

# ORGANISE!

... for revolutionary anarchism

## SEXUALITY AND GENDER SPECIAL

- Sex work and 'trafficking' – a vile trade?
- 'Gay rights' – good for business!
- Second Life: another form of gender enslavement?

**Plus anarchism and art, book reviews and much more**

# 72

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## Organise!

The magazine of the  
Anarchist Federation  
Issue 72—Summer 2009

*Organise!* is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas.

It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers.

We aim to produce *Organise!* twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first? Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our aims and principles can leave much open to debate.

As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from our readers and spur debate on.

The deadline for the next issue of *Organise!* will be **18th September 2009**. Please send all contributions to the address on the right. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc. Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at [organise@afed.org.uk](mailto:organise@afed.org.uk)

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*Organise!* hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in *Organise!* reflect the views of the person who has written the article and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!

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Editorial –

# What's in the latest Organise!

“Jacqui Smith’s proposals have very little to do with protecting the women, men and transgendered people who work as prostitutes. What they’re really about is controlling immigration, keeping prostitutes divided and increasing state control over people’s lives.” So opens our issue on sexuality and gender.

We take a look at the sex industry and ‘trafficking’ and the forms of gender enslavement in the online community, *Second Life*.

We also feature articles on the state of the gay rights movement, neurosexism and gendered language in Ursula Le Guin’s *Gethen Stories*.

Barack Obama and Hugo Chavez get a

dressing-down as we take a look at a few of the ‘messiahs’ the left is putting its faith in today.

This issue we also publish an extract from our work in progress, a new volume in our Anarchist Communist Editions devoted entirely to the relationship between anarchism and art. This major work, in collaboration with many contemporary artists, will explore what our modern ‘culture of resistance’ would look like. Watch this space for more information.

As always, if the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Write us a letter or send an email and we’ll do our best to publish it in a future issue.

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# Sex work and ‘trafficking’ – A vile trade?

UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has declared war on prostitution. In November 2008 she unveiled a set of proposals to criminalise prostitutes’ clients as well as giving new powers to the police to close down brothels. She’s doing all this in the name of ‘protecting vulnerable women’ – women who, she says, are exploited, ‘trafficked’ and coerced into the sex industry against their will. But in fact her proposals have very little to do with protecting the women, men and transgendered people who work as prostitutes. What they’re really about is controlling immigration, keeping prostitutes divided – amongst themselves and from other workers – and increasing state control over people’s lives.

## What is ‘trafficking’?

In announcing her proposals for this new legislation, Smith declared that she wanted to target the client as “the person responsible for creating the demand for prostitution markets which in turn creates demand for the vile trade of women to be trafficked for sexual exploitation”. So what is this “vile trade”, and who are its victims?

First of all, there is a difference between “trafficking” and people-smuggling. According to the definitions laid down by the United Nations, smuggling is helping someone to cross a border illegally in return for payment. “Trafficking”, on the other hand, is using either force or deception to make someone move for the purposes of exploitation – the movement itself does not necessarily have to be illegal, or even across a national border, to count as “trafficking”. Anti-Slavery International, an NGO which campaigns against all forms of forced labour, has documented cases of people being trafficked into



the UK to work in agriculture, construction, domestic work, food processing and packaging, care work, catering and many forms of casual labour as well as in the sex industry. Most of those people were coerced to work in appalling conditions by means of debt bondage (agencies charge the workers a fee for arranging their work, and the workers are then forced to work until they have paid it off), by removal of passports or other identity documents, or simply by means of threats, intimidation and violence. Anti-Slavery International has also found that many – perhaps even most – trafficked migrant workers actually enter the country perfectly legally. In other words, “trafficking” is a workers’ rights issue, not an immigration issue.

Not surprisingly, the UN definition of “trafficking” has become the gold standard for international anti-trafficking

initiatives. In 2007 the government published the UK Human Trafficking Action Plan, which quotes the UN definition at length and proudly boasts that the government has now adopted a “human rights based approach” to trafficking. But a closer look at all these declarations and action plans soon reveals that these so-called human rights are a world away from any genuine notion of workers’ rights – whether for prostitutes or anyone else.

## Human rights? Whose human rights?

For sex workers, the UN definition of “trafficking” – the movement of persons by force or deception for purposes of exploitation – is dangerously ambiguous. It’s that word “exploitation” that’s the catch. The UN definition goes on to say that by “exploitation” they mean (a) prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, (b) forced labour, (c) slavery or slavery-like practices, (d) servitude, or (e) the removal of organs. Notice that prostitution is listed separately from either forced labour or slavery. In other words, it is simply assumed that all prostitution is by definition a form of exploitation. What’s more, if you are a migrant sex worker, the mere fact that you are working in prostitution in a foreign country is often regarded as evidence that you are a victim of “trafficking”.

But the idea of “exploitation” used in anti-trafficking policies is not just bad news for sex workers in particular. It also makes a mockery of work in general. The UK Human Trafficking Action Plan demonstrates this very clearly when it turns its attention to forced labour. The Plan notes without irony that “One of the difficulties we will face in investigating trafficking for forced labour is distinguishing between poor

working conditions and situations involving forced labour. The element of coercion is an important indication of the latter.” At this point we might start to wonder who on earth would be working in such poor conditions unless they had been forced into it! The fact is that millions of low-paid workers in the UK and elsewhere are forced into exploitation – by threats of violence or incarceration, by debt, hunger and the need for survival in an economic system which is intended to produce profit for the few rather than to provide for the needs of all. The difference between the kind of exploitation experienced by “trafficking” victims and the exploitation experienced by all the other workers facing low pay and poor conditions is not qualitative but quantitative – they are at the extreme end of a continuum of misery under capitalism.

So the so-called human rights approach to “trafficking” is based on a thoroughly confused notion of “exploitation” which does nothing to get to the real roots of workers’ misery, whether in the sex industry or in any other sector. On the one hand, it assumes that all prostitutes are exploited simply because they are prostitutes, as if they had no will or agency of their own; on the other hand it also assumes that workers in any other industry are only exploited if they have been subjected to specific types of coercion, regardless of how low their pay or how poor their working conditions may be. This only reinforces the stigmatisation of prostitutes as “other” and keeps them divided from workers in other sectors.

Talk of “trafficking” also helps to reinforce divisions between migrant and non-migrant workers by

promoting the perception that the exploitation and oppression faced by “trafficked” workers is fundamentally different from the exploitation and oppression faced by all working class people everywhere. It helps to disguise the fact that what we all have in common is not just our exploitation at work – or, for increasing numbers of us these days, out of work, as we become “surplus to requirements” – but also our ability to unite and fight back.

#### **State control and market forces**

The state metes out different kinds of treatment to different categories of “trafficked” workers after they have been “rescued”. There are currently no government support agencies for “trafficked” workers in any sector other than prostitution. Once you are discovered to have been “trafficked” and your “traffickers” have been arrested, you’re on your own – and if you entered the country illegally you can expect to be deported. Nor does the government provide any support for men or transgendered people who have been “trafficked”. However, the situation is different for “trafficked” female prostitutes, who can be taken in by the Poppy Project, a government-funded agency offering “support and accommodation”. The Poppy Project “encourages” women to co-operate with the authorities – for example, by providing intelligence to the police or other state agencies – in order to qualify for long-term support. The Project also explicitly shares the UN’s assumptions about prostitution and exploitation, and puts a lot of energy into helping the women in its care to leave prostitution, while doing precisely nothing to promote the rights or welfare of women who remain in the industry. So under this apparently benevolent guise, the

government can exercise a great deal of control over migrant sex workers. If you are a migrant prostitute and get arrested on some prostitution-related charge or other, you have a choice: go along with the assumption that you are a victim of “trafficking”, in which case you will be offered accommodation, a subsistence allowance, healthcare and education, on condition that you play along with the authorities; or insist that you are working in the industry of your own free will, in which case you will be prosecuted – and, unless all your papers are in order, deported. Victim or criminal, “vulnerable woman” or whore – the state has got you either way. The UK Human Trafficking Action Plan cites the Poppy Project as an example of best practice, and reveals that the government intends to extend similar schemes for workers “trafficked” into forced labour. Such workers will, for example, be entitled to apply for residence permits for as long as they co-operate with the authorities.

The sleight-of-hand which equates all prostitution with exploitation, and assumes that all prostitutes are victims, is not unique to the Poppy Project, nor to the UN. It dates back to at least the 19th century, when Christian philanthropists like Josephine Butler notoriously campaigned to “rescue” vulnerable “unfortunates” – working-class women and girls – from a life of vice and train them for so-called decent employment such as domestic work. This assumption denies sex workers any agency of their own, treating them as poor helpless individuals who need to be saved rather than as workers with their own voice, their own strength, and their own demands. It’s exactly the sleight-of-hand which Jacqui Smith is performing now in her

attempt to criminalise the clients of all prostitutes in the name of “protecting vulnerable women”. The rhetoric of “trafficking” and “vulnerable women” acts as a smoke screen from behind which Smith can attack prostitutes in general by further eroding their working rights and conditions. Smith’s proposals do nothing to help any men, women, transgendered people or children who might want to get out of the sex industry, nor to improve the health, safety or working conditions of those who simply prefer prostitution to any of the other kinds of work available to them (or to unemployment). In fact, as many sex workers’ organisations have been quick to point out, closing down brothels and criminalising clients in the way Smith is proposing will actually make prostitutes more vulnerable, driving the trade further underground and forcing workers onto the streets and away from relative safety and solidarity with their co-workers in the brothels. The rhetoric of “trafficking” may also serve to reinforce divisions between migrant sex workers and local prostitutes. Migrant workers who have entered the country illegally and/or with the help of third parties, and who are therefore in fear of arrest and deportation, may be forced as a consequence to accept lower pay or worse conditions for their work than local prostitutes would usually tolerate. Local prostitutes often blame migrant workers for undercutting prices and lowering the standard of working conditions in general.

The rhetoric of “trafficking” is also being used as a pretext to clamp down even further on immigration. Despite the fact that the UN definition of “trafficking” very clearly states that “trafficking” does

not necessarily mean illegal immigration – or indeed any immigration at all – the UK Human Trafficking Action Plan is only too happy to present “trafficking” as one of “the main threats and challenges to our borders”. The Plan states that a series of new immigration controls will be introduced over the next ten years to tighten the UK’s borders, including the use of biometrics, and that the prevention and detection of “trafficking” will form an essential part of immigration control. This can only mean that it will become even more difficult for migrant workers to enter the UK – which in turn, of course, will make workers more likely to pay agencies or other third parties to get through the UK borders, placing them at greater potential risk of debt bondage or the loss of identity documents. In other words, the clampdown on immigration on the pretext of “trafficking” will again make prostitutes and other migrant workers more vulnerable to abuse.

