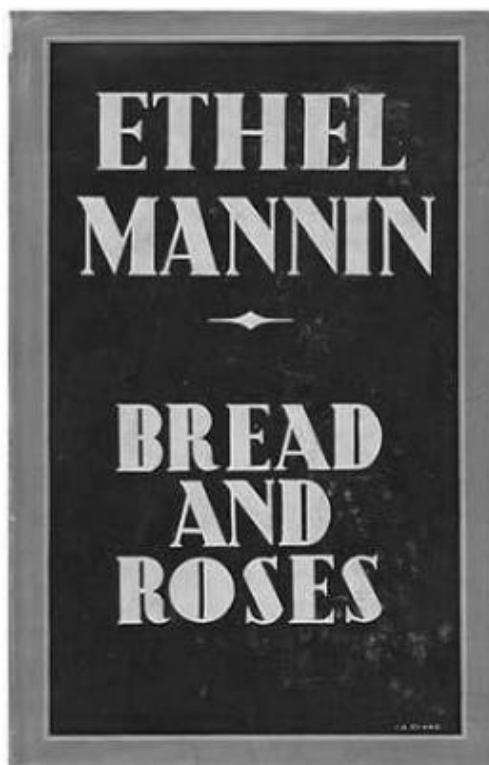
somehow', seems to me undeniable. The Beveridge Report, with its provision for human beings 'from the womb to the tomb to use the popular derisive phrase concerning it, and all the White Papers and blue-prints of the Planners, is the anxious answer to this murmur amongst the common people.

But though the people murmur, the politicians have no vision. The people ask for a brave new world, and they are offered homes — 'pre-fabricated', of all ghastly notions — employment, security, all the old make-shifts. For all their talk the politicians are not concerned to rebuild Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land; they have no vision in which they see 'this green England reborn, waking in the cool of morning with the dew upon it ... every man in his own sanctuary of the spirit, holding

steadily to the whole through the detail.' They are Planners who, fundamentally, have no plan.

Collect material from far and wide, and sort it all out into neat little heaps — education, housing, public health, social services, the Scott and Uthwatt reports, taxation, 'the coal problem', 'the problem of population', 'the economics of peace'; collect it from the Common Wealth people, the Fabians, the Labour Party, the Communists, the British Council, the British Association for Labour Legislation, the London Council for Social Service, the Association for Education in Citizenship, the Council for Educational Advance — this, that and the other party, council, society, association — collect it and sort it and summarize it, until you are all but engulfed in it and your head spins, and *still* it does not make a plan — in the sense that Plato's *Republic*, Plutarch's Sparta under Lycurgus, More's *Utopia*, were plans. It no more makes a plan than a heap of leaves makes a tree. It is not even a Paradise on paper. It has no pattern.

'Modern Utopianism', writes H. J. Massingham in his *The Tree of Life* 'makes no attempt to go outside the



terms of reference to the existing order or disorder. The Doctrine of Creation is completely outside it....'

In this book it is proposed to go outside those terms of reference, and attempt to offer 'a doctrine of Creation'. It is proposed to hold steadily to the whole through the detail.

Utopia is the everlasting dream of the Good Life in the heart of man.

## VII: Consumption and Exchange in Utopia

Any suggestion of the abolition of money always rouses such a storm of ridicule that it would seem as well to remind the scornful reader at the outset that there is nothing new in the idea. Aristophanes had it in 414 B.C. when he wrote his *The Birds*. In the Cloud-Cuckoo-Borough of that birds' Utopia, Euelpides explains to Hoopoe, 'Money is out of the question; we don't use it.' Plutarch tells us that in Sparta under Lycurgus money was banished. Sir Thomas More had the no-money idea in the sixteenth century, Gerrard Winstanley in the seventeenth, and William Morris and Edward Bellamy in the nineteenth.

More wrote of his Utopians that 'the use as well as the desire of money being extinguished, much anxiety and great occasions of mischief is cut off with it'. He refers to them 'living in common, without the use of money'. He believed that the abolition of money would abolish crime as well as poverty, and pointed out, 'Men's fears, solitudes, cares, labours, and watchings, would all perish in the same moment with the value of money; even poverty itself, for the relief of which money seems most necessary, would fall... so easy a thing would it be to supply all the necessities of life, if that blessed thing called money which is pretended to be invented for procuring them, was not, really the only thing that obstructed their being procured!'

In his Utopia More had every city divided into four, with a market-place in the middle of each where the goods produced were sorted and distributed to the appropriate store-houses, 'and thither every father goes and takes whatsoever he or his family stand in need of, without either paying for it, or leaving anything in exchange'. There is no reason for giving a denial to any person, since there is such plenty of everything among them; and there is no danger of a man's asking for more than he needs; they have no inducements to do this, since they are sure that they shall always be supplied. It is the fear of want that makes any of the whole race of animals either greedy or ravenous; but besides fear, there is in man a pride that makes him fancy it a particular glory to excel others in pomp or excess. But by the laws of the Utopians there is no room for this, and as they all 'content themselves with fewer things, there is great abundance of all things amongst them.'

Winstanley regarded trading, buying and selling, as the real fall of the human race, not 'the righteous law of

It is also the sanity, the basic wisdom, in the mind of man under the rubble that civilisation, with its industrialisation and its illusion of progress, has imposed.

'Things have got to be different.' We are agreed upon that. In the following chapters we will consider what sort of things, and how they could be different, to the common advantage.

creation', but 'the law of the conqueror'. He wanted 'this cheating device of buying and selling cast out 'among the rubbish of kingly powers. In his Utopia people were to work according to their ability and take – from the common storehouses – according to their need. He lacked the good Sir Thomas's faith in human nature, however, for there was to be, as we have seen earlier, first reprimand and then punishment for those who gave too little and took too much. People were to be free to produce in their own homes or in public workshops, which were also training centres for boys who did not wish to follow their father's trade, 'or that of any other master'. There were to be two kinds of storehouses, those for raw products, such as corn, wool, etc., and those for manufactured articles. Anyone attempting to buy or sell was to be subjected to severe punishment. To sell land, or the produce of it, was to be punishable with death. Merely calling the land one's own was punishable with twelve months of forced labour, and the guilty was to have his words branded on his forehead! No one was to hire labour, or let himself out for labour on hire: 'Whoever requires assistance may avail himself of the services of young people, or such as are specified by the labour overseers as "servants". Anyone infringing this rule will have to undergo twelve months' forced labour.' Gold and silver were not to be coined, but might be worked up for domestic utensils – dishes, cups, etc. Money could be used in transactions with other countries which insisted on payment in that form. Winstanley regarded money as the 'cause of ail wars and oppressions'.

The people of the City of the Sun had little use for money or commerce; they refused to take money for goods they exported, preferring to take in exchange 'those things of which they are in need'. They sometimes bought with money, and the young people were amused at the number of things received in exchange for small sums of money, but the old men were not amused, being 'unwilling that the State should be corrupted by the vicious customs of slaves and foreigners'.

Two hundred years later Bellamy wrote in his *Looking Backward*, ‘Money was essential when production was in many private hands, and buying and selling was necessary to secure what one wanted. It was, however, open to the obvious objection of substituting for food, clothing, and other things, a merely conventional representative of them. The confusion of mind which this favoured, between goods and their representative, led the way to the credit system and its prodigious illusions. Already accustomed to accept money for commodities, the people next accepted promises of money, and ceased to look at all behind the representative for the thing represented. Money was a sign of real commodities, but credit was but the sign of a sign/ Under such a system, he pointed out, periodic crises were inevitable. In his Utopia there were ‘no national, State, county or municipal debts, or payments on their account... no revenue service, no swarm of tax assessors and collectors’, and by this disuse of money ‘the thousand occupations connected with financial operations of all sorts, whereby an army of men was formerly taken away from useful employments’, were saved.

William Morris, in his *News from Nowhere*, shows the free distribution of goods in market-place and shop, makes one of his Utopians observe that ‘as there is no buying or selling, it would be mere insanity to make goods on the chance of their being wanted.... So that whatever is made is good, and thoroughly fit for its purpose’, and left it at that, as though it were something too simple, and from the Utopian point of view too obvious, to merit discussion.

To the Utopians it is obvious that money is a sham; that the only real wealth is the land and what it, directly or indirectly, produces. It seems to the younger ones, who have grown up in the ideal commonwealth, droll that there was ever a time when wealth was thought of in terms of money, and that money was not silver or gold but mere paper, and that in a world of plenty people starved and went homeless and in rags because they had not sufficient of these pieces of paper to procure the necessities of life.

**To the Utopians it is obvious that money is a sham; that the only real wealth is the land and what it, directly or indirectly, produces.**

‘Were the people all mad?’ they demand, and it is difficult for them to grasp that what seems to them a tremendous game of make-believe was taken seriously as ‘the economic system’.<sup>1</sup> The older Utopians remember the passing of the money system during the transitional period of change-over from the old order to the new. First of all food was distributed free, and when people got used to this innovation and ceased to think it extraordinary, more and more things — both goods and services — were gradually made available without the exchange of money. All travel was made free, and of course all education and medical services, and then more and more goods, after food, clothes, and so on, till the people got used to doing without money, and there ceased to be any use for it at all.

But barter, it should be emphasised, was never at any time the Utopian solution to the problem of consumption and exchange. Barter they regarded as absurd as money, for how are the values of things to be

assessed? The matter cannot be better summed up than by Mr. Robert Mennell in an address delivered in 1933.<sup>2</sup> He said, “‘But,” people say, “money is necessary as a medium of exchange, a common denominator. We cannot barter, so we must have a common equivalent.” Think of any two things, the contents of a glass of water and the contents of the Bible, for instance. What is the common denominator in cash? How many pieces of pastry equal a piece of poetry? What is the common denominator between a horse and a house, between clothes and clocks, between a bunch of narcissus and a Nazi uniform? It is absolute moonshine. There is no sense in it at all, and yet we all accept the idea without question. The truth is that at a certain moment, in a certain place, to a certain person a certain thing has a certain value. For example, to a naked, starving, penniless and homeless man clothing, food, and shelter are of infinite value. But that value can only be expressed in terms of the things themselves, not in terms of another thing called money, which, so far as the man is concerned, does not exist’.

Money values cannot be other than false. If all the diamonds mined were released on to the market they would be of no more value than glass beads; their price

<sup>1</sup> A writer in *The Times* (January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1937) referred to Sir Robert Peel’s famous, ‘What is a pound?’ and observed that he ‘would have had great difficulty in defining our pound at the present time, except as “a visionary abstraction” for it has no material existence’.

René Clair, years ago, in his satiric film, *Le Dernier Milliardaire*, showed how high finance consisted of buying

something that didn’t exist with something you hadn’t got ... In that film, it may be remembered, a patron at a cafe paid for his drinks with a hen, and received a couple of eggs in exchange, the money system of the country having ceased to operate.

<sup>2</sup> At the Guildhouse, 1933. Reprinted in a Guildhouse publication entitled *What Should I Do About War?*

is only kept up by giving them a false scarcity value.<sup>1</sup> Why should pearls be any more costly than blackberries? They are both natural products, and the native who dives for them in shark-infested waters lives and dies in poverty in spite of the great sums secured for them by the white man to whom he trades them; the native himself thinks nothing of them; he knows that actually they *are* nothing – grit in an oyster's shell, surrounded by the oyster's protective mucous secretion. A mink coat costs anything from two hundred pounds upwards; it can cost a thousand pounds or more, and what is it? A number of animal skins sewn together – and who is it, and what is it, that determines that the skin of this small, wild, evil-smelling animal is so much more valuable than the skins of rabbits and squirrels? At the moment of writing a small bunch of violets costs five shillings, and this is also the price of a meal, but a restaurant proprietor, even if he wished to have a bunch of violets to give his wife, would not give you a meal if you took him the violets. And who is it and what is it that determines that a meal and a bunch of violets are each 'worth' five shillings? As Mr. Menzell observes, it is all moonshine, a mere fiction, the most fantastic make-believe.

And it is a make-believe to which the Utopians do not subscribe. They have no use in their sane society for mad-house economics. The abundance of the earth is theirs, and the fulness thereof. It amazes and bewilders them that people in the pre-Utopian era did not see a fact so palpably clear as that money, far from bringing producer and consumer together, keeps them apart. In our present society it takes a world-war – with all its horrors – to find employment for everyone. In peacetime homeless human beings slept out in the open, in cities full of fine buildings full of empty rooms; they starved whilst foods for which there was no sale went bad in shops and stores; they went in rags whilst clothes deteriorated in the shops, went 'shop-rotten'. These people starved and were homeless and went in rags not because there was not enough food or clothing or shelter to go round, but simply because they had no tokens to exchange for these things, and they lacked these tokens because they lacked work.

At this point those who cannot visualise a society in which there is no money system and no barter get very angry and demand, 'Are people to plunder when they lack money for the necessities of life? Aren't you confusing the issues? The problem of unemployment has nothing to do with the money system; it is a question of supply and demand, of production and markets'....

'The question of markets.' The world's perpetual preoccupation – as though the business of living were

not preoccupation enough! Abolish money and you abolish this 'question of markets', which is only another way of saying this question of profits. When there is no money system there cannot be any exploitation of labour and raw materials for private profit, and instead of being 'everywhere in chains' Man is set free to take his part in production for the common good. Then, as Morris says, only the goods which are really needed are produced; there ceases to be any need for mass-production and competitiveness, and Man is released from the domination of the machine and is free to make it what it should be – his servant. When nothing is for sale money obviously ceases to have any use. And in Utopia nothing is for sale, neither goods nor labour.

Certainly at this point comes the demand, both horrified and incredulous, 'Do you mean that we are expected to believe in a community in which people work for nothing?'

But what would be the point of working for money if money will not buy anything?

And *who* is to assess the value of a man's work? And how is it to be assessed? In our present society the miner, engaged in work which is dangerous, unpleasant, and of vital value to the community, gets on an average £5 a week and less; an exiled European boy-king gets £2,000 a month. The inequalities in payment for work are blatant and grotesque. In war-time men go to sea, with the risk of being torpedoed or bombed or meeting a mine, for £12 a month, whilst members of parliament draw £600 a year – four times as much as the men who risk their lives. Fifty shillings a week was until recently considered an adequate wage for the agricultural worker – most vital of all productive workers. A shorthand typist is paid £3 a week and upwards; a hospital nurse 25s. It doesn't make sense. The truth being, as Kropotkin pointed out<sup>2</sup>, 'Services to society *cannot* be valued in money. There can be no exact measure of value (of what has been wrongly termed exchange value) nor of use value, in terms of production.' He takes the case of mine workers, and asks who is to be considered the most valuable worker – the colliers who hew the coal, or the engineer without whom they would dig for it in the wrong places. The one worker is as valuable as the other; there can be no real assessment of respective values. No law can apply save the rational one of 'from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs', which we have already postulated as a basic principle of an Utopian society.

'But if everybody can get what they want for nothing obviously no one will do any work!'

If nobody did any work then there would be nothing for anyone – no food or clothes or houses or furniture, and

<sup>1</sup> 'The desolate Namaqualand coast is so rich in diamonds that known deposits have been concreted in, and all working confined to the State diggings at Alexander Bay so that the

world diamond market should not be broken' (*Evening Standard*, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944).

<sup>2</sup> In his *Conquest of Bread*.

humanity would die out. But humanity is not like that. It has the will to live. The one great basic right is the right to live – and that is a right which our present society, with its slumps and depressions and unemployment problems, denies. We talk about the right to work; Utopia insists on the right to live. The difference is fundamental.

We have already seen that in Utopia the stress is not on bigger and better employment, but on bigger and better unemployment – that is to say leisure.<sup>1</sup> The abolition of the money system makes this possible. In our present society any folly and waste will be excused on the grounds that ‘it all makes work’. In Utopia they are not concerned to make work, but to make leisure. And in their work everything they make or produce is for use, not profit. But, as we have seen, there is no question of applying the harsh principle of ‘whoso will not work neither let him eat’. Jesus, it may be remembered, did not so insist, but urged that we should consider the lilies of the field, that toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not so arrayed....

In our present society people work in order to live; in Utopia they work because complete idleness is intolerably boring, and because of the creative need in everyone, and because people will do with pleasure voluntarily what is tedious to do under compulsion, whether the compulsion be authoritarian or economic. In Utopia there is no compulsion of any kind; people work because it is a natural human activity.

You do not believe this? You believe that if you could have everything you wanted without lifting a finger you would not work? That you would take everything from society and give nothing in return? ‘No, no, ‘you probably protest, ‘of course not; I personally wouldn’t – without a job of some sort I should be bored to death, apart from the sense of moral responsibility, not wanting to be a parasite.... But look at the parasites in our present society! Remove the economic necessity to work, and instead of a privileged minority of idle rich you will have the idle masses, and an exploited minority who have a social conscience and feel themselves under a moral compulsion to work.

Let us take this very common argument point by point. In the first place why should you assume – so conceitedly! – that you are different – that whereas *you* would work without any economic necessity to do so others wouldn’t? Why should you assume that because

*you* would be ‘bored to death without work of some sort, other people wouldn’t be, but would enjoy complete idleness indefinitely? We have discussed the recreative value of idleness, but it obviously only has that recreative value when it is a change from its antithesis – occupation. We are agreed that in a leisured civilisation idleness is an ‘opportunity of the spirit’, an enrichment, but the spirit devoted to idleness exclusively would lose the capacity for enrichment, for lack of creative outlet. Out of the depths of an insufferable ennui would come the cry:

‘What pleasure have we of our changeless bliss?’

The pleasure of idleness exists only by contrast with occupation. It is a great joy to down tools and abandon oneself to the simple animal pleasures of the five senses on a fine May morning – the joy of truancy and of change, such as the always idle person cannot know. It is true that in our present society there are

completely idle people who pass their days eating, sleeping, gossiping, and in idle amusement, but you have only to look at their faces to realise the utter boredom and emptiness of their days, filling in the time between one meal and the next; most of them drink heavily — what else is there to do? How else can the tedium of the empty idle hours be overcome? Their lives are utterly lacking in satisfaction.

It is probable that in the transitional period from the old order to the new there might be a good deal of idleness, from the sheer novelty of the absence of necessity to work. But that such a state of affairs would last is highly unlikely. The novelty would wear off in time, and the creative impulse assert itself. When people are free to work at what they like, at what they enjoy, work ceases to be a drudgery, and becomes a source of satisfaction; when people may have all the leisure they feel inclined for, saturation point is soon reached.

The present writer is in entire agreement with Robert Mennell, when he says, ‘I do not share the common fear of slackers. Let them slack, loaf about, play games, loll by the fire till they are sick of so doing. Let them go travelling until they are fit or fed-up and come back, as they will, begging to be allowed to settle down and take a hand with the rest as respected and self-respecting citizens’. He makes an interesting point when he asserts, ‘As for an expected large increase in “drunks”, under my system, “pubs” will cease to exist when no money can be made out of them and when the drinker has to be

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.B. Yeats in a letter to Oliver Elton, in his *Letters* (Faber, 1944). ‘We shall live to play; that is my slogan under which we shall set about the real things of life, and be as

busy, and in the same spirit, as nature on a morning in spring.’

his own brewer. Cocktail-bars and night-clubs will soon lose their charm when the revellers have to do the serving and cleaning- up themselves. When cash has disappeared a whole new technique of revelling will be discovered’.

There is no reason, however, why there should not be pleasant inns and cafes in Utopia where people can sociably enjoy good ales and wines in company with their fellows. There are plenty of people who would enjoy running such places – in our present society how often does one hear people say, eagerly, ‘I’d love to run a pub!’

But it is true, as Mr. Mennell says, that when money is abolished there will be a whole new technique of ‘revelling’. People will begin to discover what they really want, what they really enjoy, and no one class of people will be exploited – to provide entertainment for the rest. If a girl chooses to dance in a midnight- to-dawn cabaret it will be because she enjoys that kind of life, not because with her particular abilities it is the only way she knows to make a living.

Similarly, in Utopia there can be no question of ‘servants’ pandering to a parasite class, as at present. People live in big houses today, when they are able to do so, because of their social position. The big house represents power, wealth, superior social status. In Utopia none of these things apply. Because there is no money there is no such thing as power. If a man takes a bigger house than he needs, and a couple of cars, and his wife has several fur coats, all it indicates is that these people have been greedy – and stupid. But when no social position has to be established there is no point in possessing more than is needed, and the Utopians, once out of the transitional period in which everything is a novelty, and people are perhaps greedy because they cannot grasp that everything they want is freely theirs, so that there is no need to grab, realise this. When a woman can have six fur coats if she wants them there seems no point in having more than one at a time. And what is the point in having two cars to keep clean when one fine, efficient one adequately serves? When possessions cease to have any cash value they cease to represent power and position, cease to have significance, so that there is simply no point in acquiring more of anything than is needful; an excess of possessions merely becomes an embarrassment and a nuisance, and makes the owner look ridiculous, like a man wearing a thick overcoat in midsummer. Parasites flourish in our present society, because the social structure encourages their existence, its whole basis being the exploitation of the many by the few, for private profit. In Utopia the completely parasitic existence is impossible, since no one contributes to it. Anyone lacking a social sense can take freely from the common stores without doing a stroke of work, and

none will gainsay him, but he is regarded by his fellows with a mixture of pity and contempt, and he receives no co-operation from them in his parasitism; since there are no servants to command — he must cook his own un-worked-for meals, stoke up his own central heating, and if he wants a luxury yacht he must be prepared to be his own cabin-boy and captain too. There is no ‘kick’ – of power and position – to be had out of a parasitic existence in Utopia, and no one in Utopia endures it long; it is boring enough in our present society, but in a society in which excessive possessions and complete idleness are discreditable there is nothing to be gained in submitting to the boredom involved. With the abolition of money new values are evolved – a beautiful home, for example, reflects not the owner’s financial and social status, but his taste; a thing is assessed not for its cash-value but for its usefulness or beauty. There is no question of not working at a certain trade or profession because ‘there’s no money in it’; people work at the things which interest them, and for which they have ability. The values of the stock-exchange, the box-office, the market- place, cease to exist ... those values which are so sordid and degraded that the Utopians marvel that they could have been tolerated for so many centuries. They agree with Winstanley that ‘when mankind began to buy and sell, then he did fall from his innocence’.

Let us, then, sum up the Utopian situation in this important matter of production and consumption. Production is organised in syndicates controlled by the workers in each industry. There is no private ownership of the land, raw materials, or the means of production. Thus, as Alexander Berkman puts it<sup>1</sup>, ‘Your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people’, and ‘land, machinery, and all other public utilities will be collective property, neither to be bought nor sold.... The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency. Similarly will the railroad brotherhoods run the railroads, and so on. Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit.... Exchange will be free. The coal miners, for instance, will deliver the coal they mined to the public coal yards, for the use of the community. In their turn the miners will receive from the community’s warehouses the machinery, tools, and the other commodities they need. That means free exchange without the medium of money and without profit, on the basis of requirement and the supply on hand’. There is no question, it must be realised, of bartering a sack of coal for a sack of flour. The coal miners produce the coal and the farmers the flour for the common good, and each takes from the common store what he wants to enable him to produce, and what he wants to enable him to live and to enjoy life.

---

<sup>1</sup> In his *A.B.C. of Anarchism*.

‘But coal-mining is unpleasant and dangerous work,’ it may be objected, ‘who is going to do it if there is no economic necessity to do such work and no other form of compulsion? In a society in which there is no necessity to do any work at all, who, even amongst the people prepared to work, is going to do such work as that?’

The answer to that may be taken from our own society – even when other work is available there are still men who choose to go down the mines. What work is more dangerous and unpleasant and, incidentally, worse paid, than going to fight in a war? Yet men freely volunteer for such work, freely risk their lives and face unspeakable horrors. Why? Because of a sense of duty to their country; because of a conscience which insists that this is something they ‘ought’ to do; because they believe it is ‘right’ to do it – and some, perhaps, attracted by the mere fact that it is dangerous.

In Utopia men are not called upon to risk their lives and take other men’s lives in war; they are not asked to undertake anything more dangerous or unpleasant than coal-mining, and this they do for the same reasons that men go to war — as a job that has to be done ... until such time as the community learns, by engineering enterprise, to manage without coal. And this is one of the objectives of Utopian engineers and scientists. Far less coal is needed in Utopia, of course, thanks to the general de-industrialisation, plus the fact that there is no great competitive export trade to sustain, and water-power, for the production of electricity, is highly developed. Utopian engineers hope and believe that it is only a matter of time before they devise a means of getting such coal as is needed by machine, without having to send men underground for it.

In the meantime, whilst a certain amount of coal is needed, there are always volunteers for the mines. These volunteers work only a few hours at a time underground, and are the heroes of the community. A man is proud to acknowledge that he has worked in the mines, and his relatives regard him much in the way that in our own society we regard men who have won the V.C. It is an honour to have a miner in the family. The finest poet, musician, painter, is not more highly regarded. It is, of course, unthinkable in Utopia that a man should devote his life, or even a great part of his life, to such work, and, if he only puts in six months at it in a life-time the community is grateful to him, and honours him. That both his working and his living

conditions are as good as they can possibly be made goes without saying. If nobody was prepared to get the coal the Utopians would go without; there is no economic coercion of one exploited section of the community; the Utopian community is a whole, and it is entirely up to them as a whole whether they have coal or not; they know this, and there is no lack of

volunteers, because in any community there is no lack of unselfish and heroic human beings – since this is so in our own society it could hardly fail to be so in Utopia, where all work is for the common good.

The coal is got and the corn is raised, and often it happens that one man in his time plays many parts in the stirring and continuous drama of the world’s work. No work that people do voluntarily can be soul-killing and lacking in interest. What is soul-killing is work done purely for money – either out of economic necessity, or from motives of greed – and from lack of opportunity to do anything else – none of which conditions can apply in Utopia.

**No work that people do voluntarily can be soul-killing and lacking in interest. What is soul-killing is work done purely for money – either out of economic necessity, or from motives of greed – and from lack of opportunity to do anything else – none of which conditions can apply in Utopia.**

If and when, for any reason, there is a shortage of any commodity, then the syndicate responsible organises a rationing system as our present society does in time of war and scarcity.

There is no buying and selling. Everything – food, houses, clothes, entertainment, public services, transport, books, furniture, education – is completely free. There is no barter. No compulsion to work. No wages.

‘Won’t it make everything very complicated?’

On the contrary, it simplifies everything. Nothing could be more complicated than finance – the stock exchange, the banking system, the credit system, and the labyrinth of accountancy.

Robert Mennell, himself a business-man, declares, ‘More than half the worry and effort of any business is connected with the cash and price problems, buying and selling, costing, charging, checking and collecting the money. The choice and assembling of the most suitable materials and personnel, the calculating of weights and measures, strains and stresses, these would be simplified out of recognition if price considerations could be eliminated. ... If cash considerations were eliminated, countless thousands of men and women now engaged on money calculations would be set free for useful work for the public good or for the cultivating and beautifying of their own minds and bodies as well

as their own houses and gardens'. He adds that 'As a result of this release of man-power, production under scientific planning, and with mechanical devices being used to their full capacity, would so vastly exceed our power of consumption that the time available for living as distinct from earning a livelihood, would soon transform the world'.

In Utopia there is no question of *earning* a living. Living is not something which should have to be earned; the basic right of all existence is *the right to live*. To this, in a truly civilised society, should be added the right to live *abundantly*.<sup>1</sup> But only in a moneyless society is man freed from the necessity – and degradation – of having to *earn* his living.

The people who insist that a moneyless society is impracticable merely assert their lack of faith in

humanity. They refuse to believe in the perfectability of man – despite the anthropologists. It is precisely because the mass of people lack faith and vision that the idea of Utopia is relegated to the realm of impossible idealism. The mass of people everywhere are obsessed with the idea of money as with the idea of government, and the fantastic make-believe of this obsession removes them so far from reality that they forget that everything – every single thing they eat and drink and wear – the materials of the houses and furniture, every tool, every machine – has no other source than the earth itself.

Money is not wealth. Money produces nothing. When there is a famine money is useless; its falsity is then revealed; it ceases to have reality as wealth. The only real wealth is the land.

### **XIII: Utopia—The Will to the Dream**

If we are agreed that progress is the realisation of our Utopias the problem remains—how to set about this realisation. It is not to be achieved through any political party, or any leadership. The world has had a surfeit of political parties and leaders. The need is not for politicians and leaders, but for a change in the heart of man. Given the will to it the Utopian dream could be realised; there could be that world in which men, whatever language they spoke, whatever colour their skins, whatever their religions, were brothers in the true sense, racially united in their common humanity, acknowledging one race only—the human race; a world in which all things were in common, each giving to society according to his ability and taking according to his need; a world in which there was no buying or selling, no useless toil, no exploitation of the many by the privileged few; a world in which human beings lived according to the natural law of mutual aid, in a stateless, moneyless, and co-operative society; a world of true liberty, equality and fraternity. . . . There could be such a world if humanity wanted it enough. If this present civilisation, rapidly destroying itself through mechanical force, the machine, accelerated beyond all control, finally collapsed amid its smoking ruins, it might be that those who survived, purged beyond all imagining by their sufferings, would be given the vision of a new world, a new way of life—new as the first dawn when God looked upon the world and saw that it was good. Nothing less will serve.

The need, as this book has attempted to indicate, is for the complete transvaluation of values in all spheres, social, moral, economic, industrial, agricultural. That our present economics are the economics of the mad-house is clear, and that we are draining the good earth of its fertility, creating deserts, by taking from it without returning, denying the natural cycle of life.

Nothing in the foregoing chapters is impossible – given the will to the dream. Nor need mankind wait upon universal perfection. The realisation of Utopia does not call for a world of perfect people. It is probable that there will always be Ananias and Sapphira in our midst. These defaulters did not disrupt the communism of the Early Christians; of them, we are told, the multitude were 'of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold . . . and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need'.

People say, But the heart of the multitude is not to be changed overnight; there can be no mass conversion; therefore we must take the world as it is and move forward step by step.

Then it is that they come forward with their Plans and their Programmes, party labels attached – Communist, Fascist, Labour Party, Common Wealth, and the rest. Some see the nationalisation of industry as the road to salvation; others, seeing money as the root of all evil urge monetary reform – not, strangely enough, the abolition of the root of all evil; some see Utopia along the Marxist road; some want State socialism, others socialism with-out the State. In all these parties and systems there is revolt against the existing system and its social inequalities and in-justices, but some offer one thing at the expense of another—and the thing most readily sacrificed is the liberty of the individual, so that 'the step in the right direction' is continually cancelled out. There is even a crypto-Fascist school of thought – beginning with Plato – which considers freedom unimportant.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread*: 'One thing remains: put the *needs* above the *works*, and first of all

recognise *the right to live*, and later on, to *the right to well-being*, for all those who took their share in production.'

It is true that not every step in the right direction is cancelled out by a negation of liberty; reforms we must have; there must be amelioration of the human lot; but let us be under no illusion that the road to Utopia is paved with reforms. To achieve Utopia 'we must first expiate our past, we must break with it; and we can only expiate it by suffering, by extraordinary, un-ceasing labour'. Utopia has nothing to do with reform; Utopia is the new heaven and the new earth; it does not spring from any political party or system, but from the dream in the heart of man; a revolution in the human mind. By all means let us sanction this and that reform – provided it is not one step forward and two back. Whether or not we can sanction political revolution depends on whether or not we are prepared to sanction violence as a means to an end. But it is clear that Utopia cannot proceed from violence. The history of bloody revolution every-where is the history of failure. Revolution there must be, the 'complete change, turning upside down, great reversal of conditions, fundamental reconstruction', of the dictionary definition of the word, but people are not to be bludgeoned into it; only what is achieved through the great upsurge of the human spirit, out of the impassioned desire of the multitude, endures; what is imposed by force has no roots, and cannot last. There is no realisation of Utopia without the change of values, and no change of values without change of heart – spiritual revolution. Utopia can be founded only on man's love for man; on love and co-operation; not on hate and the seizing of material power. When one section of the community triumphs over another it is only a matter of time before the section from whom power has been wrested reasserts itself—in the same way that it is only a matter of time before a conquered nation rises once more to power, and to say that history repeats itself is only another way of saying that wars beget wars.

This is not to deny the importance of the day to day struggles – the struggle of oppressed peoples against imperialism, of workers against capitalist exploitation. To suggest that subject peoples should wait, passively, for imperialist governments to experience a change of heart, repent of their sins, and hand over the keys of the kingdom, is manifestly absurd. Ceaselessly the demand for freedom must go up, the doctrine of justice be preached. The masses, the world over, do not have to seize power, since it is by their toil that the wheels go round and the earth brings forth; this is their power; their strength lies in their realisation of it. With the withdrawal of their co-operation the whole machinery

**Revolution there must  
be, the 'complete  
change, turning upside  
down, great reversal of  
conditions, fundamental  
reconstruction', of the  
dictionary definition of  
the word, but people are  
not to be bludgeoned  
into it**

of the social system ceases to function, and the power of politicians breaks, eventually, under the pressure of the moral force of public opinion. No general strike, no rioting, was necessary on the part of the British working classes in 1920 to break the government's intention of intervention against the revolutionaries in Soviet Russia; the government was defeated by the great weight of opinion of the common people who poured out into the public squares and into meeting-places in mass protest. The shameful Hoare-Laval pact during the Abyssinian war was similarly defeated by the great weight of popular opinion against it. The power of *moral* force has not yet been fully tried out, though in India one old, frail man, has demonstrated its potentialities – as the Early Christians demonstrated the potentialities of co-operative living according to the law of love.

The change of heart requisite for the realisation of millennium is not, ultimately, a matter of conversion from one idea to another, but of the collapse – from exhaustion – of existing systems. Civilisations rise and fall; the machine accelerates to the point at which it blows itself up. Out of the ensuing chaos emerges the morning-star; there breaks upon the world a new day, with new ideas, new values – new vision. So long as there exists the system of society based on private profit so long will there be injustice and exploitation—the hard heart, that is to say the commercial heart, the imperialist heart, with its lust for power, and all that that connotes of the domination of man by man. Within such a system the heart is not to be changed. But systems become outworn and new conceptions develop. Eventually we do not have to convert the imperialist and the capitalist and the militarist because they cease to be. There are tides in the affairs of men that wash away systems and civilisations.

And the tide is rising in the world today, though few realise it, and Nature herself is taking a hand in the process. The earth, the source of all life, is losing its fertility; Nature is being revenged for the profligacy of Man, 'the most extravagant accelerator of waste the world has ever endured', as the eminent American professor, F. H. King, wrote in his great work, *Farmers of Forty Centuries in China, Korea and Japan*. He adds that Man's 'withering blight has fallen upon every living thing within his reach, himself not excepted'. In his *Cleanliness and Godliness*, Mr. Reginald Reynolds, indicts an evil and adulterating generation', declaring, with bitter truth, that 'of all the things that posterity will remember about us, for nothing will it so justly condemn our age as for our profligacy. They will say of

us in time to come that we wasted human labour in unemployment, and human life in war; that we willingly destroyed food on the preposterous excuse that it was necessary to maintain its price; that is to say, to make it more dear to our own pockets; that we *killed time* because we did not know how to live; that we debilitated our constitutions by destroying vitamins, inventing, elaborate methods of ruining every decent thing that was eatable; and that we destroyed the soil itself by this same mania for *waste*'. Mr. H. J. Massingham, in his *The Tree of Life*<sup>1</sup>, points out that 'In England we waste every year 219,000 tons of nitrogen, 55,000 tons of phosphate and 55,000 tons of potash as sewage sludge and house refuse that pollute the rivers and are lost in the sea. Every year the peoples of Europe and the United States pour down into the sea and rivers nearly twenty million tons of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus for every million of their populations, and every cargo of beef or milk products, every shipload of bones left the exporting country the poorer in the fruitfulness of the soil'.

