

An obscure heroine

I have been re-reading the Bible, starting with Genesis, and I was fascinated by the story of Adam and Eve. It is a good story.

There they were, man and woman, placed in a beautiful garden, to cultivate it and enjoy its fruits. But the Garden of Eden, for all its beauty and sunny serenity, was hedged in with fear. It had a secret place (beware of gardens with secret places). Right in the center of the garden there grew a tree which bore fair-looking apples. All the creatures which inhabited the garden carefully avoided the spot. They did not have to be told; it was instinctive. But Adam was told plainly: 'Don't touch,' and was warned by the Almighty of dire consequences if he did. Naturally, he did not touch the tree. He was a fine lad, though not too bright, and he found it easy to obey.

It was different with Eve. There was, in the first place, that little matter of her illegitimacy. She wasn't really a created being; she was only a rib taken from Adam and made into a companion for him. It gave her lower status. While Adam held converse with his creator and received his mandates directly from on high, Eve got her orders through Adam. She was a second-class citizen in Eden.

Deprived of communion with divine spirits, Eve had ample time to range at will, explore her environment and study its flora and fauna. She visited the secret place in the center of the garden and inspected the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She had been told (by Adam, of course) not to touch it, but taboos meant little to Eve. She had no fear, and she viewed the world with clear eyes. She decided it would be worth her while to taste of the forbidden fruit and see what she could learn thereby. Her friend, the snake, gave her just the encouragement she needed (the desire for knowledge is always inspired by the devil).

So she helped herself to an apple. But Eve had that gaiety of spirit which we call generosity; she rejoiced in sharing. She could not help calling Adam and offering part of the apple to him; he, surprisingly, accepted it. They both ate their apple, and learned a good many things about themselves.

There was an instant change in the climate of Eden. The skies turned dark and threatening, and a cold wind blew. A thunderous voice called: 'Adam, why hast thou disobeyed?' The poor fellow could think of only one thing to do. Pointing to Eve, he stammered: 'She made me do it.' (No guts there, no character!) Then followed

scoldings, gloomy predictions, and an order of deportation.

They had to leave in a hurry, since Eden was obviously no place for the pursuit of learning.

Eve was eminently well equipped for her life in exile. She had natural curiosity, she was on speaking terms with the creatures of the earth, she had courage, and she possessed a generous heart. These qualities served her well in the arduous days that lay ahead.

As time went on, Adam came to taste many other apples from the Tree of Knowledge but the record does not show that he ever offered to share them with Eve. She had to fight for the right to know, and still does.

The old fable is there for all to read and ponder. To countless generations it has spoken of woman's sinful disobedience, fall, damnation and never-ending suffering. But I read it as the story of woman's rebellion against a mindless paradise. And I want to pay tribute to an obscure heroine, our Mother Eve (always according to Genesis), who dared take the first step upward from animal contentment to human striving and discontent.

Ida Pilat Isca

Reprinted from Fragments

Originally published p11-12 of Valerio Isca's memorial tribute, *Ida Pilat Isca : Translator – Writer – Activist – Friend*. Printed for Valerio Isca by Michael E. Coughlin, 1984. Available at <http://libcom.org/library/ida-pilat-isca-translator-writer-activist-friend>

Ida Pilat Isca (1986-1980) by Valerio is at <http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/n2z47f>

Everlasting Murder By Max Baginski

War or peace – the slaughter continues, for the character of capitalist society is so inexorably murderous that no amount of moralizing can mitigate it.

Horrified we witness the carnival of death, fail to believe that these catastrophes are "accidental," exceptional, while in reality the destruction of human life, industrial murder because of greed and inhumanity, is an established institution. In a society where profit is paramount and the fate of the toilers a negligible quantity, what other result can be expected than the most cynical indifference to the lives of the workingmen.

The hundred and forty-five victims of the fire at the shirtwaist factory of Blanck & Harris, in Washington

Everlasting Murder

Square, New York, have been murdered by capitalism. The helpers and executioners in the massacre were the owners of the scab shop, the officials of the public safety department, the administration of the City of New York, and the government and legislature at Albany. These are the guilty. But as they control the machinery of “justice,” they will acquit themselves. Within a few weeks the terrible crime will be all but forgotten and – the business of murder will continue.

May the terrible tragedy help to clarify our vision. Our grief is profound; may it bear emotions and resolves strong and effectual, worthy of our great sorrow.

With terrible clearness this crime has demonstrated how useless are the laws for the protection of the lives of the toilers. The laws are there; the rules and regulations are there; the highly paid officials are there; only the actual protection is not there. Government and officialdom are necessary, it is said, for the protection of life and property. In truth, they are capable of dooming the starving wretch to a few years’ prison for stealing fifteen cents. They are indeed most faithful guardians of property. But when it concerns the effective protection of the workman’s life against wholesale capitalist murder, the governmental Providence yawns and sleeps in the bureaus; or pretends to sleep, well knowing that it must not seem too watchful if it wishes to enjoy the sympathy and good will of the wealthy pillars of society. This officialdom is the “stall”* that decoys the capitalist victim. It is not its business to make such crimes as the Triangle fire impossible. Its duty is superficially to mask – by its laws, dignity, and authority – the plutocratic greed which is responsible for such holocausts.

In their simple trustfulness the “common people” believe that the governmental Providence is ever on the alert to prevent such accidents; meanwhile this good Providence is concerned mainly in removing the obstacles in the way of plutocratic exploitation and ensuring its own position and aggrandizement.

Heavy is the penalty for this error. Because the toilers believe that the government machinery is designed for their protection, they neglect themselves to take steps to insure their safety. Hence official protection is not only useless; it is positively dangerous, often fatal.

May this be the first lesson to be learned from the murder of our comrades. And may we also realize that labor possesses the power, by means of united and direct action, forever to put a stop to the wholesale slaughter of capitalist greed. Henceforth let our motto be: Away with the deceptive hope for salvation from “representatives,” politicians, and officeholders. Let us act for ourselves, on the spot: the control of the factories should be in the hands of those who work in them; the means: direct action and the general strike, and *sabotage*, which has accomplished such splendid

results in the syndicalist movement of France and Italy.

It is the workers – not the landlords, manufacturers, or bosses; not the city or State authorities – that risk in the factories their health and life. It is therefore they who should also have the right to determine the conditions under which they will work and of taking such precautions as may be necessary to safeguard them, not only on paper, but in reality. Labor would indeed deserve to be charged with immaturity and lack of independent judgment if it will still longer continue to trust its fate to the plutocratic regime and its servants, and be persuaded to abstain from independent direct action. All too long the toilers have felt themselves mere “hands” and subjects. It is time to remember their rights as human beings and to realize their strength to assert these.

The power of labor seems weak only because it is never fully manifested. The workingmen still fail to realize their tremendous possibilities and the great tasks they could accomplish, because they do not dare to act for themselves, without go-betweens, politicians, and arbitration boards. It is these that paralyze independent action on the part of labor and strive to divert its every effort into channels profitable to capitalism.

Not merely fire escapes and safe exits can the workers secure by the exercise of their economic power, through direct action and general stoppage of work. They are also able – though naturally after a hard struggle – entirely to abolish the industrial system of wholesale slaughter and exploitation.

Upon this aim to concentrate our efforts, to work for it in the factories and shops, and finally to achieve this noble purpose be our vow at the grave of our hundred and forty-five murdered fellow workers.

Mother Earth, v.6, no.2, April 1911

*Stall: the assistant of a pickpocket who jostles the passengers in the streetcar, or starts a fight to give his partner an opportunity to rob the people.