Many women, men and transgendered people working as prostitutes in the UK face a struggle against low pay, poor working conditions, and risks to their health and safety of a kind which that workers in other sectors do not. They also face criminalisation and police harassment at work, not to mention vicious stigmatisation and discrimination from society at large. Talk of “trafficking” does nothing to tackle any of these issues. What it does instead is to criminalise prostitutes and their clients even further while also eroding prostitutes’ pay and conditions – a double whammy of state control and market forces which can only make prostitutes’ working lives more difficult. Little wonder that sex worker activists have demanded that all “trafficking” policies be scrapped

and the term “trafficking” itself abandoned. It is not just useless – it’s positively harmful.

### **Sex workers’ rights and anarchist communism**

Governments and policy-makers like to stoke the myth that prostitutes are simply victims – at worst helpless sex slaves, at best pathetic fools who are too stupid and/or drug-addled and/or “socially excluded” to know any better. But prostitutes and other sex workers have a long history of struggle against oppression and stigmatisation, and in the last 15 years the international sex workers’ rights movement has grown in strength and confidence. In 2005 the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) issued both a manifesto and a declaration of rights in the wake of a huge and important international conference of sex worker activists in Brussels. Their demands include the right to travel and cross borders for purposes of sex work, an end to abusive working practices and conditions in the industry, effective action against violence and coercion, and the right to enter, remain in or leave the industry of one’s own free will. Here in the UK the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) was founded in 2000 and subsequently became a branch of the GMB trade union with TUC-recognition. This means that prostitutes and other sex workers, such as dancers and porn actors, can join the IUSW and gain all of the usual GMB member benefits, including legal advice and support over health and safety issues at work. But the IUSW is much more than just a GMB branch – it campaigns actively for sex workers’ rights and is involved in a number of workers’ projects and initiatives, including the recently-founded X:Talk project, an

organisation specifically by and for migrant sex workers.

Organisations like these are vitally important in the struggle for sex workers' rights. Not only do they campaign hard against the criminalisation and oppression of prostitutes and other sex workers, but they also foster a sense of pride and empowerment among sex workers themselves. In an industry where stigmatisation and shame have been a stock-in-trade for centuries, it is hard to underestimate the importance of initiatives such as Prostitution Pride marches, or the appearance on demonstrations of red umbrellas, an internationally recognised symbol of sex workers' rights since their use by demonstrators in Venice in 2001. In all of these organisations, sex workers' self-organisation and self-determination are the cornerstone of every campaign. Clients, allies and friends may be welcome to support the campaigns or even to join certain organisations, but it is the sex workers themselves who call the shots, write the demands, organise the campaigns, and make their voices heard.

From a revolutionary anarchist perspective, the self-organisation of sex workers to defend themselves against criminalisation and oppression can be seen in its rightful place in the overall struggle for workers' self-determination. But of course workers' self-determination as such is only part of the story. The struggle for anarchist communism is not just a struggle for workers but also a struggle against work as we know it today. Our ultimate aim is to build a society where no-one has to work for a wage – where goods and services are distributed on the basis of need, and where we all work together to nourish our communities rather than just to earn

a wage. While prostitutes today are rightly proud of their own skill, professionalism and earning power, we want to see a world free from capitalism, where everyone will take pride in our abilities to control our own lives and co-operate to organise our own communities.

There are lots of reasons why these anarchist goals might at first glance seem quite alien to the sex workers' movement. Centuries of criminalisation and state harassment have meant that sex worker activists are much more focussed on the reform or abolition of specific laws and policies than on the abolition of capitalism as a whole. In fact sex worker activists today are more likely to be heard defending their right to work than attacking the institution of waged work as such. For example, one of the primary demands of the sex workers' movement is precisely to have prostitution recognised as a legitimate form of work and prostitutes as legitimate workers. In a context where for centuries prostitution has been dismissed as crime or immorality rather than acknowledged as real work, that demand makes perfect sense as a way of improving prostitutes' lives under capitalism. Similarly, the sex

workers' movement's demands today tend to call for states and international agencies to rescind some laws while enforcing or introducing others. The ICRSE manifesto, for example, demands the decriminalisation of sex work, but also demands the introduction of anti-discrimination laws and of legislation to protect sex workers' employment and conditions. Again, these demands make perfect sense for sex workers living under the current system of nation-states, legislative powers and international agencies. But surely the logical conclusion of migrant sex workers' demands, including their rejection of the language of "trafficking", must be a demand for the lifting or outright abolition of all national borders – no borders, no passports, no "traffickers".

If demands such as those of the ICRSE were met, sex workers would at last have the same rights as workers in other sectors. And for an anarchist communist perspective on sex work, that's precisely the point – because the rights, and the lives, of all workers under capitalism are basically shit, and going from bad to worse. Sex workers' self-organisation to pursue their demands has been inspirational, but for anarchist communists it's just one step towards our larger goal: the self-organisation of all workers to create a world without bosses or borders, where our lives will be organised around co-operation and solidarity rather than wages. It's capitalism's exploitation in all workers' lives, brains and bodies for money that's the real "vile trade".

#### Useful websites

International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe – [www.sexworkereurope.org](http://www.sexworkereurope.org)  
International Union of Sex Workers – [www.iusw.org](http://www.iusw.org)  
X:Talk – [www.xtalkproject.net](http://www.xtalkproject.net)



# 'Gay rights' – Good for business!

As if more proof were needed that Stonewall and other such 'gay rights' organisations are utterly exhausted of commitment to any genuine LGBTQ liberation, this March they held their annual Workplace Conference, the conclusion of which was that LGBT equality in the workplace should be sought because 'it makes economic sense'.

Well that's great, but making our bosses that little bit richer is little consolation to the four in five of us who will suffer verbal abuse due to our sexuality, and is certainly no consolation at all to the massive 30% of gay or bisexual males who will attempt suicide in their lifetimes!

When Stonewall aren't spending vast sums of money on irrelevant conferences, they can be found snuggling up to New Labour, praising them on the great LGBT-friendly achievements of the past 12 years (many of which were forced upon the UK by European Union directives – oops). There are many things wrong with 'leading' gay rights organisations such as Stonewall, from their willingness to ignore the rights of trans people to their 'only gay rights organisation in the village' attempts to undermine any attempts at establishing real LGBTQ organisations. But what Stonewall really lack is the recognition that LGBTQ liberation does not revolve around consumption, and that 'equality' i.e. being exploited just as much as working-class heterosexual people – is not our aim.



**The early gay militants would no longer hide who they were at London's First Gay Liberation Front March, Trafalgar Park, August 1971**

Liberation means more than just equality. It means unapologetic defiance of arbitrary sexual morality and conservatism. And since we cannot rely on Stonewall to represent LGBTQ people, it's time we took self-empowerment into our own hands and organised organically. The days of the Gay Liberation Front may be gone but the politics of identity, class, liberation and anti-capitalism are alive and well! Such a resistance group is necessary, not to simply fulfil a lingering nostalgia within some of us, but because civil partnerships, gay adoption and all the other landmark achievements of bourgeois equality can be taken from us tomorrow, should our rulers

so decide. Moreover, we can't simply use such limited achievements as civil partnerships as the benchmark by which we measure success – our aim is not to be equal to all heterosexuals, nor to aspire to be the next openly gay celebrity/boss/politician. Our aim is freedom for all the working class, and in that fight we must also celebrate our own distinctive values as the LGBTQ community. If we organise now we can fight for a world where sexuality and gender are of little concern, but in the pursuit of that society we must never forget that our class is the backbone of the fight!

As anarchists we have no faith whatsoever in parliamentarians or parliamentary lobby groups to bring us liberation, nor do we have any trust in our bosses to protect us at work. To combat homophobia we must understand where it stems from, and as anarchists we recognise the flawed logic in asking those who rule us, divide us and trample on our right to sexual freedom whenever they like, to give us liberation. Liberation will not be given by the bosses, but will come about when working-class people of all genders, sexualities and colours seek empowerment and begin to realise that homophobia and sexism (not to mention economic recessions, crap wages and poverty!) are all part and parcel of the illogical system of capitalism.

We can do without bourgeois equality, thanks. We demand real liberation!

**'Our aim is freedom, and in that fight we must also celebrate our own distinctive values as the LGBTQ community'**



# I can't believe it's not Stalinism!

If you've got enough of an interest in anarchist ideas to be reading this article, you'll probably agree that capitalism's pretty horrible and it'd be good if we could get rid of it and replace it with something better. However, the problem is that organising for a revolution is hard work, and as people from Spartacus down to Alexandros Grigoropoulos have found, it can be pretty dangerous as well. For these reasons, a lot of people have been tempted to seek cop-outs to avoid the hassle of actually throwing themselves into the class struggle. For most of the 20th century, the Soviet Union offered a very tempting option for people who hated capitalism; instead of actually fighting to liberate themselves and the people around them, they could just support the USSR and the other 'communist' powers every time they got into a war, and have faith that, at some point in the future, the iron laws of the dialectic would mean that the USSR's dictators would lead us all to a glorious future of peace, equality and justice. The Comintern-aligned communist parties were the main tendency promoting this idea, but other kinds of Leninists peddled it as well: orthodox Trotskyists would defend regimes that shot Trotskyists as being somehow progressive, while those who didn't care for Russia itself could pick China, Cuba, Yugoslavia or some other dictatorship as being the true beacon of socialism. Luckily for all of us, history didn't work out quite like the Marxist-Leninists planned and the disgusting set of ruling class ideas that called itself 'communism' was fatally discredited when the workers of eastern Europe rose up and chucked out the regimes that claimed to rule in their name. Since



then, we've seen a slow but steady revival of the class struggle and interest in anarchist and anti-authoritarian ideas. Despite all this, there are still people who'd like to see a better world, but don't trust the ability of ordinary people to make it for themselves. Here's a brief look at a few of the messiahs the left puts its faith in today.

## Hugo Chávez

Chávez's regime has some obvious attractions for today's wannabe-Stalinist. Chávez says all the right things about solidarity and revolution: he speaks Spanish, which always makes anyone sound cooler; he lives a bit near the place Che came from, which is good for extra trendy lefty points; and he does undeniably have some impressive social programmes. Perfect, right?