What it all amounts to is that *Man must find a new way of living or perish*. The dominating forces of our world today are Money and the Machine; they are responsible for our over-industrialisation and our wars, and between the non-productiveness of the one, and the destructiveness of the other, what chance has civilisation? Our only chance of survival lies in recognition of the danger – of the rising tide – and restoration of those basic values which acknowledge the earth as the only real wealth, and its fertility as 'the substratum of all that is living'.

The fertility of the earth is being destroyed through the commercialisation of agriculture, which demands intensive production, quick returns on outlay. It means that the whole source of Man's existence is slowly returning to dust, through the ascendancy of money – because the values of our civilisation are the urban values of the stock exchange and the market-place, and therefore none of the steps in the right direction advocated by the Planners, and the reformers in general, can be anything but continual readjustments in a losing struggle for survival — the make-shifts by which a system fundamentally anti-life is kept going. Dr. G. T. Wrench, in his book, *The Restoration of the Peasantries*, has reminded us that 4 By no act of man can any reform succeed, if it does not begin with the organic foundation of man's individual and social being. Man is a metamorphosis of the re-creating power of the soil. His welfare is based upon its welfare. That is the imperishable fact upon which his associations, cultures, and civilisations will continue to be based, while human life endures.

That is in essence the Doctrine of Creation, the return to the fundamental values. So long as Man continues to

exploit the soil for profit he sows the seeds of his own destruction, not merely because Nature becomes his enemy, responding to his machines and his chemicals by the withdrawal of fertility, the dusty answer of an ultimate desert barrenness, but because his whole attitude to life is debased; his gods become Money and Power, and wars and unemployment and useless toil become his inevitable portion.

That twentieth-century human beings, with all their imperfections, can live an ordered, co-operative life, free of centralised government, has been demonstrated by the Catalonian experiment during the Spanish Civil War; a beginning was even made with the abolition of money. Groups of people in all countries, throughout the ages, from the Early Christians down to present-day communities, have shown by example what can be achieved through co-operative living. Utopias cannot exist islanded in a non-Utopian world, but these experiments indicate what is possible given the will to the dream.

It is no part of the business of the planner of an ideal common-wealth to set forth instructions as to how it may be achieved; his function finishes when he has shown what *could* be done — given the will of the mass of people. Towards that end he can urge a new conception of education; he can warn against the rising tide, the impending doom; he can, by the preaching of fundamental values, stimulate thought, the realisation of the urgent need for a new way of living as an alternative to destruction. Which brings us back to our original contention that Utopia is concerned with the soul of Man, and, through the recognition of that, with the brotherhood of Man. Humanity has to be doubly re-educated, first to the conception of a new Golden Age, and then to the necessity for it, and that is the task of the teachers and the preachers, the writers and the poets and the dreamers. Only the dreamer can give us the necessary inspiration, the authentic vision. His function is that of teacher and preacher, not of director. He cannot give you the earthly paradise within the terms of reference of the existing order. He can but say to his fellow-men, 'If you do this and this, and cease to do that and that, you will achieve this heaven on earth I have outlined for you', and if they are so infatuated with money and machines that they prefer hell upon earth, with its wars and famines and squalors, its privations in the midst of plenty, its mad-house economics, and its ultimate destruction of the earth's productivity, which is the destruction of life itself — it is their own calamitous affair.

Ideally, then, God should send another Flood, but of his mercy receive into the Ark those prepared to begin again in the Garden of Eden in the morning of a new world.

London, December, 1943 – May, 1944.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chap & Hall, 1943.

# Sylvia Pankhurst: Anti-Parliamentarian Communist

Iain McKay

“Because I had been a suffragette and had fought for the cause of woman, the women came to me and asked me to help them. I had dying babies brought to me. I had to start clinics and find accommodation for people whose fathers were fighting for the capitalists’ Government of the country. I used to sit up all night writing, begging for money for these people. Then the unemployment. We had good families of people coming to my house without a penny, and with six or seven children, and I opened twopenny restaurants.... But I know it is all palliatives, it will not do any good really; I want to change the system; I am going to fight it if it kills me.”

– Sylvia Pankhurst<sup>1</sup>

Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960) was an English feminist, suffragette and socialist activist and writer. From an anarchist perspective, she is of note as being a leading anti-parliamentarian communist after the First World War, being one of the first to champion the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks before being expelled from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and becoming a leading critic of what she termed “Right-wing” Communism. Attacked by Lenin in “Left-wing” *Communism: An Infantile Communism* in its sole chapter on Britain, she broke with the Bolsheviks initially over their imposition of

parliamentarianism on the International Communist movement but then widened into a negative re-evaluation of their role in the Russian Revolution. In the process, she came to conclusions with obvious links to long-standing anarchist positions.

## The Social Situation

First, it is necessary to indicate the situation Pankhurst faced. Needless to say, this is indicative only and much more could be written about this period.



**Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960)**

The period 1910-1914 saw a massive wave of industrial action – “the Great Unrest” – in which syndicalists played a significant role<sup>2</sup> along with a militant campaign for women’s suffrage. The outbreak of war stopped these struggles but the industrial struggle soon restarted. As the trade union officialdom supported the war, strikes were unofficial and created various new organisations, most notably the shop steward’s movement. In 1915 the Clyde Workers’ Committee (CWC) was formed from a strike in support of equal pay which saw 25 factories take action. That year also saw the CWC threaten a general strike in

support of a rent strike by 25,000 tenants. The campaign was a success, with the Government passing the Rent Restriction Act. In November 1916, the Sheffield Workers Committee was formed when engineering workers went on strike against the conscription of a local engineer which resulted in the government exempting craft union members from military service. When this policy was reversed in May 1917, a strike involving 200,000 workers began in 48 towns with the Shop Stewards Movement arising from it. The number of

<sup>1</sup> “Verbatim Report of Sylvia Pankhurst’s Appeal”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 15 January 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Iain McKay, “Tom Mann and British Syndicalism”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 1 Number 3 (Autumn 2021).

working days lost due to strike action rose from 2,953,000 in 1915 to 5,875,000 by 1918.

The industrial and social struggles continued and increased after the war. Days lost to strike action were 34,969,000 in 1919, rising to 85,872,000 in 1921. Significant disputes included the CWC calling a general strike for the 40 hour week in January 1919 which spread from Glasgow to other Scottish cities which involved over 70,000 workers, with simultaneous stoppages in London and Belfast. During a large demonstration in George Square in Glasgow on 31 January 1919 (Bloody Friday), a police baton-charge resulted in many injuries and the Riot Act was read. A soviet was created in Limerick in April while a national railway strike took place between 26 September and 5 October 1919 to prevent the government from reducing negotiated rates of pay and to standardise pay rates. After nine days of strike action, the government agreed to maintain wages. Throughout the year miners took widespread official and unofficial local action. Troops mutinied and police struck. Union membership grew from 4.1 million in 1914 to 6.5 million in 1918, peaking at 8.3 million in 1920.

This is only an inclination of the situation during the war and post-war years. What happened in Britain was reflective of other countries across the world and the possibility of revolution was very real – with many looking to the apparently successful revolution in Russia as an example to follow. Pankhurst was an active participant in this wave of struggle and revolt.

### Before Communism

Pankhurst was born in Manchester to Emmeline and Dr. Richard Pankhurst. The family home hosted radical intelligentsia from both Britain and abroad, including Peter Kropotkin and Louise Michel. In 1893, her parents joined Keir Hardie, a family friend, as founding members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). However, the Pankhursts are best known for their role in the fight for female suffrage, with the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) being founded as an independent women's movement in 1903 at the family's home after her sister, Christabel, persuaded a group of ILP women that women had

to work for their own emancipation free of party affiliation.

Three years later, Pankhurst started to work full-time for WSPU, with Christabel and their mother. Drawing upon her earlier studies as an artist, she devised the WSPU logo and various leaflets, banners, and posters as well as the decoration of its meeting halls. She also contributed articles to the WSPU's newspaper, *Votes for Women* and, in 1911, she published a propagandist history of the organisation's campaign, *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement*. She took an active role in the protests for women's suffrage, enduring 15 arrests and 9 hunger, sleep and thirst strikes.<sup>1</sup> However, she later admitted to being opposed to the direction the WSPU had taken in terms of its window-breaking, arson and other forms of protest:

"I believed, then and always, that the movement required, not more serious militancy by the few, but a stronger appeal to the great masses to join the struggle. Yet it was not in me to criticise or expostulate. I would rather have died at the stake than say one word against the actions of those who were in the throes of the fight."<sup>2</sup>

As part of her work for the WSPU, Pankhurst toured America in 1911 and 1912 to raise money for the suffragette cause. In New York she spoke at a rally in support of a laundry workers' strike alongside IWW Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.<sup>3</sup> She also visited Milwaukee twice as it had a socialist mayor and while acknowledging it had made some improvements she was critical of its elitist nature, arguing that "all meetings of the Council and its committees, both Press and Public" should "be present to hear the debates... only thus can the busy populace be kept closely informed as to the doings of their city government and induced to take a vital and constant interest in them." She argued with the mayor, being "anxious to make him feel that even under socialism it would not be satisfactory to women to leave everything to be managed by men" and noted that it was "strange how few even of the best of men can quite see that we need the power to work out our own salvation as much as they do."<sup>4</sup> As one biographer suggests:

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst: sexual politics and political activism* (London: UCL Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London, 1978), 401-2.

<sup>3</sup> Winslow, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Winslow, 23.

“Pankhurst advocated a form of workers’ control of the city government, arguing that the scrubwomen and the garbage collectors should control their own departments... It is clear that her socialism was not the top-down state or municipal socialism advocated by the Fabians and Progressives, where middle-class intellectuals and technicians made the world ‘better’ for the poor or working class, but socialism from the bottom up, with workers controlling both industry and government. Similarly, her vision of women’s emancipation came from the power of working women themselves, organising and rebuilding their workplaces, homes and communities on their own terms.”<sup>1</sup>

This perspective was equally applicable to her own organisation. The WSPU was run autocratically by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst who “regarded the WSPU as an army in battle over which they had supreme control. Any questioning of the command of the generals was tantamount to mutiny” and this led to “the High Command’s decision to abolish the democratic constitution of the WSPU, which in turn meant abandoning the annual delegate conference.”<sup>2</sup> Its focus was very much directed at middle and upper class women, with working class women viewed with contempt in spite of their sacrifices being far greater than those suffragettes from “respectable” backgrounds. Pankhurst, in contrast, organised in the working class districts of East London and the East London Federation of the WPSU was renamed the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS). Although it was to remain a women’s emancipatory movement led by women, it was opened to trade unionists and to men, taking up issues wider than just winning adult suffrage.

<sup>1</sup> Winslow, 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Davis, *Sylvia Pankhurst: a life in radical politics* (London: Pluto, 1999), 29.

So, for example, in November 1913, Pankhurst spoke at the Albert Hall, alongside James Connolly, in support of the men and women of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union locked-out by Dublin employers.



This new orientation saw the differences within the Pankhurst family become impossible to ignore. Pankhurst’s mother and sister insisted that the struggle for the vote should be a cross-class movement limited to women and just to that issue. In January 1914, the ELFS split from the WPSU as Pankhurst was insistent on supporting popular and labour struggles. The ELFS soon launched a newspaper, *The Woman’s Dreadnought* and its first issue saw Pankhurst defend their insistence on creating a working-class suffragette campaign:

“Those Suffragists who say that it is the duty of the richer and more fortunate women to

win the Vote, and that their poorer sisters need not feel themselves called upon to aid in the struggle appear, in using such arguments, to forget that it is *the Vote* for which we are fighting. The essential principle of the vote is that each one of us shall have a share of power to help himself or herself and us all. It is in direct opposition to the idea that some few, who are more favoured, shall help and teach and patronize the others.”<sup>3</sup>

She also noted that “every form of government but self-government is tyranny – however kindly its intention”, a position which informed her later communism.

When war broke out in August 1914, Pankhurst opposed it, unlike her mother and sister who supported the Allies, pausing the campaign for the vote and aiding the war effort. Pankhurst’s anti-war position was attacked in the WSPU newspaper,

<sup>3</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, “Our Paper”, *The Woman’s Dreadnought*, 8 March 1914.

patriotically renamed *Britannia*. The ELFS strove to provide practical assistance to working women. It organised “cost-price” canteens, a toy-making cooperative, childcare, a home visiting centre, and free medical care and advice. The *Dreadnought* kept abreast of workers’ revolts and recognised their potential for more radical change:

“though the Clyde workers certainly are in revolt against the Munitions Act, which imposes coercion from without upon them, they are also striving to develop and democratise their own Trade Union organisation from within. They are impatient of leaders who enter into confidential understandings with capitalist Governments and become enmeshed in political compromises. The new Trade Unionism, which is so active on the Clyde, wishes to emancipate the workers from the position of incoherent dependent tools, whether of employers, Governments, or officials sprung from their own ranks. It wishes every worker in the trade to take his or her part in moulding the policy of the union, and each trade union to take its part in making of the nation a co-operative commonwealth, managed in the interests of all.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Dreadnought* on 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1916 announced the renaming of the ELFS to the Workers’ Suffrage Federation (WSF), its aim going from winning “Human Suffrage:— a vote for every woman and man of full age” to “To secure a Vote for every Woman and Man of full age, and to win Social and Economic Freedom for the People on the basis of a Socialist Commonwealth.” Internally, the WSF learned the lessons of the WSPU and the trade unions:

“In its democratic structure, the Federation clearly moved away from the autocracy of the national WSPU and Sylvia obviously regarded this as essential to building members’ confidence and autonomy. ‘We must get members to work for themselves’, Sylvia wrote in 1914, ‘and let them feel they are working for their own emancipation.’ The Federation trained

members to organise and speak for themselves and held afternoon and evening meetings so all women could attend. It also organised talks and debates on a whole range of issues including sex education, trade unionism, the law and housing. In so doing, it became an organisation that was concerned with more than the vote and one which was interested in raising women’s political consciousness around issues that directly affected their lives.”<sup>2</sup>

The WSF grew and soon spread to other cities and towns across Britain, with 30 branches in Scotland (Glasgow) and across England (including Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, York and Sheffield) by 1917 with a membership between 400 and 500.<sup>3</sup> Its paper had a circulation of around 10,000 and was “one of the most important anti-war, non-sectarian socialist papers in Britain, achieving an influential position by opening its columns to all shades of opinion on the left.”<sup>4</sup> The WSF continued its campaigns, for example organising a demonstration on 8 April 1916 “numbering 20,000, [which] was perhaps the largest of the anti-war protests to date.”<sup>5</sup>

## The Russian Revolution

Like the rest of the left, Pankhurst welcomed the February Revolution of 1917 which overthrew the Tsar. Somewhat ironically given later developments, the prospect of a Constituent Assembly elected by adult suffrage was particularly stressed. Reflecting the wider perspective of the paper and organisation, the 28 July 1917 issue of *The Woman’s Dreadnought* appeared under a new title *The Workers’ Dreadnought* with a new subheading: “Socialism. Internationalism, Votes for All”. The anti-war agitation led to a police raid on the paper’s offices and its issue of 6 October 1917 advocating a peace referendum among the troops, was destroyed and the type broken up.

An increased awareness of events in Russia and the role played by the soviets (councils elected and recallable from workplaces) saw a corresponding change in the WSF. The support for the Constituent Assembly fell as support for the more democratic soviets increased and when the October revolution

<sup>1</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, “The New Order”, *The Woman’s Dreadnought*, 8 January 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Les Garner, “Suffragism and Socialism: Sylvia Pankhurst 1903-1914”, *Sylvia Pankhurst: from artist to anti-fascist*

(Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1992), edited by Ian Bullock and Richard Pankhurst, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Winslow 78; Davis, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, 55.

<sup>5</sup> Winslow, 85.

occurred, the *Dreadnought* wholeheartedly welcomed it – likewise with the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks in the name of the soviets. In May 1918, the WSF, reflecting the changes in the paper's politics, was renamed the Workers' Socialist Federation.

Pankhurst helped to set up the People's Russia Information Bureau in September 1918 and was involved in the "Hands off Russia" campaign. The *Dreadnought* expressed her great hopes in the soviets:

"We have heard another voice, the voice of the future, now comes with great inexorable steps, bringing the elements which shall form the social structure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The old husks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century do not charm us.

"We are waiting for the Soviets, as they are called in Russia, the councils of delegates appointed by the workers in every kind of industry, by the workers on the land, and workers in the home. Through the medium of these workers' councils the machinery of the coming of the Socialist Commonwealth will be evolved, here, as in Russia."<sup>1</sup>

This was because of its more democratic nature:

"As a representative body an organization such as the All-Russian Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and Peasants' Council is more closely in touch and more directly represents its constituents than the Constituent Assembly or any existing Parliament. The delegates ... are constantly reporting back and getting instructions from their constituents; while Members of

Parliament are elected for a term of years and only receive anything approaching instructions at election times. Even then it is the candidate who, in the main, sets forth the programme, the electors merely assenting to or dissenting from the program as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

Pankhurst's "belief in soviet power was a result of her long-held faith in both workers' control and a localized or decentralized form of socialism."<sup>3</sup> She was now arguing that socialists had to embrace a soviet system (being considered as an industrial republic), abandon the Parliamentary regime and, consequently, participation in elections. She also expanded upon the soviet idea by including community soviets, recognising that a purely workplace soviet system disenfranchised working class women who were housewives.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Lenin written in July 1919 and published in the September issue of *The Communist International* she

argued:

"The Labour movement in England is being ruined under my eyes by parliamentary and municipal politics. Both leaders and masses are only waiting for elections, and, while preparing for the election campaign, quite forgetting the socialist work. Nay, they totally suppress all socialist propaganda in order not to frighten the electors. The BSP [British Socialist Party] takes pride in the election of members to the Municipal Councils; but their election is not a signal for revolutionary agitation therein. They accepted the departmental office and became part of the machinery of capitalism."<sup>5</sup>

**Pankhurst... was now arguing that socialists had to embrace a soviet system..., abandon the Parliamentary regime and, consequently, participation in elections. She also expanded upon the soviet idea by including community soviets**

<sup>1</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, "Parliament Doomed", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 2 November 1918.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, "What About Russia Now?", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 26 January 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Winslow, 148.

<sup>4</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, "The Soviets of the Street. An Appeal to Working Women", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 27 March 1920.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Winslow, 161.

The same issue contained Lenin's reply, rejecting Pankhurst's position. This came as a surprise to her as, like many early supporters of the Bolsheviks such as Anton Pannekoek, she had assumed that – given the soviet nature of the Russian revolution – the Bolsheviks would have agreed on the uselessness and redundancy of previous tactics such as Parliamentaryism. Needless to say, the BSP (the main Marxist Party in the UK at the time) gleefully reported Lenin's position.

So as well as her work in Britain, Pankhurst was becoming increasingly active in the emerging international Communist movement. In 1919 she visited Italy and attended the conference of the Italian Socialist Party in Bologna which declared for the Third, Communist, International (the Comintern). She then travelled to Switzerland and Germany, attending a clandestine Comintern meeting in Frankfurt, before going to Amsterdam in January 1920 where the short-lived Comintern Sub-Bureau was formed. This bureau was firmly anti-parliamentarian with leading figures of the Dutch Marxist movement, Herman Gorter and Pannekoek, taking a prominent role, both notable anti-parliamentarian communists. Moscow declared it closed on 15 May 1920.

In June 1920, the WSF helped form the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) – the CP(BSTI). Pankhurst travelled to Moscow for the Second Congress of the Comintern in July-August 1920 determined to change Lenin's mind on the questions of participating in elections and affiliation to the Labour Party, but to no avail – the Bolshevik leader's policies were accepted by a majority of the Congress and thus binding policies for its member parties. Pankhurst was the focus of the chapter on the British movement in Lenin's "*Left-Wing*" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, written especially for the Conference to bolster the Bolshevik's favoured policies. August saw the creation of the CPGB, formed essentially by the BSP with a few pro-Communist Socialist Labour Party members, Guild Socialists, former syndicalists and shop stewards.

After her return to Britain, Pankhurst was arrested on 19 October 1920 for sedition and was sentenced to a six-month prison sentence on 5 January 1921, being released on 30 May. This meant that she was imprisoned during the discussions on the merger of the two Communist Parties. Pankhurst re-

accounted how Lenin suggested that the "left-wing" communists could join the CPGB as a faction, working to change the policy on standing for elections and affiliation to the Labour Party. How sincere that recommendation was is moot given that party discipline would mean that any discussion would have been internal and even if successful the party would have still been bound by Comintern policy. The CP(BSTI) now faced a choice between adherence to its principles or continued participation in the Communist International, choosing the latter and entering the CPGB at the Leeds Unity Convention in January 1921.

## The Break with Moscow

Pankhurst joined the CPGB with the aim of forming a grouping working to convince the party to take an anti-Parliamentary position. This did not last long with a dispute over the *Dreadnought* being the cause for her expulsion. The party executive demanded that she hand over control of the paper, which she refused to do as "we believe that only by criticism and discussion can a knowledge and understanding of Communist tactics be hammered out by the Communist Party and communicated to the masses".<sup>1</sup> The refusal to turn the *Dreadnought* into a party journal saw Pankhurst expelled by the CPGB executive on 10 September 1921 – so as well as being one of the first to champion the Bolsheviks, she was also amongst the first to be expelled from the CPGB.

Pankhurst argued that the *Dreadnought* had to remain independent in order to present alternative perspectives and foster debate:

"The *Workers' Dreadnought* is the only paper in this country which is alive to the controversies going on in the International Communist movement; it is the only paper through which the rank and file of the movement can even guess that there are such controversies. Such controversies are a sign of healthy development, through them the movement grows onward towards higher aims and broader horizons; by studying them, by taking part in them, the membership will develop in knowledge and political capacity."<sup>2</sup>

While former Social-Democrats were being welcomed into the Comintern (undoubtedly, to

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Watch Your Leaders", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 30 July 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Freedom of Discussion", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921.

ensure a presence in bourgeois Parliaments favourable to Soviet Russia), the left-wing communists were being purged. As Pankhurst noted:

“Let there be no mistake; I am not expelled for any tendency to compromise with capitalism; I am expelled for desiring freedom of propaganda for the Left Wing Communists, who oppose all compromise and seek to hasten faster and more directly onward to Communism.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Dreadnought* had “kept its readers in touch with worldwide political developments and had published the views of the most radical international communist groups... after Pankhurst’s expulsion from the CPGB the *Dreadnought* continued to publish information, analyses and debates about which most workers would have remained unaware had they relied on the pro-Comintern publications for enlightenment.”<sup>2</sup> These included articles and reports on anarchists and syndicalists alongside Rosa Luxemburg’s critical comments on the Bolsheviks<sup>3</sup>, Gorter’s reply to Lenin’s “*Left-Wing*” *Communism*<sup>4</sup>, Kollantai’s Workers’ Opposition platform<sup>5</sup> as well as articles on and by the Russian Workers’ Group and other left dissidents.

It should be noted that the break with Moscow did not happen overnight and pro-Russia articles did not abruptly stop. However, the path was clear and followed to its logical end.

## Anti-Parliamentarian Communism

These developments lead to a wholesale re-evaluation of previous ideas, not least the uncritical support of the Bolshevik regime. After all, politics do not appear from nowhere and reflect the social position and class positions of those advocating them. Thus counter-revolutionary external policies would express, to some degree, counter-revolutionary tendencies internally (although we should not discount the legacy of social democratic orthodoxy on Bolshevik ideology and assumptions).

In terms of the two points of contention as regards the CPGB, namely parliamentarianism and affiliation to the Labour Party, the WSF critique was strong and proven right. The *Dreadnought* rightly argued that “participation in Parliamentary elections turns the attention of the people to Parliament, which will never emancipate them, away from the workshops where they should build the workers’ councils.”<sup>6</sup> It echoed long-standing anarchist

**“Any attempt to use the Parliamentary system encourages among the workers the delusion that leaders can fight their battles for them. Not leadership but MASS ACTION IS ESSENTIAL... EVERY strike tends to strengthen revolutionary class-consciousness.”**

arguments:

“Parliamentary action restricted workers to a subordinate and passive role as voters and left everything up to the ‘leaders’ in Parliament:

“Any attempt to use the Parliamentary system encourages among the workers the delusion that leaders can fight their battles for them. Not leadership but MASS ACTION IS ESSENTIAL... EVERY strike tends to strengthen revolutionary class-consciousness.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Freedom of Discussion”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Shipway, *Anti-parliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers’ Councils in Britain, 1917-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution: A critical appreciation”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 13 May 1922 to 17 June 1922.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Gorter, “Open Letter to Comrade Lenin”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 12 March 1921 to 11 June 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Kollantai, “Russian Workers v. Soviet Government”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 22 April 1922 to 27 May 1922 and “Workers’ Opposition”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 3 June 1922 to 19 August 1922.

<sup>6</sup> “Soviets or Parliament?”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 1 December 1923.

<sup>7</sup> The National Organising Council, “An Open Letter to the Delegates of the Unity Convention”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 31 July 1920.

The CPGB use of elections did not see the party grow to a significant force while alternative class organisations like workers councils never appeared.

As regards the Labour Party, the WSF had experience to base its position on. Its federal structure gave considerable autonomy to local branches and individual members which allowed dissenting views to be expressed. This had led to the Poplar WSF affiliating “to the local Labour Party in 1919 and it was expelled when, on 20 July 1919, its members raised Sovietist ideas at a Labour Party mass meeting against Russian intervention.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the WSF’s “experiences belied Lenin’s belief that it would be possible to work as revolutionaries in the Labour Party.”<sup>2</sup>

Given this, Lenin’s position was unconvincing and reflected his distance from events. Likewise, his claims that because the BSP was affiliated to the Labour Party meant that the CPGB would be allowed to do so failed to recognise that if the Labour Party officialdom tolerated the BSP it was because it was social democratic and so limited its revolutionary activity to words whilst pursuing “political action”. Significantly, the CPGB was happy to compromise its own politics to secure affiliation, with the *Dreadnought* noting how the “Right-Wing Communist Party” has “definitely and in set terms accepted the Labour Party constitution” and had “abandoned the establishment of the Soviets as an essential part of its policy, and has thus gone back to the old BSP attitude in the days prior to Moscow’s intervention in its affairs.”<sup>3</sup> As warned by Pankhurst, affiliation proved to be a source for opportunism.

This allegedly key issue became moot as the Labour Party refused to allow the CPGB to affiliate and this refusal did not produce gains in membership and influence.<sup>4</sup> Lenin’s predictions as to the future of a Communist Party which

embraced the lessons of Bolshevism never came to pass. This, of course, does not stop Leninists to this day proclaiming “*Left-wing*” *Communism* as a classic of Marxism which should be followed as being proven completely wrong apparently is of no concern.

The *Dreadnought* serialised Dutch anti-parliamentarian communist Herman Gorter’s reply to Lenin’s arguments. His “Open Letter” stressed the differences in the socio-economic conditions in Tsarist Russia compared to Western Europe, arguing that what may have been valid in the former was not automatically so in the later. The lack of success of Lenin’s recommendations would suggest this basic materialist analysis was right.<sup>5</sup>

The *Dreadnought* group also echoed long-standing anarchist arguments on the need to organise along the lines of the free society desired: “In the internal organisation of the Party we aim at the immediate application of Soviet principles... [and wish to] adopt the principle of RECALL for all comrades delegated to executive office... we seek to WORK FROM THE BOTTOM UP AND NOT FROM THE TOP DOWNWARDS”.<sup>6</sup> It also rejected nationalisation as an economic goal:

“The bulk of the work is done by hired servants whose status, in essentials, does not differ from those employed in Capitalist enterprises. They have no stake in the concern, no security of tenure, no voice in the management, no power to choose their work or the persons who are appointed to direct it.

“It is not thus that the socialised industries will be administered when Capitalism disappears.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Dreadnought* group linked up with dissident communists elsewhere, mainly with those who

very institutions that the new tactics had to combat (for example, in Germany and Italy, the Social Democrats helped undermine the revolutions – in Germany, they worked with the counter-revolutionary forces to crush the rebels.). As such, Gorter was wrong to suggest that it was only the different socio-economic conditions that disproved Lenin’s analysis. In fact, his tactics were inappropriate in Russia as well, just as social democratic tactics were inappropriate after the 1870s because they undermined working-class direct action and solidarity as anarchists had long argued.

<sup>6</sup> The National Organising Council, “An Open Letter to the Delegates of the Unity Convention”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 31 July 1920.

<sup>7</sup> “Our View: Structural Parliament’s Incapacity”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 13 January 1923.

<sup>1</sup> Shipway, 63-4.

<sup>2</sup> Winslow, 160.

<sup>3</sup> “The Outlook: Right-Wing Communists and Labour Party”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 29 July 1922.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the CPGB acted in an identical manner with regards the anti-parliamentarians as the Labour Party did with it, being unwilling to tolerate an organised faction arguing for ideas at odds with the accepted policies. Why the CPGB thought the Labour Party would act differently than it had is hard to explain but following Bolshevik recommendations clearly took priority.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, this perspective also allows its adherents to maintain that Marxists had been right to pursue parliamentarianism and (reformist) trade unionism in the decades before 1914. Yet this overlooks that this created the

became known as Council Communists. The anti-parliamentarian communists in Germany had created their own party, the Communist Workers Party (KAPD), which was active in the General Workers' Union (AAUD), an industrial organisation created during the German Revolution of 1918-19 in opposition to the reformist trade unions and inspired in part by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). By the winter of 1920-1921 the AAUD had 150,000 members while the KAPD claimed 40,000.

The *Dreadnought* group followed this. In October 1921 it announced its adherence to the Fourth International – the Communist Workers' International (KAI) – which had been formed on the initiative of the KAPD after its expulsion from the Third International. February the following year saw the forming the Communist Workers' Party (CWP) and the call for an All-Workers Revolutionary Union (AWRU) which was to organise on industrial unionist lines in July 1923. This had long been argued by Pankhurst:

“The workers councils, co-ordinated industrially and nationally along the lines of production and distribution, are the organs which are structurally fitted to give the workers greatest power in the control of industry. If that power is to be used to overthrow the present system, the councils, which together will form a One Big Union of workers' committees in all industries, should be built, from the first, with the object of taking control.”<sup>1</sup>

She rejected the notion that these bodies had to await a revolutionary situation before being formed:

“Why do we advocate the Soviets of Workers' Committees in the workshops before the revolution? Because they are a good fighting weapon, and a preparation for

the Soviets after and during the revolution...

“The anti-Parliamentary Communist who does not want the Soviets of the workshop until the hour of crisis would leave the Trade Unions as the unchallenged leaders of the workers until the decisive hour when action is demanded. To do that would be fatal.”<sup>2</sup>

Neither the CWP or AWRU outlived 1923 while the AAUD and KAPD nearly disappeared in spite of initially having a mass base the British organisations did not. In this the AWRU repeated the experience of trying to build dual-unions on the IWW model attempted before the war.<sup>3</sup> The *Dreadnought* also supported the Unemployed Workers' Organisation, reflecting the economic conditions of its last years.

As can be seen, the WSF (and the KAPD) raised against Lenin within the

## **the WSF... raised against Lenin within the Third International the same arguments and alternatives that Bakunin and the first revolutionary anarchists had raised against Marx within the First**

Third International the same arguments and alternatives that Bakunin and the first revolutionary anarchists had raised against Marx within the First – direct action and organisation on the economic terrain as against “political action” and pre-figuring the desired future society will fighting the current one.

### **The “Reversion to Capitalism” in Russia**

Pankhurst and the WSF also re-evaluated the Russian Revolution. The catalyst for this was the passing of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921 which Pankhurst denounced as a “reversion” to capitalism. She rightly asked: “But is it not very sad to find the soviet government proceeding on the assumption more can be done by people who are working for their own private gain and employing wage slaves than by free workers cooperating on equal terms to supply common needs?”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Communism and its Tactics”, *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 4 February 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Industrial Organisation”, *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 7 July 1923.

<sup>3</sup> A network of militants within a given industry working within and outwith the unions, as suggested in the *Dreadnought* at other times, is a different matter.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Winslow, 175.

Context is needed. Part of the problem facing socialists in the initial years of the revolution was the lack of reliable information from Russia. This led to radicals from different schools seeing the realisation of their ideas in Russia. Thus syndicalists and Guild Socialists saw an industrial republic based on functional democracy being created. This can be seen when Pankhurst wrote in August 1918 that “everything is being Socialised... the most important point to emphasise is that the organisation of affairs is not centralised and that each workshop manages itself... The workshop committees control the industry”.<sup>1</sup> The reality was radically different, with the Bolsheviks imposing “one-man management” and a centralised economic structure based on the *Glavki* system developed under Tsarism – in short, state-capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, it was a case of blaming the NEP, viewing it as a “reversion to Capitalism [which] strikes at the root of the Soviet idea and destroys the functional status of the Soviets.”<sup>3</sup> However, this was accompanied by a deeper analysis which recognised that “[i]n Russia, as a matter of fact, the continued existence of the industrial unions is due to the fact that there is antagonism between the workers and those who are administering industry. In a theoretically correct Soviet community the workers, through their Soviets, which are indistinguishable from them, should administer. This has not been achieved in Russia.”<sup>4</sup> The need for workers’ control was seen as essential for a successful socialist revolution:

“The trend of the times supports the view that the Soviet Government made a serious blunder when it decided (and put its decision into practice) that ‘workers’ control of industry’ is only a slogan useful for securing the overthrow of the capitalist, and must be discarded once the workers have turned out the capitalist, in favour of

management by an individual or committee appointed by some centralised authority.”<sup>5</sup>

In short, the *Dreadnought* argued “until the workers are organised industrially on Soviet lines, and are able to hold their own and control industry, a successful Soviet Communist revolution cannot be carried through, nor can Communism exist without that necessary condition”.<sup>6</sup> The rulers in Russia “pose now as the prophets of centralised efficiency, trustification, State control, and the discipline of the proletariat in the interests of increased production ... the Russian workers remain wage slaves, and very poor ones, working, not from free will, but under compulsion of economic need, and kept in their subordinate position by ... State coercion.”<sup>7</sup> This was even identified with state-capitalism:

“The term communism was adopted by the Russian revolutionaries because the Fabians and other exponents of State Capitalism had appropriated the term Socialism and distorted its meaning and side-tracked the Socialist movement by drawing the red herrings of reformism across the trail. Now we find the Right-Wing Communists of the C.P.G.B. (Third International) are distorting the meaning of the term Communism in similar fashion.”<sup>8</sup>

“State Socialism”, she came to realise, “with its wages and salaries, its money system, banks and bureaucracy, is not really Socialism at all, but State Capitalism”.<sup>9</sup>

Before the “reversion” to capitalism, Pankhurst had also noted that “there are wages of many grades, still there are graduated food rations. The ‘responsible worker must have an adequate supply of food, or his work will suffer’, therefore if there is a shortage of food the ‘responsible workers’ must have a higher ration than the rest of the people; that is the argument... These are the old injustices, the old criminal errors of capitalism persisting under the reign of the Soviets.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, “Socialism in the Making”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 3 August 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Brinton, “The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control”, *For Workers’ Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Chico/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Communism and Its Tactics”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 24 December 1921.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Communism and its Tactics”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 21 January 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Communism and its Tactics”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 4 February 1922.

<sup>6</sup> “An Appeal from the Russian Workers’ Opposition”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 15 July 1922.

<sup>7</sup> “Our View”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 31 May 1924.

<sup>8</sup> “Our View: Communism or State-Capitalism”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 1 February 1923.

<sup>9</sup> “What Socialism is Not”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 11 August 1923.

<sup>10</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Freedom of Discussion”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921.

However, she did not delve deeper into this issue at that time to conclude the obvious, namely that capitalistic distribution implies capitalistic productive relationships.