Baginski writes shortly after the notorious Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire of Saturday, March 25, 1911. 146 people died, mostly young Jewish and Italian immigrant women workers. They died because the doors were locked. Because there were no sprinklers. Because the fire escape tore away from the brick wall. The fire, despite his fears, was not ‘all but forgotten’ and spurred both fire safety codes and unionisation, particularly of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. Over a hundred years on the Grenfell Tower fire reminds us “In a society where profit is paramount and the fate of the toilers a negligible quantity, what other result can be expected than the most cynical indifference to the lives of the workingmen.” – though this was killing of working class men and women and children where they lived.

The Spanish Revolution / Petrov

Rejecting the Legend

Being built on men, the Spanish revolution is neither a perfect construction nor a castle of legend. The first thing we have to do if we are to be balanced is re-examine the civil war item by item on the basis of the facts, rather than encourage nostalgia through our paeans. This is a task that has never been undertaken conscientiously and courageously, for it might have ended up exposing not only the shortcomings and treacheries of others, but also the illusions and failings of us libertarians as well.

The mania that amounts to bragging about our acts of heroism and our improvisational abilities is a fatal one, because it reduces the search for social solutions to the level of the individual only and, by a trick of propaganda, plays down the situations we were incapable of facing up to. The tendency to 'talk up' the militants of the CNT and the FAI masks our powerlessness to operate effectively wheresoever we may be, in the places where we may be working and in a position to intervene. It is too often an escape from our time and from our world. Not to mention that the Spanish militants themselves are absolved of their own responsibilities and find themselves hovering like images of the saints which they know they are not, and frozen in poses when they ought to be acting with eyes wide open.

We cannot live in disdain for the present in order to contend that what once was will not be again, with pride covering our retreat. Spain was not thrown up only by random societal changes: any more than it was only the crucible in which individual destinies were melted. So let us steer clear of accounts that transfigure the past and furnish an alibi for our present weariness. When nothing remains but images d'Epinal, [1] the betrayal of those who survived is taken as read.

In 1956, hopes of return and of revenge assume, more clearly maybe than back in 1936, the shape of a beautiful ending rather than an engagement with reality. To many of the revolutionaries who rushed to a Spain in flames and in battle, it was not an aspiration but the ultimate sacrifice relished as a gauntlet thrown down to a complicated world that made no sense, as the tragic outworking of a society wherein human dignity is trampled underfoot day in and day out. Wholly committed to realising their individual destinies in a context where they might give their all, only a few of them had a thought to spare for the future.

So, in their heart of hearts, in the isolation which is the answer to the puke and the promiscuities of everyday living, harking back to July 1936 became a cult, like the wait for some barbarous religious celebration. Let us steer clear of any such wait if we do not want to finish up in bitterness and disappointment.

The cerebral dynamite of 1936 Spain had withered in the sunshine of wretchedness and revolt. It exploded and was all swallowed up by the four corners of the peninsula and of the wider world, leaving wretchedness and rebellious factories in its wake. Courage was not to be found only sitting before the tripod of a machine-gun. Heroism was not deployed only in the mounting of attacks. Both were etched into the bedrock of day to day life and afforded some shape to the on-off impulses of the masses. Today as yesterday, they had to contend with the nonsensicality emanating from economic formulae and the outcry from the shifting crowds.

The high price paid by a painful apprenticeship for this awareness of social situations is one we cannot lose, whether in Spain or anywhere else. The libertarian passion only has value as an answer to problems in need of resolution; it cannot be frittered away on circumstantial apocalypses or spent on gloomy paeans. True, it draws sustenance from the experience of the militant clinging to his rifle as a guarantee of his own independence, but also from the efforts of the nameless worker who harbours lucid dreams and lays the groundwork for a less despair-inducing future.

In the curious universe in which we live, the false hopes that allow us to forget about the hundred methods that conspired to manufacture totalitarianism are neither courageous nor heroic. Individual determination and individual daring can also impact upon schemes, statistics and facts. As much as the actions of concerted wills can have a bearing upon the world, as long as there is planning and measurement.

In the fox-holes dug into the hillsides of Aragon, man lived as brothers and in danger, with no use for hope, in that they were living life to the full, cognizant that they were what they had chosen to be. We have tried to enter into a dialogue with them, a dialogue with the dead in order to preserve, from their truth, whatever is left that might be of assistance to the survivors and the living. Bianchi, the thief who put up the proceeds of his house-breaking so as to buy weapons. Staradolz, the Bulgarian vagabond who died like a lord. Bolshakov, the Makhnovist who, albeit horseless, was the continuation of rebel Ukraine. Santin from Bordeaux whose tattoos spoke of the fears of a pure life. Giua, the young thinker from Milan, come to burn himself out in the open air. Jimenez of the many names, who gave proof of the power in a weak body. Manolo whose dauntlessness showed us the measure of our own daring.

All that remains of them and of thousands of others are a few trace chemicals, the remnants of bodies doused in petrol and the remembrance of brotherliness. We had been given proof that a collective existence with neither God nor master, but alongside men as

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they actually are and in the context of a world such as men have made it, is feasible.

Why would that example be pertinent only in times of high tension? Why could we not forge our destiny day by day?

Louis MERCIER

Note

1, images d'Épinal: brightly coloured popular prints, so here, 'heroic images' [KSL]

[Louis Mercier Vega (1914-1977) was a correspondent in Spain for the French anarchist paper *Le Libertaire*. He also fought with the Durruti Column and helped set up its International group. He remained an anarchist militant until he died.]

From *Témoins*, No 12-13, 1956 "Keeping Faith with Spain" Translated by Paul Sharkey.

Why I am an anarchist

I am an anarchist because contemporary society is divided into two opposing classes: the impoverished and dispossessed workers and peasants who have created with their own hands and their own enormous toil all the riches of this earth; and the rich men, kings and presidents who have confiscated all these riches for themselves. Towards these parasitic capitalists and ruling kings and presidents there rose in me a feeling of outrage, indignation, and loathing, while at the same time I felt sorrow and compassion for the labouring proletariat who have been eternal slaves in the vice-like grip of the world-wide *bourgeoisie*.

I am an anarchist because I scorn and detest all authority, since all authority is founded on injustice, exploitation and compulsion over the human personality. Authority dehumanises the individual and makes him a slave.

I am an opponent of private property when it is held by individual capitalist parasites, for private property is theft.[1]

I am an anarchist because I subject to unstinting criticism and censure bourgeois morality as well as false and distorted bourgeois science and religion, which shroud the human personality in darkness and prevent its independent development.

I am an anarchist because I cannot remain silent while the propertied class oppresses and humiliates the propertyless toilers, the workers and peasants. In such circumstances only corpses can remain silent, not live human beings.

I am an anarchist because I believe in the truth of the anarchist ideal, which seeks to liberate mankind from the authority of capitalism and the deception of religion.

I am an anarchist because I believe only in the creative powers and independence of a united proletariat and not of the leaders of political parties of various kinds.

I am an anarchist because I believe that the present

struggle between the classes will end only when the toiling masses, organised as a class, gain their true interests and conquer, by means of a violent social revolution, all the riches of the earth. Having accomplished such an overthrow and having abolished all institutions of government and authority, the oppressed class must proclaim a society of free producers which will endeavour to satisfy the needs of each individual, who must in turn give society his labour and his concern for the welfare of mankind.

I am not deluded by the loud and vulgar 'socialist' phase of 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. Dictatorship is a synonym for authority, and authority is something alien to the masses. Authority always and everywhere corrupts the rulers, who play the role of flies on the horns of an ox in a pasture, poisonous flies which from time to time bite the ox and contaminate its blood, draining its energy and killing its independent initiative.