Sadly, not quite. For all the rhetoric, Venezuela is still a country where the mass of the population have little or no control over their lives, as a recent interview with Venezuelan libertarians showed<sup>1</sup>. Power is not in the hands of 'the people', it is in the hands of Chávez and those around him, and so no matter what concessions the government gives to the working class, they can still be taken back at any time. The Venezuelan authorities, like any other state, won't hesitate to attack workers who go too far and ask for too much, as we saw when the National Guard and police attacked striking steel workers in March 2008<sup>2</sup>. When the Venezuelan state uses its power against demonstrators and striking workers, it's impossible to avoid the old question, which side are you on?

The point isn't whether Chávez is a good or a bad leader, or even if he's a good person: I've never met him, so for all I know he could be a perfectly nice, sincere bloke with a genuine desire to make life better for ordinary people in Venezuela. The point is that his entire project of gaining power through the electoral system, a system designed by the ruling class to defend their position is a totally flawed one that can never deliver real change for the mass of working class people. That'll take a revolution, which would have to be not just against the multinational corporations and the old elite, but also against Chávez and his bureaucratic hangers-on.

## The Labour left

This isn't so much a new delusion, more an old one that's grown more and more obviously crazy as time goes by. Back in the 80s when people like Tony Benn used to stomp

around making noises about workers' control and nuclear disarmament, you could kind of understand why some otherwise rational people thought it would be possible to change society through the Labour Party. But today, everyone with a shred of decency has abandoned the party. The cynical politicians who are left don't even pretend to care about us anymore – and yet people like the Labour Representation Committee still cling onto their illusions in it, insisting that Ken Livingstone or John McDonnell will 'reclaim' the party for socialist values any day now. This particular form of wishful thinking is particularly common among union leaders, who will explain to 'their' members again and again that we have to put up with whatever attacks the Labour Party makes on us and not fight back, otherwise the Tories might get in and make exactly the same attacks on us. Anarchists often take the piss out of religious people, and rightly so, but I can't help thinking that Christians who believe that Jesus walked on water and rose from the dead, or Muslims who believe that Allah will send you to burn in hell forever if you eat pork, seem positively logical and rational compared to the kind of lefties who still believe that the Labour Party is going to start standing up for workers one day.

### Islamic fundamentalists

This seems even more bizarre than most of the others on the list. Most of the other heroes of today's left at least talk like they want to make the world a better place, but Islamists openly admit how reactionary and undemocratic they are. But despite this, the SWP and others in the 'anti-

war' and Palestine solidarity movements carry on sucking up to Hamas, the Iranian theocracy, Hezbollah and various other religious nutters, because they really, really hate America, so that means they must be good, right? After the end of the Cold War, the US ruling class eventually settled on Islamic fundamentalism as their new bogeyman, so it's hardly surprising that some of the 'anti-imperialists' who used to cheer on Stalinists switched their support to the new evil empire. Supporting Islamists doesn't necessarily mean that lefties will jump up and down with pom-poms chanting 'Ooh, Hezbollah, you so fine, you so fine you blow my mind'; it can take more subtle forms, such as when the self-appointed 'leaders' of our movements decide that they have the right to say what slogans we can and can't use, so that criticising the British, Israeli and American states is fine, but criticising the equally brutal thugs running the Iranian state, or hoping to run a Palestinian one, isn't. Watching the contortions socialists twist themselves into as they explain that of course they oppose Hamas, it's just that they don't think anyone should be allowed to

openly criticise Hamas in public, would be hilarious if it wasn't so tragic.

One explanation as to why lefties are so willing to support maniacs who openly oppose everything the left stands for

might lie in the sense of powerlessness that many of us feel. The government has shown, time and time again, that they don't listen to protest, which has left many people in the anti-war movement wondering what the point of the endless Stop the War marches are, and when genuinely effective direct action does take place, politicians like George Galloway and their supporters are too worried about looking Respect-able and mainstream to get involved. When Islamist 'resistance' fighters blow up Israeli conscripts and civilians (or British and American working class kids who signed up for one of the few stable jobs our failing economy can still offer), they definitely seem to be doing something, in contrast to the impotence of liberal protest here, and so keffiyah-wearing lefties who line up alongside them (metaphorically, of course – it's noticeable how none of the trots who proclaim their 'military support' for Hamas are prepared to go over there and offer them any actual military support) can feel like they're doing something too.

### The US Army

The other side of the coin to supporting anyone who opposes 'Western imperialism' is the equally muddle-headed idea of supporting anyone who opposes 'Islamofascism'. It's noticeable how many ex-Leninists were among the main supporters of the Iraq war, so former Stalinists like Jack Straw, Peter Mandelson and David Aaronovitch could join hands with Trotskyists like Christopher Hitchens in cheering on the forces of the empire. In contrast to the other tendencies, who at least want to try building a mass



movement in support of their chosen leaders, the liberal-lefties who think you can spread freedom with tanks and fighter planes are more openly elitist, and happy to be completely irrelevant to ordinary people as long as they can influence politicians and Guardian journos. This confused lot have got quieter over the last few years as the complete disaster of the Iraq war became more and more obviously indefensible, but it's possible that we may see a re-emergence of them soon, now that Barack Obama has become the friendly, likeable face of imperial power.

#### Barack Obama

While we're on the subject, it may be worth saying a few words about Obama himself. Yes it is undeniably impressive that a country with such a huge history of systematic racism has reached the point where it's possible for a black man to gain such a position, but that change didn't come about because of Obama or his campaign team, it came about as the result of years and years of struggle by millions of grassroots activists, and we can only imagine how much more progress could've been made if all the energy that was poured into campaigning for Obama had been put into building up community and workplace self-organisation instead. Anyone who believes that individual members of oppressed groups joining the ruling elite will make life better for the rest of that group should ask themselves how much better life was for ordinary working class women at the end of a decade of Maggie Thatcher's rule. The Democrats emerged as the party of those sections of the American elite that wanted to keep slavery, and



*'Obama might offer us a slightly larger slice of cake, but we still want the whole bakery'*

while its specific policies may have changed, its basic role remains the same: to represent the sections of the ruling class that don't think the Republicans are doing a good enough job, not to provide any kind of real opposition. So, while Obama might be willing to take some individual steps to make life more bearable for the great mass of the population and reflect the widespread rage at overpaid bankers, his main priority is actually to prevent any kind of real change from happening. Obama might offer us a slightly larger slice of cake, but we still want the whole bakery.

So, where does all this leave us? If the Labour left is a mysterious creature that only appears when union leaders need to explain away their betrayals, the Islamist guerrillas don't even pretend to be on the same side as us, and neither Barack Obama nor Hugo Chávez is going to save the world, does this mean we need to give up all hope? Of course not. The power to change the world isn't in any of these people; it's in us, and the people around us. It's only when we reject all leaders, whether they're 'progressive' politicians or 'resistance' warlords, and start talking to our workmates, neighbours, family and friends that we can start actually building up the kind of forces we need to take back control over our lives. It'll be hard and it'll take time, but it's a lot more rewarding and worthwhile than waiting around for some saviour to give us our freedom.

#### Footnotes:

1 The revolution delayed: 10 years of Hugo Chávez's rule – Charles Reeve and El Libertario: [tinyurl.com/djlhk3](http://tinyurl.com/djlhk3)

2 Steel workers' strike in Venezuela attacked by Chávez' state – Internacionalismo: [tinyurl.com/cdkjgd](http://tinyurl.com/cdkjgd)

# Searching out difference –

## Neuromyths and neurosexism

Anarchist communists believe in an egalitarian society, where people are no longer judged on differences in ability and are no more or less entitled to the benefits from our collective society. As long as it is not used to discriminate, we just don't see difference as a problem. But could this make us insensitive to scientific claims about the discovery of innate differences between men and women, or do these claims need to be better understood, and challenged by non-experts?

Over the last couple of decades, intense interest in brain research, including the 1990s 'Decade of the Brain', has helped bring together many different fields of scientific enquiry, especially biology with psychology. From biology, the physical structure of animal and human brains and their electrical and chemical processes are better understood than ever. Computer imaging like MRI scans, as used in medicine, are being applied to find out how brains change when people perform basic tasks with words or pictures. Animal and human behaviours, and theories of the mind from psychology, can now be put to the test by looking for variations in chemistry, electrical activity or blood flow in the brain. Some of these experiments have been directed at searching for differences between the sexes and factors that might be related to sexuality. Where differences have been detected, it is tempting to feel that we are nearer the truth than ever.

On the other hand, we know that scientific enquiry can so easily be used to back up prejudice. In the 19th century almost all scientists believed that people of colour and women were intellectually inferior to men and this just needed proving.



An experiment with brain size by anthropologist and craniologist Paul Broca, performed by filling up skulls with seeds and measuring the difference in volume, would do nicely. Since the female brains were on average 10% lighter than the males', this proved a lack of the region of the brain where the intellect was located! Most notoriously, in 1879 Gustav Le Bon used these results to compare the brain size of women unfavourably with those of gorillas, children and "savages", using this as good reason why women should not be educated. By 1909, it was clear that brain size was really just a reflection of body size. Never mind that any connection between brain size and intellect is a fantasy. Never mind that even the figure of 10% from original data is questionable due to age, disease, and other effects on body growth not being controlled (most of the women in the original experiments were older than the men, and brains can shrink with age-related

degenerative diseases). Apart from size, supposed differences in the number of folds on the surface of one part of the brain showed women's inferiority; then, in 1909, it was shown that there was no difference. The story goes on and on, with differences in variability of brains being used to show male superiority – men were less "average" than women, an idea that carried over into the IQ tests of the 1970s. A similar story from the 19th century can be told about the linking of left-handedness to criminality, and incidentally, the possibility of brain abnormality causing criminal behaviour was investigated only as long ago as 1997 to try and explain Ulrike Meinhoff's 'slide into terror' as a member of Red Army Faction - her brain had been preserved for 26 years, then given to a neurologist!