Also of note was a review of Alexander Berkman's 1921 pamphlet *The Kronstadt Revolution* which indicated that "the Kronstadt rebellion against the Russian Soviet Government was by no means a White Guard insurrection, but an uprising of sailors, workers, and peasants against Bolshevik bureaucracy, against the

suppression of Left propaganda and freedom generally, and against the privileges and economic inequalities which have developed under the Bolshevik regime." The Kronstadt movement "was not a fully conscious Communist one: it was a movement of the poor oppressed against their oppressor – unfortunately, in this case, the Soviet Government and the Soviet bourgeoisie." If the rebels "adhered to the principle that no one may hire another for private gain, but apparently they still favoured production for profit on a small scale" then "the Soviet Government has re-established the hiring of labour and production for profit on a large scale."<sup>1</sup> Yet before the NEP the worker was the hirling of the State and, as a consequence, exploited by the bureaucracy which in turn lead to privileges and economic inequalities.

Given this, the notion of a "revision" to capitalism cannot be maintained. Rather, it was a transformation of a state-capitalist regime to one with more features of market-capitalism. Capitalism had changed its form in Russia before the NEP rather than being abolished, an analysis which would have called into question the wishful thinking previously expressed and was unlikely to be embraced immediately although, as can be seen, this re-evaluation did increasingly take place.

**Yet before the NEP  
the worker was the  
hirling of the State  
and, as a  
consequence,  
exploited by the  
bureaucracy which in  
turn lead to privileges  
and economic  
inequalities.**

This re-evaluation also extended to the soviets: "In the industrial centres where it might have been expected that the occupational basis of the Soviet would have been adhered to, the structure of the Russian Soviets was irregular from the theoretical standpoint. The Soviets, instead of being formed purely of workers in the various industries and activities of the community, were also of delegates of political parties, political groups formed by foreigners in Russia Trades Councils, Trade Unions and co-operative societies."<sup>2</sup> This, of

course, is part of the issue for it had been the Bolshevik Party leadership which had seized power in Russia, not the soviets. As one *Dreadnought* contributor suggested:

"The realisation of Communism, i.e., not Communist Partyism, but the common-ownership and use of the means of production, and the common, enjoyment of the products, still remains a problem. which will have to be solved by the creative genius of the people freely organising themselves; or not at all... But the [methods of the]

bureaucratic revolutionaries ... are doomed to failure by their very nature. The lesson we should learn is to spread the ideal of Communism as widely and clearly as possible, to make Communists, that is, people understanding and imbued with a passion for the attainment of that ideal, not members of parties obsessed before all else with the desire to build up a strong centralised party to whose leadership the masses shall be subordinated. That would only be to erect one more obstacle to be overthrown before the people can really become free economically, and morally."<sup>3</sup>

In many ways, Pankhurst's evolution reflected that of Emma Goldman. Like Pankhurst, Goldman supported the Bolsheviks primarily for their consistent anti-war position and because she

<sup>1</sup> *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 30 December 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Communism and its Tactics", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 24 December 1921. This, incidentally, echoed the position of Russian Anarcho-

Syndicalists. (Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* [Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006], 190)

<sup>3</sup> A. Ironie, "How is Communism to be Realised?", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921.

considered them as applying anarchist tactics.<sup>1</sup> Both had their illusions shattered and both re-evaluated their previous positions, although Goldman had the advantage of spending longer in Russia than Pankhurst making her *Soviet Russia As I Saw It* far less informed and so far less useful than Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia*.

While its analysis of developments in Russia was confused and incomplete, it should not be forgotten that the *Dreadnought* group "had to form its views on the spot, without any... advantages [of hindsight]. In retrospect it is relatively easy to argue that the *Dreadnought* group's view of Russian society during 1917-21, and the policies the group supported during those years, were mistaken; that at no time after 1917 was anything remotely resembling communism established in Russia".<sup>2</sup> However, that they had recognised that something had gone wrong and linked it to the socio-economic relations the regime had created are significant.

### The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

These developments were facilitated by the fact that Pankhurst "was not and would not claim to be a Marxist theoretician."<sup>3</sup> This was obscured somewhat by her terminology reflecting the British socialist movement being predominantly Marxist as were the Bolsheviks. Her use of the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" shows this.

Initially, the Bolshevik rule, the "dictatorship of the Communist Party", was equated to an elected government, as in "the dictatorship of the Liberal, Conservative, or Coalition Party, whichever happens to form the Government in power in the British Parliament" or other "strong Governments with large majorities." She believed that the Communists had won its position by means of fair elections and that "the Russian people send to their Soviets, as they have doing steadily, a majority of Communist Party delegates, it is natural and inevitable that the Communists should control the Government."<sup>4</sup> In this she reflected a common, if incorrect, perspective that Bertrand Russell noted at the time:

"Friends of Russia here [in Britain] think of the dictatorship of the proletariat as merely a new form of representative government, in which only working men and women have votes, and the constituencies are partly occupational, not geographical. They think that 'proletariat' means 'proletariat,' but 'dictatorship' does not quite mean 'dictatorship.' This is the opposite of the truth. When a Russian Communist speak of a dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense. He means the 'class-conscious' part of the proletariat, i.e. the Communist Party. He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin and Tchicherin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage-earners as have not the right opinions, whom he classifies as lackeys of the bourgeoisie."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Russell, who recognised "[n]o conceivable system of free elections would give majorities to the Communists, either in the town or country"<sup>6</sup>, it took longer for Pankhurst to reach the same conclusion but it is to her credit that she did as many others did not. Pankhurst also used the term simply to mean the defence of the revolution:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is a much misused phrase; when Communism is in being there will be no proletariat, as we understand the term today, and no dictatorship.

"The dictatorship, so far as it is genuine and defensible, is the suppression by Workers' Soviets of capitalism and the attempt to re-establish it. This should be a temporary state of war. Such a period will inevitably occur, we believe, because we do not believe that the possessors of wealth will submit to the overthrow of capitalism without resistance. On the contrary, [we] believe the owners will fight to preserve capitalism by every means in their power."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Goldman, like Pankhurst, had also noted before the war the anti-labour nature of mainstream (bourgeois) women's suffrage movement, although they had differing views on whether pursuing women's suffrage as a reform was a good use of time, resources and energy.

<sup>2</sup> Shipway, 55.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Soviet Russia as I Saw it in 1920", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 23 April 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1949), 26-7.

<sup>6</sup> Russell, 40-1.

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Communism and its Tactics", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 10 December 1921.

Given that her vision of revolution was a *social* one, in which “the Soviets, or workers’ occupational councils, will form the administrative machinery for supplying the needs of the people in Communist society; they will also make the revolution by seizing control of all the industries and services of the community”<sup>1</sup>, there would be no proletariat. Moreover, the former proletariat would hardly be “dictating” to the former capitalists and landlords as these would have no role or position in society necessitating it – refusing to obey the orders of those formerly in power hardly amounts to dictatorship. As she later explained:

“One phrase has crept into the manifesto of the Unemployed Organisation which requires discussion. It is a phrase of which all Communists have made use, both of late and also in the days of Marx, Engels and Bachunin [*sic*]. We refer to the term ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat.’ This in its original use meant the rigid suppression of the middle and upper classes in so far as they may endeavour to resist the coming of socialism and to combat the popular will.

“Latterly, under the inspiration of Russian bureaucrats, the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ has been used to justify the dictatorship of a party clique of officials over their own party members and over the people at large. So far as the dictatorship has been carried that the parties submitting to it have become utterly sterile as instruments of education and action. In Russia the dictatorship has robbed the

revolution of all it fought for; it has banished Communism and workers’ control.

“Liberty is an essential part of the Communist revolution. We must not sacrifice it to the ambitions of would-be dictators.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet Marx and Engels had meant a centralised, indivisible, top-down regime<sup>3</sup> which Bakunin correctly predicted would become a dictatorship of the party leaders. This indeed

came to pass in the Bolshevik regime which had become a de facto party dictatorship by mid-1918 – using specialised, traditionally organised armed forces separate from the people (Red Army, Cheka, etc.). This experience was generalised for all revolutions by leading Bolshevik Zinoviev at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920:

“All questions are, in reality, under the control of the Party. As a matter of fact, men like Kautsky say to us: ‘You have established the dictatorship of the Party instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat.’ If this is said to our discredit, it is entirely off the mark. We

have established the dictatorship of the proletariat because the dictatorship of the Communist Party is the expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat... It is evident that the business of the working class should be managed by its best elements. Consequently the dictatorship of the proletariat is, at the same time, also the dictatorship of the Communist Party.”<sup>4</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given her previous views, Pankhurst rightly rejected this position and the terminology which excused it. The paper showed



<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Communism and its Tactics”, *The Workers Dreadnought*, 4 February 1922

<sup>2</sup> “Our View: The Unemployed Workers’ Organisation”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 7 July 1923.

<sup>3</sup> As shown in the “Demands of the Communist Party in Germany” issued in March 1848 and the “Address of the

Central Committee to the Communist League” made in 1850, for example.

<sup>4</sup> Communist International, *The second congress of the Communist International: proceedings of Petrograd session of July 17<sup>th</sup>, and of Moscow sessions of July 19<sup>th</sup>-August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1920* (America: Publishing Office of the Communist International, 1921), 59.

that this mentality had been exported from Moscow given that “to the officials of the CPGB the Soviets mean dictatorship. They have no conception of a free Communist life in which Soviet workers in the industries will administer the production and distribution of the social product.”<sup>1</sup> One *Dreadnought* contributor noted the long-standing nature of Pankhurst’s new position:

“We were told that however much we might object to government of any sort, on principle, government in the form of a dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary to bring about the transition from Capitalism to free Communism, and that such a dictatorship, being proletarian, would be shorn of the objectionable qualities of other forms of government. Some of us never assented to this, and the trend of things seems to show we were right when we maintained that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only amount to a dictatorship *over* the proletariat of an official class, which would partake of the common nature of all officialism, even if some or all of those officials should be drawn from or voted for by the proletariat itself. We maintained that bureaucracy never proved the transition to anything save increased bureaucracy, or towards the revolt of a people which should discover that those aspirations towards free Communism which some have never relinquished, others have newly awakened to, are yet far from realisation.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, when Marx and Engels used the term the proletariat was a minority class in every country bar Britain – the vast majority were peasants and artisans. Bakunin, rightly, also opposed it for this reason. Pankhurst likewise noted this obvious issue:

“In spite of the time-honoured character, we must affirm that, in our view, the use of the term ‘dictatorship’ is responsible for much confusion and misunderstanding...

“No reasonable person believes that what was required in Russia was that the

relatively small number of industrial workers in Russia should act as the dictators – in the sense that the Czar and Napoleon were dictators – over the peasant masses of Russia”<sup>3</sup>

As with Bakunin, this opposition to the “dictatorship of the proletariat” did not mean rejecting the defence of a revolution – quite the reverse as it clearly aimed at protecting the revolution from threats from within caused by the dangers of centralised concentrations of power in a few hands.

While Pankhurst initially utilised the term under the influence of the apparently successful revolution in Russia, she was sufficiently critical to see its problems and how its application had hindered and undermined the revolution. In this Pankhurst has the advantage over council communists like Pannekoek who kept to his Marxist heritage and continued to use the term in spite of its ambiguities and contradictions.<sup>4</sup>

### **The End of the *Dreadnought***

The socio-economic context the anti-Parliamentarians faced in their last years was difficult and explains the disappearance of the *Dreadnought* group:

“The number of groups who remained outside the Communist Party and the level of their activity has been, perhaps, underestimated... But the prestige of the Russian Revolution was not with them and this, taken together with a lack of subsidy [from Moscow] and sudden changes in the economic and political situation, was to make their work well nigh impossible. For the post-war boom collapsed suddenly. By the end of 1920 there were three quarters of a million people unemployed; by June 1921, two million. By the end of 1921, wage cuts had been forced on six million workers. There were defensive strikes, bitterly fought. But the mood had changed; people who in 1919 had been shouting for revolution were now looking for work... The slump gave the government its chance

<sup>1</sup> “The Outlook: Right-Wing Communists and Labour Party”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 29 July 1922.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ironie, “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921.

<sup>3</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, “Third and Fourth Internationals”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 2 February 1924.

<sup>4</sup> Hence the repeated articles by Leninists having to explain what “the dictatorship of the proletariat” *really* means, namely a workers’ democracy (in the sense of electing their party to government). These articles do not explain why, in that case, the Bolshevik regime and those who equated it with “the dictatorship of the party” should be defended as socialist.

to take its revenge — or to “crack down on subversive elements” if that version is preferred...

“Where the government repression could not do the job the economic depression was more effective. Revolutionary morale dropped catastrophically. Willie Gallagher was later to say that whereas in 1918 100,000 people had marched on May Day in Glasgow, in 1924 only 100 could be mustered. The effect of this on the revolutionary left outside the Communist Party was predictable. The *Workers’ Dreadnought*, for example, which survived the repression and the jailing of Sylvia Pankhurst, quietly folded in 1924”<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment increased from 1.5 per cent in the autumn of 1920 to 18 per cent by December 1921. There was “a decline in engineering workers’ militancy, reflected in the downwards trend in the statistics for strikes in the metal, engineering and shipbuilding industries” with the number of workers striking in 1923 a mere 15% of that in 1919 in these industries, indeed across all industries.<sup>2</sup> This economic context is often ignored when it is claimed that the later *Dreadnought* did not cover industrial disputes as much as previously.<sup>3</sup>

The *Dreadnought* finally disappeared in 1924, but its importance is clear. Just as before the break with Moscow it had published articles by leading Bolsheviks (Russian or otherwise), the pages of the paper now published articles by leading anti-Parliamentarian Communists while articles by Anarchists started to appear in increasing numbers.

**The *Dreadnought*... published articles by leading anti-Parliamentarian Communists while articles by Anarchists started to appear in increasing numbers. This... meant that the *Dreadnought* was the premier source for material on and about what became known as the “ultra-left”.**

This, along with critiques of the Bolsheviks and articles on developments in Russia (including repression of dissident revolutionaries to the left of the regime), meant that the *Dreadnought* was the premier source for material on and about what became known as the “ultra-left”.

It also shows that anarchist conclusions can and are drawn from the class struggle even by those who originally aimed at electoral reform and later embraced the Bolshevik Myth.

## **Pankhurst and Anarchism**

The links with Pankhurst’s “free communism” with anarchism are clear as “[t]here shall be no State, Government or Parliament” in the future society while the “organisation of production, distribution and transport shall be by those who do the work, organised on a voluntary autonomous workshop basis.”<sup>4</sup> “The object of the Workers’ Council,” she stressed, “is not to govern a race of slaves, but to supply the needs of free people.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise her awareness of the need to eliminate economic hierarchies along with political ones: “The Soviet is constructed along the lines of production and distribution; it replaces not merely Parliament and the present local governing bodies, but also the capitalists, managerial staffs and employees of today with all their ramifications.”<sup>6</sup> Her support for anarchist tactics – direct action and extra-parliamentary organisation – has already been shown while she considered anarchists as part of the revolutionary movement:

“When the Revolution comes, it is the revolutionary groups within the workshops which will make it – not the N. U. R., the Workers’ Union, the Dockers’ Union, and

<sup>1</sup> John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (London: Freedom Press, 2017), 328-9.

<sup>2</sup> Shipway, 88-9.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, funding from Moscow ensured the survival of the CPGB. As one CPGB functionary later “admitted that, had the Communist Party not received big financial shots in the

arm, it would have been reduced and probably gone out of existence within a year or so of formation”. (Winslow, 178).

<sup>4</sup> “Our View”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 6 October 1923.

<sup>5</sup> “What Socialism is Not”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 11 August 1923.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Communism and its Tactics”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 24 December 1921.

the rest, but those spontaneously-gathering workshop groups engineered by the conscious propagandists who maintain the Communist and Anarchist organisations and guided by the Communist and Anarchist organisations themselves, if any of them are strong enough to lead in the crisis.”<sup>1</sup>

When the CPGB declared a boycott of anarchist Guy Aldred’s Bakunin Press, the *Dreadnought* announced its bookshop would be stocking its publications.<sup>2</sup> It re-printed Dutch anarchist Domela Nieuwenhuis’s 1894 pamphlet *Socialism in Danger* which had exposed the degeneration of Social-Democracy produced by its tactics of electioneering<sup>3</sup> as well as numerous articles by Kropotkin – including “Revolutionary Essays” (originally *Revolutionary Studies* from 1892)<sup>4</sup>, “The Wage System”<sup>5</sup> and two chapters of *Words of a Rebel*<sup>6</sup>, amongst others. It reported anarchist and syndicalist news, including the resolutions of an International Syndicalist Conference in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> She wrote a two-part review of Proudhon’s *General Idea of the Revolution* when Freedom Press published it in 1923.<sup>8</sup> The *Dreadnought* also reprinted “The Truth About Machno” from an IWW pamphlet<sup>9</sup> while Pankhurst spoke at a meeting “in aid of the Russian Anarchists” on 27 July 1923 “[t]o protest against the imprisonment of our comrade NESTOR MACHNO by the Polish Government and against the Russian Government’s demand for his transfer to Russia.”<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, the existence of other anarchist papers – such as *Freedom* – meant that the *Dreadnought* did not publish more.

Little wonder anarchist historian John Quail noted how the *Dreadnought* had ended “interestingly enough on a progressively anarchist note.”<sup>11</sup> Another historian likewise summarised that “[t]hough Pankhurst seems never to refer to herself

as an anarchist, the libertarian emphasis in the later *Dreadnought* was strong” and “[n]otable features of the later years of the *Dreadnought* are the increased approval given to libertarian and/or anarchist enthusiasts for soviet democracy and the early attention given to the rise of fascism. To create a ‘vision of Communism’ in the minds of the average person, no better books could be found, said the paper [on 19 April 1924], than Kropotkin’s *Conquest of Bread* and Morris’s *News from Nowhere*.”<sup>12</sup> Yet anarchistic elements had existed for some time, with the BSP’s *The Call* denouncing Pankhurst’s “anarchist views and action” in July 1920.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly Pankhurst had come a long way from her suffragette days and her anti-parliamentarian-communism had made her appreciative of those who had advocated that position for decades beforehand.

## Conclusions

After the end of the *Dreadnought* in 1924, Pankhurst moved away from anti-parliamentarian communism into anti-fascism – she was one of the first to report on the fascist danger in Italy – and anti-imperialism. Given that the evolution of her politics reflected the wider social struggle, with the decline in working class self-activity came a corresponding decline in her perspectives. This situation is not limited to her and inflicts libertarian politics in general – the recurring issue is one of sustaining and growing libertarian organisations and ideas in a climate when its basis of mass struggle is limited.

As with the pre-war syndicalist revolt, Pankhurst advocated two industrial strategies – working within the existing unions to transform them (“boring from within”) and then dual-unionism, the building of new industrial unionism (as the prelude of soviets). Neither approach produced the hoped

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, “Our Point of View”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 24 September 1921.

<sup>2</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 17 December 1921.

<sup>3</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 29 January 1921 to 12 March 1921.

<sup>4</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 26 November 1921 to 11 February 1921.

<sup>5</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 25 February to 18 March 1922.

<sup>6</sup> “The Bourgeois Socialist”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 16 June 1923; “The Break-Up of the State”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 18 August 1923.

<sup>7</sup> “International. Syndicalist Conference”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 5 August 1922.

<sup>8</sup> “The Views of Proudhon”, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 5 April and 12 April 1924; reprinted in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 5 Number 1 (Spring 2025).

<sup>9</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 2 February 1922.

<sup>10</sup> *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 28 July 1923; “Save Nestor Makhno”, *Freedom*, August 1923.

<sup>11</sup> Quail, 329. It is significant that *Freedom* informed its readers of the *Dreadnought*’s demise and that “a new and enlarged monthly series” would soon start. (*Freedom*, July-August 1924)

<sup>12</sup> Ian Bullock, *Romancing the revolution: the myth of Soviet democracy and the British Left* (Edmonton, AB: AU Press, 2011), 305, 343.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Bullock, 229.

for results. Her advocacy of community soviets was innovative and clearly drew upon her suffragette activism in the East-End of London, reflecting the fact that not all working class people were employed (housewives, most obviously). While her arguments for these may have taken the current sexual division of labour as a given, this simply reflected the situation she and her comrades faced and was not considered immutable.

What is of interest for anarchists is the evolution of her communism and the

break with – and subsequent re-evaluation of – of Bolshevism. Like the rest of the left, Pankhurst had little reliable information on the new regime in Moscow and, like others, projected her own hopes and aspirations upon it. Thus her support for the Bolsheviks – like that of many anarchists – was based on the false assumption that a radical socio-economic self-managed federalist system had been introduced, based on workers' councils of elected, mandated and

recallable delegates as well as workers' control of production. As more details of the reality of the regime became available, at around the same time as Bolshevik attempts to impose their favoured tactics in the International Communist movement, Pankhurst had a choice – adjust her ideas on communism or stick to her revolutionary principles. She rightly did the latter and, as a consequence, opened her paper to dissident revolutionary ideas – council communism and anarchism. This makes her relevant today as her vision of communism in terms of means and ends remains appealing.

While an early supporter of “Bolshevism”, unlike many on the British left she had not been a Marxist (being associated with the ILP tradition rather than the BSP one). As Herman Gorter suggested, “our Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, who from temperament, instinct and experience, not so much perhaps from deep study, but by mere chance, was such an excellent champion of Left Wing Communism”<sup>1</sup>. This meant she did not have the

ideological legacy of partyism, parliamentarianism and statism which even many of the pre-war syndicalists had. As such, she was able to eventually see the limitations and contradictions of such shibboleths as “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. Hence her re-evaluation of the use of the term after her break with Moscow and the awareness that without workers' control in the community and workplace then one class system had replaced another. If, as one of her biographer's

suggest, her “grasp of Marxist theory... was weak”<sup>2</sup> this was an advantage as she was unable to rationalise away the counter-revolutionary nature of the Bolsheviks by muttering about *dialectics*.

Pankhurst must be praised for her willingness to question and reject the Bolshevik position when so many of her contemporaries in the British left did not. She recounted the rationale of the others when she wrote in 1921 that “I was loathe to break with those who had placed the Soviets in power without great

consideration. I felt they had been through the fire of battle, they had the courage to rise and had at least achieved something, whereas we were only talking still.”<sup>3</sup> This perspective resulted in thousands of socialists ignoring their own experiences in favour of following Moscow, first under Lenin and then Stalin. The Bolshevik Myth – to use Alexander Berkman's term – was simply too strong for too many.

Pankhurst is of continued importance as she shows how social struggle radicalises, turning her from a Suffragette, to Socialist, to Anti-Parliamentary Communist. Likewise, her strength of mind to compare the reality of Bolshevism to what initially attracted her to it and reject it as non-communist is inspiring, showing that experience developed politics can be mightier than ideology. Her critique of “Right Wing” Communism in Britain and Russia remain valid, as do her tactics and vision of a future society. As such, anarchists today should ensure Pankhurst is remembered as more than a suffragette or an early supporter of Bolshevism.

<sup>1</sup> Herman Gorter, “Open Letter to Comrade Lenin”, *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 23 April 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Winslow, 158.

# Our Equal Birthright

E. Sylvia Pankhurst

*The Woman's Dreadnought*, 14 August 1915

Do you believe that if all the wealthy landowners, merchants and manufacturers, all the great financiers the world over, had been told that their incomes would be cut down to a bare subsistence level if war were declared, and so long as war should last, that they would have agreed to war?

Do you believe that they would have agreed to war, if they had known that they would have to starve and stint as you do?

Do you believe that any Kaiser, Czar, or Emperor, could cause war, alone, without the help of the financiers and the people?

Do you know that the great armament firms are international, that they have directors, who are both British and German, and that they have supplied arms to both sides in the war, and that Great Britain is paying a royalty to Krupps of Germany for every fuse we fire?

Do you not think it is dangerous to give the right to supply armaments to any private firm? If a man sells tea, he tries to make you want to drink it, if he sells guns, he tries to make you shoot.

Do you not want to get behind the armament firms that flourish by our fighting, and the merchants and shippers, who in their desire to open markets, consider the people between them and their trading only as pawns in the game?

Do you remember that when the Russian people were fighting for their freedom against an oppression more terrible than anything we know, the financiers of Great Britain lent money to the Czar and his Ministers to crush them down?

Do you remember that when the British dockers were striking, the German dockers sent money to them to help them to hold out?

Do you not want to get behind the financiers, to the workers of the other nations, in order that you may discover together *why* it is that you should fight, and together solve the differences that arise?

Do you remember that on Christmas Day there was a truce between the English and the German soldiers?

How was it that the men who had been murdering each other for months past were able to want this truce and enjoy it together? It was because they were human beings with minds of the same sort, who had lived the same sort of lives, and Christmas had for them all the self same memories. The religious ideal of Christmas, as drawing together all mankind in peace and goodwill as children of one family in the sight of God, and the intimate tender home memories with which it was interwoven in all the soldiers' hearts, accomplished a miracle indeed! It enabled them to cast out fear – the strongest of our masters – fear of the men of the opposing armies concealed in the opposite trenches, fear of the officers beside them, armed with the frequently exercised power of life and death over those who disobey.

What Christmas did in some portions of the opposing lines, a greater catastrophe than war would also do. If God should send a rain of fire from heaven, or if tremendous floods or an earthquake should arise, immediately the opposing troops would cease their fighting, and as poor bewildered human fugitives, would rush to each other for sympathy and aid.

Deep down beyond all race and class distinctions we are human beings, with the same needs and instincts, and this is revealed to us when we are

threatened by great catastrophes arising from non-human things.

We are suffering now, both nationally and internationally, from our imperfect social organisations, and the mistakes and difficulties that come from fear or suspicion of each other. It is because the people of the various countries fear each other that they are prevailed upon to fight. It is because they fear to trust to their equal birthright as human beings that they allow evil social conditions to prevail at home.

Those who are afraid to trust to the possibility of there being enough for everyone, in a state of society in which equal opportunities should be given to all, strive to maintain things as they are.

We must rid ourselves of the idea that there are any *real* class distinctions. The only essential differences that there are between us, as human beings, are to be found amongst the individuals in every social class. The class distinctions that we know at present are due to the

system of allowing one individual to benefit by the toil of others, and that of putting money out to interest, under which a sum of money is never spent by its owner, but always remains intact, and enables him to exact an unending toll of the things that other people work to produce. The War loan is a striking example of this.

These things are defended on the ground that production must be organised, but the capitalist is not necessarily an organiser, and we must work towards a state of society in which the person who undertakes the, to him, congenial work of organising, shall not be given a larger share of the general benefits produced, than those who are responsible for other forms of labour.

During the war it has been demonstrated very clearly that production organised by competing individuals, each striving for his own private benefit is inefficient in the extreme.

It is because the inefficiency has been very glaring that the Ministry of Munitions has been instituted. Yet still the Government refuses to take the making of munitions out of private hands and even extends the practice, so that such firms as Bryant and Mays, the match makers, are given facilities for becoming munition makers to the Government, and can get a share of the munition profits; although if munitions had been nationalised, war profits would have been saved. It is universally admitted that shippers, coal owners, and those who deal in wheat, meat and other forms of food, have been making enormous profits out of the war; but the Government refuses to prevent these powerful interests from preying upon the consumers.

There is no doubt that the Government is sacrificing the interests of the people to those of the financiers at the present time. Do you believe that you can trust the Government not to do so, when the terms of peace come to be decided?

Do you consider it is safe at any time to allow the foreign policy of the nation to be hidden from the people?

You will be told that it is useless to try to democratise our British foreign policy, because the foreign policies of the other Powers are autocratic and, therefore, our own regard for the welfare of the peoples of the world could do nothing to prevent wars.

Do not believe that. With certainty believe that there are people in every nation whose faith is built on the brotherhood of mankind and those men and women, though they are unknown to us, are striving even as we strive. Every success of ours makes their fight less difficult. Social reforms initiated in one country spread across the world just as scientific discoveries and the developments in music and painting do.

Before the war, during the war, after the war is done, the old striving for more perfect human development continues and will continue for all time.

As we take our part in the struggle let us determine that we will not want for ourselves more of the world's material goods than the common average for all, but that that common average shall be a high and abundant one for all the people of the world.

# The New Order

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Woman's Dreadnought*, 8 January 1916

Compulsion is the great issue of the present day.

By the National Register, the Derby scheme, and now by a limited form of conscription, insidious attempts are being made to gradually fasten compulsion upon us. Mr. Lloyd George, with compliments and perorations for disarming opposition, is persistently trying to filch away all power of independent action from the industrial workers.

He is finding that the men who are actually at work in the Clyde munition factories and into daily contact with the galling injustices of his Munitions Act, are less easy to deal with than Labour Members of Parliament and Trade Union Leaders, who have been brought up in the old school and were long ago comfortably emancipated from workshop life.

When protests were made in Parliament against his suppression of the Glasgow *Forward*, Mr. Lloyd George declared that the trouble on the Clyde was caused by a powerful minority who were in revolt "not against the Ministry of Munitions or the Government," but against the whole organisation of Trade Unionism."

There is a certain amount of truth in this saying, for though the Clyde workers certainly are in revolt against the Munitions Act, which imposes coercion from without upon them, they are also striving to develop and democratise their own Trade Union organisation from within. They are impatient of leaders who enter into confidential understandings with capitalist Governments and become enmeshed in political compromises. The new Trade Unionism, which is so active on the Clyde, wishes to emancipate the workers from the position of

incoherent dependent tools, whether of employers, Governments, or officials sprung from their own ranks. It wishes every worker in the trade to take his or her part in moulding the policy of the union, and each trade union to take its part in making of the nation a co-operative commonwealth, managed in the interests of all.

Naturally those who are in revolt against the hesitations, compromises and sectional outlook of the old-fashioned trade unionists, and who ardently desire the free spontaneous co-operation of the workers, are found to be in violent opposition to the attempts of Mr. Lloyd George and the other compulsionists to place the rank and file of our people under the heel of militarism!

Mr. Lloyd George told the House of Commons that he believed that "in time to come the Munitions Act will be regarded as a tremendous leap in the social and industrial revolution."

We hardly think it possible that Mr. Lloyd George can mean that the Munitions Act will force the workers to take up a more revolutionary attitude, and will make them fight more unitedly and determinedly for their just share of the wealth they produce, but whatever he may mean, this is the only good result that can possibly come from the Munitions Act!

Mr. George has absolutely refused to alter the provision of the Munitions Act which makes it impossible for a

worker to leave his employer without permission, except under pain of six weeks unemployment, although it allows the employer to dismiss the worker at will.

In defending this piece of coercion towards the worker he declared that the only alternative to it was to place all the workers under military discipline.

**The new Trade Unionism... wishes to emancipate the workers from the position of incoherent dependent tools, whether of employers, Governments, or officials sprung from their own ranks. It wishes every worker in the trade to take his or her part in moulding the policy of the union, and each trade union to take its part in making of the nation a co-operative commonwealth, managed in the interests of all.**

Undoubtedly it is at all-round compulsion that Mr. Lloyd George is aiming. He is approaching it by diverse paths, pulling a stone away here and there, as he finds it possible, from the citadel of British liberty.

Perhaps he imagines that the rule of the mailed fist and the iron heel of militarism and compulsion that he is trying to establish amongst us, will be beneficial to us faulty, common people. Perhaps he thinks that the discipline will be good for us and that we shall become more sober, honest, industrious and obedient.

But voteless, economically dependent women and workers, both men and women, who have been crushed already too long under the cruel pressure of commercialism, should know that freedom and equal co-operation is the ideal towards which we must strive.

Moreover Mr. Lloyd George and the other compulsion experts have shown us all again and again that they -- the arch-dictators, are often the grossest of muddlers in such practical matters as the making of munitions, and the drafting of Bills!

# Parliament Doomed

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 2 November 1918

The walls of Jericho are falling; the House of Commons has voted that women may become members of Parliament, and a Government Bill is expected to follow. How illogical now seems the recently-passed, fancy franchise, under which only half the women of these islands are permitted to vote!

But why has Parliament, with little or no visible agitation on the part of women, thus -- hurriedly, eagerly, and with only 25 dissentients -- decided to open its portals to them? The main argument against granting the vote always was that it would be followed by a demand to sit in Parliament, and hardly a dozen

Parliamentary advocates of woman's suffrage were prepared to say that they would ever assent to that.

Then why this change? It is said that the War has taught politicians the value of woman. But women were used as wage workers before this War, and so recently as the Boer War it was seen that they could be Jingoed. It is said that many Members of Parliament feared to vote against women becoming their colleagues lest the women voters in their constituencies should reply by voting against them. It is said that the Government hoped to gain popularity by giving facilities for this measure.

But is there not also another and weightier reason? Does not Parliament begin instinctively to know itself a doomed machine? "Bolshevism," only Socialism under another name, but actual Socialism, entailing transformation – not a mere patching up – of the social system, looms on the horizon. When they are in trouble men call for the help of those they flouted. Outside the party game the more active, independent women remain a discontented crowd of rebels; inside, is it not hoped that they will settle down in conformity with its rules? In every country Parliaments are threatened, and that mysterious, unaccountable thing, the mass people's will, surely and with growing velocity, moves onward towards a newer social organism. Realising this the old fogeys of Parliament and the powers behind them are saying "We must do something to popularise the old institution; let us bring in the women."

So the women will enter Parliament; some fully understanding why they are invited, entirely supporting capitalist system and ready to be its bulwarks; others wanting reforms, even desiring Socialism, and believing that through their action in Parliament they can obtain it; some wire-pulling, self-seekers; some sincerely enthusiastic; some mere wind-bags -- they will go in and play the sad, old Parliamentary game that achieves so little. Soon we shall see them rushing around in

motors to election meetings, dressed for the business of vote-catching, trimming the sails of principle (if they have principles) to the winds of press criticism in order to "get in"! How many of these bustling new recruits to the ranks of Parliamentary candidates will realise that women, who have been debarred from Parliament for what will prove to be the greater part of its existence, have now time to do little more than be in at its death?

We have heard another voice, the voice of the future, that comes with good, inexorable steps bringing the elements which shall form the social structure of the twentieth century. The old husks of the nineteenth do not charm us.

We are waiting for the Soviets, as they are called in Russia, the councils of delegates, appointed and instructed by the workers in every kind of industry, by the workers on the land, and the workers in the home. Through the medium of these workers' councils the machinery of the coming of the Socialist Commonwealth will be evolved, here, as in Russia. The expected General Election interests us only so far as it can be made a sounding-board for the policy of replacing capitalism by Socialism, and Parliament by the Workers' Councils. We shall be at the elections, but only to remind the workers that capitalism must go.

# **The Soviets of the Street.**

## **An Appeal to Working Women.**

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought, 27 March 1920.*

When peace was declared, a group of working-class mothers in a poor street of East London decided to organise a party for all the children of the street. They wanted the party to be something quite homely, but not one of them had a room large enough for all the children to meet in. Besides that, they wanted all the mothers to share equally in giving the party. Therefore, and because it was gorgeous summer-time, and the mothers were poor and thrifty and did not wish to spend any of the money in paying rent to outsiders, they decided to hold the party in the street. They covered the smoke-begrimed walls of houses with decorations; they placed long tables in the roadway and covered them with all the good things for tea that they could collect for their children.

The peace parties spread from street to street; from district to district throughout London. In all the poor streets the mothers caught up the idea. The Chief of Police prohibited the parties but the mothers still went on with them.

The parties grew more and more magnificent. Sums of £20, £30 and £40 were collected for the tea and materials for decoration in a single street. Elaborate concerts and pageants were seen. Everyone in the street helped. Whoever, amongst the inhabitants, had any skill in cooking, sewing, flower making, sign writing, singing or playing, threw herself or himself into the work which the mothers of the poorest sections of the London working-class were organising.

Parsons, charity organisers, and other middle-class people looked on in amazement. They were outsiders in all this.