I firmly believe that the authority will disappear with the disappearance of capitalism. The popular masses themselves will conduct their affairs on equal and communal lines in free communities.

I am an anarchist because I strive by my own personal initiative to impress upon the masses the idea of anarchist communism. I interpret communism in the full sense of the word, for I shall find my own happiness in the common happiness of free and autonomous men like myself.

N. Petrov 'Pochemu ia anarkhist', Vol'nyi Kronshtadt, 23 October 1917, pp.2-3

1, The allusion here is to the famous dictum of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 'Property is theft'. A leading French radical, Proudhon (1809-65) was the first major figure to call himself an 'anarchist', and he became one of the founding fathers of the anarchist movement. [PA]

From *Anarchists in The Russian Revolution*, edited by Paul Avrich p35-6

A biography of Petrov (AKA Petrov-Pavlov) by Nick Heath is at <https://libcom.org/history/nikolai-pavlov-aka-petrov-petrov-pavlov>

Kropotkin Goes Missing

Freedom Press published a selection from the writings of Peter Kropotkin in 1942 (on the 9th of December, according to the book). It marked the 100th anniversary of his birth on that day and was edited and introduced by Herbert Read. I recently picked a copy up, thinking the KSL could sell it at the bookfair. It's an attractive book: hardback and not too long (and without the pinched look wartime books sometimes have).

And then I found the index card: apparently it was due back to the Political Library of the Bristol Branch of the Union of Post Office Workers (cont p9)

Postbag / Library News

After the bulletin goes out it's not uncommon to get 'keep up the good work' type comments from our comrades, which is always encouraging. Issue 90's critical comment 'Thoughts on Anarchism in "the Thatcher years"' [1] received some comment in turn.

Nick Heath felt it was 'a tad harsh' and could have mentioned his own account which included the period. [2] Author Rich Cross responded with a letter which we reprint below.

Notes

1 <http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/xsj5ks>

2 'The UK anarchist movement - Looking back and forward' <https://libcom.org/library/the-uk-anarchist-movement-looking-back-and-forward>

Thoughts on thoughts on anarchism in 'the Thatcher years'

Despite the rather snarky tone of the review of my chapter 'British anarchism in the era of Thatcherism' in the May 2017 issue of *KSL Bulletin*, it's good to see the anonymous reviewer acknowledge that: "Writing a chapter really puts you on the spot because you have to leave so much out". I agree. My chapter is neither a comprehensive chronology nor an anarchist almanac. It's an argument about (frequently misrepresented) shifts in the centre of political gravity in British anarchism within the course of a decade.

That same accusation of "incompleteness" could, of course, be levelled at the review. If you were to take the *KSL Bulletin* writer at their word, you'd conclude that my short essay contains no reference to *Black Flag*, *Freedom*, *Direct Action*, the Direct Action Movement (DAM), the Anarchist Communist Federation, the Anarchist Workers Group or the writings of Meltzer and Christie, amongst several others. You'd also be led to believe that there's no reference to the history of the post-war British anarchist movement, including the Anarchist Federation of Britain, the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, the Anarchist Workers Association or the Libertarian Communist Group.

If you were to rely on the review, you'd also be none the wiser about the central argument of this short piece: that the widely-accepted notion that anarcho-punk and Class War were *polar opposites* in political and practical terms (an idea that *Class War* were extremely keen to promote at the time) cannot survive any kind of sustained scrutiny. I think this is an important issue, as this misconception has distorted the presentation of the history of anarchism in the UK in the 1980s. But this is not a contention that the reviewer even attempts to address, preferring instead to misrepresent my position in relation to *Class War* in order to denounce it as "utter bollocks".

I've no problem at all with a reviewer taking issue with these and other arguments (especially when they address ideas that I actually put forward). But I do

object hugely to the implication that the piece is the work of an outsider, rather than of someone who was an active participant in the history discussed in the chapter. What an extraordinary, not to say insulting, assumption.

How much better would it be if the *KSL Bulletin* could welcome the chapter as a small contribution to a process of writing the contemporary history of our movement, however much this one reviewer might dislike strands of the analysis it offers? There's a huge amount more to be written about British anarchism in that decade, and no one article, chapter, pamphlet or book will be able to cover everything. But how depressing is it that the instinctive reaction of one anarchist historian to the work of another is not one of critical comradeship but of sweeping dismissal? That sort of sniffy political condescension, something that was sadly all too common in the UK movement in the 1980s, is one thing I don't feel remotely nostalgic about.

Rich Cross

We're glad to hear Rich is a veteran of the struggle but still think calling the chapter 'Anarcho punk and Class War in the era of Thatcherism' would have been better. Rich feels his position has been misrepresented. This is a shame when 'Utter bollocks' was directed at a statement by 'The **editors of the collection**' [emphasis added].

We also received a great personal account from an ex-member of Bristol Class War (printed in this issue). This is what we were thinking of when we said 'Tell me a story': www.katesharpleylibrary.net/p8d05b. We're also printing some primary sources as a small contribution to recording the history of British anarchism during those 'Thatcher years'. We hope you find them interesting. Anyone else want to put their recollections of class struggle anarchist history down? Thanks to Glasgow's Spirit of Revolt collection for help with documents (www.spiritofrevolt.info/).

As always, there's more stuff on the website: www.katesharpleylibrary.net.

New pamphlet: The Anarchists in Paris, May-June 1968 by Le Flûtiste

An anarchist eyewitness to the revolt of May-June 1968, Le Flûtiste ('the flute player') looks back on the highs and lows of Paris' student-worker rebellion. Topics covered include, student life before the revolt, the barricades of the Latin Quarter, the student and worker occupations and strikes and the part played by the anarchists in the upheaval.

'Anarchy, which the Stalinists and socialists generally – not to mention the bourgeois – had declared a dead duck in the land of Utopia, was rising like the phoenix from the ashes! Its burial licence had expired, to the great annoyance of all those respectable folk.'

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Class War – Stop the City – Stonehenge

Crass and Class War in the Thatcher years, by an ex-member of Bristol Class War

I come from a Labour Party family in a town by a huge American base. Anti-Cruise demos got twenty thousand people out, across classes. We were all going to die, after all. In 1981 Crass hit me. It stripped away lots of bullshit. A lot of people come through that route. It stripped it all back, beyond what CND were saying. What, nukes are bad but napalm's OK? And you start to look at how war and the state work.

Crass really had influence and penetration into working class circles. People often want to use culture to get that sort of penetration but Crass did it. They were very influential. Look at all the people about, aged 48-55, with Crass tattoos. Builders, whatever.

1984 is the split year (in the South West). Spring 1984 is key: Crass were found out a bit. Crass started to be criticised in 1983. And then that criticism coincides with the Miners' strike. Plus you get Stop The City. The movement goes from cultural resistance and "social centre" type activity (not that we had the term then) to "Let's attack the City". It goes from single-issue politics to attacking capitalism. But the cultural stuff, the punk identity, becomes a contradiction. Why does everyone want to look different from everyone else who lives round them? Why am I supposed to look like this?