Over many decades, genetics has provided insight into sex differences at a molecular level. Before discovery of DNA, it was already understood that certain diseases are inherited

differently by male and female children. This is described in terms of passing on chromosomes, DNA sections of a person's entire genome that are present in cells of the body. Most cells have all the chromosomes, but sperm and eggs have only one of either sex chromosome, X or Y. When the egg and sperm come together, the foetus' cells become either XX (female) or XY (male). This is not always the case, though, and some people have XXY, XXXY, XYY, although having a Y is usually necessary to give you balls, so to speak (apart from the rare 'XX male' condition where the relevant SRY gene from Y jumps to the X). It becomes more complex still. Hormones are involved with a chain of events that activates a male baby's SRY gene and results in him growing testes. Some of the same hormones, and others, are involved continually after birth. These levels of so-called male and female sex hormones in the body are not static over time or age. For example, testosterone is thought of as the male hormone, but many women have higher levels than men. Levels change over a woman's menstrual cycle and with age. Coming sexually aroused makes hormone levels go up temporarily, and so on. A lot more is now known about how the brain takes part in processes involving hormones. For example, some receptors in the brain respond to hormones from other parts of the body. Interestingly, most testosterone has to be converted to oestrogen (a so-called female sex hormone) before it is received by the brain, so the actual effect of hormones on the brain is very similar in men and women.

With all this knowledge, it would be nice to think things have changed in the 21st century from the days of

Gustav Le Bon, but it seems that sexism is alive and kicking, and we can now talk reasonably about neurosexism. Books entitled 'The Female Brain' and ideas of left-brain versus right-brain types of people are now part of popular culture. They use a mixture of science and myth to explain why women don't get so bored when ironing, why working women inevitably get confused juggling work and home life, can't fly planes safely and so on. Many of these ideas have some origin in scientific experiments which attempt to measure hormone or brain activity levels. When a difference is found, explanations about innate, 'hard-wired' behaviours are usually offered. More ludicrously, origins of these behaviours within our evolutionary past are explained using theories about the way early 'hunter gatherer' societies could have been structured. For example, you obviously need a different brain to go hunting, an unpredictable activity, than to find nuts and grubs, or stay at home cleaning the cave, don't you? These kinds of stories are woven from studies of "primitive" tribes living now, since the fossil record tells us so little. One brilliant example of the kind of madness coming out of the field of 'evolutionary psychology' is a study claiming to explain why girls prefer pink, since prehistoric gathering required identifying pink berries, apparently. Never mind that the study on 21st century twenty-somethings only asked about preference and not ability to distinguish colours, you only have to go back to 1914-18 to find magazines saying things like: "There has been a great diversity of opinion on the subject, but the generally accepted rule is pink for the boy and blue for the girl. The reason is that



pink being a more decided and stronger color is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl." (Ladies Home Journal, 1918). Pink for girls came in the 1940s. Oops, so much for the prehistoric berry theory then.

For another example of neurosexism, let's look at the idea of spatial awareness differences between genders, arising from psychology experiments where people sit down to look at and compare shapes, or locate objects on a page. Rats running around and getting lost in mazes have also been studied. These experiments have arguably shown some differences between sexes, and it is from these that popular books back up their just-so stories, like why women can't read maps or park cars as well as men. Still, a difference is a difference, right? Not quite. Aside from the possibility of different life-experiences, what was once thought of as better general spatial awareness in men is now known to be much more complicated. With further research, on average, women seem to be better at some spatial tests than men and vice versa. So, was it that the definition of "spatial" was not well enough defined, or is there not really so much difference? The goal posts move yet again. Neuroscientists also claim that there are different "thinking styles" in men and women, or in homosexual and heterosexual people.

Now bring in the hormone levels and MRI scans. People doing spatial or other cognitive tests (visual, audio or language tasks) have hormone levels measured in their blood, saliva or urine. Can a difference in hormone level be related to their ability to perform the

task? Bizarrely, in some tests men with higher hormone levels do worse than other men, but women with higher than average hormone levels do better! So is there really a causal link between hormones and spatial test results, or was it just due to individuals having spent more playing with lego as children? As with hormone levels, studies with MRI scans claim to have shown differences between men and women in the way particular volumes of the brain have greater or less blood flow when doing a task. Recently, though, it seems that many of these differences go away when the experiments are done properly. In spite of early experiments to the contrary, MRI now provides evidence against both localisation (psychological events relating only to defined locations in the brain), and lateralisation (psychological events relating mainly to only one side of the brain). This of course puts, or should put, into question previous experiments that purport to show innate and permanent differences between men and women. Unfortunately, these neuromyths are hanging on so strongly and are now so pervasive in society that educationalists are starting to worry that learning in schools will be affected by this assumed knowledge with little scientific basis.

One example of how things can come unstuck was a study of gender identity in girls with a condition called adrenal hyperplasia, who have masculinised genitals. Data came from asking their mothers about behaviour that was compared to a sister without the condition. Results of one study showed evidence of increased energetic play, or “romping”, which is normally

attributed to boys. Quite apart from the possibility of mothers treating sisters differently, or typecasting gender behaviours, the killer blow came in a later study comparing children with adrenal hyperplasia and those with diabetes. Both groups were found to exhibit the energetic behaviour, suggesting that childhood illness in general was the common factor, nothing to do with gender identity. But without this last study to show otherwise, how many of us would continue to believe the gender identity theory?

So, as revolutionaries, we have to be careful not to fall into the neuromyth trap. The assumed “facts” about difference gleaned from scientific experiments have to be understood in greater depth and broken down before taking any media headline even slightly seriously. Was the experiment just a psychology experiment asking a bunch of student volunteers to look at pictures, or did it involve some measurement of hormones or brain activity? How was the hormone level measured, and was menstrual cycle taken into account? Was the experiment done on rats where the results may or may not apply to humans? Could the results have an environmental origin, as in the example above? Does a scientist doing a psychology experiment really have the expertise to make claims about hormone levels or judge theories about prehistoric society, or are they making connections that are just not there, based on prejudice? Do they perhaps want it to be true, like Simon Le Vay who hoped his (flawed) experiments showing brain differences between homo- and heterosexuals could help lesbian and gay men become more accepted? Are they even a racist like James Watson, one of the co-discoverers of DNA who got a

Nobel prize? (Rosalind Franklin, the woman on the research team, didn't, by the way!) This is not to say it's easy to get to the bottom of media headlines about gay-genes or female brains, especially as the details of the experiments are buried in scientific journals that you have to pay for unless you study or work in a university.

Finally, here are two things that often get left out of discussions about innate abilities or behaviour. Firstly, we know that it is possible to change our ability by practising a task or change behaviour by learning to think differently. It may take a few hours or days or years, but we know we get better over time when we practise something, the opposite if we don't. One practised individual can easily overcome small differences in averages between experimental groups of men/women or gay/straight (assuming these differences exist at all). So to a great extent we can just choose what to become good at, given the opportunity. Secondly, in spite of inequality in upbringing, education and diet, cultural diversity, and discrimination due to racism, sexism and homophobia, the amazing thing about human beings is the overriding similarity in so many of our abilities and capabilities. How much more will this be so when inequalities are removed as they would be in an anarchist communist society?

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# Gendered Language in Ursula Le Guin's Gethen Stories

Science Fiction is at its best when it explores everyday human problems and prejudices through their extrapolation into extreme scenarios; disasters show the best and worst sides of humanity, while dystopias explore the full implications of the political and social impulses that govern us. More unusual, subtler and equally effective, is SF that explores aspects of humanity through their absence. While utopias eradicate society's problems and dystopias exaggerate them, Le Guin creates, from scratch, ambiguous societies of human aliens who have never experienced problems central to our particular brand of humanity, extrapolates a culture, history and mythology from the inherent differences in socialisation, and goes on to explore the problems that they do have.

With Gethen, Le Guin challenges our world's social construction of gender and explores its fundamental influence on our notions of identity by creating a world of human hermaphrodites. Unlike us (but in common with most other mammals) they have an oestrus cycle, so that they are only sexually active for a few days each month (known as "kemmer"). A Gethenian may enter this state as male or female, depending on many factors beyond their control, including the state of those kemmering close to



**Ursula Le Guin**

them at the time. If a Gethenian conceives, "she" remains female throughout pregnancy and lactation, then returns to a state of "somer" and could be male next kemmer. In somer, Gethenians are without sexual drive and physically androgynous.

This biological and sociological re-imagining of sex brings with it the problem of writing a genderless society in a language that is not equipped to describe genderlessness, for an audience barely equipped to imagine it. The linguistic problem exacerbates the perceptual one, and

Le Guin has dealt with this in various ways, with varying degrees of success. Initially, she uses masculine pronouns as neutral – or, at least, views Gethen through a human male character who does so, in the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Shortly before this she had published a short story set on Gethen, but had not been aware at the time of the Gethenians' unusual physiology. She re-wrote this story, *Winter's King*, for a 1975 collection, this time using feminine pronouns for all characters while keeping the masculine titles of "King" and "Lord" to retain ambiguity. Eventually, with such deft linguistic gymnastics that the casual reader barely notices, she wrote a Gethen story eschewing the use of gendered pronouns altogether, *Coming of Age in Karhide* (1995). I'll talk first about *The Left Hand of Darkness*, since this is the first Gethen story that Le Guin wrote with the deliberate intention of making Gethen a world of androgynes. It is not, primarily, a story about gender. It is a story about the politics of small nations, in which a naive envoy from the Ekumen (a sort of research collective of inhabited worlds) is manipulated by factions from rival countries. It is also a story about survival in harsh conditions, and the relationships formed under those conditions. Suspicion and trust, exposure and

*'Le Guin challenges our world's social construction of gender and explores its fundamental influence on our notions of identity by creating a world of human hermaphrodites.'*

shelter, solitude and companionship are woven in with themes of duality and oneness, reflected in the envoy Genly Ai's (and the reader's) perception of gender as binary, and its contrast in Gethenian sexuality and psychology.

Genly Ai, a Terran and a man, finds it difficult to treat Gethenians as genderless. Early on, he says:

"I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own."

His difficulty reflects the reader's, which is made all the more problematic by Le Guin's (or Ai's) use of those masculine pronouns. Le Guin has spoken of regretting this decision, and in her introduction to the re-working of *Winter's King* she says: "In the third person singular, the English generic pronoun is the same as the masculine pronoun. A fact worth reflecting upon. And it's a trap, with no way out, because the exclusion of the feminine (she) and the neuter (it) from the generic/masculine (he) makes the use of either of them more specific, more unjust, as it were, than the use of "he". And I find made-up pronouns, "te" and "heshe" and so on, dreary and annoying."

While the decision to use masculine pronouns in *LHoD* is a submission to that trap, forcing the reader to perceive Gethen as a planet without women, it has another, stranger effect: it makes us actively fight that perception, to try to see the neutral as feminine as well as masculine. It also allows us to feel lulled into a sense of understanding

the genderlessness on our own terms, before shocking us with startling incongruities such as: "The King was pregnant" (p. 73).