The working-class mothers who co-operated in those peace parties will know to get together and co-operate for other objects as soon as the importance of doing so occurs to them.

### **Wage Earners' Workshop Committees.**

In Britain and in every country where modern industrial conditions exist, Workers' Committee movement has made its appearance. The men and women in the

workshops are beginning to organise committees with the object of getting control of the industries: in which they work, in order that some day, soon, they will be strong enough to turn out the Capitalists and establish the rule of the working-class.

In Russia, Workers' Committees like these are called Workshop and Factory Soviets, and from them delegates are sent to the Workers' Committees or Soviets for the towns and districts. But to the town and district Soviets there go also representatives of the working women in the houses of the locality.

### **The Women's Workshop Committees.**

Just as the women in each street got together to organise peace parties, so the working women in Russia co-operate in appointing their delegates to represent them in the Soviets.

The working women in London and every other part of Britain will do the same very soon. The little streets will be grouped for this purpose, so as to bring together a convenient number of women, not too many for all the women to know each other, to be able to discuss things together, and to give instructions to the woman they choose to represent their opinions and wishes on a committee covering a larger district. The woman who is appointed to do this must be instructed by the others and must report to them what she has done. A new delegate can be appointed at any time.

The Soviet Revolution is coming, but the working women ought not to wait until it is here to set up their street committees. These are the workshop committees of the mothers, for the streets and the houses they live and work in are *their* workshops. They should start the Soviets of the streets as soon as possible.

### **Organise to Protect Yourself.**

Food prices are rising, rents are going up, life is getting harder for poor people. There will probably be a miners' strike soon, and other great strikes are sure to follow. The women will be on the side of the workers against the employers in every struggle; but it is the working-class mother who will have to suffer most from the shortage of necessities that will result from the contest between Capital and Labour.

The women must organise to protect themselves and their families and to help in the general struggle of the working-class to conquer the power of government, and to put an end to wage-slavery and poverty, and the rule of the rich. We shall all suffer during the upheaval; but after the workers have won the victory and a Workers' Communist Republic has been established, we shall find that we have been richly repaid for the effort.

### **Food Control Ministry Worthless.**

We have seen that the Food Controller and all the committees set up by the Ministry of Food have not kept down the food prices. They have worked on the

principle that profits must be safeguarded before anything is done to relieve the burden of the working women who cannot make their husband's wages stretch to meet the rising cost of living.

We have seen that, though the Labour Party has got a majority of seats on many of the local councils, the Labour members are unable to keep down the price of food, and that they cannot bring down the rents or produce the houses for working-class families which are lacking, nor can they remedy any of the hardships from which the workers are suffering.

### **Work out Your Own Salvation.**

Indeed, there is no remedy except the abolition of Capitalism. The land, the industries, the food supply, the milk, the trams and buses, the houses, everything must belong to the workers, and the workers must manage everything through their own Soviets or Workers' Committees. Only the Workers' Soviets will abolish Capitalism, and put the management of the country and all its wealth into the hands of the workers.

The first thing for working women to do is to organise; to hold their own street meetings and to set up their own Soviets.

Before the War, thousands of working women from East London used to go marching up to Parliament to ask for a vote, and all over the country working women were agitating for it. They hoped the vote would give them the power to abolish the poverty with which they are struggling all their lives. Now they have got the vote; but already they see, if they read of what the workers in other countries are doing, that the class-struggle is something quite different from that which they imagined it to be; they understand as long as the Capitalist system remains, the workers will always be poor and exploited. They see that the workers in Russia, in Germany, and all other countries are discovering that votes for Members of Parliament are useless to the workers because when the workers come into power they do not use Parliament at all, but build up their own workers' committees. They see that the Capitalist class will not allow itself to be voted out of power, that it will fight to protect itself from the workers, and that the workers must prepare themselves to turn out the Capitalist by main force and then take control.

As soon as they understand the position, the women who were once so eager for the vote will be still more eager to secure the establishment of the Workers' Republic. If we want a big and splendid thing we must be prepared to make great efforts to secure it.

To organise the Soviets of the streets is a big task, but it must be undertaken sooner or later. So let us begin it now. Every woman can take her share in this; every woman can begin to organise the Soviet in her own street and can try to persuade all her friends to join in the workers' revolution.

# Infantile Sickness of the "Left"

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 21 August 1920

Nicholai Lenin has certainly added to the gaiety of Communism by his treatise under this head. Whatever his brilliance of leadership of the Russian movement, his knowledge and judgement of British Communism is badly deficient.

To argue a tactics for revolutionaries over here from Russian tactics in the Russian Duma is unsound. The Russian Duma itself was, but a few short years before, won from Czardom through revolutionary effort. The experience Russians had had of a "Constituent Assembly" was therefore very limited and incomplete. Here every worker has had a bellyful of our hoary old institution of Parliament. His father had a bellyful before him. And his grandfather away before him. British workers are far from being the political babes Comrade Lenin seems to imagine.

A clear-cut call of "Down with Parliament, all Power to the Soviets," may well be made in six months time, if we get to work, and not after Henderson and Thomas, with their palliative dope, have endeavoured to queer the pitch. The fact that the Capitalists want the workers everywhere to participate in Parliament, want them to

send Henderson, Thomas, and the group of fakirs, lawyers, Liberals, and other political sycophants who constitute the Labour Party, to power, is a good enough argument for us not to want them to do anything so suicidal to revolutionary triumph.

I sincerely trust that the "great influence" that some leaders wielded in the past, will be wielded by no future individual in the movement. British Revolutionary Communism, if I interpret its spirit aright, stands, probably more than the Communism of any other country, for strict discipline and subordination of ego to the movement, accurate infection by delegates of the letter and spirit of their instructions. Brilliant individual efforts from the star turns of the team are not wanted. Solid combination and sound team work are what the rank and file stand for. The sooner the whole movement is built up from bottom to top on sound Soviet principles, with recall of all delegates and persons entrusted with executive posts by the body delegating such powers to them, with strict Party control of all such delegates, the healthier for the movement.

## Our point of view

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 24 September 1921

What is the difference between ourselves and the Communist Party?

Our differences are partly of principle, partly of practical utility.

As to the second, we believe that we can do useful work for Communism by continuing the Workers' Dreadnought, and we do not admit the right of anyone to stop us.

Moreover, we desire to remain an independent communist voice. An independent organ is a guard against the corruptions, opportunisms and tyrannies which are apt to attend on Parties, and especially Parties formed, as the Communist Party of Great Britain has been, from groups of conflicting tendencies, brought together by outside pressure and largely composed of persons as yet untried in the political struggle. The doctrine: "My Party, right or wrong", which leads inevitably to the practice of putting party before principle, must be shunned consistently by those who desire to take part in the creation of revolutionary change. The past constantly stretches out its tentacles to

draw us back to it; constantly strives to clog our minds with sophistries. A high order of mental courage and independence is necessary to maintain always the hard, steep path of the revolutionary. The comfortable, care-free official position; the members so apt to be amenable and trusting, if only they are not asked to leave their groove, or to worry their minds with new and startling thoughts: all these provide an incentive towards opportunism, against which a constant spur is needed.

The danger of opportunism, from which an independent organ can help to protect a party, is moreover inherent in those compromise tactics for which the Third International declared itself at its Second Congress in Moscow last year, and to which it still remains committed.

We contend that the present policy of the Third International is illogical and unworkable, and either the policy must be changed, or a new force must arise to achieve the workers' revolution outside Russia, and to make Russia herself a Communist country.

Briefly, the present policy of the majority in the Third International is to secure numerous adherents, by striving to combine mutually conflicting policies.

### **Parliamentarism.**

Thus the Third International declares that Communism will not come by Act of Parliament, that Parliament is part of the machinery of Capitalism, and must be swept away; that the workers must be estranged from it and induced to set up their Soviets as the rival organism that will overthrow and supersede it; that Capitalism will be overthrown, not by a Parliamentary majority, but by actual force, by the industrial and armed power of the workers.

Having laid all this down in the most unmistakable fashion, the Third International goes on to declare that Communists, though they must not work for reforms through Parliament, must yet seek election to Parliament.

The only official reason given for this weak conclusion is that the election contest and Parliament provide effective platforms for Communist oratory, and that the speeches of Communist candidates and Members of Parliament may be widely reported in the capitalist press.

In reply to these arguments we must point out that the Parliamentary speeches of Colonel Malone went unreported after he joined the B.S.P. and the Communist Party, and that it was only when he was in the dock being tried for his speeches outside Parliament that the Press gave much space to his activities. As for the Communist candidate at Caerphilly his speeches were not even reported in the Daily Herald. But the point is of minor importance; the speeches of Lloyd George, Churchill, Asquith and the rest occupy column upon column in the capitalist newspapers: we Communists can never be given anything approaching the great and constant publicity in capitalist organs that is accorded to the idols of capitalist politics.

We must find other means of reaching the popular ear. Yet even were a candidate or Member of Parliament entitled to a verbatim report in the entire press every day, how flimsy a reason this would be for insisting that Communist Parties must, of necessity, take part in the political scramble for seats in Parliament; how miserably insufficient a reason for casting out the fighting Communist Labour Party of Germany, and many more!

But there are other reasons, reasons not given in Theses, why the Third International demands Parliamentary

action from the Parties affiliated to it. Two deeply opposed policies are represented by the Communist acceptance or refusal of Parliamentary action.

Those of the sincere and intelligent Communists decide to use Parliamentary action do so because they believe they can thereby obtain sway over unawakened, unconscious masses: they are not content, patiently, to gather a body of thinking workers, but desire to take a short cut by capturing unthinking masses.

An extreme instance of such opportunism is the decision that the Communist Party should seek affiliation to the Labour Party. Our Russian comrades fail to realise that the present Labour leaders cannot always count on the response of the inert masses in their Unions unless the issue be a very simple bread and butter one of hours and wages. If the Communist Party could conceivably capture executive power in the Labour Party, it would have captured a gigantic machine that would not move.

When we, who are against the use of Parliamentary action, argue that it is contradictory and confusing to declare on the one hand that Parliament is useless and must be destroyed, and on the other hand to urge the workers to put us into Parliament, those who have chosen the way of Parliamentary action, reply that great masses of unconscious workers still have faith in Parliament. Quite so, we answer, then we must undermine that faith; but appalled by the magnitude of the task of creating a

body of conscious workers strong enough to effect any changes, the Communist opportunists propose to accomplish the revolution with crowds of unconscious workers.

We, who believe that the revolution can only be accomplished by those whose minds are awakened and who are inspired by conscious purpose, have decided to shun the administrative machinery of Capitalism.

We have decided this because of the clear, unmistakable lead to the masses which this refusal gives, a lead, surer and more effective, because it is a lead given by action, not merely by words.

We have so decided also because the refusal to compete for electoral seats means the cutting off from us of those weak and self-seeking opportunists to whom seats in Parliamentary and on the local government bodies are attractive because of the position they confer upon the holder.

So much for our difference on the Parliamentary question with the Third International, as officially represented in its Theses. Our differences with the

**We, who believe that the revolution can only be accomplished by those whose minds are awakened and who are inspired by conscious purpose, have decided to shun the administrative machinery of Capitalism.**

Communist Party of Great Britain go still further, for the British Party does not operate the Parliamentary policy in the destructive sense laid down by the Third International.

The British Party has no representatives in Parliament at present; but it has many representatives on local governing bodies: the policy of these representatives is not the policy of the Third International Theses. As we have already pointed out, during the coal strike, when the miners were fighting the concerted attempt of the employing class of this country to reduce the working class standard of living, the representatives of the Communist Party in Poplar were responsible for cutting down wages of bricklayer's labourers, painter's labourers, bakers, sewing machinists and others, as well as reducing the rate of Poor Law Relief to the poor and unemployed. Such examples can be multiplied by anyone who takes the trouble to inquire into the doings of the representatives of the Communist Party of Great Britain, on the local Boards and Councils, up and down the country. Where, indeed, are to be found Communist Party representatives on local bodies using their position on the bodies in a revolutionary way? Where are those Communists? Let us hear of them. Echo, answering "where?" has long given the only response to that urgent question.

We do not blame those "Communists" and Labour representatives who do not see eye to eye with us on this matter; we do not accuse them of bad faith or dishonesty. We simply say that they are not operating the policy of the Third International as set forth in its Theses. We exist to point out such facts: we shall continue to do so, and, in so doing, without malice, we shall educate the movement.

In our opinion, the use of Parliamentary action by Communists is illogical, contradictory and bound to lead to the lapses into rank Reformism that we see wherever members of the Communist Party secure election to public bodies. These Communist Party members who have been elected to public bodies, are simply trying, like the Labour Party, to secure reforms: they are taking no step to unhinge the capitalist system. Some of them may be more, some less, effective Reformists than the Labour Members, but they are doing precisely the same sort of work, whilst the Communist Party fulminates against all Reformers.

Let us look the matter squarely in the face. We are for Revolution: we have done with Reform and, leaving it altogether alone, we concentrate our efforts on bringing

people to an understanding of Communism and to a determination to discard Capitalism, and replace it by Communism.

We know that the breath of Parliamentary intrigue, the breath of the Parliamentary Committee Room, the entire atmosphere of the House of Commons and the jugglery of political parties there, is antagonistic to the clean white tire of revolutionary Communist enthusiasm. Comrades who have not, like ourselves, come into close and wearisome contact with the Parliamentary machine, who have not Lobbied and sat in the Gallery, hour on hour, day on day; who have not, year by year, poured over the daily verbatim reports, and drafted and engineered Amendments to Government Bills, cannot

know the devitalising pettiness, the hideous imposture of the Parliamentary machine.

We who stood closely by at the birth of the Labour Party, holding the near confidence of its creator, the honest and true man, Keir Hardie, whose spirit, was broken by its failure, its wholly inevitable failure; we say from the depths of our consciousness: never again!

Oh, young body of earnest Communists (if such, genuinely and truly you are) break with the past and its traditions, do and dare for your faith, take not that road.

The Parliamentary contest belongs to the politics of Capitalism; the politics of Communism must forge, new weapons, must find new paths. Do not cling to the skirts of the dead past. Go out without fear to seek the future.

## Trade Unionism

The difference of policy between the Communists who place their faith in numbers rather than in consciousness, is evidenced in other matters than that of Parliament.

The decision of the Third International, that the British Communist Party should affiliate to the Labour Party, the decision that the Red Trade Union International shall be a hybrid body, composed of Trade Unions, of whatever sort and political, or non-political complexion, that are willing to join it, as well as of Shop Stewards and Workshop Committee organisations, and militant industrial organisations like the I.W.W.; the decision to expel the German Communist Labour Party for forming new revolutionary Unions: these things display the same hesitant fear of shutting out anyone, the same policy of roping in passive, unawakened masses, that has dictated the use of Parliamentary action.

**The real struggle is  
between the employers  
and the awakened  
workers; the Trade  
Union officials,  
vacillating between the  
two, occasionally pulled  
nearer to the side of the  
conscious workers by  
the unconscious masses  
growing restive under  
economic pressure**

The Russian leaders who have largely engineered the Third International into its opportunist decisions, refuse to recognise the significance of the persistent tendencies of the working class movement which manifest themselves unmistakably in the highly, industrialised Western countries. We see in these countries a triangular struggle between three forces. Firstly, the employers; secondly, the Trade Union leaders backed by unconscious masses; thirdly, the smaller body of awakened workers. The real struggle is between the employers and the awakened workers; the Trade Union officials, vacillating between the two, occasionally pulled nearer to the side of the conscious workers by the unconscious masses growing restive under economic pressure.

The awakened workers, finding the power of the Unions concentrated in the hands of the Trade Union officials by the obstructive rules and passive assent of the unawakened masses, who far outnumber the awakened, proceed to form new organisations. The merit of these new organisations is that they are manned by those who have joined them with a definite purpose and a desire for change, and are operated by the rank and file. Therefore, instead of being composed, like the Trade Unions, of inert masses, brought in by the pressure of custom and the attraction of the friendly benefits, they are composed of more or less conscious elements.

These rebel organisms, at war with the old Trade Unionism, cannot be combined with it: to make them an official part of the Unions is to destroy them: they exist as a protest against Conservatism in the Unions. They are an effervescent force, spasmodic and uncertain, sometimes merely revolting against hard conditions with no more than a fugitive purpose, but nevertheless representing the high-water mark of class-consciousness and discontent in the workshop. They are the forerunners of what, some day, will break out spontaneously to form the Soviets. They will function in times of crisis and they will die away, as the English Shop Stewards have now died down, almost to the point of extinction. Their more conscious elements are the active working-class Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists, who form the backbone of those movements, and who rally round them the rank and file of the workshops when feeling runs red enough amongst the masses to dispose the masses for action.

The Red Trade Union International formed by the Russian Communists as an ally of the Third International might have been composed of such elements: all the rebel elements that fight within the workshops. Its mainstay then (beside the Russians who have achieved their revolution) would have been the Germans who are near enough to the Revolution to maintain continuously in existence revolutionary groups within the workshops which, transcending the power ever yet exercised and the consciousness ever yet reached by the British Shop Stewards' movement, are

able to assume the title of revolutionary Unions and have proved themselves by actual fighting in the revolutionary struggle.

The Third International was not content to make its industrial ally a relatively small, though intensely revolutionary body: it wanted something big and showy that could rival the Yellow Amsterdam International in actual numbers. Therefore it has built up a shapeless, incoherent body, decorated by the names of non-Communist Trade Union "bigwigs", with the paper backing of unconscious memberships that do not know what Trade Unionism means. These "bigwigs" would all depart from the Red International should it declare a policy of action that would lead to hardship and danger. But such an International is unlikely to declare such a policy.

When the Revolution comes, it is the revolutionary groups within the workshops which will make it – not the N.U.R., the Workers' Union, the Dockers' Union, and the rest, but those spontaneously-gathering workshop groups engineered by the conscious propagandists who maintain the Communist and Anarchist organisations and guided by the Communist and Anarchist organisations themselves, if any of them are strong enough to lead in the crisis. The Unions like the miners', in which the rank and file have obtained most power, and in which advanced thought has a hold on the largest proportion of the membership, may perhaps swing into line after the Revolution has been precipitated by unofficial action; they will not precipitate it.

To state this is not to follow mere imaginings: Russia herself, and Germany, with greater, more prolonged emphasis, have proved this to be the inevitable path of development.

Smillie and Hodges, Thomas, Henderson and Robert Williams may perhaps rush in to capture the Revolution when it is made, and may perhaps succeed for a time; that depends on whether there is a Labour Ministry at the moment of the outbreak, and upon a number of other considerations. In any case, it is certain that neither the Trade Unions nor their officials will actually make the Revolution. The Revolution will be a coup d'état by the conscious Communists and the turbulent rank and file.

It is essential that the Communist Party should not be a large confused mass of incoherent elements honeycombed by Parliamentary and Local Government place-hunters, by people who believe that "Parliamentary action will do it", and by those who have come into the Party merely because they disliked the intervention against Soviet Russia.

The Communist Party can only help to precipitate the Revolution, and, more important, to make the Revolution, when it comes at last a Communist Revolution, if it be a Party of Communists.

## **The Need to make Communists**

From friends and opponents of Communism there is much talk of Revolution but, after all, our paramount need is to make Communists.

What proportion of the British population knows what Communism is?

What proportion of Communists agrees in its version of Communism; in its ideals for Communism?

When we come to discuss closely what is Communism, and how shall we make Communists, we find that the differences of opinion between Right and Left Communists are as deep and far reaching upon these two questions, as upon Parliamentarism and the Trade Unions. This again proves the need for perpetual controversy, study, and exchange of views in the Communist movement.

### **Why we joined the United Communist Party**

We were strongly urged to throw, in our lot with a United Communist Party, and we ourselves desired a United Party: firstly most obviously, because, all told, we Communists, are as yet so few that it seemed desirable to join forces; secondly, because it was obvious that the B.S.P., the S.L.P., the W.S.F., the S.W.S.S. and the rest were divided, not wholly upon principle, but partly on geographical lines and on the accidental fact that certain members had happened to be converted by certain people. There were Parliamentarians and anti-Parliamentarians in every one of these organisations; there were opportunists and extremists in them all. If they were brought together, we

hoped that the various like elements would amalgamate and form distinct blocks. Of course, we hoped most for the joining of forces by the scattered anti-Parliamentarians and extremists. We hoped also for their growing influence and final ascendancy in the united Party, failing that they could, should some crisis render it advisable, break out later on.

We never concealed this view, this desire and intention.

In Moscow, when Lenin strongly urged us to join the United Party, he said: "Form a Left block within it: work for the policy in which you believe, within the Party."

But the British Communist Party will not have it so. It declares for the extermination of Left Wing propaganda.

The Right majority in the Communist Parties of other countries has taken a similar line. The Executive of the Third International, after pleading with us to enter, now apparently encourages the excommunication of the Left Wing.

The Russian Party itself is being split; for Lenin, in a recent speech, which has just reached this country, announces that the "Workers' opposition is leaving the Russian Communist Party".

The German Communist Labour Party, the K.A.P.D. held an International Conference in Berlin, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, of Communists opposed to the Third International.

But the Communist Cause advances; do not doubt it: new tendencies are developing in the movement and must displace the old to make way for themselves.

# **To Lenin, as representing the Russian Communist Party and the Russian Soviet Government.**

**Sylvia Pankhurst**

*Workers' Dreadnought*, 4 November 1922

We address you as representative of the Russian Soviet Government and the Russian Communist Party. With deep regret we have observed you hauling down the flag of Communism and abandoning the cause of the emancipation of the workers. With profound sorrow we have watched the development of your policy of making peace with Capitalism and reaction.

Why have you done this?

It seems that you have lost faith in the possibility of securing the emancipation of the workers and the establishment of world Communism in our time. You

have preferred to retain office under Capitalism than to stand by Communism and fall with it if need be.

Yet if a great call, a high call, and a disinterested call to Communism might go out to the people at this time, from some source that could inspire them with trust, it seems that, in the terrible circumstances of the present hour, it must bear tremendous fruit. A period of great misery has fallen upon the peoples; they are suffering great bitterness in the bondage of this ruthless system of Capitalism, which is decaying from the awful and overwhelming growth of its own iniquities.

The exchanges are rising on the one hand, falling on the other, with a startling velocity, which is reflected in the miseries of the people. In the lands of high exchange values falls the blight of unemployment and lowered wages; in the lands of low exchanges is the merciless increase of prices, which forces the toilers to work, faster and ever faster, whilst starvation and want drain them, like cruel leeches, of the very life force they are expending, with desperate recklessness, upon their ill-requited toil.

The financial manipulators rule the world; they are the real Governments; and these puppet Governments, which take the stage for a time, must do their bidding or disappear from the scene.

In Italy we see once more the collapse of the old politics; but it is an evil and vile reaction which, in the shape of Fascism, has taken advantage of the general disgust with the sham fights and the futile tinkering and marking time of the Capitalist politicians. The Fascisti have acted. Because whilst others have so long been content only to talk through the welter of popular distress, the Fascisti, though with wickedness, have acted, multitudes have either followed them, or at least have refrained from actively opposing them. Because the talkers have only talked, no force has opposed the violence of the Fascisti.

The Fascisti have provided a means of existence, even though it is gained by the murder and terrorism of their class brothers and sisters, to masses of destitute demobilised soldiers. The talkers have done not even that; they have spoken of general well-being, but have produced nothing. Reformism can produce nothing of permanent value; it cannot change the essential features of Capitalism which are grinding the agonised masses between the upper and nether mill-stones.

These days of great misfortune are revealing, with piercing and ruthless clarity, the utter powerlessness of those who would reform the iniquitous system and would heal the grievous wounds which it inflicts. 'Work or maintenance for the unemployed', cries the reformist. In so far as the claim is conceded, the local burden of the concession is immediately placed on the shoulders of the working-class householders and their families and lodgers. In so far as unemployment maintenance is made, what is described as a national charge, it is transmitted, in the great complexities of the Capitalist system, into higher prices and reduced remuneration to the wage-earning community, which, having nothing to sell save its labour, has no means of recouping itself for its losses in the labour market and reduced purchasing

power, since it cannot pass on its burden to be borne by someone else.

So it is with all the reforms projected by the reformer, in so far as they ever pass beyond the stage of discussion, for the populations of the world are in the grip of the great Capitalists, and there is no possibility of improvement till that stranglehold has been destroyed.

Even the most ignorant and unsophisticated are to-day instinctively aware of this; they realise that the reformist and his panaceas cannot help them; they observe, on the contrary, that every action of that costly monstrosity, the Capitalist Government, is attended by a devastating increase of parasitic and opulent administrators, the burden of whose maintenance, since they cannot pass it on to others, always falls on the classes least able to bear it. Realising their hopeless position under Capitalism, the people sink into spiritless apathy, concentrating on the effort to maintain an individual existence. In fear of a catastrophic future, they long vainly for a return to the grey humdrum of the pre-war struggle, which was less fierce than this of to-day.

**By your subtle and specious arguments, and by the glamour of the Russian Revolution, through which you were regarded, you have diverted from the quest of Communism many who had been aroused by the call of Soviet Russia.**

Urgent is the need for the strong call to Communism, the clear explanation of the Communist life: its sane and wholesome mutual service: its large and all-embracing fraternity: its escape from this nightmare of poverty and power.

What have you done, O one-time trumpet of revolution? In your impatience of the slow awakening of far multitudes, you have turned your face from the world's lowly and enslaved. You have dabbled in the juggleries of Capitalist diplomacy; you have bartered and bargained with the destinies of the Russian proletariat; and broadcasted the message of your own desertion of Communism, wrapped up in tortuous and misleading casuistry, to the Communist movement throughout the world. By your subtle and specious arguments, and by the glamour of the Russian Revolution, through which you were regarded, you have diverted from the quest of Communism many who had been aroused by the call of Soviet Russia. Therefore we find those who lately set out bearing the standard of Communism, now working to place in power a Party which openly declares its opposition to Communism.

Therefore, instead of placing the knowledge of Communism before the peoples, we find the parties of the Third International urging the masses to continue fighting for a hotchpotch of futile and impossible reforms.

# To The Discontented Worker

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 21 April 1923

You complain of the Trade Union officials, and you cheer to the echo advice to "watch your leaders."

You join the "Red International of Labour Unions" and pass resolutions to "make the leaders fight!"

You endeavour to secure official positions in the Unions for members of the "R.I.L.U." who used to denounce the present leaders. Meanwhile you are growing careful to avoid such denunciation in future, because you want to get your party affiliated to the Labour Party.

In your peaceful permeation of the Unions; in your attempt to push members of your Party into the official positions, you are following in the footsteps of the early Socialists who put Red Flaggers into office, and saw them gradually transformed into the Social Patriots you denounce to-day. Even some of you have had that experience; you, too, have been disappointed in your chosen candidates when they happened to get into office.

From time to time you make unofficial reform committees, or workers' solidarity leagues, and draw up programmes you hope may be adopted by the Union conferences to cut down official salaries and secure more control over the officials, and perhaps to do the same with Labour Parliamentary and local Government representatives.

You complain of the Trade Union structure. You say you want one Union for each industry, or one Union for all industries. Some of you advocated a "general staff for Labour." You jubilated when the Trade Union Congress Parliamentary Committee became the General Council. You demanded that it should have more power to dictate the policy of the Unions. The reactionaries on the General Council, by their reactionary tactics in some big strike, will presently cause you to regret the existence of the general staff.

Some of you demand one card for all Unions.

Comrades, you are like the Reformists who will accept any expedient which will keep the Capitalist system going and stave off the coming of Socialism.

You say you want an organisation that will cover each industry and all industries. Why then do you not work

for that? Why do you work for any and every thing save that?

You complain of the Trade Union officials. Apparently some of you believe that the Trade Union movement has appointed as its officials only exceptionally bad and faithless men and women? Evidently that is what you think, since your only solution is to replace the present officials by others.

Some of you think that by reducing the salaries of men like Messrs. J. H. Thomas, J. R. Clynes, and Frank Hodges, and by passing a few resolutions to guide them, you will make them better servants to the rank and file, and more able to resist the insidious blandishments of the employing class.

You should probe more deeply into the matter, comrades. You are taking too superficial a view of it, or you would not dream that you can uproot the evils you complain of so easily as that.

You are dissatisfied with the Union officials – with all Union officials. Is it not time you ceased to blame

particular individuals, and decided to abolish the institution itself?

A workshop council organisation requires no paid officials. A workshop council organisation governs itself: it is not ruled by officials in an office far away.

A workshop council organisation can extend throughout the industry and to all industries.

Some of you hesitate to set to work to form such an organisation, because you want to do something you think may be easier. All your fellow-workers are discontented with the Union officials, but they are discontented for a variety of reasons, some of them merely fugitive and personal; some even reactionary. Your fellow-workers are not all converted to the idea of an All-Workers' Inter-Industrial Organisation of Job Councils.

To save the trouble of converting your fellows, some of you think the easiest thing to do would be to get all the discontented ones together into an organisation simply to criticise the Unions and their officials.

If you create an organisation of people who are discontented for all sorts of opposite reasons; an

**It is time that the  
awakened rank and file,  
who claim that the root  
of the matter is in  
them, should take  
courage to form their  
own organisation of  
action, instead of  
merely a grumbling  
organisation to criticise  
the Trade Unions.**

organisation of people who do not agree on a common aim, you will achieve nothing. Either the organisation will adopt a non-committal attitude and remain inactive, or the membership will drift away or become but a name. The few who are active and have a concrete policy will then be left to carry on. In effect, they will be the organisation. If the active few with a policy modify and distort that policy, in order to bring into their organisation who do not agree with that policy, they are simply stultifying their own usefulness, and playing the part deserters towards their ideals.

Some of you propose to follow the already tried plan of acting as a ginger group inside the Trade Unions. That was very energetically tried in South Wales by the unofficial Reform Committee. One of its main methods is that of regular attendance at branch meetings, to vote resolutions, of which the majority of the members, too apathetic to attend meetings, knows little and cares less, till it finds itself committed to action towards which it is sometimes hostile. Events have shown that the South Wales unofficial reform movement could not control the Miners' Federation: it could only influence those members of the Federation whom it had converted to its views.

If, instead of working through the branches of the M.F.G.B., it had formed a network of groups in various pits, each group composed of workers prepared to act in conformity with the policy of the movement, the unofficial reform movement would have known precisely what its strength was, where it lay, and what it could do. Moreover, it would still exist, instead of having disappeared.

It is time that the awakened rank and file, who claim that the root of the matter is in them, should take courage to form their own organisation of action, instead of merely a grumbling organisation to criticise the Trade Unions.

Every group of workers who form a job council should do so with the determination to equip themselves to be able to manage that workshop capably, consciously, independently. Some day they will aim at improving it, transforming it, superseding it. The group should not aim at being a mere tool, to be ordered about by a directing intelligence from above, nor should it give all direction and responsibility to one of its number, its members either remaining apathetic or following a plan conceived by others. The group should be a group of co-operators, co-operating with other groups for common ends, and aiding those other groups to come to common decisions where joint action is necessary, each group being responsible for its own particular activities. Only thus can a fertile initiative be obtained.

The organisation of the Trade Unions is not of this character: it is on the Parliamentary model. The members of the Trade Unions resign all their authority, all their rights and liberties, as far as the Union is

concerned, to the Union officials. This is an essential feature of Trade Unionism: it still remains even where, as in the railway and mining industries in this country, the Union approaches the stage of taking in all the workers in the industry.

The Parliamentary form of the Trade Unions, which removes the work of the Unions from the members to the officials, inevitably creates an apathetic and unenlightened membership which, for good or ill, is a mere prey to the manipulation of the officials. This tendency is intensified by the fact that the Unions not only aim at protecting the workers' interests, as opposed to those of the employer, but are also friendly benefit societies.

Workers who are indifferent to the ideal of solidarity join the Unions for the friendly benefits, and because the Unions are strong enough now to make membership of their organisation largely compulsory. The Union gives to the indifferent members little training in solidarity, less in the management of the Union, none in the management of the industry itself. The unawakened worker, in the main, remains unawakened by membership of the Union.

The apathy of the membership produces the official's lack of faith in the capacity of the membership, and, even apart from other causes, is a source of the cynical contempt for the rank and file which so many officials display.

When the revolution came to them, the Russian industrial organised; yet it was their workshop councils of mushroom growth which seized the workshops and carried on the industries; without them there could have been no revolution. They were little prepared for the work of administering production, still less prepared to administer distribution. The private salesman, profiteering out of the scarcity and turmoil, remained. The unpreparedness of the workers' councils for their task sapped the vitality of the revolution, and caused the people to suffer a multitude of unnecessary ills in addition to the hardships which were inevitable.

Gradually the officials of the Trade Unions, built on the Parliamentary plan, superseded the workshop councils. The State also came in with its experts, who were often the employers which the workshop councils had banished, in the time of crisis.

Later the workers' councils were ousted, ostensibly to increase production by means, first of management by superior committees from outside, then by single experts appointed from above. Production, however, failed to increase.

Then followed the new economic policy, the return to Capitalism, the decay of the revolution, the flight of freedom, the denial of Communism.

The workers can only free themselves from oppression when they learn independence of their oppressors.

# Industrial Organisation

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 7 July 1923

Mr. Guy Aldred, arguing in a recent debate, said there must be no industrial organisation before the social revolution, because he believes that such organisations will work for palliatives.

At the same time, he defended his attempt to secure election to Parliament under pledge not to take his seat, in these words:

“If I had been elected I should have thrown myself into this agitation, and that agitation, and at the end I should have said: ‘We here outside Parliament have done more than has been done inside!’”

We do not know why Mr. Aldred should wait to throw himself into agitations until he has obtained a seat in Parliament; but the question arises as to what would those agitations be into which Mr. Guy Aldred would throw himself after election? Would they be palliative agitations? Would they be agitations to secure palliative reforms? There seems no doubt of it, as Mr. Aldred seemed to indicate that they would be agitations arising of themselves, apart from his own initiative. We know, alas, that the agitations apt to break out in Glasgow today are not yet for the ending of the private-property system, but for relieving just the particular place where the Capitalist shoe is pinching the workers hardest.

Moreover, Mr. Aldred added that he would say: “We here have done more outside Parliament than has been done inside.” Apparently, then, he expected to meet his supporters with a record of achievement. Mr Aldred evidently did not mean that he would thus rapidly overthrow the present system. It seems that the things Mr. Aldred anticipates that he would accomplish by

throwing himself into “this agitation and that agitation” must have been those naughty palliatives of which he is so much afraid.

One would like to know whether Mr Aldred, in banning industrial organisations, condemns only the workshop committees or also the Trade Unions. Does he call upon Communists to leave the Trade Unions?