In 1983, '84 there are debates in Bristol and a massive split. Not the most bitter split, people still talked to each other, but a split. Some people were saying "The miners are sexist, the miners eat meat" – lets hide away from all that. Others remembered recent history, they remembered 1974 [Heath's defeat by the miners]. "This is IT! Fuck gigs, fuck all the cultural stuff, we have to support the miners directly." And we went to Wales, we went to the power stations. Class was a major element of the split. Working class people were saying "you hate us, you don't want us". Class War were saying exactly the same thing. [Class politics was on the rise:] *Virus* appeared at this time [which became the Anarchist Communist Federation], *Wildcat*, the DAM [Direct Action Movement], bits of the ultraleft (like the bloke who did *Miner conflicts, major contradictions*), the situationists. We sold *Class War* and read *Virus*. We sold *Class War* and *Wildcat* to the left. We were reading *Black Flag*. We split from the lifestyleists, from the social centre, alternative music scene. That music/cultural scene, we felt it doesn't matter any more. Some of us rejected it, went back to dress like their mates did. But that "Punk versus everything else", we moved out of it. That was part of getting politicised.

Class War was powerful. The lifestyleists were saying "They're fascists". Bristol Class Struggle Anarchists, in '84 or '85 rang Vera Krushik of Brixton, of 121 Bookshop. Vera, who was Jewish, said "these people don't know what fascists are." Vera knew my mum through the Older Feminist Network, and sent

me *Crowbar* and the original "Riot not to work" leaflet. Andy Dewar from Glasgow was ex-Communist Party. He became a situationist. He re-educated us. He'd tried to get the Sex Pistols to play Brockwell Park. He told us, "you're gold dust. Don't let anyone bullshit you." Vera and Andy said: Ian Bone and Martin Wright, their politics are really good.

After Orgreave Crass put out a statement saying half the group had renounced pacifism. But by that time, it didn't really matter to us what they said. We were getting a political education, racing through it. People think *Class War* was just thick people, or just a game, or that they were all mouth: No. They were definitely the most influential ultra-left group or class struggle anarchist group. By 1986 we were council communists.

Who supported us when *Class War* were suspended from AFA [after *Searchlight/Guardian* smears in 1986]? The DAM, Red Action, The ACF. The rest were our enemies. We didn't bother with the anarchist scene. We went where the Left wouldn't go, onto the estates. There were already people selling *Class War* in Bristol: Scooter kids, Barton Hill Youth Club (which has a radical history). We just got connected. It had already penetrated: a bit like Crass!

We sold loads of copies. Two groups of people would buy *Class War*: young people, and old people: pensioners, old socialists. If we put something against the royal family on the cover, older people would buy it. This was all completely invisible to the lifestyle anarchists. They weren't Bristolian, they wanted to be different. The concrete material stuff of class was not talked about by them.

I thought *Rebel alliances* [Ben Franks] didn't do a bad job. But I think it's a mistake to only talk about Class War from a London perspective. The hidden history of Class War is its influence. Doing bulk orders, we were sending parcels out to the forces, to aircraft carriers! That won't appear in the history books.

Bristol Class War split in about 1987. We didn't want to recruit students. We were more interested in spreading ideas than recruiting anyway. We had a critique of technical control, of middle class control. Those were the 1970s veterans who had ended up running unions and organisations. That was the heyday of "municipal socialism". We had the working class people, the veterans who hadn't run things. They had just done all the work for "the comrades". The ones without capital (social, educational). They were bitter, serious and noused. Class War in Bristol after 1987 starts to get people come from the working class left. People who left Militant. People who'd joined the RCP and found out it was crap. We were always at war with the SWP but that's another story... Class War started to be the organisation you want to be in, because of the critique of class. Similar to what Red Action write in 1986 or '87: class autonomy, getting rid of the

Class War – Stop the City – Stonehenge

vanguard party. The various dissidents, Class War, *Wildcat*, the ACF: we were all moving in that direction.

The 1987 split: we didn't want middle class people involved. Certainly not to front the organisation. Why should we bother with students? We were cynical about the Left in general, and mish-mash liberal politics. Fuck living in a radical ghetto. Politics has to be tried out in the real world. There was a division, and that was also mirrored in London.

To get history right you have to triangulate, to compare the written word to other sources. Now you also have film, and when something's filmed it captures something. And you can say "This is what you said then". People's thinking is always more radical than what's written. Take *The Bristolian*: The Labour Party hate it. And it gets criticised from the Left: "Where's the politics?" But when we talk about the council, we connect to real experiences. We fight for our class, and recognise our limitations. We're not here to moderate council spending. We want more pie until we can get the whole pie. We're not reformists, we're realists. Aren't organisations always more radical than their writings?

It sickens me to hear people talking about the miners' strike or the poll tax, saying that they helped "fight Thatcher". You didn't support it, you didn't support non-payment, or the Poll Tax rioters. It makes me angry, but that's history: they rewrite it to prove that they were right.

But we took out our immediate enemies. With the poll tax struggle, two things were important: non-payment and the Trafalgar Square riot. You had to see it in political terms, it was about power. Neoliberalism hit a brick wall.

Thatcher had her worst twelve days in 1981 [the summer of riots]. She only had the support of her backbenchers and the press. She had this mantra, they thought she was cracking up: "Churchill 1940, Churchill 1940". I think during the miners' strike they were more in control of the situation. Nine years on, she hit another brick wall, the poll tax riot. I remember thinking "this is gonna fuck it right up". Her cabal were in trouble. And now the memoirs come out and confirm that. Plus it became obvious to the capitalists that she was more nationalist than pro-capitalist. They turned on her. The Poll Tax was the biggest victory for an antiparliamentarian movement.

"Fuck the media", that's what we thought. Militant ran scared. They had an opportunity to get a huge boost, to say to people "we support you and we're fighting alongside you". But they pandered to the media (and threatened to "name names"). Andy Murphy coming out and saying we supported the poll tax rioters, that really took bottle. People were going to prison. The media attacked him, these posh boys attacked him by saying "he's got a mortgage". Which shows what they know about the working class. He

lost his job. The council he worked for sacked him. 147 people walked out, went on a political strike. And he got his job back. But what he did took bottle.

The Poll Tax really affected Class War. Radicalised students wanted to join. It became trendy. And it degenerated after 1990, to become a leftist organisation. We always thought that if things took off, we'd have to dissolve. Our aim was agitation to create confidence. If that works, Class War would self-destruct. The other alternatives were that we would be locked up, or we would stop because it hadn't worked. Once you become an organisation you have to educate people. You lose that influence, and just talk to yourselves.

I stopped in 1990. A lot of people were in a lot of trouble. And we'd been at it for nearly ten years.

There's a group of people who were involved in Class War who are now in their sixties, others in their seventies. We should get what they know written down, while we can.

[These are notes from a conversation which, hopefully, captures what the comrade had to say, and how they said it. Can't promise Vera K's name is spelled right, sorry.]

[Stop the city]

On the 14th and 15th of January, planning meetings took place in London for the second "Stop The City" action which is going to take place on the 29th of March.

In case anyone doesn't know what all this is about I'll say a bit about the first "Stop The City" before going on to the second. On the 29th of September last year, about fifteen hundred people took part in an attempt to disrupt the City of London in a protest against militarism. The City is the financial centre of this country and is full of company headquarters, banks and other institutions which benefit from the arms trade.

During the day we blockaded buildings, spoke to people who work in the City, gave out leaflets and attempted to reclaim the streets for people rather than traffic. Generally we did everything we could to make sure that "business" was not "as usual" on that day.

So much for history -- on to the future. The planning meetings were held in an old ambulance station in the Old Kent Road which has been squatted by a group of people who deserve to be thanked for accommodating us during the weekend and also for organising a benefit gig (with Flux of Pink Indians, Kluk and Flowers in the Dustbin) which raised £300 for Stop The City.