Like Ai, we force ourselves to view each character, by turns, as both male and female. Often, of course, the language (and our own cultural identification) forces us to view important and recurring characters as male, and this prejudice is used narratively – Ai's mistrust of Estraven, his major ally in *Karhide*, springs from his inability to read "him", to work out his motives and goals, and he especially hates the characteristics he perceives as feminine, dismissing subtle warnings and cautions as "effeminate deviousness" (p.17). Ai's unconscious, internalised gender prejudices are dangerously irrelevant on Gethen, and only when Estraven kemmers as female does he realise how great his mistake was. He has been judging Estraven according to his expectations of male behaviours, misreading a protective and loyal ally as a manipulative politician, with a mistrust coming partly from Estraven's aloofness and stringent observation of shifgrether (a system of status and etiquette that equates openly offering advice with dire insult), but mainly from Ai's inability to see him as both a man and a woman and neither.

This cultural confusion extends to Ai's and previous Ekumen investigators' view of Gethenian culture and history. We are told that there has never been a full-blown war on Gethen, yet the feuding nations that we see – a paranoid monarchy with a mad king, and an authoritarian communist state with forced labour camps – are far from utopian. The nation of *Karhide* is described early on as "not a nation

but a family squabble" (p.12). Ai speculates that Gethenians, while capable of the same aggression and cruelty as other humans, lack the capacity to mobilise. He says, with characteristic simplicity: "They behaved like animals in that respect; or like women. They did not behave like men, or ants." (p.39) An account from an earlier Ekumen investigator theorises that the Ancient Hainish (who seeded all human-inhabited worlds) created Gethenians as a genetic experiment with the deliberate aim of eliminating war:

"Did the Ancient Hainish postulate that continuous sexual capacity and organized social aggression, neither of which are attributes of any mammal but man, are cause and effect? Or [...] did they consider war to be a purely masculine displacement-activity, a vast Rape, and therefore in their experiment eliminate the masculinity that rapes and the femininity that is raped?"

This hypothesis does not go unchallenged, though. In the grip of a long ice age, Gethen is known to the rest of the Ekumen worlds as "Winter"; cold and starvation have had as much influence on the moulding of Gethenian society as has genderlessness, and which of these forces are responsible for Gethen's unique characteristics, we are left to guess.

The same researcher speculates that the lack of sexual frustration or competition (since all are released from other duties for kemmer, and nobody is barred from the kemmerhouse) dulls ambition and slows technological progress, but again this is left open to the possibility that survival of the intense cold is a factor. Technological progress happens



slowly and steadily on Gethen. Large communal buildings stand for thousands of years, being repaired rather than demolished and replaced. Their greatest technological marvel is a highly efficient camping stove that can heat a tent for months on a single fuelling, but they have very few powered vehicles and no flight (with no flying animals to inspire it). Resources are not wasted on anything but food and warmth. Travel is undertaken on foot, or by catching a supply vehicle headed in the same direction. Gethenians don't rush to reach any destination, physical or technological – they get where they're going without hurrying. Even the perilous journey across the ice that constitutes the second half of the story, compelled as it is by the need to arrive before supplies run out, is slow-paced and careful, with more development of character and setting than action or plot. Despite the lack of pace, the novel makes gripping reading. Each new discovery about the nature of Gethenian physiology and society, each shift of perception in the complex relationship between friends and aliens, every unexpected word and phrase connects theme to plot to character, and these quiet, thoughtful interactions are more riveting than any hectic chase over thin ice.

The revised *Winter's King* demonstrates the reasons why Le Guin chose not to use feminine pronouns as neutral in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Not only is the feminine more specific, but instead of giving the impression of a planet without men (as the opposite tactic implied the absence of women) it seems to suggest only that the characters important enough to have their movements described – the

King, the palace officials and politicians – are female, while those mentioned too briefly for a pronoun to be necessary (staff and subjects) remain male by default. Because the use of the feminine rather than the masculine is being reconsidered, the neutral escapes consideration altogether. As in *LHoD*, the reader struggles against these perceptions, as King Argaven struggles against the mindforming aimed at manipulating her rule, but it is a harder struggle to see her as neutral than he, and the overall effect is not of androgynes but of a world ruled by women using masculine titles. It is a good antidote to the use of male as neutral, a challenge to the reader's perceptions and the writer's skill at manipulating them, but since the aliens' sexual difference to Gethenians isn't made explicit until two thirds of the way through the story, there is no real sense of androgyny in the characters. That said, the failure at androgyny leads, at least, to seeing more women than men, which is unusual enough to be worth the experiment.

The story, remaining relatively unchanged from its original version, has echoes of *Semley's Necklace* in its concern with the incongruities of time and long distance space travel, but is most interesting for what it tells us about the Gethenian techniques of brainwashing – which they call “mindforming” and the Hainish “mindscience”. This is a huge contrast from the *Foretelling* of the *Handdara*, the more spiritually-inclined (yet still scientifically-founded) psychic ability glimpsed in the other Gethen stories, and may go some way towards explaining why so many of the kings of *Karhide* are completely insane.

In contrast to both previous stories,

*Coming of Age* in *Karhide* has no kings or politicians and is set amongst working people in an ordinary *Hearth* (a communal dwelling of around 200 people). This is a return to Gethen after around 25 years, for both for the writer and the planet. Le Guin chooses a completely different voice for this story: an open and intelligent Gethenian narrator looking back, with honesty and humour, on the experiences of adolescence. Since the narrator is using personal experience, and speaking in the first person, there is little need for gendered pronouns, and where other characters are spoken of they are either mentioned by name or cunningly pluralised to evade gendered pronouns, save for explicit uses to describe *kemmering* status. This careful consideration of language provides a very different viewpoint to previous Gethen stories, but nevertheless the characters emerge from the page gendered, perhaps more readily so as the reader has no consciously inappropriate gendered pronouns to challenge. The narrator, *Sov*, by intimately describing of the aches, pains, clumsiness and shame of puberty, including the first experience of menstruation, cannot help but come over as female, especially since we are left to hear all the anxieties regarding uncontrollable urges and awkward erections from *Sov's* taller, moodier friend *Sether*. Their conversation, though they are comparing and confirming symptoms that they are both experiencing, reads like a girl and a boy talking, her with shyness and gentle reassurance, him with angry, humiliated outbursts at the unfairness and inhumanity of it all.

The whispered fears of the two

adolescents include losing control in kemmer and committing rape, putting in doubt the Ekumen investigator's assertion that rape is a physical impossibility for Gethenians – never that convincing, since we know from LHoD that drugs exist to stimulate or suppress kemmer, and are used by government agents in Orgoreyn to seduce spies and pacify prisoners. Sether relates a friend-of-a-friend story about a rape that took place when two truck drivers were cut off by snow and one kemmered as male. Sov is shocked, never having heard such things were possible. The story might be an exaggeration, as adolescent rumours about sex so often are, but it seems more likely that such incidents are taboo and that an alien researcher would have had difficulty uncovering them.

This fear of being made inhuman by kemmer may be due, in part, to the characters' awareness of aliens and of their own uniqueness amongst other human races; they are afraid of the animalistic qualities of the kemmer cycle, that it will be like going into heat or rut, while also ashamed that, in kemmer, they become more like the grotesque aliens, who they equate with a hormonal imbalance towards male or female that causes some Gethenians to remain in a permanent state of kemmer. These people are stigmatised as “perverts” and, more tellingly, “half-deads” (indicating, perhaps, that the stigma is not in the permanence of their sexual state but in their lifelong limitation to only one physical sex). We hear of their existence in LHoD, as Genly Ai is often mistaken for one, but hear more in this story of the fear and fascination they evoke in other Gethenians. They are variously



mistrusted and pitied, but not excluded from kemmerhouses – in fact, they often live in and run them, this being one of the few roles Gethenian society deems acceptable for those whose identity and sexuality are so conflated.

These various viewpoints, with their linguistic limitations, may not quite allow us to see genderlessness as the Gethenians do, but they do allow for some striking observations that can shock us out of assumptions we didn't realise we were making. One of the best is this advice from an early Ekumen investigator on Gethen:

“The First Mobile, if one is sent, must be warned that unless he is very self-assured, or senile, his pride will suffer. A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. On Winter they will not exist. One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience.”

It is both amusing and uncomfortable to be reminded how much we have invested in gender identity, and how manipulatively seductive those heteronormative and patriarchal behaviours can be, even to those directly harmed by them. While it is tempting for any anarchist, feminist or LGBT activist to see a world lacking gender divisions as a form of utopia, Le Guin's transitions to alternative societies are never that simple – there are no utopias, and the removal of one fundamental source of privilege on our world provides no easy answer to all the rest. The binary division of society into male and female is not replaced by another single, overwhelming binary, but by a multitude of smaller systems of status and hierarchy,

shifgrethor being the most visible of these, stigmatisation of a sexual minority the most familiar. Le Guin uses Gethen not to answer the problem of gender but to provoke further questions on the nature of identity and prejudice. When Ai asks Estraven if Gethenians are as obsessed with wholeness as Terrans with duality, he replies: “We are dualists too. Duality is an essential, isn't it? So long as there is myself and the other.” (p.159)

Perhaps we will remain unable to truly deconstruct gender until we can deconstruct the language that we use to reinforce it every day. Dreary and annoying as those replacement pronouns may be, perhaps a story using the Gethenian pronouns (whose existence is implied in LHoD) to describe those in somer, those in kemmer as female, those in kemmer as male, female animals, male animals and (presumably) inanimate objects would better portray the people of Gethen, and I would love to see Le Guin take up that experiment.

Which pronouns would better portray the Terrans remains an experiment for us all.

#### **Editions used:**

Le Guin, Ursula, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 1973 (Panther, Herts.)

Le Guin, Ursula, ‘Winter's King’, in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, 2000 (Gollancz, London)

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# Second Life:

## *Escape from gender or another form of enslavement?*

If you were communicating blindly with someone, as is often the case on the internet, what would you most like to know about the person? What would you most want to communicate about yourself? In other words, what are the significant features of your identity?

In terms of what is socially significant, in the sense that there are important implications for how you are treated in society, then there is a well recognised list: social class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and disability. These aspects of our social selves will determine to a large extent where we fall in the social hierarchy and what opportunities and chances are open to us. It is envisioned that in a future society all forms of hierarchy and inequality based on any of these things will disappear. There are a number of debates about which is more important, with most class-struggle anarchists stressing the role social class plays as an overarching source of inequality within a capitalist system. Race and ethnicity also feature prominently in political campaigns and struggles, especially with the presence of very public fascist and racist movements and the obvious racial divide in terms of living standards.