## Why Workshop Soviets?

Why do we advocate the Soviets or Workers’

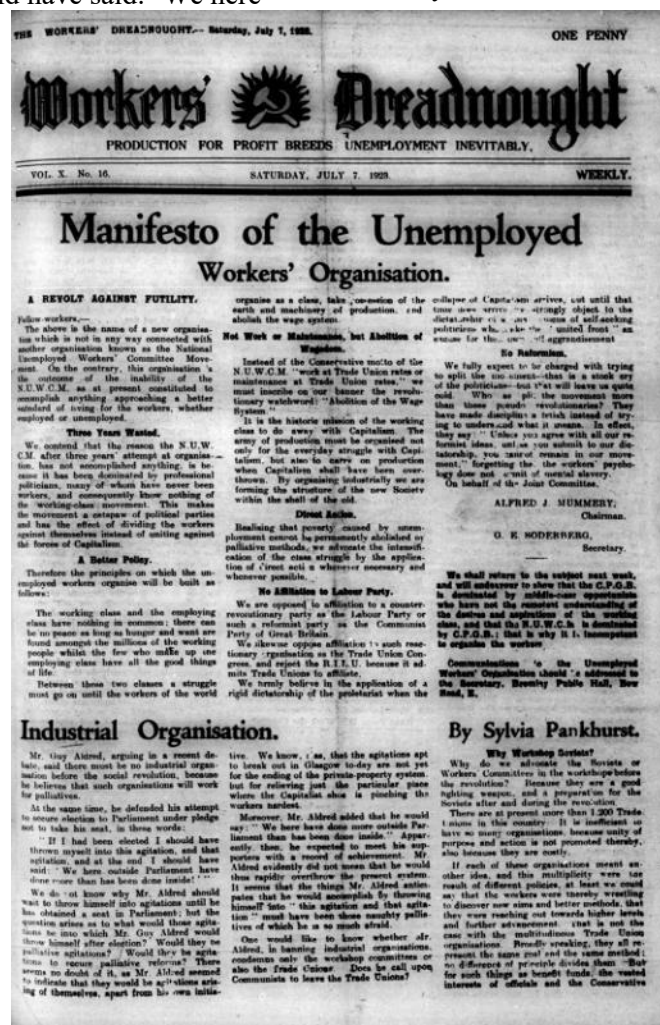
Committees in the workshops before the revolution? Because they are a good fighting weapon. and a preparation for the Soviets after and during the revolution.

There are at present more than 1,200 Trade unions in this country: It is inefficient to have so many organisations, because unity of purpose and action is not promoted thereby, also because they are costly.

If each of these organisations meant another idea, and this multiplicity were the result of different policies, at least we could say that the workers were thereby wrestling to discover new aims and better methods, that they were reaching out towards higher levels and further advancement. That is not the case with the multitudinous Trade Union organisations. Broadly speaking, they all represent the same method:

no difference of principle divides them. But such things as benefit funds, the vested interests of officials and the Conservative backwardness of members, the Unions in each industry at least would all unite, and presently, one Union for all industries would be formed.

There is, however, a difference between the Workshop Committees and the Unions that, strikes deeper than the question of multiplicity of organisations.



## A Question of Structure

The structure of the Unions is not the structure of the Workers' Committees. The Unions are governed from a central office. Each Workers' Committee governs itself, and the Committees act together as occasion arises. In the Workers' Committees there are no officials to be paid by the efforts of the members, or intimidated or influenced by the Government and employers. There are no large funds to be seized by the Government should conflict arise

Delegates appointed by the Workers Committees to attend conferences or do other work are merely recompensed for loss of time and provided with out-of-pocket expenses

## No Official Class

No specialised official class is developed. The delegates chosen by their fellow-workers only leave the workshop temporarily. They return to it as soon as the business in hand is complete. They remain members of the rank and file proletariat.

Suppose a delegate is victimised?

If a delegate is victimised he will be like any other worker thrown out of employment, either because the employer desires to replace him or has nothing for him to do

If his fellow-workers so decide, they will strike for his reinstatement. If they cannot accomplish his reinstatement, he will go to the dole like other workers who lose their jobs.

If the employer refuses to employ any hands who belong to Workers' Committees, what will happen?

## Solidarity

The same thing that happened when the employers refuse to employ Trade Unionists. The Workers Committees may be secret, or they may fight in the open, and must suffer victimisation when they cannot overcome the power of the employer. In America the IWW has maintained itself against the most acute persecution by the employers and their extra legal bands and forces of the State. In California and other States membership of the IWW has been held sufficient to procure a conviction for criminal syndicalism and long terms of imprisonment have been dealt out to those who hold the Union card. In California members of the IWW called to give evidence on behalf of their comrades have

been arrested immediately on admitting members membership of the IWW. Yet the IWWs have not been intimidated. They have flocked from all over the United States to testify in California – the danger zone – as to their membership in the Union. The early Trade Unionists in this and every country where Trade Unionism was at first declared illegal by the State, defied the law and organised both openly and secretly. Shall we expect less from those who desire to set up the Soviets of the workshops; from those whose object is to destroy the private property system?

## A Good Fighting Weapon.

We saw during the war that the Workshop Committees in this country could be a good fighting weapon for the workers. We saw that the workers secured improved conditions through them, when the official ridden Trade

Unions utterly failed them and became the instrument of the Government and the employers.

The Trade Unions here attacked the Workers' Committees here as bitterly as did the employers. Mr. Henderson, the Trade Union Labour leader, was the Cabinet Minister responsible for deporting the leaders of the Clyde Shop Stewards. When we advocate Workshop Committees we know that we shall meet with the hostility of the Trade Union officials, but that need not deter us.

## The Goal

As the breakdown of Capitalism draws nearer, the conflict of

opinion as to what shall replace it grows keener. Is it to be State Capitalism pure and simple; or is it to be some dual control of society by a Parliament of professional politicians and of officials of Trade Unions, and perhaps also Co-operative Societies? Are the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies to be the controlling force? Are all these to make way for the Workers' Committees?

This issue is vital, for on the decision depends whether the new society is to be a combination of the Post Office type of administration and the trusts, or some modification of that, or a free Communism. The question is whether the basis of social organisation is to be government and control of persons, or the administration of services, to be freely used by all. Only through the Soviet or workshop basis can the free Communism develop.

The Parliamentary Communist or Socialist (the meaning of the word is originally the same, let us remember) believes that Socialism can be secured through the ballot-box by Act of Parliament.

The anti-Parliamentary Communist believes that the change cannot be brought about superficially. but must be the work of the mass of the people through their own actions.

The change that must be created by the people will not merely be a matter of breaking heads, though since Capitalism is based on violence, heads may be broken in this as in other great changes. The change must be fundamentally a change in the way of life, work and thought. Is it conceivable that a people panting after the Soviets and Communism "as the hart pants after the waterbrooks", will wait to take any step thereto until the Parliament of Westminster has passed a law ordering them thus to proceed?

### **The Inefficiency of Parliament**

Some Parliamentary Socialists look rather to the leaders than to the masses, believing that the masses must be drilled into Socialism by the cultured few.

Would any Parliament take the great step of imposing Socialism upon a reluctant or even an apathetic people? We think not.

Moreover, we believe that, since a territorially elected talking assembly, like Parliament, cannot administer production, distribution and transport except in an outside and authoritarian manner, Parliament. will never be the body to bring Socialism about. This, we believe, is the task of those who do the work of production, transport. and distribution – the services of the community.

As to the anti-Parliamentary Communist who says that the Soviets of the workshops must not be organised

until after, or that they may only be started during the revolution, we ask them these questions:

### **What Force Will Work the Change?**

If the Soviets are to come after the revolution, what force is to make the revolution? You deny that it will be Parliament: what force, then, will make the revolution?

The French Revolution was made by the villagers and the communes of the towns: in Paris it was the local sections that carried on the struggle. That was before the time of large-scale industry. Conditions are changed now. The coming of the factory system, with the factory-like school, and the home now only a sleeping place for the employed worker, has grouped the workers industrially. It is made them more capable of working in a mass, less capable, alas, of taking individual initiative. That will have to be largely re-captured. The Workers' Committees are a school of mutual co-operation, service and persona! initiative: for all are equal members. There are no officials.

The anti-Parliamentary Communist who does not want the Soviets of the workshop until the hour of crisis would leave the Trade Union as the unchallenged leaders of the workers until the decisive hour when action is demanded. To do that would be fatal.

Moreover, when is the revolution to begin? Who can be sure of recognising its beginning, who can predict its duration?

For our part, we believe that the revolution will begin the day that the first Workers' Committee is formed and takes an action which is a direct attack upon the system the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and transport.

**"A careful and candid survey of the Russian attempt to establish Communism will some day reveal, more clearly than at present, the proportional weight of the causes which have led to its failure. That it has failed for the present, and that only a powerful new impetus can stop the present retrogression in Russia we are compelled to admit.**

**"Such a candid survey will provide evidence as to how far the Russian failure has been due to the capitalist resistance to Communism; how far to the unreadiness of the population; how far to the mistakes of the Communists, and especially to the mistakes of the Soviet Government.**

**"The question of workers' control of industry will bulk largely in this connection...**

**"To recapitulate: the Soviets, or workers' occupational councils, will form the administrative machinery for supplying the needs of the people in Communist society; they will also make the revolution by seizing control of all the industries and services of the community...**

**"Here in Britain the machinery of the Soviets must be prepared in advance. In all the industries and services, revolutionary workers, who are habitually at work there and know the ropes, must be prepared to seize and maintain control."**

**Sylvia Pankhurst, "Communism and its Tactics", *The Workers Dreadnought*, 4 February 1922**

# What Is Socialism?

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 14 July 1923

The words Socialism and Communism have the same meaning. They indicate a condition of society in which the wealth of the community: the land and the means of production, distribution and transport are held in common, production being for use and not for profit.

Socialism being an ideal towards which we are working, it is natural that there should be some differences of opinion as to how things will be organised in that future society. Since we are living under Capitalism it is natural that many people's ideas of Socialism should be coloured by their experience of life under the present system. We must not be surprised that some who recognise the present system is bad should yet lack the imagination to realise the possibility of altogether abolishing all the institutions of Capitalist society. Nevertheless, there can be no real advantage in setting up a half-way house to Socialism. A combination of Socialism and Capitalism would produce all sorts of injustice, difficulty and waste. Those who happened to suffer under the anomalies would continually struggle for a return to the old system.

Full and complete Socialism entails the total abolition of money, buying and selling, and the wages system.

It means that the community must set itself the task of providing rather more than the people can use of all the things that the people need and desire, and of supplying these when and as the people require them.

Any compromise by which the buying and selling system is retained means the employment of vast sections of the population in unproductive work. It leaves the productive work to be done by one portion of the people whilst the other portion is spending its energies in keeping shop, banking, making advertisements, and all the various developments of commerce which, in fact, employ more than two-thirds of the people to-day.

Given the money system, the wage system is inevitable. If things needed and desired are obtainable only by payment, those who work must be paid in order that they may obtain the means of life. The wage system entails also such institutions as the old-age pension, sick and unemployment insurance and widows' pensions, or the Poor Law, and probably plus the Poor Law. These involve large numbers of people being drawn from productive work to do purely administrative work. Thus useless toil is manufactured, and the burden of non-

producers maintained by the productive workers is increased.

Moreover, social conditions are preserved which are quite out of harmony with Communist fraternity. The wage system makes the worker's life precarious. The payment of wages entails the power to dismiss the worker from paid employment by an official or officials.

So long as the money system remains, each productive enterprise must

be run on a paying basis. Therefore it will tend to aim at employing as few workers as possible, in order to spend less on wages. It will also tend to dismiss the less efficient worker who, becoming unemployed, grows less efficient. Thus an unemployable class tends to grow up.

The existence of a wage system almost inevitably leads to unequal wages; overtime, bonuses, higher pay for work requiring special qualifications. Unequal wages at once establish class distinctions. Class distinctions are purely differences of education, material comfort and environment.

Buying and selling by private persons inevitably leads to riches on the one hand, and poverty on the other.

Buying and selling by the Government opens the door to official corruption. To check that, high-salaried positions are created in order that those occupying them will consider they have too much to lose to make pilfering and jobbery worth while.



# Socialism

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 28 July 1923

Socialism means plenty for all. We do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity, but of abundance.

Our desire is not to make poor those who to-day are rich, in order to put the poor in the place where the rich now are. Our desire is not to pull down the present rulers to put other rulers in their places.

We wish to abolish poverty and to provide abundance for all.

We do not call for limitation of births, for penurious thrift, and self-denial. We call for a great production that will supply all, and more than all the people can consume.

Such a great production is already possible, with the knowledge already possessed by mankind.

To-day production is artificially checked, consumption still more so.

How is production checked?

Production is checked by private ownership of land, the means of production and transport. In Scotland large areas of agricultural land are turned into deer forests. In every English county numerous large private parks are kept for the pleasure of single families. Production on farms is limited because farmers lack capital to enable them to employ the labour and materials necessary to work their land fully. Landowners with capital find more profitable means of employing their capital in agriculture or stock raising. Country landowners refuse to build cottages on their estates in order to preserve their own privacy. Landowners in and about towns put up the price of land till it becomes prohibitive to the purpose of building houses for any but the rich. Vacant plots remain for years until they are bought for factories or cinemas.

Production is also limited by inability to secure raw material owing to carefully organised cornering of supplies by persons who make money by such immoral

practices, and by inability to pay the prices demanded for raw material.

Production is deliberately limited in order to secure high prices for short supplies, and because the market in which the produce can be sold at a profit is limited.

Production is to a minor extent limited by wage-workers in order to keep up the price of labour.

Consumption is cruelly limited by lack of means to purchase.

Our cities teem with people lacking the decencies and necessities of life because they cannot afford to pay. Even Mr. Neville Chamberlain, a Tory Minister of Health, has admitted that a large proportion of the population of this relatively prosperous country is herded together under conditions which are scarcely human.

Entire nations are plunged into scarcity under which the poor die of starvation and even the middle and professional classes are reduced to hunger because the whirligig of finance has reduced the exchange value of the currency of such nations.

Capitalism offers no hope of ending this reign of poverty.

Millions of men and women, trained in the arts of production and transport, are unemployed, factories stand idle or run at half speed, land lies fallow, shops and warehouses teem with goods for which there are insufficient purchasers.

The majority of the population is not engaged in productive work. The greater part of the non-producers is employed in the buying, selling and advertising of the commodities produced by the minority. A large number of non-producers is employed in administering insurance doles, pensions, Poor Law relief and charity to the unemployed and to those whose wages do not suffice to maintain them. A considerable minority is living on rent and dividends drawn from the labour of the producers. This minority includes the people with a

small unearned income just large enough to maintain them, and also the very rich who keep hundreds of persons uselessly employed in waiting upon them, who monopolise thousands of acres of land for their pleasure-grounds, and who sometimes consume inordinate quantities of manufactured goods to satisfy their insatiable desire for artificial pleasure and extravagant display.

This is the private property system.

We wish to replace it by Socialism.

Under Socialism the land, the means of production and transport are no longer privately owned: they belong to all the people. The title to be one of the joint owners of the earth and its products and the inheritance of collective human labour does not rest on any question of inheritance or purchase; the only title required is that one is alive on this planet. Under Socialism no one can be disinherited; no one can lose the right to a share or the common possession.

The share is not so many feet of land, so much food, so many manufactured goods, so much money with which to buy, sell, and carry on trade. The share of a member of the Socialist Commonwealth is the right and the possibility of the abundant satisfaction of the needs from the common store-house, the right to be served by the common service, the right to assist as an equal in the common production.

Under Socialism production will be for use, not profit. The community will ascertain what are the requirements of the people in food, clothing, housing, transport, educational facilities, books, pictures, music, theatres, flowers, statuary, wireless telegraphy - anything and everything that the people desire. Food, clothing, housing, transport, sanitation — these come first; all effort will be bent first to supply these; everyone will feel it a duty to take some part in supplying these. Then will follow the adornments and amusements, a

comfortable, cultured and leisured people will produce artistic and scientific work for pleasure, and with spontaneity. Large numbers of people will have the ability and the desire to paint, to carve, to embroider, to play, and to compose music.

They will adorn their dwellings with their artistic productions, and will give them freely to whoever admires them.

When a book is written the fact will be made known, and whoever desires a copy of it, either to read or to keep, will make that known to the printers in order that enough copies may be printed to supply all who desire the book. So with a musical composition, so with a piece of statuary.

So, too, with the necessities of life. Each person, each household, will notify the necessary agency the requirements in milk, in bread, and all the various foods, in footwear, in clothing. Very soon the average consumption in all continuous staples will be ascertained. Consumption will be much higher than at present, but production will be vastly increased: all those who are to-day unemployed or employed in the useless toil involved in the private property and commercial system, will be taking part in actual productive work; all effort will be concentrated on supplying the popular needs.

How will production be organised?

Each branch of production will be organised by those actually engaged in it. The various branches of production will be co-ordinated for the convenient supply of raw material and the distribution of the finished product.

Since production will be for use, not profit, the people will be freely supplied on application. There will be no buying and selling, no money, no barter or exchange of commodities.

# What Socialism Is Not

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 11 August 1923

The terms Socialism and Communism had originally the same meaning.

They indicate a society in which the land, the means of production and distribution are held in common, and in which production is for use, not profit.

State Socialism, with its wages and salaries, its money system, banks and bureaucracy, is really not Socialism at all, but State Capitalism.

A recent leading article in the "Daily Herald" referred to the Port of London Authority as "a concrete illustration of Socialism as a working system."

A more gross mis-statement could hardly be made. It was a specially cruel mis-statement, since the dockers are on strike against the Port of London Authority.

Mr. Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party, and a man of very moderate views, wrote to the "Daily Herald" to protest. He pointed out that the Port of London Authority has a chairman appointed by the Board of Trade, ten members appointed by the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, the City Corporation, London County Council and Trinity House, only two of whom are Labour representatives. These ten members, who might be remotely regarded as public

representatives, though most indirectly appointed, are counterbalanced by no fewer than 18 members elected by private capitalist interests, including payers of dues, owners of river craft and wharfingers, the voting being upon the basis of the business done.

Mr. Morrison declared it unfair to “genuine democratic Socialism” to regard the P.L.A. “as Socialism in practice.”

He added, however, this very curious statement:

“I could understand such a phrase coming from a so-called Communist who admires Soviets.”

It is well that Mr. Morrison prefixed the adjective “so-called.” Obviously the Port of London Authority is the complete opposite of the Soviets under Communism.

The Soviets are the industrial councils under Communism.

Though the term Soviet is Russian, we cannot look to the Russia of to-day to find the correct Soviet. The Russian Soviets now in being are apt to be composite assemblies of representatives, not merely of workers in industries, but of political organisations, national groups, trade unions, etc.

The typic Soviets, or those which will arise under Communism, are not composite bodies of this kind. They consist, firstly, of the workers in a factory, on a farm, in a dockyard, in a ship, in a coalpit, in a railway station, and so on. In each centre of production the workers will co-operate in organising their work. The large factory or works may have, if convenient, several sub-councils, each managing its own affairs. For questions of organisation affecting the whole works,

either all the workers may confer, should occasion arise, or delegates may be appointed to hold any discussion and make any arrangements that may seem necessary, provided, of course, those whose delegates they are agree to what has been planned.

For arrangements which may have to be made for an entire industry, or for a group of industries in a given area, delegates will be appointed and instructed in the same way from the workers in the various centres, and will make their reports in due course.

No professional class of delegates will be created. The delegates will be chosen from amongst those actually working, and will return to their work when the occasion for conference has passed.

No authoritarian control will be imposed, but an efficient system of statistical and information bureaux will knit together the workers’ council organisation.

The object of the Workers’ Council is not to govern a race of slaves, but to supply the needs of free people.

The forerunners of the Workers’ Councils under Communism are those which have already begun to spring up under Capitalism. The war-time shop stewards’ and workers’ committee movement in this country was an example of this. Similar, but more advanced movements developed in other countries at the same period. In Germany these are still maintained.

In the Russian Revolution of 1905 Soviets or Workers’ Councils arose, and also in the Revolution of 1917. In the German and Austrian Revolutions of 1918, and the various revolutionary outbreaks which have since occurred, the Workers’ Councils have been the medium through which the workers have acted.

# What is behind the label?

## A plea for clearness

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers’ Dreadnought*, 3 November 1923

Men and women call themselves Socialists, Communists, Anarchists, Individualists, thinking they thus explain their views to themselves and others.

Yet question them, but a little; you will discover how few of them have any clear conception of what they mean by their labels. Thus it is that many fail to recognise a brother of their faith, unless he bear a label, discourse he never so fully and clearly upon his beliefs and ideals.

When we are considering the as yet intangible things of the future, the life of our hopes beyond our present

experiences, precise thinking is difficult; prolonged research and meditation are necessary to arrive at any clearness of aim.

Therefore behind the labels we find abundant confusion. The advocate of such an extreme form of State interference with the liberty of the individual as compulsory birth-control is found to label himself Individualist. Zealous upholders of Capitalism also label themselves Individualists, though Capitalism could not be maintained an hour without the power of the State forces, which protect private property, and

prevent those who have not enough to satisfy their needs from despoiling those who have something to spare.

Self-styled Anarchists are found who have not thought out a single fundamental of a society without law, and who support variously nationalisation of the land, the single tax, and other State organised panaceas, Trade Unions with their centralised mechanism and oppressive officialdom, and petty trading and production for profit, which, like the larger Capitalism, necessitates law and its forces to protect the property-holder from being dispossessed.

So-called Socialists are found whose idea of Socialism consists in various reforms of the Capitalist system:

Parliamentary legislation to secure such things as more liberal charity towards the poor or closer supervision over them, higher taxation or taxation on a new basis, municipal trading, State Capitalism, State subsidies and other encouragements to great Capitalism, or, on the other hand, war on great Capitalism, and State encouragement of small Capitalism, and other confused and conflicting expedients.

Self-styled Communists are found whose aims differ little if any from those of the most confused and vague of the reformists.

‘What is Socialism, what is Communism, what is Anarchy?’ ask a multitude of would-be converts, weary of the cruelty and waste of Capitalism and eagerly desiring an alternative.

For answer they receive only confused denunciations of existing things; no hopeful vision of the new life which the labelled ones are supposed to advocate is vouchsafed them. They turn away empty and discouraged.

Programmes become cramping and conservative influences if men and women worship them as holy writ, and refuse their thoughts permission to go on before an accepted formula. Yet without discovering for ourselves what our aims really are, without defining them so that they may be understood by others, how shall we work for them, how shall we sow the seed that shall create a movement to achieve them?

Our aim is Communism. Communism is not an affair of party. It is a theory of life and social organisation. It is a life in which property is held in common; in which the community produces, by conscious aim, sufficient to supply the needs of all its members; in which there is no trading, money, wages, or any direct reward for services rendered.

The Individualist emphasises his dislike for coercion by the collectivity, his desire that the individual shall be free. We also dislike coercion and desire freedom; we aim at the abolition of Parliamentary rule; but we emphasise the interdependence of the members of the community; we emphasise the need that the common storehouse and the common service shall provide an insurance against want for every individual.

We aim at the common storehouse, not the individual hoard. We desire that the common storehouse shall bulge with plenty, and whilst the common storehouse is plenished we insist that none shall want.

We would free men and women from the stultifying need of making their own individual production pay; the

peasant toiling uncounted hours with inadequate tools, the fear of incapacity and want always dogging his thoughts; the little business man counting his losses and profit with anxious mind; the wage-slave selling his labour cheaply and without security; the artist debarred from the effort to improve his skill and quest for his ideals by the insistence of the economic spur.

We aim at the common service; we desire that all should serve the community, that no longer should

there be divers classes of persons; the hewers of wood and the drawers of water; the intellectuals, the leisured classes, who are merely parasites.

The Individualist cries: ‘Freedom.’ We answer: ‘Thou shalt not exploit.’ ‘Thou shalt not be a parasite.’

Yet we would have nothing of dictatorship: we believe that a public opinion can be treated which will produce a general willingness to serve the community. The exception to that general willingness will become, we believe, altogether a rarity; we would not have the occasional oddity who will not join the general effort disciplined by law; the disapprobation, even the pity of his fellows will insure his rarity.

The thought: ‘I will not produce because I can secure a better living as a non-producer,’ whether it be the thought of an employer, or of an unemployed worker, is a typical product of Capitalism. A society in which that thought predominates is inevitably one of poverty and exploitation. The thought: ‘I will not produce if I can avoid it’ falls like a blight upon society today. It is the inevitable product of the capitalist system.

Let us produce in abundance; let us secure plenty for all; let us find pleasure in producing; these thoughts must pervade the community if it is to be able to provide, in lavish measure, plenty for all – in material

**Zealous upholders of  
Capitalism also label  
themselves  
Individualists, though  
Capitalism could not be  
maintained an hour  
without the power of the  
State forces, which  
protect private property**

comfort, in art, in learning, in leisure. At such a community we aim.

We emphasise the need for the Workshop Councils.

The Individualist fears that even the autonomous Workshop Councils may lead to the circumscribing of personal liberty. We however desire the Workshop Councils in order to insure personal liberty.

In the Communist Society at which we aim all will share the productive work of the community and all will take a part in organising that work.

How can it be done?

In these days of great populations and varied needs and desires people are not willing to return to the stage at which every individual or family made its own house, clothing, tools, utensils, and cultivated its own patch of soil and provided all its own tools. A return to productive work, a discarding of artificial and useless toil, we desire and expect to see, but work in which many workers co-operate we expect and desire to retain.

The building of engines and ships and all sorts of machinery, the construction of cables, weaving and spinning by machinery, and numberless other things are dependent on the co-ordinated work of large numbers of people. It is probable that developments in the use of electricity and other present and future inventions, will tend to render less economically necessary than used to be the case, both the vast workshop and the vast city.

Moreover the influence of profit-making being eliminated, the unhealthy and uncongenial massing together of people will be checked. Nevertheless for at least a very long time, the large scale production wrought by many inter-related workers, will remain a necessary condition of maintaining both plenty and leisure for all.

If large numbers of people are working together and if the varied needs of large populations are to be supplied, the work will come either to be directed from above or from below. Unless each individual in the work shop is an independent co-operator, taking a conscious share in the organisation of the collective work, then all the workers in the shop must be under the direction of a manager; and that manager must either be appointed by those whom he directs or by some outside authority.

The same principle applies throughout the entire field of production, distribution, and transport; unless the workshops co-ordinate themselves, unless they themselves arrange their relationship with their sources of supply and the recipients of their products, then that co-ordination must be affected by an outside authority with power to enforce its authority.

In order to promote the liberty and initiative of the individual, as well as for the welfare of the collectivity, therefore, we emphasise the need for the autonomous workshop councils, co-ordinated along the lines of production, distribution and transport.

# Third and Fourth Internationals

**E. Sylvia Pankhurst**

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 2 February 1924

The manifesto of the Communist Workers' International, which we published last week said:

“We believe in a majority of the workers becoming consciously Communist.”

That is a very sound saying. It is one with which we wholeheartedly agree. That belief must guide our whole policy. It contains many deep implications. It forces us to be thorough in our educative propaganda and organisation, not to rely on chance or fickle impulse to achieve that which can only be brought forth by earnest labour. It forever cuts us off from the race for popularity, the effort to be all things to all men. It removes us from the temptation to pander to prejudice, and to disguise our real objectives, in the hope that by securing office, we can impose on the masses for their good, a millennium they are too undeveloped to desire.

The belief that the workers must become conscious Communists lays on us the obligation to be, not the dominant leaders, or the clever wirepullers, but the brotherly ones, prepared to discuss our complete belief with all who are prepared to listen. For us there can be

no question of expounding a diluted doctrine, of telling people only that which they desire to hear, and avoiding mention of those principles to which our hearers are not yet converts.

## WORKERS AND PEASANTS

A point which frequently crops up in Continental manifestoes is the relationship of the worker and the peasant. The Fourth International manifesto we published last week referred to the fact that the Third International believes it can build a dictatorship of workers and peasants.

Leaving aside for the time being the question of the term “dictatorship,” let us consider the relationship of the worker and peasant. In England we have no considerable class of peasants, tilling their own soil and employing no hired labour. In England the labour on the land is mainly that of hired workers whose position is precisely that of the factory worker in the town. The peasant who employs no hired labour is more suitably compared to the cobblers, and small craftsmen, who make and sell their own wares, or even to the hawkers

and the small shopkeepers, than to the wage worker. The peasant with his plot of land is, however, in a more secure economic position than the small manufacturer and shopkeeper, because he has a permanent property in his land, and because he can raise his own food – or some of it at least. It must not be forgotten however, that in bad times small peasants are often driven to sell or mortgage their land, and from their loss a richer peasant class grows up.

Of course, we are all agreed that in a Communist society there will be no peasants, not that the people who are peasants will actually die out, but that which makes them peasants – the ownership of land – will disappear. Land will be held in common, production from the land, as in industry, will be for use, not profit.

Of the many discussions which naturally, and rightly, are held on the tactics of the Russian Revolution, the most heated point of contest is whether there should have been a “dictatorship of the industrial proletariat,” or a “dictatorship of the industrial proletariat plus the peasants.”

In spite of its time-honoured character, we must affirm that, in our view, the use of the term “dictatorship” in such discussions is responsible for much confusion and misunderstanding. Let us put the matter in another way; let us consider whether the peasants on the land and the workers in the factories can co-operate in constructing a Communist community – in which, of course, property is held in common and production is for use, not profit.

We see at once that before this can be done, not only must the town workers cease to be the employees of capitalists, but the peasants must cease to be peasants: that is to say, they must cease to be owners of land and to produce for sale. Otherwise there is no communism.

No reasonable person believes that what was required in Russia was that the relatively small number of industrial workers in Russia should act as the dictators – in the sense that the Czar and Napoleon were dictators – over the vast peasant masses of Russia.

Those who join issue with the policy pursued by the Third International, and oppose the attempt to build a new society on the basis of peasants and proletariat, argue that the existence of a peasant proprietary ought not to have been accepted as a factor upon which to build. The effort, constant and unremitting, ought to have been to secure the socialisation of the land, as well

as of the industries, and to brand individual ownership of land as essentially anti-communist, and to be condemned.

Instead of urging the peasants, and leading the peasants, to seize the land and cut it up for *individual ownership*, the right course was to have endeavoured to induce them to seize the land for *common ownership*, its products being applied to common use.

It may be argued, but it cannot be proved, that had the Bolsheviks called for the common ownership of the land they would have failed.

Rosa Luxemburg, herself a Russian Pole, declared *at the time* that the effort ought to have been made.

For us, whether the effort would have meant not, the effort undoubtedly early success or and continued, and should have been made continued, and continued, and continued.

“We believe in a majority of workers becoming consciously communist.”

Therefore we cannot cut off a section of the people because they happen to be employed on the land, and decide it is unnecessary for them to be Communists.

We believe that what most retarded development of the Russian Revolution was the cessation of effort to secure communism by the vast majority of the active propagandists, who, under Bolshevik influence, became infected with doubt in the possibility of further progress, and imagined that if they did not stand still, or retreat, they would lose what they had gained.

As a matter of fact, the history of all revolutions is that as soon as they cease to advance, they begin to retreat. In or out of revolution, there is nothing to be lost by endeavouring to progress; no advance can be made by pretending that things are all right as they are.

The attempt to build a Workers’ Republic, on the basis of private ownership of the land and production of agricultural produce for sale, coupled with State Socialism in the towns, proved abortive. The result was the new Economic Policy, which was the re-introduction of private capitalism into industrial production and town economy.

The attempt to save time by refraining from bringing the land workers to a state of Communism led directly and inevitably to reaction, the saddest feature of which is the attempt of those in power in Russia to check the essential propaganda and organisation for Communism.

**In spite of its time-honoured character, we must affirm that, in our view, the use of the term “dictatorship” in such discussions is responsible for much confusion and misunderstanding...**

# What We Stand For

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 10 May 1924

**The abolition of the capitalist or private property system.**

**Common ownership of the land, the means of production and distribution.** The earth, the seas and their riches, the industrial plant, the railways and ships, aircraft, and so on, shall belong to the whole people.

**Production for use, not for profit.** Under modern conditions more can be produced than can be consumed of all necessities, if production is not artificially checked. The community must set itself to provide all the requirements of its members in order that their wants may be met without stint and according to their own measure and desire. The people will notify their requirements, and the district and country, the world must co-operate to supply them.

**Production for use means that there will be neither barter nor sale,** and consequently no money. An immense amount of labour in buying, selling and advertising will therefore be saved.

**Plenty for all.** Thus there will be no insurance, no poor and no poor law, no State or private Charity of any kind. Humiliation officialdom and useless toil, which means putting parasites on the backs of the producers, will be obviated thereby.

**No class distinctions because there will be no economic distinctions.** Everyone will be a worker, everyone will be of the educated classes, for education will be free to all, and since the hours of labour at relatively monotonous tasks will be short, everyone will be able to make use of educational facilities, not merely in early youth, but throughout life.

**No patents, no "trade secrets,"** scientific knowledge will be widely diffused. Since the class war will be no more, the newspapers will be largely filled with scientific information, art, literature and historical research.

**Society will be organised to supply its own needs.** To-day the essential needs of the people are supplied by private enterprise. Ostensibly we are under a democratic Government, but the most outstanding fact in the average man's life is that he is largely at the disposal of his employer. The government of the workshop where

he spends the greater part of his time and energy is despotic.

**Under Communism industry will be managed by those at work in it.** The workshop will contain not employees, subject to the dictation of the employers and their managers, but groups of co-workers.

**We stand for the workshop councils in industry, agriculture and all the services of the community. We stand for the autonomous organisation of the workshops and their ordered co-ordination, in order that the needs of all may be supplied.**

**Parliament and the local governing bodies will disappear.** Parliament and the monarch, the Privy Council, the Cabinet, the Houses of Lords and Commons, provided no true democracy. Self-government is better than good government is to be found in a society in which free individuals willingly associate themselves in a common effort for the common good. On the basis of co-workers in the workshop co-operating with co-workers in other workshops, efficiency of production and distribution, which means plenty for all, can go hand in hand with personal freedom

Elected on a territorial basis, Parliament could not manage efficiently the industries and services of the community. The services at present controlled by it are managed by salaried permanent officials. The condition of the worker employed in such services is the same as in privately owned industry.

**A centralised Government cannot give freedom to the individual:** it stultifies initiative and progress. In the struggle to abolish capitalism the workshop councils are essential.

**The trade unions are not based on the workshop,** and are bureaucratically governed. Therefore they are not able efficiently to manage the industries. They are ineffective implements in the effort to take industry from the management of the employers and vest it in the workers at the point of production.

Therefore we stand for –

**The abolition of the private property system.**

**Production for use, not profit.**

**Self-government is better than good government is to be found in a society in which free individuals willingly associate themselves in a common effort for the common good.**

**The free supply of the people's needs.**

**The organisation of production and distribution on a workshop basis.**

\* \* \*

### **Aims of the Communist Workers' Movement.**

To spread knowledge of amongst the people.

To create an All-Workers' Industrial Revolutionary Union of employed and unemployed workers:

(a) Built up from the workshop basis, covering all workers, regardless of sex, craft, or grade, who pledge themselves to work for the overthrow of Capitalism and the establishment of Communism administered by the workers' councils

(b) Organised into departments for each industry and service.

In other words, to create the councils in the workshops in order that they may dispossess the Capitalist and afterwards carry on under Communism.

To take no part in elections to Parliament and the local governing bodies, to expose their futility to protect, or to emancipate the workers, or to administer Communism.

To refuse affiliation or unity with the Labour Party and all Reformist and Parliamentary Parties

To emancipate the workers from the Trade Unions, which are merely palliative institutions.

## **Our View: Capitalism or Communism for Russia?**

*Workers' Dreadnought, 31 May 1924*

The appeal which we publish on our front page from the Workers' Group of Russia, reveals the struggle still continuing there between the opposing ideals of capitalism and communism.

Capitalism is still in the ascendant. In Russia, the cue of its protagonists is no longer to sing the praises of private enterprise and the right of every man to do as he likes with his own. They pose now as the prophets of centralised efficiency, trustification, State control, and the discipline of the proletariat in the interests of increased production.

The Communist advocates of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of intensified capitalism explain their lapse from principle by the plea that Russia must be developed by capitalism before she will be fitted for Communism. They hope to keep the teeth and claws of capitalism to reasonable proportions.

The non-Communist manipulators of the NEP are working in an element which habit has made appear to them the only natural and possible state of affairs. They are growing in power and numbers and will passionately adhere to their own post-revolutionary acquisitions. To the dominant class it is always easier to maintain things as they are and proceed by the old methods than to forge new ones.

The result is that the Russian workers remain wage slaves, and very poor ones, working, not from free will, but under compulsion of economic need, and kept in their subordinate position by a State coercion which is more pronounced than in the countries where the

workers have not recently shown their capacity to rebel with effect.