It has been decided that this year the theme of the action should be wider than just militarism: it should be a general protest against the profit-driven system which is responsible for not only the arms trade and war but also the exploitation of animals, genocide

Class War – Stop the City – Stonehenge

against native peoples, poverty, destruction of the environment and many other evils. It cannot be stressed too much that capitalism is the root cause of all these different forms of oppression and that as the City is the nerve centre of British capitalism, all people involved in movements concerned with the issues mentioned above have an interest in taking part in this action.

The 29th of March is the last day of the financial year and on that day profits are reckoned up for the whole of the previous year, so it is the most important day in the financial year. It is also what has become known as “Harrisburg Day”, that is to say, it is the anniversary of the Three Mile Island “accident” when the core of a nuclear power station almost melted down and vast amounts of radiation were released into the environment. Green CND will be marking the anniversary by being outside the offices of the Central Electricity Board in the City of London doing street theatre, giving out leaflets and generally calling attention to the links between so-called “civil” nuclear power and nuclear weapons. They will also have an exhibition of alternative energy sources.

A very rough agenda of events has been drawn up for the day, though it should be emphasised that this is still subject to further planning and also that it is only a “skeleton”; groups of all kinds are urged to create their own actions.

8 o'clock start (it was felt that last year's 6 o'clock start was too early).

10 o'clock Concerted attempt to stop traffic. Last year we never really managed to stop the traffic completely. It is vital that we do so this year, so at 10 we will try to block Threadneedle Street. If that is impossible because of police presence, we will go for the junction of London Wall and Moorgate. Other contingency plans will also be ready.

11, 1 and 2 o'clock People are encouraged to make as much noise as possible.

12 o'clock There are plans for a “die-in” with people falling to the ground wherever they are and lying there for two minutes.

4 o'clock Everyone should gather outside the Royal Exchange as there are plans for a very important action about which it would not be very wise to say more at the moment.

6 o'clock We should all go to the Guildhall magistrates courts to support those who have been kidnapped by the police -- last year the courts sat until 8 or 9 o'clock.

All sorts of plans are bubbling away below the surface: there may be a large squat somewhere in the City just before the action; there are plans to disrupt traffic by means of a bicycle blockade (which was quite successful last time) and by other methods.

Another national planning meeting will be held at the Ambulance Station, 306 Old Kent Road on Saturday 3rd of March. On the 22nd of March there

will be actions around the country to publicise Stop the City... who knows -- something might even happen in boring old Hastings.

If you want more information, get in contact with Hastings Anarchists or write to Box STC, 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1.

Steve.

Poison Pen (Hastings) 20th January 1983

Stonehenge '85

The following extracts are from an eye-witness account of the 1st of June at Stonehenge...

“Soon there were ‘Police Slow’ notices and a roadblock. On the spur of the moment we decided to tell them that we were going to London. It seemed like a good idea anyway. There were only a couple of vans of Wiltshire Police, all very low profile stuff because the ‘respectable’ motorists used this route. They took our names and read us some rubbish about ‘attempting to join the festival’ would mean certain arrest...”

“One person I met said he'd been crawling around in the fields the night before and whenever the Police heard a noise they fired off some flares”.

“At Amesbury roundabout was a punk with a black flag. He said everyone was meeting nearby to decide what to do. After sitting about for a bit we came across a load of people with a radio tuned to the Police wave band. From this we gathered that some people had cut their way through the wire round the stones and were defending themselves with fence posts. Also the message went out that the ‘convoy’ had established a site...”

“Rounding a corner we came upon another road block so we quickly turned into a petrol station full of ambulances. About 30 Police vans choked the road ahead, including Ministry of Defence vehicles. A friend wandered up to be turned back by cop telling him that there was some kind of “fracas” going on...”

“Down a side road the local MP, (fat cat Tory) was hanging around talking to journalists all day. He said the Police were “justified in defending themselves” whilst we added “You're full of shit! You asshole! You bastard!”. We couldn't believe some of the rubbish he was coming out with. On his suit he had a badge showing Rupert the Bear in a Police helmet...”

“Avoiding the lines of riot Police we all went over a fence and into some woods. A hundred yards further on we came out into a field full of broad beans. From there I could see a narrow grain-field full of vans, truck and buses drawn up in a circle like in the Western movies. Carefully picking our way through the bean field we crossed into the field with the Convoy. I asked what had happened and was told that the Convoy had avoided the road block by going through a hedge into the field we were standing in. There was a big force of riot Police on the horizon as convoy people argued with nearby police about the peoples right to have a free festival. We returned to the

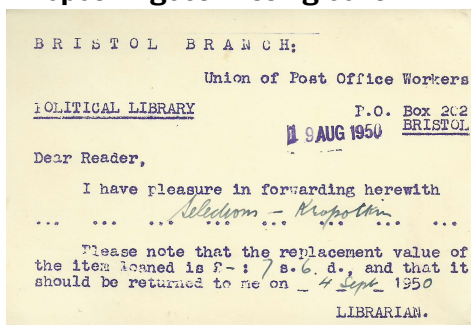
Class War – Stop the City – Stonehenge

car and heard from friends that a truck had tried to run the roadblock and turned over sending its occupants flying. Swarms of riot police had charged at that moment beating both bystanders and the injured from the truck.”

“Half an hour later the police ’copter appeared and the riot police moved in, with Telecom vans conscripted to block roads. I stopped a pig with a C.S. canister on his back. There were shouts and sounds of windows smashing, then a long line of dejected people in the distance, many in handcuffs. They were made to stand in lines whilst being loaded into vans, at least one womyn looked very pregnant. One man I met said he’d just walked out of the field and the police hadn’t noticed him. Police had gone berserk. Met the ITN crew who were white and shaken. Some said they’d been in the Falklands but not seen anything this bad. “They were beating babies” one said. Most of the journalists were being ushered away by the Chief Constable with the words “My lads are getting a bit worked up. You’d best leave or you might get hurt...”. One of my friends photographing was picked up by her hair and thrown aside. Casualties came away, Men and wimmin with their heads bleeding, some covered in blood as if their skulls were broken, others with great gashes made with the edges of riot shields. Soon some beat bobbies arrived and said “20 seconds to get out of here or you’re arrested”. We left for the car and I felt like emigrating. So far the Police have spent 1 million Quid beating the shit out of people who wanted to sit on the grass...”

Stuff it : the theoretical journal of a Bristol Anarchist group, issue 5 [1985?] p.6

Kropotkin goes missing cont



on the 4th of September 1950. Which (I think) is a fascinating snippet of book history. I don’t know if the Bristol Post Office was an anarchist stronghold. But that library got, lent and lost this Kropotkin book. There’s no indication of how many times it went out. It’s a tiny fragment of anarchist history. But it shows an anarchist book making connections outside the anarchist movement itself.

But now I face an ethical dilemma. Should I have sent the posties their book back, or do you think they’d be happy with the replacement cost (seven shillings and sixpence)?



Leah Feldman Interview

Veteran anarchist Leah Feldman interviewed, 17 minutes. Leah talks briefly about her time in Russia (1917-27), Kropotkin’s funeral, the anarchist movement in London, Emma Goldman and the Spanish Revolution, Rudolf Rocker’s internment during the First World War and her own life.

Leah was interviewed in her flat in Stoke Newington, London in 1985 by Leo Rosser.