Gender inequality has gone from the limelight of political activity since the heyday of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This is largely due to the fact that women seem to have achieved what they were seeking – they are now politicians, on the board of directors and managers. Girls do better at school than boys and seem to have the opportunities to enter any occupation. On the surface it appears that what was once considered the oldest oppression is much less of an



issue than class and race, at least in western Europe and North America. (Whether this is in fact the case is the subject of another article!)

However, on a personal level, if we return to the question of what we consider to be the most significant aspect of our identity, gender would be the first to come to mind. (Age, sexuality and disability are also significant in this context, especially when related to gender.) Gender is a term used to refer to the social aspect of a particular biological sex. The personal aspect of these social differences makes it less obvious when inequality exists and therefore more difficult to eradicate it, even in a situation of revolutionary transformation. In addition, it is not so much the issue of inequality or oppression that is at stake. Rather it is our own internalised attachment to gender identity and roles. So it is not just a question of men oppressing women, but of both biological sexes being oppressed by the whole concept of gender. We can

imagine a society without social class, with no more awareness of race or ethnicity than we have of hair colour now. But can we imagine a future society without gender?

The test of this is to go back to the question asked at the start. What would you want people to know about you? Would you care most if someone mistook your class, race, age, sexuality or gender? People could carry on an internet relationship quite happily without knowing the social class or race of someone, but not knowing the gender of someone is extremely unsettling. It is the first thing parents want to know about the new baby – is it a boy or a girl? On every form asking for personal information, you need to identify yourself as male or female. It might come as a surprise to find that the person you have been talking to all evening is actually a corporate executive, but to think that you could be doing the same with someone who turned out to be male rather than female, or vice

versa, is unthinkable. With the strong gay movement, there has been a considerable change in attitudes towards sexuality. Although we should not underestimate the significance of discrimination according to sexual orientation, it is now common for people to have friendships quite happily with people they 'aren't quite sure about'. The person might be gay or not, but it doesn't matter. However, to carry on a friendship without being able to identify whether the person was male or female would be unheard of.

If we want to abolish all social distinctions in a new society, why not seek to abolish the oldest distinction of them all – the one between male and female? In a future society, won't we all just want to be individuals, unconstrained by the social divisions that would merely be a hangover from an unjust and unequal society? Why should it be important at all whether we are male or female? Neither sex nor reproduction depend on this biological distinction nowadays, so why not purge it from our list of what makes up our identity? What will matter will be the things that are truly important to us: our interests, likes and dislikes, our personalities.

This scenario may seem to be far in the future, but we can see the possibilities already in cyberspace. The internet in many respects abolishes all social distinctions. It is impossible to tell anything about the person apart from what they say about themselves. People develop strong friendships and relationships purely on the basis of a blind conversation that takes place outside of any normal social place in which to situate someone. The most extreme example of such a 'floating', disconnected social space is the computer programme Second Life.

Second Life (SL) is a virtual world that went online in June 2003. It was developed by Philip Rosedale from California. He named the company Linden Lab after the street where he lived. It is significantly more realistic than any of the other virtual worlds or computer games that came before. What makes Second Life different is that Linden lab sculpted only the landscape. Apart from some core elements, such as the Orientation Island for new arrivals, the rest is entirely created by 'residents'. It is based on technology that allows people to actually build things within the landscape. In addition, there are no set activities or things to interact with that aren't the creation of the residents. It is a place where you log on, download an 'avatar' (your SL persona) – and what you do next is completely open-ended. Obviously, those that set up residence in SL now have a whole established world to interact with, one created by avatars who came before. However, you can also start anything of your own. Anarchists could buy some land (in Linden Dollars, although you actually pay real money into a Real Life (RL) account) and set up a new society.

One thing you don't get a choice about when you first enter SL is having a gender. The first choice you have when you download the software is to select whether your avatar is going to be male or female. This indicates how basic gender is to people's identity. Once you have chosen your gender, then your SL body will take on certain characteristics of that gender. For example, a male avatar will automatically sit with his legs further apart than a female one.

Second Life is a place where people go to escape reality. They can be whoever they like. Many feel that

it is the one place they can be who they 'really are'. The extent of experimentation with gender identities on SL indicates that gender is one of the things people – both males and females – want to escape from. In RL, gender is closely associated with the body. In SL there are no such limitations. People can choose to be a different gender regardless of what they are in Real Life. In addition, they don't have to disclose to other residents what they are in RL. This opens up a number of possibilities.

The fact that roughly 30% of people on SL have avatars that are a different gender to their RL self is indicative of people's frustration with the constraints of gender in everyday life. Male residents use their avatars to escape from the cult of masculinity in RL. In SL they can express gender-atypical traits that are difficult to express in Real Life. According to one resident:

"SL was really important to me because it gave me the chance to actually try out what I would want to look like if I had a chance to express the transgendered feelings I have. In my first life, if this were a perfect world I'd try and represent more of my personality in the real world. If I did do this it would meet with a lot of criticism. I live in the rural south and even though I love it here, people are too closed-minded. On SL I can look like RuPaul and nobody cares. I can be more like myself."

Others deliberately choose to be a different gender in order to experience what it is like. Interactions in SL are still very gender-stereotyped in many ways (SL is not going to be that different from RL), so going around as a male when you are female in RL, or vice versa, gives the feeling of what it is

like to be that gender. Women comment that by taking on a male identity they become more confident. Though you have to choose a male or female avatar, some residents have transformed their avatar so much that it becomes androgynous. Others take on completely different forms such as animals or robots.

The main reason that people go on SL is to interact with other people. Despite the experimentation with gender-neutral avatars, gender identity remains one of the main bases on which interaction takes place. As SL cannot help but reflect the concerns and interests of those who create it, it is not surprising that sexual relations play a key part in SL activity, despite the lack of real physical contact. To have more 'realistic' sex, you have to actually go and buy genitalia. Some people spend a lot of money doing up their avatar. Virtual sex seems a popular pastime in Second Life. Most of this interaction mirrors society. Many people meet people of the sex they would normally be attracted to in Real Life. Weddings are a common occurrence, with many stories of people going on to meet up in RL and getting married there too. However, the anonymous nature of social interaction means that people use SL as a way of doing things that they have always wanted to do but wouldn't dare. According to Tim Guest in his book *Second Lives*: 'Many residents see in virtual worlds the seeds of a new kind of utopia: a world free from the dangers of contraception and disease, which recaptures a post-war, pre-AIDS innocence, where gender politics and sexual morality no longer apply.' Though many single people meet up in SL, there are also many other cases

where affairs in SL have turned into real-life divorces. For many women stuck at home with the children, SL is a way to escape the drudgery of their lives. In one such case a woman was at home all day with four small children while her husband was out at work. She spent hours every day on SL, living out a completely different existence. Her avatar was an attractive, large-breasted woman dressed in kinky black lace. She had an affair, with a black muscle-bound avatar, that was as stormy as any real-life affair. The affair was in sharp contrast to her marriage. She had trouble going back to RL after her time in SL. When the man broke it off, she was completely traumatised.

The more oppressive side of real-life sexual relations is also reflected in SL. You can go on SL and type in 'sex' and be immediately teleported to areas where anything is on offer: get a prostitute, dance naked in clubs, go to strip-tease joints, rape someone, or watch young girls dance naked and then have sex with them. As all avatars are operated by real people, all those offering their services to be sexually exploited are doing so willingly as part of their avatar's character. Keeping in mind that you can never know the real gender of other avatars, those who are playing these roles could easily be men. This shows that for many people SL is more a way of indulging in the most oppressive forms of sexual relations, practices that they would not dare to do in normal life, than of liberating themselves from gender constraints. Going on Second Life is a bizarre experience. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to its significance for gender relations in a future society. On the one hand, it seems to make people think in completely different

ways about gender. We are so used to thinking in terms of being male or female, and being treated by others according to this identity, that to interact with people without knowing 'what' they are could be very liberating. Many people find it very disturbing to not know the real gender identity, especially if they are considering getting involved in a more 'serious' relationship with someone. But should it matter? If you really like someone, then their actual biological sex may not be important. Without bodies getting in the way, human relations can reach a different level, where what counts are the personal characteristics of someone, what they are like on the 'inside'. Living in a world where appearance is everything, such attitudes can seem very refreshing.

Nevertheless, there is something about Second Life that is extremely disturbing. The fact that millions of people spend enormous amounts of time living the life of their avatar has implications for the possibility of social change. There is no doubt that we need to transform society so that we are freed from the limitations of gender, both in terms of how men and women are treated and in our own minds. Second Life can give us a glimpse of what it would be like if gender were not important. Men and women can escape the impact of traditional gender in their lives and redefine who they are.

These changes need to be made in the real world, with real people, and not in a fantasy world. As people's lives become increasingly impoverished, both physically and mentally, there is a real danger that more and more people will disappear into their 'other life' where they don't have these problems. According to Tim Guest,

# We are not frightened by ruins

By Jean G. Cozzens

in an interview with the founder of SL Philip Rosedale: 'Philip decided that what he wanted was not the ability to change the real world, but to conquer it and replace it with something better: a virtual world, with no barrier between thought and action.' As anarchists we are already faced with apathy and defeatism on the part of most people when confronted with the enormity of the task to transform society. This could become worse as virtual society becomes a substitute for real society for more and more people.

With regards to gender, it is clear that stereotyped relations between male and female still predominate in SL. The difference is that the stereotypical avatar is sometimes being operated by the opposite gender. But this doesn't then change anything about relations between male and female if the actions and attitudes are the same. Though Second Life can change people's attitudes in Real Life, any fundamental transformation in gender relations needs to take place in the real world with real people. In addition, it is questionable whether the body really makes no difference to who we are. Second Life is all based on the visual and the imagination. Human beings have real physical bodies and perceive the world through all the senses. Though it seems that being a male or female shouldn't make any difference to anything, it is still uncertain whether people would really want to create a future society that was so gender-neutral that being male or female would play no role one's identity.

Second Life, like science-fiction writing, has the effect of provoking important questions about how we really want to live as human beings. We just need to make sure that it is in this world that we take action.