In spite of the NEP and the advocates of State capitalisation and trustification, however, the urge towards free and complete Communism is not dead in Russia as is evidenced by the existence of the Workers' Group and other Left Wing bodies.

The Left Wing bodies, both consciously and doubtless also unconsciously to a certain extent, are forces working towards the disintegration of capitalism and all its methods. They are working towards the creation of a new system in which instead of society being maintained under the control of a centralised directorate imposing its will by economic compulsion and backed by force of arms, social needs will be met by self-motivating units co-operating for mutual ends.

Those who, professing the Communist faith, yet fail to recognise this part which the Left Wing bodies are destined to play in the evolutionary process are apt to regard with regret the very existence of a Left Wing movement. In Russia such superficial observers complain that Left-Wing activities will arouse discontent with present conditions, and so, perhaps, hinder the growth of production and cause various troubles by upsetting the disciplined acceptance by the workers of the directing authorities.

In the same manner the educationalists who have sought to awaken the pupils' own initiative and to institute self government and pupils' organisation of the curriculum



in the schools, have been met with objections that order has been replaced by chaos and that the ratio of knowledge acquired by the pupils has been grievously reduced.

The educational pioneers have persevered in spite of discouragement and have been able to produce schools in which the pupils are able to maintain a more fruitful and harmonious order than that which the old schools imposed from above. They have been able to demonstrate by results that the knowledge which they have stimulated their pupils to acquire for themselves becomes a permanent possession and part of the personality.

So it will be with the ideals of those who are working for the complete emancipation of the race from economic subjection and the authoritarianism that accompanies it.

Many Communists outside Russia object to the searchlight of fact being turned upon Soviet Russia by their fellow Communists. They desire to have it appear that everything is perfect there. They imagine it to be bad propaganda to admit frankly the failures and shortcomings in the land of revolution and to criticise the methods and expedients resorted to by those who have secured the power. Their objections are short sighted, for after all, what we desire to vindicate and to achieve is Communism itself and not the policy or position of any party.

If we pretend that the present regime in Russia is Communism, is actually the sort of life towards which we are striving, those who observe its shortcomings will naturally tell us that our ideal is a very faulty one.

## Our View: Another Rank and File Upheaval.

*The Workers' Dreadnought*, 7 June 1924

The Railway workers are again in a state of conflict. An unofficial strike committee threatening action on behalf of the railway shopmen of the London Electric and Great Western Railways, and the N.U.R. Executive demanding that the men shall remain at work is but another instance of the spectacle which has been frequently before the industrial world of late. The policy of conciliation which the Union Executive is following grows more and more irksome to the actual wage workers. The Union Officials have taken to viewing the industrial problem from the employers' standpoint; they consider the difficulty of making the trade of the country pay in view of the competition of other countries. They have listened to the arguments of the employers and are duly impressed thereby.

To the workers the problem is how to secure the necessities and some share of the amenities of life. It is impossible that they should survey the position through the employer's spectacles.

Conciliation Boards and Industrial Councils cannot radically affect the position, though they may result in making the trade union officials who serve on them more forebearing towards the employers' interests.

The class struggle must inevitably continue, so long as we have in existence the employers and the employed.

**“The *Workers' Dreadnought* is the only paper in this country which is alive to the controversies going on in the International Communist movement; it is the only paper through which the rank and file of the movement can even guess that there are such controversies. Such controversies are a sign of healthy development, through them the movement grows onward towards higher aims and broader horizons; by studying them, by taking part in them, the membership will develop in knowledge and political capacity.”**

**Sylvia Pankhurst, “Freedom of Discussion”, *Workers' Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921**

# Anti-Parliamentarism and Communism in Britain, 1917-1921

R.W. Jones

*The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly*, Volume 3, Number 3 (July-September 1990)

In this article I shall discuss the growing British anti-parliamentarist movement in the period immediately preceding the formation in 1921 of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF). In particular, I want to consider the attempts to unite the various anti-parliamentary groups into one Communist Party. These attempts were, I shall argue, a natural development of the revolutionary movement in Britain. They were cut short by the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), an unnatural development for Britain which was based on the conditions set by the Communist International in Russia. The subsequent formation of the APCF was, as a result, a pale reflection of what could have been.

\* \* \*

At the outset it is necessary to try to clarify what is meant by 'anti-parliamentarism'. It is important to realise that, for British comrades in 1921, anti-parliamentarism was not merely a negative delineation of tactics — a rejection of the policy of socialists standing for and sitting in Parliament — though this was obviously a key element of the movement. Anti-parliamentarism has, at this time, to be viewed in the context of a burgeoning communist movement. Indeed, until the formation of the CPGB, which took upon itself the definition of all things 'communist', it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the anti-parliamentary and communist movements were synonymous. To be a communist before 1920, even 1921, was to be an anti-parliamentarian. Only after 1921 was the prefix 'anti-parliamentary' needed.

This was true of both Marxists and anarchists. Each shared a common set of ideas, including the centrality of the class struggle for social analysis and action; the conception of workers' committees and councils seizing the means of production and distribution; the ensuing creation of a Soviet Republic which initially would act as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; and, as a necessary corollary of these, the importance of direct action and anti-parliamentary agitation. While there was not

unanimity on all of these points, there was a broad measure of agreement emerging.

One revealing example of this convergence of views was the interpretation which was made by most sections of the revolutionary movement in Britain of the Russian Revolution in sovietist and councillist terms rather than in terms of the determining role of a centralised and disciplined political party. This interpretation remained almost universal until 1920, when doubts about the exact nature and direction of the Russian Revolution began to surface in Britain. It is also significant that these doubts emerged not over the political practice of the Bolsheviks in Russia — which were rationalised away into existing theoretical formulas (though this was not true of the anarchists centred on the London Freedom Group) — but over the advice Lenin was giving to German and Italian communists to participate in parliamentary elections.

Completely absent was any notion of the centralised, disciplined party as the controlling agent of the revolution. This, however, was a key element in the Comintern's 'Twenty-One Conditions for Admission to the Communist International', which all Communist Parties had to accept before affiliation. Thus Point 12 declares that the party must be built 'upon the principle of democratic centralisation', and speaks of control by 'iron discipline'; and of a party central body with 'the most far-reaching faculties'.

The acceptance of the 'Twenty-One Conditions' by the CPGB therefore represented a marked break with past British experience. What was the significance of this? For some historians, such as James Hinton in *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (1973), the unity negotiations resulting in the formation of the CPGB represented a 'theoretical clarification'. Hinton charts a development of revolutionary theory from syndicalism and industrial unionism by way of the experience of the shop stewards' and workers' committee movement to the ultimate flowering of 'the soviet idea of revolution' in the CPGB. There is much that is wrong with this

**To be a communist  
before 1920, even  
1921, was to be an  
anti-parliamentarian.  
Only after 1921 was  
the prefix 'anti-  
parliamentary'  
needed.**

interpretation. Here it is necessary only to note the simple points that the CPGB did not embody any 'theoretical clarification', and had very little to do with 'the soviet idea of revolution'. The whole point of the unity negotiations was to set up Lenin's 'party of a new type' — that is, a centralised party loyally following the orders of the Comintern. Any theoretical or other discoveries made by the British participants were subsumed within this task. The end result was that the existing revolutionary movement and any theoretical advances it had made were largely destroyed.

\* \* \*

Let me examine this a little more closely. The first point to make about the 1920 unity negotiations is that they did not involve discussions about the theoretical significance of soviet power or the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There was already a fair measure of agreement on these issues. The main, almost the exclusive, topic of discussion was parliamentarism, in the form of parliamentary action and of affiliation to the Labour Party. As I shall show later, almost the whole of the revolutionary movement was anti-parliamentary and was uniting around an anti-parliamentary platform. For the moment, however, let me assume this point, and examine how the incipient 'party of a new type' handled the question. In doing so we shall see how M path was laid for the destruction of the revolutionary movement in Britain.

What was the attitude of communists to the Labour Party? For anyone thinking in terms of communism (outside certain sections of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party), it was simply inconceivable to regard the Labour Party as having anything at all to contribute to the developing movement. Then, as now, the Labour Party, so far as any move towards socialism was concerned — and never mind about any move towards communism — was seen as a bad joke. D. Manion noted at the Communist Unity Convention of 31 July — 1 August 1920:

At the present time in Sheffield no matter how good a Socialist a man might be he was mobbed if at any Socialist or trade union meeting he said he was in favour of such [i.e. Labour Party] affiliation.

And Mrs Bamber from Liverpool added:

The industrial workers were sick to death of the position of the Labour Party at the present time, and she hoped that we, the Communist Party, showing the way not to reform but to the emancipation of the workers, would keep outside the Party that had done so much to delay the progress of the working class during the last few years.

If this was so obvious to so many people, why was Labour Party affiliation ever considered as a serious policy? One factor was that the BSP, the largest socialist body involved in the unity negotiations, was already affiliated to the Labour Party, and continued to argue for affiliation. But a growing number of BSPers, including Comrades Manion and Bamber, were starting to reject the policy. There were clearly other factors at work. The most important of these was the Comintern directive instructing the British Communist Party to affiliate, backed up by Lenin's rationalisation of the position in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. While the directive was crucial, perhaps more important was the kind of argument used to support it — a strange kind of argument, new to the British movement and indicative of the kind of reasoning that was to undermine the communist movement in Britain.

It could be argued that up to this time the main aim of British socialists and communists had been a simple one of trying to make socialists and increase the class consciousness of the working class. Questions about the mechanics of seizing power were not widely discussed, most people being content to rely on the ability of the working class to create its own organs of self-government in any revolutionary situation. Further, the Labour Party was to play no part in this process, simply because it was not socialist and because its actions had positively hampered the development towards socialism.

But such common-sense and seemingly obvious points were to come under attack from a new breed of 'realists' and 'hard-headed strategists', who were to play an important part in the unity negotiations. The common-sense view of the Labour Party now came to be seen as 'naive' and 'emotional'; one needed a longer-term tactical view.

The ultimate source of such a view was the Comintern and Lenin himself. *Left-Wing Communism* appeared just before the Unity Convention, and ably summarised the lectures and advice Lenin had been giving British Communists during the preceding months. In this work Lenin argued that 'revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone'. Fair enough; but Lenin went on to insist that in consequence 'British Communists should participate in parliamentary action, that they should from within Parliament help the masses of workers to see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice'. In this way it was hoped that the masses would very soon become disappointed with the Labour Party and would begin to support the Communists.

Unfortunately this sort of argument leads directly into the nightmarish world of the mechanistic and manipulative party politician. In Lenin's words again:

The strictest loyalty to the ideas of Communism must be combined with the My to Me A M necessary practical compromises, to manoeuvre, to make agreements, zigzags, retreats and so on, so as to accelerate the coming to power and subsequent loss of political power of the Hendersons ... to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of Communism....

Or, in his oft-quoted phrase, Communists would support the Labour Party 'in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man'.

A good example of these intellectual contortions at work in Britain comes from R. Page Arnot's intervention at the Unity Convention on the Labour Party affiliation issue. He readily agreed that 'we were all sick of the Labour Party', but he added that this didn't necessarily mean that leaving the Labour Party was 'the best tactic for the revolution'. Arnot, as befitted the new revolutionary tacticians, was thinking ten steps ahead, in terms of Communists in the Labour Party 'splitting off' and taking 'a very large number of the organised working class with us'. The essence of the new outlook was to look at matters 'as tactics in a military sense' — that is, to 'think the thing out coldly and clearly and get rid of emotion'. Those who did not have these requisite military skills and who simply pointed out that the Labour Party was hopelessly reactionary and would tar the Communist Party with the same brush were said to be using 'emotional arguments'.

In this manner, Communist policy ceased to be a matter of debate and discussion by the rank and file, based on the observable experience of the working class and its institutions. Instead, policy was now determined by long-term tactical perspectives from above — an ever-changing series of intellectual permutations and combinations known as the 'Party Line'. This, when

coupled with a centralised party demanding absolute loyalty, ensured the speedy elimination of any ideas and practice developed from the class struggle by the pre-existing communist movement in Britain. If its members didn't conform to the tactical line, they were simply disregarded as 'naive' or 'emotional'. Edgar T. Whitehead noted the process at work at an early period of its operation:

**I repeated what I had been saying in the Commission and the Plenum: that any working class representative who went to Parliament was corrupted in no time. I started to give him examples.**

**"Comrade Gallacher," [Lenin] interrupted, "I know all about these people. I have no illusions about them. But if the workers sent you to represent them in Parliament, would you become corrupt?"**

**"That's not a fair question," I objected.**

**"It is a fair question," he urged, "I want you to answer it. Would you become corrupt?"**

**I sat and looked at him for a moment; then I answered: "No, I'm sure that under no circumstances could the bourgeoisie corrupt me."**

**"Well then, Comrade Gallacher," he said with a smile, "you get the workers to send you to Parliament and show them how a revolutionary can make use of it."**

**– William Gallacher,  
"...Anti-parliamentarianism overcome",  
*The Last Memoirs of William Gallacher* (1966)**

I do like this word 'naive'. It clinches the argument. All logic falls flat before it. Anti-parliamentarians are so naive, in face of the mephistophelian astucity [sic] of these revolutionary parliamentarians. (*The Spur*, November 1920)

There could be no direct answer to such charges of 'naivety', because the Communist Party had developed its own particular logic, impervious to any questioning from outside.

Anti-parliamentary communists became increasingly puzzled by the attitude of the 'Maiden Lane Communists' (the CPGB, with its office in Maiden Lane, London) to the parliamentary question. Whitehead voiced a question which was baffling many: 'Why do the Maiden Lane Communists want participation in Parliament so much that they would rather split the movement than forgo

it?' Given that the propaganda value of electoral activity was not a serious difference with the anti-parliamentarians, and given the repudiation of Parliament by the organised Workshop Movement, what possible reason could there be for wanting to pursue participation in Parliament at all costs? Whitehead concluded: 'It is almost inconceivable that Maiden Lane should have been so blind and mad as to cease to take into account these realities, and instead, sheep-like, to blunderingly follow a tactic dictated from Moscow....'

But this is almost certainly what did happen. The increasing invective and abuse from Maiden Lane was part of what Lenin called the 'liquidation of "left" doctrinairism' — a necessary stage which the class-conscious vanguard (the Communist Party) had to pass through to establish its supremacy. There is no space to document this process further, though it may be seen in its most dramatic and pathetic form in the amazing

intellectual somersaults of people like William Gallacher and J. T. Murphy, who were very effectively 'liquidated'. The unity negotiations were in fact a crucial phase in the 'liquidation of "left" doctrinairism' in Britain. Rather than attempting to unite the existing revolutionary groups in Britain — indeed the negotiations created more division than unity — the main aim was to create Lenin's party 'of a new type', a party strictly conforming to the Comintern's conditions and with little regard for the British situation. This, and its consequences, were clearly foreseen by the anti-parliamentarians at the very foundation of the CPGB. Thus Whitehead noted:

Maiden Lane must understand ... it is Britain we are dealing with, and British industrialists and Proletarians, British historical conditions, and British realities. Until Maiden Lane faces these facts, gains some backbone and grey matter of its own, and ceases to be merely a gramophone for the Moscow Records, we can do no other than build our own party, propagate our Soviet and Communist principles in accord with realities.

Unfortunately Maiden Lane was incapable of facing these facts and continued to play Moscow Records. The tragedy of this is that in the process a real possibility of unity was lost and indeed destroyed.

\* \* \*

What was this possibility? Put simply, it was the chance to bring about a unity of a number of anarchist and Marxist groups who had in common their support of the Russian Revolution and who were moving towards a common communist philosophy. If carried forward, there was a possibility of uniting once again the differing conceptions of Marx and Bakunin in a communist movement of great potential significance.

At the outset, it must be realised that long before the Russian Revolution there was a communist movement in Britain, and that after 1917 it was a rapidly developing and largely non-sectarian movement. A good example of its nature on the eve of the Russian Revolution is given by Jim Griffiths in his description of the activities of the Communist Club at Ammanford in South Wales. Griffiths reports on a series of meetings held there in the early days of 1917:

The aim of these meetings has not been to propagate any particular brand of Socialism or Communism. They have aimed rather at providing a common platform — a workers' Forum — where all who are interested in social problems can meet, and freely and frankly exchange opinions on vital social questions, the members of the club being convinced that the providing of opportunities for such meetings is the greatest service they can render to the working class movement at the present time. If

the movement is to survive the hard times ahead, it must cease wasting its energies in fruitless wrangles over this, that or the other policy. It must return to first principles.... We must aim at securing an intelligent class-conscious rank and file. (*The Spur*, April 1917)

In this non-sectarian atmosphere socialists were beginning to forget their 'fruitless wrangles' and move towards a common conception. Thus within the anarchist movement there was a growing section of what Guy Aldred called 'Marxian anarchists' who were distinguished from other anarchists (especially 'Kropotkin anarchists') by their acceptance of the Marxist analysis of the state and their recognition of the importance of the class struggle. These anarchists were becoming increasingly impatient with those who, in the words of Freda Cohen of the Glasgow Anarchist Group, were merely content with 'fine phrases or poetical visioning'. What was needed, she continued, was 'knowledge ... for the class struggle, by giving a scientific basis in place of a sentimental belief' (*The Spur*, January/February 1918). She concluded that 'knowledge of economics, history and sociology are of primary importance', and that due recognition should be given to the fact that 'industrial unionism, IWGBism [the Industrial Workers of Great Britain], the Shop Steward movement, etc., are questions that concern the daily life of the worker ... [and] are coming more and more to the fore. We must discuss them thoroughly and define our attitude towards them.'

These were also the concerns of many members of the Socialist Labour Party and left-wing members of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party. Workers in these socialist groups were beginning to share a common literature and to exchange views and debate the key issues raised by the political and industrial struggles of the moment. For example, James Morton of the London Industrial Workers' Committee took part in a debate with the SLP in 1917 on direct action, and ordered six dozen copies of J. Blair Smith's anarchist pamphlet *Direct Action versus Legislation* for distribution at this and other meetings.

Rank-and-file members of socialist bodies were starting to question the established political shibboleths of their particular groups. SLPers, for instance, started to query the DeLeonist attitude to parliamentary action — some, like Joseph Linden, leaving the SLP to join the anarchists. Within the anarchists, too, there was dissent. Robert Selkirk, an anarchist from Cowdenbeath, questioned Aldred's rejection of the workshop struggle: 'It is as well to speed the day when "the Socialist organisations will cease to be glorified debating clubs and become fighting units". And this can be done in the despised "workshop struggle... (quoted by Aldred, *The Spur*, June 1919). A number of anti-parliamentarians and anarchists (such as Whitehead and R. M. Fox) accepted the importance of the 'workshop struggle' at

this time, and thus came close to the position of dissident SLPers and socialist militants in the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee movement.

The important point is that these questions were a matter for debate and discussion within a developing anti-parliamentary movement. Thus, on the 'workshop struggle', for example, Aldred was to make a speedy and effective reply to such palliative fights for 'petty ends', as he viewed them, in his debate with T. L. Smith of the Workers

International Industrial Union (WIIU) (*The Spur*, August 1919). There were other fierce arguments between collectivists and communists, between those who were for or against action in the workshop, and between others on the precise nature of the anti-parliamentary attitude to the ballot-box. Such arguments, however, were 'becoming less real', as Aldred had noted, with a 'growing tendency of socialists to accept a common theory and to meet on a common democratic footing' (*The Spur*, March-April 1919).

Moreover, this tendency was 'a natural growth, capable, truly, of extensive and intensive cultivation; but still a vital development from within a movement'. But Aldred was well aware of 'a hypocritical parade of unity' by those whose 'desire is not for unity, but for capture'. Such a 'mechanical inspiration from without', as he described it, would destroy the natural growth within the movement towards unity — and this is precisely what happened at the Unity Convention.

\* \* \*

But what happened in the intervening years? A number of important initiatives were made in the period from 1918 to 1920 to articulate the approaching unity in organisational terms. I shall briefly examine two of hew initiatives -he formation of the Communist League, and the formation of the Labour Abstentionist Party, both in 1919.

The more important of the two, the Communist League, was an attempt to unite dissident branches of the SLP with London anarchists centred on the *Spur* and *Freedom* papers. From it came the first paper in Britain to be called *The Communist*, and also — and more significantly — a real attempt to unite Marxists and

anarchists in one organisation. The first step towards the new group came from the London District Council of the SLP, which in February 1919 issued a proposal to convene a conference for rank and file members of the British socialist movement to discover a basis for communist unity. The proposal was accompanied by a lengthy manifesto which included a draft constitution for a new Communist League. Key elements in the constitution were: a call for local workers' committees and councils to aim at seizing the means of production

and creating a proletarian dictatorship; the ultimate aim of a republic of federated communes; and a declaration that the parliamentary vote is obsolete and that direct industrial action should be adopted as an alternative.

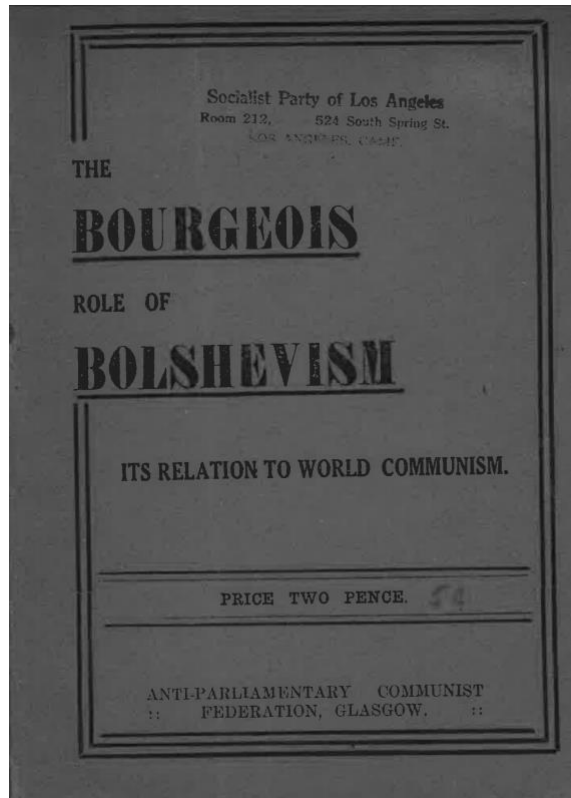
The unity conference was held on 16 March 1919, and the Communist League was established on an explicitly anti-parliamentary programme. George Rose well expressed the spirit behind the new movement in the first issue of its paper *The Communist*:

We know that there must develop the great working-class anti-Statist movement showing the way to Communist society. The Communist League is the standard bearer of the movement; and all the hosts of Communists in the various other Socialist organisations will in good time see that Parliamentary action will lead them, not to Communism but to

that bureaucratic Statism correctly named by Hilaire Belloc the 'Servile State'.... Therefore, we identify ourselves with the Third International, with the Communism of Marx, and with that personification of the spirit of revolt, Bakunin, of whom the Third International is but the natural and logical outcome. (May 1919)

The essence of the new movement was thus an attempted fusion of Bakuninism and Marxism in an anti-parliamentary movement working for the creation of revolutionary workers' councils and factory committees.

Over the next few months the League developed and expanded. An attempt was also made to unite with the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF), but the WSF had its own plans. While most branches of the League were to be found in Scotland and London, William Mainwaring announced the formation of a Treherbert branch in South Wales in May. Mainwaring, however, did reject the League's constitution on a couple of details, including the interesting point that it was



nonsense to speak of the parliamentary vote as 'obsolete' because 'to say it is obsolete will lead many to suppose that it once was useful. To this we do not agree.' (*The Communist*, June/July 1919.)

Reports in *Freedom* cast light on developments in London and the influence of the League on anarchists there. A generally favourable report on the initial unity conference, while noting that the League was not an anarchist organisation, recognised that 'the repudiation of Parliament is a long step in our direction' (April 1919). But subsequent issues carried an acrimonious exchange between William Hopkins of the Stockport Workers' Anarchist Group and David Bloom of the Stepney Branch of the Communist League, concerning seemingly irreconcilable differences over a communist dictatorship and economic determinism, among other matters (June, July, October 1919).

The prominence given to this ill-tempered debate should not obscure the progress being made towards unity in London. Among a section of London anarchists there was a desire for action to prepare the way for an expected revolution and an impatience with the primarily literary propaganda of the Freedom Group, as exemplified in 1919 by the appearance of a new Anarchist Propaganda Group. To these anarchists the best chance of the desired kind of action seemed to lie in co-operation with the Communist League. Thus at a Conference of London Anarchists in April 1919 it was argued by some comrades that 'the time had arrived for action' (May 1919):

The anti-parliamentary attitude of many Socialists and Communists was greatly due to our propaganda in the past, and good results would undoubtedly follow if we worked with them. Steps, therefore, are to be taken towards holding a Conference with the Communist League to consider a joint plan of campaign.

The resulting conference, held in June 1919, was not without points of dispute, including the vexed question of the nature of any proletarian dictatorship. But, significantly, the discussion was 'very friendly in tone, the desire on both sides being to find points of agreement rather than points of controversy' (July 1919). Finally, it was hoped that the points at issue could be resolved at a future National Conference to which anarchist groups would be invited.

**This, though, was not the end of attempts to find a basis for unity between anarchists and Marxists... There was now common agreement that the Soviet Republic could not be established by parliamentary action, but there was still considerable division over the question of the precise usefulness of parliamentary action.**

Possibly in response to anarchist criticisms, a novel feature of the League was its attempt to create a decentralised ruling body called the Local Delegates' Committee. This embodied the principle of an elected delegate committee (each branch electing delegates in proportion to its membership), with mandated delegates subject to immediate reporting back and instant recall if they failed to follow their mandates. The aim here was to sweep out 'boss domination and cliqueism' (*The Communist*, August 1919): 'It must be a movement of the rank and file, expressing itself to the rank and file.'

A real test of this new ruling body in practice was to be the first national conference of the movement. It is not clear, however, whether the conference ever took place, for the Communist League seems to have disappeared without a trace at the end of 1919 or the beginning of 1920.

This, though, was not the end of attempts to find a basis for unity between anarchists and Marxists. Aldred in particular continued to pursue closer relations with SLP, BSP and ILP comrades. In an important article Aldred again spoke of the revolutionary movement 'drawing closer and closer together on a platform of practical revolutionary effort' ('Bricks and mortar', *The Spur*, October 1919). There was now common agreement that the

Soviet Republic could not be established by parliamentary action, but there was still considerable division over the question of the precise usefulness of parliamentary action.

To overcome this division, and particularly addressing SLPers, Aldred proposed the 'Sinn Fein' tactic — communist antiparliamentary candidates adopting the Irish Nationalists' use of the ballot-box for agitational purposes, with a pledge not to take the oath and not to sit in Parliament if elected. While preferring the straight anti-parliamentary position of boycotting elections, Aldred put forward the 'Sinn Fein' alternative as 'a tactical compromise ... for effecting a wider unity'.

The tactic was put to the test in the Paisley by-election of 1919–1920, when Aldred offered to support the SLP candidate if he stood as a communist anti-parliamentarian. The offer no doubt had some effect on the local SLP branch, for when William Paul declined to stand as their candidate, they decided to forget all compromise and conducted a 'Boycott the Ballot Box' campaign aimed particularly at the Labour Party candidate, Biggar. Their leaflet concluded: 'Every vote

withheld is a vote for socialism.... Abstain from voting. Work for the social revolution.' (Quoted by D. M. Chewter. *The History of the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain*. B Litt thesis, Oxford 1965.)

Such action was perhaps indicative of a growing unease in the ranks of the SLP with the parliamentary policy of the party. Although quite a lot is known about the activities of SLP dissidents like Paul and Tom Bell, who were to form the Communist Unity Group of the SLP, very little is known about the developing anti-parliamentarism in the party as exemplified by the Paisley action. There is evidence that other SLP branches were accepting the anti-parliamentary position. For example, we know that Aldred was running a mission in 1919–1920 under the auspices of the Shettleston SLP which, in the words of its secretary J. Bowman, was to 'thump home that anti-parliamentary truth' (*The Spur*, March 1920). Realising that 'this is not the SLP position', Bowman insisted however that 'there must be no parliamentary sidestepping'. This attitude to Parliament also surfaced at the Carlisle conference of the SLP in April 1920, which spent an unusual amount of time discussing the case for and against parliamentary action.

Similar developments were taking place in branches of the BSP — for example in Scotland at the Tradeston and Anderston branches — and in ILP branches too. The rank and file of these parties were getting impatient with the traditional party arguments for parliamentary inaction, and were beginning to cooperate with individuals across party lines in practical propaganda. Individuals and branches were moving towards communist unity on their own initiative, independently of party leaders. Thus in May 1920 a Communist Group was formed in Paisley of ex-BSP members, while in June 1920 J. E. Scott announced the formation of the Acton Communist Party by discontented members of the Acton and Chiswick branch of the Herald League. The parliamentary constraints of the old parties and organisations were now hampering revolutionary propaganda, as Scott noted: 'We have stood always for the Revolution and the extreme propaganda but could not carry on whilst affiliated to the National Labour Party through no fault of our own' (*The Spur*, July 1920).

It was also at this time, in May 1920, that the Labour Abstentionist Party made its brief appearance. It was essentially the creation of Whitehead of the WSE. Its programme was largely a summary of the anti-parliamentary 'Sinn Fein' tactic as evolved by Aldred in the 1918–1919 period, but spiced with Whitehead's distinctive conception of independent proletarian ideology. Although it is not clear how much support the party could command, it did at least have the unqualified approval of Tom Mann, who wrote a foreword to Whitehead's pamphlet *The Labour Abstentionist Party* (1920), commending 'the fine

tactics of the Irish Sinn Feiners', and desired 'to see the same tactics resorted to in Britain'. The formation of the party is thus another indication of the growing anti-parliamentarism in the movement.

\* \* \*

Within a few months of these developments, however, hopes of a rapprochement between Marxists and anarchists were dealt a fatal blow by the Communist Unity Convention. I have already shown how the ensuing Communist Party, based on the ludicrous programme of participation in parliamentary elections and affiliation to the Labour Party, was completely out of step with the evolution of the revolutionary movement in Britain at this time. But why didn't this evolution continue independently of the new party? This is a very difficult question to answer. One historian, Walter Kendall in *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900–1921* (1969), has argued that the secret hand of Moscow gold was at work, which, in creating a situation of financial dependency for the small revolutionary groups, slowly but surely ensured that they were all sucked into the CPGB. There may be some truth in this, but the process was a little more complex.

It is clear that after the formation of the CPGB in August 1920 the new party was subject to a Comintern directive to unite with other selected revolutionary groups on the basis of the 'Twenty-One Conditions'. As a result, any further negotiations towards unity on an anti-parliamentary programme were a non-starter. But why didn't these other groups create their own initiative independently of Moscow? Unfortunately, they couldn't ignore Moscow and the CPGB, especially because most of them — including the SLP, the WSF, and the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement — were on the Comintern's hit-list. What is surprising, though, is that in the subsequent negotiations most of the revolutionary groups gave up their allegiance to their anti-parliamentary principles without much of a fight.

There was a fair amount of Comintern trickery in these negotiations through their British stooges. Most notable here, perhaps, was William Gallacher in his notorious attempts to discredit the leading Scottish Marxist John Maclean in the eyes of the SLP executive committee and his machinations in relation to the Communist Labour Party (which under his guidance became a conduit to funnel Scottish communists into the CPGB). But, despite Gallacher & Co., we must note that members of the various organisations were willing accomplices in this trickery and the intellectual somersaults it involved. As happens repeatedly in the history of British socialism in the twentieth century, there was a complete abdication of critical judgement when basic principles and beliefs are put to the test by supposed friends and allies.

Thus the British Communists were a push-over when faced with the simplistic and ludicrous arguments that the Russian Revolution depended on a united revolutionary movement in Britain and that, towards this end, Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks knew best about tactics since they had already created a successful revolution. If there were any doubts, they could be rationalised away by fondly imagining that one could work for a change in policy from within the CPGB and/or the Comintern. The Scottish Communists accepted this latter nonsense from Gallacher, and many others were to find themselves on the same slippery slope. In most cases intelligent people simply rejected their own revolutionary traditions and experience for the sake of a collective delusion — loyalty to the Party.

A good example of the process at work may be found in the political trajectory of Whitehead in the latter half of 1920. He was closely involved in attempts at unity among the anti-parliamentarian groups after the Unity Convention, including a proposed conference in September 1920 to bring together revolutionaries associated with the *Spur*, *Worker* and *Solidarity* papers. The ‘anti-Labour Party and anti-parliamentary in tactic’ nature of such revolutionaries was stressed. Later Whitehead wrote a series of uncompromising anti-parliamentary articles in *The Spur*. Thus in October 1920 he said:

None more than ourselves desire complete unity for action throughout the whole of the parties inside the Moscow International, but it has got to be a unity on an *effective* tactic. With the salt of the proletariat instinctively opposed to Parliamentarianism it is impossible to march forward along a parliamentary road.

And he repeated the argument with increasing eloquence in November in his discussion of ‘Maiden Lane sophistries’. The sophistry to which he devoted particular attention was the current nonsense of ‘revolutionary parliamentarianism’. For him ‘Parliamentarianism means talk’, and ‘“revolutionary parliamentarianism” [means] revolutionary talk’! Or, from another perspective: ‘It is on the industrial field where Communists must be busy, there and everywhere where there are workers. There are no workers in Parliament. Get out of it’

But by the following month, all had suddenly changed. In December 1920, at the Cardiff conference of the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International), Whitehead and others voted overwhelmingly in favour of acceptance of the Comintern’s ‘Twenty-One Conditions’, including Point 11 in favour of parliamentary action. This amazing turn-around was justified, Whitehead explained, by the relative insignificance of British theoretical concerns in the face of demands for ‘loyalty to the world revolution’. From then on he was to become a vigorous champion of the new CPGB and the Comintern.

Many other comrades followed a similar path; Henry Sara and Robert Selkirk are two who spring to mind. This kind of transformation was not limited to Britain; a similar process occurred in the United States, for example, with Robert Minor being a particularly famous and influential instance. The same kind of arguments were used; Minor stressed loyalty to the revolution, and suggested that the anarchists could act as the left wing of the Communist Party!

Most of these recruits subsequently left the CPGB within a few years, thoroughly disillusioned (though some, like Selkirk, remained in it). Sara, for example, was one of the founders of the British Trotskyist movement; but more common was the experience of Whitehead, who joined the Labour Party and became a vigorous anti-Communist propagandist. This was the fate of many good comrades, and it is too easy, as James Klugmann shows in his official *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (Volume 1, 1968), to dismiss them as opportunists and revolutionary dilettantes of no importance to the movement. But if anti-parliamentarism and real communism are ever again to have any importance, it is a trajectory which must be probed and understood beyond such convenient insults.

One contribution to such an understanding might, it could be argued, be the lack of any critical information about Lenin and the Russian Revolution in the British socialist press. This may have been true at an earlier period, but when decisions were being made to join the CPGB critical articles about Bolshevik policies were already beginning to appear. In *The Spur*, for example, a series of articles by the Austrian anarchist Rudolf Grossmann (Pierre Ramus) appeared from September 1919 onwards lambasting Lenin and the Bolshevik government. At first these articles were greeted with hostile disbelief by Aldred and others, but as Aldred in particular gained more information he came to similar conclusions. Aldred, however, was an exception in conducting such uninhibited intellectual inquiry. For most people, it seemed that nothing could get through the mind-block of the ‘unity at all costs’ school.

It was not long before the attitudes of this school became frozen into immovable dogma. After the formation of the CPGB, you criticised Lenin and other Communist leaders at your peril. Thus, because of his criticisms of Lenin and Gallacher, Aldred suddenly found that his lecture engagements with the Greenock Workers’ Committee and the Paisley BSP were cancelled, and that halls booked for meetings were no longer available (*The Spur*, August 1920). In this manner the openness of the movement, with its free discussion and debate, crumbled away after mid-1920 in the pursuit of unity with the CPGB.