See the interview at

<https://archive.org/details/LeahFeldmanInterview>

(see also

<http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/66877419/Leah%20Feldman's%20photo%20album>)

‘I remember Leah so vividly. I first met her at a meeting of the London Murray Defence Committee at Conway Hall in 1976 (Noel & Maria Murray were two Irish anarchists sentenced to death for shooting an off-duty policeman who pursued them after a Bank robbery in Dublin). When some twat in the audience asked lamely, “but why are they picking on the Murrays?”, this little old woman erupted from the back of the hall, “because zey are AN-AR-CHISTS!...” Later I had the great pleasure of taking Leah out to dinner in Madrid in 1984, during a Congress of the IWA/AIT, where the Spanish waiters assumed she was my beloved Granny – and in a way she was. Leo Rosser, a very active comrade from South London DAM/IWA, sadly succumbed to severe depression and committed suicide on 24 March 1990. Leah died in 1993. Albert Meltzer scattered Leah’s ashes at the Chicago Martyrs’ Memorial. Albert died in 1996. RIP Leah, Leo and Albert. If there’s an anarchist Valhalla you’re all in there.’

Phil Ruff

Debating the Miners' Strike

The Miners and the Left

The activities of certain of the groups of the 'revolutionary left' during the present miners strike raise whole questions about what is and what is not solidarity?

The major activity of most 'revolutionaries' on the left has of course been selling 'THE PAPER', but it is not the selling of the paper that is so bad as what is actually written in them. Many of the 'revolutionary' parties have used their papers to attack the strategy of the strike, personal union officials and in some cases the whole principles of the strike.

The principle that no person has the right to sell another person's livelihood has been attacked by the Revolutionary Communist Party who want a national ballot and Workers Power who want a branch 'show of hands'. It may not have occurred to these vanguards of the working class but people are voting everyday with their feet.

The overall strategy of the strike has been attacked by all and sundry but the main aggressor has been the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP has made personal assaults on people such as Jack Taylor, Yorkshire Area President, over the handling of the Orgreave situation, although the directing of pickets is neither controlled by Taylor or Scargill but by the Yorkshire region co-ordinating committee. They believe that Taylor has deliberately held back on the picketing of Orgreave and restricted the movement of pickets.

The overall strategy of the strike has been good, considering the lack of pickets, the wide number of targets and the determination of the police to stop them, the only tactics available to the miners has been the hit and run tactics of guerrilla warfare. Orgreave was of course a diversion from this strategy and the end result was hundreds of arrests and injuries for very little other than an education in the true nature of the police.

Although we as anarchists have different ideas about organisation than the hierarchical structures of the NUM and different political principles to people like Scargill and Taylor, this is not the fight that we are engaged in. There is little that we can criticise these two on during this strike. Both of them have thrown themselves into the frontline, both have been assaulted by police, they like all other paid NUM officials have given up their wages and during this strike have been nothing more than propaganda and symbolic figure heads.

Getting back to the SWP's assault on the miners. They have argued for Orgreave to be turned into a mass symbolic battle, day in day out (perhaps they want a permanent pitch to sell their paper), being totally unaware of the limitations of such an action and ignorant of the forces that the state has, to fight such a pitched battle.

But it is not just the words in the papers of the left that are dubious, but all their other forms of

'solidarity'. Fund raising 'for the miners' is a great thing to latch on to. The SWP started off its miners fund, which has not [now?] reached £14,000, the purpose of this fund 'to put the miners case over to other workers', i.e. fund the paper, and other SWP propaganda. Money is also raised by many groups to send miners to their conferences and meetings. But more often than not it is used by the party to control situations, pay for busses etc, and build up their prestige. Of course not all of the 'left' groups are as bad as each other and some have given useful solidarity work to the miners and their families.

This brings us onto the question, what is solidarity? Solidarity comes in various forms, first is propaganda and education in support of people involved in struggle. In most cases strikes and other struggles go hardly noticed and any form of propaganda is useful. But there is propaganda in support of the strike and propaganda for your own cause, the best example is the Support the Miners Posters by the Revolutionary Communist Party, which has RCP taking up a third of the poster, a true poster of solidarity should have the name of the group showing solidarity in print, that has to be looked for.

Likewise the written word, either in papers or leaflets, should be used to inform people of the struggle and the events going on, and not as a means to criticise the people involved, point out the ideological differences, but the aim of solidarity is to educate and propagate not to take over.

On the question of fundraising, it is very simple if all funds are handed over to those who are going to use them, now we think it would be better if we did this with the money people have entrusted to us, if people gave money for a specific purpose such as buying food, then to buy food direct.

There is also more direct support like attending picket lines and demonstrations in solidarity. On both these events we are there to add our weight, either to show our banners and flags in support or to add bodies to the push, blockade or in a symbolic manner depending on the nature of the event.

Returning to the miners strike our job as anarchists is to give solidarity. Although this fight affects all of us, it is primarily the fight of the miners and their families. We may not like the structures they choose to work within, we may not like their individual politics or religion, but these things are irrelevant, just as irrelevant as if a policeman is an atheist or in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament. There will be plenty of time after the strike to put our political theories over, but during this dispute there is only one form of propaganda, and that is propaganda by deed, through no strings, non dogmatic, consistent and practical solidarity.

Black Flag no.114. (vol. 7, no.6C) 1984

Debating the Miners' Strike

Letter: [The Miners and the Left]

Dear *Black Flag*,

Having just read your article "The Miners and the Left" I feel compelled to write to you. Whilst I agree with most of the article – am similarly sickened with the "revolutionary lefts" redefinition of solidarity as selling "THE PAPER", I believe that funds raised for the miners should go *directly* to the miners; etc. – I disagree with some of the conclusions you made, which seem to be concerned with how @s should behave during disputes generally.

Firstly, as an anarchist, I don't like to be told what "my job" is – that, I see as authoritarianism. We're all continually told what to do by the State and its various forms without other @s doing the same. Surely one of the things which makes @ different is its toleration and support of a *variety* of actions/means of changing the social order.

Secondly, I question the writers assertion that any papers or leaflets distributed on picket lines should merely inform people of the particular struggle they are participating in. Don't you think that people on picket lines are aware of why they are there? Leaflets, it seems to me, are useful in describing the particular struggles of those people in the context of the wider struggle (that we are involved in and fighting).

Finally, I don't entirely agree that we as anarchists should not be allowed to make any criticism of striking workers and I do not believe that, in the case of the miners or any other group, "the structures they choose to work within are irrelevant". Whilst I obviously support the premises of much industrial action, as an autonomous, thinking person I do not always *unreservedly* support the action of pickets – I'm not exactly crazy about the sexism of some of the striking miners, for example. I think we should move away from this very middle class, vanguardism view of striking workers as somehow beyond any criticism, "sacred". *Constructive* criticism can help bring about change particularly if its from people who are quite clearly showing support and solidarity on picket lines, demos or in any other ways.

R. G. (Exeter)

Reply The purpose of the article was to stimulate discussion and debate about the nature of solidarity and how it should affect the way anarchists work.

Written propaganda should be used to educate people about the goings on and reasons for a particular struggle and should be directed at those outside the struggle. The widespread ignorance and acceptance of misinformation even amongst political people during the miners strike, points to the need for alternative news. But as anarchists we should not abuse the position of providing alternative information by trying to direct struggles or cause divisions and weakness amongst those we are supporting.

There is no need for us to uncritically support workers involved in struggles, but we should be aware

of where our opinions and ideas are going to, and the effect they will have. There is only one way to be sure that our 'criticisms' are constructive and not divisive and that is through personal contact made through giving practical solidarity.