**W**e publish an extract from the Anarchist Federation's work in progress, a new volume in our Anarchist Communist Editions devoted entirely to the relationship between anarchism and art. We talk a lot about 'cultures of resistance' in the Anarchist Federation. It is the purpose of this project to explore just what our modern 'culture of resistance' would look like. Moments of social and collective action—from strikes to revolutions—inspire and provoke emotion as much as they add to the theory and history of our movement.

*We invited artists to attempt to capture fragments of these moments of great hope and upheaval and also their desires for a better, freer society. The following contribution was produced by Jean Cozzens a poster designer, screenprinter, and carpenter based in Providence, Rhode Island.*

In 2001, I was living in an old mill that was being painstakingly renovated by a group of artist-developers, across the street from a 14-acre tract of factories that were slated to be torn down to make way for a shopping plaza. Across the city, many other factory buildings were being demolished as well, due to neglect, arson, or the desire to make space for new buildings, parking lots, or highways.

I had always been fascinated by old buildings. At the time, in my third year of architecture school, I was becoming more and more frustrated with new construction techniques, and more and more interested in old ways of building. To me, the demolition of the mills was senseless and wasteful: it seemed that it would never again be possible to create buildings that had the quality, aesthetics and strength of the old factories. I knew of no new buildings that were designed with such conscious care, or constructed with materials that were as simple and well crafted. The mills were a valuable and

severely limited resource. Why would you destroy something that could never be built again, something that was locally relevant and specific to our city – in favour of making a cheap cookie-cutter replication of a shopping centre that could be found anywhere across the country? I got involved in the activist struggle to try to save the buildings that were slated for demolition – the first 'activist' project I had felt strongly enough about to really jump into. It saved a couple of the buildings, had definitely raised awareness of the contribution of arts and industry to the city, and had probably pushed the developers to do a little bit better than their banal norm. However, it had not been able to protect any of the messy, useful, inexpensive possibilities that the mills had offered. I began to wonder about the love I had initially felt for the old mills – by focusing on their physical structures, had I been missing what was really important about them?

Even if the mills had been saved and renovated, even if the renovations were to be done by a well-intentioned team of good people (as was happening with the building where I was living), the purposes they could be put to would still be limited: by financial pressure, by the lender banks, by the increased attention they would get, by all the work that would have been put into them and the preciousness that would

*'These sentences from Durruti offered me hope, even after this destruction of space for freedom'*

result. The freedom that comes from living or working in a slightly neglected, rough-and-tumble structure would vanish. Whether demolished or converted, the mills would cease to provide space for industry, productive businesses, small entrepreneurship and creative work. Renovation would cast the buildings in amber, preserving them while also freezing their ability to transform, to harbour activity, life, innovation, production, to be messy and changeable.

In one of the books I was reading, I had come across this quotation: “We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts, and that world is growing this minute.

These sentences from Buenaventura Durruti offered me hope for the recreation of possibilities, the re-opening of the world of action even after this destruction of space for freedom. I had been wanting to make a poster about the mill demolitions, to share my sadness about their loss, and it became clear that the Durruti quote – and the hope it spoke of – belonged on that poster. In February of 2002, on a sunny-but-still-cold day, I found myself sitting outside on a pile of rubble to draw one of the mills in the middle of its destruction... and a couple of days later, realized that I had made the drawing that would go along with Durruti’s words.

I worked on the poster off and on through 2007, then printed it in January of 2008 – six years after I had begun it. My thoughts have continued to develop and change, but I find that the quote still speaks to me very



strongly in March 2009, as I print a second run of the posters, a little more than a year later. I continued to live in Providence after I finished Durruti architecture school. The city’s marketing team focused its ‘rebirth’ efforts on promoting what a great hub it was for creative people – at the same time as it had its workers shut down independent show spaces, kick artists out of their studios, and scrape screen-printed posters off of the walls. I saw fancy mill renovations continue to push industries and workshops out of their buildings, watched the housing market become absurdly inflated, then witnessed the bubble burst, my neighbourhood hit hard by foreclosures in a flurry of board-ups. Destruction was not only

carried out by bulldozers: all the supposedly constructive strategies of modern capitalism seemed intent on ‘blasting and ruining’ the world that we live in.

Instead of nostalgically recreating old building types, though, we will need to imagine new spaces and develop new methods of construction that will fit us better, that will help foster our changing lives. The right forms for buildings, and the right structures for society, will not come from the drafting table of a single, radically enlightened anarchist architect. We will figure them out together, beginning with how we are living together now, starting from the skills and materials we already know. The vitality of our lives together, and of whatever new society we build, will depend on the fact that our structures and relationships will not ever be fixed into a ‘perfect’ form, will never be completely known or fully understood. We will always be making new experiments, trying, failing often, succeeding occasionally, learning from our experience, and trying again. At times, we will have to ruin even the structures we create ourselves, whether they are societal or physical, so they do not become petrified and immovable. What I ultimately take from Buenaventura Durruti’s words is that we cannot be afraid to dismantle our lives – we must continually un-build and rebuild the various frameworks of our own existence – to keep them flexible, to allow us and our communities to continue to change and grow.

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## The Grapes of Wrath

By John Steinbeck

Penguin Books

As harrowing and heartbreaking as a novel can be, *The Grapes of Wrath* tracks the journey of the Joad family from eastern Oklahoma to California, a voyage made by thousands of Midwestern families during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s in search of a new life and prosperity. Beginning with his release from prison, Tom Joad returns to his uncle's home to find his family packing for California in order to escape the drought and find work. After their journey across half a continent, the Joads arrive in California and are immediately plunged into a world where desperate workers compete in reverse auctions to determine who will work for the lowest wage, often just a few cents a day. Farm conglomerates print off thousands of flyers advertising for workers in order to gain a surplus of interest, and then drastically lower the wage knowing that workers will always stay. Upon moving to a government camp, the family find hope in their new surroundings, a federal-operated camp which is largely run by residents as a collective, but a further move results in them inadvertently working as scabs at an orchard where union organisers are assaulted by business owners and Californian vigilantes.



This wrenching, uneasy story of struggle and toil laid bare the true nature of big business and marked the peak of Steinbeck's literary career. The story is remarkably straightforward in its composition, with chapters forming a neatly consecutive contrast between longer, dialogue-based sections and short periods of blistering social commentary and stinging criticism of the system of agricultural conglomeration, exploitation and ownership. Indeed this simplicity of form creates an effectiveness and power that is at best frightening, and at worst downright traumatising, and Steinbeck's extraordinary talent for reaching into the reader's imagination and creating rich textures enables this conversation-and-commentary style to flow in the most natural manner.

Steinbeck's tale did much to convince native Californians of their unfair treatment and exploitation of migrant labour, but was also demonised nationally as communist and unpatriotic, facing claims of exaggeration and libel from the state and federal executives and business associations. But these accusations, while typical at the time of establishment figures seeking to disparage an opponent, were not entirely untrue. Steinbeck stated in

one letter (found in the preface) that, 'Every effort I can bring to bear is and has been at the call of the common working people to the end that they may eat what they raise, use what they produce, and in every way and in completeness share in the works of their hands and their heads.' Further, he was determined to bring the story of migrants he met during the writing of his novel to the attention of the wider American consciousness, where jingoistic pre-war chest-beating was suppressing any and every critical report.

*The Grapes of Wrath* has remained at the pinnacle of American literature for over seven decades, and is today more vital than ever. The desperation of the Joad family is reflected daily in the lives of eastern European workers in western EU countries, Africans making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean, and Central Americans working on the same Californian farms that formerly employed thousands of Oklahomans. Steinbeck's ambition was to document fully the horrors that migrant workers faced, and he fulfils this completely. *The Grapes of Wrath* cements his legacy of helping working people 'dream of a dignified and free society in which they can harvest the fruits of their own labour.'

## Muzak to my ears: Canned music and class struggle — public space and muzak as policing

Past Tense. £1.00

The pamphlet on Muzak tackles another theme of *Past Tense*: public space. It describes the role of

bland piped music from its origins to the present. Originally it was used to increase productivity in workplaces during World War Two and then began to invade lifts, shops and supermarkets, stations, telephones and open public spaces. "Muzak has been applied at the heart of the two central arenas of modern life: work and leisure. Its initial development as a means of improving workplace productivity led to its later application in the

arena of mass consumption. This only reflected capitalism's wider social and economic developments; as rising productivity enabled the greater integration of workers into society as mass consumers, so Muzak then becomes a weapon— alongside advertising — of sales techniques within the shopping environment". A stimulating read on a subject that should not be ignored — the increasing invasion of public space by the market.



## We

By Yevgeny Zamyatin  
Penguin Books

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is without doubt one of the most famous books ever written, seen as the pinnacle of dystopian fiction ahead of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and the works of H.G. Wells and Philip K. Dick. Less well known however is Orwell's original inspiration, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, written as a fictionalisation of Zamyatin's experiences of both the Bolshevik revolution and industrial production on the River Tyne. Those who have already read *Nineteen* the plot elements in *We*: gone are intercontinental Oceania and Big Brother, in their place are the walled city of OneState and the Benefactor, and I-330 replaces Julia as the sexually charged, subversive partner who leads D-503 into confusion, salvation and beyond. In contrast to Winston Smith's lowly job as an administrative clerk for the Ministry of Truth, D-503 is given the lofty role of the chief engineer for the INTEGRAL project, an enormous spacecraft that is to be used for the colonisation of other planets, mirroring the march of modernity and industrialisation undertaken by European colonial powers in the 19th century.

The society of OneState is organised along Fordist, Taylorist and mathematical principles, where maximum industrial and societal efficiency has replaced emotion, individuality and free thought. Thus the book's title is a reference to the dichotomous relationship in OneState between the individual and the state, in which citizens are forced to sacrifice all individual characteristics for the 'We' that is the social body and the state. Indeed social control is practiced to such a degree that citizens, known as Numbers, are given an identifying number, identical uniforms with a number-tag, and a timetable that leaves little time for free, unsanctioned activities. The city itself is constructed almost entirely from glass, allowing maximum surveillance and minimum personal freedom and privacy, resembling the spirit of Jeremy Bentham's radical Panopticon prison design. Moreover, dreams and imagination are prohibited, classified as sicknesses to be cured via lobotomy, perhaps echoing the Foucauldian concepts of the power, knowledge and the medicalisation of insanity, sexuality and behaviour a whole half-century



before Foucault himself.