Such developments also affected the SLP. Individual SLPers were joining the CPGB, especially in Scotland via the CLP (John S. Clarke being one notable

example). The SLP, because of this loss and the effects of unemployment, was declining in numbers at a rapid rate. To stem this decline the remaining members closed ranks and reverted to an undiluted DeLeonist position, leaving little scope for any development in an anti-parliamentary direction.

\* \* \*

As a result of such retreats and the consolidation of the CPGB, what was left of the evolving revolutionary and anti-parliamentary movement came to be centred on *The Spur* and Guy Aldred. He and his associates were now almost alone in both being enthusiastic supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution and yet not falling for the spurious unity line of the CPGB. All that could be accomplished now was to bring together the few remaining Communist and anarchist groups which still adhered to an anti-parliamentary programme.

It was hoped to create a Communist federation out of these remaining groups. The principle of federation — a federation of Communist groups developed voluntarily from below rather than an imposed centralisation from above — was always an important and consistent part of the anti-parliamentary movement's proposals for unity. Aldred summarised the position in *The Spur*:

I have no objections to an efficient and centralised party so long as the authority rests in the hands of the rank and file and all officials can be sacked at a moment's notice. But I want the centralism to be wished for and evolved by the local groups and not imposed on them from a centre.... The Communist party, the real party, must be evolved through a federation of local groups, a slow merging of them into one party, from the bottom upwards, as distinct from this imposition from the top downwards. (August 1920)

The idea of federation was coupled with a demand for self-determination — the British revolutionaries should determine their own policy in relation to British conditions, irrespective of what Lenin and the Bolsheviks might say. Lenin was faced with different circumstances, Aldred argued, and might be forced to compromise to save the Russian Revolution, but in Britain there was no such excuse for compromise:

Lenin's task compels him to compromise with all the elect of bourgeois society whereas ours demands no compromise. And so we take different paths and are only on the most distant speaking terms.

Or, more directly, we should stop 'chasing the shadows of the great man [Lenin].... It is not he who is running the British Revolution, but "ourselves alone". The policy of looking to him to mind our business is

hindering and not helping the revolution.' But increasingly such advice from Aldred and a few others was ignored, as the move to join the CPGB gathered pace.

In practical terms, however, little progress was being made towards the federation that Aldred and the anti-parliamentary communists wished to see. Early in 1920 the Glasgow Anarchist Group issued a manifesto and put forward a proposal for unity along federalist lines (*The Spur*, January/February 1920). The group hoped to form a communist federation for Lanarkshire akin to the already existing Fife Socialist League. A similar federation of communist groups was planned in Wales towards the end of 1920. But apparently such plans remained at the proposal stage.

The Leeds Unity Convention of January 1921 — with the final fusion of the CPGB with the Communist Labour Party and the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International), on the basis of the Comintern's 'Twenty-One conditions' — dashed any remaining hopes of a wider unity of anti-parliamentary groups. At this time, Aldred appealed to the example of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) as a party which had stood up to the Comintern on the question of parliamentarism. The KAPD had forced the Comintern to recognise it as a sympathising party with consultative status. If anti-parliamentary groups could unite in Britain into a National Federation or Party, they could then enter into a close alliance with the KAPD and other continental Communist Parties to form an International Anti-Parliamentary Federation. In this way Moscow would be forced to recognise the reality of anti-parliamentary organisation and be compelled to grant anti-parliamentary groups some form of representation on the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

But no one was listening any longer. Shortly afterwards, the KAPD was to get its 'marching orders' from Moscow — join the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) within three months, or else! Clearly the anti-parliamentary groups had no future inside the Comintern, and all hopes of this were now dropped. (It should perhaps be noted that Rose Witcop travelled to Moscow later in 1921 with APCF credentials to negotiate for 'associate membership' of the Comintern; ultimately nothing came of this, and it appears to have been her own initiative to gain financial support for the movement.)

Finally, at the 1921 Easter Conference of the Scottish antiparliamentary groups, a Scottish Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed. This was the beginning of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation which was to play a major part in keeping alive the hopes of a libertarian communism for the next thirty years.

# Why socialists need a better strategy than electoralism

Daniel Rashid<sup>1</sup>

One of the most distinctive aspects of anarchism is its anti-electoralism. When the doctrine was first coming together in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, our hostility to parliaments and electoral socialism was one of our key defining traits. Against both revolutionary and reformist social-democrats, anarchists argued for direct action and class organisation from below, believing that socialist participation in electoral politics would nullify the working class' ability to fight capitalism, and turn working class organisations (like unions) into tools of the capitalist class.

While much has changed in politics since, there has been nothing that would cause us to abandon this particular view. In fact, we've had over a hundred and fifty years of practical evidence proving the validity of exactly these points. The left-wing of the establishment in most developed countries is made up of people who call, or called, themselves socialists: Labour in the UK, the Socialist Party in France, the Social Democratic Party in Germany, and of course Labor in Australia. All of these organisations, at one time, advocated for the working-class to run society, but all of them made their peace and instead focused on running capitalism – even when it cost them their own working-class base.

We've also seen movements to the left of these parties emerge, and then undergo their own process of moderation. Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece drew much attention when they began and promised a new kind of anti-capitalism, connected to social movements, but the result after all these years has been a failure – even by their own standards. Syriza completely capitulated to the EU's austerity programme, the very thing it set out to oppose. In 2023 it elected a former Goldman-Sachs banker as leader, and then threw itself into another internal crisis that almost destroyed it. Podemos joined the centre-left PSOE in a disastrous neoliberal coalition that caused its once-considerable popularity to plummet, while achieving none of its key goals.

We've even been able to see the practical effects of anarchists abandoning our anti-parliamentary commitment. The Spanish CNT union helped nullify the revolution its own members made by joining the Spanish Popular Front government. In a lower-stakes environment, the nucleus around Georges Fontenis helped destroy France's then-significant Anarchist Federation by pushing it down the path of a stunt electoral venture.

More recently, we have seen a good number of anarchists dissolve themselves into the social-democratic movements around the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the USA, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, and Jean-Luc Melenchon in France; we have even seen many advocate for supporting Democrats in the US electorally, in the name of fighting "Trump-fascism".

Fortunately, it appears that this wave is receding, but have the right lessons been learnt? There is still an underlying supposition that we need to support electoral politics on some level, either to support the "lesser-evil" against the "greater-evil", or simply to try and connect with everyday

left-wing people. Those who dissent are regularly accused of being indifferent to the results of elections, or of being dogmatists obsessed with theoretical purity. Their arguments become increasingly indistinguishable from those of the "lesser-evils" themselves.

Against this, it becomes more and more important to assert the independence of the working class, and the necessity to fight against the influence of electoralism on social movements. The effect of all electoral politics is the subordination of our class to the capitalist system. Breaking out of this ideology is an essential step to overcoming capitalism altogether.

## Where working-class politics goes to die

In a real sense, parliamentary politics depends on masking class divisions. At the voting booth, we do not vote as members of the working class or members of the

**it becomes more and more important to assert the independence of the working class, and the necessity to fight against the influence of electoralism on social movements. The effect of all electoral politics is the subordination of our class to the capitalist system.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.redblacknotes.com/2025/04/09/why-socialists-need-a-better-strategy-than-electoralism/>

capitalist class, but as individual citizens, all with a nominally equal right to decide who leads us. The fact that state power fulfils the same basic functions regardless of who is in government proves that this is bullshit, but democratic ideology nevertheless reinforces it as if it were true.

The power of the working class doesn't come in our numbers – especially not expressed through vote-tallies. Our power comes from our position in the economy, from the fact that society is built on our labour. Rather than building class power from this fact, electoral politics instead focus on building an *electorate*: a mass of voters cobbled together by political promises, quid-pro-quo patronage and demographic wrangling.

Electoral politics force socialist organisations to become more conservative. They do so by tying the public commitments of socialist organisations to their “electability”: whether these policies might win or lose you votes. In order to succeed in the polls, you are forced to be realistic and leave unpopular demands to the side, no matter how important they might actually be; the alternative is to stand on an unpopular platform and get an embarrassing vote total.

It is indicative then that even revolutionary socialist electoral projects put forward demands that are little different to those of left-wing social democrats. The desire of electoral socialists to use parliaments to spread the socialist doctrine is then diminished by the fact that their success is dependent on misrepresenting what socialism actually means.

Any party that wants to win at elections is a party that seeks to govern, and any party that seeks to govern is a party that seeks to make peace with capitalism. Any socialist goals they start out with will end up meaning nothing when confronted with the reality of running the state.

Not only does the ruling government become the chief employer of hundreds of thousands of public sector workers, it also becomes the institution responsible for the maintenance of capitalism. It oversees the imprisonment of the working class, directs the war machines that obliterate the workers of other countries and it shapes the economy “in the national interest”. Its primary, overriding purpose, is the defence of private property. This is what the state was developed to do, and it is what it will always do.

By coming to power, nominally working class parties shed their previous class identity and transform themselves into the left wing of the capitalist class. There are countless examples of this “bourgeoisification” occurring, even with moderate reformist outfits. The aforementioned examples of Labor, the Social Democrats and the Socialist Party are relevant here, as are the examples of Syriza and Podemos.

## A challenge from the left

Nowadays, most revolutionary electoralists will admit that they have little chance of winning altogether; they do not seriously think that they will ever secure a parliamentary majority. In some sense they hope to never do so, knowing that it will put them unambiguously in the position of capitalists-in-chief. Their real goal is to elect a small number of people that will use their parliamentary seats to make propaganda, promote extra-parliamentary causes, and help legitimise socialism in the eyes of the general public. On paper, socialism is still going to come about through a revolution and the smashing of the state.

This is broadly the position of the most serious far-left electoral projects in Australia – Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative's Victorian Socialists. The most successful examples of this internationally are the Workers' Left Front in Argentina and People Before Profit in

Ireland, both of which are essentially coalitions of Trotskyist organisations. To varying degrees this is also the position of Marxists operating within the DSA, as well as of more traditional parliamentary communist parties, like those in Greece and Britain.

The problem is that the pressures of parliament apply to those outside of government, too. Being a minority in parliament comes with its own set of pressures. This would intensify in a hung parliament scenario, where the votes of these socialists could be crucial to the formation of a government. The pressure to moderate even further would be immense, particularly if their refusal to back the left might result in the right coming to power.

Supporters of Socialist Alliance, Victorian Socialists and other socialist electoral ventures become excited at the prospect of using potential crossbench power to vote down bad legislation and squeeze positive commitments out of whoever is in government. However, it's exactly

**The power of the working class doesn't come in our numbers – especially not expressed through vote-tallies. Our power comes from our position in the economy, from the fact that society is built on our labour. Rather than building class power from this fact, electoral politics instead focus on building an *electorate***

this position that would pressure them to support a government. In all likelihood, this pressure would also come from the socialists' own voter base, knowing that they've been mobilised on broadly reformist grounds to begin with.

The election of even one or two politicians can start a process of bureaucratisation that moderates parties in their own way. The fact that these politicians might take some arbitrarily lower salary is besides the point. The election of a politician entails the employment of a number of staffers, who will then become dependent on the re-election of the politician for their own livelihood. The politician's party will struggle to keep their elected officials to account, knowing that in the case of any severe disagreement, the politician can simply split and keep their seat while the original party suddenly becomes unrepresented.

The American DSA is a particularly good example of this – none of the politicians it has elected have ever been even remotely accountable to the policy platforms of their own organisation. For some time, a key fight in the party between the left and right has been about the feasibility of enforcing this kind of discipline altogether.

The purpose of democratic parliaments is to keep political disagreements within narrow bounds, with the aim of managing capitalism; the system protects itself from dangerous ideas by integrating them into itself. Even politicians that are not in government contribute to the process of governing, through participation in debates over legislation, membership in parliamentary committees, and representations made on behalf of constituents. Their very presence in parliament as opponents of capitalism helps solidify the impression that parliament can be meaningfully used to oppose capitalism at all.

All of this would be inconsequential if the failures of electoral socialists only affected themselves, but this couldn't be further from the truth. The failures of electoral socialism damage the prospects of revolutionary socialism generally. They don't simply discredit our ideas by associating them with blowhard politicians and opportunists looking for a bit of popularity; they also promote passivity among workers and drag working class organisations into their mess. They activate layers of potentially good militants and then burn them out during the inevitable process of betrayal and failure.

Regardless of what they might say about social movements and resistance outside of parliament, all successful electoral projects depend on promising reforms in exchange for votes. The vast majority of people vote for these parties in the expectation that they would be able to deliver serious improvements in their lives. Victorian Socialists' last electoral slogan, "For real change – vote for us!", says it all. "Real change" cannot be brought about by voting for someone to enact it on your behalf. Electoral socialists think that parliaments can be used to help workers break out of this passivity, but it has the opposite effect, swapping out one set of leaders for another.

**Our opposition to electoral politics does not entail an opposition to the idea of seeking improvements under capitalism. Not at all! We argue that working class people should fight hard for improvements in their wages and conditions, as well as for more general social goals**

altogether.

A working class person that still thinks in terms of reformism is not going to have their opinion changed by bringing in a better type of reformist. The only thing that tangibly breaks the class away from such a mentality is direct action, carried out by the working class' own institutions. One of the major problems facing working class organisations at present is precisely the fact that they are in thrall to politicians; most union officials prioritise the election of the Labor Party over the interests of their own members. The most important task for revolutionaries is therefore not to present themselves as alternative politicians, but to clear politicians out of the unions

### **Reforms, not reformism**

Our opposition to electoral politics does not entail an opposition to the idea of seeking improvements under capitalism. Not at all! We argue that working class people should fight hard for improvements in their wages and conditions, as well as for more general social goals, like an end to racism against migrants, for free access to reproductive healthcare, for trans liberation, and so on.

In fact, the main point of our argument is that by placing your faith in a politician to deliver on what you want, you are diminishing your own power as a worker. That's why we instead argue for direct action. To paraphrase the French anarchist Émile Pouget, it means the working class creating its own conditions of struggle, looking only to itself for the means to fight capitalists. By securing improvements and defending against attacks through our own organisations, through our own efforts, we develop a sense of strength and cohesion that we wouldn't otherwise achieve.

When the class fights through its unions, for instance, it undercuts the democratic ideology mentioned earlier in the article. Class interests come to the fore over party loyalties. The inevitable clash between the interests of workers and the interests of their employers becomes obvious. It becomes clearer that the entire apparatus of government, from parliament to the Fair Work Commission, is there to keep workers where they are. The very act of striking demonstrates practically that your employer is dependent on your labour for their income, and that we can instead cooperate for our own benefit.

When union disputes are taken out of the hands of officials, workers also begin to learn how to develop their own sense of power and use it against their employers. The employers' weaknesses are identified and targeted. Workers cohere themselves in order to succeed as a fighting force. Even things as mundane as drawing up strike rosters and identifying places to picket help develop the self-reliance and independence of the people involved. Anyone who has ever witnessed a real class fight up close and personal would know how it can *transform* people, as individuals and as a collective.

Imagine a situation where a government secures a wage rise for low-income workers by passing legislation raising the minimum wage by \$5 an hour. Now, imagine a situation where a union of those same workers secures the exact same wage rise by taking strike action. While the direct outcome in terms of wages is the same, the qualitative effect is completely different, and it should be clear why the latter lays the groundwork for socialism in a way that the former subverts.

Our aim isn't to build a nicer capitalism for society as a whole. We explicitly try to fight against that belief. We fight for a better life, but we do so knowing that all struggles will only ever be partial until we abolish capitalism altogether. We cannot do that without asserting our independence from capitalist politics. We instead have to look to the strength of workers' own associations – unions, tenant organisations, organising projects, all the means by which workers fight back using their own strength.

### **Their success depends on our failure**

People who argue for socialist participation in elections have real concerns that can't be dismissed out of hand. The left *is* marginal, disconnected from the mass of the working class, and tactically lost. Countless extra-parliamentary left initiatives have come and gone. Street rallies take place every weekend without any actual effect. There *is* a real need for the revolutionary left to

develop a serious strategy for class power, and to put it into practice.

Indeed, it's important to note that reformist politicians often emerge as extra-parliamentary struggles fail. Podemos arose out of the huge anti-austerity "Indignados" movement. Sanders and Corbyn emerged not long after the extra-parliamentary movement around Occupy petered out. A feeling of despondency and helplessness overtook the far-left, and the sudden emergence of an enormous mass of people interested in social democracy led many to drop their previous commitments, in order to better engage with these people. In a very real sense, electoral socialists succeed when anarchists fail. Libertarians have to face up to that fact, and take on the challenge that it entails.

Isolation is stifling. This is exacerbated when people live in areas without an established far-left to work inside of. Some of the most avid supporters of electoral politics are people who live in regional areas or in suburbs without much of a visible left. In this atmosphere, even soft-left projects have an appeal – leafleting strangers for an anarchist reading group feels like a much tougher ask than door-knocking for a left candidate come election time.

*Anything* feels better than *nothing*. Even in less isolating settings like large workplaces, a mutual interest in a popular left politician might be something that allows you to bond with a potential union member and activist.

While acknowledging all of these sentiments – and sharing them ourselves – our belief is that electoral politics offers no solution to this malaise. Instead, it reinforces all of the problems that came before, while generating new ones that future generations will have to deal with.

Our commitment instead is to long-term work in the organisations of our class, and in the broad struggles our class fights. This patient activity can only consistently be done by a well-organised and committed anarchist group, willing to break out of the left bubble and start the essential process of implanting ourselves in working class life. A young worker angry at their boss shouldn't have to turn to a charismatic politician and their illusory promises for hope; they should be able to join their union and find a militant branch that will fight their employers and encourage the young worker themselves to get involved. They should be able to see radicals in their neighbourhood, mobilising around this or that issue that affects them. This is not an impossible dream – it can be a reality, if we take it seriously. That means abandoning electoralism, but it also means *getting organised*.

**Our commitment instead is to long-term work in the organisations of our class, and in the broad struggles our class fights**

# Reviews

## The British Communist Left, 1914-1945

Iain McKay

As is well known in socialist circles, Lenin wrote “Left-wing” *Communism: An Infantile disorder* in 1920 to counteract those within the fledgling communist movement of those more revolutionary than the Bolsheviks. Most anarchists would be aware that these included those in Germany and Holland who opposed electioneering, the trade unions and the dictatorship of the party. These would latter split to form the Communist Workers Party – KAPD – and eventually become known as council communists, represented by such important writers as Anton Pannekoek, Herman Gorter and Paul Mattick. The others whom Lenin turned his fire upon were the Italian abstentionists whose leader was Amadeo Bordiga and these became known as the “communist left”.<sup>1</sup>

While the German-Dutch left communists eventually rejected all aspects of Bolshevism and increasingly came to the same conclusions as anarchists had decades previously, the Italian “communist left” continued to view Bolshevism positively (if critical of developments in the USSR and Comintern) and maintained a great many of its positions from 1920 – most notably, politically, on the nature and role of the vanguard party and the necessity of its dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> Bordiga, it should be noted, played a disastrous role as

the leader of new Communist Party during the rise of, and resistance to, fascism in Italy after the Red Years.

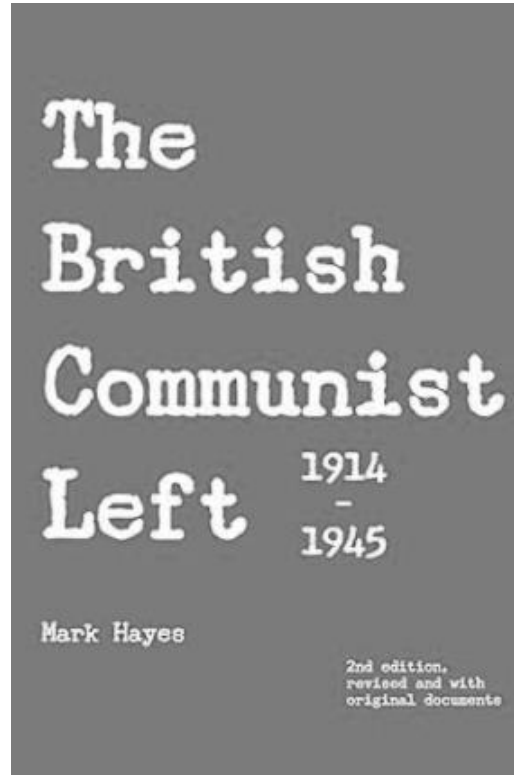
I will use the term “left-communist” to mean the Dutch-German tendency (who became council-communists) and “communist left” for the Italian faction (who

remained Leninists). Lenin’s “Left-Wing communism” could do for both considered together but with the caveat that these two groupings cannot really be united so.

This is to provide some context for this review of Mark Hayes’ *The British Communist Left*<sup>3</sup> which I purchased at a recent London anarchist bookfair. I was initially drawn to the book because I had recently written an article on British syndicalism for *Black Flag*<sup>4</sup> and have read – planned to review – Leninist Ralph Darlington’s book on the labour revolt of 1910 to 1914 (spoiler alert: a Bolshevik party is needed!).<sup>5</sup> The period between 1910 and 1920 is of note for anarchists today as it was (probably) the closest that Britain has been to revolution and, not by coincidence, anarchist ideas had

become more widely known, accepted and practiced (even if under the more polite label of “syndicalism”).

However, by 1920 the revolutionary wave had peaked and its lasting legacy was the Communist Party of Great Britain and the marginalisation of previous ideas by Bolshevism on the revolutionary left. Thus, for



<sup>1</sup> See Adam Buick’s “Bordigism” in *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), Maximilien Rubel and John Crump (editors), for a useful introduction to the tendency. I must note that Alain Pengam’s chapter in this book on “Anarcho-Communism” is somewhat inaccurate as it downplays its influence and importance within anarchist circles.

<sup>2</sup> Economically, they favour a highly centralised economic system and oppose all local autonomy in the belief that it means “commodity production”. They seem blissfully unaware that such a regime would be a dysfunctional, inefficient, wasteful bureaucratic machine which would create a new class system – such as the Bolsheviks had created by 1920 (Trotsky in *Terrorism and Communism* advocates the militarisation of labour and unsurprisingly it was “republished by the French ‘Bordigists’, who described it

as ‘one of Trotsky’s most magnificent texts’.” (Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–68)* [Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018], 190). Suffice to say, autonomy (free agreement) is essential for relations within and outwith a workplace to respond to the unexpected and difficult developments any real economy would face and reflects the experience, local knowledge and enthusiasm of the working class which any centralised regime would crush.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Hayes, *The British Communist Left: A history of left-wing communism in Britain, 1914-1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Old Moles Collective, 2023). The second edition includes reprints of a few original texts from this period which are of interest.

<sup>4</sup> “Tom Mann and British Syndicalism”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 1 No. 3 (Autumn 2021)

<sup>5</sup> The review finally appeared as “A Missed Opportunity”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 5 No. 2 (Autumn 2025)

example, workers' control was replaced with nationalisation – faithfully reflecting the “lessons” of the “successful” Russian Revolution. There was a decline in a variety of promising libertarian traditions (including Syndicalism and Guild Socialism), and their replacement with Russian Bolshevism which built upon the worst aspects of pre-war British Marxism (namely, the SDF-BSP and SLP traditions). In short, an opportunity for libertarians to become a significant – albeit minority – part of the labour movement was lost.

So I had hoped that this book would shed some light on this period and how the various pre-war libertarian tendencies reacted to Bolshevism. I was distinctly disappointed as this was an account by an adherent of the “communist left”, one whose aim I think is to bolster its influence within the British left by trying to rewrite the “conventional wisdom” of this period. In and of itself, this would be a useful goal – I have done this myself in my writings, most obviously with Proudhon and Kropotkin. However, to be valid such work needs to show conclusively the facts which debunk the repeated assertions which have been handed down and this book does not do that – for, as will become clear, the obvious reason that these do not exist.

Hayes particularly objects to the “anarcho-Marxist” account of Mark Shipway’s *Anti-parliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers’ Councils in Britain, 1917-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988) arguing that what we are “dealing here with two distinct political currents; one whose main influence was post-war left-communism, and the other nineteenth century Bakuninite anarchism”. (9) Yet Aldred’s anarchism is well-known while the *Workers’ Dreadnaught* reprinted articles by anarchists. Thus it noted the “Death of Domela Nieuwenhuis” (6 December 1919), reprinting his 1894 pamphlet *Socialism in Danger* in early 1921, a number of works by Kropotkin in 1922-3 as well as an interesting review of Proudhon’s *General Idea of the Revolution* by Sylvia Pankhurst after Freedom published it in 1923. In terms of Kropotkin, it stated that *The Conquest of Bread* was the “best book on Communism as it will be when it comes, and on the scientific possibilities of realising it” while *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* was “on the science of feeding the people under Communism.” (30 September 1922) and the following year saw “Kropotkin’s Ideas on Communism” discussed at its

“Communist Workers’ Movement Meetings”. As for the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation which was founded in 1921, that included anarchists and Marxists united by what they obviously shared in common. Indeed, as Hayes admits, like the council communists, Aldred “began to question its original proletarian character, along with the Communist International and the Bolshevik Party” (131) So there clearly was a coming together of revolutionaries who had come to similar conclusions even if one got there somewhat belated compared to the other.

Given this, Hayes’ notion that anti-parliamentary communism is “an artificial political theory” (9) cannot be maintained. It is the influence of the Bordiga which is missing, not anarchism, and so it is trying to construct a British “communist left” – as opposed to a British “left-communist” or council communist left – which is “artificial”.

Still, Hayes is right to say that these British revolutionaries had arrived at anti-parliamentary communism by different paths. Aldred did come from an anarchist background and Pankhurst’s politics were a response to which she believed was a successful revolution in Russia which had replaced capitalist parliamentarism with a soviet socialist republic. Yet it cannot be denied that both drew the same conclusions, even if Aldred had drawn them much earlier. This explains why many libertarians saw in the soviets a Russian variant of syndicalism and, likewise, initially viewed Bolshevism favourably – it appeared as if the Bolsheviks had come to anarchist conclusions (as some Marxists likewise did, with one former Bolshevik turned Menshevik declaring that “Lenin has just made himself a candidate for a throne that has been vacant for the last thirty years – that of Bakunin.”). That these initial hopes were misplaced does not mean that this was not the case, as can be seen from Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman who went from being early defenders of the Bolsheviks to their most vocal critics after seeing them in action first-hand.<sup>1</sup> This reflected the path of Aldred and Pankhurst – in contrast, Bordiga was called “more Leninist than Lenin” and had no issues with party dictatorship or State control over the economy.

Part of the problem is that Hayes’ awareness – like that of most Marxists<sup>2</sup> – of the anarchist tradition seems

<sup>1</sup> See the articles by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in *To Remain Silent is Impossible: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in Russia* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority!, 2013), Andrew Zonneveld (editor); Goldman’s *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970); Berkman’s *The Bolshevik Myth* (London: Pluto Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> It is to the “communist left” I owe one of my favourite anecdotes. When looking through one of their diatribes against anarchism, I saw it proclaimed that we anarchists think that the State should be destroyed before capitalism –

with an endnote promising a reference to back this claim up. I was excited – I would now discover which anarchist stated this much asserted – but baseless, as far as I could tell from my decades of research into anarchism – claim by Marxists. Turning to the end note in question, I discovered that the source of this assertion was that well-known anarchist Frederick Engels! That a Marxist could consider it sufficient to back up an assertion on anarchism by referencing another assertion on anarchism by a Marxist says all there is to be said about Marxism as a viable and useful theory for radicals.

poor: such as putting anarchist-communist in quotes when discussing Guy Aldred (never mind it has been used since the 1870s), implying Kropotkin's pro-war stand in 1914 was more widespread than it was (21) when he and the very few comrades he influenced were quickly rejected (*Freedom* printed their arguments for a whole two issues before becoming staunchly internationalist) and that there was a *Freedom* group in 1936 (151-2, 161-2) when any remaining members of the defunct paper like other anarchists supported *Spain and the World* (which took the title *Freedom* in 1945).

It is hardly the work of an objective historian to write of "elements" (21) of the anarchist movement taking an internationalist stance when the vast majority of anarchists did and, given this, the claim that "those revolutionaries who most intransigently defended the principle of proletarian internationalism in 1914 came from within the social democratic parties themselves" (143) is simply nonsense. The facts are while a small minority in the Marxist Second International opposed the war, the over-whelming majority of anarchists did so. Likewise, it is proclaimed that the anarchists of *War Commentary* "appear[ed] to reveal in its anarchist prejudice against centralised political organisation and intervention in the class struggle" (153) when in fact they organised to achieve that intervention and that they were correct about vanguardism (the author simply has no awareness he has an unfounded prejudice for a centralised party<sup>1</sup>).

This ignorance of anarchism produces some really bizarre comments, such as when Hayes states that it is "the left tendency that has fought hardest against the influence of bourgeois ideology to defend the historic interests of the working class" and lumps the anarchists in the First International who warned about the reformism that would be produced by Marx and Engels advocacy of electioneering in the First International with "the open revisionism of the right and the veiled opportunism of the centre" in the Second which confirmed those warnings! But, then, he mutters about the "anti-organisational prejudices of the anarchists", showing that he does not appear to know that anarchists then, like now, were advocating federal organisation. (147)

**So a better  
awareness of  
anarchism would  
result in recognising  
that the anti-  
parliamentary  
Marxists had come of  
anarchist conclusions  
on various issues.**

So a better awareness of anarchism would result in recognising that the anti-parliamentary Marxists had come of anarchist conclusions on various issues.

The context for this evolution is important. Hayes' notion that this was "a struggle between different wings of the same movement, agreed on the same programme and goals" (142) was true as long as ignorance of events in Russia predominated. So we are, rightly, informed that the left-communists were "[a]gainst the nationalisation of industry, [and] counterposed the socialisation and workers' control of all production, distribution and exchange as steps towards

communism" (61) yet no mention is made that the Bolsheviks nationalised industry, destroyed workers' control and built state-capitalism. Still, we are informed without irony that Trotskyism "defends a state capitalist programme founded on all the opportunist mistakes of the early CP". (10)

As accurate information began to circulate and experience was gained in working with the Bolsheviks within the Communist International and in Britain, it came clear to the left-communists (and anarchists and syndicalists) that they did *not*

agree on programme and goals after all. So, yes, initially, the British left-communists "were in political continuity with Russian Bolshevism" (11) but as they became more aware of the reality of Bolshevism they turned against it – with some taking longer than others to do so (and it is a disgrace that for Aldred this took until 1925). Similarly with the claim that the left-communists were "very much influenced by the experience of the Bolshevik party itself in 1917" (145) or, more correctly, by *accounts* of that "experience" which had varying degrees of accuracy. When the experience became better known, they rejected it.

This is reflected in Lenin's "*Left-Wing*" *Communism*, with its dismissal of a difference between the dictatorship of the class and of the party, as well as the arguments made by the Zinoviev at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

"Nowadays people like Kautsky come along and say: 'There in Russia you have not got the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party.' You would think that this was a criticism of us. Not at all! We have

<sup>1</sup> Bourrinet has an amusing section in which he noted that its left argued that social democracy degenerated due to a lack of centralisation before admitting that centralisation was used very effectively against them by the opportunists. (27-8) In

short, do not give your enemies tools that can be used against you, particularly tools which have historically been used by the few against the many.

the dictatorship of the working class and for that very reason we also have the dictatorship of the Communist Party. [Applause.] The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, a characteristic, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class. What is our Party? You should not confuse it with other parties that are made up of barristers. It is made up of between 600,000 and 700,000 of the best workers, the vanguard of the proletariat. And it is clear that the affairs of the working class are well looked after by these, its best representatives. That is why the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party. The supervision of the various organisations and the right to purge them belongs to the party. So it has to be during the proletarian revolution. The role of the party does not diminish after the victory, but on the contrary it increases.”

These were contributions to the debate within the German Communist Party between those favoured by Moscow and those who became council communists. The latter, as Gorter put it, thought “that the dictatorship of a Party, of a Communist Party, cannot exist here in Germany, as it did in Russia, where a few thousand dominated the proletariat. Here, in order to conquer capital, the dictatorship must be exercised by the class itself, the entire class.” He linked this to the left-communists in Britain, noting “the dictatorship of the masses themselves... is what the German and English Left Wing, what we ourselves, mean by these words.” (*Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*)

An echo is found in Hayes, so we read of “the role of the party was ultimately to take power on behalf of the working class as a whole” (144) but also “the dictatorship of the working class based on the soviets” (61) and “the seizure of political power by the working class, and recognition of the role of the soviets”. (36) The proletariat, we are told, must replace the current State “with its own dictatorship based on the soviets or workers’ councils (146) yet Hayes is silent about Bordiga’s views on “the Marxist principles concerning the dictatorship of the party” (*The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism*) and that the “dictatorship advocated by Marxism... will not have the naiveté to abdicate for lack of having a majority of votes... In conclusion the communist party will rule alone, and will never give up power without a physical struggle.”

(*Proletarian Dictatorship and Class Party*)

Unsurprisingly, a 1926 letter from Bordiga to Karl Korsch indicated their differences included that “[w]e agree with Lenin’s theses at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress.” Lest we forget:

“The declaration by the ‘left’ Communist Workers’ Party of Germany (KAPD) at its founding conference in April that it is founding a party, but ‘not a party in the traditional sense’ means an ideological capitulation to those views of syndicalism and industrialism<sup>1</sup> that are reactionary.” (*Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution*)

Bordiga echoed Bolshevik orthodoxy from 1920 decades after the Trotskyists stopped mentioning it (presumably to add in recruitment), an orthodoxy which the German-Dutch and British left-communists rejected during the period Hayes discusses. This awkward legacy undoubtedly results in other contradictions in the book. Pankhurst, we are told, “continued to defend a vision of the proletarian revolution essentially as a coup d’état by a small, determined force of revolutionaries” (144) but, sadly, no references are given for this claim nor how this relates to the earlier praise that her paper had expressed “solidarity with the Bolsheviks against all lies in the capitalist press about a ‘coup d’état’” (37) nor that the strength of the left communists was an awareness of the need “to develop the mass action of the proletariat into open confrontation with the capitalist state”! (145)

All of which shows that the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” is one of the most confused, confusing and unhelpful terms every uttered, doing untold damage to the socialist movement. If by the term it is meant the consolidation, extension, and defence of a social revolution by the masses, then just say so – adding “by the class rather than the party” does not really get to the root of the problem.<sup>2</sup>

The major problem is that the author wants to embrace Marxist and Leninist practice *and* denounce their inevitable outcome while avoiding making any link between the two. Thus Marx and Engels were right, even if subsequent events may suggest otherwise. This is due not to the strategy advocated but rather objective circumstances for “capitalism has entered its epoch of decadence, in which the old struggle for reforms is no longer possible or progressive” (146) and this absolves

<sup>1</sup> Industrialism was used by many (including Emma Goldman in *Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism*) to refer to the Industrial Unionism of the I.W.W.

<sup>2</sup> We should also remember that when Marx used the term, the proletariat was a *minority* class in Western Europe and America (with the exception of Britain) with the majority of workers peasants and artisans. Likewise, to talk of the “proletariat” implies that there is no simultaneous economic

revolution with the expropriation of the owning class by the workers themselves, meaning any political power would lack an economic base to secure it. Finally, the notion that the working class is in power if the leaders of a socialist party form a government is one which was always naïve and after numerous experiences of such regimes really cannot be maintained.

them for the legacy this “old struggle” produced – although “reforms” in the form of higher wages, better conditions, etc. have been won by direct action and solidarity since 1914 and so are possible and definitely “progressive” in terms of building class consciousness (which explains the Tory anti-union laws as the ruling class is well aware of this educative aspect of social struggle).