As anarchists we believe that people are capable of organising their own lives and although the NUM may not be organised in the pure libertarian way we would like it has been created by the miners for the miners. The reason why the NUM and all other unions are not organised in a libertarian way, is because of the failure of anarchists over the last 100 years to convince people of the advantages of non-hierarchical federalist forms of organisation. For us to go running in during disputes (and to be honest how many anarchists gave a damn about miners, mining communities and the NUM, before this strike?) laying down the line, attacking the structures and generally being negative, neither does our cause any good or helps those involved in fighting against the state and bosses.

Also we must not let our idealistic purity get in the way of our basic beliefs. People involved in struggle are quite capable of questioning the structures they are involved in and the wider society as a whole, and people do try to change things. During the miners strike great breakthroughs have been made in the struggle for women's equality (sexism confronted, women organising etc.) in altering people's attitudes to the police, in questioning local power cliques and society generally. Our solidarity besides helping to win the direct struggle, can also go to strengthen and develop new attitudes, but to do this we must be trusted and respected, which means being involved in practical solidarity on a grass roots level without pushing our politics, self-righteousness and arrogance.

M. (Doncaster)

Black Flag no.116 (vol. 7, no.6E, 6/8/84)

Letter: The Miners' Strike and the Anarchists

The article (The Miners' Strike and the Left) in *Black Flag* 114 was correct to state the paramount importance of the miners' strike for the working class in this country. Considering themselves an integral part of that class it goes without saying that class struggle anarchists up and down the country are committed to supporting the strike and aiding its victory.

The article was also right to point out the various intrigues and manipulations that other groups of the revolutionary Left are indulging in during the miners' strike. But then this was expected; we know from experience the parasitic way Leninists feed off workers struggles. We hope that as libertarians we take a more *principled* position in workers struggles.

However, though the article was right to condemn the Leninists and then emphasize the importance of real solidarity it seems to me it then went on to adopt an attitude that borders on mere liberalism. Because we oppose the Leninists' practices do we really have to

Debating the Miners' Strike

throw the baby out with the bathwater and refrain from any kind of specifically revolutionary propaganda about the strike?

The line pushed by the article is currently fashionable: "There will be plenty of time after the strike to put over our political theories, but during the dispute there is only one form of propaganda, and that is propaganda by deed, through no strings, non-dogmatic, consistent and practical solidarity."

We have to be involved in giving practical aid and solidarity of course (and I have been), but any variety of socialist can do this, and even bleeding heart liberals will collect food for the miners' families (*not many round our way: typesetter*). We should be in the thick of the struggle as anarchists and workers, and we take our own ideas into that struggle.

The article condemns the Socialist Workers Party for taking Jack Taylor (Yorkshire Area President) and other full time officials to task for certain aspects of their handling of the strike. The article says there's little we can criticize these on during the strike (!), and of course they've given up their wages during the strike. Was the article written by Scargill's press agent? True, they have given up their wages during the strike, but then as bureaucrats they've got plenty to spare.

I don't think much of the SWP's strategy, and [it?] is no more valuable than Jack Taylor's (such as their fixation with mass picketing). But I do read '*Socialist Worker*' because it gives probably the best industrial coverage of all the left-wing press, and I've seen no evidence of the "SWP's assault on the miners" as the article puts it. They have criticised the way the strike has been conducted at various junctures and the failings of full time officials but does this constitute an 'assault on the miners'?

I heard Arthur Scargill speak at a rally a few weeks back. Referring to the NCB closure plan he more or less said "I told you so, you should have listened to me" to the assembled miners. That is the attitude of the most militant of the NUM full time officials; a unionism from the top down. No realization that the grass roots hadn't listened to his warnings because in a reformist unionism the bureaucracy, no matter how left-wing, talks a different language to the grass roots. As anarchists we believe in a unionism by the workers, not an ineffective unionism for the workers. *So save your solidarity for the miners, bureaucrats don't need it.*

This strike holds a number of lessons for the workers movement, and maybe one or two two for the anarchist movement... Firstly it has shown once more the tremendous resilience and power of organised and militant workers. Secondly it has shown the ethical bankruptcy of the Leninist groups whose main priority is selling their paper behind the picket lines while people at the front are getting their heads cracked open. Thirdly it has shown yet again that reformist unionism isn't up to the job. Much of the sacrifice and

commitment of the miners and their families has been squandered at times (as when the area NUM leaderships gave "their" steelworks special dispensations to carry on production). As to the response to the bureaucracies of other unions, the less said the better (*wot? – typesetter*).

The article misses the basic point: that the dynamism behind the strike from day one has come from the grass roots of the NUM. On this welcome development, as anarchists and believers in a revolutionary unionism under the conscious control of militant, self-organised workers, we must base our propaganda and activity. We seek working class unity yes. But don't confuse that with entertaining the mistakes and missed opportunities of reformist trade unionism.

D.M. (Middlesborough)

REPLY: There is a difference between revolutionary and anarchist propaganda. Revolutionary propaganda can be seen as the education and agitation which increases peoples understanding of the present society, whilst anarchist propaganda is presenting the anarchist approach to changing society. Whilst revolutionary propaganda in this miners strike, such as pointing out it is not solely a mass conspiracy against the miners, but it is the natural function of the DHSS police etc., is important, putting over the complete anarchist 'package' is not. Therefore the best way to put over anarchism is not by claiming to have the solution to the miners strike, the world and everything, but by proving ourselves as useful allies in the struggle.

Not all NUM bureaucrats (full time, paid officials) are better off than all the miners, some are at the bottom of the structure, are worse paid, these too have given up their salaries. Simplistic attacks on bureaucracies based on 'they get more money' etc, is basically petty and shows a lack of understanding of the problem. As anarchists we believe that bureaucracy, hierarchy etc. weakens workers organisations, whether they are paid more or less is irrelevant.

Getting on to the SWP. They have not attacked full time officials, they have attacked selected individuals ie. Jack Taylor, because he is a soft target. Even they aren't stupid enough to attack Scargill, which could be quite easily done in the same tone as their attack on Taylor. On the lines of [']more mass picketing needs national not regional control Scargill's failure to take control from the regions will lose this strike etc. etc.['] But they have personalised the miners problems into Jack Taylor – in the same way as the SUN newspaper of the Rupert Murdoch Party blames it all on Scargill.

The *Socialist Worker* may give a good coverage of industrial news but so does the *Newsline* (WRP daily paper) and for that matter the *Financial Times* and the *Sunday Times & Observer* business sections. In all cases there is a need to read between the lines.

Black Flag, no.118 (vol.7, no.6G 3/9/1984)

Debating the Miners' Strike

[Letter: Anarchists and the Miners' strike]

Dear *Black Flag*,

I was pleased to see the letter from RG (Exeter) in the *Flag* No. 116. I had been furious about the article "The Miners and the Left" and had intended to write to you myself.

I am stunned that any Anarchist can write that the structures that the miners, or any other strikers, work within are "irrelevant". When I read the article a picture immediately entered my head of a hypothetical union run on fascist lines and headed by a dictator. One sunny day the dictator called a strike and threatened to expel/beat up/ murder every worker who did not support it. As it happened a group of Anarchists supported the premises of the strike and joined the dictator and a small band of others in their actions. A few of the @s had some qualms about it and asked: "Is it really libertarian to work with a dictator?" But their newspaper hastily reassured them that the structure of the union was irrelevant.

You can't be serious.

I thought M (Doncaster)'s reply was useful. It clarified a lot of points which should have been said more clearly in the original article. There's a lot of difference between "running in during disputes, attacking the structures and generally being negative" – which I am sure no @ would advocate – and seeing the structures as "irrelevant".

I was amazed to learn that the article was written to stimulate debate about the nature of solidarity. You could have fooled me!