Zamyatin's writing style is certainly more descriptive and lucid than that of Orwell, taking time to paint a detailed, highly emotive backdrop to each scene. Given the diary-entry nature of *We*, Zamyatin's writing has much more pace and intensity than *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s slower, suffocating style that smothers the reader with the aura of totalitarian control that characterises the plot. At times, this pairing of pace and detail can become disorientating, particularly later in the novel when D-503 begins to confuse reality and dream, but overall it is a sharp combination that guarantees an engaging, entertaining read. Written in the early 1920s, *We* both predates and predicts the horrors of ideology that would define the next 25 years, as well as reflecting late 20th-century debates, particularly from post-modernists such as Foucault and Zygmunt Bauman, on medicalisation, the surveillance state and the pitfalls of modernity. Ultimately, *We* is a passionate novel that rails against totalitarianism, the extremes of scientific rationality and the suppression of individuality for the sake of ideology.

## Rare Doings at Camberwell: radicals, subversion and social control – A short tour through Camberwell's underground history

Past Tense. £1.50

Past Tense continues with their brave venture of issuing short and easy to read pamphlets. To continue with one of the themes in their publishing local radical and working class history they deal with the Camberwell area of London. A particularly long running fair (1279 to 1855) was held in Camberwell. The unrestrained goings-on at the Fair were viewed by the wealthy and respectable with increasing disgust by the 18th and 19th centuries. There were repeated attempts to control and curtail the enjoyment of local people with applications at

Bow Magistrates Court and finally the Fair was closed down in 1855. As the pamphlet says this should be seen in the context of "a widespread campaign in the early 19th century, to impose social and moral control over the growing working classes". The pamphlet goes on to discuss radical movements in the area, including Chartism. Following one Chartist demonstration, 400 to 500 marchers fought with police in what became known as the Camberwell Riot of 1848. The General Strike of 1926 effected Camberwell and the pamphlet describes the events there,

with attempts to stop scab trams, huge demonstrations and the eventual defeat of the Strike. The squatting movement of the late 60s–early 70s is also touched upon with homeless families moved into empty properties (there were over 1600 empty properties in the Borough of Southwark at the time). Squatting continued into the 1980s and up until the present time. Anti-racism and anti-fascism in Camberwell are also described, as well as the role of radical artists in the area. Another good attempt to reclaim history from the powerful and rich.

## Obituary

# Harold H Thompson

U.S. anarchist Harold H. Thompson has died (11/11/2008) in a Tennessee prison where he was serving life without parole at the age of 66. Harold accepted that he would never be free, and won the help of well-wishers and supporters worldwide, including many members of the AF. Harold did his best to lead a pro-active, anarchist-driven existence from within the confinement of steel and concrete walls, never an easy task given the age-old class enemy of authority, petty vindictive bureaucracy and perhaps worst of all, hostile sectarian gangs who prey on anyone not subscribed to their sick mindset. Harold could not stand prejudice or bullying, calling the perpetrators 'class clowns' as he fought daily running battles with the racist thugs, often at the cost of putting his own life in jeopardy. Himself subjected to the precariousness of survival only a couple of years ago, he was beaten to within an inch of his life by a White Aryan Supremacist gang. Hospitalisation followed, but the callousness of the U. S. judicial system meant that he never properly recovered from this and previous assaults.

This last occasion there was incontrovertible evidence of collusion between the attackers and prison personnel, which Harold was pursuing through the courts at the time of his death.

None of the violence sustained, and there was much, deterred Harold from his work to guide the indigent, the illiterate, the downtrodden, any ethnicity or maligned minority. That was what the class traitors couldn't figure out about Harold: his undiminished willingness to come to the aid of anyone who wasn't a racist, rapist or child molester. It bugged them and Harold knew he must watch his back every single day. To his great credit,



he bowed the knee to none of them.

Harold witnessed first-hand the brutalities of the American state, not only in the gulags ( as he labelled U.S. incarceration facilities) but also serving in Vietnam where he was wounded under fire. It was a war that disillusioned many of the combatants including Harold who went on to adopt the ethics of anarchism from which he would never thereafter deviate.

How come he ended up sentenced to a prospect without parole? Harold made no secret that he had terminated the life of the man who had murdered his partner, the mother of his son. This action drew a life sentence, ostensibly with distant chance of release far into the future. He blew this all away in an attempted armed escape, earning himself an additional few score years.

Harold didn't always receive the support he deserved. Disappointingly,

a negative response came from two prickly U.S. Anarchist Black Cross groups who refused aid when approached. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but typically he just got on with business. Britain's Anarchist Communist Federation (now the Anarchist Federation) were asked to carry out an independent investigation and duly came to the conclusion that the insinuations bore no substance. Preceding this the group Friends of Harold Thompson (FOHHT) had been reformed in the UK, where in particular, it must be said, with the ready help of many readers of this magazine a supporting network was put in place to enable Harold to mount his challenges to the U.S. legal system, one major issue being the outright denial to inmates of anarchist literature. It proved a successful outcome for prisoners across the USA.

Harold wrote a number of libertarian pamphlets, took up painting and engaged in protracted correspondence with comrades near and far, old and young, of which company this writer is one. A privilege held dear for almost 12 years. Harold will quite genuinely be missed by all whose lives he touched. He was a courageous, talented, inspirational and committed anarchist. To readers of *Organise* the FOHHT would like to say 'Thank You', each and everyone, for their unflinching encouragement down the years. Harold truly did appreciate it, just as he warmed to the knowledge that there were 'so many out there' determined to take the struggle to the enemy full on. As Harold used to sign off his letters, 'They'll never get us all!'. Rest easy, cherished comrade.

**Frankie Dee**  
pp. FOHHT

# Pamphlets from the Anarchist Federation

**Postage costs** UK: 50p per item. Non-UK: £1.00 per item

## **NEW—Basic Kropotkin**

£2.00 By Brian Morris. An introduction to the politics of one of the most influential anarchist communists of 100 years ago

## **Defending anonymity**

Free ID cards and the National Identity Register are coming to Britain (and elsewhere) very soon. This pamphlet aims to see through Labour's smokescreens of 'identity theft' and the 'war on terror'. Third edition

## **Resistance to Nazism**

£1.50 Telling the stories of libertarian groups that were opposing Fascism in Europe before, and into, the 1930s including Edelweiss Pirates, FAUD underground, Zazous, 43 group, Arditi del Popolo and dozens of other Italian groups

## **Beating the Poll Tax**

Online only A relevant 'blast from the past' that encouraged and analysed the rise of mass revolt against the Community Charge in 1989/90. Out of print

## **Anarchism – As we see it**

£1.00 A newly revised edition of our very popular pamphlet, describing the basic ideas of anarchist communism in an easy-to-read form

## **The anarchist movement in Japan**

£1.80 The fascinating account of Japanese anarchism in the 20th Century, by John Crump

## **Aspects of anarchism**

£1.00 Thoughts on some of the most important issues that anarchists must confront, from an anarchist communist perspective. Collected articles from *Organise!* magazine

## **Against parliament, for anarchism**

£1.00 Insights into the political parties of Britain, and why anarchists oppose all parties

## **Basic Bakunin**

£1.00 This new edition outlines the ideas of one of the 19th century founders of class struggle anarchism

## **The role of the revolutionary organisation**

£1.00 Anarchist communists reject the Leninist model of a 'vanguard' party as counter-revolutionary. This 2003 new edition explains the concept of revolutionary organisation and its structure. All libertarian revolutionaries should read this fundamental text

## **Beyond resistance – A revolutionary manifesto**

£2.00 The AF's in-depth analysis of the capitalist world in crisis, suggestions about what the alternative Anarchist Communist society could be like, and evaluation of social and organisational forces which play a part in the revolutionary process

## **Work and the free society**

£1.00 Why work is so terrible and why it must be destroyed before it destroys us

## **Ecology and class – Where there's brass, there's muck**

£2.00 This major second edition looks at the ecological crisis facing us today, what is being done about it and sets out in detail our views on what an ecologically sustainable world would be like

# Back issues

Back issues of *Organise!* are available from the London address for £1.50 (£2.00 non-UK) inc. p&p. Alternatively, send us a fiver and we'll send you one of everything plus whatever else we can find lying around.

**Issue 50** GM foods; Who owns the land; War in Kosovo; Ireland – the 'peace' process.

**Issue 52** East Timor slaughter; Kosovo – no war but the class war; J18 stop the city; Why we changed our name; Gueorgui Cheitanov portrait.

**Issue 53** Mass direct action; East Timor; Youth resistance to the nazis; Workplace notes.

**Issue 62** Participatory economics; Anarchist movement in Argentina; Camille Pissarro; International of Anarchist Federations.

**Issue 64** G8 special; Casualisation; ID cards; Women's struggles in Iraq

**Issue 65** International special. Reports from Australia, Belarus, China and Croatia.

**Issue 66** The fight against ID cards; Rossport; Mountain top removal; Empowering prisoners; Spanish revolution 1936.

**Issue 67** The anniversary issue: twenty years of the AF, Hungarian revolution and the British general strike; décroissance; Belarusian anarchism.

**Issue 68** Anarchism and nationalism in Armenia; Neighbourhood communities; Psychology of uniforms; Albert Camus, Anarchist vision of Flores Magon; Georg Elser.

**Issue 69** Squatted community garden; grassroots environmentalism; academy schools; Defy ID and No Borders.

**Issue 70** Anto-fascist special; Social centre history; May 1968; Constructivism

# Stormy Petrel pamphlets

## **Towards a fresh revolution** by The Friends of Durruti

75p plus postage The Friends of Durruti were a much misunderstood group who attempted to defend and extend the Spanish Revolution of 1936

## **Malatesta's anarchism and violence**

50p plus postage An important document in the history of anarchist theory refutes the common misinterpretation of anarchism as mindless destruction while restating the need for revolution to create a free and equal society

## **A brief flowering of freedom – The Hungarian revolution 1956**

60p plus postage An exciting account of one of the first post-war uprisings against the Stalinist monolith

# Foreign language documents

## **As we see it**

70p plus postage Available in Welsh, Serbo-Croat, Greek, German, Spanish and Portuguese

## **Beyond Resistance**

70p plus postage Available in French

## **The role of the revolutionary organisation**

70p plus postage Available in Serbo-Croat.

## **Aims and principles of the Anarchist Federation**

20p plus postage Available in German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Italian, Esperanto and Spanish

All available from our London address (see page two)

# Aims & Principles

## of the Anarchist Federation

1 The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3 We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women, lesbians and gays, and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

10 We oppose organised religion and religious belief(s).