Hayes does not discuss in any depth (as if you could)

the notion of the imperialist “epoch” which allowed Lenin to dismiss the warmongering, “taking sides” and “defence of the fatherland” comments by Marx and Engels as being correct in pre-Imperialist times but quoting them now was wrong since imperialism had appeared. That Lenin had not noticed this in 1904 – when he took sides in the Russo-Japanese war – is not discussed nor the happy coincidence that the imperialist epoch came into being after Engels had breathed his last.<sup>1</sup> Hayes lets the cat out of the bag somewhat by noting how William Morris had denounced imperialism in.... 1887! (43-4)

This should be of little note other than it allows various contradictory positions to be maintained – thus parliamentarianism was right in 1871 but wrong in 1921 (as shown by the outcome of applying it!), that the degeneration of social democracy was due to imperialist profits allowing reforms to be granted rather than the impact of working within bourgeois institutions, etc.

There is, of course, an element of truth in the notion because objective circumstances can and do have an impact on tactics and strategy.<sup>2</sup> Yet this materialist perspective was ignored, for by 1921 the lessons drawn from experiences in an advanced industrial nation were replaced by those gathered from one which was still primarily feudal in nature, which had no functioning parliamentary system and so no experience of how utilising electioneering lead to the reformism and

opportunism as well as undermining mass direct action from below. As such Gorter and Pannekoek were right to note how the differences in objective circumstances experienced by the Bolsheviks and the left-communists had to be taken into account in order to explain their different perspectives and tactics.

Yet this does not mean that Bolshevik electioneering, modelled on German Social Democracy, were right in Russia as the impact of certain tactics –

parliamentarianism – would be the same regardless even if specific objective circumstances may change the speed of degeneration. And, indeed, that has been the case with parliamentary tactics in a whole host of different times and places – even if the word “revolutionary” is stuck in front of it. Whatever the apparent short-term gains of the approach, in the long term it has been a failure – as seen when Hayes indicates the necessity for communists to fight the opportunist and reformist legacy of social democracy. In short, symptoms are denounced but their root causes are embraced.

Perhaps unsurprising, anarchism being completely correct about Social Democracy seems to

count for little for Hayes. Indeed, we are told that the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party “clearly distancing itself from the anarchists” while advocating what the anarchists had long been arguing, namely “renouncing electoral and parliamentary action.” (47) Presumably this is a case of anarchists being premature abstentionists due to their correct predictions?

Gorter, for example, once suggested that the “difference between [anarchist Domela Nieuwenhuis] and us Marxist revolutionaries is that we are for revolutionary methods in a period of revolution, while he wanted them prematurely”<sup>3</sup> (Antonio Gramsci said something

and self-activity in workplaces and communities are the same.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Bourrinet, 24. Bourrinet states that “[u]nlike the Marxists, Domela Nieuwenhuis came to the conclusion that the workers should abandon the struggle for reforms”, (26) which seems unlikely. Nieuwenhuis being against reformism by political action, yes, but against direct struggle against capital for better wages and so on seems unlikely and, as such, some supporting evidence other than a quote by Gorter would have been appropriate.

<sup>1</sup> This is discussed by ex-communist Bertram D. Wolfe’s “What Lenin made of the Testament of Engels” (*Marxism, One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* [New York: Dial Press, 1965]). Wolfe’s move from Communist to (right-wing) anti-Communist should not be used to dismiss his (informed) argument.

<sup>2</sup> For example, how Spanish anarchists organised in the 1870s, the tactics of British syndicalists in the 1910s and those of libertarians today would not be identical even if the overall strategy of promoting working-class self-organisation

similar in his “An Address to the Anarchists”<sup>1</sup>). Yet how do you move towards a revolution without advocating and utilising revolutionary tactics in non-revolutionary times? And, needless to say, during the revolutionary periods which did arise, the dead-weight of the parties and unions produced by the advocacy and utilisation of non-revolutionary tactics was something which needed to be overcome, making the process even harder as Hayes implicitly acknowledges. Rather than defend a flawed tactic, would it not be easier to simply admit that Marx and Engels were wrong and the Federalist International was right?

This is a conclusion Hayes is at pains to avoid for that would throw “into question the whole experience of the workers’ movement”. (9) Yet given that this experience surely shows that that social democracy *was* a dead-end, perhaps we should question it? Likewise, the outcome of the Bolshevik revolution should be cause for concern for socialists but no, for by “dismissing the whole experience of the Russian Revolution”, Guy Aldred was “in danger of throwing into question the entire history of the workers’ movement, along with its political lessons”. (131) Yet the “communist left” prides itself on drawing “political lessons” which include rejecting electioneering.

Ultimately, the problem is the need to defend the tactics which produced the degeneration being denounced. Hence the contradictions and the fear, repeated time and time again, that the “logic of the ‘anti-Leninist’ line of argument is to reject the whole experience of the working class and its painstaking efforts to build mass parties and trade unions to wage a struggle for reforms within capitalism during its ascendant phase” (143) Can we not draw obvious conclusions from this “experience”, namely that Marxism put the working class onto a path away from socialism?

Yet we should not confuse, as Hayes does, building mass parties and trade unions. One, as anarchists stressed, conducted a direct struggle against capital while the other worked within capitalist structures and became enmeshed within it. That trades unions did not

automatically become revolutionary organisations goes without saying but Marxist prejudices on “political action” and centralisation undoubtedly worked against such tendencies. It may be easier to electioneer than strike, but that does not mean that the latter is not more fertile in terms of class consciousness and socialistic tendencies.

In short, the First World War simply exposed the rot which existed within Social Democracy long before 1914, which exposed it in a way that no longer could be ignored or denied by Marxists within it. So, given the actual experience of the workers movement, perhaps it

**during the revolutionary periods which did arise, the dead-weight of the parties and unions produced by the advocacy and utilisation of non-revolutionary tactics was something which needed to be overcome, making the process even harder**

is correct to reject “the proletarian nature of social democracy itself”? (142) For Hayes, Guy Aldred being right about social democracy before 1914 becomes “disdain for the workers’ struggles and the organisations so painstakingly built in the preceding period” before immediately admitting these were “degenerating”! (27) Surely a genuinely scientific socialist would base their politics on the whole experience of Marxism rather than cherry-pick a few periods and individuals?

This position reflects the strange notion that “remaining inside” social democratic parties and

unions is utterly important before 1914 and then “breaking with the social chauvinists” makes it essential to leave them after 1914. (27) Why this is not “disdain” is not explained beyond vague comments over ascendant and declining periods within capitalism. And how do we know that capitalism is now decadent? Because the degeneration of Marxist parties into opportunism became so obvious with their support of the war (bolstered by appropriate quotes from Marx and Engels, lest we forget) that even Lenin could no longer deny it. Hence the search for the new epoch so that a general re-evaluation of Marxism is not needed (why should it be, it is the truth!).

The same can be said of the Bolshevik Revolution which is also viewed as being above reproach during its ascendant phase in spite of its subsequent degeneration clearly being influenced by these earlier tactics and ideas. That this degeneration was reflected within the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci complaints against the anarchists in this article seem ironic given the creation of the Communist Party and its lack of success in displacing the Socialist Party in the allegiances of the Italian proletariat. Irony also springs to mind in his berating the anarchists for holding to the same tactics given the typical Marxist embrace of electioneering in spite of experience confirming the anarchist critique. As for his notion that for “anarchist workers the advent of the

workers’ state will be the advent of the freedom of their class, and thus also of their personal freedom”, it suffices to note that this was written at a time (1920) when the Bolsheviks were exercising a party dictatorship over the working class, breaking by force all protests and strikes, while anarchists and other socialist and working class critics were being thrown into the jails and prisons camps of the new regime.

Comintern should be obvious but Hayes clearly agrees with Bordiga in trying to stay within it and wished that the British left-communists had decided to become “a fraction of the centralised International [and] to accept collective discipline and attempt to work within it for a change in policy”. (142) This position completely ignores the awkward fact that the Comintern, like the Profintern, was dominated by the Russian party and its interests. It also ignores that far too many of the members of the new Communist Parties were prepared to ignore their own experiences and ideas in favour of following the Bolsheviks for they had had a “successful” revolution. That this subordination was hardly revolutionary can be seen from the twists and turns needed to maintain “collective discipline” once Stalin secured his power.<sup>1</sup>

Lessons are there to be learnt from this period and I hoped that this book would contribute to drawing them. Sadly, this was not to be. To be fair, the author makes it clear that he is writing from a “left communist” position (although he does not really make clear what this really means – hence no comment on the dictatorship of the party, for example). However, this does contribute to why the book has little to recommend it, reflecting the authoritarian politics it is trying to sanitise and the contradictions and omissions this cannot help but produce.

Which raises an obvious question: why are Bordigists at an anarchist bookfair given their lack of libertarian ideas. Trotskyists are not welcome so why are these dissident Leninists? Perhaps this is evidence of, as was said in *On the Poverty of Student Life*, that “since the anarchists tolerate each other, they would tolerate anything”? Or perhaps this is an expression of anarchist lack of confidence in their own ideas which makes “ultra-leftism” more influential in British anarchist circles than it deserves to be? Whatever the reason, they were there and their texts appear in libcom.org and elsewhere. Still, how irrelevant must you be to be parasitic on the British anarchist movement?

Leaving that to one side, this book is a wasted opportunity and Mark Shipway’s account is far better. It is clear that more research is needed about the period of 1910 to 1925 for that remains the period when the UK was closest to revolution. That the replacement of “infantile” anti-parliamentarianism (whether anarchist, syndicalist or Marxist) with Bolshevism on the far-left of British politics has seen the possibility of socialism retreat further and further into the distance should make any serious revolutionary reconsider the whole history of the labour movement. Why Hayes appears to fear this being done should be obvious.

## **Kropotkin’s “The Conquest of Bread” for Today; Anarchist Political Economics Wayne Price**

For forty years, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) was active in the anarchist movement. “Kropotkin...was the chief exponent of the ideas of the European anarchist movement, which for the most part, only developed after Bakunin’s death.” (Cahm 1989; p. ix) One of his most well-known books was *The Conquest of Bread*. Written clearly and understandably, it laid out his program of anarchist-communism and is still widely read throughout the world.

Some anarchists and other radicals ask whether it is worth considering the work of dead white men with bushy beards. Times have changed, they point out; society, technology, and anarchism have evolved.

However, while there have been many changes in society, certain basic dynamics have remained. We still live under capitalism, where a minority rules by exploiting the working majority. The state still exists throughout the world, repressing the people and waging

wars. It props up—and is propped up by—capitalism. Other forms of oppression still exist (patriarchy, racism, nationalism, imperialism, heterosexism, ecological destruction, etc.). These also are supported by, and support, capitalism and the state.

Anarchism was created by Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, and many other workers and activists, in order to deal with capitalism, statism, and other oppressions. We do not have to re-invent the wheel. Contemporary anarchists have a great deal to learn from their predecessors. This includes learning from their mistakes. We can see further than they did, only because we stand on their shoulders.

Paul Goodman, perhaps the most well-known anarchist of “the sixties,” wrote, “The ways that Kropotkin suggested, how men can at once begin to live better, are still the ways; the evils he attacked are mostly still the evils....” (Ward 1985; p. iv)

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny the need for collective agreement and action, simply to note that “discipline” is used to describe both this conscious cooperation between equals and unthinking submission to a few leaders, a distinction made by

Bakunin long before Rosa Luxemburg’s famous comments on the subject in *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*.

## Economic Science

Kropotkin declared, “the only economic science worthy the name [is] a science which might be called ‘The Study of the Needs of Humanity and of the Economic Means to satisfy them.’” (p. 94)

His view of “economic science” does not focus on how capitalism works, as does bourgeois economics as well as Marxism (from another angle). It does not emphasize how goods are presently produced. He criticizes all economists, “from Adam Smith to Marx,” whose theory “begins with Production...” rather than starting with “Consumption, that is to say, of the means necessary to satisfy the needs of individuals...” (p. 201)

It looks toward the future, the ways a better economy might work. While Kropotkin regards this as a scientific approach, there is a moral aspect to it (again, unlike bourgeois or Marxist political economy). How could we determine what human needs should be satisfied without considering values?

Although not the central focus of this book, Kropotkin does discuss the functioning of capitalism—if only to show that it does not satisfy “the Needs of Humanity.” He points out the immense growth of productivity in industry and agriculture. Unlike previous ages, he writes, society could now potentially provide everyone with enough for a fulfilling life. This was written in the late 19th century. How much more true is it today!

However, “The socialists have said it....All that is necessary for production...have been seized by the few....The few only allow the many to work on condition of themselves receiving the lion’s share....These few prevent the remainder of men from producing the things they need, and force them to produce...whatever offers the greatest profits to the monopolists. In this [analysis] is the substance of all socialism.” (p. 55) (Unlike some present-day anarchists, Kropotkin regarded anarchism as a variety of socialism.)

All this is true, every word. The basis of capitalism (and landlordism) is exploitation of the working people. “The landlord owes his riches to the poverty of the peasants, and the wealth of the capitalist comes from the same source”—the poverty of the workers. (p. 85) I would add that the question of what is “poverty” is not an

absolute criterion but a relative one, depending on the level of productivity, the cultural background, and the history of working class struggle.

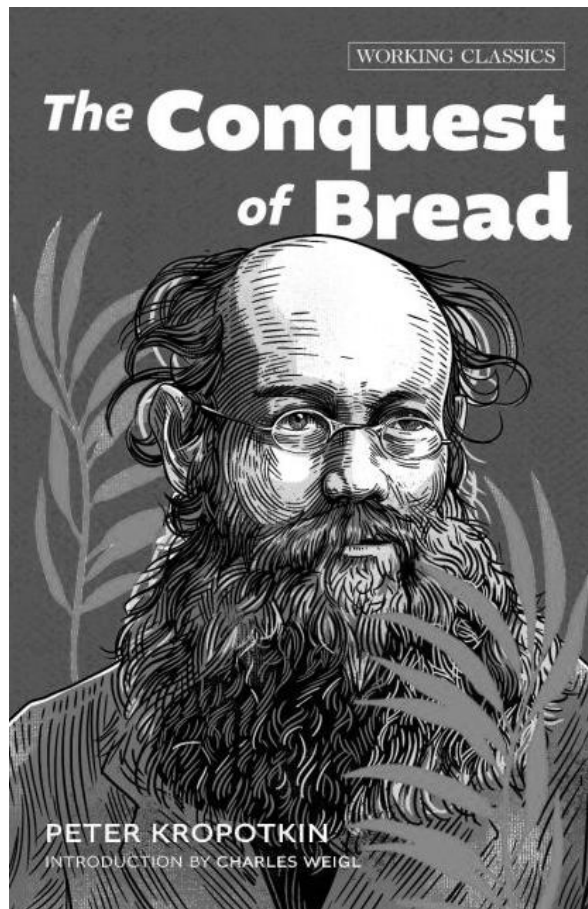
Kropotkin refers to “the comparative well-being of a certain category of young robust workmen, skilled in certain branches of industry.... This well-being...is the exclusive right of a few....” (p. 131) He is touching on what has been called “the aristocracy of labor.” However, he notes that even these workers are insecure and vulnerable to the ups and downs of the economy, resulting in periodic unemployment.

Their better work situations depend, he says, on the poverty of the many and on capitalist super-profits from imperialism. “Eastern lands in a backward state are exploited by the West, in order that, under the capitalist system, workers in a few privileged industries may obtain certain limited comforts of life.” (p. 132) In any case, even the better-off workers are still exploited, producing more value than they get back. (The concept of a “labor aristocracy” may be seen as a distinct layer

of workers, but it is probably better to see the working class in terms of a graduated polarity.)

In this book, Kropotkin refers repeatedly to imperialism, colonialism, and war. “The state...finds it necessary to maintain an expensive army, because the traders of all nations are perpetually fighting for the markets, and any day a little quarrel arising from the exploitation of some part of Asia or Africa may result in war.” (p. 91) In a sarcastic tone, he writes, “Since all our [bourgeois] civilization is based on the exploitation of inferior races and countries with less advanced industrial systems, the Revolution will confer a boon at the very outset, by menacing that ‘civilization,’ and allowing the so-called inferior races to free themselves.” (pp. 114-5) (He does not consider that the colonized peoples might have revolutions before the imperialist nations do.)

Besides referring to the exploitation of industrial workers, peasants, and oppressed nations (mostly People of Color), Kropotkin raises the oppression of women: “Woman, too, at last claims her share in the emancipation of humanity. She no longer wants to be the beast of burden of the house.” (p. 153) “A revolution...would not be a revolution if it maintained



slavery at home. Half humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half.” (p.156-7)

His proposals for the liberation of women involve the increased use of machinery and cooperation in cleaning, cooking, laundry, etc. However, he accepts that these are all “women’s work,” even if socialized and made less burdensome. Childcare is specifically women’s work, without any mention of socialization. “Women [will be] engaged in the education of their children....” (p. 136) While advanced for his time, this way of thinking was still behind the views of the best socialist feminists.

### Post-Capitalist Economies

In *The Conquest of Bread*, his presentation of post-capitalism is not a detailed blueprint, as the “utopian socialists” often drew up. Neither is it as vague as that of Marx, who essentially proposed that the workers take state power and then see what happens next (with a few predictions scattered through his writings). Instead, Kropotkin is providing principles for an anarchist-communist society, to argue for its possibility. “But whether the revolution would everywhere exhibit the same characteristics is doubtful.” (p. 109)

Kropotkin proposed the socialization of the economy: the land, factories, workshops, productive machinery, railroads, roads, warehouses, housing, restaurants, natural resources, and so on. “Society itself will be forced to take production in hand, in its entirety, and to reorganize it to meet the needs of the whole people.” (p. 99)

However, he was adamantly against the program of “state socialism” (or “authoritarian Communism”): that the state should take over much or all of the economy. This would involve top-down centralized direction and planning. The workers would still be taking orders from bosses; bureaucrats would become the new ruling class; and the economy would be as inefficient as ever. In practice it would be state capitalism. All this, Kropotkin and other anarchists predicted, well before the advent of Stalinist Russia and its off-shoots.

Nor was Kropotkin only against revolutionary dictatorships. He was just as vehemently opposed to putting a parliamentary republic in charge of a nationalized economy. Such a “representative democracy” (including the U.S. system) was still a state, hierarchical and centralized, and developed to serve capitalism. At best it was incompetent to manage the affairs of a whole nation. At worst, it was repressive and fraudulent, giving the workers the illusion that they are a free people. Even if the population voted every few years, the state would be ruled by the top managers, bureaucrats, and bourgeoisie. Workers would still sell their working ability for wages or salaries, still labor under bosses, carrying out alienating labor, and being exploited.

The socialized (or communized) economy must not be managed by a socially-alienated body, backed by armed forces, standing over the working people—that is, a state. Instead it should be organized, by free, self-governing, associations of the people. Industries would be run by workers’ councils and the directly-democratic assemblies of communities. Peasant villages would collectively decide how to organize their farming.

There would be popular associations to distribute goods once produced. Communal kitchens might do the basic cooking, with families free to finish the cooking at home if they did not want to eat collectively. The various cooperatives, communes, and associations would be federated and networked into systems of coordination.

“The free agro-industrial communes...must be vast agglomerations like Paris, or still better, small territories. These communes would federate, even irrespectively of national frontiers...and large labor associations might come into existence for the inter-communal service of the railways, the docks, and so on.” (pp. 50-51)

He gives the example of the European railroad system, which goes from Turkey to France, crossing borders, without there being an overall government to arrange matters. Instead, the railroad companies sent delegates to conferences and made agreements to coordinate their roads, schedules, rail gauges, etc. And this was done under capitalism, with Europe divided into nation-states! (A similar argument could be made today as to international air traffic, coordinated through agreement, without a world state.) Under anarchist-communism, regional and international coordination would provide democratic economic planning from the bottom up.

He rejects the “collectivist” program, in which workers would be paid for the hours they work, in money or in labor-notes. The workers would buy back commodities with their dollars or coupons. Kropotkin was disagreeing with programs proposed by P.J. Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin (despite agreement on other issues) and also with Marx’s prediction of two stages of post-revolutionary economies. In the first, the workers would be paid in labor-notes; only in the higher stage would there be full communism.

How, he asks, can we judge how much effort different workers put out in the same amount of time? Should there be different levels of payment according to skill and training? Does not all production depend on the mass cooperation of a great number of people, in the past and in the present? How, then, judge how much any individual worker contributed to the final product? Don’t different workers have different needs, so that equality of payment leads to inequality of lives?

Instead, Kropotkin proposes anarchist-communism and the end of the wage-system. (No connection to [big-“c”] Communist Parties.) All able-bodied adults would be

expected to work for a set number of hours (he suggests four or five) on some socially-necessary task, in a voluntary group. This would entitle them to the social standard of food, clothing, housing, etc. If they want something more, they are free to participate in additional groups which produce music, books, musical instruments, art, more varied food and clothing, and whatever “luxuries” they may desire.

The classical definition of (small-“c”) communism is “From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs.” Except for having to engage in a minimum of necessary labor, under communism there is no connection between work and consumption. “The system is this: no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scarce or apt to run short.” (p. 105) Of goods which are plentiful, people can take what they want; of scarce goods, there may be rationing.

Kropotkin argues that food could be grown far more abundantly in regions than it is. He provides evidence from market gardens and the then-best agricultural practices to support this claim. In many ways, post-capitalist economies could be more decentralized and regionalized than under today’s corporate imperialism.

He makes similar claims as to increased productivity in industry, without the drain of capitalist misdirection of production toward profitability. Technology could be redesigned to make work more creative, fulfilling, and interesting. “A factory could be made as healthy and pleasant as a scientific laboratory.” (p. 150) “Free men will create new conditions, and their work will be pleasant and infinitely more productive.” (p. 152)

Society would overcome the divisions between mental and manual labor, between giving orders and taking them, between agricultural and industrial labor, and between work, art, and play. This mostly answers the question of how to get people to work without the lash of poverty and the reward of wages.

In a later edition of *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin notes that he provided more material for these assertions in a sequel. “A fuller development of these ideas will be found in my book, *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*.” (p. 220) It is subtitled *Industry Combined with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work*. (Kropotkin 1974) (Later, Colin Ward re-edited this

work, replacing Kropotkin’s lengthy reports of evidence with more recent data to support his claims.) (Ward 1985)

Since then there has been a vast literature relevant to Kropotkin’s perspective. Radicals and even liberals have come to advocate worker managed enterprises. (See my overview; Price 2014) Virtually every industry has somewhere been democratically managed, successfully, by producer and/or consumer cooperatives. Meanwhile modern technology has provided possibilities of small scale and wide spread production, which can yet be coordinated over vast distances. (Carson 2010) The possibility, even the necessity, of smaller, organic, farms for an ecologically safe future, has also been demonstrated. (McKibben 2007)

Kropotkin laid the basis for what has been called “alternate,” “appropriate,” “liberatory,” or “humanistic” technology. But he did not himself quite advocate it. He thought that productive technology was evolving in that direction—smaller, more flexible, and more able to be controlled by the workers in a creative and democratic fashion. He did not advocate a conscious effort to deliberately refashion technology away from its capitalist form to a liberatory form, as later alternate technologists have. (McRobie 1981)

Similarly he laid the basis for an ecological approach to industry and agriculture. However, he only criticized the capitalist economy for its holding back the production of useful goods, including food, and for its mistreatment of the working class. He had an ecological consciousness, as a professional geographer and naturalist. But he rarely critiqued capitalist agriculture and industry for their destructive impact on the natural environment. This was to come later, by anarchists following in his footsteps—especially by Murray Bookchin. (Biehl 2015; Bookchin 1980)

## Revolution

Various anarchists have admired Kropotkin for showing how a free and cooperative society might work, without a state or capitalist class. They believe that such a society might be achieved gradually and piecemeal, peacefully and “democratically”, with little, if any, forcible conflict. Such was the view of Paul Goodman, Colin Ward, and, in our time, David Graeber and many

**Kropotkin did not believe  
that the rich and  
powerful would give up  
their riches and power  
easily, even if a big  
majority wanted a new  
society. They would  
have to be forcibly  
expropriated, their  
wealth, their land, their  
productive machinery,  
their money, and their  
politicians all taken  
away from them**

others. This was not Kropotkin's perspective, but that of P.J. Proudhon before him.

Kropotkin did not believe that the rich and powerful would give up their riches and power easily, even if a big majority wanted a new society. They would have to be forcibly expropriated, their wealth, their land, their productive machinery, their money, and their politicians all taken away from them. "Expropriation...must apply to everything that enables any man...to appropriate the product of others' toil." (p. 89)

How the anarchist minority should act in non-revolutionary periods is not discussed in this volume. Kropotkin was for anarchists participating in unions, strikes, and other popular struggles, even for limited goals. Meanwhile they should continue to advocate revolutionary anarchist-communism. (Cahm 1989)

He expected a revolution to break out in a time of economic crisis. "It is certain that the coming Revolution...will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis." (p. 98) Given the instability of capitalism and the suffering of working people, he regarded a revolution as inevitable in the foreseeable future. "Revolution, for whose coming we look, not two hundred years hence, but soon, very soon." (p. 89)

In this situation, anarchists should call on the people to completely expropriate the capitalists, to take away their industries, means of transportation, warehouses, housing, land, and other wealth. "On the day we strike at private property, under any one of its forms, we shall be obliged to attack them all." (p. 92) This must not be given over to the state, which should be dismantled rather than strengthened.

Workers should take over their factories and workshops and run them, producing useful goods, and planning for reorganizing the process of production. Small farmers should take over the land, including unused land, and begin to produce food for all of the people.

"Citizens, men and women both, will form themselves into bands of volunteers and address themselves to the task of making a rough inventory of the contents of each shop and warehouse....In every block of houses, in every street, in every town ward, bands of volunteers will have been organized." (p. 103) Coordinating with each other, committees should account for existing stores of food and distribute it equitably—while setting up consumers' cooperatives. Similarly, popular committees should investigate what housing was available and what were the housing needs, and organize a redistribution of shelter. Plans for building more housing would also be made.

Kropotkin does not write of the need for producing armaments, distributing them among the people, organizing a democratic popular military (a militia) to defend against counterrevolutionary armed forces of the old regime. Also the need to spread propaganda among

the regular army's ranks (daughters and sons of the working people). But this would fit into his program.

Full anarchist-communism could not be implemented overnight. Some have criticized revolutionary anarchists for thinking that a new society could be created instantly. Certainly this was not Kropotkin's view. "We do not believe that in any one country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of an eye." (p. 110) It will be a process and a struggle, relying on the needs and the creativity of the working people.

Kropotkin's prediction of an inevitable revolution, coming soon, may sound absurd today. "...This revolution is imminent,...it may break out in a very few years." (p. 67) However, he lived to see the 1917 Russian Revolution, which was followed by a revolution in Germany and other rebellions and uprisings throughout Europe. That these revolutions failed or were distorted (as in Russia) is true, but he was raising real possibilities. However, we must abandon all talk of revolutionary "inevitability," "certainty," or "imminence" (which Marxists also have claimed). It is not inevitable that a world revolution of the workers and all oppressed will happen before, say, a nuclear war or ecological catastrophe.

Yet, in places, Kropotkin suggests that the revolution is not so much inevitable as an alternative possibility, a choice—that society faces what Rosa Luxemburg called "socialism or barbarism." "A society cannot live thus;" Kropotkin wrote, "it must return to truth or cease to exist....Under pain of death, human societies are forced to return to first principles:...All things are for all." (p. 61) Capitalism continues to be crisis-prone, unstable, and the cause of great suffering. It threatens humanity with just such military and/or ecological disasters. "Under pain of death" the need for a revolution, and the possibilities of such a revolution, remain.

### **Anarchist Political Economy**

Nearing the end of the book, Kropotkin restates his definition of the "science" of "Political Economy" as "The study of the needs of humanity, and of the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy." (p. 202) He contrasts this with Marx's focus on how capitalism works (Marx's "critique of political economy"). This he rejects (he specifically rejects the labor theory of value and the tendency of capital toward concentration and centralization).

In my opinion, Kropotkin's approach has both weaknesses and strengths. Without more than his limited overview of how capitalism functions, it is not possible to understand how capitalism has survived so long, or what caused the prosperity after World War II, or what caused it to end in the seventies, or the nature of state capitalist regimes, or why capitalism must be so terribly destructive to nature. Or other topics. It may be an unfortunate legacy of Kropotkin's influence that

there have been virtually no anarchist writings on the economics of capitalism since Proudhon.

But Kropotkin's approach provides workers and others with a vision, a moral goal, which is also practical and workable. It leads to strategies for action in a revolution. It provides a standard by which to judge societies—which Marxism sadly lacks when facing mass-murdering dictatorships calling themselves “Marxist.” The libertarian and humanistic aspects of Marx's views easily wore off because they were never central to Marx's project. Such humanism, participatory-democracy, and scientific hope were central to Kropotkin. He was not perfect (see Price 2022) but our present-day perspectives are extensions of Kropotkin's revolutionary anarchist vision.

### References

(There are various books about Kropotkin as well as collections of his writings. I recommend Iain McKay's Kropotkin anthology. It has an excellent “Introduction,” summarizing his ideas and life.)

Biehl, Janet (2015). *Ecology or Catastrophe; The Life of Murray Bookchin*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.

Bookchin, Murray (1980). *Toward an Ecological Society*. Montreal-Buffalo: Black Rose Books

Cahm, Caroline (1989). *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carson, Kevin A. (2010). *The Homebrew Industrial Revolution; A Low-Overhead Manifesto*. Booksurge.

Kropotkin, Peter (2008). *The Conquest of Bread*. (Charles Weigl, Intro.). Oakland CA: AK Press.

Kropotkin, Peter (1974). *Fields, Factories, and Workshops; Or Industry Combined with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work*. NY: Gordon Press.

McKay, Iain (Ed.) (2014). *Direct Struggle Against Capital; A Peter Kropotkin Anthology*. Edinburgh UK/Oakland CA: AK Press.

McKibben, Bill (2007). *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*. NY: Henry Holt/Times Books.

McRobie, George (1981). *Small is Possible*. NY: Harper & Row.

Price, Wayne (2022). “Kropotkin and War—Today; The Debate over Kropotkin on World War I” <https://www.anarkismo.net/article/32683>

Price, Wayne (2014). “Workers' Self-Directed Enterprises: A Revolutionary Program.” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* (Winter 2014) #61

Ward, Colin (Ed.) (1985). *Peter Kropotkin's Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow; Edited, Introduced and with Additional Material*. London UK: Freedom Press.

## Parish Notices

Solidarity International is a network of anarchist and anti-authoritarian support groups from different parts of the planet. Currently they can communicate in English, Swedish, Belarusian, Russian, German, Spanish and Kurdish: <https://solidarity.international>

Anarchist Black Cross Dresden is a collective of people aiming to promote the ideas of Anarchism and Solidarity, founded in 2014. They organise letter writing evenings writing to people in prison, fundraising events and info evenings focusing on different parts of the world. ABC Dresden supports primarily anarchist and anti-authoritarian activists. They also help prisoners who became anarchists during their time in prison: [abcd.org/en/home](http://abcd.org/en/home)

Blue Ridge ABC is a collective of anarchists in southern Appalachia (so-called Asheville, NC, USA) who believe that jails and prisons, rather than offering a solution to the harms people commit against themselves and their communities, instead make social problems worse. They are a prison abolitionist organization: [brabc.noblogs.org](http://brabc.noblogs.org)

Bristol ABC is a prisoner support group based in Bristol, in the west country of England. They offer material, emotional and financial support to prisoners both nationally and internationally: [bristolabc.org](http://bristolabc.org)

From *The Periphery* is a worker-owned media collective focusing on centring voices, struggles, and ideas that are otherwise made peripheral under mainstream journalism.

They have numerous podcasts, produce several zines, host online film screenings and much more. They are explicitly anti-authoritarian and seek to nurture internationalist solidarity through the work they produce and spread: [fromtheperiphery.com](http://fromtheperiphery.com)

11-12 October 2025, a conference was held in Carrara to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Federazione Anarchica Italiana (FAI). *Umanita' Nova* and IFA have published the programme and a report (in Italian): [i-f-a.org/2025/10/14/80th-anniversary-of-the-italian-anarchist-federation-fai](http://i-f-a.org/2025/10/14/80th-anniversary-of-the-italian-anarchist-federation-fai)

If you ask them nicely, Freedom Press will send an ‘irregular’ e-newsletter: [freedomnews.org.uk/newsletter](http://freedomnews.org.uk/newsletter)

*Wildcat* the newsletter of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and England is appearing monthly: [iww.org.uk/wildcat](http://iww.org.uk/wildcat)

ACG continue to produce issues of their magazine, *Stormy Petrel*, and their free bulletin, *Jackdaw*: [anarchistcommunism.org/jackdaw-2](http://anarchistcommunism.org/jackdaw-2)

Local bulletins we know of include *Barricade* (Derry, [derryanarchists.blogspot.com](http://derryanarchists.blogspot.com)), *Black Star* (Ireland, [organiseanarchistsireland.com/black-star](http://organiseanarchistsireland.com/black-star)) and *Totally Independent* (Haringey, [haringey.org.uk/backnewsletters](http://haringey.org.uk/backnewsletters)).

Please tell us if you are publishing a Libertarian Socialist freesheet.

# Future Society

**Sylvia Pankhurst, *One Big Union Bulletin*, 2 August 1923**

The words Socialism and Communism have the same meaning. They indicate a condition of society in which the wealth of the community: the land and the means of production, distribution and transport are held in common, production being for use and not for profit.

Socialism being an ideal towards which we are working, it is natural that there should be some differences of opinion in that future society. Since we are living under Capitalism it is natural that many people's ideas of Socialism should be coloured by their experiences of life under the present system. We must not be surprised that some who recognise the present system is bad should yet lack the imagination to realise the possibility of abolishing all the institutions of Capitalist society. Nevertheless there can be no real advantage in setting up a half-way-house to socialism. A combination of Socialism and Capitalism would produce all sorts of injustice, difficulty and waste. Those who happen to suffer under the anomalies would continually struggle for a return to the old system.

Full and complete Socialism entails the total abolition of money, buying and selling, and the wages system.

It means the community must set itself the task of providing rather more than the people can use of all the things that the people need and desire, and of supplying these when and as the people require them.

Any system by which the buying and selling system is retained means the employment of vast sections of the population in unproductive work. It leaves the productive work to be done by one portion of the people whilst the other portion is spending its energies in keeping shop, banking, making advertisements and all the various developments of commerce which, in fact, employ more than two-thirds of the people today.



**Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960)**

Given the money system, the wage system is inevitable. If things needed and desired are obtainable only by payment those who do the work must be paid in order that they may obtain the means of life. The wages system entails such institutions as the old-age pension, sick and unemployment insurance and widow's pensions, or the Poor Law, and probably plus the Poor Law. These involve large numbers of people drawn from productive work to do purely administrative work. Thus useless toil is manufactured, and the burden of non-producers maintained by the productive workers is increased.

Moreover social conditions are preserved which are

quite out of harmony with Communist fraternity. The wage system makes the worker's life precarious. The payment of wages entails the power to dismiss the worker by an official or officials.

So long as the money system remains, each productive enterprise must be run on a paying basis. Therefore it will tend to aim at employing as few workers as possible, in order to spend less on wages. It will also tend to dismiss the less efficient worker who, becoming unemployed, becomes less efficient. Thus an unemployable class tends to grow up.

The existence of a wage system almost inevitably leads to unequal wages; overtime, bonuses, higher pay for work requiring special qualifications. Class distinctions are purely differences of education, material comfort and environment.

Buying and selling by the Government opens the door to official corruption. To check that, high salaried positions are created in order that those occupying them have too much to lose to make pilfering and jobbery worth while.