I thought it was a thinly disguised attack on the SWP. Next time could you make it a bit clearer. An interview with the miners as to *their* idea of useful forms of solidarity would have been far more interesting.

Another point about Ms reply to RG. It was couched in terms of disagreement yet to me M seemed to be making very similar points to RG. eg. I was glad to hear that M *does* recognise as does RG, that criticism if it comes from people clearly giving solidarity *can* be constructive.

Last point – above all "The miners and the Left" was a waste of valuable space which could have been filled with info about workers' struggles – in particular about the miners strike, which to me, is the most important industrial action for years and deserves all of our *informed* support.

Fighting with the miners,

C.G. Hackney/ London E8

To CG, Hackney,

For your information, the article "The Miners and the Left" was written from a report 'Bores Under the Floor', which happened to be written by a miner for miners; also from conversations with miners on picket lines; as our neighbours; as our friends; and as our comrades. Of course it was about the nature of

solidarity. As for the attack on the SWP, that comes directly from the miners.

Perhaps I'm wrong, but your hypothetical case seems to be a thinly disguised, cheap and safe attack on A. Scargill! He did not call the strike – this happened as a direct result of miners coming out in support of the Cortonwood men whose pit was threatened with imminent closure. Scargill & Taylor had nothing to do with it – see previous issues of *Black Flag* which spells this out quite clearly. Expulsion of scabs is a call from the rank & file. Of course there are doubts about this, but it is up to the rank & file miners to decide. Plus, the deaths in this strike have been the deaths of pickets; people are lying in intensive care with broken skulls & suspected brain damage – they are pickets injured by thug pigs. Old women have had their homes broken into by pigs wielding truncheons. Children have had limbs broken by these same pigs.

Having been involved with this strike from day one, not only on picket lines daily but also giving economic support, moral support, our time and energy to the communities involved in this dispute – including our own – I find your cheap jibes insulting. If you believe that debating about the nature of solidarity is a waste of space then there's something wrong – because the nature of solidarity is about workers struggle and vice versa. Our reporting of the strike in this area for *Black Flag* has been informed – if you want interviews with miners go on the picket lines – you're not too far from Kent, & talk with the people involved there.

There seems to me to be too much attacking of the NUM in this strike* and not enough attacking the NCB, the government, or the pigs. The structure of the NUM may not be perfect, but attacking that during the middle of the most important workers struggle in the country for years, is counter-productive. Miners themselves have started to question the structures but want unity now & we should respect this. This is not defending the bureaucrats, only the rank & file. Talk *with* members of the mining communities, don't patronizingly spout purist platitudes from the safe confines of Hackney. And if you want articles on workers' struggles, and can't get to Kent, why not try writing about those struggles in your area – or aren't there any?!

At the moment we in mining areas feel that we are in a country that is occupied by an enemy force – which we are. Pigs from London, Manchester, in fact from all over the country, are occupying our streets and attacking us. Living here doesn't allow itself to us wasting time on cheap jibes about a union. Our solidarity is with the men, women and children who make up the pit communities, & we shall continue to fight with them, and report about that fight.

Fighting with the miners (literally)

J & M (Doncaster)

* by people who know nothing of its history,

Debating the Miners' Strike

structure and nature.

Black Flag no. 119 (vol.7, no.7A, 15/10/1984)

The Miners & Social Change

Strikers now find themselves in major confrontation with the police. It is an eye-opener for all those trade unionists who have been elected to public office, to councils and to Parliament, who sit as magistrates or school governors or on tribunals and fancy themselves as part of the Establishment, to find that a determined government can at one blow wipe it all away. Miners – even the lower echelon of the union machine – are having to battle in the streets, to bleed under truncheons, to face political grilling in police stations, to be stopped at roadblocks, to have their homes searched, to be fined and imprisoned. All this has happened before, but to ‘extremists’... suddenly the ‘extreme’ becomes nearer than they thought.

Only a matter of months ago one odd member of the anti-strike brigade was deprecating the printers of Fleet Street and their high wages (which were fought for over the years) saying how much more he would think of them (not that he would *do* anything) if they were to stop printing lies – regarding this as totally unthinkable. Now they have done just this. They have forced the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* to print the other side, they have stopped the *Sun* altogether because it wouldn't. (‘An infringement of free speech!’ cry those who think only a few proprietors have the right to freedom of expression).

Amongst the lies being hurled at the strikers is the one that says that this is all a bid for power by or for Arthur Scargill. Mr Scargill is being built up as the Lenin of the strike by the anti-strike brigade: those who fight for it are tarred as wishing to build up a Scargill Government, as puppets of Scargill, as bootlickers of Scargill, as minions of a Scargill dictatorship.

The miners are organised in an authoritarian body, the National Union of Mineworkers, and Scargill at its head has the spotlight on him. But to imagine the fight is for ‘Scargill’ is to fall for the most obvious brainwashing we have had since we were told the war was ‘won’ by Churchill. Few men will undergo six months of voluntary semi (or actual) starvation out of hero-worship or blind following – against the brainwashing of the media – however eloquent or handsome Scargill is – and if they did they would not have the backing of the women who have emerged as the greatest of fighters.

Scargill happens to boss the NUM, but then the struggle is not for the NUM. It is the whole structure of the NUM – tied to the closed shop system beloved of British trade unionism because it saves them so much bother and normally excludes having to fight that has caused the division between workers. If an independent miners union wanted to fight and some

people didn't want to, they could go and be damned.

In a closed shop union miners who want to scab – because of greed or fear of the consequences or concern for their families – want at the same time to remain as unionists because it is the only way they know to guarantee having jobs at all. If expelled they appeal, to the courts. What have judges to do with a workers union? A union is to fight economic battles; not to be determined by every law. The fight would have been long won since if those who felt threatened by the closures had been able to part company with those who did not feel the threat affected them yet, and who think they can afford to wait until it does and work meantime, paying their mortgages and hire purchases and keeping their holidays and cars.

If those who had no stomach to fight had been allowed to leave the union, they would have seen there was no alternative but to fight. The notion that ‘they should have balloted’ (echoed by all the reactionaries who never hold ballots on anything affecting themselves) is a false cry. The only purpose of balloting would be to preserve the unity of the closed shop union. No miners would vote yes on whether they wanted pits to close. A number would have disagreed with striking – but obviously they would not be people being closed down, they would be the ones in hopefully secure pits (or so they think).

The struggle has transformed the mining communities politically. Most older miners always hoped that the task of mining as it is known would eventually cease. But nothing is offered in its place. The NCB is taking the means by which whole valleys and communities live and ordering them to be extinct. This is being done by the nationalised coal industry, which was a 75 year ambition of socialism and trade unionism – something which the NUM forgets when it mightily attacks coal chief MacGregor.

The younger miners are battling against police and pickets. But this is not a battle for the streets and it will not be won there. If the police are defeated they bring in the army and all the reserve forces being built up by the new dictatorship. That front must not be neglected and it is one on which major support is needed, but like war the strike will be won or lost on provisions. In this the women of the coalfields have shown superb communal organising ability and received enormous support which has won the admiration of organised workers everywhere. They must not be allowed to perish for want of ‘lease-lend’.

Albert Meltzer.

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[This issue contains a number of political debates about the 1984-85 Miners' strike. As always, we have reprinted them because we think they're worth reading again. They touch on Anarchist solidarity actions with the miners, but that's another story: not all of which has been written down.]

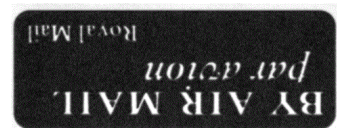
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